

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

**Between Generations: The Construction of Mother-Daughter
Relationships in the Work of Black Women Playwrights in Britain**

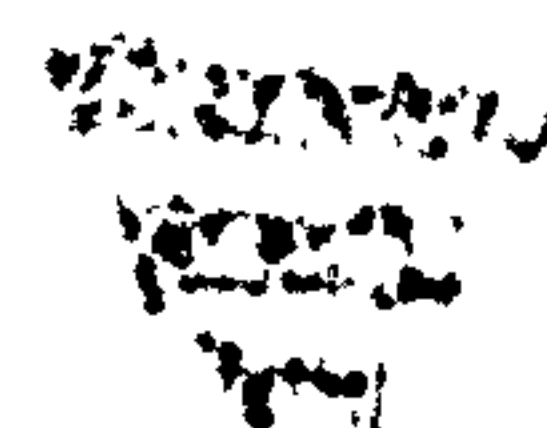
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INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Second World War, race relations and immigration have become major subjects of debate in the political, social and cultural life of Britain¹. The presence of immigrants from Britain's former colonies and the subsequent arrival of economic migrants and asylum seekers have triggered discussion of many issues, not least those surrounding difference, assimilation, diversity and identity (Gilroy 1993). It is these particular issues (and the tensions that they engender), often articulated through the depiction of mother-daughter relationships, which are dramatized in the work of contemporary Black British female playwrights such as Winsome Pinnock, Trish Cooke, Paulette Randall, Maya Chowdry, J. B. Rose, Tanika Gupta, Rukhsana Ahmad, Jackie Kay, Grace Dayley, Jacqueline Rudet, Maria Oshodi and Zindika². My thesis is thus about the construction of mother-daughter relationships as presented in the work of these playwrights. It places particular emphasis on how mothers and daughters negotiate their relationships, positions and identities in the context of their respective experiences as first- and second- generation female migrants in Britain.

¹ See, for example Hiro Dilip 1991; Solomos, John in Braham et al. 1992; Visram, Rozina 2002.

² My use of the term "Black" is defined below.

Considering “Black”

Before discussing my use of the term “Black”, it is important for the reader to understand the breadth of tradition, experience and background represented by the twelve playwrights whose work is considered in this thesis. Demographic details regarding the playwrights have not been readily available. Although Susan Croft’s She Also Wrote Plays, for example, has been helpful in providing a number of playwrights’ biographical elements, information on a few others has been difficult to ascertain. This is partly because their work is not archived with such information in the Theatre Museum, London, or the British Library Manuscript Room, but also because the lack of critical reception of their work means that few additional sources of information are available. I have therefore relied on a variety of sources for this information, which include “blurbs” in the introduction to playscripts, theatre companies’ websites, and the playwrights’ works in areas other than playwriting. Based on this range of sources, I will proceed to discuss the playwrights’ ethnic backgrounds.

Of the twelve women playwrights on whose work I focus, nine are of African or Caribbean extraction, with two of them (Kay, Oshodi) having a mixed-race, Black and white background. Kay, for instance, identifies herself as “Black” and a number of her writings are characterized by the

consciousness of being Black in Britain³. The three remaining playwrights (Ahmad, Chowdhry and Gupta) have Pakistani, Punjabi and Bengali backgrounds respectively. Despite her Asian descent, Gupta's first play was performed by Talawa, a Black theatre company and as recently as 1998 Chowdry, for example, defined herself as "a lesbian and a Black woman" in Acts of Passion: Sexuality, Gender and Performance (9), a book she jointly wrote with Nina Rapi. In her notes to the usage of "Black" in that work, Chowdry specifically mentions that it "denotes a political identity" and is used "in a way which highlights my experience" (19).

Thus, in this thesis, I use the word "Black" to refer to people of African and Asian descent in the British context. That the term "Black" is used to indicate both Black and Asian women in this context is not unproblematic⁴. Indeed, it might suggest the kind of reductive

³ Kay's experience of being adopted by and growing up within a white family informed her first collection of poetry, The Adoption Papers (1991). She also wrote poems such as "So You Think I am a Mule?"(1984) and "In My Country" (1993) in which she explores white people's inability to imagine that Blackness and Scottishness can be combined.

⁴ The use of the term "Black" as a homogenizing label has been the subject of considerable debate. As an Asian, Tariq Modood, for example, argues that the term "Black" is rather limited/ing in that it is biased towards those of African descent. Since it owes its origins to the Black Power movement it effectively

homogenisation which non-white immigrants have suffered in this country for at least the last four decades. Anne Marie Smith makes the point in arguing that “the new laws of the 1960s invented the black immigrant because they legally constituted the Asian, African and Afro-Caribbean peoples from the former colonies as outsiders” (23). And yet the migratory history of Black and Asian people in Britain and the diverse socio-economic and political features attached to their respective migrations point to the fact that they do not represent a homogeneous group of people. For example, although in many instances mid-twentieth-century migration into Britain from Africa, the Caribbean, India and Pakistan involved those whose histories were rural and highly impoverished (Wilson 1978), political refugees of Asian descent who left East African countries for the UK during the 1970s were often from middle-class backgrounds, not unfamiliar with significant economic success. (Brah 1996)

However, what has bound Black and Asian migrants together is “an experience which is both historical and contemporary, both collective and individual” (Lewis and Parmar 89). Their experience of Britain is characterized by the common exclusion endured by them – an exclusion which hardened into the use of “Black” as a term of common abuse but

carries a concept of “Afro-political leadership” which cannot encompass Asianness (399). See also Hazareesingh’s article entitled “Racism and Cultural Identity: An Indian Perspective” (1986).

also, eventually, of political empowerment through coalition-building. During the 1980s the suffering experienced by immigrants led them to work together to re-claim the term from its negative associations. Coalitions were forged in which the word “Black” was strategically adopted as a bulwark against the common economic, social and racial oppressions these diverse groups had suffered (James 1985). Simultaneously, the term became (for such migrants) a symbol of pride and a means of collective empowerment. In the words of Heidi Safia Mirza:

In Britain in the 1980s, this shared sense of objectification was articulated when the racialized disempowered and fragmented sought empowerment in a gesture of politicized collective action. In naming the shared space of marginalization as “black”, postcolonial migrants of different languages, religions, cultures and classes consciously constructed a political identity shaped by the shared experience of racialization and its consequences. (3)

Among those articulating and constructing this common political identity were playwrights such as Grace Dayley, Trish Cooke, Tanika Gupta, Jackie Kay, Paulette Randall, Jacqueline Rudet, Winsome Pinnock and Zindika all of whose work first came to prominence in the 1980s and a decade later encouraged a second wave of playwrights amongst whom, for instance, was Maya Chowdry. In Modood’s words:

They [Blacks and Asians] may not all share identical notions of “black”, let alone a common political perspective, but they do all believe that the term “black” should be used to promote a positive identity. The important point to note is that *this* use of black, is no longer descriptive. It is evaluative or aspirational. (1988: 4)

It is in this sense that I propose to use the term “Black” in my thesis, as a positive reclamation of an identity that has been denigrated but is now being revalued.

Changing attitudes towards victimization is, for instance, a case in point. In one of her interviews, Winsome Pinnock states that she reclaims the term “Black” in her plays by refusing to give the characters the roles of a victim:

One of the themes in all my plays is examining the idea of the victim. To be black was always to be in the position of victim. I think in all of those plays I play with the idea of what a victim is and none of my characters accept that definition of themselves, because they all take action. It’s not just about being angry, it’s about somehow moving forward. So Minda has her way of doing it, whatever one thinks about it. Enid again, whatever one thinks about her position, is trying to do something for her daughters, trying to

save them from the fate of victimhood and the same goes for Claudia ... It was about exploring that and exploding a stereotype around the issue of Black identity. (Stephenson and Langridge 51)

This re-evaluation and hence celebration of Black identity stems from the playwrights' personal lives. For example, Pinnock cites the pride associated with being who she is and demonstrates how that is largely reflected in a play like "Leave Taking". Here, Pinnock engages with a specific experience that she and her contemporaries share in relation to their parents, that of the first-generation migrants' conspiracy to keep the past from their offspring. Unlike her parents who felt shameful towards their past, Pinnock affirms new ways of being, embracing that particular experience as part of who they are:

That's based on when I was growing up. If you ask anybody my age they'll say, "They never told us anything about where they came from, how they lived." And in "Leave Taking", in my own life I suppose, the silence was to do with a sense of shame. The sort of poverty they came from was shameful, they thought. And there was a desire for their children to be British, and therefore to forget about the past ... But the play was about celebrating those things that people were ashamed of. And also for me it was about saying, "Look, this is who we are. This is what our lives are and were like." (Ibid. 49)

Another playwright whose work relies heavily on her personal life experiences is J. B. Rose. In her introduction to “Darker the Berry” in Young Blood: Five Plays for Young Performers, she explains the genesis of this play:

The idea for the play came from a variety of sources. Firstly, my mother’s personal experience of growing up as an illegitimate child in Jamaica where she had to fight to get educated, and where her struggle to leave her home eventually led her to England where she became a qualified nurse. Secondly, many themes came from work with young people at Second Wave ^[5]
 ... (124)

The danger in this emphasis on the personal is that the plays may be dismissed as too idiosyncratic. However, the playwrights rely on their sense of discernment to choose instances that resonate with other people’s experiences. A case in point is Grace Dayley’s “Rose’s Story” in which she tackles the theme of single motherhood, drawn from her first-hand experience of teenage pregnancy in Britain. As a result, autobiographical elements are also summoned:

⁵ Second Wave, founded in 1982, “provided a support system for young women who want to write” (Gray 1989: 10). It was based in Sheffield at the Albany Empire.

I first began to write about my experiences during my early teens. Much of what I wrote was centred around my life in England comparing it with stories I had heard about life in Jamaica. It was, however, during my pregnancy, living in a Mother-and-Baby home, that I realised that every pregnant teenager's experience was unique. This prompted me to write about the Mother-and-Baby home. It then dawned on me that how I came to be there was much more interesting. The notes I made then, formed the basis for "Rose's Story" (79).

The playwrights thus address in their work issues that are pertinent to personal preoccupations, and this reliance upon personal or first-hand experiences in the creation of the plays – a so-called "slice-of-life" approach – explains why the plays tend to be realist at the formal level, a mode which is typical for issue-based plays. The plays frequently function as social documents in that they illustrate events and preoccupations that were affecting the Black communities at a certain point in time. As such they are a comment on actual experiences which are given expression in a theatrical space. Pinnock acknowledges the importance of the plays in that they draw attention to neglected issues vital to the Black community and redress Black women's stereotypical representations:

You see it in a lot of the mainstream theatres, the fact that racial issues aren't really addressed. You know, I go to a theatre and I may

see a black woman or a man playing a servant and that for me means something. It has repercussions beyond the fictional world of the play because it touches on history and it touches on the fact that we're not addressing history. We have the opportunity to create new ways of being theatrically. (Stephenson and Langridge 53)

The playwrights' creation of "new ways of being theatrically" which consists in representing experiences of being Black and having more than a token Black character in their plays is one way of redressing the under-representation of Black people on stage. It creates a Black presence on stage and gives Black experiences voice. These experiences are often articulated as mini-narratives, thus filling in the histories of the characters. This is especially evident in "Paper and Stone", "Every Bit of It" and "Leave Taking", where mini-narratives punctuate the flow of each piece with a regularity that, at times, renders these plays more akin to realist fiction or documentary than drama. An example of this type of narrative comes in the context of a conversation between Martha and Juliet in "Paper and Stone", with the former saying:

MARTHA: You know when I first come to this country? ...
1967 I land here with my two long arms, a cardboard grip in the left and the address of a bigamist in the right. That was all I had.
My first husband left me with three children in Jamaica. I had to

come to England looking for him only to find he had married and set up house with another woman – a white woman too. (5: 18)

Such narratives are one of the reasons why I have chosen to treat the plays as texts rather than as performances. The care taken by the playwrights to reflect their experiences through realist depictions invites engagement with the material on a textual basis as opposed to the more performative or technical aspects of theatre-craft, especially since, on the whole, the focus of the plays is on specific issues rather than on theatrical experimentation. But this text-based approach also results from acknowledging that the plays have an “afterlife” in another sense. The point here is that, with few exceptions, the plays have not enjoyed widespread exposure and publicity. Most have been performed only once, and at a time when I was not resident in this country. To give but a few examples, Rudet’s “Money to Live” and “Basin” were respectively first performed at the Royal Court, Theatre Upstairs in 1984 and 1985; Oshodi’s “The S Bend” at the same venue in 1984; Dayley’s “Rose’s Story” at the South Bank Polytechnic, London in January 1984; Kay’s “Chiaroscuro” at the Soho Polytechnic in London in 1986; Pinnock’s “Leave Taking” at the Liverpool Playhouse Studio in 1988. Cooke’s “Back Street Mammy” was produced at the Lyric Studio, Hammersmith in London in September 1989; Pinnock’s “A Hero’s Welcome” at the Royal Court, Theatre Upstairs in the same year; Ahmad’s “Song for a Sanctuary” was first performed at Worcester Arts Workshop in May 1990 and in the same year Zindika’s “Paper and Stone”

at the Lyric Studio, Hammersmith London. “Talking in Tongues” had its first performance at the Royal Court, Theatre Upstairs in August 1991; Randall’s “24%” at the Battersea Arts Centre in London in the same year; “Running Dream” at the Theatre Royal Stratford East, London, in March 1993. “Leonora’s Dance” was premièred at the Cockpit Theatre, London in February 1993 and, two years later, J. B. Rose’s “Darker the Berry” at the Albany Theatre, Deptford, in South London. Since documenting dramatic performances – even those on a short run – is not a priority for funds-starved theatre, such documentation was not available to me. This means that the only evidence of the plays having been performed (and, hence, the only “after-life”) is the text itself, a fact which makes a text-based approach such as I have chosen appropriate. In any case, it is an approach frequently undertaken in the analysis of plays⁶.

In this thesis I shall examine the play-texts on which I focus from a sociological perspective. Indeed, the force of these texts lies in their articulation of Black women’s realities through the interrelation between the playwrights’ and their communities’ lives and the playwrights’ work. The plays thus speak to a collective experience, here of alienation and oppression, and engage with historical and contemporary social and

⁶ For example, Michelene Wandor focuses on textual strategies to the exclusion of performance in Post-War British Drama: Looking Back in Gender (2001), a methodology which she thinks “unabashedly repositions the written text at the centre of play analysis.” (6)

political issues that impact on Black communities in Britain – hence, the sociological stance which underpins the examination of the plays in this research. It follows that in the course of my analysis, I shall be using a variety of non-literary media like newspaper materials and political and sociological literature as a means of highlighting the relationship between the plays and the wider social context in which they have been conceived.

Mirroring the connections between the playwrights' lives and plays, my personal experiences have acted as an impetus for the writing of this thesis. I was born and brought up in the former French colony of Madagascar. Having lived on the island for twenty-seven years, and – in that time – never having ventured beyond South Africa, I came to Britain in August 1999 to further my studies in English literature. In doing so, not only did I experience the shock of Europe and a contrasting life for the first time, but I crossed an additional border rarely attempted by my compatriots; namely to leave a francophone environment for the English-speaking world. Washed up on this distant shore, with memories of home and family sharpened by the miles now between us, I began to take stock of my life history.

Prior to my time in Britain, I had been able to gauge who I was by my position in my family and society and by the way in which people responded to me in different situations. Coming to Britain, to Europe, for the first time five years ago destabilised all these certainties in that I found

myself effectively divorced from the relationships that I built in previous years, from the people who told me who I was and through whom I was myself⁷. In short, the people who defined me and allowed me to define myself were no longer there. And so I was thrown into a vacuum, deprived of roles and relationships that had given shape to my identity. Thus, to some extent my situation is not dissimilar to that of most of the Black mothers in the plays discussed here who also came to a foreign land on their own.

My thesis explores the migratory experiences of these Black mothers, their sense of displacement and the ways in which they handle the issue of unbelonging. It then continues by focusing on the lives of the second-generation female characters, analysing their experience of being born Black in Britain and their position as daughters vis-à-vis their maternal homeland and Britain. I shall examine the actions mothers and daughters take to negotiate the identity issues resulting from these experiences.

⁷ Hyacinth, the main character in Joan Riley's The Unbelonging, experienced similar feelings of loss and vulnerability when deprived of the relationships that were meaningful to her upon her arrival in Britain: "It had been at the airport in London. She had been feeling lonely and small, wishing for Aunt Joyce, for Jamaica and her friends ..." (13).

A Brief Outline of Black Settlement in Britain

In order to understand the plays one needs to understand the context in which they are rooted. Hence, and in line with my sociological approach to the plays, I shall provide a brief historical overview of Black settlement in Britain, focusing initially on the period of the 1950s and 1960s. Although the plays were not published within that particular period, they touch upon the economic and socio-political circumstances of female characters following their arrival in those particular decades. Next, I shall investigate the evolution of these conditions in the 1970s, putting emphasis on the situation of second-generation immigrants in British society and the role of Black mothers in fighting for their children's rights. Then, I shall consider the social and political changes of the 1980s, paying particular attention to the position of second-generation migrants and the types of racialized ideologies dominating the period, before finally examining the social, political and cultural trends dominating the 1990s and early years of the new millennium in relation to the subject of ethnic minorities. For each of these four stages, I supplement my historical analysis with an examination of the literary milieu which also fostered the plays. In light of these analyses, I shall then give a brief individual summary of the plays so as to provide a broad picture of the themes they are concerned with. Lastly, I shall delineate the organization of the rest of this thesis.

In the post-war period, Britain became attractive to Black and Asian people from the former colonies in search of better economic conditions and improved standards of living. Struggling from the repercussions of six years of war, Britain desperately needed a cheap supply of labour to rebuild the country's economy. As a result of this labour shortage, "several private British companies placed job advertisements in Caribbean newspapers. London Transport, British Railways and various hospitals established special recruitment schemes with the West Indian governments" (Smith 141).

The dominant travel discourses have the propensity of casting men in the role of travellers or migrants. For instance, it was often assumed that migrant workers in the 1950s and 1960s were always male. In West Indian Migration to Britain (1968), Peach, for instance, presumed female migration to have been a reactive process which consisted in Black women's passive following of men. In short, women came as either wives or children, dependent on the man. This is not always true. Many Caribbean women came to Britain as migrant workers in their own right. They arrived independently and in almost equal numbers to men (Fryer 1984).

The plays discuss a re-appropriation of the notion of migrancy as Black women's experience rather than a predominantly male one. Enid in "Leave Taking" travels to Britain in order to escape poverty. In the same

vein, Minda in “A Hero’s Welcome” dreams about the possible material benefits of moving to Britain and subsequently leaves her husband who is reluctant to travel in order to pursue her dreams: “There must be plenty opportunities there, Len. They crying out for people. You see it all over the island now. You could get a good life there” (49). Equally, Esther in “Darker the Berry” has high hopes regarding England where her aunt lives: “When she [her aunt] talk about England, job, opportunity ... Jamaica come in like a place fe the living dead [*sic*].” (175)

Many of the immigrants came to Britain with no intention to stay on a permanent basis (Peach et al 576). They thought that after saving for a few years they would happily go home. However, due to poor wages, some did not manage to buy a ticket to visit home, let alone return home after several years of employment in Britain. A first-generation migrant looks back on her time in Britain and recalls her initial objective when she first arrived:

I didn’t actually think I would stay here so long without going back even for a visit, but I haven’t been back since I came to this country twenty years ago. I don’t think anyone came here with the intention of staying for good. (Bryan 22)

Thus, Black migrants faced a major disappointment when they realized that Britain was not the promised land they had expected it to be. Upon

arrival, the immigrants were disillusioned not least by the problem of accommodation. Addressing Britain's housing problems was the central raft of the government's re-election campaign in 1966 as *The Times* reported its "plan for a building rate of 500,000 a year by 1970."⁸ However, no measures were taken to supply Blacks with basic shelter. Stanley Bryan gives an account of such difficulties on his arrival in Wolverhampton from Jamaica: "He could find no place to live, not even a room for the night. Finally he arrived at a West Indian's house which was 'like a satchel filled with human beings': there were men sleeping under the stairs" (Hiro 27). Another immigrant remembers a frustrating trend in the housing market in Britain at the time: "Jobs were available precisely in those conurbations where the housing shortage was most acute." (Ibid.)

Although many studies have covered the Black migration to Britain, very few have closely examined the conditions of Black women's lives. Williams (1993) points out that when the Empire Windrush came in June 1948, a 25-year-old Kingstonian called Averilly Wauchope was on board amongst other workers from the Caribbean. Subsequent ships brought more Black women to Britain. For instance, three months after the Empire Windrush had arrived, the *Orbita* transported fifteen women to Britain. Then, 49 more came in 1949. Accommodation-wise, they shared a similar fate to their male counterparts. Donald Hinds, a West Indian writer,

⁸ "Half a Million...", 8

mentions that “a twenty-year-old Jamaican girl who went to Birmingham had to share a room with four [West Indian] men. The young lady said that the men were very ‘gallant’ about it. They would give her time to put up her screen and get into bed before they came in ...” (Hinds 59)

Coupled with the immigrants’ struggle to find accommodation was disappointment with the degrading type of jobs they were offered and the deplorable working conditions they had to endure. Plays such as “Leave Taking”, “Paper and Stone” and “Back Street Mammy” refer explicitly to the types of low-paid and unfulfilling jobs (Enid and Martha are cleaners and Maria is a factory worker) women had to do for the family’s survival. In Jacqueline Rudet’s “Money to Live” three central female characters end up as sex workers to make a satisfactory living. Apart from coping with long hours at work and low wages, Black migrants also had to deal with discrimination:

They were placed in low-skilled occupations and refused promotions, regardless of their qualifications. They had to contend with quotas and even bans on “coloured labour” by the management of several private firms. In exceptional circumstances, a small number of black workers were placed in skilled and supervisory positions, but their white co-workers often staged walk-outs to protest these promotions. (Smith 141)

Thus, unable to secure similar if not better positions than they used to occupy at home, many Black immigrants ended up doing jobs beneath their qualifications. A study of West Indians conducted by Ruth Glass in 1958-9 revealed that 55 per cent took lower-status employment when they moved to Britain (Glass 31). A West Indian welder recounts his experience of job downgrading in his early days in London: "It didn't take me long to realize that I couldn't get a job in that trade. So I start to ask for anything which take me off the dole ... When I start riding the buses looking for a job, I would jump off wherever I saw a chimney ... At last I went to Lyons, and get a job there as a porter." (Hinds 71-2)

Black women underwent similar strain. Many of those who came to Britain in the 1950s and early 1960s were young women who had just begun families. However, for the sake of survival, they had to work despite the lack of child support facilities. Thus they were condemned to perform night or shift work to enable them to earn money and to take care of their children. Most Black mothers also suffered from the racism inflicted by their bosses and co-workers. Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe describe this phenomenon in The Heart of the Race:

British workers felt threatened by our presence and were unable to shake off the years of racist and sexist conditioning. Even though our arrival usually ensured their own promotion to less tedious and better paid sections of the industry, the fact that we were there at all

was openly resented. The Race Relations Act of 1966, far from outlawing such attitudes, merely entrenched them. (27)

The social and political impacts of the Black presence on British society manifested themselves in various forms. In terms of social history, racial conflicts between Blacks and whites became rife. The 1958 race riots were notable⁹. Violence broke out in major cities in Britain. The Institute of Race Relations survey in 1966-7 revealed that a feeling of being “swamped” by Blacks was prevalent amongst whites. For instance, in the 1966 census, two-thirds of the white respondents estimated the Black population to be either 2-5 million, or more than 5 million. However, it also showed that white migrants (1,628,000) far outnumbered the Black ones (730,000) (Rose 570). This suggests that the visibility of racial difference embodied in Black people was more important in the perception of “being swamped by blacks” than the actual figures.

As a result of their economic hardships and socio-political discrimination, first-generation Black immigrants leant heavily on the Church just as they

⁹ On 30th August, 1958, “a crowd of 3000 to 4000 whites gathered at the junction of St Ann’s Well Road and Pym Street in Nottingham. No blacks were to be seen in the streets: they were following their leaders’ advice to stay indoors from Friday evening to Monday morning. Frustrated, the mob attacked the police for ‘having protected the blacks on the previous Saturday.’” (Hiro 39)

did in their native land.¹⁰ According to Hiro, “at least 50% of the West Indian immigrants were regular churchgoers” (34). In particular, Black women found the church helpful since it provided one of their “main sources of support and sustenance, offering some continuity with the forms of social and community organisation [they] had known in the Caribbean” (Bryan, 131). Correspondingly, Martha in “Paper and Stone”, Enid in “Leave-Taking” and Maria in “Back Street Mammy” are all devout Christians.

As for the Black literary scene of the 1950s and 1960s, themes developed by the first-generation writers of the period have a particular emphasis on the collective struggles they faced in Britain. For example, Sam Selvon’s Lonely Londoners, set in the 1950s, offers a vivid account of various hardships faced by Caribbean immigrants upon their arrival in Britain. Similarly, in her semi-autobiographical novel, In the Ditch, set in London in the 1960s, Buchi Emecheta describes the plight of a Black single mother working and caring for her five small children. In “Nation and Contestation: Black British Writing”, Alison Donnell argues that the writing of first-generation Black writers is distinctly different from that of

¹⁰ Upon arrival in Britain, these Black immigrants found “the official denominations were cold and unwelcoming” hence, the endeavour to set up pentecostal churches “run by immigrant groups and individuals in their own houses.” (Mike and Trevor Phillips 201)

the later generations because of “the security of their cultural identities” and the strong cultural bond they had with the country they had just left (12). These factors acted as a bulwark against the strains of living in Britain.

Unlike the preoccupations of the first generation who were mostly concerned with their rights (for example, to jobs, suitable accommodation, good working conditions), the generation of the 1970s and 1980s displayed an engagement with issues of identity. The new politics of being Black in Britain was triggered by their coming into awareness of the fact that “whiteness is very often equated with Britishness, an equation which puts them in an ambiguous dislocated position” (Mama 112). By being Black they were doomed to be eternal aliens who must explain their continued presence in Britain. On the other hand, they did not have the particular connection with their country of origin their parents had. When experiencing racism, first-generation immigrants might be prompted to turn their thoughts to going back to their homelands; but for the second generation both geographical places of homeland and Britain remain problematic in terms of their sense of belonging¹¹. Most of the second-generation characters in the plays are entrapped in that position.

¹¹ See Asian Adolescents in the West (1999) by Paul A. Singh Ghuman for an exploration of the complexity of the situation of second- and third-generation adolescents of South Asian background in positioning themselves between their parents' values and the dominant British culture.

One repercussion of the issue of second-generation migrants being left out of British society was that they remained disadvantaged on the basis of every major indicator of economic, political and social well-being. Their deprivations extended to many significant areas of their lives. In the plays, there is no indication of social privileges to which Black youth might be entitled. On the contrary, they seem to inherit the same treatment their parents had. They tend to occupy poorly paid positions. Some end up prostituting themselves (like Charlene and Judy in "Money to Live") or stealing (like Angela in "24%").

Hiro suggests that "by the early 1970s it had become clear that black schoolchildren were three times more likely than whites to be categorized as educationally subnormal (ESN)" (69). Indeed, on 15 December, 1971, *The Times* reported Parliament's discussion of "the worrying matter of the excessively large number of West Indian children in educationally subnormal schools." Daphine, a Jamaican, in "Leonora's Dance" epitomizes this experience. In one of her conversations with Frieda she reveals: "They said I was sub-normal, they gave me electric shock treatment. It didn't make me better. It made me worse" (II/4: 105). Low levels of attainment in schools which resulted from this situation in turn provoked high levels of unemployment. For instance, in Looking for Work, the Commission for Racial Equality published a survey of 500 white and Black school-leavers in the London Borough of Lewisham in

1978. It showed that the unemployment rate among Blacks was three times that of whites. Black and white jobless were looking for a job, with two-thirds of Blacks believing that employers were discriminating against them.

The construction of Black communities as social problem began to emerge. For instance, some crimes such as mugging were perceived to be typically Black. Such perceptions could be played upon by people such as Keith Squire, a National Front campaigner, who committed the crime of “dishonest handling” in order to stir up racial hatred. *The Times* reported this case on 24 October, 1978:

Police saw him putting up the poster in High Road, Wood Green, North London during Greater London Council elections last year, when he stood as a National Front candidate. The poster, depicting a black youth mugging an old woman, carried the slogan: “Danger – muggers at work.” It said that four-fifths of muggers were black and 85 per cent of their victims white. (2)

Hall et al. closely analyzed the mugging issue in Policing the Crisis (1978). They explain that mugging became associated with Black youth because they were perceived as a socially deprived and alienated group who belong to a racial group with a “weak” culture and high levels of

social problems such as broken families and underachievement at school.¹²

From the early 1970s, these clashes between white and Black communities resulted in a noticeable development in the levels of political involvement and mobilisation among the Black community. For example, Black mothers felt that they had a duty to protect their children's rights in order to safeguard the latter's place in the country of their birth. They became increasingly active in protesting against police brutality towards young Black men.¹³

¹² Some quarters in the media contributed to perpetuating this negative association. As late as 1985, *The Times* recorded the Press Council upholding a complaint against *The Sun* over a report on Black people's involvement in London muggings: "*The Sun* should not have used the firm headline 'Blacks do 60 per cent of London muggings' on its story about a long, complicated and qualified Home Office report." ("*The Sun* used Misleading ...", 4)

¹³ Diane Abbott, a Black MP, recalls the Black women's mobilization phenomenon: "I remember going, in the late seventies, to a conference – a national conference of black women in Brixton. It was the first of its kind, and there were hundreds of black women in the Abeng Community Centre in Brixton. I just thought it was magic and I got drawn into all types of community activity. And I got drawn into the sus campaign in particular ... And I think probably the important thing about the sus campaign was, first of all, police harassment of black youth is on the cutting edge of the relationship between black people. But it was also a campaign where, for the first time, that older

? Why 'as late as'?

Owing to Black women's interests in social and political issues directly affecting them, the 1970s saw the formation of the Brixton Black Women's Group, the first autonomous Black women's group in Britain.¹⁴ Apart from their fight against the growing criminalisation of Black youth, these women were challenging racist housing policies. They were struggling mainly against the ghettoisation of Black single mothers assigned to high rise blocks on "problem" estates.

At this point, it should be noted that the steady rise in the number of immigrants of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin in England is explained by the Immigration Acts in the 1960s which prompted migrants

generation of black people were saying, 'Hey, hello. What's going on? There's something not quite right about this society.'" (Mike and Trevor Phillips 307)

¹⁴ Although the Brixton Black Women were among the first female political activists in Britain, Claudia Jones is considered the originator of Black political mobilisation. She was a nationalist Black woman who defended the cause of Blacks against racism in the late 1950s in Britain. In 1958 she founded and edited the *West Indian Gazette*. A year later, she also launched the Notting Hill Carnival which is "an annual showcase for Caribbean talent."

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/society_culture/protest_reform/claudia_jones.shtml

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to send for their families before the Acts were enforced.¹⁵ For example, Amrit Wilson argues that “before the 1965 Immigration Act, Mirpuri and Bengali families would send their sons to England for a few months or a few years at a time. An elder brother would come to Britain, return, and be replaced by a younger brother – and so on. The Immigration Acts, with their strict control of entry, made frequent trips to and from Britain impossible. Finally, the men who were here had no choice but to stay on, send for their wives and settle in Britain” (15). Before 1960, immigration from the Indian subcontinent was on a much smaller scale. The group was composed of seamen, teachers, ex-Indian army personnel, doctors; in short, people who were generally educated and had a good knowledge of English. After 1960, the Asian migrants who came to Britain were more often from a rural background, “mainly farming families from Gujerat and the Indian and Pakistani areas of Punjab. There were also smaller groups of higher and lower caste people from these areas and in addition there were people from the villages of Sylhet, a district of Bangladesh” (Wilson 110). The men from these countries were mainly unskilled workers who – as previously noted – came to fill post-World War II labour shortages in

¹⁵ It began with the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act which ended the rights of Commonwealth citizens to settle in the UK by making them subject to immigration controls. More specifically, it required all Commonwealth migrants to obtain an employment voucher before being given leave to enter. This limited the right of entry to the UK.

the lowest-paid and unskilled occupations in cities in Britain. Their main motivation to migrate lay in their hope for improved economic prospects.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the make-up of the body of Black migrants in the UK underwent a major change with the arrival of Asians as political refugees from East Africa. Ian R. G. Spencer records that at the beginning of this period “the Caribbean community was comfortably the largest single component, making up about half of Asian and Black Britain. By 1981 the Indian population had overtaken the Caribbean and the total South Asian population was heading quickly for a figure double that of the West Indian community” (146).

Unlike their fellow Asian counterparts, who predominantly came from underprivileged rural areas from the Indian subcontinent, the group of Asians from East Africa who migrated to Britain from the late 1960s onwards were mostly skilled professionals and “overwhelmingly urban, middle-income families”¹⁶ (Brah 1992: 64). They left East Africa *en*

¹⁶ For an exploration of the Asian roles in Uganda under British colonialism and their politico-economic position just prior to the expulsion see Adams and M. Bristow, “The Politico-Economic Position of Ugandan Asians in the Colonial and Independent Eras” (1978).

masse to escape the local anti-Asian climate after independence¹⁷. It is these diverse migrations and their ramifications in the lives of Black and Asian people in the UK which inform the plays.

Racial inequalities continued to affect all sections of the Black and Asian community in the 1980s despite Race Relations Acts and government initiatives aimed at their eradication. For example, on 6 July 1984, Pat Healy, *The Times*' Race Relations Correspondent, quoted a government-sponsored survey from the Policy Studies Institute, stating that "Black Britons are still at the bottom of the job and housing markets because of the persistence of racial disadvantage" (5).

The 1980s recession, fuelling racial hostility from whites, further exacerbated the racialised inequality structures deeply embedded in British society.¹⁸ Major urban unrest characterised this period. Across England in 1981 Black and Asian youths rioted and rebelled against racialised hostility, from London to Liverpool to Leeds. This generation

¹⁷ The Asians in Kenya left around 1968; the ones from Tanzania circa 1970 and the Ugandan Asians in 1972.

¹⁸ Most studies of inequality portray Blacks as almost overwhelmingly victimised (see for example Farley and Allen, 1989 and Hacker, 1992). The victimisation of Black women is one of the major foci of Paulette Randall's "24%".

was resisting and demonstrating. They were taking part in public discourses and entering public places, making demands for social justice.

This period of widespread unrest coincided with the rise of political theatre. White playwrights such as David Hare, Caryl Churchill and David Edgar interrogated national institutions in work that was characterized by an almost journalistic level of research and analysis. Howard Brenton's "A Short Sharp Shock"¹⁹ featured an attack on Thatcherism, and Trevor Griffiths's "Oi for England"²⁰ was written in response to the riots in the early 1980s. But, at the same time, other political writers looked towards their own circumstances and reported on their own lives. These largely autobiographical plays – like the trilogy written in the early 1980s by Andrea Dunbar, documenting life as a teenager on Bradford's Buttershaw Estate – tended to pose uncomfortable questions rather than seek or offer ideological answers.

Black and Asian women's plays, which at this time began to be staged more frequently, were – broadly speaking – examples of the second school of political theatre. Playwriting gave an opportunity to these Black

¹⁹ First produced at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, London in 1980.

²⁰ First produced at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in London in 1982.

women dramatists to assert their public voice. hooks describes the act of coming to voice as “an act of resistance [as] speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject” (1989: 12). Thus, the plays point to a small triumph in Black and Asian women’s renaissance as subjects whose struggles over access to the means of representations in the public, cultural and political spheres ultimately met with some success. Wandor refers to the influence politics exerted on theatre in that period:

The general raising of the political temperature meant that all playwrights, even those who did not see themselves as “political” or who tried to keep their distance from various political ideologies were influenced by the public nature of the political debates and the visibility of political activism – socialist and feminist – at the end of the 1960s and the first part of the 1970s.

(90)

The political plays were part of a wider literary phenomenon that emerged at this time of politically-oriented writings, focused on social injustice, and grounded in the experience of being Black in Britain. Many narratives of the period are thus rooted in sociological and auto/biographical observations, such as Beryl Gilroy’s autobiographical Black Teacher (1976) which depicts her personal experience of racism in Britain, and Amrit Wilson’s Finding A Voice: Asian Women in Britain (1978) which

gave evidence of the struggles of British Asian women. Together with the public demonstrations outlined above, this political literature helped encourage a shift in discourse from being Black in Britain to being Black British.²¹

The 1980s were characterized by more diverse representations of both blackness and writing. Anthologies of Black women's writing emerged. Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain (1987) edited by Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins for example is a set of poems and stories that portray social and political issues and the experience of racism. Another anthology Laretta Ncgobo's Let It Be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain (1987), showcases the work of ten essayists. They deal mainly with personal stories which assert a sense of resistance to British racism. John Solomos' Black Youth, Racism and the State (1988) stands out on the documentary narrative front. It provides an analysis of the state's role in the area of race relations and concentrates in

²¹ One way in which this shift manifests itself in the 1980s plays is that they that feature inter-generational conflicts, establishing a contrast between the immigrant parents and their "British-born" children. Plays by Black and Asian playwrights from the 1990s have centred more closely on second- and third-generation migrants.

particular on the process through which young Blacks came to be seen as a social problem. In the same year, in the realm of Black cultural studies, there appeared the highly influential essay, "New Ethnicities" by Stuart Hall, which examines a wide range of issues relating to culture, racism and identity. Hall's goal was to separate the concept of "ethnicity" from its common negative associations with "race" and to re-fashion it to convey the notion of "new identities". He raised the question of blackness and representation in this anti-racist enterprise and argued that scholars' sole concentration on the issue of relations of representation is not sufficient; rather, in order to be effective, they need to consider the "politics of representation". Gilroy's There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack (1987), another theoretical landmark, revolved around the relationship between class, race and nationality in contemporary Britain. He examined new forms of racism, and advocated that the importance of the history of racism should not be overlooked in debates over racism, as racist discourses tend simply to focus on Blacks in the present and to deny their past.

Without the burgeoning of Black and Asian women's theatrical creativity during this decade, my thesis would not be possible. But despite the increasing number of such plays, most of them had only one short run and often remain unpublished. Yvonne Brewster highlights this in her introduction to the first volume of Black Plays (1987), "the first anthology

ever of plays written by and about black people living in Britain” (7). It was meant to set up an arena where Black work had its rightful place in the multicultural British literary scene:

The book is more than timely when one considers the emphasis which the funding bodies have recently been placing on the cultural needs and the work of the black community. The work of those who live in this country must become more accessible; if not, then the work of playwrights living in the Caribbean and Africa will continue to dominate the scene as their plays are more readily available in the educational editions meant for the schools of the Third World. These “source” plays establish vital links with essential cultural roots, but the indigenous voice is just as important ... (Ibid.)

In her recent article entitled “Constitutive Subjectivities”, Gabriele Griffin addresses this lack of engagement with the literary “indigenous voice” in British theatre. Sharing Brewster’s view, Griffin emphasizes the predominance of postcolonial theory/theatre as a factor in the eclipse of homegrown Black and Asian talent, that is of those who came to Britain as migrants or are the children of such migrants:

In the case of postcolonial theatre/theory, the focus – as the term suggests – has been on the relation between the colonial and what came/comes after, often very much with the head turned back towards the colonial and with an emphasis on current cultural productions in the former colonies. (3)

Lack of funding and financial support apart, neither has the critical reception of such activities matched the enthusiasm these Black women playwrights show in their commitment to their work.

Although the 1980s were characterized by an interest in feminist and women's theatre and a number of major works on the subject were published, the presence of Black British women in that particular field hardly registered at the time. To name but a few relevant volumes of the period, let me begin with Helen Keyssar's An Introduction to Plays of Contemporary British and American Women which appeared in 1984. It charts the history of feminist drama and its development as a theatrical genre in both Britain and America. Much as Keyssar mentions notable playwrights such as Caryl Churchill and Michelene Wandor in the British dramatic scene, she fails to record the emerging phenomenon of Black women's theatre in Britain. Michelene Wandor's Look Back in Gender (1987) is a landmark in critical commentary on British women's theatre. In it she focuses on selected British plays performed in the post-war

period from 1956 to the early 1980s. Encouraged by her interest in what she terms the “imperative of gender”, Wandor analyses the way these dramas represent men and women. In her analysis, Wandor displays an awareness of the political and social climates of the time and its impact on the plays – even less well-known plays – produced in that period, and yet Black women’s plays do not feature in her work.

Later in the course of the decade, Sue-Ellen Case published Feminism and Theatre (1988) in which the focus falls on women’s works and feminist uses of history and theatre. She, for instance, engages in the subject of radical and materialist feminisms and women of colour, and finds ways to link those areas in order to create a connection between social movements and the stage. Although Black and Asian women’s theatre in Britain was mainly born out of Black and Asian women’s experience of their racial and gendered selves in a hostile society – thus meeting Case’s purpose in her intention to establish a tie between the stage and society – Black women’s contribution to the history of British theatre was overlooked. Case’s chapter on “Women of Colour and Theatre” is restricted only to Chicanas and Black women’s theatre in the United States. A British equivalent to Case’s work would be Elaine Aston’s somewhat later An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre (1995) in which she devotes a chapter to “Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theatre”. It identifies Black women’s marginal position in relation to mainstream, white, feminist

theatre and argues for the re-fashioning of feminist theory and theatrical practice which their marginality demands.

At the end of the decade, Case also edited Performing Feminisms which features a collection of articles selected, with the exception of two, from issues of *Theatre Journal* published between 1984 and 1989. These articles deal with performance and feminist theatre representing the trends of the decade. The book has one chapter entitled “Centering Class and Ethnicity” which focuses on African-American and Chicano theatre. In the same volume, Janelle Reinet looks at the relationship between socialism and feminism as artistic and political practice in “Beyond Brecht: Britain’s New Feminist Drama”. However, Black and Asian women’s theatre does not feature in her discussion.

Following Yvonne Brewster’s pioneering collections of Black Plays One and Two in the late 1980s where she sketches the history of performance and publication of plays by people of African and Caribbean descent in Britain, the 1991 Bloomsbury Theatre Guide includes a general historical entry on Black and Asian theatre. In 1993, in “Black Women Playwrights in Britain” Susan Croft starts to set up a record of the work of Black – Afro-Caribbean and Asian – women playwrights in Britain and later published She Also Wrote Plays (2001) in which she compiles, *inter alia*, bibliographies of works by Black and Asian (women) playwrights in Britain and also includes writers whose work demonstrates the diversity

and development of dramatic writing in English-speaking countries over the millennia. Although Croft's compilation is extensive, many Black and Asian British playwrights such as Maya Chowdry, Maria Oshodi, Paulette Randall, J.B. Rose and Zindika do not figure in her list, indicating the bulk of work still waiting to be done in the field.

Such invisibility is matched by the only marginal improvements that have occurred in the lives of ethnic minorities in Britain in the 1990s and beyond. These years have been partly characterized by a significant increase in the number of asylum seekers in Britain. Research suggests that "while the number of applications for asylum in the UK fell in the early 1990s, since 1996 (when about 30,000 individual applications were made) there has been a steady rise."²² The figures are a reminder that, notwithstanding the difficulties, coming to Britain still has its attractions for immigrants. As Nick Cohen has written:

They note that Britain doesn't have a mass far-Right party on French lines, not because the British are better, kinder and more modest than the French, although there are many that will make that case, but because the archaic British state is far easier for immigrants to settle in. In a "proper" nation with a written constitution and ethnically homogeneous population, foreigners can

²² Data accessed on <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1157031.stm>, 09/07/04.

be presented as aliens who threaten the blood and soil of the true nation. It is impossible to imagine the French controversies about Muslim girls wearing head scarves in schools being repeated here because there is no constitutional separation of Church and state; no dominant idea of what being British means. (29)

In the cultural sphere, the 1990s and beyond continued the growing momentum in political theatre. 1998 saw the Tricycle Theatre's production of "The Colour of Justice", a dramatised reconstruction of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry by Richard Norton-Taylor. It captured the Lawrence family's search for justice for Stephen who was killed by a group of white youths for no apparent reason. The play used *verbatim* extracts of the inquiry to dramatise one of its chief findings, namely institutionalized racism in the Metropolitan Police Force.

In terms of theatre literature, the most recent addition to writing in the area of Black and Asian British theatre is Gabriele Griffin's Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain (2003).

This is the first monograph to document and analyse plays written by Black and Asian women in Britain. The volume explores the theatricalization of themes such as migration, displacement, identity, racism and sexism. The volume also explores diverse concerns such as geographies of un/belonging, reverse migration, "sexploitation", arranged marriages, the racialization of sexuality, and asylum seeking as they

emerge in the plays. It argues for the importance of Black and Asian women playwrights in British theatre.

The late 1990s and first years of the twenty-first century have also witnessed the publication of anthologies on Black Britain. A number of these anthologies were written to mark the 50th Windrush anniversary, the arrival on British soil of the ship SS Windrush which brought the first of the biggest wave of immigration from the Caribbean to Britain. Amongst these anthologies are Tony Sewell's Keep on Moving: The Windrush Legacy (1998), Onyekachi Wambu's Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing about Black Britain (1998) and Mike and Trevor Phillips' Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain (1998). Kwesi Owusu's Black British Culture and Society and IC3: The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain edited by Courttia Newland and Kadija Sesay came out in 2000. Finally, Alison Donnell's The Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture (2002) offers a critical inventory of Black British culture from the 1970s to 2001. It focuses specifically upon concepts employed and initiatives taken by second-generation Black British immigrants highlighting their struggle for the recognition of Black Britain and tackling various themes such as fashion, design, film and performance works. A common thread running through these anthologies is the editors' concern for presenting the richness and diversity of Black writing that has been part of the British literary landscape for the last 50

years. However, everywhere in Britain Black and Asian women's theatre continues to remain largely an unexplored territory.

The Plays in Brief:

Although all the plays that I have chosen have been performed at least once, most of them have remained unavailable in published form. Consequently, knowledge of most of the plays (if not all) examined here will be limited to theatre specialists. I shall therefore provide a brief summary of each play.

Zindika's "Paper and Stone" (1989), Trish Cooke's "Running Dream" (1993), Winsome Pinnock's "Leonora's Dance" (1993) and Rukhsana Ahmad's "Song for a Sanctuary" (1993) are plays which centre on the filial relationship binding mother and daughter. They explore the interconnected lives of grandmother and/or mother and daughter. The plays examine the impact of the past on the present and the mothers' inner landscapes as they grapple with issues of displacement, their past pain and anger, the difficult upbringing of their daughters, their personal expectations of their new lives and the necessity of accommodating these experiences. The plays also tackle the daughters' ambivalent relationships with their mothers, their experience of growing up in a racist society and the struggle they go through in their search for identity. "Paper and Stone" explores the complex relationship between Brenda and her devout mother

Martha. Martha's controlling upbringing makes Brenda leave the maternal home and move into a place with her friend Juliet. Juliet was abandoned by her parents at birth; she is a lonely drifting figure in search of a fulfilling identity. At the end of the play, Martha recognises the mistake she made in denying her daughter the freedom she needs. As a result, she decides to search for both her daughter who has left and the long-lost Juliet.

"Running Dream" is set in Dominica and England. Florentine leaves the former to follow William, her partner, to England. Upon arrival, she discovers that William is living with another woman. She then decides to raise her two daughters Bianca and Grace on her own but is unable to send for her eldest daughter Clementine to join them in England. The death of their grandmother, Ma Effeline, prompts Grace and Bianca to return to Dominica. The three sisters are reunited. However, Bianca feels alienated from her mother's country because she is treated like a tourist and also because of the hostility Clementine shows towards her. The play is concerned with the female characters' choices – their search for self in both England and the maternal homeland, and the conflicting relationships that follow.

In "Leonora's Dance", the protagonist – a mixed-race woman born in the West Indies to a black servant and a white master – moves to England in order to pursue a dancing career. However, racism in the world of ballet

prevents her from becoming a ballerina. In her letters to her mother Frieda in the Caribbean, Leonora tells lies, pretending to have a husband and children. The truth is that she lives in a house in London battling with mental illness and has little contact with the outside world beyond her two lodgers Melisa and Daphine. Frieda comes to England to see her daughter. She tries to get her to come home in order to become her spiritual successor. Leonora resists her mother's offer which leads the latter to bestow her spiritual gift on Daphine.

"Song for a Sanctuary" tells the story of Rajinder and her daughter Savita who come to seek shelter at a refuge following instances of domestic violence inflicted by Rajinder's husband. Rajinder's experience of life at the refuge questions her long-held values and confuses her sense of identity. It is also at the refuge that she is made to know that her daughter has been sexually abused by her husband. The play deals with intergenerational conflict as Savita challenges her mother's authority in her quest for independence. It ends with Rajinder's tragic murder by her husband.

A second group of plays brings together Grace Dayley's "Rose's Story" (1985), Winsome Pinnock's "Leave Taking" (1988), Trish Cooke's "Back Street Mammy" (1990) and J. B. Rose's "Darker the Berry" (1998). They share a common thread, that of the daughters' unplanned pregnancy. They tackle the mothers' reaction to their daughters' discovery of sexuality and

the ensuing conflicting relationships they have as the daughters make their own choices. “Rose’s Story” deals with the issue of intergenerational conflict. Rose is raised in a devout Pentecostal household. Upon her unplanned pregnancy, she runs away and sets up home with her boyfriend Leroy. To defend her choice to keep the baby, Rose confronts her parents and other authority figures. At the end of the play, Rose is abandoned by her parents and boyfriend. She assumes her responsibility and moves into a Mother-and-Baby home.

In “Leave Taking”, Enid raises her daughters Viv and Del on her own. She has ambitions for her daughters, the dream of a better future for them. Viv strives to win her mother’s approval through education whereas her sister Del becomes pregnant. After a violent quarrel with Enid during which Del accuses her mother of being domineering, Del leaves the maternal home and moves in with an obeah, May²³. After May’s bestowal

²³ The Oxford English Reference Dictionary defines “Obeah” as “a kind of sorcery practised especially in the West Indies” (1002). Azoth Kalafou explains that

Obeah is one of the more unknown and obscure African traditions of sorcery ... The word obeah or obi is itself a word shrouded and obscured in secrecy. The most understandable meaning of the word can be translated into “occult power” meaning a powerful engine used to empower spells for witchcraft as well as other forms for practical magic

of her spiritual gift onto Del she becomes an obeah herself. 'Leave Taking' locates the family as a site of conflict and a springboard for the daughters' search for identity.

Tackling similar themes of pregnancy and intergenerational conflict, "Back Street Mammy" tells the story of 16-year-old Dynette who, raised within the Roman Catholic tradition, is torn between her awakening sexuality and the esteem of her family and friends. She has her first sexual relationship with Eddie and finds herself pregnant. Dynette chooses abortion despite her attachment to her unborn child.

"Darker the Berry" is about a close-knit community in Jamaica, struggling against poverty. Miss Faith is deserted by her husband and is left to fend for herself with her daughter Esther and a step-daughter Norma. Throughout the play, Faith idolizes Esther and treats Norma unfairly. Miss Faith sends her lighter skinned daughter away to be educated, keeping her darker stepdaughter Norma at home as a domestic servant. In one of her visits home, Esther gets pregnant by her boyfriend Hector but refuses to keep the baby. She flees to England taking everybody's savings with her.

and communication with the gods ...

(<http://www.angelfire.com/electronic/awakening101/obeah.html>).

Ultimately, Norma also finds the courage to leave Faith in order to make a better life for herself.

Plays such as Jacqueline Rudet's "Money to Live" (1986) and "Basin" (1987), Jackie Kay's "Chiaroscuro" (1987) and "Every Bit of It" (not-dated), Paulette Randall's "24 Per Cent" (1991), Maya Chowdry's "Monsoon" (1993), Winsome Pinnock's "A Hero's Welcome" (1993) and "Talking in Tongues" (1995), Tanika Gupta's "Fragile Land" (2003) and Maria Oshodi's "The S Bend" (not dated) are all invested with personal narratives. They explore the inner conflicts and ambiguities of the female characters, their sense of sisterhood and the process of socialization that emerges as they negotiate their racial, sexual and gendered selves. "A Hero's Welcome" concerns a group of Black people who live on a West Indian island in 1947. Following an earlier injury Len, the "hero" in question, marries Minda, settles on the island and busies himself with the job of educating himself. Consumed by the desire for a more fulfilling life than the boredom she faces on the island, Minda flees to England with her lover. The play revolves around the intertwined relationships between Minda, Len, an obeah called Nana, Sis and Ishbel and their struggle for a better world. It is also about the characters' efforts at confronting reality. For example, it is revealed that Len's injury was not a direct consequence of enemy action (as he likes to suggest) but caused by an accident in a Liverpool munitions factory, where racism was a more immediate war than the one they were waging in a physical sense.

“Talking in Tongues” explores the experience of two Black British women, Claudette and Leela, on a trip to Jamaica. They do not feel they belong to the island because the language spoken there is foreign to them. Leela is recovering from the break-up of her marriage in England. Life on the island enables her to come to terms with her personal pain. For Claudette, island life represents another opportunity to vent frustration over her low self-image, racism and interracial relationships.

“Chiaroscuro” is concerned with the complex lives of four Black female characters. Opal and Beth’s coming out as lesbians heralds a discussion about racial and sexual identity. The play depicts the development of the characters’ relationships as their understanding of racism and heterosexism grows. Largely, the play centres on the exploration of identity; in Kay’s own words:

In all of the drafts of this play, I have been obsessed with naming. What do we call ourselves as lesbians and black women? How did we get our names? How do we assert our names? What are our past names? Each of the characters tells the story of her name. She is also searching for another name. She is in flux, reassessing her identity, travelling back into memory and forward into possibility. In order to change we have to examine who we say we are and how much of that has been imposed. The

more these characters perform this play the closer they get to who they are. (82)

“Basin” shares similarities with “Chiaroscuro” in that it explores the relationships of three Black women – Mona, Susan and Michele – who bring support to each other through the difficulties of life. Mona goes out with Michael but it is a one-way relationship as Michael only visits her when it suits him. Her friend Susan falls in love with Mona and helps her see the exploitative aspect of Mona’s relationship with Michael. Upon learning that Susan and Mona have become lovers, Michele strongly expresses her disapproval. She spells out her prejudice against same-sex relationships, especially ones involving Black people. However, the girls’ friendship triumphs over their differences.

“Money to Live” is another play by Rudet which she describes as “a story about hard times” (180). It gives an account of Charlene’s daily survival, her struggle to keep her low self-esteem afloat in her relationship with her boyfriend. She leads a quiet, lonely life away from her family until Judy, a lifelong friend, comes to visit her. To improve her material condition and self-esteem, Judy advises Charlene to follow her footsteps into the lucrative stripping business. After much persuasion from Judy, Charlene agrees. When Charlene reveals to her mother Olive what she does for a living, the latter shows understanding and does not condemn her. Instead Olive confesses that she used to be a prostitute while raising her children.

Thus, "Money to Live" explores the politics of Black female sexuality in the context of mother-daughter relationships.

"The S Bend" relates the friendship between Fola, a young girl of Nigerian descent, and Mya, a white female plumber who struggles to be accepted in the male-dominated world of her profession. Meanwhile, Fola finds it hard to adjust to her Black friends' West Indian culture. Her attempt to "stabilize" her identity takes her back to Nigeria from where she sends a letter to Mya enlightening her about her reasons for leaving Britain and her decision to settle in Nigeria. "Monsoon" too deals with a return to a country of origin, here India. It opens with Jalaarnava's and Kavita's journey through India by train. After travelling together with her sister, Jal decides to strike out on her own, leaving her sister behind. The play deals with Jal's sense of unbelonging in her mother's homeland. As she puts it: "I'm not English, I don't know why everyone keeps thinking I am ..." (III/4: 65). Jal rents a room in a houseboat where she falls in love with her landlady's daughter. In the journal she keeps, Jal discusses taboo subjects such as menstruation and sexuality.

"Every Bit of It" is the story of Georgia and Cathy. Georgia is a 42 year-old white American academic on her way to her brother's funeral whereas Cathy is a Black Scottish woman escaping from a violent husband. Georgia had a son eighteen years ago whom she gave up for adoption. Cathy has just killed her husband. Both women's conversation on their

train journey centres on the life of the American blues singer Bessie Smith, interjected with their own painful life experiences. One of the themes of the play is the characters' confrontation of their memories and the ways in which they come to terms with the past.

“24%” stages the daily problems that two black second-generation sisters face. Angela is a single mother who is in financial difficulties and goes to extremes to feed her baby. She ends up in prison where she comes to terms with herself. Angela's life is different from her sister's in that the latter adopts education as a way to search for acceptance. The two sisters' life trajectory presents different aspects of the lives of second-generation immigrants.

Finally, “Fragile Land” addresses the question of what it is like to be a young British Asian today. Seventeen-year-old Tasleema is under pressure from her father to marry a nice Bengali boy while her Hindu friend Lux is harassed for seeing Fidel, a white boy. The play explores the complexity faced by second-generation British Asians in negotiating the meaning of home, nationhood and family.

Structure of Thesis:

This thesis comprises seven chapters – each rooted in a specific theme. The thesis' structure reflects the ebb and flow of mother-daughter

relationships. Rather than one complete section being devoted to mothers followed by another on daughters, there is an alternation between the two through the course of the chapters. In chapter one I explore the concept of displacement and its impact on the Black mothers' lives in the plays. Chapter one also deals with symbolic mothers in the form of obeahs and with the extent to which the daughters negotiate their identities in the relationships they forge with these symbolic mothers.

In chapter two I am mainly concerned with the daughters, the second-generation characters in the plays. I shall explore ways in which these characters are alienated from the world of their mothers and from British society more generally. I then move on to analyse how the daughters negotiate their positions in both spaces/places. Finally, I investigate the emerging identities resulting from their experiences.

In chapter three I explore the various strands of body politics that inform race and gender and their impact on the Black women in the plays. I analyse the ambivalent nature of the body for these characters, the extent to which it is an oppressive and/or liberating force for them.

In chapter four I explore the daughters' affirmation of independence through metaphorical matricide. I examine the ways in which this act of separation manifests itself and the outcomes it brings in the mothers' and daughters' lives. This leads – in the following chapter – to an analysis of

the inherent contradictions in the mothers' stance on the notion of "right" womanhood. I shall be concerned here with the diverse ways in which the daughters resist the mothers' ideals of womanhood. Then, I examine the daughters' resolve to stand up for themselves.

In chapter six I focus on the theme of relationships between women of the same generation. I highlight the re-conceptualization of the family as second-generation Black female characters move out of the family nest and develop a special type of social network through their relationship with their peers. I consider the transformative effect friendship has on the characters, its impact on the way they conceive themselves and on their sense of sisterhood.

Chapter seven deals with the various ways in which the female characters handle the past. I explore their strategies for coping and living with their own histories. I shall address the ways in which daughters come to terms with their mothers' absence as the former leave and settle in England. Then, I shall deal with the ambivalent process of the act of remembering in the characters' lives.

In the final chapter, I examine the opposite trajectories mothers and daughters undertake in their self-exploration. The former leave their homelands to seek self-actualization in Britain and subsequently transmit their aspirations to their daughters when they fail to do so. Whereas the

daughters metaphorically or physically revisit their roots and their socio-historical and cultural legacy in order to address their unmoored identity. The chapter ends with an analysis of a character's (metaphorical) "homecoming" as a means towards deeper self-understanding.

Rationale for this Thesis

In their introduction to *Out of the Kumbia*, Davies and Fido discuss the multidimensionality of Black women's voicelessness:

We mean the historical absence of the woman writer's text, the absence of a specifically female position on major issues such as slavery, colonialism, decolonization, women's rights and more direct social and cultural issues. By voicelessness, we also mean silence: the inability to express a position in the language of the "master" as well as the textual construction of women as silent. Voicelessness denotes articulation that goes unheard. In practical terms, it is characterized by lack of access to the media as well as exclusion from the critical dialogue. (1)

It is these last issues that constitute the rationale for my thesis. Not only does it address the imbalance in critical reception of Black and Asian women's work in the field of drama, but it also gives prominence to Black

and Asian plays which deserve more acknowledgement than they have thus far received.

CHAPTER 1 – MOTHERS AND DISPLACEMENT

In an introductory passage to Travellers' Tales, George Robertson evokes the inescapable feeling of dis-location associated with any narrative about travel:

The travelling narrative is always a narrative of space and difference. It may not always broaden the mind but it prods at it. It provokes new concepts, new ways of seeing and being, or at the very least, when the old ways of seeing and being have been stubbornly imported into foreign territory, subjects them to strain and fatigue. (2)

This observation reflects my own experience of coming to live in a foreign country. Indeed, my “old ways of seeing and being” were put under “strain and fatigue” even upon my very arrival at Heathrow airport. As my fellow passengers and I headed for the exit door, the distant sign ahead warned me that we would not share the same path. We may have had the same destination but not the same destiny. I handed my passport to the immigration officer and with a short glance at it he gave it back to me and shouted “white card”. I was rather perplexed for a minute. In my “old ways” of thinking, if you were given a “white card” you were given a free hand, a key to freedom. However, in this kingdom, I learnt that a white card is a “landing card”, not a card for freedom but a card of restriction: in short, the ultimate reminder that one is foreign and different.

I duly filled in the card, my shadow waiting on the other side of this boundary.

As someone coming from what is labelled a third-world country, Madagascar, I can relate to the experiences of displacement suffered by the Black mothers in plays such as “Paper and Stone”, “Leave Taking”, “Running Dream”, “Song for a Sanctuary” and “Money to Live” during their settlement in Britain. To borrow Hebdige’s words, for these mothers the new country would be “a space to be made over, a space where everything is still to be won” (278). The sense of dislocation is a constant feature of these mothers’ lives as they battle to make over a space of their own in the new territory called Britain.

In this chapter, I shall start by unraveling the concept of “displacement”. Then I shall briefly introduce the plays I want to focus on, discussing Black mothers’ experiences of displacement generally in terms of their new lives in Britain. Next, I shall analyse in detail the particular manifestations of displacement that have marked these characters’ lives. In the final part of the chapter, I shall examine how the mothers’ quest for belonging to Britain has an impact on their attitude to the past and their homeland, but most importantly on the way they nurture their daughters. Keen to have a better understanding of the mechanisms of the world, some daughters in the plays turn to obeahs for guidance; I shall then explore the ways in which these daughters adopt obeahs as “symbolic mothers” to ease their way into adulthood. Finally I shall demonstrate how the

relationship between the daughters and the obeahs reflects the concept of “entrustment” – a symbolic economy of exchange between women in steps towards empowerment – developed by the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective. I use this theoretical framework because it is the only one which has at its centre an analysis of the relationships between women of unequal power and knowledge. Thus, the notion of “entrustment” is a useful instrument in my thesis because of its particular focus on the management of relationships between women who have differential powers.

Dissection of the term “displacement” (dis-place-ment) reveals at its heart a particular focus on the word “place”; a concrete, physical import to the word is given. Indeed, The New Oxford Dictionary of English’s definitions of displacement reflects that general understanding: it is (1) “the moving of something from its place or position”; (2) “the removal of someone or something/someone or something else which takes their place”; (3) “the enforced departure of people from their homes, typically because of war, persecution or natural disaster” (532). But in the context of this chapter, the meaning of displacement goes beyond the physical and the geographical, in that the mothers experience diverse forms of displacement as a result of occupying new positions – socially, culturally, psychologically, emotionally – in a new location. In Cartographies of Diaspora, Avtāh Brah aptly identifies this phenomenon while referring to the notion of “the politics of location” as *locationality in contradiction* – that is,

a positionality of dispersal; of simultaneous situatedness within gendered spaces of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age; of movement across shifting cultural, religious and linguistic boundaries; of journeys across geographical and psychic borders.
(204)

The Black mothers in the plays are situated beings, still bound up with the homeland they have just left and yet simultaneously entangled with their new location. Thus, these characters find themselves in particular situations where they have to handle the burden of physical displacement in a new territory but also where they have to cross “the psychic borders” of “home” to England.

The plays “Leave Taking”, “Paper and Stone”, “Running Dream”, “Song for a Sanctuary” and “Money to Live” are concerned with exploring the lives of first-generation immigrant Black mothers as they enter unknown territory – both of motherhood and of Britain. Their new surroundings make mothers like Enid, Martha, Florentine, Rajinder and Olive acutely aware of the inadequacy of their colour, sex, culture, class and language; hence, their sense of displacement.

Coming mostly from a rural background the mothers are confronted by a new reality when they arrive in industrial Britain. Maria in “Back Street Mammy” hints at her own sense of displacement and helplessness when

she depicts the dreary monotony and injustice of factory life: “Everyday de same. Everyday I sit down at dem people sewing machine making teddy bear. Ten pence they does gi’ me fo one, yes, two shillin’ and they does sell de same teddy bear wid my number on it for five pound” (65). She feels displaced in her new role as an industrial worker. So too must Martha whose previous lifestyle as fleshed out in “Paper and Stone” gives her similar feelings to Maria. Her deeply-rooted rural experience clashes with the urban way of life in England: “We use to walk seven miles to market, nearly everyday ... wash clothes on beating rock together” (I/3: 9). In the same vein, Enid evokes the stark contrast between her present life in Britain and her previous life in Jamaica: “When I was a girl you kill a cow, you share it up, everybody in the district get a piece. Here, you poor an’ you by you’self. Nobody cares” (II/2: 176). Her displacement is heightened by a sense of alienation from the present harsh reality: the communal spirit that defined her rural society in Jamaica is replaced by the cold individualism of metropolitan, industrial Britain.

As they arrive in England these mothers go through the trauma of geographical, emotional, cultural and social displacement. In “Running Dream”, Florentine's trip to England with her second child Grace represents the journeys many Black mothers undertook to Britain from the West Indies, India and other parts of the world from the 1960s onwards to be reunited with their husbands and the fathers of their children. The play then charts Florentine’s inner sense of dislocation in her new life as a single mother in England. She admits to her daughter Bianca:

... I used to be young and sure at one time, but the things I was sure about was the things I ended up being not so sure about and the things I wasn't sure about was the things I wish I had been sure about because then I might not be where I am today ... (Part 2: 217)

Florentine is confused as the world of certainty she inhabited is crumbling in the face of the new circumstances of the present. This excerpt seems to indicate that Florentine's disorientation stems not only from geographical displacement but also from temporal displacement, that is, displacement from the state of being young and inexperienced by virtue of the passage to old age, as well as a psychological displacement from one state of (un)certainty to another.

What can be said about the particular manifestations of displacement in these Black women's lives? In addition to the mothers being geographically displaced, they also have to go through psychological displacement in their relationship with their husbands. Many of the plays address the psychological and emotional displacements women face as they have to come to terms with their male partners' inadequacies. Characters such as Martha, Enid and Florentine travelled to England in the hope of reunification with their husbands or partners. However, the reality proved to be different. Martha confides in her daughter's friend, Juliet, about the husband who left her with three children in Jamaica. When she came to join him in England, he disowned her as he had already married

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an English woman. Similarly, Florentine, having left Jamaica to join the father of her children in Britain, is shocked upon her arrival in this country to discover that William lives with an English woman: “In anodder woman place William, how you expect me to stay?” (206) Enid has the same fate. As she admits to Broderick: “My husban’ lef’ me gone, yes” (146). As a result, deserted by their menfolk, the mothers have been assigned a new status, that of single mother¹. Deprived of the support of extended families “back home”, the mothers feel displaced in their new dual role as breadwinners and nurturers².

¹ Wendy Webster provides data about mothers left on their own with children once their marriage has fallen apart. She tells the story of Vi Chamber who migrated from Jamaica in 1956 to join her husband but by the time their third daughter was born in 1957 the marriage had ended:

It was an absolute nightmare. The worry, you just live ... you don’t know how you are going to manage. You are on your own, my husband went off to Canada, he didn’t care ...” Webster also quotes another case, Mrs H’s, who also “migrated from Jamaica to join her husband, leaving one daughter with her mother, her marriage ending soon after arrival. (142)

² During the twentieth century, the ideology of separate spheres translated into dual roles for women. The economic need to include women in the labour force became coupled with the principle that women’s primary duties consisted of home and family continued. This applied to both Black and white women. However, in “Black Women’s Employment” Gail Lewis mentions the additional burden Black women had to bear, namely, the rise of the notion of the “pathological” Black family, a notion which is nothing other than a racially-

Like Florentine, Enid in "Leave-Taking" is a single mother. The play relates her day-to-day experience of displacement as she struggles to meet the physical, emotional and cultural needs of her daughters who were born and bred in Britain. Martha in "Paper and Stone" shares a situation not dissimilar to Enid's and Florentine's. She came to England to join her husband. But to her disappointment, he had deserted her for another woman. She has to make a life for herself as a single woman and a mother.

Olive in "Money to Live" is not a single mother. However, responsibility for the household falls mostly upon her shoulders as her husband does not sufficiently provide for the family. In a conversation she has with her daughter Charlene, Olive speaks of her early days in England as a young struggling mother. A sense of displacement is implied in her mini-narrative:

Your father never knew, I made sure of that. He'd go out to work, come back with the pay, give me some of it to keep the house and you children but, within a few days, he'd have spent all of his money and he'd be asking me to lend him. That man never had any money sense. He thought half his wages were enough to feed and

specific, ideological assault on Black people in general and Black women in particular. Its roots lay, at least in part, in the tensions associated with the particular way in which black women were forced to bridge the "separate spheres" ... (83)

clothe us all. There was no way I could've kept the house on his money. To begin with, the woman next door used to ask to look after her children while she went out, and I'd earn a little money from that. One day we, we were talking about money, and she told me that while I was looking after her children, she was out working as a call girl. She asked me would I like to do it as well and, of course, I was shocked and said "No" ... until she told me how much she earned. What she earned in an afternoon was the same as what your father earned in a week. That's how I started. I'd look after her children while she was out, and she'd look after you while I was out.

(7: 169-70)

Olive is displaced in that the context in which she lives in Britain is radically different from her home country. In Britain economic necessity drives her into prostitution, a situation she never envisaged in Jamaica. Interestingly, her narrative and indeed the story of her daughter indicate the female support structures that enable the women to sustain themselves (and their children) in the face of men's inability to provide. Whilst this does not prevent their exploitation by men, as sexworkers, it gives them some economic independence.

Rajinder in "Song for a Sanctuary", married and a mother of two, suffers in a different way. She is a victim of domestic violence. The play, focusing on her time spent in a refuge in London with her two children,

escaping from her husband, is a treatment of the displacement with which she has to deal in coming to terms with her new position.

Rajinder's move from the confines of her own comfortable, traditionally-policed home to the refuge can equally be considered as a physical, cultural and class-oriented displacement. She reveals to Sonia, another refuge inhabitant, that she is rather disappointed at the filthy condition of the place: "I've always lived in a nice house" (I/1: 161). Culturally, Rajinder's experience of the refuge makes her acutely aware of her sense of difference: "I'd like my children to grow up with some sense of who they are. We're different" (I/5: 171). She wants to protect her children, especially her daughter, from the liberal values of the West. Although Kamla, the refuge worker, and Rajinder appear to share the same racial origin, they have nothing in common. It strikes Rajinder that Kamla's behaviour and ways of thinking are at odds with her racial and cultural backgrounds, which makes her wonder: "I don't know where a woman like you come from. Call yourself an Asian, do you?" (III/1: 182) Rajinder's concept of Asianness is thoroughly destabilised as a result of her interaction with Kamla. The contradiction between appearance and reality is at the heart of the clashes between these two characters. Rajinder is a middle-class, Muslim Pakistani woman who is bound up with and defined by her customs. She views every decision she makes in relation to its impact on her community: "You don't know what it is like to live within the community" (Ibid.). On the other hand, raised in the West and

not governed by the traditions that inform Rajinder's actions, Kamla relies on the logic of the law to deal with the issue of domestic violence.

Another element illustrating Rajinder's sense of cultural displacement is the clash she has with the refuge authorities over her conception of what is private and public. Unlike Kamla and Sonia, she is unable to talk about her experiences of abuse. When the authorities discuss with her further procedures to be undertaken following their discovery that her daughter has been sexually abused by her father, Rajinder is strongly opposed to the idea: "I can't agree to that. Why should I talk to strangers about my daughter? Where I come from we deal with things within the family" (III/1: 182). Her old way of thinking is being challenged.³ Is the best approach to domestic issues keeping them private? The very question brings up her sense of displacement, for the cross-cultural understanding of boundaries between the public and private sphere presents an obvious

³ From November 1987 to October 1988 Amina Mama conducted one of the first investigations into domestic violence amongst Black women in London. The study is based on in-depth interviews with over 100 women of Caribbean, Asian and African origin. The research indicates

that woman abuse remains a shameful and buried phenomenon, only made worse by its private nature ... Seeking help from the authorities is often regarded as an act of betrayal and several women in the sample who had been forced to seek police assistance as a result of serious violence now live under threat of death for doing so ["A Song for a Sanctuary" highlights this issue with Rajinder's murder in the refuge].

issue for Rajinder. The fact that she has “to explain to some stranger the history of fifteen years of marriage, expose every intimate detail of [her] life” (II/1: 175) in order to secure accommodation is beyond her understanding. She is convinced that there should be a clear barrier between the public and personal domains. Kamla’s reasoning with her that the “‘privatisation’ of women’s lives ... keeps [them] from seeing domestic violence in a socio-political context” (II/1: 175) is met with incredulity. Rajinder’s pattern of thinking, based on strict demarcations between what should be kept private and public, and resulting from her deep-rooted cultural heritage, remain – hence, the need for her to reconstruct her own boundaries after other people’s imposition of theirs on her.

To conclude this analysis of the particular manifestations of displacement, stepping outside the “motherland” – where everything seems to be predictable and relatively secure – to enter the urban hostile world of the “fatherland” entails a variety of forms of displacement for the young mothers in the plays. The mothers’ migration to England was supposed to be a journey to wealth and happiness. However, that notion is seriously undermined by their estrangement from their new environment due to the hostile treatment they receive both from their husbands and from other people in Britain more generally. Enid in “Leave Taking” provides a fitting summary; she complains to Broderick that “this is white man country, a black woman less than nuttin [*sic*]” (I/1:148).

In such a “white man country”, the mothers’ quest for belonging has a deep impact on their attitude to the past and to their homeland. Above all, cross-cultural difference shapes the way in which they bring up their daughters. When Enid decides to leave her home country for England, Enid’s own mother re-classifies Enid’s position as a foreigner in her home country upon her departure to England. She reminds Enid that she “was Miss English”, that she “should forget them” and that she should “get on with [her] life here” (II/4: 188). Enid’s mother sets a clear boundary between England and the homeland. Enid is then positioned outside both spaces in that, in England, she is not embraced by society on account of her blackness, the epitome of foreignness and, back home, she is no longer considered one of the family – hence, her paradoxical status which leaves her on the edge of both English and Caribbean societies. She drifts along the two borders – not able to become English and being excluded from Caribbeanness – alienated from any form of geographically-based self-identity.

The act of stepping outside the “maternal” continent on the migrant women’s part, separating themselves from their mothers’ homes, means that the migrant women are caught in a state of limbo. Their position in English society is ambiguous in that they are situated neither inside nor outside of it; neither subject nor object: their work contributing to the development of the economy is wanted but their basic needs as human

beings are negated⁴. In being workers, they are given access to public places. However, they are denied the rights of possessing their own private spaces – a family home. As Webster puts it: “Wanted as workers, they were not wanted as people who would establish family life in Britain, with all the complex notions that suggested settlement, housing, education and other provision from the expanded post-war welfare state”⁵ (146). Thus, these women are permanently locked in an equivocal position as they enter the British world order.

In the white patriarchal British society of the 1960s, these mothers were reduced to units of production. They were defined solely in relation to their employability – other aspects of their personhood were not recognized. Thus, the ambivalence of their situation lies in the fact that they are attracted to employment for the sake of survival, yet, at the same time they are repelled by it because of the injustice and humiliation it

⁴ Webster argues that “the racism of the housing market in all sectors meant that they [Black women] were concentrated in a declining private rented sector on arrival in Britain in overcrowded, multi-occupied houses where they had to share facilities, and were constantly refused access even to this accommodation.” (150)

⁵ In her article “White Woman Listen!”, Hazel Carby also recalls the position of the British State *vis-à-vis* Black women migrants. They were recruited to do the most menial jobs and “rather than a concern to protect or preserve the black family in Britain, the state reproduced common sense notions of its inherent pathology: black women were seen to fail as mothers precisely because of their position as workers.” (218-19)

entails. To these mothers, the exploitation employment carries is a threat to their motherhood, womanhood and most of all their sense of self.

While Black women are equated with economic production within white patriarchy, they seem condemned to reproduction in Black patriarchal culture. Frequently, they are propelled into motherhood against their own will – victims of men’s need to assure themselves of their manhood, and of impregnation as a tool to reassure the male of his power over female sexuality. For instance Esther in “Darker the Berry” is overwhelmed to discover that she is pregnant:

HECTOR: Kill me pickney?

ESTHER: Me not ready fe baby [*sic*].

HECTOR: But baby ready fe you!

ESTHER: I trusted you Hector, and look what you do. Find somebody to give me something. I’ll go anywhere ...

HECTOR: Me naa kill me pickney. Me youth. Me seed [*sic*].

ESTHER: You don’t have to bear it. I never know nothing [*sic*] – you just take advantage. Control! (II/6: 185)

Controlled by Hector and her own sexuality, Esther is disempowered. Despite her attempt to fight off Hector’s oppression, she is vulnerable to his exploitation as he holds her an emotional hostage.

Hector and Esther's story is just one example of the portrayal of the fraught relationship between Black men and women in the plays. The women's relationships with men represent a site of oppression for them which creates a sense of ambivalence on the women's part. Men are both desired and resented. Hence, in "Back Street Mammy", Maria regrets her past involvement with men. She confesses to her daughter that she could have had a better life "if I had take care ... But I meet a man and I start to make children for him" (67). The same sense of disappointment and loathing runs through Florentine's words as she reviews her past relationships with men: "Sometime I wish I was a virgin you know. No is true if I was a virgin I would be alright" (198). Her desire seems to consist mainly in erasing the past. Equally, Martha in "Paper and Stone" articulates mixed responses to the subject of men. Although admitting to falling for one man after another, each a failed relationship, she still encourages her daughter to get noticed by men (8), seeking to live her unfulfilled dreams through her daughter.

Coupled with the struggle of displacement and their blurred sense of self is the mothers' day-to-day quest for belonging. Their endeavour to be accepted and recognised in their new environment is not without sacrifice as it can make them deny their past and important aspects of their identity. But most importantly, this situation affects the process of nurturing their children as the latter's heritage is hidden from them. Mothers such as Enid and Martha, in the typical fashion of first-generation migrants, are reluctant to share their past with their children. For instance, Enid avoids telling her past history to Viv, her youngest daughter, insisting on her

daughters' "Englishness": "I love England an' I bring up the girls to love England because they English" (I/2: 152). This betrays the mother's deliberate attempt to curb any desire on the daughters' part to discover their roots/routes.

Broderick strives to remind Enid of her origins and challenges her to be responsible enough not only to share her previous personal life story in her native country with her children, but also to transmit her cultural heritage to them. However, these efforts are trivialized and met with protest:

BRODERICK: Back home she used to rise with the dawn, an' she was on them feet, bare feet, all day: climb high hill, work in the field, walk over big stone to fetch water from gully.

ENID: Brod, what the use of telling her that? She don't know that way of life, she don't understand.

BRODERICK: Well she should, you teaching those children all wrong.

ENID: What you think I should teach her?

BRODERICK: Where she come from. These girls ain't English like the newsreader, them people got English stamp on them like the letters on a stick a' rock, right through English. These girls got Caribbean souls.

ENID: Don't talk foolish. (I/2: 152-3)

Enid refuses to dwell on the past but more importantly she does not believe in sharing any aspect of her previous life and her homeland with her children. When one of her daughters declares her wish to be in touch with her roots and to visit Jamaica, Enid's response is correspondingly negative:

VIV: I want to go to Jamaica.

ENID: What?

VIV: I want to see for meself. What it's like and everything. It must be part of me.

ENID: Don't talk nonsense

VIV: Who knows? I might like it so much I won't want to come back.

ENID: Wouldn't survive two minutes. You don't know what it like out there. (*waving her letter about*) They start begging you for this that an' the other, you soon come running back. You know, Brod, last year she did write ask me for eight million dollars. (I/2: 162)

As this exchange begins to show, the mothers do not want to engage with their pasts for a number of reasons. One is their desire for their daughters to have better lives. This applies specifically to "Leave Taking" in which Enid goes to great lengths to shield her children from the past. A second reason stems from painful personal memories that occasionally make the women question their integrity or remind them of experiences of victimization. For example, Enid's mother resorts to wounded silence

when Enid bids her farewell upon leaving the country. This tactic indicates her disapproval of Enid's departure. Enid's sorrow at recalling this scene/her decision is subsequently turned into guilt upon her mother's death. Similarly for Martha in "Paper and Stone", the past is better suppressed because of her memory of the rape she endured at the hands of a white man. A third factor in the mothers' reluctance to engage with the past lies in the sense of a break with the past that cannot be bridged again. After all, the characters have hardly returned home since their initial departure for financial reasons.

Enid raises the problem of her daughter's inability to survive in her ancestral land in response to Viv's desire to know more about her mother's past. Brenda in "Paper and Stone" displays a similar yearning as Viv. One day, while oiling and massaging her mother's hand, Brenda asks about the scar on Martha's hand. However, her curiosity about the scar is rebuffed:

BRENDA: Mum ... about the scar. What happened?

MARTHA: Girl you ask too many questions ... you getting so inquisitive these days. (I/3: 9-10)

Martha's discomfort in facing up to the scar, a concrete reminder of the ugly reality that has marked her past, is obvious. She then lies to her daughter, Brenda, upon the latter's persistence in excavating the

significance of the scar⁶. Martha invokes her responsibility toward the Church to evade an explanation for it:

MARTHA: No time for that now. (*She begins to dry her feet*) ... we must prepare the living room for bible class this evening. I want to put on a good show for my church brothers and sisters dem. (Ibid.)

This is typical in the depiction of her generation. Black mothers' fervour for the Church is characterized as an important part of their life. Maria, in "Back Street Mammy", also uses the Church as an excuse to cover up her reluctance to engage in a meaningful discussion of her past experience with her daughter⁷. Dinette's first sexual experience has left her full of

⁶ In the course of the play, Martha eventually manages to reveal her past:

The little blood stain bundle I pushed out in the field. My God what a did [*sic*]. Onto the grass it fell ... It move. It start to cry. So I ran ... The wind took its scream over the grass and further away from me ... wailing, screaming, squealing ... It didn't sound human, it sounds like banshee ... Johncrow picks its eyes - alive or dead ... I don't know. I didn't know it had two arms, two legs a face. I didn't know it was part of me. There is tears. I can't see, the barbwire. I can't feel the paink [*sic*]. (II/15: 54).

⁷ Broadly speaking, the impulse to attend church may be explained in one of two ways. Either the worshipper attends church because (s)he believes that the service will provide answers to problems set by the weekday world. Or the believer's attendance at church works on a respite or escapist basis, namely that

questions. She desperately wants to confide in her mother and discuss the incident with her, but Maria escapes the subject. She prefers recourse to the Church in order to keep a personal dimension, namely her past experience, out of the situation: "Jesus, listen to de chil', stop me from going church to talk nonsense" (66). Dinette remains confused as to the import of her sexual relationship with Eddie. She had hoped that Maria would help her unravel the complexity of love and the act of love-making. However, her mother's unwillingness to share her personal history is a stumbling block for the daughter to understand her own history.

Since the daughters fail to receive clear orientation from their biological mothers, in some plays they turn to obeahs or symbolic mothers for guidance (in the Caribbean, obeahs are believed to be endowed with mystical power which differentiates them from other women). One of the main recourses to the obeahs' power in plays such as "A Hero's Welcome" and "Leave Taking" is in the context of women's relationships with men. Thus in "A Hero's Welcome", Minda, Sis and Ishbel marvel at the obeah's ability to predict the reason for their visit. The girls beg Nana's guidance in their fostering a positive and intimate relationship with men. In "Leave Taking" Del's similar need urges her to seek out the obeah Mai who then undertakes the role of mentor, assisting Del with her problems and imparting her gift as a healer to the latter.

far from anticipating solutions during the service, the time in church will be an opportunity to forget the outside world and to be refreshed as a result.

The obeah's role as a healer is crucial for Del and her mother Enid. In one of Enid's consultations with Mai, she asks Enid if she "bin to a doctor?" (II/2: 174) Enid's reply is telling: "What doctor know about our illness? Just give you few pills to sick you stomach and a doctor certificate. What they know about a black woman soul?" (II/2: 174). Enid points to the inefficient if not harmful effect of white men's cure for Black women's ills. She articulates an alternative type of treatment which consists of a holistic healing, a deed that an obeah is equipped for. In short, obeahs such as Nana and Mai are believed to have special powers to understand the troubles of Black women, a concept that second-generation migrants such as Del slowly begin to grasp when they seek such interventions in their time of need.

However, notwithstanding the obeahs' power, the obeahs themselves are not immune to problems. Nana in "A Hero's Welcome" feels restricted by the confines of her home. The limited spatiality of the domestic realm prevents her from exploring the outside world. She raises the issue with her son a number of times in the play. Len's apparent concern for Nana's protection is motivated by his desire to maintain clear divisions of space. With the statement – "You free to come an' go as you please. As long as you don't go further that line I mark over there" (I/1: 22) – he defines the extent of her liberty and warns against any transgression of boundaries.⁸

⁸ Doreen Massey attempts to explain the patriarchal rationale behind men's limitation of women's spatiality in Space, Place and Gender. She suggests that men fear that women's participation in the public sphere "might subvert the

He considers Nana's well-being less important than his own need to mark out borders. Her feeling of suffocation and imprisonment in the house is not taken into account. In fact, Nana's confinement is two-fold in that it implies both physical and psychic containment. She is physically restricted in movement but she also cannot decide what to do about her life. She is aware that men's efforts at consigning women to private spaces only encourage subordination and dependency in the latter, to the benefit of the former. Hence, Nana warns her daughter of male egocentric tendencies and the danger they represent: "Girl, a word of advice. Some men ain't interested in nothing but what goes on in their own minds" (I/3: 33).

Obeahs such as Nana possess a vision of what women's rightful place in society should be. For instance, Nana keeps petitioning for women's mobility and freedom in encouraging the girls to be independent. She articulates female desire for change: "I'm happier out there." (I/1: 22) – the desire to exist, to think freely and to be recognised in society. She advocates the need for women to embrace the concept of an "autonomous female symbolic", "turning the cause of non-freedom – which we [women] cannot eliminate, as we cannot eliminate the fact we are born women – into a principle of liberty." (Bono and Kemp 136)

willingness of women to perform their domestic roles and that it gave them entry into another public world – a life not defined by family and husband." (180)

The daughters' actual seeking out of the obeahs, instead of their own mothers, is significant in that in the same way as the daughters needed their biological mothers to gain access to the world through the process of birth giving, they also require the obeahs who function as their symbolic mothers, to nurture and advise them in order to facilitate their entry into the adult world. In other words, the daughters rely on female/maternal mediation to be introduced into the world. The girls' act of choosing the obeahs as their point of reference operates along the lines of the concept of "entrustment" which has been elaborated by the Milan Women's Collective Bookstore, who theorize differential power relations between women, including that between (symbolic) mothers and daughters. According to the Collective, in order to escape from the present symbolic structure which continues to validate men and erase women, there is a need to establish a symbolic economy of exchange between women⁹; that is "between the woman who wants and the woman who knows." (123)

Banished from the maternal home and in a state of confusion, Del goes to seek help from Mai, "the woman who knows":

MAI (*angry*): Come here, expecting me to give you the answers – palm reading, herbal bath, tricks with cards, read the bumps on you head - expect me to look into your lives and alter the future for you.

⁹ Bono and Kemp (1991) argue that a woman's plight lies in the fact that she is "put into the world without a symbolic placement." (131)

You have sucked me dry. I've come to the end. My battery dead.
Finished. I have had enough.

DEL: I don't believe in that stuff.

MAI: Then what you want from me?

DEL: Don't know.

MAI: That's a start.

DEL: Maybe I am lost. (II/2: 177)

Del's scepticism towards the obeah and her craft was evident the first time her mother took her to see May in order to establish whether the latter was pregnant or not. Then she accused Mai of being "a phoney" (II/2: 169). However, she turns to Mai for support in the time of her need. The above scene of confrontation helps Del see herself more clearly and compels her to admit her sense of confusion to Mai. It can be argued that Del's provocation resulting in her subsequent admission of disorientation is a cry for Mai's guidance. Although Del tells Mai that she does not believe in her traditional practice, it is Mai's teaching her her trade that enables Del to make a living and subsequently to make sense of her existence.

In the same vein, needing advice about their love life, Minda, Ishbel and Sis seek counsel from Nana:

NANA: So. Girls, what you want me for?

MINDA: We need your help Nana.

SIS: Advice

ISHBEL: (*to others*) You hear that? She know already before we even open we mouth an' say anything. How you know?

NANA: Why else would three lively young girls wit plenty to fill them days come hotfoot come visit an old lady like me? Besides, by the time I was your age I was married three years. (I/1: 25)

It is interesting to note that, owing to the obeah characters, the plays seem to privilege the voice of knowledge, experience and ageing, a useful tool to contravene the hegemonic cultural trend that renders women, and older women in particular, invisible and unheard. This picks up on traditions of wise women, female seers and soothsayers in Greek plays as much as in Shakespearean ones such as Macbeth. In the plays discussed here, however, the power inherent in the obeahs is defined as women's ability to enter into a meaningful relationship with other women, enabling the "affidante" (the one who entrusts) [to act as] a figure of mediation [so that] the 'affidata' (the entrusted) can enter the exchange of female knowledge and desire and ... can assert herself as a female subject" (Giorgio 17).

This aspect of the phenomenon of spiritualism prevalent in the plays stands as an expression of "female knowledge" since it is used as a means of creative resistance on the women's part against patriarchy. In this spiritual arena, women are depicted as the strong rather than the oppressed ones. Indeed, through their knowledge of witchcraft, the obeahs/symbolic mothers reveal the potential dimensions of female ability or power to the

daughters.¹⁰ For instance, the subject of women's relationships with men keeps recurring in the talks the symbolic mothers have with the daughters¹¹. Unfailingly, the obeahs provide the girls with advice. In "Leonora's Dance", for example, Leonora wistfully recollects George, the ideal partner she once had but was unable to retain:

LEONORA: George wasn't just any kind of man. He had hands like a piano player and he was in the airforce - a real catch. He knew how to treat a lady right. Together we was a real swinging couple. I was the dancer but he could show me a step or two ... to waltz. To tango. Rock and Roll. We were going to America. That was my only regret. Things are better there - more opportunities. I could have made it in America.

FRIEDA: You should have come to me if you wanted to keep a man. There are potions a woman can take. Just sprinkle a little in his tea and he's yours forever. (II/2: 98)

This passage suggests the imprint of patriarchy in the female psyche as constructed in this play. Leonora's representation of George proceeds

¹⁰ The obeahs' objective here is to instil the notion of a "relationship of entrustment" in the daughters: "this relationship occurs when you tie yourself to a person who can help you achieve something which you think you are capable of but which you have not yet achieved." (Bono and Kemp 123)

¹¹ Each of the plays discussed in this thesis presents at least one case of a relationship broken because the man has left the woman or the family home.

along conventional hetenormative lines. Her description of the couple's dancing indicates a hierarchical paradigm in the relationship: George is the active initiator – “I was the dancer but he could show me a step or two ... to waltz” – whereas Leonora is an embodiment of dependency and passivity in being the “lady” to be treated right. Despite Leonora's feeling that George was the right man for her, it is implied that she could not keep him. This indicates a common thread in many of the plays: the lack of faith in the possibility of a successful heterosexual relationship. Indeed, all female characters involved in a relationship end up being on their own at the end of the plays. In “A Hero's Welcome” Minda, Ishbel and Sis face the same issue as Leonora in her attempts to keep a man. They tell Nana:

MINDA: ... The men so different now, Nana.

SIS: They don't want to settle down.

ISHBEL: If we're not careful we'll never get married.

...

NANA: I see. So you think that I can give you some kind of potion turn man fool in love with you?

ISHBEL: We won't ask for anything else. (I/1: 26)

The girls are eager to pursue a romantic notion of heterosexual relations that does not match the reality of their experiences. The power of the scene lies in part in their act of faith that “magic” will prevail but also in their misguidedness. They think that it needs extra skills to secure a viable relationship with a man. Their appeal to the obeah signifies an attempt to

find ways to occupy the position of the active subject in the unpredictable, precarious relationships men try to impose on them.

In assuming the role of obeah, figures such as Nana, Frieda and Mai restore the value of a certain kind of women's historical experience. Their roles re-create the era of an assumed lost matriarchy when women were autonomous subjects and had a symbolic "placement" in society. In insisting on transmitting to the daughters "female knowledge" under the guise of rituals, the obeahs endeavour to stir the daughters' allegiance to their maternal heritage:

FRIEDA: ... When you get the calling Leonora you just can't ignore it. It was a great responsibility for me to take on the role which my mother had left me - but I was proud to do it. It's a powerful gift I'm telling you ... There is only one successor Leonora. You - eldest daughter - You don't know how lucky you are. (*she walks over and hands her the bag*) Take it. (II/3: 100-101)

As the guardian of knowledge and culture, Frieda is eager to bestow the gift (that she herself inherited from her mother) on her daughter. Handing it on to the next female generation represents a symbolic act of perpetuating and strengthening female genealogy in which the more experienced and knowledgeable person empowers the younger one. However, Leonora rejects the gift:

LEONORA: I don't want it.

FRIEDA: You just can't refuse like that.

LEONORA: Why not? It's my life.

FRIEDA: It's not just your life - What about those who will come after you? What about history and tradition? You forget where you come from. (II/3: 100-101)

Leonora does not display any interest in preserving her maternal heritage. The play raises the difficulties of cultural succession through filial means in a foreign country. In this particular instance, Leonora's refusal to embrace the gifts and their significance urges Frieda to break with tradition. As it happens, Leonora is not the only one who might be Frieda's successor. Frieda turns to Daphine, another distant female blood relation, appointing her as her heir. Daphine thus becomes Frieda's symbolic daughter:

FRIEDA: ... It seems my journey to England was twofold. I thought I was coming to initiate my daughter. But, what I found was not as simple as I thought. England needs Mother Frieda - you've been chosen - accept it with grace. (*Daphine takes the bag*) When my mother was nine she had learnt all the names of over sixty-five herbs and plants ... She passed the gift onto me. The light has settled in your eyes, my dear. That's how I know it is yours. (II/6: 110)

Daphine welcomes Frieda's gifts. They reinforce Daphine's identification with her African roots. Combined with the house that Frieda also bequeathes her, these gifts change Daphine's situation.

Mai like Frieda departs from the traditional practice of handing her powers onto a female blood relation in bequeathing her spiritual gift to someone with whom she has no filial connection. With only an estranged son and no daughter, she needs symbolic succession. She tells Del: "I want you to have my thoughts. I don't have a daughter to pass them on to ..." (II/2: 178). Del's receiving clients on her own in Mai's house at the end of the play signals that she has become Mai's symbolic daughter.

Daphine and Del are thus entrusted to guarantee female symbolic "placement". Their respective relationship with the obeahs has a transformative impact on their lives: Daphine's situation as a struggling single mother is changed into that of a home-owner and healer; whereas Del's confused and helpless state of being a resourceless single pregnant woman gradually disappears. The relationship of "entrustment" which has developed between the symbolic daughters and the obeahs has healed the former's lives.

In some of the plays, the daughters' trust in such symbolic mothers is – at one level – an attempt to find a way through their own internal turmoil and the specificities of British society. Indeed, their experience of being born and bred in Britain, and having little or no connection to their

mothers' country of origin, is a major factor influencing daughters in their shaping of different values and ways of life from that of their birth mothers. Often, this is portrayed as hardening into alienation from the culture in which they are raised – the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2 – DAUGHTERS: ALIENATION FROM MATERNAL CULTURE AND BRITAIN

In the plays, mothers and daughters display different responses to the alienation they face in Britain. The first generation's experience of their homelands fundamentally continues to shape their re-actions to their diasporic situation once they arrive in Britain. On the other hand, the daughters have little or no vital link with their mothers' countries. But their experience of Britain as birth-place and/or where they have spent the majority (or even the entirety) of their lives has major influences on their creating different values and ways of life from those of their mothers.

This chapter will pay particular attention to these daughters. I shall focus on plays such as "Song for a Sanctuary", "Running Dream", "Leave Taking", "24%", "Leonora's Dance", "Talking in Tongues", "The S Bend" and shall analyse the various forms of alienation suffered by the characters both from their maternal world and their present positions as second-generation immigrants. Then I shall elaborate on the degrees of "re-actions" in the daughters' handling of the issues of alienation, belonging and identity in Britain.

In the daughters' value system, unlike their mothers', the primacy of religion and the church as a means of sustenance through hardships is given less importance¹. For Afro-Caribbean mothers, the church is

¹ Robert Beckford traces the origins and history of the Black church in Britain:

associated with the close-knit community from which they came. Thus, the church takes on a particular significance in that it helps to establish continuity with their earlier selves. It stands as a re-creation of the kind of cohesive existence they left behind as well as acting as a remedy for the ills suffered through racism or isolation². Enid, in “Leave Taking”,

Racialized oppression and Black response has also played a role in the emergence of African Caribbean Churches in Britain. For example, Anita Jackson’s discussion with Black pastors in the 1980s revealed a history of rejection by white churches of the first Black settlers from the West Indies. This rejection led many to start their own churches as early as 1952. However, this is not the full picture. In contrast, another school of thought puts forward a religio-cultural argument for the formation of Black churches in Britain; it suggests that Black Christianity was socially, culturally and theologically qualitatively different from English Christianity. Therefore, it was inevitable that Black people would form their own churches once in England. (15)

² In Windrush, Carmel Jones affirms the communal spirit the Church strives to create:

We didn’t have money to dish out to people, but by pooling our resources together we were able to support one another in sending for relatives back home, pooling our moneys [sic] together to buy houses in partnership so that we could house our people ... So the church has been very, very active in dealing with the social and personal issues of our people, not least our constituents, people who have no connections with the church but come to us, then and now. (Mike and Trevor Phillips 202)

admonishes Broderick for underestimating the power of the church: “Don’t mock, Brod. It very important, the church. Is at the centre, the heart a’ things. Is there to support you when you need it [*sic*]” (158). Enid’s words prefigure Valentine Alexander’s evocation of the vital role the church plays in Black women’s lives in Britain:

For the Christian Black woman arriving in Britain during the periods of post-war migration, her primary struggle was simply one of survival; to find someone who would give a room, to find a job that paid enough wages for you to live on, to find a face that would actually smile back at you and to locate a church where you could feel accepted and inspired ... What was obvious from the start was that if you were to survive at all you would have to be anchored in a strong network of support, and it was precisely this kind of life-line that many women discovered in the Black-led Church. (90)

For the mothers, the church can be a site of resistance to the hegemonic culture and racism of the outside world. It gives them space to re-enact faith and tradition. Alexander suggests that

By the time Caribbean women began migrating to Britain and practicing their faith both inside and outside traditional British church structures, they had already familiarized themselves with the language of resistance ... Their tactics for resistance had been two-fold; they had implemented a religious life-style which changed an

alien faith into their own and then utilized it in the general struggle for the liberation of their people; second, they had created an institution where their specific needs as oppressed women could be met and dealt with in a context largely developed by themselves. All that was left to do on arrival in Britain was to adapt their long-established tactics to a new environment. (89-90)

It can be argued that the church both enables resistance to the racism of white Britain but also – in its evangelical expression, at least – undermines the mothers’ struggle against racism due to the prejudiced values it fosters. In “Rose’s Story” Rose reveals that she has a very limited/ing and oppressive horizon because of the sort of life (for instance, they were not allowed to watch TV or enjoy other entertainment) that was imposed on her: “It was a miserable existence, nobody outside that house could understand. It was church, school, church, school, and more church, school” (I/1: 57).

As for daughters such as Dynette in “Back Street Mammy” and Brenda in “Paper and Stone”, the opportunities for resistance are not associated with the church but happen in other contexts. The church does not carry the same significance for the daughters as for the mothers. For one thing, it lacks the necessary correlation with the daughters’ past experience. They view it as part of the mothers’ world. For example, when Dynette in “Running Dream” is quizzed by Eddie, her boyfriend, as to whether or not she is a regular church-goer her reply is: “No, I don’t go anymore. Leave

that to Mum” (59). The church is constructed as a world closely linked with the mothers and whose importance is not readily accepted by the daughters.

The authority of the church in the mothers’ lives goes together with a notion of obedience to elders. It is an attitude that the daughters have some difficulty in embracing. The daughters are estranged from the mothers’ attachment to traditional relationships within families which emphasize obedience and respect for hierarchy³. Several instances of confrontation on this issue occur in the plays. When Brenda decides to move out of her mother’s home in “Paper and Stone”, she openly criticises her mother’s behaviour: “You sit here in this house with your bible and your religion and your god ... like you’re sitting on some kind of throne, and you expect everyone to come and bow and pay homage to you ...” (I/8: 33). Her graphic description of the mother’s position reveals her disapproval of the unquestioned hierarchy within which her mother chooses to place herself.

³ In Who Do You Think We Are? Sushna, a first-generation migrant, gives an account of two contrasting relationships – hers in childhood with her own parents, and her son’s with his grandparents:

I am always mediating between the old world and the new world without taking sides. Take my son who is 14. He was very rude the other day to his grandmother who lives with us. This would have been unthinkable in my day and it is wrong. I gave him hell for it. But in some ways his relationship with his elders in the family is much healthier than mine was. (Alibhai-Brown 245)

Equally, when Dynette wants to move out of the family nest and attempts to put a convincing case to her mother, she gets told off:

DYNETTE: Jan had nothing to do with it. It was my decision. I just think the time is right for me to ...

MARIA: You think! You don't think! How can you think? You is a chil'. You don't know noffin about life yet [*sic*].

DYNETTE: I think a lot Mum and I know a lot more than you're allowing me to. (90)

Maria underestimates Dynette's ability to think for herself. Indeed, the mothers' sense of hierarchy relies mainly on age and experience, and they strive to impose this pattern of values on the daughters. Thus, mothers such as Maria, Martha and Rajinder are reluctant to encourage daughters to think for themselves because they fear that their daughters may stray from the path of obedience. However, in the course of the plays, the mothers tend to learn to re-think their unquestionable positions based on hierarchy. A case in point is the final scene in "Paper and Stone" in which Martha recognizes her mistake and, instead of waiting for her daughter's return home before instigating reconciliation, goes beyond her comfort zone to look for her.

Nonetheless, despite the mothers' attempt to relate to the daughters the latter are mostly estranged from their mothers. And this sense of alienation from their mothers extends to the countries where the latter

come from. In one of his interviews, Paul Gilroy refers to the generation of migrants such as Viv's, Grace's and Jalaarnava's as "a deeply troubled generation, because they feel deeply the sense that they don't know who they are. They're not British, 'cos the British don't want them; they're not Caribbean because they've never seen the Caribbean, nothing to do with it" (Phillips 296). For instance, being born and brought up in Britain, Grace's younger sister, Bianca, has no past outside of Britain to remember – hence, her total estrangement from Dominica on her first visit to the homeland. Clementine, her eldest sister, whom she has never met before, sniggers at the way Bianca reacts to the novelty of her surroundings. The latter feels alienated both by the cold reception she receives from Clementine and the difficulty of adapting to the local way of life. Dennis, an inhabitant of the island, classifies her as an English tourist: "Madam Angle, vini, mwen ka moutjwe'w toupatou. (Hey English come let me show you the sights)" (222). Bianca does not display or experience any sign of affiliation to what is supposed to be her "motherland". Everything points to her strangeness in the place.

Jalaarnava in "Monsoon" also undergoes a complex experience on a trip to India, her motherland. She refuses to be identified as English, and to be considered a tourist, yet she has difficulty in integrating herself into Indian society: "Her mother Sameerah spoke to me in English and I answered in Hindi, I think she was really confused. I'm not English, I don't know why everyone keeps thinking I am ..." (65). However, when Nusrat asks her if she wants to live in India she answers negatively: "I don't think I could. I

would get really frustrated with the way women have to live, and with the levels of poverty” (71). Elspeth Probyn aptly captures the ambivalence that informs Jalaarnava’s position in showing her conflicting desire to be part of her homeland and her disapproval of its customs towards women:

It seems to me that the processes of belonging are always tainted with deep insecurities about the possibility of truly fitting in, of even getting in ... While belonging may make one think of arriving, it also marks the often fearsome interstices of being and going, of longing, of not arriving. (40)

The sense of alienation is not limited to the daughters’ homelands, but equally applies to their adoptive country. This is particularly striking in matters of education⁴. Britain’s system of education is biased against Blacks. For instance, Daphne has illiteracy problems despite her age. She

⁴ The second-generation’s experiences and assumptions of homeland are challenged on a day-to-day basis; Dhooleka Raj cites the experience of a young Punjabi man on this subject: “I go back to India, and I’m a stranger, and I accept that. But I’m still a stranger here [in Britain] too” (2). Raj explores the implications of the often-posed question – where are you from? – for second-generation Blacks. She thinks that “it can be an innocent question about getting to know someone better – but it can also be experienced as a disruption. It is a question of ethnicity and difference, especially when the identity connections between people and places are destabilized ... The unstated assumption behind the question is that one is a sojourner; one is not from here, or can only claim to be here temporarily.” (Ibid.)

confides her situation to Frieda, Leonora's mother: "I never go anywhere. Sometimes I wonder if I'll ever get out of here. That's why I'm doing literacy classes ..." (105)⁵. The system has failed Daphine due to deeply-ingrained prejudice and racism. She mentions the fact that rather than addressing the failings of the educational system towards Blacks, the authorities point the finger at the latter for being the "problem":

No I can't read ... not properly. I've had this problem since I was a kid. I can't even get a job. People judge you don't they? They think you're mentally retarded. They think you should be locked away in a dungeon or hidden away in the attic with embarrassment. (93)

⁵ Indeed, in the 1970s a high proportion of Black children were classified as educationally subnormal. In 1971, Bernard Coard published a pamphlet entitled "How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System" in which he articulated the unfairness of the British educational system regarding Black children, denouncing the fact that these children were labelled to fail. Bryan et al. mention that "foremost among those who opposed ESN schooling were Black mothers". She relates the testimony of a mother whose child was sent to such a school: "At first I didn't realise what was going on because I really thought they were sending her to a 'special' school ... But when I went up and visited, the penny dropped. As soon as I saw that most of the other kids there were Black, I knew something was going on. There was [*sic*] a lot of kids there who had nothing wrong with them, and as far as I was concerned my daughter was one of them." (Ibid.)

Daphine understands the ways in which such views have informed her life. As she puts it, “I’m what they call part of the Thatcher legacy ... If you ain’t up then you’re down, if you black, get back ... if you can’t cope there’s always dope ... Violence is the only thing that talks. Fight the power”⁶ (87). Daphine seems to conclude that the only viable Black response to the unfairness of the system is violence. It is a violence which reveals the levels of alienation afflicting Black citizens. However, she also does not enact it.

Although slightly better off than Daphine in matters of education, Viv suffers alienation from both a Eurocentric British curriculum and her own cultural heritage.⁷ When Broderick tests her on the identity of ‘Nanny a’

⁶ In Multi-racist Britain, Solomos notes that “a number of internal government reports during the early 1970s had warned that violence could be one outcome if there was no improvement in the socio-economic position of black communities” (181). The report’s prediction was confirmed by the riots which took place in the early 1980s. In Race and Racism, Solomos adds that the Scarman Report, investigating the possible cause of the riots, partially attributed that violence to “the feelings of alienation and powerlessness experienced by young blacks living in depressed inner city areas.” (158)

⁷ In The Heart of the Race, Bryan et al. discuss the racist nature of the British educational system at the time. They observe that “right across the curriculum at every level, the schools’ textbooks confirmed that Black people had no valid contribution to make to the society, other than to service its more menial requirements. Children were presented with a world view in which blackness represented everything that was ugly, uncivilised and underdeveloped, and our

the Maroons', a significant figure in Jamaica, Viv admits her ignorance⁸. However, when her mother asks Viv who she herself is, she hastens to quote from Rupert Brook's poem "The Soldier": "A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware ... A body of England's breathing English air, washed by the rivers, blest by the suns of home" (153). Enid is not quite sure how to take her reply. Are these words simply recited out of habit? Or is there a sense in which she owns them, and has made them speak for her? Maybe Viv thinks of herself as "the soldier" in the poem, a child of mother England whose nurture and care are indispensable for her survival. But having recourse to one of the canonical forms of English literature to identify herself suggests a rather confused sense of self. In the course of the play, she relates this uneasiness (even as a student) to her cultural alienation:

teachers made little effort to present us or our white classmates with an alternative view." (66)

⁸ Nanny of the Maroons (circa 1700-1740) is Jamaica's national heroine. She was from the Ashanti tribe in West Africa. She was brought as a slave to Jamaica but managed to escape. According to Caribbean legends, she was a mighty warrior endowed with supernatural power and exceptional leadership skills. She was an inspiration to her people in maintaining the spirit of freedom in their fight for a life of independence. She was also considered as "a type of chieftainness or wise woman of the village, who passed down legends and encouraged the continuation of customs, music and songs that had come with the people from Africa, and which instilled in them confidence and pride."

http://www.mfajt.gov.jm/Symbols/Heroes_Nanny.htm, 11/03/03.

I knew all the answers. I'm like a machine – pat me on the head and they all come tumbling out. Rely on me to say exactly what the examiners want to hear. It doesn't change anything. I sometimes feel like I need another language to express myself. (172)

Just as important as the language is the fact that Viv compares herself to a machine – churning out the right responses, separate from herself for whom she needs another language⁹. There is a suggestion that she seeks recognition in England in the same way that she used to be approved by examiners; namely by treating the search for identity as a test, the mechanistic work of an automaton, rather than as human discovery. Even her use of Brook's poem – which sounds more lively, though on closer inspection reveals all the life to be in the rivers, sun, and air, and none of it in the woman – hints at an identity entirely moulded by extraneous factors, one in which there is no relationship between the person and the world around her because to her it is a machine-like mother demanding conformity of the type made infamous by Norman Tebbit's "cricket test"¹⁰.

⁹ In his article "The Journey Back", Tuku Mukherjee explains one of the possible causes of this self-alienation in asserting that "the cultural assassination of the black child took place as soon as he or she arrived at the school gates." (213)

¹⁰ Norman Tebbit was one of Margaret Thatcher's ministers and a one-time chairman of the Tory Party. He came up with the idea of the "cricket test"; he argued that the true test of loyalty for a British person was which cricket team (s)he supported. Tebbit observed that "when Britain's cricket team played one of

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In "Talking in Tongues", Leela also locates language as her source of alienation from British society¹¹. She suffers from cultural alienation, one of the main legacies of colonialism. Leela tells Sugar about her sense of vulnerability: "We look alright on the outside, but take our clothes off and you'll find nothing underneath, just thin air. That's what happens to people who have no language. They disappear" (223). Leela conceives of language as a shield for self-preservation, a way of defining her very humanity. Leela's feeling of destitution arises from the fact that she has no

the West-Indian teams, 'our blacks' tended to root for the wrong side. How could they be truly British if they weren't rooting for the British team?" (Gates Jr. 175) One of the purposes of the Tory government then was to strive for a homogeneous nation where difference was eliminated. Thus, Blacks were conceived only as British when they were willing to relinquish their cultural history and dissolve themselves into the British nation.

¹¹ Language as an instrument for articulating the characters' cultural location or the lack of it has been explored by many Black playwrights. Paulette Randall uses Dominican patois in the opening scene of "Running Dream" which not only sets the tone of the play but also ascribes a cultural context to the characters' actions. Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) discuss the politics behind the use of indigenous languages in plays. They assert that "when a playwright chooses an indigenous language, s/he refuses to submit to the dominance of the imposed standard language and to subscribe to the 'reality' it sustains" (169). Reasoning along the same line as Gilbert and Tompkins, it can be argued that the use of Dominican patois in "Running Dream" is an act of resistance against the supposed superiority of English, the colonial master's language, and a means of empowering Dominican language and its culture.

control over her past or her present because she has been robbed of her own language. Gilbert et al. argue that “one method of installing the overarching power of an imperial tongue is to prohibit the ‘old language’. Forbidding people to speak their own tongues is the first step in the destruction of a culture” (164). Leela gives a detailed description of her daily linguistic struggle:

I’ve always felt really self-conscious about the way I speak ... Words are sometimes like lumps of cold porridge sticking in my mouth ... I mispronounce words ... It’s because it’s not my first language, you see ... If you don’t feel you belong to a language then you’re only half-alive aren’t you, because you haven’t the words to bring yourself into existence. You might as well be invisible. (195)

She has difficulty in expressing herself fully and freely, and as a result finds herself regressing to an infantilised state¹². Closely bound up with language is the speaker’s sense of independence and dignity. However, Leela has neither of these attributes. She feels that her lack of connection

¹² Pinnock refers to the liberating effect of using patois for the first time in her play: “I found that so liberating. It was another voice and it freed me in some way to be myself as a writer. It was a breakthrough for me personally ... It was like discovering my voice” (1997: 50)

with the new language is killing a part of her, making her only “half-alive” and reducing her to a state of powerlessness and invisibility¹³.

A symptom of Black people’s powerlessness manifests itself in the area of employment. Whites hold positions of control whereas most Blacks occupy menial jobs¹⁴. The latter are cast as low achievers. For instance, Daphne says that her teachers “thought all the girls were going to end up as baby machine^[15] ... and there was always shelf-filling at Tesco’s” (94).

¹³ Leela’s feeling about her linguistic alienation is not dissimilar to Sivanandan’s question in “The Liberation of the Black Intellectual”. As he puts it, “how does one communicate the burden of one’s humanity in a language that dehumanises one in the very act of communication?” (73)

¹⁴ Tracey Reynolds comments on African Caribbean women’s record of employment:

The last twenty years has seen a shift in the areas of employment with movements away from the National Health Service, as semi-skilled and unskilled manual labour, towards clerical/administrative employment and other service industries ... [but] a significant proportion of black women are clustered at the bottom of their respective professional and career ladders with little opportunity for promotion, often earning less than their white male and female colleagues. (107-108)

¹⁵ Parmar notes prejudices against young Black women in “Gender, Race and Power”: “While young women of Afro-Caribbean origin are seen as potentially ‘at risk’ through a lack of discipline and because of an uncontrollable sexuality which results in unwanted pregnancies, young Asian women are seen as either too meek and mild or as rebelling against their unreasonably backward and

Equally, Del is fed up with her “greasy job in some greasy café where they treat [her] like shit, a couple of quid at the end of every week and a few hours off [she] can’t even call [her] own” (156). As a result, a significant number of the new generation of Black children born in Britain cultivate what Farrukh Dhondy describes as a “Culture of Resistance”: “School has not succeeded in inspiring them with an ambition they know they will not be allowed to fulfill. Their ambition can be characterised as survival. They refuse to work as their parents’ generation did.” (49)

Deprived of ambition and deeply afflicted by societal injustice, characters such as Daphine, Del and Angela feel that they are considered outsiders in British society. Daphine is aware that despite spending all her life in Britain she still lacks a sense of belonging. As she puts it, “I’ve been in this country all me life and I still feel like an alien” (91). Tony Sewell raises this point, quoting Caryl Phillips who aptly describes the kind of predicament in which Daphine and the others find themselves in Keep on Moving: The Windrush Legacy: “The fundamental problem was, if I was going to continue to live in Britain how was I to reconcile the contradiction of feeling British, while being constantly told in many subtle ways that I do not belong?” (92) Part of the alienation the characters feel stems from a prejudiced and sweeping generalisation that recognises subjects only as generic representatives of their race. In “24%”, Dawn is angry at how she is treated upon a visit to her sister in prison:

tradition-bound parents who insist on such ‘barbaric’ practices as arranged marriages.” (199)

ANGELA: ... Because on your last visit they searched you? Horrible isn't it? How humiliating. Treating you as if you were the criminal rather than just trying to visit one.

DAWN: And showing me the sign saying "no drug or alcohol allowed on visits". Do I look like a person who would do that? (II/4: 27)

The prison officer's reasoning, which consists in constructing all Blacks as criminals, reinforces the alienation of Blacks like Dawn from a positive, assured sense of self. On one level, she fears alienating herself from her own community and on the other from white people, both anxieties a result of her being a Black person:

At the university I've never told you what it was really like. I felt as if I was going into battle every single day. Am I "black" enough? Am I "too black" and "alienating" my white peers? ... I spent so much time worrying in case anybody asked me anything about the black race, what if I don't know the answer? ... How the hell am I supposed to know everything about all black people? (55)

Dawn is not comfortable with the "burden of representation". She finds the tendency to view blackness as a unitary category rather unsettling¹⁶.

¹⁶ Grace Nichols, the Black British poet, shares a similar concern on this issue: "I have a natural fear of anything that tries to close in on me, whether it's an ideology or it's a group of people who feel that we should all think alike because

She seems to fight off the idea that if one is Black then one has to confirm, and conform to, hegemonic constructions of Blacks. As a result, instead of simply representing one kind of blackness, she feels she is made to be representative of the entire Black race which leads to a dilemma on her part as she does not know how to position herself without alienating one group or another. Her obsession with conformity and assimilation reveals her fear of being different, of being classified as the other.

Fola, originally from Nigeria, also struggles with the idea that “most people think that blacks are the same” (28). Here the use of “Black” as a derogative form of homogenization is called into question, which is unlike the affirmative strategic use of “Black” discussed in the introduction to this thesis. The simplistic and reductive equation of Fola’s individual identity with an all-encompassing conceptual idea of derided blackness confuses her. When Mya, a white friend, asks her about the difference between West Indians and Africans Fola states that “there is something more fundamental, something more sociological” that differentiates the two peoples, and since Africans are outnumbered by Caribbeans, Fola feels that her “Africanness” is threatened: “I think ... African kids feel they are in the minority amongst blacks. Also there is a fear of being ridiculed by the majority of black West Indian kids in this country” (30). When Mya asks Fola whether or not she has “sold out” to the pressure of

we’re all women or because we’re all black, and there’s no room to accommodate anyone with a different view.” (Ngcobo 98)

West-Indianness she replies: “I have in the respect of needing to be accepted and therefore trading in my dignity for acceptance” (30). Thus, for the sake of assimilating to West-Indian values, Fola has to alienate her own (if not her parents’) standards – a move that results in an awkward conflictual position on her part¹⁷. As she puts it: “I feel as if I should owe

¹⁷ Fola points to the heterogeneous nature of Black experience, but also indicates the complex power dynamics that operate within the category “Black” itself. Beverly Bryan et al address this subject in their discussion of an interviewee whose parents are from different Black backgrounds. The interviewee has a Nigerian father and a Jamaican mother. She revealed the hostility her parents faced about their marriage: “They faced opposition on all sides. My father’s family accused him of going to Britain and marrying the descendants of slaves. My mother’s family didn’t want anything to do with her marrying a Black African. She had ‘spoiled’ herself. It was all to do with status. A beautiful brown-skin girl wasted” (227). She then describes the strategies she adopted to negotiate her background:

With that kind of confused, culturally insecure background it was understandable that I took on white ways ... I did come over to others, especially other Black girls, as though I was trying to act white. They felt that I was just being snobbish. The white girls tolerated me. When they made their racist comments, it was a case of ‘Not you, you’re different’. That was what I had to live with ... Fortunately, it didn’t last and as I came through my mid-teens I did begin to change. From there I made a conscious effort to take on my mother’s culture. Why my mother’s? Only with Black Power did Africa become fashionable. Before that, when I was just into an understanding, I thought that to be accepted meant to be West Indian. So I taught myself to speak

allegiance to my culture and see its advantages, but somehow the outside influences of British society makes it impractical” (31). Fola seems to suffer double alienation in both her domestic and external spaces: at home, she is bound by her parents’ values whose background eludes her. Outside, she is ruled by West-Indian values that are as foreign to her as those of the white society in which she lives.

The daughters’ attempts to assimilate themselves into English society vary greatly. For instance, characters such as Brenda, Dawn and Viv use education as a means of assimilating themselves better into that society. These characters think of education as having transformational powers that facilitate their attempt at defying the hegemonic order which seems to

Jamaican and learn how to cook ... I’d go and watch a domino match, go to a shabean, picking up bits of Black life at the time. It was the only way I could learn to feel part of my people ... That was the beginning, but I’ve been through enough to know myself now and how to handle what this society can deal out ... (Ibid.)

In the above narrative, the interviewee depicts the struggle she has undergone to negotiate a space where she can live out certain aspects of her self – her continental Africanness and her Afro-Caribbeanness. She throws light on her experience of diasporic identities which compete and conflict with one another. Her attempt “to take on white ways” in the interest of self-preservation is worth noting. It would seem that for a time she took refuge in the normative space of whiteness in order to obliterate her other identities marked by race, class and ethnicity.

condemn Blacks to occupy the bottom rank of society. Thus, striving to be educated is an endeavour not only to fit in but also to gain a dignified and rightful place in British society. Viv's academic success makes her mother very proud. And in "Paper and Stone" when Juliet tells Brenda that she has given up college to work full-time in a record shop because it is more rewarding Brenda reproaches her for "aiming so low" (22). Equally, Angela is against the fatalist attitude her sister Dawn shows as a Black single mother. She urges her sister to pursue a course at college in order to avoid stereotypes and to improve her future prospects:

DAWN: Why don't you get a decent job that pays well?

ANGELA: If only I could.

DAWN: But you can't. "I haven't got the qualifications." Well get them! Go to college. Do an evening course. Do something! You've got to take responsibility for yourself. (I/1: 9)

Angela and Dawn represent two different kinds of people borne of the experience of growing up in a racist society. Characters such as Dawn, Brenda and Viv are more inclined to conform and seek education as a passport into that society¹⁸. For instance, in "Paper and Stone" Brenda

¹⁸ In her article entitled "Race, Gender and IQ", Mirza points out the achievement of some Black women despite their plight: "black female success must be understood as a process of transcendence, resistance and survival. It must be understood in the context of racism, discrimination and poor conditions.

chastises Juliet with the observation that it does not amount simply to luck to fight against the racial stigma they are enduring:

... Its [*sic*] not luck Juliet. Its [*sic*] hardwork. Damn hardwork. You think when I walk down the street, anyone is going to see me as a big shot lawyer? No ... they'll see what they want to see ... a humble little black girl, who's at the bottom of the pile ... I have to be strong Juliet. I have to be positive: I have to know who I am ... Its [*sic*] hard work finding yourself Juliet ... and once you do, its even harder holding onto yourself. You're a black woman ... we can't rely on luck ... (II/15: 55)

On the other hand, there is a group of people including Angela who are openly aggressive towards the racial prejudice they suffer and adopt a politics of resistance as a defence mechanism against the injustice of racism. Angela, a resourceless Black single mother, resorts to stealing to survive. To prove to herself that she has authority over her own life, she empowers herself by choosing a new name ("Buki") in prison. She explains the motive for her later escape from prison by stating that "running away has made me feel in control of myself" (II/7: 40). Equally, after years of aimlessness, Del moves out of her mother's house to affirm that she is neither powerless nor passive but can take action based upon her own judgments, while fully appreciating the difficulties lying ahead:

These young women do well compared to their peers in their run-down, poorly staffed, chaotic, failing schools." (306)

“For once in my life I can’t run away. For the sake a’ my kid I got to stand and face up to who I am. For once in my life I feel like I got a future” (189). Thus, the second-generation daughters display varying attitudes towards the notion of assimilation in how they deal with the issue of belonging and identity. Some rely on education in their aspiration to fit into British society whereas others simply attempt to assert difference in the face of discrimination.

Characters such as Leela and Claudette in “Talking in Tongues” and Fola in “The S Bend” undertake travel to their homelands as part of their strategy to deal with their unsettled self. In “The S Bend”, Fola finds solace in the thought that going back home to Nigeria will somehow resolve her crisis of identity. In this excerpt from her letter to her friend Mya she writes:

I think I’ve found the answer and the way out of my dilemma ... The confusion I felt began to clear when I met my uncle ... He had been brought up in England himself and found the only way to escape the pressure of conflicting cultures was to completely avoid them and live in a less conflicting environment. This can only be done in your native land so he suggested I try life in Nigeria for a while ... (45)

In this letter, written before her departure to Nigeria, Fola seems to be suggesting that an identity is awaiting her there. The fantasy of wholeness she conjures up at the idea of being home, in Nigeria, is problematic. Fola

assumes that a purer culture and a more culturally stable environment prevail in Nigeria. Rather than negotiating her identity in the diasporic space of Britain – a space in which she can live out and adapt her Nigerianness – Fola searches for a singular identity within the space of lineage (through her uncle) and a geographical setting (Nigeria). Thus, she undergoes a literal and metaphorical re-patriation. Her going home does not only mean a physical return but it also implies that she has reinserted herself into male-dominated Nigerian society where men like her uncle have the power to rule and to set boundaries.

Unlike Fola, Claudette and Leela return to Jamaica effectively as tourists. However, once on the island, their respective visions differ greatly. Leela is determined to address her personal issues. She walks about Jamaica in order to get to know the country but also as a way of dealing with her romantic disappointment. To some extent, the relentless walks she takes help her go through the stages of self-exploration. Leela and Claudette are treated as tourists in the land of their ancestors, an experience which sharpens Leela's alienation from the place and which in turn helps her face her identity crisis. For instance, she expresses her envy of the local people who "seem so at ease with themselves. They have that confidence that comes from belonging" (II/1: 206). As a result, Leela's feeling of unbelonging seems to intensify as she unconsciously compares herself with the native women. Thus, the state of not belonging in both places – in Britain and at her ancestral home – triggers a sense of worthlessness in her.

Claudette's behaviour also betrays a sense of inferiority, a state of mind from which she is unable to steer herself. She deals with her feelings of insecurity by setting herself up in competition with both native Black women and white female tourists on the island. Owing to her status as a rich tourist she gains the interest of the men on the island and feels powerful and in control. She expresses her sense of achievement on that matter thus: "Yesterday I had three men dancing attendance on me. All the rich young American women on the beach and they're swarming around me" (II/1: 204). Later, she manages to seduce Mikie, a local waiter in the hotel where they stay, and has no qualms about being sexually involved with him despite the fact that the latter is already married to Sugar, a native woman. Unlike Leela, who strives to undertake self-regeneration, Claudette is not yet ready to take such a step. Winsome Pinnock explains Claudette's behaviour in her additional notes to "Talking in Tongues". She argues that Claudette's strong belief against interracial relationships "is an attempt to avoid her own pain and longing caused by the traditional double oppression (both within and outside their communities) that some black women experience" (226). Thus, unlike Leela who is able to confront her self and her pain and manages to move beyond that unsettled self in the process, Claudette is absorbed in self-protection which prevents her from facing up to her real self with the required degree of honesty. Submerged in that confusion, Claudette is also unable to move away from the shackles of the racialized social constructions that bind her. She acts simultaneously as the stereotypical Black woman reduced to hypersexuality and as the conventional sex tourist. She sums up her

holiday plans on the island in the following statement: “I intend to rest, eat, drink, soak up as much sun as I can stand and fuck everything that moves” (I/1: 204). In “From sexual denigration to self-respect”, Anneeka Marshall endeavours to account for the conduct of Black women like Claudette:

We’ve taken on board these stereotypes because we’ve had to accept certain images about ourselves by virtue of the way our lives are restricted to stereotypes that are not resistant to change. To challenge them actively in the way that actually rebukes what they’re saying we can’t; because they hold the key; they’re in a position. We can’t obtain the key. We can reach the key but the key is on the highest step and with that key you can open the doors and go anywhere that you want. (25)

Leela seems to be determined “to reach the key”. She refuses to be trapped in certain hegemonic stereotypes of the bitter, hypersexual Black woman but strives to transcend them.

She and Claudette are involved in physically assaulting Kate, a white woman residing on the island, when they suspect that the latter might have had sex with Mikie during their outing on a boat. While Kate is asleep on the beach the two Black girls smudge lipstick on her face and crop her hair. In shearing Kate’s hair, Leela and Claudette demystify the so-called power and superiority that the latter’s race and sex possess. From that

moment onwards Leela is gradually released from the anger and pain that fill her life. She lets herself go, talks in tongues and vents the repressed feelings of hatred and oppression she experiences as a Black woman. She makes peace with Kate. The two women manage to reach a deal that the next time Leela comes back to the island she will share a walk with Kate, a positive hint at the possible healing of the relationship between Black and white women. Thus, Leela transcends the various forms of alienation that beset her and attempts to heal her relation with her self and others.

In sum, for characters such as Viv, Dawn and Dynette, education is a means to save themselves from the alienation they face in British society. They assume an assimilationist stance in their quest for social acceptance. On the other hand, Claudette's, Angela's and Del's experiences of social alienation in their everyday dealings provoke other complex reactions. These characters' apparent rejection of assimilation betrays their need to negotiate their place in British society. Their behaviour which seems to go against the grain can be translated as an endeavour to gain acceptance without too much compromising of the self. However, all the characters' strategies – be it through assimilation or resistance to it – for negotiating their sense of alienation from the outside world are put to the test in the face of a different aspect of alienation, that of an internal alienation linked to the concept of the body.

CHAPTER 3 – THE BODY

Estrangement from the *social* body stands as a major cause of alienation for the daughters in the plays. Reflection on the *physical* body is another, especially in dramas such as Cooke's "Back Street Mammy", Zindika's "Paper and Stone", Dayley's "Rose's Story", Rudet's "Money to Live", Kay's "Chiaroscuro", Pinnock's "Leave Taking" and "Talking in Tongues". The female characters' bodies, inscribed by external markers such as race and gender coupled with the social constructions associated with these two elements, become a site of alienation and oppression.

In this chapter I shall unravel the crucial role played by the body in the characters' self-definition; I shall attempt to establish the various strands of body politics that inform race and gender in the plays and explore the rationale behind the characters' negotiation of their body image. Then, I shall tease out the ensuing concept of self-hate as well as the question of women's re-appropriation of their bodies. Next, I shall deal with the female characters' sexuality and the commodification of the Black body, an arena where problematic notions of "subjects" and "objects", "active agency" and "passive victimhood" are worked through in the plays. Finally, the concept of the body as a home will be developed.

In "Talking in Tongues", Claudette's hedonistic lifestyle points towards

the perceived primacy of sexuality and the body in Black women's lives¹. Indeed, Claudette's hypersexuality is reminiscent of a number of stereotypical images of Black women. She takes pride in her sensuality and her main satisfaction in life seems to be focused on the number of sexual conquests she has achieved. In her research on Black women, Anneka Marshall notes the extent to which historical constructions of Black sexuality still hold in that "the prevalent images of the Black female define her as sensuous and animalistic, as a prostitute, breeder or sapphire^[2]" (11). Claudette's licentiousness seems to indicate a surrendering position to this hegemonic conception of the "other" as made clear in Elleke Boehmer's definition of the other as "corporeal, carnal, untamed, raw and therefore also open to mastery, available for use, for husbandry, for numbering, branding, cataloging, description or possession" (Gilbert and Tompkins 269). Thus, in her obsession with carnal pursuits, Claudette fulfills the role of the other. She inadvertently uses her body to fit the label of the sensual, promiscuous Black woman. Her abiding position of complying with the construction of the "other" is

¹ As remarked by Rebecca Schneider in The Explicit Body in Performance, "white women are ambivalent signs, split between the binaried poles of potential virgin and potential fallen whore, whereas Black women historically have been socially decided, as Gilman notes – never virginal, never pure, but signifying, [...] the always already fallen site of primitive, animal sexuality." (27)

² Sapphire is derived from the Greek lyric poet of the early 7th century who lived on the island of Lesbos and whose poems are centred around passion and jealousy, and which express her affection and love for women. These have led to her association with female homosexuality.

an ambiguous statement of conformity reinforcing the dominant discourse about Black women. At the same time it springs from her belief in self-empowerment. In Kimberly W. Benston's words: "Primordial Blackness is not a node of absolute essence but, rather, the (re)discovery of the subversive ambiguity of any expressive act" (10). However, Claudette is not constructed as someone who revels in the subversive ambiguity of her acts. Rather, she professes to make statements about herself that, however inadvertently, contradict the ideological stance of pro-blackness she seeks to adopt.

On the one hand, the quest for conformity – implying that the idea of blackness and whiteness are negotiable – points to the characters' (unconscious) resistance to an essentialist concept of race. On the other hand, the characters' attempts to conform also indicate the fact that they have internalized a certain social construction of "racial" difference, one in which difference is articulated in terms of the positive whiteness and the negative Black "other". This is conveyed by the fact that some Black women try to adopt a politics of representation that strives to attain white beauty standards. Claudette recalls a childhood memory which associates long straight hair and whiteness with power:

Reminds me of a little girl who used to live next door to us. She'd walk past you with her nose in the air, and if she did deign to play with you she'd have to be the one bossing everybody around. It makes me sick to think about the power she had over me. I'd have

done anything she told me to. I envied her power. I used to pose in front of my mum's dressing-table with a yellow polo-neck on my head. I'd swish it around, practise flicking my hair back like she used to. (217)

Some female characters in the plays are concerned with transforming their bodies to meet normative white ideals with the intent of gaining acceptance in both Black and white communities. In "Paper and Stone" Martha admonishes her daughter about her hair: "Brenda ... how many times must I tell you to straighten up your hair and wear pretty dresses like the other girls at church"³ (8). According to Martha, Brenda's body – her hair in particular – is a site of signification that determines her daughter's success in life. Her insistence in advising Brenda to straighten her hair accounts for her belief in straight hair being synonymous with being desirable, hence the ability to attract a good partner (in her daughter's case, the pastor of their church), and that it also enhances her chance of class mobility⁴. Thus, hair is one of the main body elements that

³ In Sisters of the Yam, hooks argues that "the first body issue that affects Black female identity, even more so than color, is hair texture ... Many Black women view their hair as a problem, or as one Black woman put it, a 'territory to be conquered'." (85-6)

⁴ The play does not mention how Brenda feels about the experience of straightening her hair. However, her mother, Martha, sees it as an entirely positive act shorn of any mixed feelings. Contrary to Martha, Cheryl Clarke in her poem entitled "Hair: A Narrative", raises the subject of hair straightening as a process not devoid of mixed feelings. She depicts her experience as triggering

requires attention in the quest to remain as close as possible to the hegemonic standard of beauty⁵. “Paper and Stone” points to self-inflicted scars on the Black female body to ensure hegemonic acceptance: “Black girls who do not see themselves reflected in the mirror of acceptance must scar themselves with third degree burns ... singed hair skin like an angel” (11). The deliberate act of maiming the self at the price of suffering for the sake of acceptance furthers Black women’s oppression.⁶

The desire for the attributes of whiteness conveys an endeavour to shift to the position of the individual, seemingly from object to subject, so as to secure the privileges assigned to being white. Richard Dyer aptly identifies the assumption whiteness carries:

contradictory feelings of pleasure and pain, shame and pride. The testing pain of the hot-lye and steel-comb treatment is set in contrast to the bond and intimacy which develops between her and the hair-dresser. As she puts it: “Against the war of tangles / against the burning metamorphosis / ... [the hairdresser] taught me art / gave me good advice / gave me language / made me love something about myself.” (3)

⁵ It was Frantz Fanon who first conducted an analysis of the political impact of racial hegemonies at the level of Black subjectivity. He viewed Black cultural preference for all things white as a symptom of “psychic inferiorization”.

⁶ In her article on “Black Women and Representation in Film”, Lola Young raises the problematic aspect of physical beauty for Black women. She affirms that “the notion of feminine beauty has always been an oppressive concept for Black women in a European context.” (188)

For those in power in the West, as long as whiteness is felt to be the human condition, then it alone both defines normality and fully inhabits it ... The equation of being white with being human secures a position of power. (2)

Cathy, in “Every Bit of It”, wrestles with the same issue:

My favourite painted colour was always white. Plain white, fresh and clean. That’s the most important thing, being clean. Some people think having a bath three times a day is over the top. But I think it’s absolutely necessary. Don’t you? (I/2: 4)

Cathy’s *clichéd* vision of whiteness, equating it with adjectives such as “fresh” and “clean”, unconsciously projects a certain binarism, the opposition of whiteness to blackness with the latter’s implied negative image. In “Love in Black and White”, Felly Nkweto Simmonds articulates the hierarchical construction involved in the dichotomy between Black and white:

The “fact of blackness” and that of “whiteness” has to be seen as a relational one, and in doing this a new reading of these constructions becomes possible. This is the point at which “race” becomes literally embodied. For the Black body, this is often a negative experience because historically “blackness” has been constructed not only in opposition to whiteness (ie Black = not white, and not

vice-versa), but also as occupying an inferior position to whiteness.

What is also being articulated in the social formations of “blackness” and “whiteness” are the power relations of the dominance of *white* over *Black*. (212-13)

The longing to be associated with whiteness, the privileged signifier, engenders physical and psychological consequences in the female characters in the plays. Its physical impact resides in the scars or the lasting traces of maiming inscribed on their bodies which have become sites of particular significations. Martha warns Brenda about marks on her body: “You make sure you don’t end up with hands like these ... My hands didn’t get like this by avoiding hard work” (9). Martha’s hands not only display the sign of years of tiring menial jobs but they also disclose a scar, a physical reminder of an unresolved traumatic past, the result of her running away upon forsaking her child.

Thus, some Black women develop a particular relationship with their bodies as they negotiate daily with their embodied selves. In The Beauty Myth Naomi Wolf explains that “women are the slaves of our own bodies. We are entrapped in a beauty myth and if we are unable to achieve it we hate ourselves” (Marshall 26). A few Black women in the plays have internalized the kind of self-hatred that Wolf mentions. This internalised

self-hatred dominates characters such as Martha, Juliet, Opal and Leonora.⁷

Leonora's self-hatred is made apparent in her dialogue with her lodger, Melisa, and in her internal conversations with Medusa, the spirit that keeps destabilising her to the point of insanity. Despite her physical talent for dancing, Leonora is stigmatised due to the colour of her skin⁸. She describes the difficulty in being the product of whiteness and blackness: "I

⁷ In her article "Shades of Blackness: Young Black Female Constructions of Beauty", Debbie Weekes mentions different racialised spaces Black and white women occupy in terms of standards of beauty:

The entire concept of feminine attractiveness has been heavily based upon dominant definitions of beauty which have far reaching consequences for Black women. Not only has female beauty been constructed to objectify women, the assumption of Whiteness as the norm indicates that Black and White women are objectified differentially. The signifiers of hair texture, skin shade and shape of lips and noses are reacted to in terms of their approximation to Whiteness. (114)

⁸ Ervin Goffman's etymological explication of the term "stigmatisation" leads to a better understanding of the import of this word. Stigmatisation started as a practice on the skin: "The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term *stigma* to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor – a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided" (11).

could paint my face white. I thought I was white enough. But one per cent Black can ruin your life” (84). Her essentialized conception of race and her desire to literally and symbolically whiten “the blackness that ruins [her] life” can be perceived as a sign of self-hatred. Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe describes the problematic position of a mixed-race identity as a form of “psychosocial struggle(s) between subjectivity and alterity” (127). Leonora’s skin locates her in a liminal position where she is classified as neither entirely Black nor white. The combination of Blackness and whiteness unsettles the rigorous hegemonic compartmentalization of colour.⁹

Opal in “Chiaroscuro” also shows symptoms of self-hate:

My face was a shock to itself. The brain in my head thought my skin white and my nose straight. It imagined my hair was this curly from twiddling it. Every so often, I saw me: milky coffee skin, dark searching eyes, flat nose. Some voice from that mirror would whisper: *nobody wants you, no wonder. You think you’re white till you look in me.* (I: 65)

Opal articulates the disjunction between internal fantasy and external

⁹ In Notes of a White Black Woman, Judy Scales-Trent raises the anguish borne out of being mixed-race: “This system of rigid dualism ... fosters so much anxiety when people don’t fit into the categories neatly, when people ‘transgress boundaries, yet in order for me to exist I must transgress boundaries.’” (7)

reality. Her ideal self is phenotypically white – her bodily actuality is Black. The reflected image she sees portrays the bodily realities she has been fearing, “milky coffee skin”, “flat nose” and so on. To Opal, the image of the actual self that the mirror projects initiates a traumatic visual experience which is laden with negative associations: it is both a physical reminder of her abandonment by her biological mother and her diminished position as a Black person in a racist society. Dissociating herself mentally from her body is a way for her to cope with her inability to reconcile her inner idealized image and her actual physical self.

Opal’s gaze into the mirror is a search for self-affirmation. But her relationship with the mirror is also problematic. The act of turning in on oneself for self-affirmation points to the lack of a social network that supports her mixed-race state. What is failing her is not the physical body but a collective body which is unable to affirm its members so that they can develop positive bodily self-esteem. As a result, the ethic of communalism that might be an important pivot for a survival strategy is replaced by a highly individualistic approach which relies on the mirror and the strength of the inner self.

Juliet in “Paper and Stone” mentions her individualistic fight to belong and the personal effort she makes to negate the blackness in her in order to fit in and achieve the “normal” state of whiteness:

I did try [to fit in]. Once when I was little, I even tried to skin

myself ... and you know when you get in the sun and sometimes your skin peels ... I thought I was turning white ... but the tan always came back like a bad dream ... But he [Daddy] never noticed, there was always someone there staring at me, pointing a finger ... reminding me that I was different. (19)

Juliet attempts to purge herself of her uncleanness. She literally burns out the stigmatisation from her skin to the point of body damage. Her experience is not dissimilar from Opal's – "a Black girl. She bought all the teenage magazines. The non-Black magazines." (12) – in that nobody grants her the self-affirmation she seeks, not even her father. The lack of positive role models in her life clearly affects her self-image.

A distinctive consequence of self-hate is the propensity of some characters to abject members of their own group. For instance, characters such as Leonora project their fear and loathing of themselves onto others; in this case, onto Daphine. Daphine and Melisa are both Leonora's lodgers but the two girls inhabit different locations in Leonora's eyes. Melisa, the girl from Hong Kong, is lighter-skinned and better educated than Daphine – hence, Leonora's preferential treatment of the former:

LEONORA: (*ecstatic*) Oh, Miss Chung – a woman after my own heart. You know from the moment I saw you. I knew you were suited for occupying that room upstairs, I just had a feeling, kindred spirits (*winks at her*) call it what you will. (I/3: 83-4)

Leonora's words show that she wants to identify with Melisa and that she is relationally ready to engage with her on an equal-to-equal basis. In Looking Like What You Are, Lisa Walker explains the importance of "identification" as

central to issues of visibility and identity because it is an aspect of subject formation located in the field of vision. As the mechanism that produces both self-recognition and the apprehension of "difference", it is also the point where the psychological and the social converge. (141)

In terms of colouring, Leonora identifies herself more with Melisa than with Daphine¹⁰. The latter is not positioned within her circle of identification. Her self-identification with Melisa leads her to react strongly against Melisa's intention to study "tropical medicine". For Leonora "tropical medicine" conjures up Africa, the ultimate image of Otherness:

¹⁰ In Embodying Strangers, Sara Ahmed points out the role of the skin. She argues that "the skin functions as a boundary or border, by supposedly holding or containing the subject within a certain contour, keeping the subject inside, and the other outside. But as a border, the skin performs that peculiar destabilizing logic, calling into question the exclusion of the other from the subject and risking the subject's falling into – or becoming – the other." (91)

LEONORA: ... You are much too delicate for that field, and you don't want to end up in some fly-infested place where they don't even have running water; and those uncivilised pit latrines ... (I/3: 83)

In short, as Leonora identifies with Melisa she does not want her to be associated with the jungle to which "tropical medicine" points. On the other hand, Daphine is treated as abject by Leonora because of her skin:

DAPHINE: Yes, Miss Leonora. We're Africans ... you and me.

LEONORA: Don't tar me with the same brush.

DAPHINE: It's nothing to be ashamed of ...

LEONORA: You don't see it on television? They digging in the earth, fighting over a mouthful of grain. Africa is one dry up piece of land. (I/2: 81)

Leonora rejects her potential African origins in relation to Daphine. Her stereotypes of Africa betray her lack of knowledge of that continent. She constantly confronts her own Otherness through the talks and admonishments she bestows upon Daphine. Thus, Leonora's interaction with Daphine involves a continual and repeated process of self-othering, in which darker people like Daphine become loathsome, in order to establish the border between the subject "I" and the other.

In “Money to Live” the othered body is used strategically by the character Judy as an albeit problematic source of empowerment¹¹. Judy describes the job of a stripper to her friend, Charlene:

In different clubs, though, your act has to change. Some people want it to be sexy, while other people like it crude: you have to open your legs and touch yourself. I used to be all shy and thought I had a terrible body, but people soon told me different; I thought my thighs were too big, but guys started telling me they liked big thighs! (1: 153)

Judy’s description is linked to what bell hooks calls the objectification of Black women’s bodies in the sexual politics of Black women’s performance in Black Looks: Race and Representation. Here, hooks draws a parallel between the fate of slave women and contemporary Black women:

¹¹ Rudet declared her dissatisfaction with the quality of the first performance of “Money to Live” directed by a male director: “It was a mistake having a man direct the play. In the production, he created a scene where Charlene and Judy perform at a club. Without my consent, he removed the scene where Charlene and Judy rehearse. This is an important scene. The girls take their clothes off, then they put them back on again” (180). Rudet thinks that the male director’s decision to cut the crucial scene of the girls’ rehearsal and his replacing it with a mere striptease club scene points to the male director’s lack of understanding of the gender concerns in the play.

Most often attention was not focused on the complete Black female on display at a fancy ball in the “Civilized” heart of European Culture, Paris. She is there to entertain guests with the naked image of Otherness. They are not to look at her as a whole human being. They are to notice only certain parts. Objectified in a manner similar to that of Black female slaves who stood on auction blocks while owners and overseers described their important, salable parts ... They were reduced to mere spectacle. (62)

hooks’ Black female portrayal finds its counterpart in Judy’s account:

Figure doesn’t matter, those men want to see just one part of your body ... They stand there patiently and wait for me to do some floor work and open my legs. Their eyes glare at this little section of me ... They don’t care about any other part of my body, they just want that image for their fantasies. It’s easy money, so easy. (1: 155)

The above description encapsulates certain elements of men’s exploitation of Black women’s bodies through stripping in public. First, Black women are objectified through being portrayed as fragmented in body parts. Secondly, and more specifically they are reduced to their private parts with the suggestion that their bodies are open to any advances and can be appropriated in exchange for economic gain.¹² Thirdly, the women are

¹² In relation to commodified sex and the status of the women involved, Carole Pateman, for example, raises the close connection between sex and the self

reduced to mere spectacle – and it is here that the issues of subject and object are fully played out. The woman’s position as spectacle (making a spectacle of herself) before the masculine eye is a fertile issue to pursue. It introduces the idea of performance and its defining of the body, a term which captures within its meanings the idea of offering up the body/the self to public consumption. But, beyond self-hatred, the issue here is to what extent Black women can be the subjects of their own performing, fighting back for control from those that watch them. Theories of the so-called disciplining functions of the male gaze suggest that a male audience can “tame” a woman. Although she might enter public (masculine) space as a potentially disruptive, transgressive body, spectacle “disciplines her back into line, returns her into a docile body” (Brook 112). However, Judy in “Money to Live” embodies attempts by Black women to evade or subvert that very disciplining, even though to all intents and purposes she seems to be a sexualized object¹³. As Foucault argues, “bodies and pleasures” are not only “the raw materials on which power works” but “the sites for possible resistance to the particular form power takes”¹⁴ (157). Thus, in the act of stripping, Judy totally dissociates herself from

which makes prostitution inadmissible: “Womanhood ... is confirmed in sexual activity, and when a prostitute contracts out use of her body she is ... selling herself in a very real sense. Women’s selves are involved in prostitution in a different manner from the involvement of the self in other occupations.” (207)

¹³ Shannon Bell qualifies the postmodern prostitute “simultaneously as a new political subject and as a plural, rather than a unitary subject.” (99)

¹⁴ Though not without opposition. See Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism.

her body as she conducts the mechanical act of baring herself for her male audience¹⁵. Judy's job appears to perpetuate the objectification of Black women in the context of the commodification of the Black body, but she is not ready to assume those particular shackles: "They want to look at your body and all you have to do is show it to them. I don't call that work." (155)

The issue of the meaning of the female body in performance is raised by Brook:

Women in performance as actors [*sic*], dancers and other entertainers, athletes, body-builders are, by definition, drawing attention to their bodies: a question for feminism is, how far can they do this and also have autonomy? To become and remain subjects they must negotiate not only the regulatory conventions of performance, but also the ways in which the disciplining male gaze attempts to reduce them to no more than the docile (hetero)-sexualised object of desire. (112)

Appropriating the concept of the Black female's uncontrollable hypersexuality constructed by a racist system of patriarchy, Judy exploits it for her own ends to achieve financial self-sufficiency. In her conversation with Charlene, she questions the concept of romantic

¹⁵ On one level, Judy's self-exposure to men, undergoing (self)-humiliation on stage, suggests an inherent hatred of self.

relationships and positively encourages the use of sex as a commodity for exchange:

JUDY: Of course. He [Charlene's boyfriend] comes round when he wants something. Let me tell you, darling, I don't call that a relationship, I call that opening your legs twice a week. Look, you've got to earn money. It's none of his business – or anybody else's business – how you earn it ... (1: 156)

Judy uses her Black female body as an image for male consumption. However, in this context, she deconstructs the show's purpose in objectifying her by affirming that, despite all appearances, she remains an active agent of her own body. Griselda Pollock points out the possible pitfalls in a position such as Judy's. She explains that the "attempt to decolonise the female body, [is] a tendency which walks a tightrope between subversion and reappropriation, and often serves rather to consolidate the potency of signification rather than actually to rupture it" (140). One is left wondering if the spectator is able to "see" differently in Judy's body performances.

Owing to its tackling of complex issues surrounding the sex industry, "Money to Live" engages in the feminist debates on sex-working, pornography and the so-called sexual liberation of the late 1970s and 1980s. Rudet shows her ambivalent position on the matter through her particular handling of Charlene's characterization: at the beginning of the

play, Charlene is portrayed as a recluse, depressed and impoverished, lacking self-esteem. Later, her involvement in the sex industry turns her into an assertive, materially affluent person who has future plans (she is saving to fulfill her dream of travelling) and who is also able to transform the lives of those around her: with her financial help, her sister and her mother plan to start a business together and she is able to “solve” her brother’s problem in arranging an abortion for his girlfriend.

The experience of pregnancy, as indicated in the reference to abortion just made, is another somatic context which is pathologized as a dis-ease in some of the female characters’ experiences. For the first-generation mothers, pregnancies were lived within the social and political realities of home, their original countries. In “Leonora’s Dance”, Frieda undergoes the racial and gendered oppression of colonialism. Her body is reduced to its sexual and reproductive functions through the violatory relationship with the master. Frieda is only too aware of the social and racial chasm separating her world and the master’s, which makes their relationship impossible:

Marry me? Him with his big white house ... his grand piano
and huge ballroom, crystal chandelier – the colonel, lord and
mighty – marry me, a field hand – who cut cane under the
burning sun? (97)

Frieda's awkward relationship with him results in her pregnancy and the subsequent birth of Leonora. The kind of relationship Frieda has with the master is also reflected in the uneasy relationship between mother and daughter¹⁶. For instance, when Frieda comes to England to persuade Leonora to come home and become her spiritual heir, Leonora refuses:

LEONORA: ... I've still got plenty of contacts. So you see you can take your mothering and your obeah back to the Caribbean with you. In fact on the way over, drop it in the ocean where it belongs. (107)

FRIEDA: You can say that to me, after I spent 15 years in penitentiary for you. You thought I was dead, didn't you? ... You wanted me to die. You just like your father – deny me ... deny me ... and deny me again. (108)

Frieda's ambivalent relationship with her daughter accounts for her conception of Leonora as an extended embodiment of her father. The above passage indicates the uneven power dynamics between them, reminding Frieda of the experiences she had with Leonora's biological father. In the same way as Frieda was considered a mere property,

¹⁶ In "Analysing Representations", Richard Allen relates painful experiences of motherhood during slavery: "For the slave woman, motherhood is characterized not by bonding, but by bondage; by the pain not of unity but of separation, as emblemized in her own enforced estrangement from Africa, the Motherland." (140)

deprived of social and legal recognition for her affiliation with the master, her daughter also denies her the recognition she seeks as her mother. Frieda suffers dual rejection from her daughter: of both her motherly status, and of her race and culture. However, ultimately Leonora's mental breakdown enables Frieda to address the power imbalance in her relationship with her daughter.

Martha also undergoes sexual coercion while living under the regime of colonialism. She graphically describes her experience of rape:

People say he owned acres of land ... he own [*sic*] the whole village ... and he had blue blood, so they say. He had big red hands [...] like they could suffocate me. Dropping his trousers like a shot from a gun ... the gun he carried all the time to shoot the Black bird in the field. His face gone greyish white like someone built a mask over it ... a plastic mask. Only his eyes remain ... blood shot red. It was Sunday he was boring through me and my back snapping like a twig. His hands drowning my screams ... my back limp on the flour bags on the floor ... (54)

Exercising his presumed property rights over the body of Martha, the slave master displays his ruthless domination of the Black body and thereby bolsters his powerful positioning in relation to Blacks¹⁷. Later,

¹⁷ Hazel Carby invokes the socio-political ideology behind rape in Reconstructing Womanhood. She discusses the extent to which rape has several

when the child is born, Martha mentions that “it didn’t sound human, it sound like banshee” (54). Still haunted by the inhuman action of her rapist, Martha also deems the child as almost inhuman, a “banshee” whose power lies in foretelling a coming death. Thus, her conception of the child as a threat explains her need to reject the baby, here in the form of her physical abandonment of the child.

Both “Leonora’s Dance” and “Paper and Stone” demonstrate that the bodies of some first-generation mothers living in the colonial period were still the site of a territorial battle where white supremacist males reinforced their authority through rape. If Martha’s and Frieda’s pregnancies are borne out of the political oppressions of the period, then the daughters’ pregnancies in England are motivated by the oppression of home and the church upon their lives. For the parents, the difficulties of adjusting to a new territory make church and religion take on more prominence than they possibly had for them at home. As explained in chapter two, the church occupies a central role in the mothers’ lives as they use it to connect with other immigrants like themselves. They also view it as a way of negotiating a new land. Consequently, the boundary between home and the church is blurred in some of the characters’ lives.

significances for Black women in that it is a stark reminder of their colour, gender and history. As Carby puts it: “Rape itself should not be regarded as a transhistorical mechanism of women’s oppression but as one that acquires specific political or economic meanings at different moments in history.” (17)

In “Rose’s Story”, the protagonist describes the oppressive atmosphere of her home life:

My parents, hum, yeah my parents, you see, they are Christians and you know what these Christians are. I grew up a loner in a house full of people, people who did not know and who did not want to know ... There was young people’s meetings and prayer meetings in between, but basically church and school was the only ... no, no, is the only thing I know, we couldn’t even watch television, ... well I couldn’t ... not until two months ago when I ran away from home with Leroy ... (I/1: 57)

Becoming pregnant and the deliberate decision to keep the baby is a kind of rebellion for girls like Rose, not as in the case of the previous generation’s experiences, the result of unwanted sexual intercourse or domination.

Any act of rebellion implies the quest for self-empowerment. Rose takes steps to leave her parents’ house in order to escape from the lonely and disciplined nature of home. Equally, Del’s leaving home to stay with May upon her pregnancy is an act of mutiny. It shows her determination to flee from the limiting way of living in her home environment. Like Rose’s mother, Del’s mother Enid is greatly concerned with keeping up appearances for the church: “Is my house. She [Del] got to learn to have respect’. Pastor an’ him wife did say them want to me all me family [*sic*]”

(I/2: 150). This difference in view between Del and her mother means that most of their conversations at home seem to be made up of violent verbal exchanges with no hope of fruitful discussion. In "Back Street Mammy", Dynette strives for closeness with her mother, Maria, by asking her about her personal experience of sexuality. Dynette asks her mother about her first sexual experience as she seeks guidance about the confusion she faces after having taken that step. However, no real dialogue takes place between mother and daughter as Maria is in a hurry to go to church.

When Dynette is certain of her pregnancy she also temporarily leaves home to stay with her sister, Jan. Her symbolic departure from home is a statement of her desire to be in control of her own life and her determination to get away from the abusive relationship her parents have. As she puts it: "Mum, I 'need' to stay at Jan's. Give me a break. I need a break from you two at each other's throats all the time" (82). But most importantly, her pregnancy is an act of defiance in that she acts against her mother's expectation.

"Rose's Story", "Back Street Mammy", "Leave Taking" are plays about teenage pregnancy, a topical subject in the UK since the 1980s because of a sharp increase in the numbers of teenage pregnancies in this particular period coupled with a financially-stricken welfare state struggling under the pressure put upon it by so-called "spongers", amongst them

supposedly teenage mothers¹⁸. Through becoming pregnant, some of the daughters use their bodies as an instrument to achieve liberation¹⁹. In “Basin”, Michele explains her reason for getting pregnant:

Daddy was so possessive, so violent. He used to love us in a very primitive way. That’s why I left. I couldn’t bear to hear her cry anymore. The only way I could’ve left home and got a flat was to get myself pregnant. (132)

Pregnancy is then a conscious or unconscious act of destabilising the uneven power dynamics between mothers/fathers and daughters. Taking as a basis the paradigm of the master-slave relationship, some of the mothers in the play seek to exert their parental rights as property claims on their daughters. In a way, what the daughters reclaim through getting pregnant is freedom from the parents as masters and from the shackles of an authoritarian and religiously oppressive home.

¹⁸ Since the 1980s a number of newspaper articles on teenage pregnancies have been written, raising people’s awareness of the subject. On 1 May 1985, for example, *The Times*’ science correspondent reported the findings of an international group of health experts who highlighted the increased number of teenage pregnancies as a major issue facing Britain. Ann Phoenix also tackles the subject in *Young Mothers?* (1991).

¹⁹ Nonetheless, in some cases, pregnancy can also be a new form of imprisonment. In “Back Street Mammy”, Dynette opts for abortion to release her body from the burden of child-rearing for which she is not ready.

If the sexed/racialised body is the source of an identity that can lead to oppression, it can also represent salvation. The body is a point to which some of the characters have recourse in order to gain individual freedom. In "Talking in Tongues", Leela frees up her body in her effort to become more attuned to it through her walks. Consequently, she achieves a more harmonious relationship with it: "I've got used to walking here. I'm not so frightened of the pitfalls now. It's the way you displace the weight of your body, isn't it? You've got to be in touch with your body" (II/6: 225). Leela's walk is not only bound to the physicality of the exercise but also extends to the psychological dimensions of her experience. The fact that she feels the necessity "to be in touch with [her] body" could be translated as the desire to be both at home in/with her body. Thus, homecoming implies the cathartic experience of recuperating the loss of trust in the body. More specifically, in Leela's case it evokes the process of being healed from the trial of abandonment and betrayal she has gone through in the relationship with her husband. In a sense, Leela's walk functions as a journey of self-discovery in both physical and metaphysical senses. She achieves physical wholeness and regains inner peace out of the experience. She has attained the state of contentment the obeah, May, in "Leave Taking" describes: "you at peace with yourself, you at home anywhere" (I/2: 179). Unlike Leela, characters such as Opal and Juliet remain unable to come to terms with the otherness within themselves as they struggle to resolve the problematic issue of reconciling their mirror images, their bodily fantasy images and the reality of their bodies.

The female characters' experiences of their bodies are thus inscribed with multiple significations. Characters such as Juliet, Opal and Brenda deny and change "undesirable" parts of their bodies in order to gain societal acceptance and to redress the uneven balance of power resulting from the inescapable external markers their bodies carry. In Judy's case in "Money to Live", the body is utilized as an instrument for deconstructing the male gaze and for an affirmation of power derived from sexuality. As for Del and Rose, the body – through pregnancy – is a vehicle for self-empowerment in the quest for independence. In the context of mother-daughter relationships in the plays, this quest for autonomy on the daughters' part takes place in many different guises. One of them is the act of metaphorical matricide, the focus of my next chapter.

CHAPTER 4 – MATRICIDE

One of the main features of the plays under scrutiny is the conflict at the heart of mother-daughter relationships. Mothers and daughters have difficulty in relating to each other as they adjust to the changing phases of their relationship over the time of the daughters' development in and out of adolescence and then beyond. This chapter addresses the theme of the daughters' act of separation from mothers.

As the daughters grow up, their relationship with their mothers evolves in their search for independence. This search for independence entails the phenomenon of metaphorical matricide. I shall discuss the different figurative forms this matricide takes, most obviously those involving literal, emotional and cultural "death". In the process of becoming independent the daughters have to relinquish their early bonding to the mothers.

In "Chiaroscuro", Yomi describes the fusional relationship she had with her mother while she was in the womb:

My mother had a time of it with me. I just wouldn't come out! Her womb must have been too cosy for me to want to leave! She just got bigger and bigger and it seemed, she said, she would never have me, like she would be carrying me around inside her for the rest of her

life. What a thought! Finally they cut her open and out I came, all six and a half pounds of me. (I: 60)

The original bond between daughter and mother extends far beyond a daughter's existence in the womb. In most of the plays, the mother is positioned as the prominent figure in the family. For instance, in female-headed households such as those depicted in "Leave Taking", "Paper and Stone", "Running Dream" and "A Rock in Water", the mothers assume the duties of both mother and father in taking on the roles of breadwinner and carer. In other words, the mother's responsibilities for her household make her an indispensable element in her daughter's life. As a result, the mother's role here seems to be an extension of the duty of caring and feeding that fall upon her when the baby is still in the womb.

In a West Indian home featuring a single-parent family – the context for some of the plays – the daughter, for instance, attaches herself to the only available parent and that is usually the mother¹. Deprived of a male parent, the daughter sustains an intense relationship with her mother and the mother comes to rely emotionally on her daughter. A case in point is Martha's despair and lack of purpose once Brenda deserts the maternal nest:

¹ Men in plays such as "Leave Taking", "Running Dream", "Paper and Stone" and "Money to Live" are often portrayed as lacking commitment and a sense of responsibility towards their relationships with their wives and children.

I am nobodies [*sic*] mother anymore. I have no children left ... not one. They all leave me ... one by one. My Brenda gone ... now my punishment is complete. I is left empty, light and hollow like a calabash ... [*sic*]. (15: 53)

In plays such as “Leave Taking”, “Paper and Stone” and “Song for a Sanctuary”, however, the daughter is as needy of the mother as the mother is of the daughter. In other words, the daughter is physically and psychically dependent on the mother and, at the same time, it is the daughter’s need for the mother which psychically justifies her existence as a mother. At the beginning of some of the plays, the mother insists on the daughter’s continued identification with herself to ensure her survival as a mother. For instance, “Paper and Stone” opens with a scene in which Brenda receives a letter from her long-lost sister in America. Her sister keeps her abreast of the news of her own family and explains to her the relationship she had with their mother. Martha gets angry at the suggestion that the two sisters are in touch with each other behind her back. She behaves very emotionally, forcing Brenda to give her the letter. Her reaction can be interpreted as a way to protect her role as Brenda’s first object of identification. Martha seems to fear that Brenda’s sister might usurp this position; hence, Martha’s violent verbal diatribe against her eldest daughter. Moreover, Martha discourages any kind of bonding that Brenda might develop with any external influence (say, her friend Juliet) which threatens her position. Similarly, in “Song for A Sanctuary”, Rajinder shows her distrust of Sonia, someone with whom her daughter

strikes up a friendship at the refuge. Whereas Savita selects Sonia as a friend and a role-model, her mother sees Savita's behaviour as a repudiation of her own influence over Savita. Rajinder's suspicion may be explained by the fact that Sonia is a female figure who can act as a symbolic mother to Savita and the danger lies in the fact that her daughter might identify with Sonia, not her. Again, this may explain her fear of being stripped of the only role she has – that of being mother to Savita.

Savita's behaviour which consists of distancing herself from her mother can be seen as an attempt at metaphoric matricide. She wants to rid herself of the mother who, as it turns out, has failed to protect her. Equally, Juliet, in "Paper and Stone", urges Brenda to be independent and to make the decision of metaphorically killing off her mother by leaving her for the sake of the former's survival:

I know she's a damn tyrant Brenda ... but what can she do if you leave, whip you, shoot you, burn you alive ... what? You have to stand up to her Brenda. Otherwise she'll suffocate you. Mothers always do. (6: 27)

Thus, female independence implies a renegotiation of the relation with the mother. Whilst none of the plays stage matricide in the strictly legal sense of an assault by a daughter on her mother with the intent to end their physical life, two of the plays (namely "Running Dream" and "Leave Taking") deal with the death of first-generation mothers at home, in the

Caribbean. In “Leave Taking”, Enid speaks of the gradual death her mother has been through, since she left her for England: “I’m the one feel guilty. It ain’t easy to let you’ mother die. I knew she was dying. When I went out there you could just see it. She wanted me to put a’ end to it.” (II/4: 188)

The physical death of Enid’s mother is partly attributed to the daughter’s move from the maternal home and continent to England. Her mother is devastated by the break. In this case, the maternal response to the separation seems to be desperation and depression, leading to the slow, painful suffering that only death – initiated by her daughter – can release. It is a form of matricide; emotional matricide might be the term for it.

In “Running Dream”, Florentine’s wilful refusal to take her mother’s advice can be, to some extent, considered a form of metaphoric matricide. Florentine separates from her mother, Effeline, to go to England. She leaves her children behind to be looked after by her. After warning her mother that she will be leaving, Florentine is given some advice: “I will look after the children for you ‘til you ready then after I will send them for you. But don’t go chasing William, girl. Have respect for yourself” (205). Florentine leaves for England and the first step she takes is to ask for William’s phone number from a friend. Later, she sends for her two younger children. However, her mother is still left to care for her oldest child, Clementine, as Florentine never manages to send for her due to financial difficulties. Her mother’s death could be attributed to old age.

However, it could also be argued that the toll of taking care of her grandchildren and worries for her daughter in England partly account for her death.

Years later, Florentine has a premonitory dream about her mother's coming death – "I dream my modder [*sic*] passed away" (212). When her mother does actually die, Florentine dutifully carries out her mother's "cultural" death. She is still rooted in her cultural belief that a person is not fully dead until the proper rituals have been completed:

BIANCA: O.K. (Bianca *looks at the burning lamp*) Does that thing have to be burning all the time now?

FLORENTINE: Yes ... until she find [*sic*] her way. Is a custom. You don't understand but is a custom [*sic*].

BIANCA: What would happen if I blew it out?

FLORENTINE: ... Is jus' lost ... lost spirit, you know like when you don't know where you going ... (216)

Florentine's custom-obedient seeing off of her mother to the hereafter is, in a sense, a completion of that matricide. Matricide is about doing violence, however passively, to the mother in order that space – physical and emotional – can be created for the daughter to live her own life, connected to but not smothered by the mother. Florentine's determination to carry out the proper death rituals betrays a resolution to insist on such independence. She will not let her mother's "shade" or "lost spirit" haunt

her. She will give her mother a “good death” so that the older woman finds peace, and Florentine can find hers, too. In a sense, there is an insistence on Florentine’s part to underline in death the cutting off that was necessary (and nearly missed) in life.

Among the second-generation female characters in England, matricide comes in a different form. Separation does not involve the mother’s literal death as in the above cases but it provokes a different outcome, that of emotional death. This may be considered a clearer case of emotional matricide.

Despite some characters’ reluctance to befriend people who threaten the symbiotic relationship they have with their daughters, the mothers cannot halt the daughters’ efforts to become autonomous. In “Leave Taking”, Del takes steps to resist her mother in order to secure autonomy. At the opening of the play, Enid takes her daughters, Del and Viv, to see May, the obeah woman. One of the main purposes of their visit is for the mother to check if the mother-daughter dyad remains unspoilt. Enid pays the obeah to reveal to her Del’s secrets (whether she is pregnant or telling her lies) and it is at this critical moment when May and Enid are having a discussion about her that Del decides to confront her mother, telling her that she is “disgusting” (148).

Given her experience of the outside world, and in the face of her mother’s endeavour to break into her privacy, Del asserts herself as a separate entity

from her mother. In order to protect her autonomy, Del seems to acquire a new language: the language of protest which marks her growing individuality. Del's verbal attack against her mother can be considered as a matricidal drive to free herself from her mother's primal grip. Anger is a useful diagnostic tool because – when it erupts – it is a signal that something is wrong. Diagnostically, it is virtually infallible, and in the plays the mothers and daughters learn to trust it. But what anger fails to do is alert the characters as to whether the trouble is outside or inside them. For example Del leaves her mother's household, tearing herself away from the family nest – which, by extension, stands for the mother's womb – to go to live with May, the obeah woman, her symbolic mother. Towards the end of the play, her mother still keeps following her. She pays her a visit at May's place; she is unwilling to let her daughter go and wants to re-build the ties that they previously had. It is then that Del gets angry:

DEL: Why did you come here? I don't wanna see you. I'm doing all right here. There's nothing I want from you.

ENID: You really think you something, ennit? You soon find out what it like. You soon wake up.

DEL: I have. Into a fucking nightmare.

ENID: You an' you' bastard picknee. You nuttin', y'hear me? Nuttin'.

DEL slaps her mother, then recoils. A moment passes where each stands, shocked ... (176)

Del's physical and verbal assault on her mother is an act which can symbolically be viewed as emotional matricide in that such virulent behaviour on her part is an effort to establish separateness from her mother.

The same scenario of emotional matricide occurs in "Paper and Stone" when Brenda decides to desert the maternal home to live with her friend, Juliet. After being told that Brenda is moving out, Martha is speechless – "Mum, mum, why won't you talk to me. You have to say something before I leave" (32). Martha's speechlessness can be viewed as the first sign of her erasure, an outcome of her daughter's matricidal drive. Once again, what is significant in the leave-taking scene between mother and daughter is the anger and bitterness that characterize the mother's words to her daughter:

Children sometimes they mek [*sic*] you regret the day you was born, they think you is put on this earth to serve dem, and at the end of the day, who is there to serve me ... soothe my pains away ... Hey ... she don't know what goes on inside me and never will ... you enjoy them when they is young ... but not for long, by the time you look round there is an empty space and what to fill it with? (33)

Maternal anger is an area of study overlooked by many accounts of mothering which tend to focus on the mother figure in terms of her role as her child's primary source of nurture and care. In such accounts, no

attempt is made to evaluate the processes involved in maternal development – all the emphasis is focused on the child’s development – especially when it comes to instances of mothers confronting their own mixed feelings towards their child’s need to negotiate issues of separation. In The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Marianne Hirsch makes this clear, arguing that “the essence of the maternal in psychoanalytic writing lies in the service to the interests of the child” (170). In the same passage, she explores maternal anger, and highlights how over-scrupulous accounts of a child’s development eclipse consideration of such significant emotion: “But as a mother, her subjectivity is under erasure; during the process of her daughter’s accession to subjectivity, she is told to recede into the background, to be replaced. In as much as that suppression is her maternal function, it is reasonable to assume anger as her response, especially if we grant that female subjectivity is already suppressed in relation to male subjectivity” (ibid). Hirsch concludes with the observation that “a mother cannot articulate anger *as a mother*; to do so she must step out of a culturally circumscribed role which commands mothers to be caring and nurturing to others, even at the expense of themselves.” (Ibid)

Expressions of maternal ambivalence towards the child are voiced in “Rose’s Story” when Rose reveals her pregnancy to her mother:

No ... Mek me sit down, Rose yu mean to she yu pregnant? After me grow yu up inna Christian home. God knew me try fe teach unnu

right from wrong, an dis is how yu repay me [*sic*]? (60)

Like Martha in “Paper and Stone”, Rose’s mother questions her daughter’s ingratitude on becoming pregnant outside wedlock – a situation which runs counter to her own religious principles. Rose’s deserting of the house without maternal consent to “shack up” with her boyfriend, Leroy, coupled with the fact of her pregnancy breaks up the dyadic relationship that binds her to her mother. It is another example of emotional matricide. In this play, however, the mother abdicates from her role as mother, leaving professionals like the police and the social worker to take care of Rose “in loco parentis”. Unlike in other plays where mothers eventually seek reconciliation, Rose’s mother takes no such step.

The mother in Patricia Hilaire’s play “Just Another Day” also displays anger and aggression towards her daughter, Carol, at the latter’s falling in love. Carol’s frequent and prolonged absence from the maternal home seems to suggest that she considers life beyond dyadic dependence which, in turn, leads to emotional matricide. In her fury, her mother comes to the point of denying Carol as her daughter:

Tell me something, why is it when I’m in my bed at night you have to be walking streets? Eh is big woman you be so ... You know I don’t tink you could be my daughter cause you don’t care one bit about how I feel you sure is my daughter? If anyone did ever tell me

say you would have come like dis I would have tell dem not my daughter ... [*sic*]. (2)

As a result of figurative matricidal actions initiated by the daughters, Rose's mother, Martha, and Enid display their feelings of ambivalence and anger towards the daughters. In expressing their resentment they go against cultural expectations of the caring, sacrificial mother; instead they re-claim a subjectivity that affirms them as beings with feelings and needs rather than as figures constantly at the service of others.

Characters such as Rose, Dynette, Brenda and Leonora abandon not only their mothers, but also their mothers' dialect in favour of English. In the texts, however, their act of symbolic matricide extends beyond adopting a different (m)other tongue. They undertake a kind of cultural matricide. For instance, Leonora kills off the mother culture by refusing to carry on the maternal cultural heritage that her mother seeks to bestow upon her by asking her to become an obeah. Along the same lines, Rose in "Rose's Story", Dynette in "Back Street Mammy" and Brenda in "Paper and Stone" turn their backs on the church, an institution which, although expressive of paternalistic structures, nurtures most of their mothers' values. In "An Arranged Marriage", Lalita culturally kills off her mother by challenging Mrs. Parmer's deeply-ingrained belief in arranged marriages. She refuses to subscribe to such a custom and thus provokes her mother into accusing her of denying her roots: "You have become too used to these English ways and forgot your own culture" (4). In this sense,

the characters' cultural matricide culminates in their sacrificing their collectively defined self in favour of the individual self. Indeed, the individualistic spirit the daughters cultivate in England is alien to the communal mindset prevalent in their mothers' homeland. Thus, to some extent, the daughters' attempt at individuation can be conceived as both an act of revolt against their African/Caribbean/Indian cultures which usually take pride in prioritising community and collectivity above individuality.

The female characters' act of individuation is not once and for all achieved at the point of separation, that is, leaving the maternal house. Such leave can, after all, be effected in many different ways and, as the plays demonstrate, how that leaving was effected is central to how the daughters manage their subsequent lives. In "Paper and Stone", Juliet feels ambivalent towards the mother who abandoned her. The conversation Brenda has with Juliet on the subject of the latter's mother reflects that inner contradiction. When Brenda suggests to her that it is perhaps time for her to find her mother, the conversation unfolds as follows:

JULIET: Thanks but no thanks Brenda. If my mother wanted to find me she could have done it by now. I never want to see her or know her.

BRENDA: Every one wants to know their mother Juliet ... even you ... come on ... there must be one thing you would like to know about her.

JULIET: No! There is one thing I'd like to know (*Moving around*)
 What she smelt like ... (*She smiles to herself*) Was she sophisticated,
 thin, fat, ugly, pretty, cold, warm. What kind of woman is she ... has
 she got any other children, brothers and sisters for me? I just want to
 know how she smelt. Another thing is ... is she light, dark ... then
 again, perhaps she's Black, Black as night. Was she from Jamaica,
 Trinidad, Africa ... what? Where does she come from? In fact I don't
 think she is sophisticated at all.

BRENDA: (*Going up to her*) What if she's white ...

JULIET: (*Thoughtful*) I don't think my mother is white or Black ...
 in fact she was caramel ...

BRENDA: (*Surprised*) ... Caramel?

JULIET: Yes, she was a dancer ... an exotic belly dancer.

BRENDA: ... don't tell me she had green eyes ... didn't she and the
 longest, blackest hair ...

JULIET: Yes, she toured all of Europe dancing for popstars, princes
 and millionaires and Royalty. One weekend my mother went to
 dance for an Arab prince, Rasheed, that was his name.

JULIET: (*Rushes up to grab Brenda*) Brenda can't you see, I'm a
 princess ... a real princess ... (6: 23-4)

Juliet undergoes a complex process here: she begins by dissociating herself from her mother. Then she explores what her mother might be like and ends up idealizing and fantasizing about her. Juliet's assertion that she "never want[s] to see her [mother] or know her" conveys an inner unease

about her own self. In her initial reaction of disidentifying with the mother – rejecting the possibility of getting to know her – Juliet discloses a low sense of self-worth, the traumatic impact of her mother's abandonment on her, and an unconscious intent to obliterate hated parts of the self along with the mother.

Almost simultaneously, Juliet acknowledges and is proud of the positive physical legacy her mother bequeathed her: “My mother have dumped me right, but at least she gave me something you'll never have in a million years ... you see I inherited her beauty ...” (14: 52). Here her mother (who is now identified with a good part of her self) is idealized. Juliet's narcissistic feelings towards her own body which are associated with her idealization of the mother constitute her attempt to re-claim herself against the sense of worthlessness she feels because she has been abandoned. It is her strategy for re-valuing herself.

Juliet's projection of good parts and negative feelings of her self onto her mother creates deep ambivalence within her, both ambivalence towards her mother and towards her self. This ambivalence accounts for her inability to develop good relations with others. A case in point is her irrational, aggressive attitude towards Brenda which makes her unable to cultivate simple friendship with the latter. This inability to relate fully to others is also expressed through her sublimatory fantasy about the future:

I hope you don't come back because as from tomorrow this house

will be with my life ... my music ... and my friends ... all of them men ... they'll fill my life to the brim. I'll show you I don't need you. Men will fill my life to the end just like old times. (15: 53)

Juliet's attitude towards men reflects the baggage of her history with her mother. Unloved in childhood, Juliet seeks to heal her narcissistic wounds through the reparative love of men. Her fantasy about men "fill[ing] my life to the brim" is reminiscent of her desire for completion – for a fullness that might compensate for the lack of the mother. Thus, her fantasy is an indication of her need for compensation for the absence of the mother, a need that has remained unfulfilled.

Juliet emerges as a problematic figure in "Paper and Stone". Set in contrast to Brenda – who is a fighter, ambitious and a relatively balanced individual, in short embodying the hope for an optimistic future for the British-born generations of Black immigrants – Juliet's life seems to represent the hardship a second-generation Black female might face in Britain. Juliet appears as a motherless, despondent, rootless and drifting figure who has neither faith in herself nor in the future, and who resorts to fantasy to compensate for this lack.

Above all, Juliet struggles to dissociate herself from what she imagines her mother is. This struggle is also experienced by characters such as Brenda, Rose, Del, Dynette and Leonora in their attempts at separating themselves from their mothers. Specifically in Del's case, her move from

the biological mother's nest to the symbolic mother's home can be viewed as part of the negotiating process for the daughter to achieve adulthood. Through their struggle for independence, these characters assert their need to free themselves from their mother's control, an act which leads to metaphorical matricide. And operating along the same axis as the desire for autonomy, development towards womanhood is another arena of contention between mothers and daughters in the plays. This is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5 – BECOMING WOMAN

In the plays, becoming a woman represents one of the major life goals mothers set for their daughters¹. However, becoming the “right” woman (or an “acceptable” woman) is what really matters to the mothers, and the terms of “success” that they draft are narrowly conceived and interpreted.

Quite independently of their mothers’ targets for them, the daughters embark on their own journeys of self-discovery and growing up. They are keen to taste life, although sometimes their experiences are unwanted and thrust upon them, such as Susan’s rape in Jacqueline Rudet’s “Basin”. In conversation with Mona, she reflects: “They don’t care how old you are in the West Indies! If you can say ‘hello’, you’re no longer a child! ... Caribbean girls don’t have the chance to enjoy childhood, we’re catapulted into womanhood from an early age!” (124-5)

But both for daughters landing in adult lives with a literal bump, as for those whose growing up is less sudden and more sedate, there is a process

¹ In 1905, a Muslim writer called Rokeya Hossain opened her short story entitled ‘Sultana’s Dream’ with the following sentence: “One evening I was lounging in an easy chair in my bedroom and thinking lazily of the condition of Indian womanhood” (Tharu 342). Hossain seems to see womanhood in essential terms. However, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, we are more inclined to regard womanhood as a process rather than a state, something continuously (re)produced rather than reached (see Butler 1990).

of self-searching and struggle with their mothers over imposed views of ideal womanhood. The process of growing up is not an easy undertaking for the daughters. In this section, the daughters' uncertainty about their position and purpose in life will be examined. I will also consider possible contradictions in the mothers' stance as the daughters try to assert their existence in their own right rather than in relation to another person. Next, the causes of the daughters' resistance to becoming the "right" woman will be analysed and the various outcomes borne of their resistance investigated. Finally, I will particularly focus on the daughters' developing and deepening sense of self in the process of becoming a woman.

For some of the second-generation female migrants in the plays, becoming a woman is analogous to the migrants' path to the "promised land". It is, in many ways, a sought-after destination, a desirable continent beyond the confined islands of childhood and adolescence. But in such a journeying venture, rather than helping their daughters to arrive, many of the mothers seem to be the main obstacles en route. Like immigration officers, the mothers patrol access to this "kingdom" through the imposition of rigid regulations, only letting their daughters pass into the promised land through the "correct" channels – a process that involves answering questions in a certain way, and behaving accordingly. It is as if another border is yet to be negotiated.

At the outset, it needs to be noted that, although the mothers in the plays tell their daughters “be married (ideally with children)”, their argument involves more than simply pleading: “Be like me”. In most cases, the older generation of women has experienced traditional marriages. These women have yoked themselves to men, but once the husbands have travelled abroad, the relationships begin to unravel so that by the time the women catch up with their menfolk in Britain, the latter have begun extra-marital affairs or lost interest in their wives. As a result, the women suffer at the hands of men. This reveals the mothers’ views of marriage to refer to an ideal rather than their own lived realities. It is as if they do not want to give up the dream of hetero-romance that has remained unfulfilled in their own lives but instead hope that the daughters’ lives will vindicate their belief in heterosexual union.

That some of the mothers hold a definite view of the “right” model of womanhood and/or are blind to the contradiction outlined in the previous paragraph raises questions about their own self-awareness. One wonders whether the mothers really know themselves if they fail to grasp the disjunction between their life experiences and how they want their daughters to lead their lives. This lack of self-knowledge and the resistance to the values of the society in which they live in part account for the clash between the daughters and the mothers.

One area in which friction occurs is the mothers’ and daughters’ differing concept of womanhood. In plays such as “Song for a Sanctuary” and

“Paper and Stone”, Rajinder and Martha respectively strive to impose specific womanly ideals on their daughters. In “Song for a Sanctuary”, Rajinder seems to be reluctant to accept Savita’s move into a certain kind of womanhood, a type of womanhood which is verbally and bodily self-assertive. Hence, the mother’s desire to control her is revealed:

SAVITA: I look cool in that, don’t I Ma?

RAJINDER: Sorry, Savita, you’ll have to change.

SAVITA: Why? It looks fine to me.

RAJINDER: I don’t want any discussion, or argument about this.

You’ll change, or else, you can’t go to the party ...

SAVITA: That’s not fair. You have to say why.

RAJINDER: All right, then. The skirt’s too short, the blouse is too grown up, together they look tartish.

SAVITA: Talk about stereotypes, Ammah! They’re doing “tart with a heart” films even in Bombay now. What have you against them anyway?

RAJINDER: I hate to hear you talk like this.

SAVITA: Like what? What’s wrong with it?

RAJINDER: As if ... You’re all smart and sophisticated and grown-up and know everything. (II/2: 176)

Savita has evolved into a woman who is not complying with the cultural values of her ancestors: her act of contradicting her mother displays her resolve to question the authority of her elders. In so doing, Savita

transgresses not only the tacit code of passive womanhood but also violates the traditional deference reserved for her elders. In this particular case, the conflict between Savita and her mother is heightened by Savita's display of her sexualized self – an aspect of the self that Rajinder refuses to acknowledge. She rejects her daughter's sexualized self as, in her eyes, Savita remains the little girl who is “sweet, lovable, graceful, good – anything but sexually alive, tinged with desire” (Olivier 44). It is this refusal to see Savita as a sexualized entity that accounts for some of the tragic incidents which occur in the play and to which I shall return.

In “Paper and Stone”, Martha also lays down rules as to what outfit Brenda should be wearing to church in order to meet the ideals of womanhood about which she fantasizes:

MARTHA: Why aren't you wearing that nice peach dress I made for you, you know the crêpe de chine one with the lace collar and ribbon. That's a nice church dress.

BRENDA: It's too fussy mum ...

MARTHA: Nonsense. You don't see all the young girls at church dress up very stylish. That is a nice church dress. (I/2: 4)

Martha displays a concern with conforming to a certain hegemonic model of desirable womanhood. But, more importantly, she is keen for Brenda to participate in the girls' competition of attracting the pastor's attention in her church – hence, her drive to win the approval of the male gaze.

Linked to the desire to satisfy the male gaze is marriage. According to the mothers in plays such as “Paper and Stone” and “An Arranged Marriage”, being married counts as an important criterion in attaining the promised land of ideal womanhood. The viewpoint that a woman is not complete as a human being unless she is attached to a male, is all prevailing, and – it could be said – points to a relational rather than an essential understanding of womanhood. Martha tries to persuade her daughter that “for a woman, to be saved, married in the church – is the most glorious thing” (8). That salvation and marriage are here conjoined is significant in Martha’s hierarchy of values in that it seems to imply that Brenda’s earthly salvation lies in marriage. Brenda explains to her friend, Juliet, that “in the church, you are not an accomplished woman until the ring is on your finger” (27). But there is no role model in Brenda’s life to suggest that marriage is indeed salvation. In “Basin”, Mona also recalls her mother’s observation: “Remember what your mother taught you: you’re not a woman unless you have a man to look after. Unless you have the love of a man, you’re not a real woman” (124). Some Black women assume that womanhood is negated if not tied to a man.

Coupled with the notion of marriage as a prerequisite for the accomplishment of womanhood is the stance that one is incomplete as a woman unless one becomes a mother. Florentine mentions her own mother’s attitude on this in “Running Dream”: “I could do most things a man could do but Mammy, Mammy did want me to be like other women. Make children, be a wife ...” (219). Women are made to believe that their

chief purpose in life is to be married and to procreate. Thus, motherhood is a major act in establishing the “right” womanhood. Michele in “Basin” points out: “All these girls at my school, all they ever talked about was marriage, kids and having big houses” (117). Marriage and kids occupy the first two rungs on the ladder of “acceptable” womanhood.

In “Leonora’s Dance”, Frieda, Leonora’s mother, feels a certain contentment getting her daughter’s letters from England explaining that she is married and has given birth to a daughter. Leonora becomes a source of pride and a role-model for girls back home. “You was our ambassador [*sic*]” her mother says to her. However, Frieda is shocked to discover the truth about Leonora’s life when she unexpectedly comes to see her daughter in England:

You’re a strange one. (...) Lies ... Lies ... all these years ... (*She takes out some letters and begins to read.*) Dear mother. I am well. I am married now. He has money ... (*She looks at Leonora. Takes out another letter*) Dear mother. I am well. I have a little girl now. She beautiful ... She look like you. [*sic*] (II/2: 97)

Leonora deceives her mother by telling her what she wants to hear: the predictable way in which her life as a woman is unfolding; she gets married, then bears a child – two essential criteria that assure her the title of an accomplished woman. Thus the mothers’ views of self-representation, sexuality and marriage in the plays indicate how greatly

they remain confined and controlled by a sense that women's identity is derived from their relations to men and children.

For the daughters concerned, the mothers' desire to fashion them to become the "right" woman results in resistance and rebellion. Resistance on the daughters' part comes firstly from their rejection of strategies used by the mothers to achieve their aims. And the mothers' tactics lie mainly in the imposition of their views and values on their daughters. Brenda in "Paper and Stone" openly refuses to comply with her mother's strict impositions and uses her accession to womanhood as an arm against her mother's will to stunt her growth:

I am a woman now mum. I know you don't like me saying that, but it's a fact. That's what I am. I can't be dependent on you for the rest of my life. I need to stand on my own two feet. (32)

Brenda draws her mother's attention to the fact that she wants to be a woman on her own terms. She can think for herself without her mother forcing her views upon her regarding how she should be or what she should do. Towards the end of the play, Brenda believes she has found what it takes to ensure her own salvation: "I have to know who I am ... and that means rebuilding myself from the core ... solid" (55). She trusts in a reflexive process which relies on defining herself in a way that does not involve reference to anybody else, that does not – for instance – entail

saying that she is the daughter of someone. It is the search for self-knowledge independent of maternal, indeed any external influence².

Like Brenda, Del also revolts against the authoritarian way in which her mother deals with her behaviour. She reminds her mother of her change in status in becoming a woman. She believes that reaching womanhood grants her the freedom to become what she wants to be:

ENID: Future, I want you in this house by twelve

DEL: I'm not some kid. You can't tell me what to do any more.

ENID: Long as you live under my roof, you abide by my rules. (I/2: 156)

The second reason for the daughters' resistance to the constructed conception of the "right" woman stems from the prevailing culture in which they have lived. Whereas their mothers grew up in a period of greater austerity and fewer opportunities, the defining aspect of Britain since the early 1980s has been consumer choice. Familiar with the need to choose between one commercial brand and another, the daughters approach human identity in precisely the same way – namely, by selecting that which appeals to them most, given the choices they perceive to be open to them. According to the plays, these young women do not believe

² Whereas, in chapter six, the daughters in "Basin", "Money to Live", "Chiaroscuro" and "Monsoon" are seen to rely on external support, albeit not maternal.

in the “product” (that is, to be married with children) peddled by their mothers. The product is outdated; in any event, it is not the only one or even the best one available to them. The daughters believe that there are other expressions of womanhood and that to gain fulfillment as a woman, one does not necessarily have to be a mother and a wife. Characters such as Rose in “Rose’s Story”, Del in “Leave Taking” and Jan in “Back Street Mammy” feel they are not lesser women for being single mothers. On the contrary, occupying that position enables them to have a better understanding of themselves. In “Rose’s Story”, taking stock of her situation at the end of the play, Rose comes to appreciate her transformation: “Rose Johnson is finally growing up” (II/4: 78). Jan also views the avenue of single motherhood as an expression of her womanhood. However, she confesses to her sister, Dynette, that she envies her situation: “Huh, if I could go back in time Dynette I’d gladly swap places with yer ... ‘young, free and single ...’” (69). Del is another character who faces her responsibility and fully lives out her womanhood as a single mother. She advises Viv to make a choice about what she wants to be without depending on her mother’s opinions: “You got to grow up, sus out what it is you want out of life, not what’ll please her” (170). In this context, to grow up means the act of assuming a form of womanhood one is comfortable with, regardless of the pressures from external influences.

Girls such as Tasleema in “Fragile Land” and Lalita in “An Arranged Marriage” resent the effect of such external influences on their lives. Their

respective parents are keen to marry them off. Nonetheless, they choose to put education at the top of their list of priorities, and relegate marriage to a minor concern. In these two plays, the girls transgress the cultural values they grew up with in challenging the central role of marriage in the making of ideal womanhood. In Lalita's case, although her mother's primary goal for her is marriage she clings to education and uses it as an instrument to counter her mother's traditional stance on womanhood. She is critical of her parents' generation's opinion on education – “In their views, girls who go to college become rebels” (7), even though this is proved to be the case. The parents see education as an obstacle to producing the “right” kind of womanhood, not because they do not approve of education but because they recognize that education can foster independence of mind. The notion of rebellion is assigned to those who have recourse to education as a means of self-expression. This is the vantage point of Tasleema's father in “Fragile Land”. He has plans to marry his daughter quickly but the latter first wants to find her place in society by being an individual in her own right and refuses to be defined by a husband:

TASLEEMA: I wanna finish my A levels. I've gotta get my grades
... I wanna be someone.

LUX: An educated housewife.

TASLEEMA: Fuck off.

LUX: You might as well get used to the idea; cos that's what your Abba's got lined up for you. Nice Bengali boy, good teeth, steady income and a healthy body. (9)

In this context, neither intellectual fulfillment nor ambition seems to have a female voice. They are conceived as potentially destructive elements on the path to womanhood since they may encourage independence. Hence, Tasleema's father is reluctant to let his daughter finish her 'A' levels. In "A Rock in Water", Claudia's mother also discourages her daughter from harbouring grandiose hopes about her future. She psychologically prepares her daughter to adopt the societal expectations supposedly appropriate to someone of her race, gender and class:

MOTHER: You'll grow up and marry Ben.

CLAUDIA: Never, never, never. The women that come out of the Apollo don't look married.

MOTHER: Are you still hanging around outside that theatre?

[...]

CLAUDIA: I'm going to be an actress and you can't stop me.

MOTHER: The sooner you get used to washing some white women's clothes ...

CLAUDIA: Stop it, Mom.

MOTHER: ... the better. Because it's what you're going to be doing for the rest of your life. Even if you pass those wretched exams. (I/1: 49)

For Claudia's mother, marriage represents the essence of one's growth into the right kind of womanhood. It represents an answer to the shortcomings of one's gender, race and class background.

In "Money to Live", Judy's life as a Black female sex worker offers a further example of a daughter locating her life and discovering herself outside the "acceptable" understanding of womanhood. Judy demonstrates new ways of seeing and being a woman. She questions the concept of womanhood synonymous with marriage as a tenable option for a woman and celebrates the view that women should have agency over their own bodies. She compares the lucrative nature of a woman's job in the labour market with her unpaid work in the privacy of her own home. Like Judy, Savita, in "Song for a Sanctuary", ponders the same issue when she tells her mother that "housewives sell their bodies too ... Only it's to one man, and that must be so boring, and they have no control over ... their bodies" (176). Savita draws a parallel between marriage as an institution and prostitution as a profession. According to her, marriage has granted men "conjugal rights" over their wives' bodies in exchange for economic support. In short, she thinks that whether a woman is bound to the contract of selling her sex or of marriage, she is bartering her sexuality for economic gains.³

³ This line of thinking has been widely discussed in feminist writing. De Beauvoir, for example, invoked the commercial and contractual aspects of marriage in comparing the status of a prostitute and a married woman: "For both

In “Basin”, Mona and Susan try to live out womanhood by rejecting heterosexuality – heterosexuality being a tacit necessity for an “acceptable” womanhood – and expressing a different kind of sexuality. By becoming lesbians, both characters re-inscribe “woman” in a way that resists patriarchal heterosexual norms⁴. In so doing, Mona and Susan also challenge the hegemonic conceptualization of womanhood espoused by their mothers.⁵ When Mona tells Michele that she has to get used to the idea that her friends have lesbian inclinations, the latter is shocked and says in disbelief: “No man! No way! It’s not normal! It’s an abomination against man and God!” Michele’s view of alternative sexuality as deviant, on account of the threat it represents to patriarchy and to religion, is widely shared among the first-generation Black mothers in the plays. For instance, in “Chiaroscuro”, Beth craves her mother’s acceptance of all that

the sexual act is a service; the one is hired for life by one man; the other has several clients who pay her by the piece.” (569)

⁴ Maya Chowdry’s “Monsoon”, relating Jalaarnava’s epic Indian journey, suggests Jalaarnava’s exploration of a different expression of womanhood through her intimate relationship with Nusrat, a local Indian girl. At the end of the play, Jalaarnava notes her transformation in her diary: “I have passion and it blinds me. I am growing and changing before you, with you.” (IV/7: 75)

⁵ In The Feminist Spectator as Critic, Dolan explains the role lesbians take to challenge the institution of heterosexuality: “The lesbian subject is in a position to denaturalize dominant codes by signifying an existence that belies the entire structure of heterosexual culture and its representations ... The lesbian is a refuser of culturally imposed gender ideology, who confounds representation based on sexual difference, and on compulsory heterosexuality.” (116)

she represents, including her sexual orientation: “Someday I’d like to be able to be all of myself to all those close to me. To have my mother love my lover.” (II: 73)

To some extent, the mothers’ views of ideal womanhood as regards sexuality have been moulded by the hegemonic institutionalization of heterosexism⁶. For the sake of conformity, if one is Black and a woman, heterosexuality has to be the norm. However, despite being a Black female heterosexual, thereby supposedly meeting the norm, sexuality is already deemed to be deviant for a Black woman. As Hill Collins puts it in Black Feminist Thought: “Within assumptions of normalized heterosexuality, regardless of individual behaviour, being White marks the normal category of heterosexuality. In contrast, being Black signals the wild, out-of-control hyperheterosexuality of excessive sexual appetite” (129). Consequently, by being Black and lesbians, Mona and Susan in “Basin”, like Opal and Beth in “Chiaroscuro”, are doubly stigmatized and marginalized from the circle of normalized womanhood.

The younger female characters’ exploration of other forms of womanhood outside the conventional points of reference expresses their need to become a subject. In her article entitled “On the female feminist subject,

⁶ Hill Collins argues that “heterosexism” has been recognised as “a system of power” due to the activism of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals. She defines the term as “the belief in the inherent superiority of one form of sexual expression over another and thereby the right to dominate.” (128)

or from ‘she-self’ to ‘she-other’”, Rosi Braidotti highlights the fundamentals of the process of becoming a subject. As she puts it: “What sustains the entire process of ‘becoming a subject’ is the will to know, the desire to say, the desire to speak, to think and to represent” (184). This is evident in the daughters’ assertion of their own subjectivity in the plays. For instance, Savita in “Song for a Sanctuary” attempts to comply with her mother’s request in the choice of outfit she wants her to wear. However, her compliance with her mother’s desire does not weaken her own convictions. Her display of subjectivity lies in her determination to defend her opinions at the expense of her mother’s moral authority.

In “Leonora’s Dance”, Leonora also challenges her mother’s authority over her choice of lifestyle. The agency with which she makes the crucial decisions in her life – say her preference for remaining unmarried and childless – is an expression of her subjectivity. Her epistolary constructions of the imaginary life of a happily married woman with children for her mother can be seen as a way for her to negotiate autonomy from her mother. For Tasleema in “Fragile Land” and Lalita in “An Arranged Marriage”, education is the site where they express their subjectivity. In Changing the Subject, Wendy Hollway writes of the “use of ‘subjectivity’ to refer to individuality and self-awareness ...” (3). Tasleema and Lalita articulate self-awareness in their deliberate choice of education over marriage. This demonstrates their capacity to think about what is important to them and decide their lives accordingly. As for characters such as Rose in “Rose’s Story”, Del in “Leave Taking” and Jan

in “Back Street Mammy”, pregnancy and the eventual experience of motherhood act as the central process for the formation of their sense of self. Towards the end of the plays, they achieve maturity and gain a better understanding of themselves. In “Basin”, Susan and Mona’s form of friendship, namely their lesbian relationship, becomes an area of resistance, fostering the process of becoming a subject. They challenge the tacit hegemonic rules that govern female (sexual) behaviour.

Rose’s, Del’s, Jan’s, Susan’s, Mona’s, Tasleema’s, Lalita’s, Leonora’s, Savita’s and Brenda’s experiences of becoming a woman enable them to inhabit diverse locations regarding the female self. In the process, they achieve empowerment in their negotiation of the multiple variables – age, race, sexual preference, lifestyle – that define them. As characters they throw light on the differences among women. They reject the linear variables of normative womanhood their mothers attempt to impose on them. This establishes a new process of becoming which allows spaces for transformation, difference, agency and the activity of thinking differently.

The “becoming-a-woman” process undergone by the daughters has different outcomes in the plays. In “Rose’s Story”, Rose’s decision to carry through her pregnancy is unwaveringly met with hostility till the end of the play. Rose’s mother settles the issue by abandoning her daughter, throwing the responsibility for caring for her upon the Council: “Daddy, yu sign her over to the council, soh let dem do the worrying now [sic]” (77). No attempt at any constructive discussion occurs between mother

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the linear variables of normative womanhood are imposed on them by their mothers

and daughter from the point when the mother knows about Rose's pregnancy. Her mother cannot come to terms with the "becoming" of her daughter. Her main concern seems to lie with her own reputation and the failure of her endeavour to mould her daughter to meet the norms of ideal womanhood: "After me grow yu up inna Christian home. God knew me try fe teach unnu right from wrong, and dis is how yu repay me [*sic*]?" (60)

In "Leave Taking", Enid eventually seems able to come to terms with Del's evolution from girlhood into her own style of womanhood. Despite the fact that Del sways from her mother's expectations to become the woman she wants to be, the play ends positively in that mother and daughter reach a stage of mutual acceptance:

Del: Do you hate me?

Enid: How can I?

Enid holds Del in a steady gaze. Del looks down at her feet.

[...]

Enid (*opening her arms*): Come hold me. (II/4: 189)

In "Leonora's Dance", Frieda chooses Daphne to be her symbolic daughter and successor. In a sense, it is a step Frieda takes towards acknowledging the fact that she cannot force Leonora to be the kind of woman she wants her to be. In the final scene of the play, Frieda at last admits that her daughter has "got a mind of her own ... She always had

ever since she was a girl” (II/6: 109). Similarly, in “Paper and Stone”, Martha feels remorseful at the estrangement caused by her authoritative upbringing of her daughter: “I must go there and mek [*sic*] peace with her. I must go now, find her” (54). Her eagerness to search for her daughter can be interpreted as a repentant willingness to embrace a particular side of her daughter she has denied so far. The desire to make peace is a sign of an endeavour to reconcile herself with the reality of her daughter’s choice.

In conclusion, it is clear that mothers and daughters in these plays frequently have different conceptions of what it is to become a woman. For the mothers, being a woman consists in respecting the hegemonic dictates of ideal womanhood. This involves sticking to the traditional female world: growing up to become wives and mothers. It is something they have to work at, and something their behaviour can endanger. They are aware that ambition, competition and independence can threaten their sense of womanhood and they fear the exclusion which may stem from that. On the other hand, their daughters’ generation enters adulthood with very different ideas about what a woman should be, what she can be, and explore various ways of being women, usually against their mothers’ will. They no longer want to live according to the gaze of others and constantly face new challenges to their evolving sense of self. They therefore re-define their sense of self in their negotiations between their upbringing and their desires.

Some daughters themselves become mothers as a result of their experience of womanhood. With their awakening sexuality, characters such as Del, Dynette and Rose turn out to be pregnant and enter the realm of motherhood armed with both fear and determination for their choice. I shall now briefly and finally discuss the ways these daughters live out the steps to motherhood. The first thing to note is that they become mothers without the support of their boyfriends. In “Leave Taking”, there is neither any mention of Del’s boyfriend nor any revelation of the relationship leading up to her pregnancy. In her conversation with her sister, Del seems to be resigned to her state, saying that “loads a’ Black women bring up children on their own.” (II/1: 171)

Dynette’s boyfriend Eddie too fails to support her during her pregnancy. Dynette is alone coping with the difficulties of abortion. “Back Street Mammy” ends with Eddie meeting Dynette again after the abortion, the former acting like a stranger, not remotely aware of what Dynette has been through:

DYNETTE: I won’t be here when you come back.

EDDIE: Right, well take care of yourself.

DYNETTE: I will.

CHORUS 1: She thinks, after the event has passed, of all the cues he gave her to say cute one-liners, that could have crippled him. But she could not tell him. Not then. Not ever.

What was the point? (94)

Rose has no vital connection with her boyfriend either. She is disheartened by Leroy's immature behaviour as regards his impending fatherhood: "You are going to be a father with responsibilities. You can't sit around here all day smoking weed and playing music" (II: 59). To Leroy, fatherhood means nothing more than the confirmation of the manhood that he craves.

For all this struggle, becoming a mother is largely seen as a positive undertaking by the characters. Thanks to her brief experience of pregnancy, Dynette undergoes a sense of self-enlightenment: "I'm discovering things about myself that I didn't know before" (87). Equally, pregnancy changes Rose's usual reactive and depressive stance into a confident, self-determined disposition. She seems to be emboldened by her novel state of becoming a mother. Similarly talking to her sister, Elaine, echoes Dynette's happiness at her self-discovery:

Don't cry Elaine, because I've realised that I will have to become somebody in my own right ... I know this may sound really silly, but me getting pregnant, is not such a bad thing. I now answer back because I've got to ... (II/3: 72)

As for Del, not only does she gain self-confidence but she also undergoes a sense of self-empowerment thanks to her baby: "For the sake a' my kid I got to stand and face up to who I am. For once in my life I feel like I got a future" (II/4: 189).

Re-claiming motherhood as a site of self-empowerment, these characters subvert the normative significance of motherhood: in the conception of babies out of wedlock in their teenage years coupled with the unlikelihood of a “stable” marital relationship their expression of motherhood is far from conventional notions of motherhood.⁷

The characters’ assertion of independence through moving out of the family home, and their readiness to assume responsibility for single motherhood or same-sex relationships witnesses the emergence of alternative family forms. The understanding of the concept of family as a nuclear entity comprising father, mother, child is challenged as second-generation female characters such as Beth, Opal, Mona and Susan establish nurturing communities, a social network of relationships that replace the old familial ties. The girls’ friendship in the plays highlights the constructed nature of families and points to the fact that family relations can, in fact, be flexible and contingent.

⁷ In “Narrow Definitions of Culture: The Case of Early Motherhood”, Ann Phoenix lists dominant reproductive ideologies from different sources suggesting that women under twenty years of age should not become pregnant – mothers are considered as adults and it is not clear whether or not teenage women are adult (Murcott, 1980). Secondly, marriage is expected to precede motherhood (Busfield, 1974). (160-2)

CHAPTER 6 – BLACK WOMEN’S FRIENDSHIP: REDEFINING COMMUNITY BEYOND THE FAMILY

In an interview, the American novelist, Marita Golden, refers to Black women’s friendships as the “psychic glue” that both unites and encourages them (Jordan 94). The sentiment that Black women need to cultivate their love for one another is echoed in Audre Lorde’s Sister Outsider. As she puts it:

We have to consciously study how to be tender with each other until it becomes a habit because what was native has been stolen from us, the love of Black women for each other. But we can practice by being gentle with each other ... As we arm ourselves with ourselves and each other, we can stand toe to toe inside that rigorous loving ...
(175)

Here, Lorde writes about the conscious effort Black women have to make to reach out to one another. It is this particular brand of affection amongst Black women that I shall explore in this section. I shall argue that, as portrayed in the plays, Black women’s friendship is distinctive, both in the sense of not being like that between white women, or indeed that between the races, but also in the positive sense of having certain characteristics of its own. The friendship as presented in the plays is complex, fraught with contradictory feelings of anger, resentment and love. It is a site of contestation, but ultimately – as is illustrated in my analysis of the special

relationship Black women have in plays such as “Basin”, “Money to Live”, “Chiaroscuro” and “Monsoon” – friendship helps the characters handle hardships and other challenging experiences.

This section concentrates on Black women’s friendships in the context of a re-imagining of family and community. It begins by foregrounding the subject of relationships between women in literary theory. It will involve largely leaving the area of blood ties across generations behind and instead exploring the phenomenon of elective affinities within one generation – peer relationships – as women grow older. A recurring theme of the chapter will be the way in which intimacy in family units is extended to, or replaced by, friendship pacts. The chapter will also examine the particular ties Black women have with one another so as to set them against a different type of relationship Black and white women are able to develop. Next, the transformative effects friendships have on these Black characters shall be investigated, paying particular attention to their endeavour to seek self-empowerment and the re-definition of self. This leads on to a consideration of sisterhood, one of the main outcomes of Black women’s relationships and a concept in the light of which it is helpful to “read” the plays.

It is in the context of fiction that friendship in literature has been most widely explored. However, the concept has – until recently – rarely been

explored in theoretical and literary inquiry¹. In The Second Sex (1949), a groundbreaking study of women, Simone de Beauvoir touches upon the theme of relationships between women.² She observes that “the feminine friendships” that a woman cultivates “are very different in kind from relationships between men. The latter communicate as individuals through

¹ See Losing Friends (2002) by Digby Anderson. The author argues that friendship is in peril in Western society, and that human beings are in danger of undervaluing, if not losing, something that belongs at the very heart of human well-being. Among numerous illustrations, he shows how the romantic family can exclude friendships; how the giving of a job to a friend, which in an earlier generation or different societies would have indicated a depth of trust that would have been applauded, is now condemned as cronyism; and how the contemporary culture of “rights” is a significant opponent of friendship. He also recognises that another contemporary enemy of friendship is the sexualisation of relationships – a reason, he believes, for the omission of references to friendship in obituaries: were close friendships to be mentioned, it might be thought to be a coded allusion to sexual orientation. This suggests, problematically, that same-sex relationships are somehow undesirable.

² Janet Todd’s Women’s Friendships in Literature (1980) offers a contrast to de Beauvoir’s more general analysis of the nature of relationships between women as it looks particularly at the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literary phenomenon of friendship between women in English and French fiction. Todd organizes the novels she studies according to five categories of friendship – sentimental, erotic, manipulative, political and social. Todd argues that “like the gynocentrism of the novel, female friendship is a literary given of the eighteenth century. But, while women’s prominence in the novel may reverse their social obscurity, fictional friendship remains incidental” (305).

ideas and projects of personal interest, while women are confined within their general feminine lot and are bound together by a kind of immanent complicity” (556). Despite de Beauvoir’s less than enthusiastic comment on the kind of relationship fostered amongst women, she raises the point of women’s consensual effort “to create a kind of counter-universe” to the male world (ibid.). Despite her endeavour to achieve a better grasp of the category “woman”, de Beauvoir fails to dwell on the dynamics of relationships between women in the communal “universe” they try to create³. Rather, she is simply content in summing up that “women’s fellow feeling rarely rises to genuine friendship” (559). De Beauvoir’s account of the respective type of friendship that men and women are capable of suggests an anti-female friendship stance; a female friendship which lacks sophistication and is prone to stagnation – hence, the binarism

³ Almost three decades after de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex, a searching concern for a better understanding of female bonding came with Nina Auerbach’s Communities of Women (1977). Auerbach attempts to trace a history of representation of female communities from classic Greek mythology to the present through the analysis of nineteenth-century writing by men and women. In the book, Auerbach tries to give an alternative view of the concept of community of women in literature where she hopes to “restore a half-perceived literary image, its integrity and its complex completeness” (12). In this sense, her work unravels a different image of a woman – beyond “the roles of daughter, wife, and mother men impose on them” (11) – to redeem her from the predictable critical assumptions about women without men. (Ibid.)

inherent in her analysis reinforces male and female stereotypes which results in a hierarchical notion of friendship among the sexes.

Conversely, in Italian Feminist Thought, Sandra Kemp and Paola Bono project an optimistic possible outcome of women's coalition. The book suggests the "practice of the unconscious" and the idea of "entrustment" as helpful instruments to understand relationships between women: "The former was an attempt to bend the tools of psychoanalysis to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of women's relationships between and among themselves; the latter insists on the need to acknowledge not simply differences, but actual disparities between women, in order to overcome a 'static separatism.'"(12)

Although some plays ("Leave Taking", "Rose's Story", "Back Street Mammy") which have been analysed in previous chapters tackle a specific aspect of female connection, particularly that of mother-daughter relationships, others such as "Basin", "Money to Live", "Chiaroscuro", "Monsoon", and "Talking in Tongues" display a different focus in dealing with the intricate subject of Black women's relationships; a different kind of relationship in that it is removed from filial bonding. In these plays, the move from the intergenerational conflicts between mothers and daughters to daughters moving into peer societies is striking.

In "Basin", Susan, Mona and Michele celebrate their friendships by recollecting pleasant memories from the past. They organize parties "so

everyone could cast aside the troubles in their life and have a good time” (116). They support each other in times of trouble, a not uncommon situation for single mothers. For example, Michele does not hesitate to seek out Mona’s help to relieve her of the food shortage in her household:

MICHELE: ... Is there anything left over from the party?

MONA: There’s a tin of cheese biscuits on top of the fridge. I didn’t even open them. (I/1: 119)

This theme of solidarity amongst women also runs through “Money to Live”. Judy visits her friend, Charlene, advising her on ways to improve her life. Her inquisitive questions show the concern she has for her friend: “There’s nothing I don’t like about you, all I’m doing is asking questions. I walk into the flat of one of my best friends and I discover she’s changed. You were something else a year ago!” (1: 153)

Equally, “Chiaroscuro” opens with the reunion of friends sharing their individual history, discussing, encouraging and advising one another. In “An Arranged Marriage”, the same theme of mutual support amongst women prevails in that it is her friend, Leander, who advises and saves Lalita from entering a marriage she does not desire. These instances show the importance of friendships in these characters’ lives. Its importance lies in part in locating affection beyond the family unit. Here, Black theatre re-

plants intimacy⁴. Whereas bourgeois theatre usually centres it in the family, the work of female playwrights, and in particular Black ones, extends it to extra-familial friendships.

This change of focus in the kinds of relationships these playwrights portray can be explained in terms of their own experience as second-generation immigrants in Britain. In terms of their migratory history, their reality is different from their parents'. Whereas their parents could relate to a culture and a land prior to their migration to Britain, the daughters often lack that particular kind of reference. The young female characters are cut off not only from the culture of their homeland but also from the extended and nurturing family ties that were available there. It is the issues emerging from that void in the daughters' lives and the experience of being born Black and female in Britain which is mirrored in the plays. Hence the characters' need to build nurturing communities, a support network of friends who share the same background and thereby the same understanding of their own lives. To some extent, the daughters' female friends act as a surrogate extended family, an element that is otherwise denied them.

Other factors that greatly influence Black women's relationships in the plays are the contexts of economic, political and social policies of the day.

⁴ Compare with the opening scene of Caryl Churchill's "Top Girls", where the women sharing a meal together are shown to live in parallel worlds.

Some of the plays discussed here were written during the Thatcher years, a period which witnessed one of the major transformations in British history. One of the significant features of Thatcherism was its intensive investment in “the family” and its dismantling of the culture of dependency on the state and welfare state. Thatcherism involved a vision of society in which individuals and families would provide their own welfare and rely less on state support. For Thatcherites, the family was the fundamental basis of the nation, but their notion of the family relied on an essentialist definition of the term. Family was understood only as the nuclear family, with a much greater emphasis on the importance of marriage and the traditional, patriarchal family⁵. For instance, “Clause 28” was introduced in 1988. It was a provision within a Local Government Act designed to prevent local authorities from the “intentional promotion of homosexuality.” In particular it prohibited “the promotion of the teaching of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.” (Stacey 285)

⁵ In Heavenly Love? Lesbian Images in Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing, Gabriele Griffin discusses this particular New Right tendency. She terms it “the familialization of society”, a process which strives to replicate the nineteenth-century model of the bourgeois family in the political and economic spheres of Thatcher’s society. A case in point is the role of woman in society: “A woman’s place remains in the home. However, should she be involved in the realm of the public sphere then her position is a mere re-enactment of the role she inhabits within the home.” (123)

In practice, however, Thatcher's policies destabilised poorer families (ethnic minorities included) so much so that marital breakdown and family break-ups soared⁶. Ironically, the victims of her economics were obliged to find their intimacy outside the family unit. Characters in plays such as "Basin", "Money to Live", "Chiaroscuro" and "Monsoon" present a serious threat to the New Right ideology that informed Thatcherism⁷. In "Basin", Michele is a single mother. She represents the "burden" of

⁶ Statistics suggest that prior to Thatcher's accession to power there was 4.7% of divorce per 1000 marriages. In 1987, the divorce rate jumped to 12.6% per 1000 marriages (Muncie 139).

⁷ New Right pressures aside, single-parent or female-headed families are a particular feature of the Caribbean family. The notion of the nuclear family is not central in Caribbean culture on account of its history. During slavery, the family unit was an alien concept amongst Blacks as they were constantly faced with being separated from their families. Husbands were torn from their wives and parents were denied their rights to their children. This historical legacy of slavery has had a lasting impact. It has been suggested that the Afro-Caribbean female-headed households act as a point of resistance against the dominant family construction. For instance, Hazel Carby argues that "during slavery, periods of colonialism and the present authoritarian state, the Black family has been a site of political and cultural resistance to racism" (83). In Killing Rage, Ending Racism, bell hooks suggests that the dominant patriarchal family is deeply problematic: "The problem lies with the insistence that the redemptive family be patriarchal. It should be more than clear if not from Black life then from the experience of white folks, documented in feminist writings, that the patriarchal family presents no model for liberation." (71)

society within the social context of the time in her reliance on the welfare state for survival. Due to her single parent status, the different shape her family takes does not fall into the New Right's concept of what a family should be⁸. Judy and Charlene's self-sufficiency, their job as strippers and their inability to live up to the conservative familial position a woman should occupy, make them enemy elements within the conformist society that "nurtures" them. Moreover, Mona and Michele in "Basin", Jalaarnava and Nusrat in "Monsoon", Beth and Opal in "Chiaroscuro" are viewed as deviant in their subscription to a different expression of sexual orientation⁹. Both their blackness and their lesbianism do not fit into the mould of the New Right's outlook of what a family should be. As Smith clearly points out in New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality:

⁸ In New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality, Smith suggests that single mothers and lesbians are considered dangerous in the eyes of those who supported Section 28 because of their being "pretenders to the real thing." (213)

⁹ In Black Feminist Thought, Hill Collins puts forward the rationale behind the consideration of Black lesbians as "the ultimate other" according to "Eurocentric thought": "Black lesbians are not white, male, or heterosexual and generally are not affluent. They represent the antithesis of the norm and become the standard by which other groups measure their own so-called normality" (194).

Still remaining on the topic of Black lesbianism, in "The Black Lesbian in American Literature: An Overview" Ann Allen Shockley speculates on the reasons why many Black writers and reviewers have avoided addressing the subject. She suggests that "the fear of being labelled a Lesbian, whether they were one or not" has been a major deterrent. (84)

In both Powellian discourse and the debates on Section 28, Blackness and homosexuality are not just represented as something other, and they are not simply excluded. They are represented instead as threats to the social order in so far as these otherness [*sic*] take the “form” of a subversive supplement, and these threats are managed through strategies of differentiation and representation.

(216)

The characters’ experiences demonstrate the difficulties and the prejudices prevalent in a society that alienates them – hence their being drawn to recreating a community of their own. The influence of the traditional, close, tight community in which the family is the fundamental unit is shown to be waning in the plays. Thus notions of family and community are re-negotiated. The new type of community that emerges is not only born out of the pressures of the social and political agendas of the period but also out of the influence of the daughters’ common fate, that of being born at the other side of migration. It is these factors that contribute to the birth of the different forms of relationship which constitute the foundation of a new community.

In terms of the women’s personal development, the new, (re-)invented community borne from friendship plays a major role in giving them the opportunity for transformation. For instance, in “Monsoon”, Jalaarava feels she has undergone positive changes thanks to her friendship with Nusrat. She describes her metamorphosis in the following terms: “July 3rd.”

I have passion and it blinds me. I am growing and changing before you, with you" (V/2: 75). In "Basin" Susan tells Michele about the deep sense of communion she shares with her: "You see, not only do I love you but I know how it is to be how you are" (3: 125). It is this identification with one another that brings Black women in some of the plays a sense of well-being in their lives. In "Chiaroscuro" Beth talks about the attraction she had for Opal the first time they meet: "She's left a warm glow over me" (1: 63). In "Basin", Susan admits to Mona the sense of fulfillment she derives from their relationship: "I feel wonderful. I feel really happy ... I feel really different, don't you?" (2: 121) Susan's sensation of being different and fulfilled may stem from the new kind of friendship she has cultivated with Mona. Later, Mona herself is empowered by the sentiment she has for Susan. Her newly-found friendship bolsters her self-confidence and self-acceptance:

MONA: ... Living with you is different, though. I feel secure ... You make me feel at home. I know it is my home, but I've never felt so at home. It feels right. (I/4: 129)

Mona's words seem to suggest that, thanks to her relationship with Susan, she finds some certainty and possibly an answer to the ambiguous position she had occupied as regards her sexual orientation. Beth's line about Opal, upon striking up a friendship with her, seems to indicate similar significance. As she puts it: "There's something about her that made me feel so at home" (1: 63). The characters' comfort in these terms is aptly

captured by bell hooks in her observation about the polysemic nature of home:

At times home is nowhere. At times one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. (1989: 19)

It is this new meaning of home that some of the characters start to grasp. Home is no longer where the family is but it is re-located within the realm of friendship. Home is re-signified with the change towards a new appreciation of the concept of the self. Thanks to her new position and the friendship she shares with Susan, Mona sees her relationship with her husband from a new perspective:

Now that I think about it, who was always there for me? Susan. Where was Michael when I needed him? It doesn't bear thinking about! What about when I couldn't find a job? Was I depressed! What miserable company I must've been! She was here, though. She stayed, she listened ... maybe we've always been lovers? I'd never made love to her before, but maybe we've always been lovers? I always turn to her when I need comfort. I always turn to her when I need help ... (3: 123)

Mona's friendship with Susan also induces her to think about much larger issues. It makes her review the dynamics of men and women's relationships back home:

It was for the women to hold the family together. The men drifted in and out like irritating mosquitoes. And no matter how much the women swatted them, they still seemed to be there. (126)

Other characters similarly remark upon the differential roles men and women seem to occupy within relationships. In "Money to Live", Judy opens Charlene's eyes to the reality of the relationship the latter has with her boyfriend:

JUDY: Has he got a car?

CHARLENE: Yes, a Mercedes.

JUDY: That's nice for him. He's got a car, he can go where he wants, do what he wants. A car, pussy in different parts of London; he must be a happy man. You haven't got a car, you're stuck here ... but that's cool, isn't it, Charlene? (156)

This general mistrust of male partners is analysed in works by Black women writers such as Michele Wallace. In Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman (1990) Wallace argued that during slavery Black men were disappointed that the Black woman was not his slave and that the motive of the Black Power Movement of the 1960s was "revenge" and an

expression of Black macho rather than a pursuit of equality. In the present case, it can be argued that Charlene is, to some extent, treated as a sex slave by her boyfriend. While he enjoys proving his manhood in “different parts of London” her movement is restricted. Her day is spent mostly indoors, waiting for him, just in case he turns up. This sense of suspicion towards Black men seems to strengthen the women’s alliance and friendship in these plays; at the same time it also encourages female characters such as Charlene to exercise more agency over their own lives.

So far in this section, I have sketched out the background to women’s friendships and shown, in broad terms, the kind of community Black women re-create together. I now want to develop the practical solidarity Black women bring to their friendship, and in doing so I shall examine how friendship acts as a vehicle for self-definition and survival.

“Basin” relates the daily hardships a Black single woman faces in providing for her family. Such hand-to-mouth existence is illustrated by Michele’s visit to Mona for some assistance: “I feel bad but I just haven’t got any money. I’m feeding my baby rubbish. Things will get better soon” (119). Mona helps Michele when the latter is in financial difficulties. She also babysits for her to allow Michele to have a social life. Thus, the young female characters draw strength from one another by attending to the primary needs of their peers. This theme of practical solidarity amongst Black women friends is also evident in “Money to Live” when

Judy comes to see her friend, Charlene, advising her on ways to overcome the latter's financial difficulties:

JUDY: ... How much are you making a week?

CHARLENE (with embarrassment): About £78.

JUDY: Is it enough?

CHARLENE: No.

JUDY: You're in the wrong job.

CHARLENE: At least I'm not one the three million. I don't have a lot of choice plus, I'm Black, that doesn't count for an extra 'A' level, you know.

JUDY: You should do what I do! Think of the money! (1: 155)

Thus, a focus of Black women's relationships is alleviating the struggle of meeting the basic daily needs of a friend. Their primary needs revolve around providing for themselves and their children. Audre Lorde aptly identifies the importance for Black women of satisfying the family's immediate material demands:

Experience has taught us that action in the now is also necessary, always. Our children cannot dream unless they live. They cannot live unless they are nourished, and who else will feed them the real food without which their dreams will be no different from ours? (38)

This accounts for Lorde's pointing out certain differences between Black and white women's realities. In addressing a white mother in Sister Outsider, she writes:

Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you; we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying.

(9)

The different kinds of concern that Lorde raises point to the divergence in Black and white mothers' lives: white mothers' main concern is the fear of being patriarchally dominated, whereas Black mothers' worries centre on being both patriarchally and racially oppressed¹⁰. However, in Common Differences Gloria I. Joseph observes the apparent similarities that exist in the mundane activities that Black and white mothers undertake; she writes of "women gathering together in beauty parlors; women meeting in the kitchen over a cup of coffee or soup; women talking on the steps; and women congregating at church meetings" (194). But the picture conjured up here is that of a faux friendship – of Black women "doing" friendship in the style of white women. In addition, the

¹⁰ Foster-Carter acknowledges this point when she asserts that "all Black people are subordinated by racial oppression, women are subordinated by sexual domination, and Black women are subordinated by both as well as class" (Aziz 73).

image that Joseph suggests about Black women's lives is that of a leisurely existence blessed with uneventful friendship; a projection that is not necessarily in keeping with the details of Black women's lives as portrayed in the plays because the social difficulties and domestic dramas are simply omitted.

The inequality between Black and white women engenders animosity and antagonism as is illustrated by Claudette's view of white women in "Talking in Tongues":

It's not as if they [white women] want to be your friend. The only time one of them wants your friendship is when she's trying to get her hands on one of our men, and once she's done that they're both off without a backward glance: she never rated us in the first place and he doesn't want to be reminded of the detritus he left behind on his way to the top. (I/1: 176)

According to Claudette, Black men's and white women's conspiracy prevents any chance of genuine friendship between Black and white women. An interracial relationship between women is bound to be plagued with suspicion and animosity as it seems to entail an additional site of oppression for Black women.¹¹ The intimate ties between Black

¹¹ In Killing Rage: Ending Racism, hooks explains the difficulties Black women and white women face in establishing close relationships in a white capitalist and patriarchal America:

women however remain strong. Plays such as "Basin" show that Black women's relationships with one another prove to be enduring. In "Basin", the friendship between Michele and Mona is severely put to the test by Michele's intimate relationship with Michael, Mona's boyfriend. In a way, Michele's deed could be taken as an act of betrayal, not only of her

A major barrier has consistently been the fact that individual white women tend to be more unaware than their Black female counterparts of the way the history of racism in the United States has institutionalized structures of racial apartheid that were meant to keep these groups apart. First, there was the race/class understanding that the role of Black females was to be that of servant and of white females that of served. That servant/served paradigm continued as Black women entered all arenas of the workforce since white women were usually positioned higher. Second, there was the racist/sexist division of sexual competition for men that deemed white women more desirable, more worthy of respect and regard than Black women. These two major differences in positionality have had profound impacts on interracial relationships between the two groups. (218)

hooks' observations also apply to Black people in Britain in that the racialization of the class structure in Britain is conducive to huge disparities between Black and white people; the former are usually meant to occupy the bottom rank of society. Lennie James' experience confirms this. In an interview with Simon Hattenstone about his then forthcoming role in the play "Fall-Out", James highlights the deeply-entrenched racialization of class in British society: "The moment Mum stepped off the boat from Jamaica, three things happened to her. She became Black, she became working-class and she became West Indian. When she got on the boat, she was a middle-class Trinidadian woman." (18)

friendship with Mona but also as a denial of the deeper ties of female interdependency that bind them. However, their friendship is shown to cope with these obstacles. Mona is aware of an inextricable connection with her friend. Her empathy towards Michele's relationship with Michael is significant in that she manages to identify herself with Michele. This identification with Michele can be partly explained by the strong anti-male sentiments Mona harbours. This situation enables her to see Michele not as a rival but as a friend and/or a peer sharing the same kind of failings and hopes as her. Mona is aware of the shared state of victimization in which she and Michele find themselves.

The plays suggest that Black women experience intense bonding with one another through the knowledge and firm grasp of one another's realities. Their empathic understanding of each other's lives gives them the desire to change their reality. For instance, part of their quest for change lies in their need to empower themselves. Judy, in "Money to Live", is keen on reviving a sense of self-belief in Charlene while reminding her of the empowered person she used to be. Judy rescues Charlene from low self-esteem. Similarly Audre Lorde emphasizes that Black women's empowerment lies within themselves:

Sometimes we drug ourselves with dreams or new ideas. The head will save us. The brain alone will set us free. But there are no new ideas still waiting in the wings to save us as women, as humans. There are only old and forgotten ones, new combinations,

extrapolations and recognitions from within ourselves along with the renewed courage to try them out. (38)

Judy helps Charlene to “renew her courage” to re-define herself. So does Lux in “Fragile Land” when her friend Tasleema is disheartened with the seemingly inevitable fate awaiting her as an Asian girl:

TASLEEMA: One day I’ll find myself on a one way trip to Bangladesh – trussed up in the back of the car on the way to Heathrow.

LUX: Even he wouldn’t do that.

TASLEEMA: What makes you so sure?

LUX: ‘Cos you’re dead clever Tas. You could be anything you wanna be – a doctor, a nurse – I dunno – even a professor ... (I/1: 10)

In a sense, friendship becomes a vehicle for self-definition – transcending all forms of stereotypes – for characters such as Charlene and Tasleema. Thanks to their friends, they become active agents able to decide what they want to be. In Talking Back: Thinking Feminist – Thinking Black, hooks describes this phenomenon as “the act of becoming a subject” which is “yet another way to speak of the process of self-recovery” (29). Thus, friendship amongst the Black characters brings about not only an

enabling therapeutic power but also self-growth and self-definition¹². Lorde insists on the importance of Black women's initiative to define themselves. She also warns about the danger of not doing so: "For Black women ... it is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves we will be defined by others – for their use and to our detriment." (45)

Bearing the notion of self-recovery in mind, friendship acts as a means of survival – physical, psychological and emotional – for the Black characters. Without her friend, Lux, Tasleema would be psychologically unable to resist patriarchal tyranny and the oppressive nature of tradition facing her. Equally, without Mona's friendship, Michele would not be able to physically survive the remainder of the week: "I haven't got any food in the flat. My dole comes on Friday" (119); and Judy's friendship is an agent of enlightenment for Charlene; without her she would find it hard to cope with the sense of isolation and the low self-esteem dominating her life.

In The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain, Bryan et al acknowledge the unifying character of history and experience, major elements in reinforcing the ties between Black women:

We have come to recognise that it is the bonds we have in common because of our history and our experience of racism and sexism

¹² Toni Cade Bambara, editor of the anthology The Black Woman, emphasizes:

"Revolution begins with the self and in the self." (in hooks 1989: 30)

which unite us; that whether raised in the security of our culture or in isolation from it, our unique experience as Black women and as Black people binds us closer together and gives us the strength to resist and overcome. (238)

What is evoked in the above statement is the notion of sisterhood which helps Black women to cope with issues of racial and patriarchal oppression. "Sisterhood" is closely associated with Black culture, having its roots in the Civil Rights Movements in the United States. Laden with historical significance, sisterhood is still valid, lived out and tested in the relationship between the Black women in the plays. hooks asserts in Ain't I a Woman? that "sisterhood cannot be forged by the mere saying of words. It is the outcome of continued growth and change. It's a goal to be reached, a process of becoming" (157). In "Basin", Susan undergoes this process of "growth and change" in her dealings with Michele. Despite the latter's provocative judgement of and reaction to her relationship with Mona, she refuses to retaliate and sees beyond the present hurt that Michele has caused them¹³. Instead, she strives to focus on their commonalities rather than on their differences. As she puts it:

¹³ Michele strongly subscribes to heterosexuality and violently rejects lesbianism, describing it as "dirty" and "not natural" (128). In "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism", Barbara Smith explains the rationale Black women like Michele may have for clinging to heterosexuality: "Heterosexual privilege is usually the only privilege that Black women have. None of us have racial or

I can't hate Michele. She's the same as me. I'm not going to criticise any Black woman, I know where she's coming from. We all share a spiritual bond. (I/4: 129)

Susan here presents a certain vision of sisterhood. First, there is her initial recognition of their sameness, the sameness of Black women united in the shared understanding of their history¹⁴. Then comes the mental shift towards an awareness of differences, and finally the assertion of the spiritual quality of the ties between Black women¹⁵; a bonding which transcends human divisions, and thus acts as preservation for Black women.

“Basin” attempts to negotiate issues of sameness and difference in relationships in an optimistic manner. Consequently, one issue is whether the playwright has unconsciously (or polemically) produced an idealistic

sexual privilege, almost none of us class privilege, maintaining ‘straightness’ is our last resort.” (171)

¹⁴ The special symbiotic nature of the relationship between Black women is well rendered by Lorde in these terms: “I am who I am, doing what I came to do, acting upon you like a drug or a chisel to remind you of your me-ness, as I discover you in myself.” (47)

¹⁵ Lorde also borrows the theme of spirituality to describe Black women's relationship. She mentions the redemptive character of Black sisterhood in the act of befriending one another: “For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered.” (47)

community or whether it is one that could be realistically “affirming” and “nurturing”. Both Mona and Susan care for Michele and keep on doing so in a spirit that claims remarkable utopian connections, despite betrayal, anger and jealousy. Each of these sentiments is laid aside and ultimately refocused into a spiritually nurturing context in which lessons have been learned:

We’re all in the same boat, we all have so much in common, so why are we arguing? Who will love us? White people? Black men?^[16] Who will love us if not other Black women? (II/1: 132)

In order for the community to be considered as nurturing, it must be seen as a possible alternative to individual insecurity and grudges on the one hand, and to the hegemonic and established practices of the wider community from which it distinguishes itself, on the other hand. The ideal of community thus triggers a certain utopianism in “Basin” – “a reading that rests on an illusion of coherence and co-operation but eschews the foundation of the communitarian ideal: the family”, as Sharon Monteith describes it in “Advancing Sisterhood” (85). Here, once again, friendship

¹⁶ Lorde advances the same argument as Rudet in stating the necessity for unity and compassion between Black women: “In this country, Black women have had compassion for everyone else except themselves. We have lived for whites because we had to for pay or survival; we have cared for our children and our fathers, and our brothers and our lovers ... We need to learn to have care and compassion for ourselves.” (47)

and family are presented in an antagonistic pose. However, sisterhood sometimes rejects communitarian ideals because there is an understanding that these involve their own prescriptive roles for women within the institutions of family and home, as well as in the wider social realm.

Still, questions remain about these utopian leanings. Could they engender actual social change or not, or is the belief that “the issues on which we focus may be necessary preliminaries to concerted, mass political activity” (Childers and hooks 60) simply naïve? Iris Marion Young thinks so. Recognizing such a position as an “understandable dream”, she views it as a fiction: “The vision of small, face-to-face, decentralized units that this ideal promotes ... is an unrealistic vision for transformative policies in mass urban society.” (300)

But whether or not the vision is realisable, perhaps a more fundamental issue concerns the question of difference. Of course, in one sense, difference is being underlined by sisterhood.¹⁷ It can act like a haven in a heartless male/heterosexual world, one in which women remove themselves and underline their distance/difference from men in the manner of a bunker mentality. Indeed, all identity-based movements have a tendency to fall into what Alberto Melucci’s Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society has termed “integralism” – the yearning for a totalizing identity, for a “master

¹⁷ Lorde points out in “Advancing Sisterhood?” that the need for unity “is often misnamed as a need for homogeneity.” (116-19)

key which unlocks every door of reality” (209). Integralism, writes Melucci, eschews a pluralist and “disenchanted” attitude to life and encourages people to “turn their backs on complexity” (209). Whilst the desire for personal affirmation from the group is great in these circumstances with sometimes the complementary desire for assertion of individuality, more often individuals encounter difficulties in maintaining their individuality amid pressures to conform, and so experience a loss of self. In extreme cases, the self can drown in the communal pool. Such an eventuality is not life-enhancing, as sisterhood would intend, for there remains no self left to affirm.

The danger of this dynamic is that it can cause individuals to overcompensate. They become more preoccupied with bolstering their own identities than with achieving political goals, hence the suspicion of several commentators that sisterhood is a utopian fantasy. However, individuals troubled by the inability to resolve the tension between identity and difference have taken one of two approaches, and I would argue that the plays under scrutiny reveal both. Either they reject identity as a basis for politics and assert instead the desire to strike out on their own, promoting individual autonomy and personal difference, or they “reshape identity politics and form new attachments which acknowledged ‘multiple’ allegiances and the partial nature of lesbian activity”, as Arlene Stein writes in her article “Sisters and Queers: The Decentering of Lesbian Feminism” (559). The form Black women’s friendship takes continues to be worked out, and – I suspect – the work of Black British women

playwrights will continue to hold up a mirror to these developments, be they utopian or otherwise.

CHAPTER 7 – NEGOTIATING THE PAST

Friendship is one relationship in which the female protagonists in the plays are able to nurture self-understanding and de-code their own lives. Relationships with other people are a means by which one can come to know oneself more fully, and one's self can be structured by interactions with others. However, such reaching out is not the only means to self-knowledge.

Negotiating the past proves hardest for those characters who were not born in Britain and who subsequently travelled to this country to live. For them, the plays testify that befriending their peers (and being befriended) never in itself cultivates the self-understanding they seek. The principal reason for this seems to centre on the gulf in experience between the early years of these immigrants and their present situation. They are left to shoulder the burden of a markedly different life – a history entangled with memories that serve to blur or even obscure their current sense of self in such a way that understanding the self becomes particularly elusive. To give a simple example, Grace's background is deeply rooted in rural life, a considerable contrast to the urban existence she leads in England.

These difficulties in understanding the self are not generation-specific. In the introductory note to "Running Dream", Trish Cooke draws attention to the fact that the same generation within the same family may have a different kind of relationship to the past, as she recounts the case of her

own family:

I soon discovered that within my own generation, (my brothers and sisters) there were two parts – a generation who travelled to England from Dominica and those who were born here. Three of my sisters and two brothers travelled to England when they were kids while four of us were born in England ... Those who travelled remembered a world we English-born knew nothing about and as I got older I envied their memories. They spoke of a grandmother who brought them up ... (187)

Equally, in the plays themselves, negotiating the past is a task that particularly concerns the female characters – whether mothers or daughters – who have had an experience of life in their homelands prior to migrating to England. Unlike the second-generation female characters who were born in England, the characters who have first-hand experience of their native countries display a different dimension in their attitude toward the past¹. Life in England is in some respects a continuation of the living they left behind, and their separation from their family.

The characters in question, along with second-generation British-born

¹ Connerton writes about the crucial impact the past has on the self: “Our past history is an important source of our conception of ourselves; our self-knowledge, our conception of our own character and potentialities, is to a large extent determined by the way in which we view our own past actions.” (22)



ones attempt to make sense of their past not as a “cerebral” exercise but so as to cope with the present and to tackle the issue of their unsettled sense of self. In this chapter, I shall examine the different ways in which the characters negotiate their past before exploring the complexity and the ambivalence involved in the act of remembering.

In “Leave Taking”, Enid is severed from her past even before she physically leaves her island: her mother ignores her and refuses to say a proper farewell to her on the day of her departure:

But the day I was to leave I couldn't find her, search everywhere.
 You know where she was? In the field, as usual, working hard like this was jus' any other day, cutting away with she [*sic*] cutlass.
 “Mooma” I say “I gone now.” She never turn round, jus' carry on working ... (I/3: 160)

In this passage, Pinnock here echoes a biblical moment when Jesus treats two mourners with unusual roughness². One of them wants to attend a funeral before joining Jesus on a journey, and says: “Let me first say farewell to those at my home”. But Jesus insists that “no one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God”. It is, then, as if Enid's mother regards her daughter as already dead. This is made explicit by Pinnock's investing the concept of “absence” with not only a temporal but also an emotional dimension. The passage implies that

² Luke 9. 59-62.

the daughter stopped being present to her mother upon the former's decision to leave her homeland. The mechanism of Enid's involuntary rupture with her past has started before she even departs. She leaves her homeland heartbroken: "In the end I had to give up, walk away. (*Slight pause*) I had this ... big, dark hole inside." (Ibid). Grace, in "Running Dream", also refers to "a big hole" as a result of "all the years I here, I missing Ma Effeline ..." (206). Thus, the maternal – here of the grandmother as symbolic mother – absence has a resounding impact on the characters' present lives. They are, to some extent, prisoners of the past. Their unresolved relationship with loved ones left behind makes them live in limbo and lead diminished lives.

Enid confides her feelings about her past to Broderick, somebody who shares a similar background to her. She also imparts fragments of her past life to one of her daughters:

VIV: You all right?

ENID: I'm used to sitting in the dark. You think me mother could afford electricity? Hot an' cold running water? Flush toilet?

(*Laughs.*) You ever been hungry? (I/3: 164)

Enid is unable to articulate the pain of loss at her mother's death when it occurs. She resorts to specific reminiscence of the past instead. Carolyn Heilbrun's suggestion that nostalgia is "likely to be a mask for unrecognised anger" (15) seems to be relevant in this case. Enid's issues

run deeper than the material deprivations of her childhood and her mother's inability to cater for her needs. Her words above betray hidden anger, anger at her feeling of helplessness, the rage of being powerless in face of her past and probably the resentment at her failure to address her unresolved mixed feelings towards her mother.

Although Enid keeps urging her daughters not to look back but concentrate on the future she changes her attitude upon her mother's death; Enid allows Viv to look into her safely-guarded past. To some extent, her mother's death has the effect of triggering repressed memories of the past to surface. Sharing the memories with her daughter Viv releases Enid and simultaneously enables her daughter to re-connect with her mother as an individual, to have a better understanding of her maternal history and by implication to have a better grasp of her own past:

ENID: Sometime I feel like a cat chasing him own tail. Going round and round and getting nowhere but dizzy. (*Slight pause. Deep in thought.*) My uncle did go to America.

VIV: Did he?

ENID: I never tell you? Him did come back visit with him wife. I did think she was the most beautiful woman I ever seen in me life ... Long after, I couldn' stop dreaming about her. An' America. I did read everything I could get me hand on. I knew I was going there one day.

VIV: Never knew you wanted to go to America.

ENID: I did cry for days when them say they wasn' taking any more people.

VIV: All your dreams up in smoke ...

ENID: I wanted to die. I didn't want to grow old in that blasted slow pace distric' ... (I/3: 164-5)

Enid's history, her dreams and her spirited character become clearer to her daughter with this revelatory passage. The disclosure of her past shows Enid's resolve finally to acknowledge the roots she has consistently hidden from her daughters.

In "Leonora's Dance", Leonora also has to confront her past when her mother, Frieda, comes to see her in England after the two have been unable to see each other for many years. Frieda tells her daughter that even her father's family sends their love to her:

LEONORA: Well what am I to think mother? You always told me I never had a father. You made up all sorts of stories about him when I was young. I was confused.

FRIEDA: It's not that I didn't want you to know your father, or benefit from his success. It's just that I thought once you got to know him, you wouldn't want to know me, and I was right. The minute you set foot into that posh school you changed. (II/2: 97)

Leonora's reaction to her past is as interesting as that of her mother's here. Frieda's confession is twofold. It can be viewed as a way to protect herself from the past – her defensive tone about her past conduct indicates her concern to protect herself from her daughter's accusations – but it is also a strategy to win her daughter back. Frieda's act of restricting Leonora from developing ties with her father gives an insight into the power dynamics of Frieda's relationship with her master. Leonora is used as a pawn in the power struggle between her parents. As for Leonora, she reveals to her mother that despite all the lies the latter told her about her father she has a distinct memory of who he was:

LEONORA: But I always knew who he was. He had ginger hair.

FRIEDA: Did he?

LEONORA: He used to come to our house.

FRIEDA: Did he?

LEONORA: (*FRIEDA occupies herself*) He used to carry a shooting stick and two fierce dogs by his side. The first time I saw him, I ran. He came up onto the verandah ... He bent down to kiss me on the cheek. It was warm. ... He gave me chocolate from England - That's how I knew I was special to him ...

....

FRIEDA: As I say blood is thicker than water - because your name was the last word on his lips when he died. You remember?

LEONORA: My memory is sometimes a little fuzzy. He was a good man... wasn't he? (II/2: 97)

When her mother encourages Leonora to probe deeper into that particular past she is suddenly reluctant to do so. She only seems to be prepared to cling to a more palatable side of a past that is devoid of dramas.³ And she uses her failing memory as a thinly-disguised excuse to avoid the topic. Leonora's attitude has clear resonances with Freud's definition of repression which involves "the effortless and regular avoidance of anything that has once been distressing ..." (600). Indeed, the conversation between mother and daughter seems to awaken key, disturbing and long-buried memories that the daughter has so far repressed; for instance the day when Frieda fatally wounded the father during one of their heated arguments over their children's maintenance:

FRIEDA: You can say that to me, after I spent fifteen years in penitentiary for you. (*Leonora looks away scared*) You thought I was dead didn't you? ... You remember the last day he came to our house?

LEONORA: (*Turning round suddenly*) You promised.

FRIEDA: You remember what he looked like that day? I believed he was angry, very angry.

LEONORA: No.

³ Here Leonora's use of the past could be described as "nostalgic", in the sense in which Gayle Greene and Annette Kuhn respectively use the term in "Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory" and in Family Secrets – she pines for the good old days, the reservoir of lost happiness, and in the process engages in repression.

FRIEDA: He always left his boots outside – caked with mud, and then you children knew he was there and not to disturb me.

LEONORA: I don't remember. (II/5: 108)

Leonora's persistent denial of what exactly happened on that occasion demonstrates a deliberate choice to repress the emotional turmoil resulting from it. Her mother was sent to jail for fifteen years on account of murdering the master but Leonora, too, is imprisoned by guilt over that significant incident as it appears she contributed to the killing of her father:

FRIEDA: He was angry that day because I'd told him I wanted more money for your school fees and your extra dancing lessons ... I cursed his children. He boasted that he didn't believe in Mother Frieda's magic. That was when I felt the force driving my hands forward with the knife ... He was squeezing the life from me with the very hands that stroked my back ... (*gasping*) ... but you came didn't you Leonora?

LEONORA: I must help mama ... (*crawling on the floor*)

FRIEDA: I don't know where you find that knife girl but you saved my life. (*Leonora begins to stab at ground – crying*) The police came with the catholic priest – Marshall Croft was lying dead in my arms. The priest gave him the last rites. (II/5: 108)

In attempting to reconstruct her daughter's memories and her own past,

Frieda foregrounds the personal, historical and sexual politics of memory. Her act of remembering can be considered as a belated yet necessary resistance to the social and domestic histories of abuse within patriarchy and slavery. Remembering is enabling. However, the above passages also point to the ambivalence of remembering⁴. Leonora's remembering veers from eagerness to reluctance to recall. Her endeavour to re-construct a more palatable narrative as well as her attempt to build up a selective memory through repression reflect a defence mechanism against the guilt and sadness that colour her life⁵.

⁴ In "Dis/composing the Subject: Intersubjectivities in Oral History", Penny Summerfield addresses this subject in her discussion of Graham Dawson's idea of the production of personal memory as "composure". The term can be defined as the subject's act of "composing" a life-story and a self (s)he feels comfortable with. Summerfield wonders whether the possible outcome of feminist oral history could be, in this case, the reverse act of composure which is "discomposure". However, "composure" seems to be the strategy of remembering that is adopted by Leonora in the play in that she leaves out and represses crucial memories she feels uncomfortable with – namely the circumstances surrounding her father's death.

⁵ In States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering, Stanley Cohen elaborates further the complex notion of "repression" and its impact on the individual's mental health:

Repression became the archetypal defence mechanism: keeping out of awareness information that evokes the psychic pains of trauma, guilt and shame. This generic use ignores the distinction between troubling external events and troubled feelings about these events. We may

Frieda's step-by step reconstruction of the past is positive in that it saves Leonora from the confusing amnesia she finds herself in. Thanks to Frieda's endeavour to excavate the past, she can ease the psychic wounds that plague Leonora into believing that she is guilty of her father's murder⁶.

However, this process is not as liberating for the daughter as it is for the mother. Leonora remains caught in a triangular *cul-de-sac* in her relationship with her mother and her dead father. She feels an ambiguous loss as regards her father's death. She is faced with the loss of her father, the loss of a certain kind of future but also in a way, the loss of her mother. While growing up, she was always suspected by the mother of establishing an alliance with the father at the mother's expense. And in her adult life, her refusal to return to her homeland at her mother's request can be interpreted as reinforcing evidence of Leonora's rejection of her mother:

remember what happened, but repress the emotional tone – or else remember feeling bad, while forgetting what we felt bad about. These tactics are anyway doomed to fail. The repressed pain “is not really forgotten”: it remains somewhere “in there” – causing distortions, pathological inner states and generally rotten “symbolic behaviour”.

(119)

⁶Self-blame and guilt are major issues in understanding ambivalence. Leon Grinberg and Rebeca Grinberg list different forms of guilt. The one that is closest to what Leonora feels is “persecutory guilt” which consists in “resentment, despair, fear, and self-reproach.” (162)

LEONORA: Can't you see Mama, this is where I belong. This is my father's land. Where else should I belong? It's my birthright.

FRIEDA: But it's your mother's line that is important, after all who knows your father is?

LEONORA: You see, it's all your fault. You've curse [*sic*] my life from the day I was born.

FRIEDA: Is the bad blood in you talking.

LEONORA: No matter how hard I tried. I could never amount to anything in your eyes . . . (II/5:107)

Leonora's unresolved grief about the past and the problematic relationship she has with her mother can be accounted for in part by her unease about her present life. Her past is shaping her present as she struggles to understand her own identity. When she talks to her lodger, Melisa, about the weather she prides herself in being English – “You'll soon get use to it like us English” (I/1: 78). However, the society in which she lives refuses to consider her as English – hence, her social isolation and cultural ambivalence. In the play, she uses her room to protect herself from both alienation from the present reality and disturbing memories of the past in conjuring up an uncomplicated vision of the past:

This room is my capsule. In it I will preserve my memories. Here, I will preserve my grand dance... (*She holds each invisible item up slowly and then lays it carefully into container*) my grandmother's song which she taught me at her knees. (*She sings briefly*) My

mother's warning - all about men ... (I/1: 79)

Leonora is permanently stuck in a fantasy world mixed with images of her childhood. Her failure to negotiate the past causes her an inability to move on as she remains imprisoned by that past and becomes permanently paralysed in her psychotic state⁷. Indeed, Leonora's relation to the world is mediated by a kind of delusional structure. Her daily mental crises show that amidst moments of lucidity she suffers from bouts of delusion, and hallucinations of being persecuted by her mother. Glimpses of Leonora's traumatised and confused psyche are seen in her interaction with the invisible Medusa:

MEDUSA: Leonora, stop that dancing girl. I've told you already, you too fat. If the Lord had made Black people to dance, their arms wouldn't be so strong, they back so broad.

LEONORA: (*As MEDUSA speaks, LEONORA becomes more agitated and tries to shut her out*) They said that I had poise and posture and a good sense of rhythm. I would make a great dancer.

⁷ In his Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, Freud mentions that there is no sharp difference between neurosis and psychosis in that both share a common symptom: "There is no lack of attempts to replace a disagreeable reality by one which is more in keeping with the subject's wishes" (19, 187). He further adds that in both cases "there comes into consideration the question not only of a loss of reality but also of a substitute for reality." (Ibid.)

MEDUSA: You too Black and you hair don't even tie back in a bun.

(Mocking laughter) ...

LEONORA: I'm going to live with my daddy. My daddy lives in a big house. (I/3: 85)

This instance corroborates the fact that Leonora cannot reconcile herself to her past. It torments her. That past takes on the shape of the “ghosts” of the past which predominantly people her present world and which – despite the torment – make the past seem more vital and significant than the present. She has not yet come to terms with the loss of her father, and her rejection of her mother, seen as a symbolic loss, prevents her from fully engaging with reality. The gap between the child and the adult Leonora has not been “patched up” appropriately.

In “Running Dreams”, Grace takes steps to negotiate her past by physically returning to her homeland in order to mourn the loss of the grand-mother who raised her. Unlike Leonora who rejects her mother's heritage, Grace attaches value to her matrilineal legacy. She considers her grand-mother, Ma Effeline, as incarnating her “past” and her “history”. With her death, Grace seems to finally accept the loss that has beset her and starts the process of mourning which helps her reconcile the present with her own past and history. In a racist street incident during which a right-wing gang orders Grace and her little sister, Bianca, to go back to the place where they are originally from, Grace shares their common history and re-members the past with Bianca upon the latter's request:

CHORUS: Blackie! Golliwogs! Nig Nog!

GRACE/BIANCA: (*In unison*) White trash! White trash!

CHORUS: Go back to where you come from!

...

BIANCA: (*Shivering she looks over at the chanters*) I'm not ... English. (Pause) Grace tell me about that place again. (*Grace is trying to get warm - she puts her arm over Bianca's shoulder warming her sister up.*)

GRACE: Well, it hot!

BIANCA: ... and sweaty?

GRACE: Sometimes.

BIANCA: What else? Did you swim everyday?

GRACE: Most days if you want.

BIANCA: And Clementine?

GRACE: What, my sister ... my sister always making mischievous [*sic*]. She not afraid to go any place and do anything. If my sister was here eh ... you think them children would trouble us! You mad!

(Part 1: 208)

Grace re-creates her homeland and the past for her sister. This amounts to what Svetlana Boym terms “restorative nostalgia”⁸ which “puts an emphasis on *nostos* [etymologically meaning, to return home] and

⁸ Elspeth Probyn provides the history of the origin of the term “nostalgia”. It was coined in 1688 by Johannes Hofer as a medical term for homesickness on the

proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps” (41). In fact, having been born in Britain and having never visited their homeland, “the memory gaps” here are mainly those of Grace’s sister in that she has only second-hand knowledge of the place of her origin. Nonetheless, in this scene Bianca’s need to be reminded of “that place” can be interpreted as escapism, the desire to take refuge in a warm and peaceful space/past in contrast to the hostile racism-filled present, a chilling climate indeed. However, Grace’s strength resides in the fact that she does not forget who she is and where she comes from. But most importantly she takes seriously the role of being the guardian of the past by instilling memories of home in her sister, at the same time as reminding her of their origin.

A different form of negotiating the past shown by characters in the plays consists of instances that allow a confrontation with the past, not with the aim of coming to terms with it, but rather so as to explore the consequences of living part of one’s life as a lie and of attempting to determine the status of truth. For example, Olive in “Money to Live” lays bare the truth about herself and her past to her daughter, Charlene:

I know what it’s like to have no money. In fact, when you were a child, I had a terrible struggle making ends meet, and I understand that your morals can go out of the window when you’re poor.

(Pause) I can’t be angry with you. I’ve certainly got no right to tell

part of Swiss soldiers who longed to return to the Alps. Later, the term took on a broader set of associations such as absence or loss.

you off. (*Pause*) Stripping is pathetic and dangerous ... but I stooped much lower than you. (4: 169)

Olive's basic objective in disclosing the truth about resorting to prostitution in the past is to establish sincerity and truthfulness in her relationship with her daughter. Sharing the truth about her past allows the mother to re-connect to her estranged daughter and is calculated to prevent the daughter from making the mistake of putting the mother on a pedestal. Olive's confession of her past experience leads to the positive effect of drawing mother and daughter closer together, and establishes a climate of trust and understanding between them. As a result, albeit only to some extent, the act of determining the truth of her past is liberating for Olive.

In "Paper and Stone", Martha has not yet arrived at the stage of disclosing the secrets of her past. However, she still goes through the consequences of her own conscious cover-up of past difficulties. Since Juliet's appearance in her life, Martha has been constantly reminded of the child who was conceived through rape and whom she subsequently abandoned in the field. Moreover, her guilt for not having treated her children more kindly intensifies towards the end of the play as she faces loneliness. Brenda, the last of her children still to live at home, decides to leave her mother for a freer and more independent life.

Like Martha, Georgia in "Every Bit of It" also abandons her own child and later desperately tries to find him. She is somehow reluctant to face

the inevitably painful process of dealing with the past that she has carefully concealed all her life. As she says to her friend Cathy:

Don't you hate the past? Don't you hate remembering things? I read. I write. I make things up. I research. I notate. I put things down in writing. Wherever I go, there it is. The past. I can't get away from it. There it is, a heavy weight across my chest. (I/2: 12)

Probyn discusses the power of the past to unsettle the present. She states that "far from being reassuring, the retrieval of the past into the present is profoundly dislocating, disorienting" (114). However, in the play Georgia's friend urges her to see the past as not fully recuperable. She advises her to acknowledge that she made a mistake, yet at the same time to look to the past as a source for change and for attempting a better present:

CATHY: What I'm saying is you never know the minute. You've got to grab it. You can't keep waiting. That boy of yours, he could be sitting on this train and you wouldn't know it. He wouldn't know you are his mother either, would he. He's probably turned out well ... It's not him. You're the one. You've to forgive first.

...

GEORGIA: To forget that's what I need.

CATHY: No. If you forget you can never forgive. You've got to remember to forgive properly ... I've forgiven myself because I remember. (III/1: 32)

Cathy suggests that remembering should not be an act of control over the past; rather it involves an engagement with the past, making space for its other possible meanings – whereas for Georgia, remembering carries the painful act of self-condemnation. It is Cathy who helps her come to terms with her limited/limiting attitude towards the past in enlightening her to view remembering as a source of forgiveness. It is this alternative function of remembering that allows growth and provides a means of effecting change in the present.

CHAPTER 8 – HOMECOMING

If memory provokes change, it is also responsible for change's spatial cousin, movement. One of the distinctive features of plays such as "Running Dream", "Leonora's Dance", "Talking in Tongues", "Every Bit of It", "Running Dream", "A Hero's Welcome", "Basin", "Back Street Mammy" and "Monsoon" is the frequent portrayal of movement. These chart not only the physical movement undertaken by some of the female characters in their journeys to and from Britain but also deal with an underlining theme – particularly evident in the daughters' lives – namely, the metaphorical movement of the self.

This section seeks to unravel some of the female characters' ongoing attempts at understanding their selves as they negotiate the new territory which is Britain. Like chapters two, four and six, it focuses mainly on the daughters, and in particular on how – given gendered constructions of the self, borne out of close intersubjective relations with their mothers, grandmothers and other female forebears – they come to terms with themselves through an awareness of their homeland and of their own uncertain identity. The chapter ends with an analysis of one character's (metaphorical) "homecoming" as a means towards self-understanding. But it begins with an account of the initial movement made by the mothers.

In the main, characters coming to Britain do so to join their husbands. However, on closer inspection, some of these characters betray a different

kind of motivation, that of self-actualisation. In “Leave-Taking”, Enid mentions her determination not to “grow old in that blasted slow pace district” (165). The implication here is that Enid feels held back by the leisurely way in which her compatriots go about their daily round, no doubt compounded by the Caribbean’s stifling heat. She identifies an energy within herself which longs to be spent; the desire to be taking part in another “race”, at a quicker pace, covering more ground. But, of course, the “mañana” tendency in tropical places can breed complacency, and may blunt the will to build and develop, hastening poverty. As a result, coming to Britain represents (in part) the means for Enid to rise above the limiting poverty that is imprisoning her life. Britain gives her the chance of re-making her self.

In “Running Dream”, Florentine is also concerned with self-actualisation. She leaves her children in the care of her mother and moves to England. Although the primary motive for her journey to England is to look for William, her husband, the shift in expectations and the change of circumstances *in situ* bring about a different resolve. Romance no longer acts as the main drive for self-fulfilment. A conversation she has with William reveals her desire for self-actualisation:

FLORENTINE: What do you want William?

WILLIAM: Jus’ a woman who can be my friend, ...

[a woman ... who] let me be a man.

FLORENTINE: An' what about a woman who want to do thing for herself ... You would want her?

WILLIAM: [...] I will take care of you.

FLORENTINE: [...] I is a woman dat like to do things. My modder say don't do dat and dat is the thing I want to do [*sic*]. (202)

William's asking Florentine to let him "be a man" betrays his entrapment into the dualistic mindset that essentializes and hierarchizes gender roles. Despite Florentine's efforts to show him the possibility of other options for a woman, William invests deeply in a hierarchical marriage in which the man is the protector and provider. He wants the woman to assume the position of wife but Florentine refuses to slide into a subordinate position of passivity. In the same way as Florentine challenges maternal authority in order to experience life for herself, she also challenges male authority in her relationship with men. She refuses to be contained and defined by a mother or a husband.

In "A Hero's Welcome", Minda is tired of the boring existence she leads on the island:

MINDA: ... You lucky to have those books.

LEN: What?

MINDA: You lucky you got something to fill your life. I ain't got nutting. (II/2: 49)

Like Florentine, Minda does not find self-fulfillment in simply being married. The emptiness of Minda's life makes her swap the security of her marriage to Len for the prospect of self-actualisation in the land of "plenty of opportunities"¹ (49). As a result, these female characters come to understand themselves better by being aware of their own agency and utilizing this to effect change. This awareness enables them to overcome the limitations of their positions. Marriage is initially presented as their only conceivable option. Leaving their homeland is a way to escape that option as it enables them to explore other dimensions of the self. And although the process of self-understanding comes at a cost – the loss of a lover/husband, mistakenly thought to represent the key to self-fulfillment – it is still worth pursuing for these characters. It offers them the possibilities to become other than what is conventionally expected of them.

Minda and Florentine deepen their self-understanding in the act of leaving security behind. In their case, the typical Caribbean sense of community is relinquished for the sake of personal growth. Having a more pronounced individually-oriented identity, as opposed to an identity geared toward

¹ In her interview with Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge in Rage and Reason, Pinnock describes Minda as "a girl who is surviving, a girl who uses any which way she can. That's why she ends up running away to Britain because that's what she sees will ultimately rescue her from the desperation of her circumstances." (51)

prioritising community, reflects the internal change experienced by these female characters.

The sense of self has been the object of much recent feminist debate. In Feminist Studies/Critical Studies, De Lauretis introduces the notion of “the female subject of feminism” which offers a subject conceptualised as complex and contradictory. As she puts it, “the female subject of feminism” is

The concept of a multiple, shifting, and often self-contradictory identity ... an identity made up of heterogeneous and heteronomous representations of gender, race, and class, and often indeed across languages and cultures; an identity that one decides to reclaim from a history of multiple assimilations, and that one insists upon as a strategy. (9)

Minda and Florentine move to a position at odds with their communities' values in that they no longer seem to be driven by community ideals in their quest for self-development. The shifting nature of their identity is further fostered by their experience of the passage from the West Indies to Britain which requires them to negotiate physical and metaphysical boundaries and which in turn urges them to form different identities. They go through a continuing process of reformulating their identities under the influence of the different forces that operate on them.

As indicated in outline at the outset of this chapter, the main focus in this study of movement – physical and metaphorical – falls on the daughters, and it is to them that this analysis now turns. The crossover between mothers and daughters stems from the project of self-actualisation undergone by the mothers. This is a project which has profound implications for the daughters because – whatever emotional attraction the motherland might still exert on the first-generation migrants and despite the victimization and other difficulties of settling in a new place – the mothers convince themselves that they have aspired beyond the limiting horizons of the homeland. Realising those aspirations – or, perhaps more accurately, moving towards the realisation of those aspirations – has not come cheaply, and so the mothers are resolute in resisting any slippage; that is, they impose the same aspirations upon their offspring, and disabuse them of any inclination to return “home”.

We see this transmission of mothers’ aspirations to their daughters in “Leave Talking”. Enid is proud of the grades on Viv’s school report: “All A’s. My daughter going to university” (152). Similarly, in “Paper and Stone”, Martha’s pride lies in the successful outcome of Brenda’s upbringing:

You know I love all my children Brenda, but you ... You were always different from the others ever since you were a baby. No crying and always a nice smile. I’m so proud of you and the way

you turned out. You go to church. You go to school and you come home... (6)

Martha's excessive praises for Brenda are twofold. They aim at affirming the former's values but they are also meant to secure the daughter's allegiances to the social mobility project that is a significant component in the mother's process of self-constitution. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim describe the process that informs the parents' transferring of their aspirations to their progeny:

With the future lying ahead the child confronts its parents with their own biographies and ambitions, disappointments and fears, including old dreams of being a huge success and making it to the top. Anyone suggesting that "my child should have it better than I did" is not just thinking of the child, but mostly of him/herself. (138)

The child's future is a provocation. It provokes his or her parents into comparing their "biography" – that is life experiences – with "the ambitions, disappointments and fears" that underscore those experiences even if they are not reflected in it. The child's future acts as a catalyst. It spurs the parents into viewing their offspring's life as a continuation of their own; a biography waiting to unfold. Florentine has such double-edged ambition for her children: "well maybe is too late for meself but I want my children to be somebody" (204). In her struggle to raise children

in difficult circumstances, Florentine is unable to attain the self-fulfillment she imagined at the outset of her journey to Britain. She has in a sense failed “to be somebody”. As a result, her aspiration for a better future for her children is in part about a re-validation of her own self.

In “Back Street Mammy”, Maria also shares her failed ambition with her daughter:

MARIA: ... Back home I did always say I would make a seamstress but is me own dress shop I did want, yes girl, you ol’ modder had big dream. I did think of going to America to study ... open a fancy clothes shop ... (79)

Maria’s telling of her dreams suggests a thorough engagement in a reflexive account that is both designed for her own self-constitution and for her daughter. In the course of the play, she urges her daughter to “make her proud”:

MARIA: You is my las’ daughter. Make me proud. You study. Finish school. Be a seamstress, a fashion designer or ... [*sic*]

DYNETTE: I want to be a language interpreter. I can’t sew.

MARIA: You can learn. Anyway you have brain you can do anything you want. (79)

Maria wants her daughter to pursue the same dream she herself had. But

such a dream does not bring happiness to the daughters. The mothers in a sense misread this. Dynette's resistance to her mother's dream in aspiring to become a language interpreter instead, is not only a sign of healthy autonomous self-development on the daughter's part. It also arises from the daughter seeing herself as a new person for whom the old labels will no longer suffice. Ziauddin Sardar elaborates the crisis of selfhood:

Having some idea of who or what we are helps us to determine how we ought to live and conduct our daily affairs. A little self-knowledge also provides us with a little coherence in our metaphysical and moral outlooks. But in a rapidly globalising world, it is almost impossible to have even a modicum of self-knowledge.

(94)

It is this particular awareness of the changeable nature of the world they live in and the need to make sense of one's self which drives some of the characters in the plays to revisit their roots. "Homecoming" becomes a way of attempting to become grounded.

Revisiting their roots involves the daughters in an exploration of their filial identity²; that is an ontological connectedness to their ancestors' past

² In The World, The Text and The Critic, Edward Said describes the concept of "filiation" as a kind of "organic complicity ... relationships held together by natural bonds and natural forms of authority" (20). In contrast "affiliation" is

or family members in their homeland. The first generation's need to make such sustained breaks from their background³ is, for instance, evident in Enid and Florentine's detached attitude to home in comparison to their daughters'⁴. Indeed, despite the fact that Enid in "Leave-Taking" and Florentine in "Running Dream" are still loosely in touch with home, providing financial assistance to their mothers, it is Viv and Bianca who express the desire to relate meaningfully to their homelands. In "Leave-Taking", Broderick rebukes Enid for her endeavour to erase from her daughters' consciousness any connection to their homeland: "these girls ain't English like them newsreader, them people got English stamp on them like the letters on a stick a'rock, these girls got Caribbean souls" (I/2: 153) That the girls have "Caribbean souls" implies that their

defined by bonds which are "transpersonal" (ibid.), social and cultural products of history and location. In the case of the second-generation female characters, a sense of affiliation is developed when they form friendships with their peers, people who share the same background as they have.

³ Like some of the first-generation characters who have left home to make sense of themselves, Gloria Anzaldua also states: "To this day I'm not sure where I found the strength to leave the source, the mother, disengage from my family, mi terra, mi gente, and all that picture stood for. I had to leave home so I could find myself." (16)

⁴ Mothers such as Enid, Florentine and Martha show a lack of allegiance to any concept of home. They remain alienated from their "British home" as a result of racism and their men's attitudes to committed relationships and responsibility. But they are also alienated from their original Caribbean home as a result of poverty and/or traumatic personal experiences.

“salvation” lies not in their mother’s aspiration for them to become English but rather in their being in touch with their culture and past. Pinnock’s endorsement of such a principle is evident in her characterization of Del who after years of struggling to understand who she is manages to address the issue of her unsettled self thanks to a gradual interest in her maternal culture instilled in her through an obeah.

In the same way, the female characters in “Chiaroscuro” appreciate their maternal legacy. Reflecting upon kinship identity liberates them, strengthens their weakened sense of self and ultimately helps them recognize themselves afresh. The play opens with the characters mulling over the origin of their names:

AISHA: ... I was called after my grandmother on my mother’s side ... I heard say that my grandmother was born in the Himalayas at dawn. Her mother shrieked as she pushed her out of herself ...

BETH: I was called after my great-great-great-great grandmother on my father’s side who was taken from Africa to slavery in America and raped often; who had children that were each taken from her. But, Beth was one strong woman; she was like Sojourner Truth⁵ or

⁵ Having suffered many hardships under slavery, Isabella Baumfree aka Sojourner Truth was determined to improve herself and her world by transforming the lives of freed slaves despite being illiterate. The following passage recounts the events which led to her self-reinvention:

Harriet Tubman – a woman who made change, who was Change herself. She helped some other slaves escape to the free country that was North America. (1: 59)

Aisha and Beth are self-empowered through recalling the indomitable spirit and creative power of their ancestral namesakes. Although the pair are separated from their female ancestors by generations and locations, they can identify with them⁶. Their forebears' legacy in being strong women is not silenced but continually kept alive due to both characters'

She stated that during her term of servitude, she was sold and re-sold five different times, and was known by as many names, taking a cognomen each time from the most recent purchaser. But after slavery had ended, "it came to her, from de Lord, dat her name was to be Sojourner; an' also it came to her, whilst travling thro' Long Island, on her way to de East, dat de oder part – de handle to her name – was Truth; an' a person who has got 'Truth' always present as I have," she remarked, "cannot be far astray" (Mabee and Newhouse 46).

Beth compares her grandmother to Sojourner Truth. The latter's resilience and her decision to name herself, a gesture which suggests her freedom to have agency in her own life, is an inspiration for Beth. The grandmother acts as a role model fostering a sense of independence in Beth.

⁶ In her article "Matrilineal Narratives", Tess Cosslett discusses matrilineage as a way of constructing the female subject. According to her, matrilineage consists in the fact that "the identity of the subject is assumed to be dependent on or in relation to the identities of her female ancestors." (142)

carrying on the name⁷. As a result, harking back to the site of their respective roots through naming helps the daughters explore the fluidity of their identities. As Jackie Kay puts it, each of the characters is “in flux, reassessing her identity, traveling back into memory and forward into possibility.” (Davis 82)

Susan in “Basin” reveals how her self-understanding is grounded in a memory recalling the importance of her female lineage:

All Black women know about their basin ... My mother gave me my own basin when I was about four. I think it was probably the first thing I possessed. Just before we went to bed, my mother would tell us, “Go wash your kookalook!” That was when I first became conscious of being a woman and what it meant to be feminine. That was when I first began to think about my mother, and her mother.
(129)

The basin is the first possession handed down to Susan by her mother. It

⁷ In Talking Back, hooks highlights her new name as a symbolic re-claiming of the power of a female ancestor:

I chose the name bell hooks because it was a family name, because it had a strong sound. Throughout childhood, this name was used to speak to the memory of a strong woman, a woman who spoke her mind. Then in the segregated world of our Black community ... Claiming this name was a way to link my voice to an ancestral legacy of woman speaking – of woman power. (161)

comes to signify physically and symbolically Susan's reality as a woman. The basin also establishes a vital link between her, her mother and grandmother. It conveys an almost sacred kind of ritual which expresses female identity in their culture.

Daphine and Frieda also display an interest in lineage and the possibility of transmitting spiritual gifts across generations:

DAPHINE: My mother sees spirits. She says that one day I'll see spirits too ... and my daughter Daryl she'll see spirits too – when she's older ... (II/4: 104)

FRIEDA: ... I used to know a little girl back home ... but her name wasn't Smith. Esther ... Esther Thompson.

DAPHINE: (*Excited*) That's my mother's maiden name.

FRIEDA: ... She was my cousin's daughter. (*Approaches her*) So you must be my cousin's daughter, daughter ... Your grandmother was a very calm ... woman, very adventurous. (II/4: 105)

Both are excited about their kinship. Frieda herself acts as a living link with the dead by telling Daphine about the spirited grandmother the latter had. Much in the same way as Aisha and Beth can relate to their female ancestors and Susan to her maternal forebears, so Daphine can also identify with Frieda, her kin. This process suggests that powerful identifications with mothers, grandmothers or female ancestors play an important part in the second-generation characters' conception of their

adult self. For these characters, identifications represent lineage and tradition, motivation and validation. They stand as the roots/routes to identity. The sense of the spirit of kin, and the vitality of lineage, greatly contribute to the construction of subjectivity and the on-going formation of the self in these Caribbean female characters⁸.

But in a complicated world, Bianca (in 'Running Dream') and others⁹ recognize that one has to move beyond identifications with others. This is why she runs: "Running eases the tension. Makes me feel at home with myself. Make me relax with what I know to be me ... I don't know where I'm going or why. I just want to – run ... I ran for myself – I don't know ... ran for my life ..." (209-10)

⁸ Constance Sutton views the Caribbean woman's sense of self as being as much to do with origins as with continuity, an awareness of the roles women play in their lifespan and that of their families. (Kerns 1983)

⁹ In "Monsoon", Jalaarnava retraces her steps back to India, her country of origin. It is another kind of homecoming as she leaves the comfort of her familiar surroundings in England "to come home". Like Bianca and Leela, this helps Jalaarnava to listen to her body which gives her a stronger awareness of her sexual self. Her journey homeward leads Jalaarnava to self-realization, especially regarding her sexual orientation. She reclaims her body with an exploration of menstruation and lesbianism in her sexual relationship with Nusrat. Thus, for Jalaarnava, coming home is as much about a journey as about a heightened bodily awareness.

Bianca's restless running is an expression of an unmoored identity to an unspoken need for ways of understanding the self in the context of a society which is experienced fundamentally as being hostile. The movement leads Bianca not only towards self-understanding but also self-preservation. She admits not knowing the goal of and the motive for her running. Nonetheless, she likens it to a homecoming, not in a geographic or historic sense, but in that sense of a projection into future possibilities.

As Charles E. Winquist puts it:

homecoming is not a return to the past but it is a becoming into the future. The natural self with which we seek a reunion is an unfinished self ... Homecoming is never completed because there is always a dimension of possibility that awaits its future actualization.

(9)

The daughters' quest for a home becomes a journey of learning to understand the past in order to appreciate the present and from that empowering position of knowledge to envision a future. The female characters' attempt to make sense of their lineage and their socio-historical and cultural legacy implies not only a search for rootedness but also a search for a sense of historical and cultural belonging. This, in turn, constitutes a means of dis-identifying with a society which is experienced as alienating. To some extent, the characters' efforts to be aware of the past and their ability to draw meaningfully from it are part of their survival project. It can be argued that in their articulation of being

different, characters such as Aisha and Beth in “Chiaroscuro”, Daphine in “Leave taking” and Susan in “Basin” are engaged in a process of self-affirmation and validation which seeks to destabilize the disempowered sense of self fostered in them from the repeated negative social experiences they have endured.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been concerned with the representation in plays by Winsome Pinnock, Zindika, Trish Cooke, Tanika Gupta, Paulette Randall, Maya Chowdry, G. B. Rose, Rukhsana Ahmad, Jackie Kay, Grace Dayley, Jacqueline Rudet and Maria Oshodi of the migratory and diasporic experience of first-generation Black and Asian women migrants. It examines the effect of migration on these women's lives, on those who remained in their homeland and subsequently on their daughters. It explores the tensions between mothers and daughters and the ways in which they respectively negotiate their identities in Britain. The influence of displacement is a major factor shaping the mothers' existence right from their arrival in Britain. The thesis investigates their sense of dislocation as they cross physical and metaphorical borders, giving particular emphasis to the specific social, cultural, and psychological positions they occupy in their new environment. For example, Enid in "Leave-Taking", Maria in "Back Street Mammy" and Martha in "Paper and Stone" undergo a sense of displacement as they move from the rural background of their homelands to the industrial and metropolitan heartlands of Britain. In "Song for a Sanctuary", cultural, social and class-related displacement is experienced by Rajinder in the refuge where she temporarily stays with her children.

The first-generation female characters are reluctant to share their past with their daughters on account of their desire to start a new life and because of

their endeavour to focus on the present in order to enable the daughters to be rooted in their new environment. However, this policy is not always satisfactory for the daughters. The thesis shows that when failing to receive clear orientation from their biological mothers, characters such as Del, Mina, and others turn to obeahs for guidance. Thus, the daughters rely upon female/maternal mediation to have a better understanding of the world. The obeahs in the plays promote a meaningful relationship with older women, acting as symbolic mothers to the younger female characters. The ensuing relationship of “entrustment” offers reciprocal benefits for both obeahs and symbolic daughters. It is a relationship that in most cases brings growth and healing to the women. Although plays such as “Leonora’s Dance” and “Leave Taking” highlight the difficulty in perpetuating female cultural inheritance in a changing diasporic world they demonstrate that such action is still viable through a break with tradition and adapting to circumstances. Despite the fact that Del does not share any filial relationship with May, as is the case too with Frieda and Daphine, both obeahs adopt the girls as symbolic daughters through their bestowal of power and material possessions upon them. In doing so, they demonstrate to the younger female generation the importance of maintaining a matrilineal heritage.

A point that has been raised in the course of the thesis is the disjunction which exists between the daughters’ and the mothers’ worlds (see chapter two). The daughters do not share their mothers’ system of values, that is, in the case of Black women values derived from the world of the Church

with its traditional associations and unquestioned respect for elders. To some extent in plays such as “Chiaroscuro”, “Rose’s Story”, “Back Street Mammy” and “Basin”, the younger female characters seem to define themselves against a context determined by their female elders, a fact which partly contributes to their alienation from their mothers’ values. This is reinforced by their being deprived of any notion of their maternal past which leads to alienation from their homeland. Alienation from their mothers’ values and homeland does not however guarantee the daughters’ inclusion in their adoptive country.

The British-born characters in the plays are estranged from their adoptive country because of racism. They respond to the situation in different ways. On the one hand, there are a set of characters such as Angela in “24%” and Del in “Leave-Taking” who reject conformity and adopt a politics of resistance as a defence against the injustice of the racism they have to endure. On the other hand, there are characters such as Dawn and Brenda in “Paper and Stone” and Viv in “Leave-Taking” who value conformity and seek education as an instrument for better integration into British society.

Part of the women’s plan to be “fit” for and to “fit into” their new world involves adapting the body to meet the normative standards of white physical ideals. The inability to meet these ideals leads these characters to self-hatred. Due to their mixed-race status, Leonora and Opal have difficulty in coming to terms with the Black side of their identity. While

their physical appearance leads them to be described as Black, their psychic identification and cultural image lie in being white. In Leonora's case, the persistent self-hate and internalized racism derived from this dilemma are embodied in the constant presence of Medusa nagging her, and prompting her subsequent breakdown. Characters such as Opal and Leonora struggle with their sense of self because of the failing of the collective social body to support them in achieving a positive identity. Thus, plays such as "Chiaroscuro" and "Leonora's Dance" suggest that identity is not self-given, but relational.

We have seen that a tendency to dissociate oneself from members of one's group is a consequence of self-hate. In "Leonora's Dance", Leonora projects her self-hate onto Daphine and establishes a border between herself as a subject and Daphine as the "other". The problematic concept of the subject "I" and the object "other" also comes into play in the treatment of the Black body, particularly in the scene where Judy strips on stage in "Money to Live". The scene raises the issue of the extent to which Black women like Judy can be the subjects of their own performing. One wonders whether Judy's self-exposure on stage suggests an inherent self-hatred. Moreover, characters such as Martha transfer their self-hatred onto their daughters. Martha considers her long-lost daughter (Juliet) as an extended embodiment of the white man who raped her. The daughter then comes to represent a partial incarnation of the resented colonial master, the despised racialised other who sets in train the mother's dissociation from her own flesh and blood.

However, recourse to the body as a means of self-empowerment is evident in the lives of younger female characters, namely Leela in “Talking in Tongues”, Del in “Leave-Taking” and Rose in “Rose’s Story”. Leela’s walks are self-empowering. They enable her to be better attuned to her body, to stave off the feeling of alienation she previously had in relation to it. In short, the walks equip her with strategies which foster self-appreciation and self-acceptance. As for Del and Rose, they utilize their bodies in an attempt to exert agency over their lives. In this context, becoming pregnant is an act of empowerment and a means of escaping the oppressive nature of home.

For the daughters who remain at home, mothers impose womanly ideals – rooted in hegemonic models of desirable womanhood. My analysis suggests that some Black mothers in the plays are portrayed as believing that marriage and motherhood are synonymous with fulfilled womanhood despite the failure of their own married lives. The daughters resist the mothers’ concept of an “ideal” woman by enacting other versions of womanhood. Del and Rose suggest the viability of single motherhood. Tasleema in “Fragile Land” relies on education to oppose her mother’s idea of the right kind of womanhood. Judy in “Money to Live” expresses different ways of being a woman in the sex industry while others such as Yomi and Opal in “Chiaroscuro” reject compulsory heterosexuality and explore other dimensions of their sexuality.

The issue of conforming to particular versions of femininity is dealt with variously in the plays. In the cases of Martha in "Paper and Stone" and Enid in "Leave-Taking", the mother-daughter conflict over the "right" model of womanhood is resolved by the mothers' gradual acceptance of their daughters' choices, whereas in Rose's case, her mother's inability to acknowledge Rose's alternative development leads to the break-up of the relationship between mother and daughter. In some plays, the daughters themselves become mothers as a result of their enactment of womanhood. Dynette, Rose and Del each view motherhood as a positive influence in their self-development.

One way in which the second-generation become independent of their mothers' grip on their lives is through committing symbolic matricide, killing off the mother metaphorically-speaking in order to obtain their independence. Daughters such as Savita and Brenda metaphorically commit matricide either by figuratively distancing themselves from their mothers or by literally leaving the maternal home. For Rose, Del and Dynette, becoming pregnant is part of this metaphorical matricidal act which leads to a life beyond dyadic dependence, ironically partly into a new dyadic form, where, however, they are the mothers rather than the daughters. The daughters' attitudes provoke anger in the mothers, an emotion that is often overlooked in many accounts of mothering as it runs counter to cultural expectations of the good, caring mother. In sum, the daughters' metaphorical act of matricide, through their affirmation of

independence, leads the daughters to step from filial relationships into peer societies.

We saw that plays such as “Basin”, “Money to Live”, “Chiaroscuro” and “Monsoon” explore the significance of friendship for the British-born characters whose lives, unlike their parents’, have not been determined by actual migration. Their ability to grasp one another’s reality favours bonding amongst themselves, and helps them survive the hardships of day-to-day living. Due to their common experience of being born on the far shore of the family’s migration and given the social injustices they suffer, the second-generation characters move into a peer community in which they are involved in a network of support that takes on the role of caring which the family originally assumed. The community that emerges from these friendships, made in times of hardship, is an affirming one. It plays a major role in the education and growth of the characters. It helps nurture their sense of self-understanding, solidarity and “sisterhood”. However, the question remains whether the pursuit of sisterhood is merely utopian – perhaps a polemical device used by Black women writers – or whether it can really engender actual transformation in the friendships and lives of Black women today. Even if it can, a tension between identity and difference persists.

Friendship is just one means by which the characters in the plays further self-understanding. Reaching back to the past with a view to negotiating its meaning represents another opportunity for self-growth. For instance, a

review of the past is crucial for those female characters who have a prior experience of life back home. Characters such as Enid and Leonora have to confront their past in order to free themselves from their unresolved feelings. Upon her mother's death, for example, Enid is finally released from the past as she manages to share with her daughter her memories and her failed dreams. On the other hand, Leonora's forced confrontation with the past occurs when her mother comes to England. Frieda unearths emotions tied to the past – those surrounding the circumstances of the death of Leonora's father – which Leonora has tried to repress for a long time.

One way employed by Leonora to avoid facing the past is the use of selective remembering through repressing the disturbing traumatic memories that make up her past. As a result, Leonora remains stuck in her own delusions as she is unable to reconcile herself with her tormented past. Grace in "Running Dream" marks her confrontation with the past by her physical return to her homeland, and makes reconciliation with the past by taking up the matrilineal legacy. Similarly Jal and Leela's trip to India and Jamaica respectively provides them with the opportunity to explore their identities. Home acts as a necessary passage to regenerate the unsettled self. It becomes a site of awakening which is part of the processual unfolding of an identity subject to constant change.

However, there is also the case of those who regain an awareness of the past without going back to the place of origin. Daphne and Del connect

with their past and maternal culture through obeahs who encourage them to forge connection with their matrilineal heritage. Where both “Leonora’s Dance” and “Leave Taking” posit that a break with one’s past leads to disintegration as the cases of Leonora and Viv would suggest, in the opening scene of “Chiaroscuro”, Yomi, Aisha, Beth and Opal celebrate continuity with the past through recalling their personal histories with a particular emphasis on their connection to their female forebears.

Yet another way of dealing with the past is shown by characters such as Olive in “Money to Live”, Martha in “Paper and Stone” and Georgia in “Every Bit of It” who confront their past not with the aim of coming to terms with it but rather so as to explore the consequences of living part of one’s life as a lie. Olive discloses the truth about her past sexual life to Charlene in order to show empathy but also to establish a constructive relationship with her daughter – whereas mulling over the past enables Martha in “Paper and Stone” to recognise her own errors and gives her the courage to search for her lost children. In the same vein, Georgia looks to the past as a source for improving the present in “Every Bit of It”.

The final chapter of this thesis highlights how moving from the past to the present has a significant impact on the characters’ self-understanding. For the first generation, adapting to their new circumstances in Britain represents an opportunity for self-actualisation. Moreover, the act of raising their daughters on their own in a new territory, for example, contributes to a self-reflexive process of self-constitution. On the other

hand, second-generation characters such as Grace (“Running Dream”), Viv (“Leave-Taking”), Aisha and Yomi (“Chiaroscuro”) re-connect with the past either by returning to their homeland and reuniting with relatives left behind or by embracing their maternal cultural heritage or by attempting to recover a heroic past initiated by their female forebears. This metaphoric and physical homecoming influences the characters’ present in that it helps strengthen their filial identity, rehabilitate their unsettled self and give affirmation to a positive, transfigured image of blackness.

Through their concerns about telling the fictional stories of first-generation Black women migrants and their British-born daughters, the playwrights strive to give presence and a voice to Black female characters who have been rendered invisible within hegemonic theatre. Indeed, among the foremost aims of Black and Asian women playwrights is the desire to present more than a one-dimensional portrayal of Black and Asian women, of preventing misrepresentation, and of avoiding stereotypes that encourage static understandings of their experiences. Plays such as Rudet’s “Money to Live” for example provide an intervention against a fossilized stereotype of Black femininity. This is particularly evident in the scene where Judy teaches Charlene how to strip. According to the stage directions, Judy instructs Charlene to parody the expected sexual behaviour:

Charlene's room, one early evening. Pulsating, sensual dance music plays, while a strobe of light flashes on and off. Judy is teaching Charlene a few moves. Both wear typical costumes. Judy is instructing the sexiest way to uncover breasts. Judy demonstrates. Charlene attempts, Judy motions that it's not right. Charlene puts her top piece back on and tries again. Judy motions that she's got it right this time. (165)

A Black performer is constantly characterized by external markers such as gender and colour. In this scene, Judy and Charlene foreground the constructed conceptualization of the gender/racial sign-systems but attempt to re-produce Black femininity as a “show” of refusal. In other words, their repetitive rehearsals of the “stripping” scene aim at deconstructing the fixity of blackness and femaleness. Judy and Charlene use their bodies as a strategy which enables them to create a subversive register.

However, the opportunities for Black and Asian theatre to develop and to assert these *raisons d'être* are scarce in British theatre. In 2002, American writer Maya Angelou remarked that the “English theatre’s shortsightedness reminded her of America in the 1960s” (Chrisafis). In the same vein, Yvonne Brewster relates her experience: “In 1956, I was the first full-time, Black female drama student in England. I was told by my drama school: ‘We’ll take your money, but you’ll never work.’ I can’t believe 50 years later, the same story rings true” (Ibid.). Paulette Randall

reinforces a similar argument when she observes that “Black theatre isn’t part of the English theatrical world” (Pool).

The particular issue of the invisibility of Black theatre was raised in the “Eclipse” conference of June 2001¹. Afro-Caribbean and Asian artists attending the conference expressed frustration about high-quality Black and Asian work not being seen on the main stages. This exclusion is conveyed in many areas of Black theatre. One of the major issues facing it is the absence of a theatre building run by a Black director². Black artists in the theatre world have been fighting for a permanent base for Black theatre because they have been denied a symbol which specifies, at least, their physical belonging to the British theatrical scene. Anton Phillips, a Black director, explains the importance of this set-up for Black artists through his insistence that “without our own buildings we will always be marginalised” (Chrisafis). Brewster asserts the vital necessity of such a structure: “A Black building is crucial if we are to attract Black audiences into English theatres, and create plays that don’t have to be filtered through a white prism” (ibid.). Indeed, the 1999/2000 Arts Council

¹ The Arts Council of England in collaboration with the East Midlands Arts Board, Theatrical Management Association and the Nottingham Playhouse organized a conference designed to develop strategies to combat racism in theatre at the Haymarket Theatre in Leicester. The conference took place on 12 and 13 June 2001.

² Tara Arts, the Asian Theatre Company, has now acquired its own permanent South London home.

statistics show that of 2009 staff jobs in English theatre only 80 were held by Black or Asian workers. Nicholas Kent, artistic director of the Tricycle Theatre in Kilburn mentions that since “Black people are not being encouraged to take up stage management or administration ... most Black companies have white administrators” (Kellaway). While there has been an improvement in the casting of Black actors, many are still relegated to theatrical invisibility due to a lack of roles; moreover, those who have been trained in the know-how of the trade such as stage managers, technicians and administrators still remain almost wholly white. As a result, the aims of plays which are artistically designed to examine the concerns, yearnings, history, culture and relationships of Black and Asian people are not always adequately conveyed as the playwrights themselves do not have full authority over matters that concern their world in the first place. This is evident in Brewster’s disapproval of the whims of the theatre establishment in dictating what is appropriate: “We’re tired of being told by white theatre managers that ‘hip hop is really now.’” (Chrisafis)

It is this simplistic reduction of Black theatre to certain trends and the desire to find a space for Black women’s voices that has partly motivated Black women artists such as Brewster to promote Black women’s work. As Parmar points out, the tendency is that Black women are “being cast into the role of the Other, marginalized, discriminated against, and too often invisible, not only within everyday discourses of affirmation but also within the ‘grand narratives’ of European thought” (58). The plays by

these women playwrights present alternative realities, realities that are endowed with new issues and a diversity of voices that remain invisible within European “grand narratives”.

These plays are important not least because there is a sense in which theatre is perceived to hold up a mirror to the society in which it flourishes. What it displays it legitimates. As a result, if audiences do not see characters that represent them or look like them on stage they may feel excluded, which may in turn have the effect of reinforcing their status as outsiders in society. In A New World Order, Caryl Phillips, a second-generation Black British man from the Caribbean, draws attention to the difference between first- and second-generation immigrants, and appeals for a legitimate space for Blacks in British society:

By the 1970s their children’s generation, my generation, was still being subjected to the same prejudices which had blighted their arrival, but we were not our parents. You might say we lacked their good manners and their ability to turn the other cheek. Whereas they could sustain themselves with the dream of one day ‘going home’, we were already at home. We had nowhere else to go and we needed to tell British society this. (242)

Phillips declares his generation’s determination to assert that Britain is also his home. Black and Asian women’s performances and playwriting

are, in a way, part of this second-generation migrants' communication of "assertiveness".

Their use of theatre as a means of communication is important because theatre is connected to the wider social and cultural context and has a political relevance especially in the world of ethnic minorities. To borrow Paulette Randall's words, theatre is "a platform for making change, on a political and a personal level" (Pool). To some extent, the playwrights conduct the emancipatory act of re-defining Britishness through their work. In the same vein, contemporary Black and Asian women writers such as Zadie Smith and Meera Syal have played a significant role in giving voice to other kinds of new literary works that are part of British culture.

However, unlike these few major non-white writers who stand out in multicultural Britain, Black women playwrights have not yet achieved a significant level of recognition in British theatre. The observation raises the question whether a cultural mind-shift – involving a particular way of seeing that allows for a discussion of racial, ethnic, gender and other social markers – is needed for Black drama to be appreciated properly³.

For instance, having considered how to make British stages more

³ In the remarks that follow, I will restrict myself to a discussion of a mind-shift by the producers of Black theatre. However, it should be noted that consumers of drama – the paying public, and particularly Black men and women – may also need to perform this mind-shift.

inclusive so as to reflect the diversity offered by playwrights, delegates at the Eclipse conference suggested ways to promote this diversity. They thought that "theatres need ... to embrace and acknowledge the validity of other cultures, perspectives and theatrical forms. It is essential that organizational development includes enhancing inclusion, developing Equal Opportunities practice and taking positive action in the workforce This would lead to an enriched theatrical experience, with the very real potential for revitalizing theatres and attracting new audiences."⁴

Nevertheless, some would argue that a mind-shift is already under way and that it tends to be known as multiculturalism. For this reason, "reflecting diversity", "breaking down barriers", "building new audiences" and "exploring ethnicity" are the buzzwords belonging nowadays to arts funders and practitioners. Increasingly, arts organisations seek to fund and showcase diverse artists, and employ specialist ethnic agencies to promote arts events to specific communities. For example, London Arts' Cultural Diversity Action Plan makes a commitment "to reflect the cultural diversity of London's artists and audiences across the full range of our funding" and "to act as an advocate for cultural diversity in the arts and the wider world."⁵ (17)

From one point of view, this represents a timely opening up of the capital's cultural life. Indeed, Black and Asian theatre groups show their

⁴ See www.artscouncil.org.uk/information/publicationdetail

⁵ See www.artscouncil.org.uk/downloads/information/culturaldiversityactionplan

work in many parts of the UK, albeit not everywhere and only intermittently. Theatre companies like Tara Arts and Tamasha show how the migrant or immigrant experience provides fertile ground for artistic exploration. The Black representation of experiences – such as love, loss, conflict and tension – common to all humanity can broaden theatre's horizons, refine its sensibilities, and enable many people – both Black and white, male and female – to live more informed and fulfilled lives. That arts organisations are now promoting cultural events to a broader range of people who might not otherwise go to theatres could indeed enrich British cultural life.

But does this all amount to something as fundamental as a cultural mind-shift? Might not the practice of organising policy on the basis of people's identities subvert the aims of Black theatre? Defining particular kinds of "culturally diverse" drama that should be consciously supported tends to result in the relative poverty of pigeon-holing certain groups. For instance, playwrights or directors are seen as Asian playwrights or Black directors; theatre-goers are defined in terms of their ascribed cultural group. As Tanika Gupta complains: "You get these separate awards ceremonies. Asian Woman of Achievement, the Ethnic Multicultural Media Awards – but then we don't get nominated for the mainstream awards. It still feels very much as if the theatre industry and TV and film really take only their own work seriously – meaning white work ... But we should be in the

mainstream as well; we should be everywhere, and I think that is beginning to happen, slowly, slowly”⁶.

Kristine Landon-Smith, the director of Tamasha Theatre Company, aired her own condemnation in the Review section of The Independent on 16 January, 2004:

Why are we still treated as part of a collective, of a movement labeled ‘Asian theatre’ or ‘British Asian theatre’? This categorization is simply not useful. It implies a particular form or approach that sets Tamasha’s work apart from that of other mid-scale touring companies. Complicité are “physical theatre”, Trestle are “mask theatre”, Out of Joint are “new writing” – and Tamasha is an “Asian” company. The difference is that the former are categorised by their art-form, while Tamasha is categorized by its ethnicity. (30)

Rather than opening up national cultural life, and giving Black theatre the platform to express itself more freely, and enabling more people to appreciate different ideas and different culture, cultural diversity policy could actually end up ghettoizing Black dramatists.

A further argument is that these policies might also affect artistic judgement, which is founded on a focused consideration of the play itself,

⁶ See <http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/theatre/interviews/article110384.ece>.

in its own terms. Cultural diversity policy is likely to shift attention away from the quality of art, or the quality of artistic experience, and on to the kinds of people engaging in it. The question of whether a playwright deserves funding is not only decided on the basis of their plays, but also on the basis of their cultural identity; hence, the question is raised of whether there is a tokenistic element to the promotion of Black and Asian theatre – giving groups recognition and funding that they may have not won had their art been judged dispassionately.

I think when the argument is pressed to this point it betrays the less than complete conviction with which multicultural projects are pursued in this country. It reminds the Black British theatrical community that the actual implementation of multiculturalism is impoverished by too many vested interests encouraging white leaders of the industry not to risk power-sharing with Black and Asian theatre. Put simply, they prefer to allow Black dramatists occasional opportunities rather than have them woven into the very fabric of theatrical life. As the Eclipse Conference noted, the absence of dispassionate judging actually works against Black theatre for “if the artistic directors are white Europeans from a traditional theatre background, then their knowledge base and their cultural perspective about what constitutes ‘good plays’ will be biased against culturally-diverse work”⁷.

⁷ See www.artscouncil.org.uk/information/publicationdetail

This is why a more authentic mind-shift is required before Black theatre can make a sustained break-through. When the break-through comes, it will be signaled by Black female playwrights' own work in the West End, and not their re-working of "borrowed" material as happened with Gupta's adaptation of Brighouse's early twentieth-century play, "Hobson's Choice", for the Young Vic in 2003.⁸ Departing from the practice of seeing the play from a Eurocentric perspective, Gupta gave it a multicultural facelift, turning Hobson into an Asian tailor-business owner with three daughters who help him run the shop for no wages, but the play's raw material still belonged to a white British male born in the Victorian era, a high point of colonialism.

In conclusion, for all multiculturalism's achievement in widening people's horizons and amplifying their field of knowledge it is not an all-purpose solution to the issue of the marginalization of Black voices in British theatre. Whereas the Eurocentric measure of assessment has its limits, multiculturalism also has a potential to enmesh us in limits of its own. One lies in the fact that its promotion of inclusion may weaken the very cultural differences that make up the crucial components that define people, not to mention its awkwardness in handling complicated cultural experience in manageable theatrical units, ensuring a play's accessibility as well as its "authenticity". However, one corrective to the problems of multiculturalism is perhaps to reach outside its boundaries in order to be

⁸ In a related field, Gurinder Chadha's Bollywood film version of Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice called "Bride and Prejudice" is another example.

sensitively open to other (theatrical) truths which need to be acknowledged and embraced. The key to the future of Black and Asian British theatre may lie in such a reconfiguring.

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