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# 'Wondering if I'm Home': The Road to Selfhood in Jackie Kay's Prose and Poetry. A Creative Study of Fiere, Red Dust Road and The Adoption Papers

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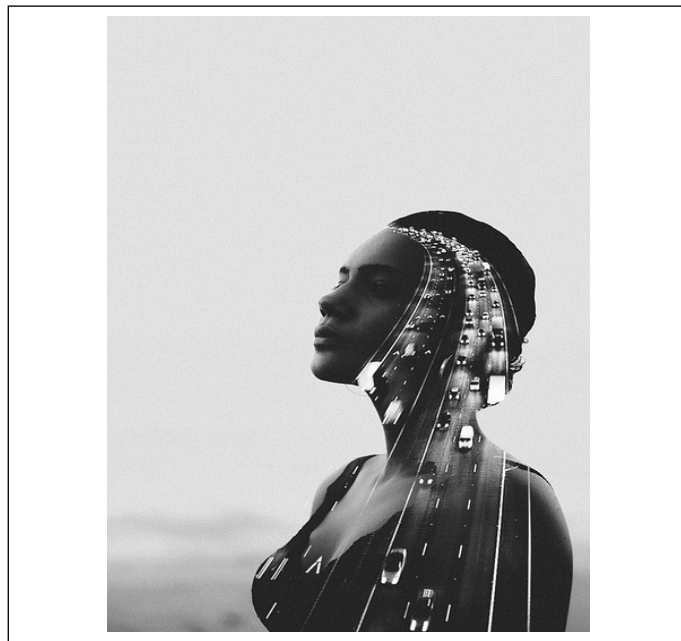


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AIX-MARSEILLE UNIVERSITE  
Département d'Etudes du Monde Anglophone (DEMA)

**'Wondering if I'm Home': The Road to Selfhood in Jackie Kay's  
Prose and Poetry.**

*A Creative Study of Fiere, Red Dust Road and The Adoption Papers.*



Mémoire présenté en vue de la validation de la deuxième année de

Master Études Culturelles du Monde Anglophone

Par

**Klaudia KOPIASZ**

Sous la direction de

**Pr. Marie-Odile HEDON**

LERMA – EA 853

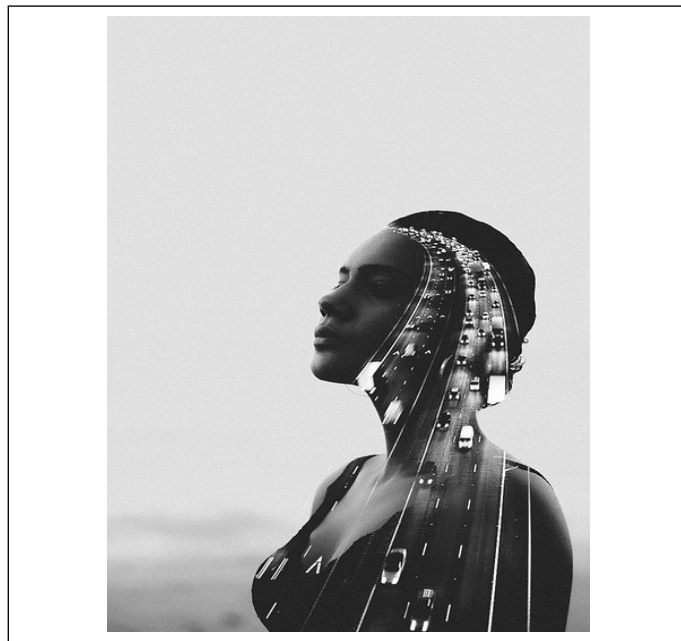
Session de juin 2022



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## Table of Contents

|  |        |
|--|--------|
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....  | - 7 -  |
| <b>CHAPTER 1</b> .....   | - 12 - |
| <b><i>'A windy place at the core of my heart': the adoption journey</i></b> .....                          | - 12 - |
| <b>A – Dislocation: m/other and Scotland</b> .....   | - 12 - |
| 'Bringing up an alien child': adoption in the 1960s.....   | - 12 - |
| From babyhood to childhood: nature vs. nurture and the conflict of identities.....                         | - 16 - |
| The impact of family and memory on identity formation.....   | - 19 - |
| <b>B – The 'self' and the 'other': adopting m/other selves</b> .....                                       | - 21 - |
| Between a ghost and real figure: the birth and adoptive mothers .....                                      | - 21 - |
| She is 'faceless': tracking and imagining a birth mother .....   | - 23 - |
| Filling in the gaps of fragmented identity through maternal perspectives.....                              | - 27 - |
| Accessing trauma or/and seeking ontological security.....  | - 32 - |
| The role of women in the daughter's appropriation of (cultural) identity .....                             | - 38 - |
| <b>CHAPTER 2</b> .....   | - 45 - |
| <b><i>'The long and winding road': roots, routes and crossroads</i></b> .....                              | - 45 - |
| <b>A – Reconnecting roots (routes) in Africa</b> .....   | - 45 - |
| Identity quest and the act of mapping the face.....  | - 45 - |
| 'My waiting footprints': Adopting African heritage vs. a further desire for belonging and recognition..... | - 49 - |
| The 'mixture of myth and gene': 'Drawing' and 'constructing' Africa .....                                  | - 52 - |
| When reality intervenes: meeting the Nigerian father, or the 'painful homecoming' .....                    | - 56 - |
| The struggle to belong: an encounter with the local people in 'Ukpor Market' .....                         | - 59 - |
| <b>B – Somewhere between</b> .....   | - 61 - |
| Convergence, fluidity and continuum in 'Black River' and 'Between the Dee and the Don' ...                 | - 62 - |
| Personal and communal: memory and oral tradition(s) .....  | - 66 - |
| Roots and routes: the intersection of national and ethnic identities on the 'hot red, dust road' ...       | - 70 - |
| <b>C – Going on and on: a never-ending journey</b> .....   | - 72 - |
| The old and new paths and selves in 'Road to Amaudo' .....   | - 72 - |
| An infinite journey: the symbolic meaning(s) of the moringa tree.....                                      | - 75 - |
| Moving across genres: identity, writing, and multiformity .....  | - 77 - |
| <b>Chapter 3: 'Another road to go on': writing the voice, voicing identity</b> .....                       | - 80 - |

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| A – ‘A voice that captures your own complexities’: language and identity .....                    | - 80 -  |
| Embracing the Scottish voice(s) and the fear of losing the mother tongue in ‘Old Tongue’ ....     | - 81 -  |
| Scottish voice and ‘black pen’: a linguistic challenge .....                                      | - 85 -  |
| Musicality and linguistic identity in Kay’s poems: ‘a Black voice that is Scottish and blue’ .... | - 91 -  |
| The voice <i>of</i> and <i>from</i> Scotland: Jackie Kay as the Scots Makar.....                  | - 94 -  |
| Above the space of writing: performance, performativity and poetry.....                           | - 97 -  |
| The road to change: destabilising boundaries, broadening horizons .....                           | - 100 - |
| <b>Conclusion</b> .....   | - 103 - |
| <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....   | - 106 - |
| <b>ICONOGRAPHY</b> .....  | - 115 - |

## INTRODUCTION

‘Roads were made for journeys, not destinations.’

Confucius

Who am I? How can we narrate our lives if our identities are constantly shifting? In her works, Jackie Kay invites the reader to explore the complexity of identity and story-telling through her multigeneric writing. According to Jane Gray, “[q]uestions of identity—or more appropriately of identities—are at the core of much of Jackie Kay’s writing, and are often intimately linked to the writer’s personal experience of being Scottish, Black and adopted.” (Gray 155)

It is worth observing that many academic writers have laid emphasis on Jackie Kay’s multiple “selves” and used a number of labels to define her. In Ph.D. theses by Cassie Adjei (University of Warwick) and Karen Elizabeth Cocannon (University of Leeds), she is listed among other “black British” writers. Her works are further analysed in several scholarly works and anthologies devoted to the study of black Britishness, diasporic cultures and Scottish women’s writing. Although those categories are frequently used to gather works by the different authors and provide the reader with a gist of what the collection of texts is about, they nonetheless seem reductive. In her interviews, Jackie Kay often refers to the critics’ tendency of putting a few categories after her name. She claims that:

They do ultimately become very dull, those terms, because they tend to box you in and give people an expectation of you. It’s liberating to define yourself if you are the one that’s doing the defining, but when other people are constantly doing the defining and when all they ever do is define the Other in society, the black person, the gay person, the woman, then they kind of assume by that that the white person, the heterosexual person and the man are the norm and everybody else deviates from that. So there’s constant categorisation, because you don’t get the likes of Ted Hughes or Andrew Motion constantly being described as white, male, middle-class and heterosexual. (Kay in Dyer 1999, 57)

As Kay’s works include autobiographical elements and address a number of labels sanctioned by society, they have been discussed in the light of the various ‘assumptions being made about her identity’. Due to ‘constant categorisation’, there exists the danger of overlooking some important questions raised by the author. Though labelling may at times seem to be inevitable,



it is important to perceive that her multigeneric writing represents a form of resistance to the repetitive act of categorisation. By breaking conventions and pushing boundaries within preconceived genres, the prolific writer allows the reader to call into question the already established modes and identities.

In order to analyse Kay's works in relation to their central theme which is that of identity, I would like to adopt a new perspective: instead of focusing on the so-called "categories of difference", I aim at identifying various – both real and imaginary – pathways constructed in her poetry and prose which will prove instrumental in my analysis of Kay's genre-bending exploration of selfhood. Inspired by Robert Frost's poem, *The Road Not Taken*, which dwells on the complexity of pathways, those already travelled and others yet unexplored, the author explains in the interview how roads can be interpreted in multiple ways:

Roads are physical and metaphorical. We think of them as two things at once, roads we walk along with our feet and ones we travel in our minds, destinations we set ourselves, and things we need to learn on our road through life. There are roads that we have only imagined, and there are forks in the road, and the roads you might have taken had it not been for this eventuality or that one.

The road constitutes a recurring motif in Kay's prose and poetry. It is referred to in the title of her memoir, *Red Dust Road* (2010), in which the author describes her quest for biological parents while reminiscing about various moments spent within her adoptive family. In her outstanding and poignant text, the word 'road' appears 81 times<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the subtitle of *Red Dust Road* is 'Autobiographical journey' which seems to suggest that the discovery and development of identity/identities are intrinsically linked to the exploration of various, ever-multiplying routes which make for the journey.

As her memoir deals with both identity and routes, so do her two collections of poetry, *The Adoption Papers* (1991) and *Fiere* (2011), in which Jackie Kay reuses the key themes of road and selfhood in order to show how they can function and be elaborated in both prose and poetry. The abundance of shared autobiographical elements in both her memoir and poetic forms, as well as the concomitant use of the two themes, thus enable the reader to read all her three works in tandem so as to identify the various strategies Jackie Kay uses to cross boundaries – be they geographical, generic or related to identity.

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<sup>1</sup> I have counted the number of recurrences of the word 'road' by using the free digital version of *Red Dust Road* from Internet Archive, and counting each appearing instance of the word which I found in the 'search' tab.

In this M2 thesis, I would like to explore the diverse ways in which identity is constructed through Kay's multigeneric writing and her use of 'road' trope. My objective is to analyse the image of the road Kay constructs in her prose and poetry, most notably the 'long and winding road' from identity confusion in *The Adoption Papers* to the new ways of multiplying, fantasizing, fictionalizing and liberating the self in the same collection as well as in *Fiere* and *Red Dust Road*. I aim to demonstrate that identity or rather identities are not fixed but rather mobile and shifting as they involve many layers of (de-/re-)reconstruction. Writing, travelling and identity formation should therefore be viewed as continuous and ever-renewed processes.

In the first chapter of my dissertation, I will show how the sense of displacement, experienced by the protagonist, affects her identity and is reflected through the writer's choice to include the different voices and cultural identities in *The Adoption Papers*. First, I will introduce the context of adoption in the 1960s in the UK in order to highlight the different challenges it posed up to the 1990s (the decade in which Kay's collection of poems was published). Second, by referring to transracial adoption, I would like to develop a more nuanced analysis of the double effects of displacement which will lead me to make an analogy between the two terms, 'mother' and 'Scotland'. As dislocation affects identity, it will also be important to call attention to the way the author portrays the coexisting notions of nature and nurture from the very first moments of the adoptee's life (babyhood) until childhood. This will allow me to demonstrate the tensions between biological and familial identities and eventually analyse the role of family and memory in the process of identity formation. How can the adoptee be sure about her identity if her past is nothing but a mist? Why is memory fundamental to self-identity? Adopting m/other selves will therefore be a way of revisiting the past. The second sub-chapter will explore the role of poetry in probing the depths of what Kay describes as a 'windy space'. One of the problems that I am going to address is whether the act of poeticizing one's experience and inviting many selves and voices to coexist can be perceived as a way of accessing trauma or/and seeking ontological security. Finally, in the third subchapter, I will argue that there is a relationship between women and cultural identity in *The Adoption Papers*. Moving from surrogate mothers to others, I will examine the extent to which the 'other' voices in Kay's collection of poems represent not only the adoptee's quest for identity and identification but also enable her to embark on the imaginary route through racism, oppression and 'othering'.

In the second part, the adoption journey in *The Adoption Papers* which explores the various aspects of imitation and appropriation will be linked to the autobiographical journey in

*Red Dust Road* as well as several poems from *Fiere*. By bringing those three works together, I will be able to reconnect the adoptee's roots (routes) with Africa. I aim at revealing the transition from the daughter's quest for knowledge about her roots to her sense of recognition and belonging which concerns Africa and its routes and crossroads (the latter referring to the intersections between the Nigerian heritage and Scottish culture expressed in the adoptee's depiction of the continent). By using the examples from *Red Dust Road* and *Fiere*, I will show that the protagonist uses both the real and the imaginary to depict her African identity and belonging. The author's descriptions of the African landscape will prove instrumental in the study of convergence, fluidity and continuum. In this chapter, I will also investigate the relationship between prose and poetry in relation to memory, identity, story-telling and life-writing. What types of observation can be drawn from the reading of Jackie Kay's memoir and poems being the two 'different but complementary paths'? Another possible correlation – that of identity and movement – will be discussed in relation to the writing practice.

Ultimately, the last chapter of my dissertation will cover the relationship between identity and voice as well as identity and performance. In the first sub-part, I will examine Kay's search for a voice that can account for her multiple identities. I will explore the different strategies that the author introduces in her poetry in order to embrace the Scottish voice while bearing in mind the different limits and fears which may occur during the construction of identity. This will lead me to ponder the next stages of Kay's linguistic battle: how she can develop a black voice if she was brought up in a predominantly white Scottish environment? Eventually, in the last sub-chapter, I will try to address the following questions: what kind of voice does Jackie Kay adopt through the musicality of her poetry? How does her voluntary practice of moving across texts and genres contribute to the creation of her voice that is 'Scottish, black and blue'? We shall also observe the power of her voice, as well as her body language, in her outstanding readings and performances of her poetry. Indeed, through the performativity of her poetry which moves from page to stage, she delineates her capacity to stage, perform and put in motion various identities.

In order to analyse the author's complex and creative re-working of identity vis-à-vis the road motif, I will adopt an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from literary analysis, history, psychology, memory studies, race studies, performance studies, and linguistics. The plurality of those methodological tools testifies to efforts that should be made in order to capture and analyse the multiplicity of themes, problems, and observations that arise while one is approaching the depth and richness of Kay's works. Indeed, analysing her prose and poetry requires journeying between genres, concepts and disciplines: Jackie Kay opens up the roads

to the readers, asking them not to choose one or two of them, as in Robert Frost's poem, but rather enjoy the rich multidirectional quality of human experience.

## CHAPTER 1

### ‘A windy place at the core of my heart’: the adoption journey

This chapter aims to ‘reconstruct’ the image of the road and the various strategies Kay uses in order to represent the life paths that the protagonist from *The Adoption Papers* takes in order to assert her identity. Moving from the past to the present, from one viewpoint to another, the writer adopts a back-and-forth movement throughout her collection of poems, inviting the reader to embark on a twisting, challenging and multi-layered route towards identity, belonging and acceptance: the adoption journey.

#### A – Dislocation: m/other and Scotland

##### ‘Bringing up an alien child’: adoption in the 1960s

In *The Adoption Papers*, Jackie Kay explores the predicament of adoption, while subtly referring to the realities of the 1960s in the UK and, more particularly, Scotland. It should be noted that the act of bringing up another child as one’s own was not recognised by the law until 1926 in England and 1930 in Scotland (Görey 127). The enactment of the Adoption Law in those two countries enabled foster families to raise non-related children and empowered private charities with the responsibility for giving away the abandoned, orphaned, or illegitimate babies to prospective and respectable families. After the Second World War and the introduction of new pieces of legislation, such as the Adoption of Children Act 1950, adoption became less a private matter than a public service supervised and regulated by the local authorities and the court (Northern Ireland Assembly 2). In the 1950s and especially in the 1960s, the number of adopted babies in the UK and Scotland reached its peak.

In *The Adoption Papers*, the author examines the legislative nature of adoption. The title of her work implies that becoming a parent of a non-related child is a complex and administrative process that requires a number of official documents. The adoptive mother bitterly observes that she is ‘not a mother until [she has] signed that piece of paper’ (Kay 16). In ‘The Birth Certificate’, her daughter, who is now a young adult, enquires about her past and wants to see her birth certificate. It should be noted that accessing one’s birth entry had long been problematic since the records were either lost or unavailable. In 1975, a debate took place

in Parliament on whether the adopted person who wished to know their birth details should be entitled to see the document without recourse to the court (Hodgkins). By mentioning the different official papers attached to the process of adoption, Jackie Kay reflects on how judicial matters may determine our identity.

Since adoption had become a public service and an important issue of social and political concern, the suitability of potential adoptive parents was measured by professionalised social workers. The writer refers to this phenomenon in 'The Waiting Lists' when she describes the character's struggle to be accepted by agencies as a candidate for a child. In order to fulfil her dream of becoming a mother, she has to pass the 'test' of suitability. Several criteria are taken into account by the social workers in order to verify her eligibility. The author mentions religion, political party and salary as the main determiners:

The first agency we went to  
didn't want us on their lists,  
we didn't live close enough to a church  
nor were we church-goers  
(though we kept quiet about being communists).  
The second told us  
we weren't high enough earners. (1-7)

Interestingly enough, those three criteria cast a light on both the situation of the future adoptive parents and the realities of 1960s Scotland. First, during the McCarthy era and the Cold War, there existed, even in the UK, an atmosphere of resentment towards Communists, according to a commonly upheld consensus that 'religion must be Christian, politics non-Communist' (qtd. in Harper and Porter 236).

It is worth observing that most adoptees would be given away to prosperous and respectable families. Adoption had become a 'predominantly middle-class activity' and a crucial subject of numerous debates around the question of infant welfare, the parents' suitability as well as the integration of the children within a specific family, and, more largely, society. In order to provide minors with better living conditions, the local authorities were persuaded to choose those candidates with higher salaries. In her 1991 collection of poems, Jackie Kay problematises the parents' eligibility by bringing attention to - and even satirising - those criteria which the Glaswegian couple does not meet. Through a comic description of the social worker's visit in 'The Waiting Lists', she portrays adoption as a highly codified procedure with pre-conceived social rules to which the parents-to-be have to conform (Kay 14-16).

The Swinging Sixties saw an increased interest in adoption and, paradoxically, decreased availability of babies. Prior to that decade, numerous infants had been left parentless. The reason for their abandonment was most often related to the situation of unmarried women who could not afford to raise their children on their own (Northern Ireland Assembly 2). Stigmatised by their families as well as society, mothers were sometimes forced to give away their babies. The existence of agencies had been a means for women to overcome the ‘social problem’ as much as it provided childless parents with an opportunity to grow their families (*Ibid.*). In *The Adoption Papers*, the birth mother is said to be a nineteen-year-old waitress from Aberdeen involved in a romantic relationship with a Nigerian student. Months later, their baby comes into the world, yet the young woman who has lost touch with her boyfriend decides to give up the baby for adoption. Her decision raises a number of questions in the reader’s mind and calls our attention to the context of the 1960s. Though the level of stigma towards pre-marital pregnancies was decreasing, some women who gave birth to children out of wedlock were still likely to suffer from social harassment.

By the mid-60s, and up to the end of the second half of the decade, maternal and infant welfare improved, new methods of birth control occurred, and unmarried women who had babies became less and less an object of prejudice and criticism within British society (*Ibid.* 2-3). As a result, fewer babies were available in the agencies; yet this did not prevent the financially stable and reputable couples from demanding their parental rights. In ‘The Waiting Lists’, Jackie Kay evokes the problem of adoption availability when referring to the character’s struggle to find a child. The mother goes from agency to agency and learns that they are either ‘full up’ or have a ‘five-year waiting list’ (1991 14). It is only when she claims that she does not ‘mind the colour’ that the agency succeeds in finding an adoptee for her (*Ibid.*).

From the 1960s onwards, the question of adoption had not been left out of the public eye and become even more challenged with a small but growing number of transracial adoptions (McLeod 213-214). The question of mixed-race fostering incited a number of political and social debates. In her poetic work, Jackie Kay calls the reader’s attention to the unwarranted racism of the social workers who would not inform white families about the possibility of applying for interracial adoption. The placement of children of colour proved to be challenging for numerous adoption agencies and eventually, some of them refused to provide such service. According to John McLeod, two institutions, known as the International Social Service of Great Britain and the Sociology Department of Bedford College, worked on the project which aimed at ‘securing adoption placements for fifty-three children described as ‘born in Britain of Asian, African, West Indian or mixed racial parentage’’ (211). In the 1960s,

it was difficult for social workers to track prodigious same-race parents for children of colour (*Ibid* 212). Many white families were reluctant to foster a mixed-race minor, and those who were in favour of such practices had to bear in mind the social and cultural consequences the choice of a transracial adoption entailed. In *The Adoption Papers*, the mother does not hesitate to adopt the black baby, despite the discouragements on the part of the social workers and the stigma that the process of adoption might cause: ‘even in the early sixties there was / something scandalous about adopting, / telling the world your secret failure / bringing up an alien child’ (Kay 1991 10).

Though transracial adoptions were nothing but scarce and generally ‘out of necessity’, they nonetheless raised the people’s awareness of the notions of race, culture, identity, and parenting in relation to adoption (McLeod 212). The adoptive mother reveals her aversion for such classification in the opening lines of ‘Black Bottom’: ‘Maybe that’s why I don’t like / all this talk about her being black, (...) colour matters to the nutters’ (Kay 1991 24). She rejects the idea that race could have any significance for her since she loves the baby as if it was her own. By saying ‘we knew she was coloured’, she shows her awareness of racism in society, yet the level of prejudice in the institutions which shelter the adoptees comes as a surprise to her: ‘to think she wasn’t even thought of as a baby, / my baby, my baby’ (*Ibid.*). The line, with the repetition of an emotionally charged segment, ‘my baby’, in which her overflowing love is packed, comes as a contradiction to the cold, administrative, and ultimately racist position held by the adoption agencies which the parents had to go through. What becomes opposed is the institution and the mother-daughter’s relationship based on love, regardless of colour.

It is worth mentioning that transracial adoption has stirred many debates concerning infant welfare and their adjustment to families of different ethnicity. The Association of Black Social Workers and Allied Professionals (ABSWAP) began to promote same-race adoptions arguing that children of colour would be guaranteed better possibilities of accommodation in non-white parents’ houses (McLeod 213). Within the organization, criticism was levelled against the ‘colour-blind’ white families who decided to bring up adoptees with little regard to their race (*Ibid.*). As claimed by John Small, the champion of the same-race adoption movement in the last two decades of the twentieth century, such a tendency to disregard the child’s ethnicity would cause ‘identity confusion’ as much as it jeopardized their well-being: ‘To tell the child that colour in this society does not matter is to ignore the racism in the society and to do the child dis-service by setting the pre-conditions for identity confusion’ (qtd. in McLeod 213). Eventually, by enacting the UK’s Children Act 1989 according to which local



authorities must ‘attend to the racial and cultural background of potential adoptees’, the government ruled in favour of the same-race policy (McLeod 214).

By mentioning ‘identity confusion’, John Small may imply the double effect of transracial adoption on the child of colour who, on discovering its identity as an adoptee, is likely to experience a lack of self-knowledge and a form of disruption in identity development. Apart from being at the centre of legal, political, and cultural concerns, adoption triggers off a discourse on the child and its identity.

It would be wrong to consider Kay’s work as merely reflective of sociological or historical facts and/or events. Literature is not merely a mirror of the reality of a situation. As we shall see in the following chapters, it offers much more.

From babyhood to childhood: nature vs. nurture and the conflict of identities.

In ‘Generations’, Jackie Kay describes the first stages of the daughter’s babyhood by referring to the moment of the infant’s separation from the maternal body: ‘I was pulled out with forceps / left gash down my left cheek / four months inside a glass cot’ (1991 10). The passage indicates the dominance of culture (‘forceps’) over nature (‘cheek’) (Elgezeery 127). The terms such as ‘pulled out’ and ‘gash’ conjure up an image of injury, fraction, violation as well as displacement. The baby is forced out of the belly of its biological mother and confined to a small bed for a period of four months. The ‘gash’ on its cheek testifies to the brutal act of disunion between the mother and the child. It becomes a literal inscription of a painful experience she has come through as a newborn. Furthermore, since the harm is inflicted in an unnatural way, through instruments of culture (‘forceps’), the physical damage on this part of her body metaphorically foreshadows the detrimental impact of society on her self-perception. The image of the baby’s wounded cheek alludes to the metonymy between face and personhood, signalling the daughter’s upcoming difficulty to identify herself with her own reflection in the mirror.

The sense of alienation in the first three lines of the stanza is conveyed through the lack of reference to any character, outside of the daughter herself. That a biological mother is not mentioned shows how biological identity is annihilated in the passage. In the following lines of the poem, the adoptive mother comes to compensate for the absence of the birth one: ‘but she came faithful / from Glasgow to Edinburgh / and peered through the glass’ (Kay 10). Moving from one city to another, the adoptive mother epitomizes the sense of dislocation as much as her Glaswegian background foreshadows, the constellation of different linguistic,

cultural, political and social identities that her daughter will confront within her family network (Elgezeery 127). It is worth noticing that glass separates the woman from the child, indicating the existence of a barrier between the two. The daughter's birth is thus represented as a battle – forceps, like weapons, leave her injured, and she then struggles to survive. The phrase 'somebody willing me to survive' also implies the daughter's awareness of her diminished chances of survival as a transracial adoptee in Scotland (Kay 10). This is further illustrated in the poem 'Black Bottom', in which the reader learns that the daughter is 'objectified and is kept separate from all other babies waiting for a new home... as if she occupies another category which classifies her as separate from the white babies' (Görey 128). Kay demonstrates the relationship between adoption and racial difference in the construction of dislocation. Not only is the daughter detached from her birth mother, but she also suffers from a form of alienation and estrangement in the community into which she is born and which bars her from being designated as a 'baby'.

As Sarah McClellan argues, '[t]he dual dislocation from the mother and dislocation from one's motherland feeds much of Kay's work' (114). In 'The Telling Part', the daughter experiences the first moment of disruption in her relationship with the adoptive mother. The first stage of her identity development occurs due to the dynamic change in the family context. According to Baden et al: '[it] occurs when the fit between core (intrapsychic sense of self) and family context is explored, evaluated or challenged' (79). Though she feels a strong connection with her adoptive mother, the daughter nonetheless perceives she is different from her: 'Mammy why aren't you and me the same colour' (Kay 1991 21). Her curiosity about their colour difference is what pushes the latter to make a painful revelation that she is not a 'real' mother.

The persona's denial of being a 'real' parent enables us to observe the tensions between the biological and familial, culturally-constructed, selves. She detaches herself from the construct of motherhood, claiming that her daughter's 'real mammy is away far away'. Yet, upon hearing the 'upset in her [child's] voice', she begins to regret her announcement: 'Christ knows why I said that' (*Ibid.*). Bearing in mind her love for the little girl, she reasserts her role as a parent, and restores the relationship between them: 'she's my child, I have told her stories / wept at her losses, laughed at her pleasures, / she is mine' (*Ibid.* 23). Similarly, the daughter privileges the familial identity over the biological one: 'But I love ma mammy whether she's real or no' (*Ibid.* 21). First, through the metaphor of 'a shop', a cultural construct, she legitimizes her status as an adoptee. She further supports her identity by confirming the identity of her mother as a reliable reference. She perceives her own value through the reflection of her

parent's love and admiration. Since the adoptive mother has chosen her and considered her a 'lovely baby', the daughter feels somehow reassured about her personal worth. Yet, as soon as the latter confesses 'she's no real', the daughter rejects any biological explanation for the contested maternal identity. Instead, she ventures into the world of fantasy. According to Jack Zipes, 'as a product of human culture, fairy tales are generationally transmissible just like genes' (qtd. in Adami 464). Her immediate identification with stories and use of the vernacular is what reaffirms the relationship with her mother. The woman recognises her accent while listening to her child's talk: 'I listened to hear her talk, / and when she did I heard my voice under hers' (Kay 1991 23).

However, the ever-recurring references to the bonds of nature in Kay's work allow the reader to presume that although biological identity is not granted preeminence within the daughter's familial cluster, it nonetheless remains at the centre of the social discourse on family. In the poem entitled 'Generations' which opens up a section covering the daughter's adulthood, the protagonist comments upon 'the great importance people attach to blood and biological difference' (Elgezeery 132). When visiting doctors or dentists, she is asked about her genetics and realises she has got no idea about her biological roots: 'I don't know what diseases / come down my line, / when dentists and doctors ask / the old blood questions about family runnings' (Kay 1991 29). She replies she does not know anyone who could confirm her biological identity or provide a mirror image of her physical appearance: 'I have no nose or mouth or eyes / to match, no spitting image or dead cert, / my face watches itself in the glass' (*Ibid.*). The line shows that having no connection with her biological parents results in the daughter's feeling of void and loneliness – since only 'her face watches itself in the glass' – as well as an impression for the persona of being somehow non-existent expressed through the negation of metonymy in the phrase 'I have no nose or mouth or eyes...'

The persona further asserts that everyone '[we] all have our contradictions, the ones with the mother's nose and father's eyes have them' (*Ibid.*). Through the use of the inclusive pronoun 'we' in the very same line, she attempts to demonstrate that diversity and contradiction constitute the core of the human body and experience. Her own 'contradiction' unfolds in the following statements: 'I know my blood. I want to know my blood'. By problematising natural lineage and family bonds, the daughter raises a question about how one determines identity. What decides who we are – blood or upbringing? Is blood a marker of ancestry or merely an element of racial rhetoric? In the poem, the doctors' reference to 'diseases' related to the characters' lineage may reflect the stereotypical idea according to which her blood is 'impure' (Elgezeery 132). Blood, in fact, comes to convey an essentialist view of racial identity, as

shown in 'Black Bottom'. In the poem, the author shows how the blood rhetoric hints at racism in society. During her school years, the daughter practices 'the Cha Cha Cha and the Black Bottom' but 'can't get the steps right' (Kay 1991 25). Her inability to dance encourages the school teacher to make some racist remarks: 'my teacher shouts from the bottom / of the class Come on, show / us what you can do I thought / you people had it in your blood' (*Ibid.*). The teacher expects the protagonist to perform the dance correctly as if it was a natural, innate skill that Black people possess. In this respect, she alienates the daughter from both her Scottish schoolmates and even the Black community. This double estrangement creates a 'site of contestation' in which both the daughter's identities are being denied.

In order to work out her different selves, she will first turn to her family which becomes a favourable milieu for her identity development.

The impact of family and memory on identity formation

*The Adoption Papers* impels the reader to consider that the family context serves as the basis on which the processes of identity can be built. It has widely been claimed that the domestic circle of parents and other close relatives - the intimate milieu in which the individual is likely to spend a considerable amount of time and benefit from different interactions – plays a significant role in shaping identity. Professor Eakin upholds a view that self-formation always occurs in connection to others: the self is *relational*. One's individuality develops through different 'aspects of sameness, affiliation, imitation... differentiation, and distinction', and the family unit becomes a preeminent site of such processes (Assmann 8).

In *The Adoption Papers*, Jackie Kay recognizes the impact of family on the way identity is formed, asserted, and imagined. The daughter transfers the epithet 'the best' from her mother ('the best mammy in the world') to herself ('I wiz the best'). The parent's physical presence, represented stylistically through the repetition of 'ma mammy' and semantically through the daughter's concern about her mother's 'face' and 'flesh', becomes quintessential to the daughter's sense of identity, strengthened by her feeling of belonging.

The family also functions as a pivotal vessel for cultural transmission and a primary vehicle of values, norms, beliefs, and traditions. Within the family network, children become the recipients of their parents' introjects, such as accent, attitude, and behaviour. In 'The Telling Part', the mother speaks warmly about her little girl's unconscious and repetitive habits which, in the reader's mind, she might have inherited from her parents: 'I heard my voice under hers / and now some of her mannerisms crack me up'. The daughter's linguistic and behavioural

appropriation is then followed by her adoption of her parents' political beliefs during her adolescence.

By sharing the same traditions or ideals, the individual may experience a true sense of belonging which further provides them with a sense of self and place. Through the theme of adoption which challenges the monolithic notion of a blood-related family, Jackie Kay demonstrates how the child's primary milieu, consisting of loving parents, can be developed across race and genes. The special mother-daughter relationship which emerges in the collection of poems testifies to the superiority of love and nurture over biological ties: 'Closer than blood. Thicker than water. Me and my daughter' (Kay 1991 34). The line alludes to an English proverb 'Blood is thicker than water' and through the alteration of the popular saying, the adoptive mother dislocates the clichés surrounding biological family connections.

In the poem entitled 'Generations', the lack of knowledge concerning the protagonist's ancestry pushes her, on one hand, to assert the insignificance of biology in the construction of familial identity and, on the other, reinforces her strong need to 'know [her] blood' (29). Being the conveyor of family memory and continuity, genealogy becomes an important issue for the daughter. The protagonist's unfamiliarity with her ancestral background urges her to wonder about her ancestry, her 'grandmothers' and 'the days... passed in Scotland / the land [she] come[s] from / the soil in her [blood]' (*Ibid.*). Through the depiction of the Scottish land and of her grandmothers, she associates her Scottish identity with her biological roots. The author thus highlights that one's descent is important in the individual's exploration of the familial affiliation as well as their sense of identity. By mentioning the 'soil' and the 'family tree', the daughter seems to seek a form of consolidation and continuity for her identity, a sense of coherence and unification that family history and memory generally provide.

Poetry and the act of poeticizing the continuity of her grandmothers' experience on Scottish soil enable the daughter to inhabit the double self – the one who identifies with her adoptive family, and another which emerges from the protagonist's desire to know the narrative of her biological ancestors. By imagining her grandmothers and picturing her attachment to the land, she shows how the poeticization of her biological family and roots may fill in the generational, temporal, and spatial gap as well as function as a new way of constructing family memory. As Barclay and Koefoed explain in their article:

When we inherit memory from parents and other family members, we also inherit identity, a sense of who we are and where we come from. Memory work

within families plays a central part in establishing, negotiating, understanding, and adjusting personal identity.

In order to make sense of, negotiate and adjust her identity, the daughter from *The Adoption Papers* will explore her family remembrances and maternal imaginings.

## B – The ‘self’ and the ‘other’: adopting m/other selves

Between a ghost and real figure: the birth and adoptive mothers

It is worth observing that family in *The Adoption Papers* is largely matrilineal. The two dominating voices in the collection of poems belong to birth and adoptive mothers. The daughter’s double sense of self in ‘Generations’ derives from her dual heritage: she is a child of two mothers. In the poem, she voices her desire to search for her biological roots, and, by referring to ‘grandmothers’, she expresses a particular interest in her matrilineage.

Mothers play an uncontested crucial role in Jackie Kay’s poetic work. As explained by Kanneh, ‘understanding one’s mother, learning her story, becomes an act of racial and historical reassertion and self-understanding’ (Kanneh 179). Interestingly enough, the figure of the Nigerian father is marginalised in the text, indicating the supremacy of women in the daughter’s search for identity. Motherhood, motherland, and mother tongue become central elements of study in *The Adoption Papers*, showing how nurture, origin, and linguistic identity may altogether be explored through the maternal voices.

In one of her interviews, Jackie Kay reveals the backstory of her writing of *The Adoption Papers*. She explains she wanted ‘the adoptive mother [to be] earthy, witty, grounded, bold.’ (Kay 2021). Undeniably, she represents the ‘real’ and loving mother, involved in her daughter’s every sad and joyful experience. Her boldness manifests itself in her political beliefs as well as her active fight against the hegemonic construction of the natural mother. The adoptive parent is stylised after Kay’s real mother, though some elements of her representation have been imagined. On the other hand, the poet admits that the birth parent in her lyrical expression is ‘ethereal’, made up of smatterings of information, ‘fantasy versions of her’ and the results of the author’s search. After the daughter is born, she is removed from the passage, her presence rendered invisible. The mystery and ghost-like mother represents the daughter’s misty knowledge of her birth story.

However, it would be mistaken to presume that the two maternal figures in *The Adoption Papers* are merely presented in contrast to each other ('ethereal' vs. 'grounded'). Jackie Kay creates a subtle and intimate bond between the two mothers, both in the structure of the poems and through the common themes the poems in which they appear explore, such as pregnancy, motherhood, anxiety, dreams, etc. The first poem of the sequence entitled 'The Seed' establishes a visually dialogic relationship between the two characters. Their voices intermingle, as illustrated in the following lines:

I never thought it would be quicker  
than walking down the mainstreet

I want to stand in front of the mirror  
Swollen bellied so swollen bellied (11)

The use of the first-person pronoun 'I' and the author's choice to convey the maternal voices through the couplets create an impression of both shared intimacy - since the mothers make poignant personal confessions - and shared identity. Furthermore, the text organised around two-line stanzas underlines the duality of motherhood, suggesting that the maternal body is neither 'unified' nor 'whole' but rather 'plural' (Beyer 2010: 76). In *The Adoption Papers*, the dual nature of motherhood echoes the daughter's twofold identity since she is the daughter of two different women. In a manner similar to the way the voices of both birth and adoptive mothers converge, the daughter's biological and cultural selves intersect and are constantly examined in different poems from Kay's collection.

In her article, Ashley L. Allen proposes a psychoanalytic reading of *The Adoption Papers*, referring to Jung's conception of the psyche, which can be divided into three parts: the first being the ego or the 'conscious mind', the second designated as the 'personal unconscious' and the latter called the 'collective unconscious' (Allen). She believes that those three parts correspond to the three voices in Kay's collection of poems:

The daughter can be thought of as the personal unconscious. She has a partial understanding of herself... We can look at the adoptive mother as the ego, or conscious mind. The adoptive mother is someone that the daughter can understand; she knows about her, she knows how she has created aspects of her personality. (...) Therefore the biological mother must be the collective unconscious of the psyche. She resides in the part of psyche that is unattainable to the daughter. (Allen)

Both birth and adoptive mothers play a significant role in the daughter's quest for identity. The latter is a reference point according to which the child can orientate herself towards the understanding of her own self, either through affiliation, similarity, and/or differentiation with her mother. The natural parent, on the other hand, epitomizes the gap in the daughter's personal knowledge and history; a mystery that is yet to be solved.

She is 'faceless': tracking and imagining a birth mother

The idea of the riddle appears in the poem 'The Original Birth Certificate'. At some point during her life, the protagonist begins to seek information about her natural parents. She launches the quest for her biological and ethnic identities when she visits the birth registration office. The man at the desk teases her to guess her original name:

I say to the man at the desk  
I'd like my original birth certificate  
Do you have any idea what your name was?  
Close, close he laughs. *Well what was it?*

So slow as torture he discloses bit by bit  
my mother's name, my original name  
the hospital I was born in, the time I came. (Kay 1991 12)

The first line of the second stanza attests to the feeling of impatience and anxiety. The atmosphere of suspense accompanies the moment of revelation. What the daughter learns is a few pieces of information that may seem trivial to the majority of people. Yet, those data enable her to find the 'roots that plant her in place and time' (Elgezeery 128). The mother's name is mentioned before all the other birth details as if it was a hint at the daughter's strong desire to know her mother before learning about anything else. The parent's name precedes her own, somehow indicating how maternal identity is quintessential to the daughter's sense of self.

Interestingly enough, the birth details are not revealed to the reader, which may imply that identity is always partly mystery; something that one speculates about and cannot always be sure of. It involves a continuous investigation and revision. As Jackie Kay aptly demonstrates, the daughter will learn about her identity, depending on the documents she will get access to.



In 'The Waiting Lists', she receives a letter from Edinburgh in which more information concerning her mother is provided. She observes it is merely a 'microfiche' and makes a metatextual reference to adoption in Britain: 'this is all the records kept nowadays' (Kay 1991 14). Still, in the second half of the twentieth century, birth records were scarce, thus preventing adopted children from getting a broader picture of their ancestry. Examining puzzle after puzzle, the daughter endeavours to pick up all the elements that would help her know her mother:

From your mother's letters, the following information:  
Your mother was nineteen when she had you.  
You weighed eight pounds four ounces.  
She liked hockey. She worked in Aberdeen  
as a waitress. She was five foot eight inches. (14)

What the daughter discovers is largely factual data. The prevalence of numbers ('nineteen', 'eight pounds four ounces', 'five foot eight inches') suggests that maternal identity is merely represented through scientific and administrative information. The persona learns about her relative thanks to collected information about age, height, weight, workplace, profession, and leisure activity. It is also interesting that Jackie Kay uses the possessive pronoun 'your' when she refers to the biological mother: instead of saying 'my' mother, the daughter directly quotes information she received about the parent. There is thus a sense of distancing from the birth mother; the phrase 'your mother' stands in sharp contrast with the description of the adoptive mother as 'my mommy' in 'Telling Part'.

How can the daughter picture her mother if she has not yet seen her? After having received a few pieces of information concerning her biological parent, the protagonist attempts to visualise her birth relative. Picturing her - giving her a particular shape, appears to be the adoptee's way of piecing together her own identity. The phrase 'Now I come from her' establishes an identity relationship between the daughter and the birth mother; a relationship that has not previously been acknowledged, hence the use of the adverb of time 'now'. In order to identify with her birth mother and to feel a form of connection with her, the daughter needs to create her mental portrait, something that would breathe to life the 'never-seen figure':

She is faceless.  
She has no nose  
She is five foot eight inches tall

She likes hockey best (30).

Yet, the act of visualisation is doomed to failure. Elgezeery wittingly observes that '[the] formless body implies that the birth mother does not have any form of existence in the life of her daughter' (133). It is also worth noting that the line 'She has no nose' echoes the daughter's first observation that she herself has 'no nose... to match' which maintains the idea that the latter cannot identify with her mother who remains an imagined figure, 'a mere abstraction' (*Ibid.*). Her presence in the daughter's life is not physical and 'grounded' but airy, unrooted and thus difficult to grasp. The latter then notices: 'I reach out to catch her... But no matter how fast... I run after... She is faceless' (30). Since the face is generally used as a metonymy of one's personhood, the facelessness of the birth mother underlines the impossibility for the daughter to make sense of who her biological parent really is and what she looks like. The protagonist seems ill-equipped to produce a convincing portrait of her mother. The latter, a shapeless figure with 'neither eyes nor fine boned cheeks', escapes her, her identity being read only through certificates and letters ('she is five foot eight inches tall'). However, the character longs for her physical presence:

Once would be enough,  
just to listen to her voice  
watch the way she moves her hands  
when she talks. (30)

The voice becomes not only an instrument of communication which would enable the exchange between the two characters; it also functions as a conveyor of feelings, temperament and identity. The daughter is interested in her mother's way of speaking and the gestures which accompany her talk. Voice is also the opposite of silence, a strong resilience to the daughter's silenced birth history. In addition to this, hands perform an important role in broadening the scope of communication, which may then be adorned with non-verbal signs. Gestures facilitate verbal exchange, especially if there are some painful things that cannot be expressed with words. They can also be part of her birth mother's mannerisms, thus shedding a light on some individual aspects of her identity.

By blending together elements of imagination and factual data, the daughter demonstrates that the birth mother is both 'unreal' and 'real', 'both an imaginative construction of the adopted child and a real person inaccessible but known to be there' (Novy 186). In 'The

Meeting Dream’, which concludes the entire sequence of poems, the daughter fantasizes about the encounter with her mother:

*If I picture it like this it hurts less*  
We are both shy  
though our eyes are not,  
they pierce below skin.  
We are not as we imagined. (32)

The first line of the stanza informs the reader that the daughter decides to imagine their meeting in a specific way (‘like this’) in order to avoid being hurt. Since the reality may seem painful, the daughter indulges in reverie, as it is signalled through the title’s telling onomastics. By describing them both as ‘shy’, she implies they do not feel comfortable in each other’s company. On the contrary, their eyes are bold enough to ‘pierce below skin’, to peer through the surface of their physical appearance. The daughter then observes there is a discrepancy between reality and the imagined portraits they have produced of themselves (Elgezeery 133). The atmosphere of strangeness and the lack of intimacy prevail, revealing the inexistence of any emotional connection between the characters:

There is no sentiment in this living-room,  
a plain wood table and a few books.  
We don't cuddle or even shake hands  
though we smile sudden as a fire blazing  
then die down. (32)

By comparing their smiles to ‘a fire blazing [and] then dy[ing] down’, the persona highlights the quickness of their smiles and thus implies their inauthenticity (*Ibid.*). The line’s syntax also shows the death of the relationship that is being born – hence the use of the present simple form ‘die down’ – and echoes the violence of the way the daughter’s birth is narrated in the opening poem of the collection. The characters do not feel comfortable with each other, as is further illustrated in the following lines: ‘Her hands play with her wedding-ring, I've started smoking again’ (32). Elgezeery provides an interesting interpretation of the poem, suggesting that the so-called ‘dream’ announced in the title turns into a ‘nightmare’ (133). Several psychologists, especially Freud in his ‘Family Romance’, have shown that children may fantasize about their parents in order to cope with painful affects (Klass et al, 2014: 275). Surprisingly enough, the daughter’s reverie is far from being a positive vision of the mother-child encounter. Rather, it bitterly uncovers the character’s unfamiliarity with her birth parent: ‘she is too many

imaginings to be flesh and blood' (30). Eventually, by the end of the poem, the real meeting does not take place, and the birth mother's sister informs the adoptee that she will receive a letter:

Her sister said she'd write me a letter.  
In the morning I'm awake with the birds  
waiting for the crash of the letter box  
then the soft thud of words on the matt.  
I lie there, duvet round my shoulders  
fantasising the colour of her paper  
whether she'll underline First Class  
or have a large circle over her 'i's'. (34)

Facing the impossibility of meeting her mother, the daughter wishes, at least, to grasp a bit of her mother's 'physical presence' through her handwriting. She attempts to give shape to her 'shapeless' birth parent (Elgezeery 134), even if the only means of knowing her is through different written documents. From piercing 'eyes' to the 'i's', from the physical being to a form of textual existence, Jackie Kay portrays the complexity of both identity and representation. The two homonyms hint at the transition from eyesight to poetic vision, shedding a light on the transformative power of Kay's poetry, as well as its subjectivity.

The line 'One dream cuts another one open like a gutted fish' casts a light on the daughter's continuous quest for her mother's as well as her own identity. Her act of visualising the birth parent reveals that her own self is fragmented. It should be noticed, however, that 'this fragmentation does not mean that her identity is lost because when reality fails to provide her with some missing aspects of her identity, she imagines and reconstructs, or rather constructs, them' (*Ibid.*). Through maternal imaginings, the daughter fills in the gaps of her family history. As claimed by Gish, Kay's collection of poems 'establishes... a form of character who is both self and other' (186).

We shall now analyse how the maternal voices and perspectives in *The Adoption Papers* reflect the daughter's fragmented identity and her attempts to manufacture, reconstruct and make sense of her own identity.

Filling in the gaps of fragmented identity through maternal perspectives

It is generally admitted that adoptees encounter difficulties in reconstructing their past. As observed in 'The Waiting Lists', the records are often scarce and fragmented. In the entire

sequence of poems, which are partly based on the author's personal experience, Jackie Kay enriches the protagonist's story with the mothers' perspectives. The presence of the two maternal voices, intertwined with that of the daughter, is central to understanding the protagonist's identity as well as the poet's creative act of voicing, lyricising, and renewing the self.

Jackie Kay employs empowering strategies to reshape the past and fill in the gaps of fragmented identity. First of all, she establishes a dialogic relationship between the daughter's voice and the two maternal voices, demonstrating how the self is likely to re-construct itself when interacting with the m/other. In the prologue, the author presents the three major voices in *The Adoption Papers* through the lenses of memory, loss, and (be)longing. Each stanza is dedicated to the personal confession made by one of the poetic personas. First, the adoptive mother remembers her strong desire to 'give birth / do that incredible thing / that women do' and her painful discovery that she will not become a mother. She further refers to the public opinion on adoption ('something scandalous', 'secret failure') and foreshadows both her own and the child's sense of alienation. Then, the second stanza illustrates the daughter's sense of loss and violent separation ('pulled out with forceps') and the necessity of belonging to survive ('somebody willing me to survive'). The 'glass cot' and the woman's journey 'from Glasgow to Edinburgh' symbolize the distance between the baby girl and the adoptive mother, the lack of the pre-linguistic phase of development when the maternal figure and the child are united. Ultimately, in the poem's final lines, the birth mother reveals she keeps 'the baby photograph' in her 'bottom drawer'. The article 'the' comes to replace the possessive pronoun 'my', conveying the sense of loss and detachment. Otherwise, the phrase would probably be formulated as follows: 'the photograph of my baby'. It should be noted that despite the passage of time ('she is twenty-six today / my hair is grey') and the supposedly neutral tone achieved in the phrase 'the baby photograph', the birth mother has not forgotten her child. She remembers her daughter's birthday and wonders if she imagines her as an aging woman. The photograph becomes not only a token of memory but a sign of the mother's grief.

Through the common exploration of loss and longing, the prologue sheds a light on the interrelation of the three voices and on how they respond to each other. It is another way of looking at the context in which the protagonist was born and raised; barring the official documents, what allows the reader to draw links between maternal identities and the filial self is the multifaceted subjectivity and dialogic relationship between the dominant voices in *The Adoption Papers*. It is worth observing that each stanza in the prologue begins with 'I', thus bringing to the fore the notion of identity. By putting together the snatches of the personae's

memories and highlighting the sense of alienation common to each speaker, Jackie Kay portrays ‘the gap between the expectation of unity and the actuality of division’ (Nettelbeck 1991: 5).<sup>2</sup>

Each of the three female protagonists in *The Adoption Papers* is aware of the lost state of pre-lingual unity. Both the adoptive mother and her daughter search for natural mother-child ties; for a biologically-based sense of integrity, continuity, and belonging. In ‘The Seed’, the adoptive mother imaginatively responds to pregnancy: she yearns for ‘the tearing searing pain’, ‘crave[s] discomfort’ and ‘want[s] [her] waters to break like Noah’s flood’ (11). Through the use of similes, biblical imagery, antitheses, and hyperboles, she identifies with suffering pregnant women and articulates her loss and longing which result from her failure to procreate. According to Beyer, the excessive description of ‘ghost pregnancy’ reveals ‘the adoptive mother’s pain at not conceiving, and of being deprived of the physical markers of maternity’ (Beyer 2010: 75). In the poignant account of her babyhood, the daughter highlights the traumatic experience that the disconnection from her mother has proved to be. The natural mother-child unity is also problematised from the birth mother’s point of view: after having abandoned her baby, she claims: ‘my own body a witness / leaking blood to sheets, milk to shirts’ (13). It can thus be observed that her own body reminds her of biological aspects of maternity and the lost union with her baby.

For Stuart Hall, ‘identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured’ (Hall 1996; 4). Furthermore, identity formation involves ‘different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past’ (1990; 25). Through retrospection, the daughter can reassess her identity and reimagine it. As Jackie Kay argues in one of her interviews for *The Guardian*: ‘Our own pasts constantly rejuvenate themselves... It’s not something that has happened and that was it. It’s open to reinterpretation.’ (Kay 2002)

By incorporating the two maternal perspectives in the story of an adopted girl, Jackie Kay shows the possibilities of both reinterpreting identity and revisiting the past. In *The Adoption Papers*, the different fragments of the persona’s voices overlap and echo one another. Nancy Gish examines the interrelation of the selves through their common interest in voice. Following her analysis, we shall first observe the adoptive mother’s connectedness with her

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<sup>2</sup> The remark by Nettelbeck is addressed to another writer, yet I also found it accurate in relation to Jackie Kay. The quotation comes from NETTELBECK, Amanda E. “The Darkness at Our Back Door”: Maps of Identity in the Novels of David Malouf and Christopher Koch.” University of Adelaide, 1991, pp. 1-26.

child through voice: ‘I listened to her talk / and when she did I heard my voice under hers / and now some of her mannerisms crack me up’ (23). Then, the scholar notices that the adoptive child voices her desire to observe some ‘mannerisms’ in the way her adoptive mother speaks: ‘listen to her voice / watch the way she moves her hands when she talks’ (30). Eventually, the latter wonders whether her lost girl speaks ‘broad Glasgow’ (*Ibid.*). As Nancy Gish points out, ‘[the selves] enter and reenter one’s other mind and voice, sound, speech, body even’ (186). Thus, in order to confirm and consolidate her identity, the daughter needs to oscillate between her two mothers’ bodies and voices.

As Arthur Rimbaud has famously exclaimed: ‘Je est un Autre’ (‘I is an Other’). The malleability of identities is well-portrayed in the poem entitled ‘Generations’. Before the daughter indulges in a reverie about her ‘faceless’ mother, the latter describes how she looms large in her child’s mind:

She’s lying in bed; I wake her up  
a pinch on her cheek is enough,  
then I make her think of me for hours.  
The best thing I can steal is sleep.  
I get right under the duvet and murmur  
*you’ll never really know your mother.* (30)

The question that may arise is whether the mother’s voice is both imagined and internalised by the daughter. Is it the birth mother who bluntly speaks about haunting her child’s mind? Or is it ‘the layering of another’s voice murmuring inside one’s head’, an ‘inter-enactment of self and other’? (Gish 186-188). Undeniably, further echoes are made between the two personas, showing how Jackie Kay masterfully uses poetry in order to provide double layers of voices, selves, and emotions:

But I can see the smallness  
She is tall and slim  
of her hands, Yes  
Her hair is loose curls (30)

The two voices are simultaneous, interwoven, breaking the spatiotemporal loop and creating a visually dialogic relationship between them. The poetic intensity is achieved through the doubling of voices. If we read the text without distinguishing the voices typographically, we can observe that each verse is nothing but a fragmented and fractured line, somehow indicative

of the discontinuity of identity. In the daughter's search for the self, m/other voices constantly intervene, thus offering ever-renewed possibilities for revision and reinvention.

Furthermore, the interaction between the speakers becomes a means to fill in the spatiotemporal gaps. Though the text is organised around the chapters which include a chronological timeline, the way the mothers and the daughter respond to one another through repetition, as well as antecedents and referents (especially in 'The Seed' and 'Generations'), seem to problematise the notion of time and make the daughter's search for identity a circular journey involving numerous back-and-forth movements. In her writing Jackie Kay blurs both time and space borders and enables the voices of the three women to interchange.

The layering of identity is explored through the doubling of mother-child relations. The maternal perspectives enable the reader to better understand the daughter's sense of belonging. From the latter's point of view, the identification with the birth mother proves difficult. Yet, paradoxically, she wants to unearth information about her ancestors and expresses her belonging to Scotland while mentioning her biological inheritance. Her concern about the Scottish soil is what brings her closer to her birth parent. From the latter's account in 'Baby Lazarus', we learn that she has prepared an imagined burial for her daughter: 'dug a hole the size of my baby / and buried the clothes I'd bought anyway' (18). By saying 'Late that same night / she came in by the window, / my baby Lazarus' (*Ibid.*), the mother dreams her abandoned daughter will return to her one day; a possibility that frightens the adoptive mother: 'Now she's gone. (...) It's not I think I am losing out... Tonight I cried watching bloody Adam Carrington discover he's not a Carrington any more (sic)' (32). Yet, despite her fears, she asserts the closeness between her daughter and herself: 'See me and her / there is no mother and daughter more similar' (34).

By incorporating the two maternal voices, Jackie Kay shows how the self is fractured, plural, both inherited and transmitted culturally. While travelling back to family remembrances and forward to the possibilities that poetic subjectivity and the imagination offer, the daughter can reassess her identity. Both the birth and adoptive mother represent the contested maternal figures reflective of Tuttle Hansen's concept of 'mother-without-child': 'the figure of the mother without child is *both* one thing – a mother – and another – a not-mother' (Hansen in Beyer 2010: 74). Through the double construction of motherhood in which one mother can refuse to perform her maternal duties only by signing a piece of paper and another may become a parent in the very same way, Jackie Kay shows how one's identity is largely constructed and moveable. This construction and mobility of identity will be highlighted in the daughter's adoption of cultural and political selves.



Can the gaps of fragmented identity ever be filled? Adoption seems to give a partial experience: ‘The baby explodes into an unknown world that is only knowable through some kind of story – of course that is how we live, it’s the narrative of our lives, but adoption drops you into the story after it has started. It’s like arriving after curtain up.’ (Winterson in Eagleton and Parker 2016; 190). There is a sense of void and constant interrogation that seems to accompany the adoptee’s life experience. However, as Jackie Kay demonstrates, there are possibilities for filling in the gaps of the adoptee’s fragmented identity and history – some of them arise from the creative use of imagination and the constantly renewed recollections from the past, whereas others stem from one’s desire to adopt other voices, to look at oneself from another perspective.

Finally, voice and writing become primary forces in the search for identity, as suggested by the daughter’s interest in those two markers of individuality which would enable her to get a sense of her birth mother’s presence. According to Marie-Odile Hedon: ‘Kay enrolls the power of words, of storytelling to go over her own dual confluent identity’ (Hedon 2017: 1). The poet herself reveals: ‘I think that we write often in order to try and discover or understand ourselves and so *The Adoption Papers* was a cathartic book for me to write’ (Kay in Elgezeery 127). Writing oneself into existence and inviting other voices into the writing space is what enables the author to create a bond between the self and the other. As she observes: ‘I am my adopted mother, I am my birth mother, I am myself’.

#### Accessing trauma or/and seeking ontological security

Jackie Kay recognises the healing power of writing poetry. It should be noted that at the time she was working on her *Adoption Papers*, she had not yet traced her birth mother. However, this did not prevent her from ‘carrying’ her ‘imaginary’ parent around with her (Kay in Novy 2004, 171). She ironically observes that in her collection of poems she has ‘[given] birth to her birth mother’ (*Ibid.*). The latter is her ‘creation’, which interestingly shows how the creative act of producing poetry may lead to a role reversal, since parents, and precisely mothers, are perceived as those who provide their children with the gift of life.

The author’s imagination and poetic creativity enable her to rethink both her mother’s identity as well as her own. It is worth observing that she mentions ‘catharsis’ as a result of her producing poetry. The term originates from the Greek word κάθαρσις, meaning ‘purification’ or ‘cleansing’. According to The Oxford Languages Dictionary, it designates ‘the process of

releasing, and thereby providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions'. Though it was originally applied to drama in Aristotle's *Poetics* and described as emotional relief that the audiences experience when viewing tragedy, it shall nonetheless be observed that the term is linked today to any form of art and media and seems to apply to both spectators and the artist himself.

Poetry thus brings the author closer to self-knowledge allowing her to find ways of 'discover[ing]' and 'understand[ing]' herself (Kay in Elgezeery 127) as much as it functions as a therapeutic site of catharsis. Releasing oneself from strong emotions may be associated with the desire to access and heal trauma. From a psychological point of view, writing and/or reading poetry is likely to help individuals purge themselves of sadness, anxiety, and emotional pain. Therapist Louis Hoffman reports in his article 'Can Poetry Be Healing? Writing Poetry Through the Pain' that his patients use poetry during their therapy sessions and thus are endowed with an opportunity to cope with their traumatic experiences and get a heightened sense of self-awareness. As he explains:

Poetry is often written during times when people are feeling intense emotions. In fact, the emotions often drive the poetry. Much like a good conversation or therapy session, poetry can provide a release... Poems often emerge in the midst of strong emotions. While part of what the poem does is describe the painful experience vividly and creatively, there is often a component of trying to make sense of the experience through understanding it more fully or through finding meaning in the suffering. When this second component is part of the writing process or the reflections on the poem, it closely parallels therapy... Processing emotions often leads to greater self-awareness and new insights. (Hoffman 2018)

Poetry stimulates emotions and self-recognition. Its beauty lies not merely in the style, aesthetics, and rhythm but also in the emotional responses it causes and the new sense of awareness it may raise: from Latin *poesis*, 'creation'. According to Britannica, this literary genre 'evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience or a specific emotional response through language chosen and arranged for its meaning, sound, and rhythm'.

Through its musicality, rhythm, poignant sincerity, and emotional directedness, *The Adoption Papers* begets a wide spectrum of emotions in the reader. Among other back cover blurbs, Elizabeth Burns recommends Kay's work as follows: 'These are brave, honest, unsentimental poems... Kay's poetry can be loud with pain and rage, but sometimes it's as though she whispers too, entering dreams, allowing herself a delicate imagery' (Burns, *The Scotsman*). The strong emotions, such as 'pain' and 'rage', as well as the oneiric dimension of

the text are what enables us to explore the way Jackie Kay accesses trauma in *The Adoption Papers*.

The etymology of the word ‘trauma’ (from Greek, ‘wound’) draws the reader’s attention to the very beginning of Kay’s sequence of poems in which the author mentions the ‘gash’ on the daughter’s cheek. This seems to echo the concept of the ‘primal wound’ and signals the protagonist’s painful experience in the early stages of her infancy. In both Lacan’s theory and contemporary research on adoption, the child’s separation from the birth mother, even during babyhood, is considered a traumatic event. Violently disconnected from the maternal body, the daughter is unwell (‘baby is a girl but not healthy’) and spends four months in a ‘glass cot’. Yet, what helps her recover is the presence of the ‘faithful’ adoptive mother who comes to visit her: ‘I must have felt somebody willing me to survive’ (10). It can thus be observed that the loss of physical contact with the natural mother has a tremendous impact on the infant’s well-being.

The violent separation also affects the biological parent. Not only is her body a ‘witness’ of her lost connection with the baby but she also finds it difficult to heal the emotional wound. In the two parallel stanzas, Kay casts a light on the persona’s pain of giving up her child:

Land moves like driven cattle  
My eyes snatch pieces of news  
Headlines strung out on a line:  
MOTHER DROWNS BABY IN THE CLYDE  
(...)  
Maybe the words lie  
across my forehead  
headline in thin ink  
MOTHER GIVES BABY AWAY (16-17)

While travelling by train and reading the newspaper, the birth mother fails to drive the baby out of her mind. The ‘pieces of news’ she catches a glimpse of paradoxically cover the tragic incident of infanticide. She then reappropriates the headline of the newspaper to ponder her own decision of abandoning the child: ‘MOTHER DROWNS BABY IN THE CLYDE / MOTHER GIVES BABY AWAY’ (*Ibid.*). The image of words being inscribed on her forehead indicates that the persona carries both physical and psychological scars. This also highlights the presence of social stigma. By making a parallel between the sensationalist headline of the

newspaper and her own personal situation, the mother seems to draw attention to the terrible magnitude of what she now experiences. The tumult of her emotions is conveyed in the description of a train:

The rhythm of the train carries me  
Over the frigid earth  
The constant chug a comforter  
A rocking cradle. (16)

‘The constant chug’ of the train is juxtaposed with ‘[a] rocking cradle’ which demonstrates how the baby constantly permeates the mother’s thoughts. The ‘frigid earth’ becomes a symbol of motherhood gone astray. Yet, in this stanza, the protagonist is portrayed as both a stigmatised mother and a comforted baby. This shows that she herself is a victim who needs to be comforted. In this way, Kay expresses her sense of inclusiveness and forgiveness. The birth mother finds no joy or comfort in daily activities: ‘This sandwich is plastic. I forgot to put sugar in the flask... I should have brought another book...’ (17-18). Consequently, she forces herself to get over the loss of her child: ‘I must stop it. Put it out my mind’ (17).

In an attempt to release herself from the traumatic memory of giving up her baby for adoption, the mother then prepares a burial ritual. By burying her daughter’s clothes, she somehow attempts to purge the latter out of her life. The mother’s symbolical act, however, does not provide her with catharsis. She admits that the daughter comes back to her the same night. This somehow reflects the former’s anxieties and obsessions. Jackie Kay even portrays the mother’s pain and aggressivity which pushes her to the imagined acts of infanticide:

I’ll suffocate her with a feather pillow  
Bury her under a weeping willow  
Or take her far out to sea  
and watch her tiny eight-pound body  
sink to shells and reshape herself.  
So much the better than her body  
encased in glass like a museum piece (13)

Intense anger, shame, and guilt seem to impact the mother’s psyche who would rather murder her baby than watch her ‘encased in glass like a museum piece’ (13). The ‘museum piece’ may allude to the ‘glass cot’ in which the daughter will spend the first moments of her infancy. The mother’s swinging moods, from imagined aggressiveness to benevolence (‘I lie willing life into

her'), demonstrate how she struggles to recover from trauma. This can be observed with the shifting of perspective between the daughter and the mother announcing their separation: 'On the first night', 'On the second night', and 'On the third night' are the phrases belonging to the daughter's voice.

It is worth observing that one of Kay's major literary inspirations remains Toni Morrison. In her memoir entitled *Beloved*, she reflects on infanticide in the context of slavery – the mother kills her child in order to protect her from oppression. In *The Adoption Papers*, Jackie Kay concludes the sequence with the birth parent's decision to drown her 'baby' which may be seen as a desperate attempt to put an end to the haunting memory of her lost child:

I wrapped her up in purple wrapping paper  
And threw her down the old well near here.  
There was no sound, it's no longer  
In use – years – she's been in my drawer  
Faded now, she's not a baby any more (34)

It should be observed that it is not the child who is drowned but the baby photograph that the mother has kept for years in the bottom drawer. The dramatic act of 'infanticide' becomes an effort to annihilate the memory of the baby and put an end to any existing trace of her physical presence. The mother's imagined violence symbolically represents her violation of parental duties, as illustrated in the daughter's statement: 'Now I come from her, / the mother who stole my milk teeth / ate the digestive left for Santa' (20).

The child's language of fantasy is what underlines her fears and anxieties, as illustrated in the poem 'The Telling Part'. Through the oneiric dimension of the text in which the real and the imagined are interwoven, Jackie Kay probes the depths of trauma. The connection between dreams and trauma has already been explored by psychoanalysts and scholars. Deirdre Barrett, Professor at Harvard Medical School, explores the relationship between the two concepts and argues that 'dreams constitute a unique window on trauma and its effects' (Barrett 2001; 1). She brings together literature, folklore tradition, and psychology to show how dreamlike visions offer some insight into people's traumatic experiences and their way of processing memory (*Ibid* 1-3). In his online article, Rob Newsom uses the example of 'repetitive nightmares experienced by war veterans' and demonstrates that dreams may enable individuals 'to revisit and work through old trauma' (Newsom 2022). He supports the view that 'dreams help to integrate our experiences into long-term memory, a process called memory consolidation. When our experiences are traumatic, dreams may reflect the body's attempt to

cope and learn from these situations' (*Ibid.*). In one of Kay's poems entitled 'The Tweed Hat Dream', the adoptive mother's fear of losing her daughter and her anxiety about belonging and 'true' motherhood is translated through a dreamlike sequence in which she imagines her child being kidnapped by the birth mother. In the 'Meeting Dream', the 'anticlimactic' interaction between the daughter and the imagined parent sheds a light on the former's 'concerns about her relationship with her birth mother' (Lyle 46). In addition to this, the latter enters the daughter's dreams, looming large in her mind. The real and the imagined are equally important for the daughter who, as a child, fears that her 'unreal' mother is likely to melt. The dreams thus hold up a mirror to the personae's emotional torment.

What the oneiric dimension of the text also unravels is Kay's rejection of binarism; through her dreamlike sequences, the author blurs the boundaries between the real and the unreal, promoting fluidity instead. She opens the possibilities of narrating trauma through the malleability of identities. The overflow and excess of women's bodies which can neither be restricted nor controlled lies at the centre of *The Adoption Papers*:

'Attempts to limit and control the female body fail repeatedly in *The Adoption Papers*, in the Daughter's hair that 'grows out instead of down', the Birth Mother's post-partum body that leaks 'blood to sheets, milk to shirts', and even the Adoptive Mother's melting 'skin like toffee' in the Daughter's dreams (27; 13; 22). Bodies in the poems are in excess, proving to be uncontainable within the rigidity of mathematical, permanent information in files. The overflow of women's bodies is threatening to bureaucracy, as fluidity is not so easily maintained in government census and legal certifications' (Lyle 29).

The bodies in *The Adoption Papers* both cross and reconstruct boundaries; they are a site of transgression and resilience to rigid and culturally sanctioned categorisation. It should be observed that the bodily marks and reactions in Kay's sequence of poems testify to the existence of both trauma and social pressure.

By bringing together the three female protagonists whose bodies and consequently identities do not correspond to cultural norms, expectations and/or ideals, Jackie Kay ponders the complex notion of womanhood as well as interrogates women's roles and position in society. In *The Adoption Papers*, all the female protagonists suffer from judgemental social attitudes; boundaries are imposed on their bodies and identities. Using the maternal voices, the author shows how the daughter identifies with them in order to seek a sense of ontological security which refers to 'security not of the body but of the self, the subjective sense of who one is, which enables and motivates action and choice' (Mitzen, 2006: 344). As can often be

observed in trauma fiction, Jackie Kay brings to the fore ‘the denied, the repressed and the forgotten’ (Whitehead in Schönfelder 2013; 29). This will now lead me to analyse the role of women in the adoption of the daughter’s cultural identity as well as their vital presence in the discourse on race, gender, and oppression.

The role of women in the daughter’s appropriation of (cultural) identity

Though the daughter’s identification with the two maternal voices is a means for her to develop, understand, and constantly renew the self, her identity formation seems nonetheless to be ‘complicated by a sense of physical and cultural ‘difference’ from the ‘family’ who raised her’ (Gish 181). Physical characteristics are primordial in defining one’s conception of the self, either through the patterns of difference or/and similarity. Already as a child, the daughter perceives that she and her adoptive mother are not ‘the same colour’ (21). The ‘faceless’ birth mother is not a proper reference point for the child, either. As the adoptive parent observes in ‘The Tweed Hat Dream’, she is ‘white, lightning white’ (19). The use of the adverb ‘lightning’ suggests that the paleness of the birth mother comes as a surprise to the adoptive one. It can therefore be noticed that the daughter is not the mirror image of the two other female protagonists.

Lacan argues that there exists ‘a preoedipal ‘mirror stage’ in which the infant gazes at the mother for its reflection and identity’ (Slipp 199). Once the child recognises it is different and separate from the maternal figure, there occurs a ‘sense of loss of wholeness’ and ‘a loss of the mother’ which triggers the further development of identity (*Ibid.*) The daughter in *The Adoption Papers* observes she does not share any physical characteristics with her mother. As a transracial adoptee, she has been deprived of the sense of continuity that biological children experience while looking at their parents’ and relatives’ faces (Gish 2004; 182). The sense of confusion and alienation arises from her difficult identification with her reflection in the mirror:

so sometimes when I look in the mirror  
I give myself a bit of shock  
and say to myself *Do you really look like this?*  
as if I’m somebody else. (27)

The daughter’s feeling of astonishment sheds light on the problematic notions of self-image and self-recognition. In *Red Dust Road*, a memoir that also covers the daughter’s adoption journey, the author further dwells on the protagonist’s experience of identity confusion: ‘My

own face in the mirror was not the face that I had in my head' (1997: 13). Looking through the glass provides the observer with a double sense of personality; of being oneself and an Other. The author plays on the doubling of identity in another collection of poems entitled *Life Mask*: 'One pair of eyes / stares through to the other' (3-4). In *The Adoption Papers*, the dual identity of the daughter unfolds; the mirror shows that she is both the subject and the object, the viewer and the viewed, the objective 'I' and the personal 'me', the self-image and an Other described in the phrase 'somebody else' (27).

Perhaps, because she has been raised by the white parents, the daughter imaginatively puts on her mother's face and then experiences 'a bit of shock' while gazing at herself in the mirror. When referring to Lacan's mirror-stage theory, Samuel Slipp explains how the mother-child separation and the latter's recognition of being different from the parent affect its quest for identity: 'The pain of this separation and loss results in a repression of this preoedipal relationship into the unconscious. The infant then attempts to reestablish a relationship with an Other through discourse and communication' (1995; 199).

The daughter's search for identity is yet problematised since she does not know anyone who looks like her, even outside her family network. Jackie Kay admits that 'most black children brought up in a white environment will experience some form of psychological distress. It's hard to get a strong sense of being black and proud when there is nothing to reinforce this notion' (Kay, Interview, 38). Growing up in a white-dominated environment, the daughter becomes a victim of collective racism. In 'Black Bottom', the schoolteacher urges the protagonist to perform a dance, thus perpetuating a racist and essentialist view that the daughter's capacities to dance are inherent to her race: 'you people had it in your blood' (25). Experiencing the alienation of her own body, she will look for some role models in order to reinforce her identity and 'develop a wholesome self-image' (Aydin 249).

It should be noted that Lacan coined the term *méconnaissance* in order to explore the humans' tendencies to (mis)represent themselves as well as their ways of seeking cultural models for imitation. As the French term indicates, there is 'both the idea of self-knowledge (*me-connaissance*) and misunderstanding (*méconnaissance*)' (Jackson 2010; 463). The two appear at the developmental stage and continue throughout the individual's life (*Ibid.*). In adolescence as well as adulthood, 'the functioning of *méconnaissance* leads us to the chasing of mirages but may motivate us to develop and achieve as, for example, when we identify with someone whom we admire and wish to emulate...' (*Ibid.*). Teenagers and young adults endeavour to gain a sense of identity while experimenting with various roles and ideas. As Stuart Hall poetically observes: '[the individual] has to go through the needle of the other



before [they] construct [themselves]' (qtd. in Grossberg 89). During her school years, the daughter tries on different selves, particularly those with 'cultural visibility':

Maybe it's really Bette Davis I want  
to be the good twin or even better the bad  
one or a nanny who drowns a baby in a bath.  
I'm not sure maybe I'd prefer Katharine  
Hepburn tossing my red hair, having a hot  
temper. I says to my teacher Can't I be  
Elizabeth Taylor, drunk and fat and she  
just laughed, not much chance of that. (26)

The daughter first attempts to identify with iconic white American actresses. However, she does not succeed in finding a proper mirror image, nor does she feel fully satisfied with those cultural representations.

In the 1940s, a couple of researchers, Kenneth and Mamie Clark, conducted a so-called 'doll test' in order to investigate 'how young Black children viewed their racial identities' (Sturdivant 2021). The participants had to choose between black and white dolls and justify their decision. It turned out that most of them would rather play with white dolls. As Professor Sturdivant explains,

'They ascribed positive characteristics to the white dolls but negative characteristics to the Black ones. Then, upon being asked to describe the doll that looked most like them, some of the children became 'emotionally upset' at having to identify with the doll that they had rejected. The Clarks concluded that Black children – as a result of living in a racist society – had come to see themselves in a negative light.' (Sturdivant 2021)

It shows how racism has a detrimental impact on the child's self-image. The daughter herself first attempts to reinforce and make sense of her identity, while searching for white idols. Furthermore, the absence of any positive Black-figure, either in the child's environment or in media, is what hinders the protagonist's identity formation. As shown in the 'doll experiment', racism in society is what makes individuals and consequently children associate Black culture with negative terms. The daughter in *The Adoption Papers* is called 'thug', 'vandal', and 'hooligan' by her teacher. Furthermore, the black woman whom she begins to identify with is on 'America's Ten Most Wanted People's List at 26' (27). This reflects how society represents Black identity in a depreciative light while perpetuating a stigma against people of colour.

Though the daughter lives in a society that imposes a fixed identity on her and bars her from other children, this form of exclusion, however, pushes her to explore her ethnic self (Elgezeery 131). It leads her to ‘search for other figures who belong to her ethnic group and look like her’ (*Ibid.*). The ‘wanted person’ and simultaneously the daughter’s role model is Angela Davis, an African American activist: ‘On my bedroom wall is a big poster / of Angela Davis who is in prison / right now for nothing at all’ (26). For Elgezeery, ‘[b]oth have the same origin, colour, and perhaps fate’ (2015; 131). They share physical characteristics, such as *Afro*, which represents an ‘identity marker’ for the daughter; something which defines both her sense of belonging to one ethnic group and of exclusion from another: ‘she had big hair like mine / that grows out instead of down’ (27). The protagonist assumes that the other woman is her sole mirror image: ‘Angela Davis is the only female person / I’ve seen (except for a nurse on TV) / who looks like me’ (*Ibid.*).

That the daughter identifies with an African American activist underlines the aspect of her identity which is diasporic. Within the Black diaspora, the malleability of cultures and selves is palpable and enables the protagonist to incorporate Angela Davis into her own Black Scottish experience. Not only does the daughter identify with the latter because of the shared ethnic roots but she wishes to be as brave as the activist (Elgezeery 131). Such courage is vital for her to fight the racism that she experiences at school (*Ibid.*). Her worrying about Davis’s fate may imply she is also concerned about her own destiny: ‘I worry she’s going to get the chair. / I worry she’s worrying about the chair’ (27). She then receives ‘a badge home’ from her father which she wears to school and which ‘says FREE ANGELA DAVIS’ (*Ibid.*). As Elgezeery explains: ‘The daughter’s fighting for the cause of Angela Davis equals fighting for her own cause in a society...’ (2015; 131). Interestingly enough, by choosing Davis as her role model, she constructs her ethnic, cultural, and political self-concept. Her identification with Davis’s physical appearance, alongside her courageous and unsilenced activism, also emphasises the importance of both body and voice as structuring forces of identity. In ‘Voiced Bodies / Embodied Voices’, Crispin Sartwell and Judith Bradford highlight that:

‘Racing and gendering are social and political processes of consigning bodies to social categories and thus rendering them into political, economic, sexual and, residential position... voices emerge precisely from bodies; it is bodies that speak or write’ (1997; 192).

Jackie Kay shows how racism silences the oppressed women. In one of the poems from *The Adoption Papers*, she writes: ‘Words chase me like bullets overhead. Kaffir. Wog. Kaffir. Wog. Between tight teeth I whisper’ (48). Then, in a similar manner to the anonymous persona on page 48, the daughter herself is unable to utter a single word after having been insulted by the school teacher: ‘Thug. Vandal. Hooligan. Speak up. Have you lost your tongue?’ (25). The body thus becomes a site of discourse. By turning to an African American political figure, the girl ‘conjoins herself historically, geographically, and culturally to the history of racism in the US as a way of accessing a dialogue about racial issues’ (Concannon 235).

Hence Angela Davis plays a tremendous role in the daughter’s reappropriation of cultural identity which is also supported within her family network. In the poem, Jackie Kay mentions the active role of the father in inciting his child to be culturally and politically active. He and his wife are involved in the communist movement while supporting equality, world peace, and minorities, as illustrated in the poem ‘The Waiting Lists’: ‘a poster of Paul Robeson’ and ‘a red ribbon with twenty world peace badges’ testify to their political engagement. In such favourable milieu, the daughter can therefore construct and cultivate her cultural identity.

The cultural self enters in a dialogue with various selves and is constructed via different patterns of adoption, revision, re-telling, and reassessment. As Jackie Kay explains: ‘So it’s like capturing somebody at moment in time, and in capturing them at that moment in time I hope to kind of capture myself too, some fear, some paranoia, some joy, whatever. But I always feel as if I find out something about myself too’ (Kay in Novy 2004; 188). It is an interaction with others that furthers the quest for self-recognition and self-knowledge. The voices of women are particularly significant in Kay’s *Adoption Papers*, bringing the reader’s attention to the double processes of ‘racing’ and ‘gendering’. The daughter rejects the hegemony of white heterosexual men in the line: ‘Me and my pal / don’t have Donny Osmond or David Cassidy’ (23). Instead, she gives preference to African American female singers, Pearl Bailey and Bessie Smith. For the daughter, those blueswomen become black cultural icons and vehicles through which she can convey her own experience as well as make sense of it. In the poem, ‘In the Pullman’, reprinted in *Darling*, Jackie Kay imagines herself traveling with Bessie Smith:

Bessie and I are in her Pullman heading for Tennessee.  
Bessie and I are in her Pullman heading for Tennessee.  
We got so much heartbreak, we can’t divide it easily.  
I take one piece, she takes another, we both drive

And our sadness drives further,  
It's way up ahead, ahead of Bessie and me,

And even in the springtime it's hanging from the pawpaw tree.  
The road is long and flat, the fields are repeating the cotton.  
The road is so long and flat. Life is like that.  
We drive without moving. We try and carry on, but  
There's this big sadness hanging from the pawpaw tree.  
It's way up ahead, ahead of Bessie and me. (71)

What links Jackie Kay to the singer is her use of 'blues rhyme scheme of aaba', the travel trope as well as the feeling of heartache (Concannon 244). This imaginative journey enables her to cross temporal, geographical, and cultural boundaries. Her traveling companion on the way to Tennessee as well as through life is Bessie Smith. She also accompanies her during her imaginary route through racism. When employing the metaphor of 'big sadness hanging from the pawpaw tree', Jackie Kay alludes to the lynchings of Black people in the US and provides an intertextual response to Billie Holliday's song called 'Strange Fruit' (1939) which begins with the following lines: 'Southern trees bear a strange fruit, / Blood on the leaves and blood at the root, / Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze'. By surpassing temporal barriers and reconnecting her routes with those of Smith and Holliday, she also shows that today's generations of Black people may identify with their ancestors in pain and sadness (Concannon 2014; 251).

According to the Ph.D. researcher, '[p]oetry's capacity, for Kay, is that it can be a space in which histories and cultures encounter and perhaps transform each other, forming a dynamic interchange across the Atlantic' (Concannon 235). Poetry is therefore a site of transformation; a space where the author can re-invent himself and re-tell 'his-story'. Bessie Smith, Angela Davis, and other 'surrogate mothers' become central to the telling of the daughter's story as well as the history of racism, oppression, and judgmental social attitudes. Jackie Kay combines personal history with the history of the black community, thus showing how one's personal search for identity can also be a means of racial and historical reaffirmation.

The daughter's identity journey proves to be complex, multivocal, and multifaceted. Since she does not succeed in meeting her birth mother and in the end longs for, at least, a marker of her personhood, such as her handwriting, we can observe how Jackie Kay leaves the story of search and adoption open to further exploration. It is, indeed, a constant search that does not end with one collection of poems. The author chooses different itineraries – be they

imaginary or autobiographical, poetic and prosaic, physical and metaphorical – in order to explore the fertile ground that the themes of identity and adoption provide.

## CHAPTER 2

### ‘The long and winding road’: roots, routes and crossroads

Jackie Kay draws a literary link between the Scottish-African roots and her own identity routes. She writes prose and poetry showing that those two genres may be different, but yet may create ‘complementary paths’ (Kay in Davidson 2015, 120). This, of course, requires the reader to abandon the linearity of story-telling and instead contemplate the multiplicity of voices and forms that the author employs in her writing. For her, adopting the different selves equals adopting new *ways* of expressing herself, while giving a form to a specific emotion, memory, and thought. In this chapter, I will examine the selected poems from *Fiere* which will function as a poetic ‘companion’ (from *fere*, a companion, a mate, an equal) to Kay’s memoir, *Red Dust Road*.

#### A – Reconnecting roots (routes) in Africa

Identity quest and the act of mapping the face

As announced in the poem, ‘In the Pullman’, the inquiry into one’s self, history, and belonging represents ‘a long road’. In Kay’s works, the adopted daughter travels through time and space, experiments with various selves, and crosses both real and imaginary borders. Her face becomes an imaginative ‘map’ that guides her in identity exploration. By associating her countenance with that of an African American woman, she shows how identity is not fixed but mobile.

It should be noted that the features shared between the protagonist and other female characters, such as Bettie Smith and Angela Davis, ‘provide feelings of solidarity and belonging in the ‘imagined community’ of the Black diaspora...’ (Früh 73). The daughter clings to the concept of shared blackness, especially once her Scottish identity is questioned, threatened, or denied, as illustrated in ‘So You Think I’m a Mule’. In this autobiographical poem, Jackie Kay recalls a meeting with a woman who once approached her and began to question her Scottishness:

“Where do you come from?”

‘I’m from Glasgow.’

“Glasgow-?”

‘Uh huh. Glasgow.’

The whiteface hesitates,  
 the eyebrows raise,  
 the mouth opens  
 then snaps shut  
 incredulous  
 yet too polite to say, outright,  
 liar  
 she tries another manoeuvre  
 “And your parents?”  
 Groan.  
 Not again.  
 It’s such a bore.  
 ‘Glasgow and Fife.’  
 “Oh?”  
 ‘Yes. Oh.’  
 Snookered, she wonders where she should go  
 from here  
 “Ah, but you’re not pure.”  
 ‘Pure? Pure what?’  
 Pure white? Ugh. What a plight.  
 Pure? Sure I’m pure,  
 I’m rare...’  
 “Well, that’s not exactly what I mean,  
 I mean... you’re a mulatto, just look at...”

The lady’s set of questions is not a sign of her curiosity but rather implies that the protagonist does not belong to Scotland. The white speaker rejects the possibility of being both Black and Scottish, her conception of identity being fixed and essentialist. Her speculations on racial impurity are what makes the protagonist cut her short and ‘assert both her sense of ethnic identity as well as cultural affiliation and belonging in terms of her Blackness and gender’ (Früh 71):

You see that fine African nose of mine,  
 my lips, my hair. You see, lady,  
 I’m not mixed up about it.  
 So take your questions, your interest,  
 Your patronage. Run along.  
 Just leave me.  
 I’m going to my Black sisters,  
 to women who nourish each other  
 on belonging...  
 There’s a lot of us black women struggling to define

just who we are,  
where we belong  
and if we know no home  
we know one thing:  
we are Black;  
we're at home with that.'

As Früh observes, '[b]eing excluded from the traditional concept of Scottishness, the speaker makes her "home" in a transnational community of women who share her sense of otherness' (72). Jackie Kay shows that home is malleable, altering and unrooted. Her dual identity does not create a space of double inclusion but rather of 'contestation' or, as Concannon argues, 'pervasive exclusion... as though Scottish inclusion could only occur at the price of Nigerian exclusion, where one half of the identity compromises the other' (253). According to Jane Gray, the phrase 'I'm going to my Black sisters' somehow 'implies a form of exile – be it geographical or imaginary, forced or voluntary – from Scotland' (Gray 158). The oppositions, such as 'inclusion/exclusion', 'home/abroad', 'insider/outsider', and a foreigner both 'within' and 'without' feed much of Kay's poetry as well as her memoir *Red Dust Road*. Though the persona identifies with 'Black sisters', echoing the daughter's emotional bond with African American women in *The Adoption Papers*, her shared concept of blackness as a 'place-to-belong' does not 'reveal a lot about the adopted girl's specific geographical, tribal and familial origins' (Früh 72-73). Indeed, in 'So You Think I Am a Mule' and *The Adoption Papers*, the adopted daughter's knowledge about her African father is reduced to the fact that he comes from Nigeria.

Yet, Jackie Kay implies that the face may mirror biological identity and origins and literally communicate a 'place' and 'tribe' where someone comes from. In Kay's 1991 collection of poems, the birth mother gazes at her baby's face and believes she can observe the mirror image of her boyfriend, Olubayo: 'I looked for him in her; / for a second it was as if he was there / in that glass cot looking back through her' (26). In another poem, inspired by Kay's personal experience, the author recalls a meeting with a man on the train who 'reads' her ancestry in her facial features. In *Red Dust Road*, she recalls that at that moment she knew little about her ethnic origins:

'Years earlier, I'd been on a night train from London to Manchester after having done a poetry gig... A black man, sitting opposite me, looked at my face and said suddenly 'I bet you are an Igbo. Igbo - definitely!' It was such a striking experience that I wrote a poem about it... I discovered the man on the train was right. My father was an Igbo.'



Jackie Kay reveals that part of her identity has, for some time, remained foreign to her. In 'The Pride', she recalls the encounter with the stranger, which made her realise that her Black identity is not homogenous but can be ascribed to a particular place and ethnic group (Früh 73). The revelatory moment is yet preceded by a feeling of recognition, continuity and belonging:

When I looked up, the black man was there,  
staring into my face,  
as if he had always been there,  
as if he and I went a long way back.

The protagonist begins to imagine that the stranger can read her 'whole childhood' from her facial features. It is as if they share some form of intimacy or familial bond, which enables the latter to know about the protagonist's weaknesses, lies and secrets (Concannon 255):

My whole childhood, I'm quite sure,  
Passed before him, the worst things  
I've ever done, the biggest lies I've ever told.  
And he was a little boy on a red dust road.  
He stared into the dark depth of me,

By mentioning 'a red dust road' and 'the dark depth', the author shows that the meeting between the protagonist and the stranger is in fact the former's encounter with her African roots and heritage:

and then he spoke:  
'Ibo', he said. 'Ibo, definitely.'  
Our train rushed through the dark.  
'You are an Ibo!' he said

As the 'train rushes through the dark' and 'past unwritten stops in the blackness', it somehow reflects the speaker's identity quest and her lack of knowledge concerning her ancestry. Her face becomes a 'map' from which the man reads the name of her native village:

There was a moment when  
my whole face changed into a map,  
and the stranger on the train  
located even the name

of my village in Nigeria  
in the lower part of my jaw.

Apart from establishing a relationship between selfhood and the road trope, the map metaphor thus serves as a way of charting other, still undiscovered, aspects of the protagonist's identity and personal history.

'My waiting footprints': Adopting African heritage vs. a further desire for belonging and recognition

In 'The Pride', the speaker asks the stranger to describe the Ibos while accepting his role as a member of her 'large clan' or even her close family.

Tell me, I asked the black man on the train  
who was himself transforming,  
at roughly the same speed as the train,  
and could have been  
at any stop, my brother, my father as a young man,  
or any member of my large clan,  
Tell me about the Ibos.<sup>3</sup>

While referring to the Ibos, the man enumerates both their physical and moral qualities: 'Ibo noses are the best noses in the world', 'Ibo teeth are perfect teeth' and 'Ibos are clever, reliable, dependable, faithful, true'. When the protagonist asks him whether the clan has any faults, he replies there are not any. His pride or, what Kay calls, 'a quality of being certain', is highlighted in the repetition of 'definitely' as well as his way of describing the Ibos with highly appreciative terms. This sense of dignity reminds the protagonist of Scottish pride represented by 'a MacLachlin, a MacDonnell, a MacLeod'. The repeated surname prefix 'mac', meaning 'son' and dating back to medieval Gaelic Scotland, becomes a marker of one's ancestry and belonging, and a patronymic element in one's name. It evokes the hereditary and continuous aspect of familial identity, and, because 'mac' is mainly used in Scotland and Wales, also highlights the common sense of national pride and identity. By comparing the Nigerian sense of dignity to that of Scotsmen whose surnames are deeply rooted in the country's history, Jackie Kay draws links between the two remote, and supposedly unrelated, countries. Ironically, 'a

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<sup>3</sup> Reprinted in *Darling* (1991), Bloodaxe Books, 2008, 161.

MacLachlin, a MacDonnel, a MacLeod' become a sign of essentialist thinking, representing the concept of Scottishness as generational and thus exclusive. A set of positive adjectives attributed by the black man to the Ibo clan also provides a monolithic representation of identity, as much as it presents a risk of cultural supremacism: 'The Ibos should be running Nigeria. There would be none of this corruption'. By representing the exclusive nature of the Scottish identity and adopting the Nigerian pride ('I smiled my newly acquired Ibo smile, / flashed my gleaming Ibo teeth'), the protagonist withdraws herself from Scotland and adopts the African heritage.

Jackie Kay then portrays the transformative power of poetry through a number of transitions occurring in the text. From face to place, from individual to the community, from longing to belonging, from transformation to self-formation, the author emphasises that poetry, being adaptive in nature, may become a space of ongoing shifts and metamorphoses:

'If you went back,' he said brightening,  
'The whole village would come for you.  
Massive celebrations. Definitely.  
Definitely,' he opened his arms wide.  
'The eldest grandchild – fantastic welcome.  
If the grandparents are alive.'

I saw myself arriving  
the hot dust, the red road,  
the trees heavy with other fruits,  
the bright things, the flowers.  
I saw myself watching  
the old people dance towards me  
dressed up for me in happy prints.  
And I found my feet.  
I started to dance.  
I danced a dance I never knew I knew.  
Words and sounds fell out of my mouth like seed.  
I astonished myself.  
My grandmother was like me exactly, only darker.<sup>4</sup>

In the first stanza, the stranger's description of the Ibos' hospitality arises as a form of performance. The man portrays the clans' generosity not only through the power of his visual language but also uses body language ('opened his arms wide') to create both physical and

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

mental pictures of what the female protagonist is likely to experience once she returns to Nigeria.

The feeling of belonging and recognition then transposes onto the speaker who 'sees herself' arriving on the red dust road (reprinted in *Darling* 162). It implies that the persona's return to Africa is now her own dreamlike vision, somehow triggered by the highly positive image of Nigeria that the black man has painted before her eyes. The oneiric dimension of the poem manifests itself, especially in the vague depiction of the land with 'other fruits', 'the bright things', 'the flowers' and '[w]ords and sounds.' Through an array of figures of speech, such as anaphora, simile, asyndeton, and epithet, Jackie Kay demonstrates the oral and aural aspects of her poetry. The performativity of her language is strengthened with the image of the 'dance' which is a performance in itself. The speaker observes: 'I danced a dance I never knew I knew' as if the ability to dance were something innate, transferable like genes (Concannon 257). This stands in sharp contrast with an anti-essentialist vision of ethnic identity in *The Adoption Papers*; at school, the daughter practices 'the Black Bottom' and fails to perform it correctly. Hence, for Concannon,

[t]he imaginary capacity to dance a dance she never knew she knew accomplishes two things. It subverts the social subjugation of this particular childhood experience. Through the power of this memory, she is no longer an outsider struggling to find the rhythm of the dance while being humiliated; she is part of the crowd, talented, included. Also, by suggesting that she never knew that she knew the dance, Kay insinuates that it is somehow part of her makeup, but that it had never been fully realized. The knowledge of it had been in her all the time but had never been brought to fruition. If a dance is innately in one's consciousness, then Kay suggests that, within poetry, one can cross over between geographic and temporal constrictions and participate in a kind of essentialist memory, in which the experiences of the group are transferred onto the individual. (*Ibid.*)

The two rhyming terms 'feet' and 'seed' underline the protagonist's desire to belong to the land of her ancestors. In a manner similar to the daughter from *The Adoption Papers* who refers to her Scottish grandmothers and feels a strong attachment to her motherland, the protagonist from 'The Pride' wants to 'ground' herself in specific time and location – the village in Nigeria. This is made possible through poetry, as illustrated in the line: 'Words and sounds fell out of my mouth like seed'. The seed symbolises the persona's further growth and identity development as much as it marks the beginning of her quest to reconnect both her roots and routes in Africa. Words, like 'seed', enable her to become ingrained in the sensory and

welcoming Nigerian village. Through poetry, she leaves an imprint, thus turning her absence into presence (Turnay-Theodotou in Maebe 2017; 33). Her poetic rendering of the African soil, its roads, and rituals is to be found in another literary genre she adopts, the memoir. Kay's *Fiere* as well as her prose create a network of resonances – be they stylistic or/and thematic. In *Red Dust Road*, Jackie imagines herself walking barefoot in Africa:

‘I take off my shoes so that the red earth can touch my bare soles. It's as if my footprints were already on the road before I got them. I walk into them, my waiting footprints. The earth is so copper warm and beautiful and the green of the long elephant grasses so lushly green they make me want to weep. I feel such a strong affinity with the colours and the landscape, a strong sense of recognition... I feel shy with the landscape too like I might be meeting a new blood relation.’ (213)

As in ‘The Pride’, the passage explores the protagonist's ‘strong sense of recognition’ which occurs before her real journey to Africa. The imagined encounter with the Ibos in the poem is juxtaposed with a personified meeting with ‘a new blood relation’ in *Red Dust Road*. Through the anthropomorphised representation of the road and the use of transferred epithet ‘waiting footprints’, Jackie Kay lyricises her longing for recognition with the African land and its people. She believes her footprints are already there on the continent; that they speak of her existence and belonging to Nigeria. Walking barefoot is a way of getting a ‘whole experience’, of feeling free to merge oneself and unite with the land. With traces, tracks, footprints and even a face-as-a-map metaphor, Jackie wants to transform her African identity into something earthy and tangible.

The ‘mixture of myth and gene’: ‘Drawing’ and ‘constructing’ Africa

However, the vision of the dark continent Kay presents, with some vague references to ‘other fruits’ and ‘bright things’, is only a phantasmagoria, an imaginary and paradise-like land, a ‘fantasy Africa’ (Kay, *Trumpet*, 34). In ‘The Pride’, the protagonist's act of fantasising her Nigerian heritage thus functions as a short-lived ‘dream-like state’:

her dream-like state, however, cannot last long and she eventually “wakes” to find the stranger gone, left with the reflection of her own isolated face in the train window. She is back with her own fragmented, contradictory and multiple identities that she needs to work out. (Früh 74)

For many Black British people, Africa has proved to be a ‘hot red, dust road’; a fantasy world ‘all in the head’ (Kay, *Trumpet*, 34). In her memoir, the protagonist admits: ‘Part of me came from Africa, part of me was foreign to myself, strange to myself since I had never been to the dark continent and could only really have it burning away, hot and dusty, in my mind’. As Afam Akeh observes, the protagonist’s representations of ‘homecoming’ in the poem are ‘poignantly estranged, as they focus, like tourists, on what is strange, what is different’ (Akeh in Gray).

In ‘Fantasy Africa’, a chapter from *Red Dust Road*, Kay probes the depths of her imagination in order to picture her father; the only figure that links her to Africa. Her attempt to draw a portrait of her birth parent resonates with the daughter’s endeavour to imagine her biological mother in *The Adoption Papers*:

‘In my imaginary childish drawing, my birth father is a tall, handsome black man with large hands and dark life lines and a broad smile. He is a rich dark colour, a melting darkness, warm and endless like the dark of sleep. He has broad features, a wide nose, high spread cheeks, wide as the span of a small bird’s wing, and a laughing smile. When I trace round the edges of the bold picture-book picture, he becomes a bit fuzzier, a bit less whole. He has black curly hair, but I can’t quite see its texture, I can’t image the smallness of the curls. His eyes are black and dark and I can’t read them. I don’t know this man. I have never met him yet.’ (Kay 2010; 37)

The protagonist idealises her father, imagining him as ‘a tall, handsome black man’ (Ibid.). The simile ‘warm and endless like the dark of sleep’ reveals that the child perceives her parent as a dreamlike and comforting figure. Yet, the repetitive use of the polyptotons ‘dark’, ‘the dark’ and ‘darkness’ hints at Jackie’s unfamiliarity with her father and the limits of representation that it entails. She realises that although her depiction of her birth father is vivid, somehow poetic, it lacks precision: ‘He has black curly hair, but I can’t quite see its texture (Ibid.). The insistence on the adjectives, such as ‘broad’, ‘wide’ and ‘wide spread’, indicates that the protagonist feels incapable of putting her father’s image into some real ‘frames’, as he is a blurry and inaccessible figure (‘melting darkness’), escaping her imagination: ‘When I trace round the edges of the bold picture-book picture, he becomes a bit fuzzier, a bit less whole’. This leads her to distance herself from the parent as indicated in the shift from ‘my birth father’ to ‘this man’: ‘I don’t know this man. I have never met him yet.’ (Ibid.)

The act of fantasising about parents as being extraordinary heroes is one of the major questions addressed in Freud’s *Family Romances* (1909). In his work, he elaborates a theory according to which the child begins to imagine that his biological parents are not the ‘real’ ones

and then fantasises about other parents, generally being of noble lineage. Jackie Kay alludes to this concept in the following passage:

I like making him up now and again, like children make up stories, or draw bright pictures. He is proud; he is clever; he is noble. Like the young Sidney Poitier or Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King or Cassius Clay – the only real images of black men I have at my disposal – I imagine my father possesses great dignity, stature...

The daughter imagines herself as an ‘African princess’ after having been stimulated by her adoptive mother’s own fascination with myths and story-telling. Hence, her interest in adoption, the lost narratives of her birth parents’ lives and romance, seems to originate from her upbringing: ‘I often wonder whether or not I’d have been that interested in being adopted if my mum hadn’t been so fascinated by it all’ (Kay 41). Jackie Kay implies that adoption creates a fleeting space of reality and fantasy. The Nigerian biological father epitomises ‘a mixture of myth and gene’: he is ‘part fact, part fiction’. For Fox, he ‘represents a tantalizing fantasy of ‘live’ and originary black kinship that haunts Jackie throughout her adult years’ (Fox in Maebe 2017; 24). In this chapter, the images of Africa and the different portraits of her father are intertwined, showing how both the continent and the father represent a vast fantasy landscape: ‘Africa itself could only ever be imagined in the way that I imagined my father...’ (38)

Since her Nigerian birth parent is such an unknown and inaccessible figure to her, her Nigerian ancestry and identity also remain unattainable. In addition to being a ‘foreigner without’ experiencing estrangement in her motherland, this unfamiliarity with her African roots is what makes her ‘a foreigner within’, a stranger to herself (*Ibid.*). Having been repetitively asked where she comes from, she explains that this constant interrogation of her belonging causes her to be ‘subconsciously caught up in asking that question again and again of [herself]’ (*Ibid.*).

This feeling of estrangement and otherness is translated through the depiction of Africa that the daughter has observed at school. She draws a parallel between her own alienation and the depiction of the continent by reproducing the discourse she has got acquainted with at school:

‘African people lived in mud huts in appalling poverty, wore grass skirts and tribal make-up, had strange cuts in their faces to indicate their tribes, were primitive, unsophisticated. Something about sex was hinted at but not spoken. (Big penises,

whisper, whisper.) Africans could dance; they had natural rhythm. There was jungle out there in Africa – jungle and bush, lions and elephants. There were African elephants which had different ears from Indian elephants. It was hot in Africa. The people were very dark. The people were wild savages. When they were born they were put into an oven to make them darker so that their skin did not burn in the sun. There were bongo drums in Africa, witch doctors and strange wild dances, lots of chanting and humming and squealing. Superstition was big in Africa. African people were not logical thinkers. African people were more like stories and myths than rational, logical human beings’ (39)

In his article ‘Other/Otherness’, Jean-François Staszak perceives otherness as a cultural and discursive construct, ‘the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group (“Us”, the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups (“Them”, Other) by stigmatizing a difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination’ (2008; 2). In the passage from *Red Dust Road*, the depiction of Africans as ‘savage’, superstitious, irrational, different both in their physical appearance and attitudes, is what ‘relegate[s] [them]... to the margins of humanity’ (1). This process of ‘othering’ is based on a binary logic (the Self vs. Other/the White vs. the Black/the savage vs. the civilised), the system of norms and categories imposed by the in-groups, and, finally, on different forms of geographical marginalisation which make Jackie’s schoolmates mistake Africa for a country.

Furthermore, since skin colour is portrayed in the passage as a marker of one’s affiliation to a country/continent, we can observe how this type of discourse confines race to a particular geographical location. This, of course, denies diversity and imposes spatial borders on the individuals and their identity, as illustrated with the example of the question ‘Where are you from?’ which Jackie is repetitively asked. Although the school discourse on Africa is potentially alluring too, with its tribal dances and ‘bush, lions and elephants’, Kay nonetheless is aware of the fact that this exotic portrait of the continent only reinforces the sense of otherness while reassuring the in-groups of their cultural dominance and sophistication. As Staszak explains: ‘Although it seems that the Other is sometimes valued, as in exoticism, it is done in a stereotypical, reassuring fashion that serves to comfort the Self in their feeling of superiority’ (1).

Jackie Kay evokes the stereotypical images of Africa not only to represent racism in the society she lives in but to illustrate the protagonist’s struggle as a black girl to detach herself from ‘the assumptions and stereotypes that nibble at [her] own brain.’ (40) That is why she needs to ‘deconstruct’ and ‘reconstruct’ Africa in order to find the right expression for her own



identity. As she observes, reading texts by African diasporic writers, such as Lorde, Walker, Morrison, Ellison, has ‘changed the mirror that she [held] up to [herself]... changed [her] racial awareness’ (40-41).

It is through different life experiences and her own power of imagination that she can picture her father. Some of his facial features then become more distinct and even similar to those of the daughter (41), suggesting that at different periods of her life she is more likely to identify with her birth father, her own self, and her Nigerian ancestry. The author uses the metaphor of a spark to show how little is needed to dive into an imaginary act. Adopting fiction which comprises story-telling and social discourse is a way of reworking her Black identity and filling in the void that Africa and her father represent for her.

When reality intervenes: meeting the Nigerian father, or the ‘painful homecoming’

The ‘red dust road’ which burns away in the protagonist’s mind does not represent a specific, clearly distinguishable place in Africa; ‘it cannot be pinned down on a map’ (Assman 2018; 226). In order to locate her diasporic self and fill in the void that Africa and her Nigerian identity epitomise, Jackie decides to trace her biological father. She observes there are two types of adopted people:

the ones who never trace, who never want to, are not interested, or who are frightened of hurting their adoptive parents' feelings; and the ones who want to trace, who are curious about their origins, who think that in tracing their original parents they will understand themselves better (qtd. in Forna 2010).

Contrary to her long and patient search for the identity of her Scottish birth mother, the act of tracing the Nigerian father does not take much time (52). While surfing the Internet, Jackie immediately comes across a photograph of her father, ‘an article about his work on trees’ and even a phone number. This urges her to get in touch with her relative, first via a phone call, and then through an exchange of emails. She informs him that she is a writer and will come to Africa in order to do some work. She proposes a meeting on which the man agrees, admitting that ‘God has intended [them] to be in touch at this stage in [his] life’ (53). Apart from being a botanist, Jonathan also proves to be a religious man.

The real meeting between Jackie and her Nigerian father is recounted in the opening chapter of the memoir entitled ‘Nicon Hilton Hotel, Abuja’. The structure of Kay’s work is non-linear, and, because the events are not narrated in chronological order, *Red Dust Road* thus

breaks with ‘phantasmagoria of the linear life course’, as Klein observes. Furthermore, such a narrative mode implies that ‘individual memories of our past do not usually come to us in a coherent, linear form’ (Palazzolo 17). The memory of the father-daughter encounter comes first in the memoir and therefore does not signify the end of the latter’s identity quest. Meeting her birth parent does not serve as an epigrammatic conclusion but rather becomes a magnet attracting multiple questions reverberating around the home, identity, belonging, recognition, the past and the present, and the relationship that the adoptee can develop with her birth parent.

In the hotel, Jackie is confronted by a man ‘sitting on a white plastic chair in a sad café’; this man looking like other male figures that the protagonist has spotted the entire afternoon turns out to be her father (1). He immediately asks her to go to her room and once they are there, he expresses his wish to begin their meeting with a sermon:

‘And now we’re in the room. I’m about to have a conversation with my birth father for the first time. Jonathan is moving about from foot to foot, shifting his weight from side to side, like a man who is about to say something life-changing. He begins: “Before we can proceed with this meeting, I would like to pray for you and welcome you to Nigeria.”’ (3)

The prayer, however, turns out to be a two-hour session of blessing, singing, dancing, spinning, and foot-tapping. The performance is further enriched with a bevy of biblical passages and the man’s shouts to the God Almighty. It is not a welcome that the protagonist might have expected. Undeniably, it stands in sharp contrast with the representation of ‘homecoming’ in ‘The Pride’. In *Red Dust Road*, the father’s extravagant service stirs up different emotions in the daughter who in the end pities herself and wishes it was over. As a born-again Christian and local healer, the man strives for converting - and almost “bribing” - his child into Christianity by promising that God will increase her literary talent. His behaviour reveals he does not act like a warm and loving father but rather appears to be a caricature of a missionary who pushes the limits in order to convert a non-believer and only stops his ritual in order to ask whether the woman is ready to receive Christ. Jackie even uses an oxymoron ‘holy vampire’ to portray his ‘need [for] the fresh hit, the new blood of a beginner believer’ and show how his extended service has sucked energy out of her (8).

Very much to the protagonist’s surprise, the sermon also turns out to be an act of spiritual cleansing. As she notes, flabbergasted,

‘I realize with a fresh horror that Jonathan is seeing me as the sin, me as the impure, me the bastard, illegitimate. I am sitting here, evidence of his sinful past, but I am the sinner, the live embodiment of his sin. He’s moved on now, he’s a clean man, a man of glory and of God, but I’m sitting on the hotel room chair little better than a whore in his eyes, dirty and unsaved, the living proof of sin’ (6)

Jonathan transposes his own ‘sin’ of having the child out of wedlock over Jackie, the ‘living proof’ of his buried past or, rather, what he perceives as his former life. Being considered as the epitome of ‘sin’ or someone else’s failure does not install any feeling of pride and hinders the daughter’s identification with her biological father. He himself sets boundaries between his child and himself by assigning her daughter to his previous life and his wife and other children to the present life; the only one that seems to matter for him: ‘You are my before. This is my after’ (10). The father’s statement seems to widen the temporal and emotional gap between him and Jackie. The latter, however, longs for his love, acceptance and recognition: ‘[I] ask him if he is glad to meet me’ (*Ibid.*).

During their meeting, she offers him a watch so that the gift will remind him of her. Yet, the man interprets it merely as a sign of her kindness and generosity. Since he has already got a watch, he suggests he might pass the present over to his wife:

‘Then he says, “Now I have a question for you. Would you mind very much if I gave this watch to my wife?

I’m stunned. ‘Yes, I would mind,’ I say. ‘I bought the watch for you. It is a gift for you. I like to think of you wearing it and that you might sometimes think of me when you look at the time’ (94).

Jackie is astounded with Jonathan’s offer, for the gift has an emotional importance for her. The watch symbolises her desire to be remembered by her father and to mark her presence in his life. She wants to believe that her biological father might think of her at times. The latter is nonetheless uninterested in introducing Jackie to his present life and wants to keep her existence secret, as he has done for over forty years.

Therefore, the vision of a wonderful ‘return’ to her father’s clan, represented in ‘The Pride’, is destroyed in *Red Dust Road* with Jonathan’s refusal to accept and recognise his long-lost daughter. This painful encounter cannot even be described as a ‘homecoming’ since there is nothing that would provide the protagonist with the sense of return or even the comforting feeling of being ‘at home’ with her father’s personality. What also appears significant is the place where the two characters meet. The Nicon Hilton Hotel in Abuja, ‘a planned city, with

little history' is not a domestic space but rather a 'neutral, impersonal and transient place' or what Marc Augé calls a 'non-place' which 'cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity' (Kay 2010; 165; Assman 227; Augé 1995; 75)<sup>5</sup>. This fleeting and transient nature of a hotel as well as the absence of history, memory and communal life increases the protagonist's difficulty to identify with her father as well as experience a sense of black recognition.

Even though Kay's story-telling makes the painful meeting a brilliant scene, glossed with humour, the encounter nonetheless sheds a light on the challenges that Jackie encounters while attempting to access her identity and find her space of belonging.

The struggle to belong: an encounter with the local people in 'Ukpor Market'

Jackie Kay demonstrates that one's identity and sense of belonging may be challenged in the interaction with other people. In *Red Dust Road*, the protagonist learns that the search for her identity mirrored back to her by her birth parents is unfruitful: 'You cannot find yourself in two strangers who happen to share your genes' (47). Despite some physical resemblance, she is very much unlike her father. Jonathan cannot indeed provide her with a sense of familial affiliation or, further, of ethnic recognition. Contrary to her father who is uninterested in his past and has muted his Igbo identity for the sake of his Christian faith, the daughter wants to trace her roots, her ancestral village and its people, in order to make sense of who she is, where she comes from and, finally, where she belongs (169-170).

A few years later, while travelling the 'red dust road', Jackie expresses her fascination with the African landscape and captures a few moments of self-recognition, as illustrated in the line: 'As we go further and further east, I notice the shapes of people's faces change to mirror the shape of my own' (). She also believes she can make sense of some Igbo words, as if her knowledge of the local language were innate: 'The strange thing is that I can understand quite a lot of, without ever having been taught it'. Her identification with the local people through language becomes an attempt to assert and consolidate her ethnic identity, for language is 'one of the principal means by which a sense of common ethnic identity is maintained' (Woods in Elgezeery 130).

Upon arriving at her father's village, she meets a woman who gives her directions and laughs at her accent. This short and supposedly insignificant encounter with an anonymous

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<sup>5</sup> Augé, Marc. *Non-places. Introduction to an anthropology of super modernity*. London / New York: Verso, 1995, p. 75.

character, yet, marks Jackie's linguistic alienation and foreshadows her struggle for belonging and recognition. As soon as she finds Jonathan's house, she observes he is not there and that no one is going to welcome her. There will not be any celebrations or large gatherings or 'drum-beating'. Her father's house is inaccessible to her, as demonstrated in the following passage: 'I go and stare into the windows and through the shutters of Jonathan's house. I can't see much. I stand outside the mustard-painted front door and try and peer through the little bit of window the shutter doesn't cover. But it's dark in there, and I can't see anything at all' (25). Both the woman's reaction at Jackie's accent, the absence of a welcoming family, and the dark and secluded house indicate that the protagonist is an 'outsider'. The atmosphere of secrecy pervading Jonathan's living place seems to epitomise the secret around Jackie's own existence. For the father, she is locked up in the past ('you are my before'), inaccessible to others.

The female character then drives to Ukpok where she speaks of a 'big market... bustling and vivid' (215). It is worth observing that already in ancient times, the market represented a vibrant and lively place, a centre of communal life and a site of negotiation and exchange. Jackie goes shopping there and, at some point, observes that she has attracted a crowd of people gathering around her and 'shouting, 'Oyibo' (*Ibid.*). The scene is retold in the poem from *Fiere* entitled 'Ukpok Market':

In the market in Ukpok  
 I saw a row of women  
 with my face: mirror image.  
 Same square physiognomy,  
 same wide nose, same broad smile.  
 The only difference I could see  
 was another shade of black.  
*Oyinbo!* They say to me, *Oyinbo*.  
 I nod excitedly. Yes my father  
 is an Igbo. *Oyinbo*, they say,  
 admiringly, touching my skin.  
*Onye Ocha*. Kachi tells me  
 what they mean:  
*Oyinbo is a pidgin word  
 for white woman,*  
 he says, smiling. (8)

There is a tiny element of difference which distinguishes the protagonist from local women: her skin colour. Yet, despite lighter complexion, Jackie feels the connection with the place. She is thrilled to see that people recognise her ethnic origin; she further confirms her

Igbo identity while mentioning her father, the figure which links her to Africa. The moment of recognition, however, does not last long since she is informed that the word ‘oyinbo’ which the women use to describe the protagonist designates, in fact, a ‘white woman’ (8). The struggle for belonging in ‘So You Think I’m a Mule’ is echoed in ‘Ukpor Market’, showing how colour difference affect the perception of identity and bars the protagonist from claiming either her Scottish and Nigerian selves. As Maebe notes, she ‘seems out of place wherever she goes ‘because of the duality of her illegibly marked body’’ (Maebe 41). As a biracial person, the protagonist struggles to define and assert her identity. As already observed in ‘The Pride’, her temporary removal from Scotland and her fantasy, tourist-like vision of Africa metaphorically represents her exclusion from the two countries. The daughter feels welcomed and accepted on the road: ‘it welcomes me; it is benevolent, warm, friendly and accepting’ (213). The road does not designate any particular location; rather it implies that Jackie is situated ‘somewhere between’, that her space of belonging is not easy to define and that the process of identity-building is still in progress.

## B – Somewhere between

Kate Turner confirms that ‘Kay’s journey to find her birth parents could lead to an essentialist story in which the ‘roots’ of identity are uncovered. Instead, Kay offers a multifaceted exploration of ‘belonging’...’ (Turner 275). As a biracial adoptee, the protagonist in Kay’s writing observes that ‘her Nigerian and Scottish heritage repeatedly exclude and displace one another’ (*Ibid.*, 284). For Margaret Elphinstone, ‘identity is located precisely at the point of painful contradiction: recognition of and alienation from one’s own place’ (1999; 68-69).

The protagonist escapes ‘the social construction of [...] natural and homogenous national identity’ which is supposed to provide the individual with a sense of cohesion, rootedness and completeness (Turner 284). This impression of unity and stability, which has long characterised autobiographical texts aiming to produce the stable and unified self, is disrupted through the non-linearity of *Red Dust Road* so that the reader is both ‘out of time or out of place’ (*Ibid.*, 275-276). In a manner similar to *The Adoption Papers*, the transitions from reality to fantasy and the shifts in fonts, time, location, voices and writing style allow the reader to explore Kay’s space in-between or, as Turner suggests, occupying the ‘third space’ (276).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The ‘third space’ is a postcolonial sociolinguistic concept of identity and community coined by Homi Bhabha. It explains the uniqueness of each person or context as being ‘hybrid’.

The structure of the memoir is evocative of Kay's search for her identity and her space of belonging as much as it denies the possibility of 'the imagined coherence promoted by national identity' (*Ibid.*).

The constant back-and-forth movement in time and space and the oscillation between the Nigerian and Scottish inheritances reflect the idea of the journey, with constant crossing and a sense of relocation. We shall now observe how Kay manages to portray the duality and fluidity of identity, fluctuating between Nigeria and Scotland - between 'home' and 'abroad' – in both her prose and poetry. This will also enable us to analyse the 'third space' that the protagonist from *Fiere* and *Red Dust Road* inhabits.

Convergence, fluidity and continuum in 'Black River' and 'Between the Dee and the Don'

Jackie Kay reinvigorates river imagery, much celebrated in African American poetry and American blues, in order to explore coexisting and confluent identities. It is worth observing that Kay's poems and passages on rivers have received little critical attention. In their Ph.D. dissertations, Davidson analyses 'Black River' from a stylistic point of view, whereas Concannon elaborates on the trope by drawing links between Kay's poetry and American blues. I shall, however, focus on the trope as a means to better understand the protagonist's exploration of her roots, identity and space of belonging.

In 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers' written by Langston Hughes, a key African American poet and one of Jackie Kay's literary inspirations, the author metaphorically represents the flow of the river as a symbol of African American history, perseverance and continuity through time:

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.<sup>7</sup>

The river becomes a source of one's origins; the idea which can be found in 'Black River':

a black river running through our arteries  
a black river putting our hearts at ease,  
a black river touching our skin like a lover,

a black river to remind us of our ancestors,  
running through the swamps and secret marshes  
when freedom was a belief the river rushes  
passed along the dark water like a breeze. (11)

The black river flows 'through... arteries' like blood which means it is carried within one's body, natural and innate, almost a life source. As it affects different body parts, we can observe how vital the presence of the river is to one's existence and personhood. Arteries, hearts and skin become a metonymy for identity – be it biological, racial, or based on emotional recognition ('hearts'). The anaphora 'a black river' also establishes a sense of identity that endures in time. The repetitive use of gerunds ('running', 'putting', 'touching') seems to imitate the ever-continuing movement of the river. The body of water carries the protagonist and the others – represented with the inclusive 'we' – back to their ancestors, to their past, as demonstrated in the couplet: 'when freedom was a belief the river rushes / passed along the dark water like a breeze' (11). The river reaches as far as the history of slavery. Through the repetition of the verb 'running', we can notice a smooth transition from the present to the past, from the image of the flowing and nourishing river to the portrait of enslaved and escaping African people.

The river, being fluid and mobile in nature, becomes a metaphor for crossing the generational and temporal boundaries. In *Red Dust Road*, Jackie Kay describes the river Niger, as follows:

The road up to the Niger is smooth and lovely and when we turn the corner and see the metal structure that is the Niger Bridge, something in me lifts. I feel so full of excitement just to be crossing the Niger. It's a bigger bridge than I imagined, not as big as the Forth Bridge in Scotland or the Golden Gate in

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<sup>7</sup> Langston Hughes, 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers' from *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. Reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates, Inc.



California, but still impressive... It's thrilling because the River Niger is just something I learnt about and now it has suddenly leapt into life, and is running underneath me, like it would still have been running when I was doing my geography lessons. (209)

The river brings Jackie back to her school days. The idea of 'crossing' seems appealing to her, and she ponders about the bridge, which literally reconnects the two shores, and can metaphorically represent the possibility of reconciling the protagonist's Scottish and Nigerian identities. While admiring the Nigerian bridge, she recalls the Forth Bridge and the Golden Gate, somehow indicating how her identity is constructed at the crossroads of three different cultural inheritances. It can further be illustrated in the line from 'Black River': 'the colours changed – black, to brown, to blue' (11). The river epitomises the endless flow of experience during which the dualities of stability and change, memory and transcendence come to the fore. This infinite flow of experience is also inherent to the protagonist's search for identity.

In 'Black River', Kay emphasises the transformative power of the self:

We passed crocodiles masquerading as logs  
Under the mangroves, and snow egrets  
Fluttering like blossom in the branches,  
And the river carried us as if carrying us home – (11)

By describing 'crocodiles masquerading as logs', the author shows how identity can be staged, while the phrase itself underlines the performative aspect of Kay's poetry. The verb 'masquerading' implies the word 'mask' which becomes an important metaphor for the layering and doubleness of the self. Nature, with its river and wild animals, seems to transform itself into the different parts of the tree ('logs', 'blossom', 'branches'), thus indicating the protagonist's longing for her African roots. Eventually, 'home' is mentioned in the last line of the third stanza. As Davidson notes,

'the last line of the third stanza has the consolidating image of going "home" – "and the river carried us as if carrying us home –" (12) yet the word home is followed by a dash and then a space between stanzas rather than a full stop which would have underscored the idea of a destination finished. Instead of a sense of resolution the dash leads the reader to a clause that brings complexity to the concept of home: "wherever we were, wherever we came from" (13).' (2015; 131)

In the poem, home is not fixed in a particular location. The loss of identity and roots is highlighted in the opening lines of 'Black River': 'the water darker than the darkest mirror, / the mangrove roots trailing the river bed' (Davidson 2015; Kay). As a Black person, the protagonist struggles to define 'home', which recalls another poem, 'So You Think I'm a Mule'. The lack of rootedness sheds light on the nature of the protagonist's identity as multiple, fragmented and diasporic, as illustrated in the following lines: 'the boat lifted and crashed and smashed on the waves, / and there were the jack-fish leaping, / the dolphins diasporic dive' (12).

By choosing a river as a 'route' or 'pathway' to her origins, identity and 'home', the protagonist shows that she inhabits a liminal space – somewhere between the past and the present, here and there, slippery and rooted. Jackie Kay explores doubleness and liminal space in her description of the Niger and that of a river running through a Scottish city. The former 'roughly bisects Nigeria' (209), whereas the Dee and the Don divide Aberdeen, the city where Jackie's parents have met and fallen in love: 'I like Aberdeen. Its name means between the Dee and the Don, the two rivers... In my imagination, I was conceived between the Dee and the Don, a confluence of rivers, the mouth of two rivers' (132-133).

Concannon wittingly observes how Jackie Kay uses the geography of the city which is situated in-between two rivers in order to meditate on her own dual identity. In 'Between the Dee and the Don', she 'articulates her self-attitude as a set of dual syllogisms and her state of being both, neither and in between various characteristics' (Concannon 271). The poem becomes a manifesto of the persona's identity which is multiple, as highlighted in the abundance of anaphora 'I':

I will stand not in the past or the future  
not in the foreground or the background  
not as the first child or the last child.  
I will stand along in the middle ground.

I was conceived between the Dee and the Don.  
I was born in the city of crag and stone.  
I am not a daughter to one father.  
I am not a sister to one brother.  
I am light and dark.  
I am father and mother. (23)

The poetic 'I' chooses the 'middle ground' as a proper space of belonging. Through parallelisms 'I am light and dark. I am father and mother' and negation 'I am not a daughter to one father', she explores the complexity of her dual identity which may at times seem contradictory, since it defies social norms and categories, such as race and sex. The set of litotes and binary oppositions allows 'a flexible, multi-dimensional space, one that can accommodate ontologies, voices and words...' (Hedon 6).

Personal and communal: memory and oral tradition(s)

'I live between the land and the sea', observes the poetic persona in 'Between the Dee and the Don', thus shedding a light on the complexity of her identity oscillating between her desire for rootedness and stability and the actual nature of her selfhood which is fluid and multiple. The convergence between 'slippery' and 'rooted' can be explored in one of the chapters from *Red Dust Road*. 'Mull' evokes the protagonist's and her family's holidays on the Isle of Mull. Being a piece of land surrounded by the sea, the island represents a liminal space.

In this chapter, memory becomes a driving force that reconnects the geographical routes with the crisscrossing pathways of reminiscing and story-telling. Jackie and her mother engage in the act of remembering and re-telling their past holidays: 'Remember the first time we were in Mull? You were four. Maxie was six and a half. You both had identical anoraks, yours was brown and Maxie's was blue' (114). The repetitive use of the word 'remember' adds a musical quality to the text and calls the reader's attention to the importance of memory as well as its circularity – it is a form of looping back and forth in time and journeying between the past events and the present re-telling of them. The journey motif is explored both literally – through the description of the road trips across Scotland – and metaphorically, since the text travels back to Jackie's childhood memories and forward to the moment when she goes on a family trip.

It is worth observing that the text uses the direct form of address and fluctuates between the mother and the daughter, between 'I' and 'you'. For Assmann,

'[t]he lack of quotation marks to indicate the change of the narrative voice at the beginning of the chapter, and later during the long passages where holiday memories are being shared, points to the blurring of boundaries between one's own and other's stories as part of the process of conjoint family reminiscing' (2018; 217).

Remembering the past becomes a collective participatory experience during which the reminiscences of one family member can complete another. It is a way of piecing together different elements of a family story. While referring to her parents, Jackie explains their shared memory work: 'I love the way they tell [stories] in tandem, and both remember slightly different things' (117). The phrase reflects the idea which applies to many of Kay's works – story-telling represents a set of connections. Intertwining different voices can be compared to the act of knitting: in many ancient cultures, people used to weave up threads in order to communicate with others as well as tell stories of their lives – the threads led them to produce a text (from Latin *textura*, 'fabric').

Jackie Kay observes how her parents' stories enable them to plant their past 'in the land of permanent present' (118). The past, as well as different 'routes', can be 'played' like music. This is shown through the repetition of the phrase 'And we played our way...' which appears at the beginning of the paragraphs and functions as a refrain. Songs bring the protagonist's family to different places, such as 'Torridon', 'Inverness' and 'Ballantrae'. They flow between the past and the present, between one location and another (119). Furthermore, they enable the characters to trace their roots and routes, as shown by the parent's singing of 'The Hiking Song', the Scottish song about being wanderlust and travelling between the land ('highland glens') and the sea ('Minch Waves').

Though cultivated through story-telling and music, memory can nonetheless prove fallible. It offers a partial and subjective view of an event or/and experience. It also involves the act of selecting information, while privileging some elements over others. The partiality of memory may also be related to the decreased mental capacities – some events and experiences run the risk of being forgotten over time, as illustrated in the following passage: '...do you remember that couple went missing in the Lost Glen? my mum says in her serious, dramatic voice, low and slow in tempo. Was it after? Was it not before?' (123). Hence, the memory work creates a liminal space between forgetting and memorialisation. Jackie explains that the act of reminiscing allows her parents to build a fortress which protects their identity and reunites their old selves with the new, constantly evolving ones:

It's like a whole new way to tackle the potent danger of dementia or Alzheimer's: my parents reinforce each other with memory. I imagine the stories as a kind of fortress, that we will sit around the table as the water rises from the flooded moat around our small castle, and as long as the stories are shared, swapped and strengthened and embellished, my parents will be buttressed from the worst and live on and on, changing still, because all their

past has been brought forward into their future. It is a whole new kind of account, not a cash account, but an account-account. And nobody will drown. The banks will not be ruptured. It's not so much that people drown in memories, or that the past is another country; for my parents the past is their future. Old age and illness threaten the walls of even the new extension, but they are still here, confirming again and again all the people they have been...' (121-122)

In the passage, Kay delineates the importance of story-telling as a way of looking both to the past and the future. Remembering becomes an act of ensuring the continuity of one's identity as well as a means to fight against absence.

This threatening possibility of absence and/or erasure is mentioned in the passage and alludes to the birth parents' loss of memory. Elizabeth, a fragile and troubled woman, slowly descends into Alzheimer's and keeps secret notes as a way of reminding herself of various things. Jonathan, on the other hand, has deliberately rejected his past. Whereas the former lives in a city with no history, Milton Keynes, the latter explains to Jackie that the Biafran War has 'wiped out' his ancestors' culture and history. Unlike the protagonist's parents who keep memorabilia which allow them to preserve the link between the past and the present, the Nigerian father has no family photographs or documents since they have all been lost:

When I met him in Abuja he told me he had no photographs of himself as a young man or boy because they all got lost during the Biafra War... he shook his head and said 'Biafra, Biafra, that was terrible, terrible,' and physically juddered. He said, 'It wiped us out. It took everything. All the photographic history, all the other family documents were completely lost during Biafra, everything personal' (114-145).

Kay's fascination with oral tradition and textual history has already manifested itself in *The Adoption Papers* in which the personal story of adoption is weaved up through three female voices and explored around written documents. It is then followed by a chapter entitled 'Severe Gale 8' in which the author meditates on the Thatcher years in Britain.

In *Red Dust Road*, personal and communal history are intrinsically connected: the erasure of culture and history during the Biafra War has led to Jonathan's loss of his Igbo identity. Turner notices that quoting Jonathan's words becomes an act of recording an oral testimony from someone whose culture has been annihilated:

his voice is inscribed into the text and his account of Biafra is then passed on to Kay's reader through her memoir. As such, the exposition of Biafra through

medium of personal memory that directly quotes the voice of an Igbo person who experienced the war plays out a process of oral testimony as a process for preserving erased history (288)

Turner further observes that the author continues to describe the conflict as the 'Biafra War' instead of using the common name of the 'Nigerian civil war' (*Ibid.*). By referring to Biafra, Kay 'introduces the reader to the conflict through an affiliation with the side of the conflict often erased under dominant historical narratives' (*Ibid.*). This reappropriation of Jonathan's way of naming the war reinforces the value of cultural transmission and oral history since Jackie 'passes on' not only her father's words but also his perception of the war.

Oral history is necessary to maintain a living record of one's life and belonging. In the chapter 'Christchurch to Glasgow', Jackie mentions Scottish traditional music played at her parents' house during parties: 'Alec Clark would sing 'Ae Fon Kiss', and Anna Ashton would sing 'John Anderson my jo', and Peter Morton would sing, and Kenny Haldane would sing, and I would feel happy, gloriously happy, surrounded by people who had their songs with them' (31). Songs are ascribed to different characters and convey 'histories, stories, and cultures' while begetting a sense of belonging. Especially, 'Ae Fon Kiss', originally a poem by Robert Burns written in spoken Scots, evokes the figure of the national poet and as well as draws links between Scottish identity and oral tradition.

Orality is central to marginalised cultures, as in the case of Biafra or larger, African countries, colonised by the English and Scots. While travelling in Africa, Jackie subtly portrays the impact of colonialism on the Nigerian towns and villages: 'We turn left at blue-and-white sign which reads Christ (Ang) Church Ukpore (Aka Mount Zion City) Diocese of Nnewi. The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) motto: Alive unto God... Everywhere you go in Nigeria there are wordy signs telling of worship' (212). The haunting image of the colonial past persists in the present, even in the names of geographical locations such as 'Victoria Island' and 'King George roundabout' (260). Those names recall the domination of the British Empire over Nigeria.

Though aware of the English and Scottish involvement in colonisation, Jackie Kay nonetheless attempts to create analogies between Scotland and Nigeria, by focusing on their common heterogeneity and even marginality. Nigeria is home to diverse clans, religious affiliations, and dialects. In the poem 'Ukpore market', the author portrays the country's linguistic diversity through the mention of women who use a 'pidgin word' in order to describe the protagonist. Similarly, Scotland is not a homogenous country, as illustrated by various

songs, each bringing Jackie and her parents to distinct places in Scottish Highlands, such as Torridon and Inverness, and to the coastal town of Ballantrae. For Turner, since ‘the oral tradition is associated with, but not limited to Highlands and Islands, we may establish a dual sense of marginality whereby Scotland is marginal to the wider British state, but its Highland and Island communities are also a marginalised part of the wider Scottish nation’ (Turner 289). The double experience of marginality is also typical of and within Nigeria, in the context of British racism and the erasure of the Igbo’s culture.

While searching for her roots in Nigeria, the protagonist also seeks local tales and testimonies. She voices her desire to tell the stories of their past to the marginalised communities in both states: ‘I want to talk to old Igbo people about their customs and beliefs and how they’ve changed over their lifetime; and then to do the same in the Scottish Highland and Islands. It interests me that my father is from a village in eastern Nigeria and my mother from a small town in the eastern Highlands in Scotland’ (Kay 217).

Though generally perceived as geographically and politically marginal, those places and communities become central to Kay’s story-telling as well as her meditation on the journey towards identity, belonging and self-acceptance. Story-telling enables the protagonist to create a liminal space between ‘personal’ and ‘familial’ as well as ‘personal’ and ‘communal’. Celebrating and preserving oral history comes at the intersection of both her national and ethnic identities, of being both Nigerian and Scottish, Igbo and Highland. The ‘red dust road’ then epitomises the crisscrossing of her complex national and ethnic inheritances, as we shall observe in the following sub-chapter.

Roots and routes: the intersection of national and ethnic identities on the ‘hot red, dust road’

In the chapter entitled ‘Lagos to Ukpor via Oguta’ whose telling onomastics already convey ‘the metaphor of the journey and the significance of the paths of connection’ (Palazzolo 118), Jackie Kay elaborates on the different ways her ‘Scottish and Nigerian homes may coexist, intersect, or perhaps rewrite the other’ (Concannon 263). She describes the road to her ancestral village, as follows: ‘[it] is much more winding than I imagined, and has more tight bends than any road I’ve been on so far in Nigeria. It is more like a road in the Highlands of Scotland’ (212). She also portrays the notions of home and self as possibly double: ‘There’s a feeling of liberation, and exhilaration, that at last, at last, at last I’m here. It feels a million miles away from Glasgow, from my lovely Fintry Hills, but surprisingly, it also feels like home’

(213). Jackie reconnects her memory of the Scottish roads with the new exhilarating experience of the Nigerian routes. The African landscape enables her to zoom past her Scottish inheritance, whereas the ‘hot red, dust road’ itself is crucial to understanding how the different selves overlap, thus shedding light on the nature of identity as both mobile and layered. This layering of identity is also represented through the protagonist’s act of ‘walking into them, [her] waiting footprints’.

The image of the ‘hot red, dust road’ reappears in Kay’s poetry and similarly epitomises the crossroads of the Nigerian and Scottish identities. In ‘Kano’, a poem from Kay’s collection *Life Mask*, the memory of the Scottish garden jumps onto the vivid pictures of Sahara and creates a twofold identity:

I step back in time, old love,  
along the hot dust, red road.  
People – are they my people? –  
Drag their bare feet like camels  
  
in this humped Sahara heat.  
The air shoves its long hand  
down my throat and pulls out  
my back garden in Brackenbrae. (180)

Later in the poem, the persona observes that ‘her face is a bright mask now’. The motif of the face, first explored in the daughter’s feeling of estrangement while looking at her reflection in the mirror, is now re-invigorated in the poem. The adjective ‘bright’ has joyful connotation, somehow conveying the transition from the daughter’s first feeling of alienation to a new positive exploration of her identity. It is as if the road had led to a new version of her face, a mask.

The mask that one puts on the face suggests the layering and doubleness of identity; the existence of not only one but two selves, one of which being secret or hidden. That two identities can coexist is illustrated in ‘Longitude’ from *Fiere*:

And though we share the same time  
and we sleep and wake in unison  
you are further away, in my dark mind,  
odd times, I glimpse you walking  
along the red dust road,  
same age as me, same hands, feet, toes. (2)



On the 'red dust road', the protagonist's coexisting selves can meet. The road cannot, therefore, be restricted to Africa since it always begets the memories of the other familiar self; the adopted girl's Scottish identity. For Tournay-Theodotou, it reflects the protagonist's dual selfhood since the 'red' refers to Robert Burns's poem and the 'long and winding' road alludes to both Scottish and Nigerian cultural inheritances (Theodotou in Maebe 2017; 32). The title of the work can also nod to another autobiographical text, *Dust Tracks on A Road* (1942), written by Zola Neale Hurston, a well-acclaimed author exploring her double African American identity.

In the interview with Karen Concannon, Jackie Kay mentions that walking barefooted on the road and reuniting her imaginary footprints with the real ones enabled her 'to dip her pen in ink' (qtd. in Concannon 263). Since the footprints seem to represent the materialisation of the fleeting, imagined experience, the long and winding road itself may be a metaphor for the coexisting and – sometimes overlapping – selves and paths of story-telling. For Dimock, 'literature... is a crisscrossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of geographies, other languages and cultures' (Dimock in Concannon 2).

## C – Going on and on: a never-ending journey

The old and new paths and selves in 'Road to Amaudo'

In 'Road to Amaudo', Jackie Kay experiments with form. The poem visually reproduces the long and winding road: it winds on the page and its lines are twisted in a serpentine form, creating the multiple shattered pieces of a long sentence. The full stop appears only after twenty-eight winding lines, thus miming the length of the road which 'stretches / perhaps into infinity / to a foreseeable future / and back to / lost time' (Kay 2011 52). It does not seem to have a clear beginning or an end – 'lost time' and 'infinity' are fluid terms that do not establish any precise timeline. Furthermore, the road cannot be put on the map since Amaudo is an imaginary place, meaning 'the village of peace in Igbo' (*Ibid.*). It shares the characteristics of all other routes in Africa: 'the road to Amaudo / like the road to Nzagha / like roads all over Nigeria / all over Africa / is a winding and long / red dust road' (*Ibid.*). The other pathways that the road to Amaudo evokes seem to symbolise the long and meandering experience of the members of the Black diaspora.

Yet, it is first and foremost a contact zone or, in other words, a universal meeting point between people: ‘the road to Amaudo / is at times impassable: / but pass people do, / men and women and children’ (*Ibid.*). In common hardship, carrying the same emotional baggage, and walking the same twisting and bending road, those people are not alone. Jackie Kay emphasises the importance of the other person, of ‘a... companion, a compadre, a fiere’ (52-53) in one’s life struggles and journeys of identity exploration. The idea of companionship manifests itself in the title of the 2011 poetic collection, *Fiere*, as well as in the 2010 memoir, *A Red Dust Road*. In the latter, the experience of walking down the road is both personal and interpersonal, solitary and in company: ‘I danced further down the red-dust road, and turned another bend and another. [...] In my dream, I walked with my baby brother all the way into the village’ (Kay 2010 243-244). The dreamlike sequence in which Jackie first imagines walking down the road alone, and then together with her baby brother, is followed by the real journey to the continent during which her friend Kachi keeps her company and other people appear on the road, enriching her journey with ever-renewing stories, insights, experiences, perspectives, and identities which allow her to tie together the different strands of her life narrative. As suggested in the line ‘round one corner, / and then another, / round one bend, then the next: / a father, a daughter, / a mother, a son’, the road provides the traveller with an opportunity to discover new identities and family affiliations (Kay 2011 52). During her journey to Africa, Jackie fails to receive acceptance and recognition from her father, but she does feel accepted and experiences a sense of recognition while meeting her Nigerian half-brother. The encounter unexpectedly paves a way for her new sense of identity and belonging:

There are tears in his eyes, and tears in mine. He hugs me tightly again and then takes my hand. We walk towards the outside stadium café together, hand in hand, comfortable, brother and sister, as if we’d known each other all of our lives. [...] I’m drinking in his face. His face has the same shape as my own, his forehead is the same. I feel a strange almost ecstatic sensation of recognition (271-272).

Sidney legitimises both her familial and ethnic selves, as he claims ‘[t]his is your heritage’ (273). Although Jackie is not acknowledged by her Nigerian father, the latter does not, however, prevent her from further exploring and claiming her belonging to her kinship and the Igbo community, to her ancestors and her siblings. The road, therefore, creates a space from which multiple identities and human relationships emerge.

‘Road to Amaudo’ also provides the speaker with an opportunity to reconcile her past and present selves: ‘Come, let us go / down the road to Amadou / and shake hands / with our

old selves' (53). In the poem, the old self is separate from the new one and embodies a single independent entity. The idea is somehow echoed in one of the chapters from *A Red Dust Road* entitled 'The Granite City' which covers Jackie's visits to Aberdeen, a city where her birth parents met while studying at the same university. She goes there twice; first, in order to trace her father and turn him, this mythical figure, into a flesh and blood character; second, to find him again after the disappointing meeting in Abuja. Aberdeen reconnects the character with her parents' past, and especially, her pre-Born-Again father: 'I can still find out where he lived. I can pick him up from where I met him that time, and take forty-seven years off him and have him back here, walking down the very old High Street, across the Quad, in front of the Linklater Hall, walking out of King's College. It is a kind of returning' (139-140). She believes her father's previous identity is set in stone and can be accessed every time she goes to Aberdeen. By knowing where he lived and what roads he usually took to get to the university, the protagonist manages to reunite with the young Jonathan.

Returning to Aberdeen is thus a way of claiming back her birth father – despite his refusal to meet again – as well as a means to fill in the gaps of the 'windy place'. In 'Road to Amaudo', the metaphor of 'cracks and crevices' recalls the adopted daughter's feeling of void, loneliness, and incompleteness which she tries to overcome by finding out the 'missing pieces' of the jigsaw that her life and her search for identity both represent. In the city of her parents, Jackie can re-sculpt her young father from the granite stone and learn 'sparkling, fossilized facts' about his life. Aberdeen renews her 'desire to know' and her search for 'wholeness'. Though it is described as 'the city of granite and oil', Jackie chooses the solid material – the granite stone – in her search for identity and family story, somehow indicating that she wants to find some sense of continuity, stability, and coherence.

Yet, in the very same chapter, she sadly notices that recreating her parents' story is an unrealisable task: 'I try and keep them walking until they fade into the distance, but they've stopped at the crossroads between the old High Street and Market Street, between fact and fiction' (151). Although story-telling remains her creative and restorative force, Jackie nonetheless observes that her family story should be freed 'from dictates of coherence and finality' (Fox in Maebe 47). She thus acknowledges the existence of open-ended, unfinished, and even unexplored pathways: 'Maybe the crossroads is the best place to leave them, the fork in the road, or the road not taken' (151).

It should be noted that the road to selfhood is always unfinished and open to new possibilities. This is well illustrated in 'Road to Amaudo' in which the speaker does not reach the destination but rather voices her desire to walk 'on the road to Amaudou, / the road to [her]

heart' (53). The unstable spelling 'Amaudo/Amadou' may suggest that the road has no fixed ending and/or destination but rather leads the persona to her own constantly evolving self. Eventually, what matters in the poem is the journey itself. The different selves and paths that appear in the poem reflect that there is no static identity – in fact, identities can change in time and space; they are ever-shifting, and sometimes difficult to grasp, as reflected in Jackie's statement about her parents in *Red Dust Road*: 'They are ghost one minute, haunting the city of stone, and ordinary people the next. It is impossible to sustain them, or maintain them' (151).

An infinite journey: the symbolic meaning(s) of the moringa tree

The themes of transience and instability which reverberate around the concepts of identity and place are illustrated in the final chapter of *Red Dust Road*. After her journey to Nigeria, Jackie returns to her home in Manchester, planning to plant the pods of the moringa tree in her front garden:

I decide that next week I will soak the moringa pods Uncle Nwora gave me and try my luck at growing a *Moringa oleifera* tree. I have never been particularly green-fingered, but you never know the minute. They are hardy trees, put the pods directly into the soil, Uncle Nwora said. I will chance my luck. I'll plant the tree to mark meeting my brother Sidney, like my mum fifty years ago, planted the cherry blossom to celebrate adopting my brother Maxwell.

I try and imagine my own moringa growing in the front garden of my terraced house in Manchester, far away from its home. I wonder if the pods will ever take root. I picture my healthy, tall moringa in ten years' time. Will I still be living here then? I imagine a magical moringa, years and years away from now; its roots have happily absorbed and transported water and minerals from the dark, moist soil to the rest of the splendid tree (288-289).

The author concludes her memoir with the image of a tree which may allude to the family tree; a symbol of rootedness and continuity. One could thus presume that the identity journey has reached its end and that the plant - whose pods have been brought from Nigeria and which is now going to be successfully transplanted to the British soil – highlights the character's personal growth and her positive claim about her dual transnational identity.

However, it should be observed that the perspective of rootedness and final self-concept is problematised in the passage. When analysing the concluding chapter of Kay's work, L. Sheppard argues that 'the juxtaposition of the image of the tree's roots with Kay's question 'Will I still be living here then?' signals the possibility of shifting identifications over time

(101). Indeed, as the plant may begin to sprout – or not – on foreign soil, the protagonist herself who now lives in England, away from her two home countries, is likely to wonder if she is going to settle down in the city or live elsewhere. The sense of instability and transience is thus delineated in the passage through the parallel feeling of uncertainty concerning the protagonist's future and the tree's possibility of adaptation to the foreign environment. For Maebe, the use of tree imagery becomes instrumental to the understanding of identity as involved in a continuous process of development: 'The tree is as organic as Kay's story and identity that will grow and change' (78).

Indeed, the story itself is left open-ended, unfixed, and somehow suspended between the real and the imaginary. In the final paragraphs of the memoir, Jackie only *foresees* growing the moringa tree and then *imagines* it in the years to come. The auto-fictional mode in the passage adds to the reader's sense of uncertainty since, as L. Sheppard observes, it is unsure that the protagonist has planted the tree at all (101). Palazzolo further detects ambiguity in Kay's description of *moringa oleifera* which, for her, does not portray the protagonist's celebration of roots but rather sheds light on her dilated perception of time and her awareness of multiple life paths:

In wondering whether the pods will take root, she conjures up both a conceivable future and a space of infinity. She imagines the tree "in ten years' time" – "Will I still be living here?" - but also as a 'magical moringa, years and years from now" (289). Although the transplanted moringa tree is visualised as "healthy" and quickly "absorb [ing]" nutrients from foreign soil, there is no celebration of origins. Rather, the uncertainty of the length of her stay in Manchester and the reference to the unbounded, ever-renewing magical tree highlight the transitory and dynamic quality of life paths (old, new, and imagined) and their significance as journeys of discovery' (121).

Palazzolo's thoughtful remark helps draw a parallel between the final chapter of *Red Dust Road* and Kay's 'Road to Amaudo' in their common exploration of time - oscillating between 'foreseeable future' and 'infinity' - and space which is that of numerous and ever-renewing possibilities. The new possibilities to define oneself are somehow indicated in Kay's decision to plant the tree not to remember her father who has been particularly interested in the *moringa oleifera* and done research on it, but to celebrate her encounter with her newfound Nigerian brother, Sidney: 'I'll plant the tree to mark meeting my brother Sidney, like my mum fifty years ago, planted the cherry blossom to celebrate adopting my brother Maxwell' (289). L. Sheppard refers to Tournay-Theodotou who

notes that the act of planting the tree, which Kay does for her biological brother, Sidney, whom she met in Nigeria, is significant when one considers she does not do so with her father, who happens to be a tree surgeon, in mind. It could be argued, then, that planting the tree signifies the capacity for choosing how one self-identifies, rather than being bound by any rigid definition of identity, or a providential destiny, that is preordained by one's immediate biological, cultural or social inheritance. Kay's tree... is a symbol of the commitment to nurturing a more open attitude towards identity and belonging among future generations (101).

By comparing her decision to plant the tree to her adoptive mother's, Jackie further shows that identity and belonging are a matter of personal choice; the idea which can be found in *The Adoption Papers* through the daughter's privileging of her adoptive identity in 'The Telling Part' and her adoption of cultural identity in 'Black Bottom'. That identity can be self-designed and re-assessed is shown in one of Kay's poems from *Fiere* titled 'Burying My African Father'. After having undertaken the long road to Nzagha 'and seen the lizards and geckos... and walked beside the elephant grasses', the persona is now able to claim her African identity and her relationship to the kinship *through writing*: 'Now that I have finally arrived, without you, / to the home of the ancestors, I can bid you farewell, Adieu. / For I must, with my own black pen – instead of spade - / ashes to ashes and dust to dust, / and years before you are actually dead, / bury you right here in my head' (Kay 2011 29; Maebe 42). What enables Kay to capture the complexity and multitude of identity and belonging is her writing space, 'her own mythmaking via pen and paper' (Fox in Maebe 43).

Ultimately, the image of the tree which appears in the end of her novel creates a space of infinite possibilities where not only can her two sides of identity – Scottish and Nigerian – be conjured through the metaphor of 'transplantation' but also Kay's identity as writer emerges. It is worth noticing that the front cover of 2011 *Fiere* collection illustrates two treetops, one of which being put upside down, so that they can merge together. While its branches keep going in two directions, forward and downward, the transformed and two-crowned tree somehow symbolises the sense of infinity and continuous renewal. This, of course, is typical of Kay's writing space in which she can re-invent the past, the present and the future, while fluctuating between autobiographical and fictional modes of narrative and diving in and out of prose and poetry.

Moving across genres: identity, writing, and multiformity

The theme of road and selfhood which prevails in Kay's *Fiere* and *Red Dust Road* allows the reader to observe that identity is always in motion, and so is Kay's writing practice. In her exploration of adoption, she, indeed, moves across genres in an attempt to find a suitable form for her self-expression. While reading her prose and poetry in tandem, one can explore the dynamic quality of "I" – be it poetic, autobiographical and/or fictional – and observe how the author conveys, what Palazzolo calls, 'a sense of internal multiplicity' (120). Furthermore, the crisscross reading of Kay's texts also urges the reader to abandon the linearity of the reading experience and beckons them to explore the new paths of story-telling and life-writing.

When interviewing Jackie Kay, Charles Henry Rowell is particularly interested in the way the writer manages to 'make a shift from writing poetry and writing fiction' (270). He asks her: 'How do you negotiate between the two genres, which make different demands on the writer?' (*Ibid.*). She explains that prose and poetry are two distinct literary forms with unique structure, length and purpose, requiring different writing practices. What comes to decide about the genre she is going to choose is the idea that springs to her mind, already embedded in a specific form: 'the idea already comes within a form for me, the idea and the form are already married (*Ibid.*). Kay then uses examples of her works to show that there are ideas which are realisable in poetry but cannot be developed in prose and *vice versa*. In another interview with Karen Concannon, she mentions the effect that poetry may produce and which cannot be achieved through the act of writing autobiographical text, such as *Red Dust Road*: 'In a poem, for instance, like in 'Egusi Soup' that I wrote about in *Fiere*, the father in that poem just gets up and flies off at the end. He just turns into a fable. It's very easy to do that in a poem. A poem can have a lift-off, a moment where the real then suddenly becomes completely unreal. It's doable, whereas in prose, you can do that in short stories...' (Kay in Concannon 310).

Though there exists a number of limitations in each literary form, Kay nonetheless succeeds in establishing a relationship between *Fiere* and *Red Dust Road* through a set of thematical resonances. For Palazzolo, those two works 'signal a key stage in Kay's search for a suitable form in which to narrate her life story, where the affordances provided by the hybrid quality of the memoir are combined with the close-up effect of poetic rendition' (119). Far from bringing poetry and prose into one single form – a practice which she strongly opposes, the author constantly searches for new literary grounds to explore.

It, therefore, means that identity and journey cannot be accommodated in one single form; those themes come in different shapes and require various forms of expression. They can be re-told, rejuvenated and re-explored through different genres which have their own rules and specificities. To understand the complexity of Kay's multigeneric writing, the reader needs

to follow in the author's footsteps and navigate between prose and poetry, between her poetic and narrative voices.



### Chapter 3: 'Another road to go on': writing the voice, voicing identity

In 'The First Lady of Song', a short story which for Kay is 'a lovely hybrid form, a cross between a poem and a novel', the author brings to the fore represented through various selves and musical genres. Emilia Marty is a 300-year-old shape-shifter who sings her way through different life periods, alternating between different names (Ekaterina, Elina) and types of music (folk, classical, jazz). It is indeed essential to mention this piece of writing as it synthesises Kay's conception of identity as coming in different forms.

Emilia's understanding of life, as Hedon observes, comes from music: 'over the years she sings Moravian Folk song, classical arias in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through to jazz in the 20<sup>th</sup>, and back to the classical music, until the moment when her last self Emilia says, "my voice is deeper now" (Kay, 2012, p. 42). It is a voice that has absorbed and synthesised the music of the past, a voice that can confidently account for the fluidity of the various identities she has had over the years' (Hedon 4).

Interviewed by O'Malley, Kay admits that 'a short story is all about voice...'. In the conversation with Rowell, she acknowledges the importance of the voice in her writing: 'most of my work is voice based and voice is the most important thing to me...' (273). As she further explains, the voice may decide whether she can write the whole text – it constitutes a bridge between her own self and the other voice she makes up: 'a voice that would work off as me and that voice' (*Ibid.*). In 'The First Lady of Song', Kay sheds a light on one of her goals - finding one voice that can capture all our idiosyncrasies and complexities, all different selves and shapes. The question that arises is the following: What kind of voice can perhaps encapsulate multiple identities and what techniques does the author employ in the construction of her voice which inhabits different selves and moves across texts and genres?

A – 'A voice that captures your own complexities': language and identity

This part will be dedicated to Kay's search for a voice that can account for her multiple identities. I will explore the different strategies that the author introduces in her poetry: the use of phonetic language, the different patterns of linguistic and cultural affiliation, and the significance of music in voicing identity. First, I shall observe how Kay attempts to embrace the Scottish voice while bearing in mind the limits and fears which may occur during the construction of identity. This will lead me to ponder the next stages of Kay's linguistic battle: how she can develop a black voice having been brought up in a predominantly white Scottish

environment? Eventually, in the last sub-chapter, I will try to address the following questions: what kind of voice does Jackie Kay adopt through the musicality of her poetry? How does her voluntary practice of moving across texts and genres contribute to the creation of her voice that is ‘Scottish, black and blue’?

### Embracing the Scottish voice(s) and the fear of losing the mother tongue in ‘Old Tongue’

Generally, scholars agree that there exists an intrinsic relationship between language and identity, for ‘language has always played an important role in the formation and expression of identity’ (Warschauer in Cumming 46). For Crystal and Elgezeery, it represents the primary step and/or symbol of identity which defines the communities we belong to as well as reveals our cultural distinctiveness (Elgezeery 130; Crystal in Cumming 46). Language, therefore, opens the portal to identity and communication – we are likely to identify and communicate with people who speak the same language. It connects people and enables the individual to maintain both a sense of belonging and social, ethnic, or/and national identities.

For Jackie Kay, language and identity are interrelated, as illustrated in the poem ‘Old Tongue’ in which the loss of the mother tongue becomes synonymous with the loss of the self:

When I was eight, I was forced south.  
Not long after, when I opened  
my mouth, a strange thing happened.  
I lost my Scottish accent.  
Words fell off my tongue:  
*eedyit, dreich, wabbit, crabbit*  
*stummer, teuchter, headbanger,*  
*so you are, so am ur, see you, see ma ma,*  
*shut yer geggie or I’ll gie you the malkie!*

My own vowels started to stretch like  
my bones  
and I turned my back on Scotland.  
Words disappeared in the dead of night,  
new words marched in: ghastly, awful,  
quite dreadful, *scones* said like *stones*.  
*Pokey hats* into ice cream cones.  
Oh where did all my words go –  
my old words, my lost words?

Did you ever feel sad when you lost a  
word,  
did you ever try and call it back  
like calling in the sea?  
If I could have found my words  
wandering,  
I swear I would have taken them in,  
swallowed them whole, knocked them  
back.

Out in the English soil, my old words  
buried themselves. It made my mother's  
blood boil.  
I cried one day with the wrong sound in  
my mouth.  
I wanted them back; I wanted my old  
accent back,  
my old tongue. My dour soor Scottish tongue.  
Sing-songy. I wanted to *gie it laldie*.

The speaker describes the impact of forced exile on accent, language and identity. In the first stanza, she recounts that moving south has contributed to the involuntary and uncontrolled dropping of many Scottish dialect words. In the following stanza, Scottish vernacular is replaced by standard English which somehow reproduces the protagonist's loss of the mother tongue. The line 'My own vowels started to stretch like my bones' alludes to the phonetic properties of both English and Scottish languages: the former is renowned for having 'stretched' vowels, whereas Scottish vowels are referred to as 'clipped'. The persona makes a reference to this phenomenon in the phrase: '*scones* said like *stones*'. By saying that 'words disappeared in the dead of night, new words marched in: ghastly, awful, quite dreadful', she seems to create an image of invasion, since the verb 'to march' has a military connotation and the adjectives, which come next, imply that something terrible and disquieting is taking place.

According to Alison Lumsden, 'the deprivation of one's language may be seen as both a form of colonisation . . . and a means by which identity may be destroyed' (84). It is possible that the poem alludes to Scotland's colonial oppression instigated by the English, as was the case for the Scottish Highlands between 1750 and 1860 which saw the forced eviction of its inhabitants and the erasure of Gaelic culture. In her writing, Jackie Kay is interested in bringing to the fore marginal voices: for her, 'to be "Scottish in Britain" is already to be marginalised' (Gish 185). In *Uneasy Subjects: Postcolonialism and Scottish Gaelic Poetry*, Silke Stroh

explores ‘the ambivalence of Scotland’s cultural and political status, as both an intra-British marginalised Other and an integral part of the British mainstream and the British sense of the self’ (12). With the growing influence of capitalism and the emerging visions of post-nationalism, Scottish critics, such as Eleanor Bell, have discussed the dual position of Scotland as internationally-oriented but also regional, aware of its local distinctiveness. In her article on ‘Queer Scottish Gothic’, Kate Turner explains how the studied genre reflects the problematic status of Scotland perceived as a ‘marginal borderland’ to England (208). Representing Scottish identity – whether to retain its international quality or claim its distinctiveness from Britain – has been a challenging task for writers during the lengthy period of the referendum and even years following it.

In her exploration of Scottish marginality vis-à-vis England, Jackie Kay decentres the vision of linguistic homogeneity in Britain as well as challenges the hegemony of standard English. In ‘English Cousin Comes to Scotland’, she illustrates the linguistic discrepancy between the two child speakers:

See when my English cousin comes,  
It’s so embarrassing so it is, so it is.  
I have to explain everything.  
I mean Every Thing, so I do, so I do.

[...]  
Whilst I’m saying this, my English cousin  
has her mouth open. Glaikit.  
Stupit. So she is, so she is.  
I says, ‘I’m going to have to learn you  
what’s what.’ And at that the wee git  
cheers up; the wee toffee nose says,  
‘Not learn you, teach you,’ like she’s scored.

While analysing the poem, Katharine Burkitt pays attention to the way the ‘childish bickering’ and ‘gentle mockery’ reflect ‘the split between English and regional Scottish English’ (89). As she further explains, ‘the English cousin becomes an embarrassment on account of her lack of knowledge: “I have to explain everything,” and the Scottish narrator is empowered’ (*Ibid.*). Not until the English child makes a grammatical mistake - ‘I’m going to have to learn you’ - does the cousin brighten up and corrects her. For Burkitt,

[...] although when the narrator's English is corrected by her cousin it is a reassertion of English dominance, it is notable that this linguistic [sic] correctness is also a sign of its own difference. The narrator's defiant "like she's scored" returns to her Scottish dialect and reinforces this colloquialism as the norm. "My English Cousin comes to Scotland" does not allow standard English to be prevalent, and as such, roots its consciousness firmly within the Scottish context. In so doing, the divisions that characterise inter-national relationships in the UK are uppermost and a single notion of British identity is always out of reach (90).

Jackie Kay denies the existence of a static and unified linguistic identity in Britain. It is worth observing that in 'Old Tongue', the lines 'where did all my words go' and 'If I could have found my words wandering' establish a link between language and movement, first indicated through the context of exile ('I was forced south') and then through the creative act of anthropomorphising the language where words are represented as being in constant motion ('fell off', 'go', 'wandering'). The author thus casts a light on the fluid and mobile quality of language, especially if we take into account other poems she has written:

[...] I use Old Scots, my own version of it, which would be in a poem like "Fiere." I use Shetland dialect in a poem in a poem called "The Knitter." I use Glaswegian from the 70s which would be in "English Cousin Comes to England." Then I use more contemporary Glaswegian and contemporary Scots. I'm always playing around with language and one of the fascinating things for a poet is how language is very fluid, and how it changes depending on immigration, influx of people, movement to places (Kay in Davidson 121).

Kay acknowledges the mutability of language which changes in time and space. Furthermore, by writing in different dialects, she complicates the picture of univocal and essentialist Scotland and challenges the sense of coherent and exclusive national identity. Her active promotion of multivocality goes hand in hand with her own general perception of identity – be it personal, communal or linguistic – as fluid, layered and multiple. As Gish points out, 'Kay's self-conscious play on voices, dialects... destabilizes any notion of a consistent unified self' (268). The rejection of univocal identity particularly suits Scotland since 'to be Scottish is, significantly, to be already aware of multiple identities and voices because every Scot is bilingual, trained in school to speak English, yet retaining Scots or Gaelic in varying degrees. They are, moreover, both "British", closely linked to England, and distinctly and self-consciously "Scottish."' (Gish 185).

For Lumsden and Christianson, the notions of heterogeneity and multiplicity are typical of Scottish women's writing which constantly challenges the monolithic and exclusionary model of Scottishness, as Scottish literature, poetry and citizenship have long been reserved for the male representatives of society. Those female writers, including Jackie Kay, rethink both gender and nation while working towards a new form of openness and inclusiveness concerning national identity. As the scholars explain in the Introduction: "the breadth of work of contemporary Scottish women writers now ensures the redrawing of the literary map of Scotland, allowing for these writers a natural assumption of place in a culture previously more accessible to male Scottish writers" (1). In her multivocal writing, Kay gives voice to women as well as other members of society who have been silenced: "I give voice to the voiceless". This, of course, can be observed in *The Adoption Papers* where the maternal voices and bodies – already challenging the heteronormative concepts of womanhood and maternity – are followed by other voices in the section called 'Severe Gale' in which the author 'speaks from the margins', showing that individuals in Scotland may be oppressed and marginalised because of their sexual, cultural and/or racial identity.

Kay's use of polyphonic and peripheral voices is thus an attempt toward a more cosmopolitan view of Scottish identity, without, of course, forgetting that such vision might not be apprehended by everyone. As Brown observes, 'Kay's work attends to Scotland's extraordinary social and symbolic dynamism at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century – in both devolutionary and post-devolution times – imagining the nation as a site of cultural possibility, yet without ever losing sight of the persistent threat to inclusive citizenship posed by racism' (220).

Scottish voice and 'black pen': a linguistic challenge

The cultural possibility which seems alluring to Jackie Kay is also a challenge, especially in a society that finds it difficult to accept the author's identity as both Scottish and Nigerian. For Kay, writing about two halves of her identity is political since it challenges the people's assumptions about one's personhood as fixed and univocal. In an interview, she claims that '[b]eing black and Scottish is a battle because you constantly have to assert your right to say "I'm here too, I have been for years and actually, I was born here"' (qtd. in McFarlane 2017). This battle also transposes over the space of writing where her Scottish voice and, what she calls, 'black pen' become the primary devices for the construction of her identity. Though Kay's voice is - both in her writing and performance - incontestably Scottish, she nonetheless

admits that finding a voice or writing technique that would capture the complexity of her identity as a black woman has been and still remains a challenging task. She explains in an interview published via the Scottish Review of Books that growing up in a predominantly white society and having no connection with Africa in the past have indeed prevented her from having a clear idea of what it means to be black.

Hence, poetry, considered an oral form, becomes a space where she attempts to voice her Scottish and Nigerian selves not merely through the set of thematic resonances between identity and road, belonging and landscape, but also through her creative construction of language which encompasses the author's selves. It is a form of language that moves across texts, dialects, and genres and which, in its fluidity and adaptiveness, can include many identities. In *Fiere*, she balances her dual inheritances so that the collection is neither too densely Nigerian or Scottish. The opening poem of the sequence, also titled *Fiere*, addresses and enacts Kay's Scottish identity through its phonetic and intertextual use of old Scots:

If ye went tae the tapmost hill, Fiere  
Whaur we used tae clamb as girls,  
Ye'd see the snow the day, Fiere,  
Settling on the hills.  
You'd mind o' anither day, mibbe,  
We ran doon the hill in the snow,  
Sliding and singing oor way tae the foot,  
Lassies laughing thegither – how braw.  
The years slipping awa; oot in the weather.

And noo we're suddenly auld, Fiere,  
Oor friendship's ne'er been weary.  
We've aye seen the wurld differently.  
Whaur would I hae been weyoot my jo,  
My fiere, my fiercy, my dearie O?  
Oor hair micht be silver noo,  
Oor walk a wee bit doddery,  
But we've had a whirl and a blast, girl,  
Thru' the cauld blast winter, thru spring, summer.

O'er a lifetime, my fiere, my bonnie lassie,  
I'd defend you – you, me; blithe and blatter,  
Here we gang doon the hill, nae matter,  
Past the bracken, bothy, bonny braes, barley.  
Oot by the roaring Sea, still havin a blether.

We who loved sincerely; we who loved sae fiercely.  
The snow ne'er looked sae barrie,  
Nor the winter trees sae pretty.  
C'mon, c'mon my dearie – tak my hand, my fiere!

In her article on Kay's use of Scots in 'From a Drunk Woman Looks at Her Nipple', Maturana provides a table illustrating words used in the latter's poetry in comparison with Burns (See Maturana 46). This enables her to draw links between Kay and Scotland's national bard from the point of view of phonetics. Undeniably, if we analyse Maturana's graphic illustration of the linguistic resonances between the two poets, we shall observe that Jackie Kay privileges some of Burns's spellings of different words, such as 'tae', 'sae', 'oor', 'wee' and 'auld' (*Ibid.*). Through the use of phonetically transcribed old Scots, she links herself to the bard as well as to the Scottish oral tradition. In this poem celebrating friendship as already suggested in its title, 'Fiere', being at the same time the title of the sequence, Jackie Kay highlights the power of human connections while establishing a literary connection between herself and Robert Burns.

This relationship between Kay's poetry and Burns's is also intertextual since 'Fiere' has been written in response to one of the latter's poems 'Jo Anderson, my jo' (Davidson 125). Davidson agrees that the presence of Burns in Kay's poems is crucial, for 'his work captures an essence of Scottish experience and character that is important to Kay, including a new approach to nation and language' (*Ibid.*). Though the reference to an 'essence' of Scottishness may appear problematic and reductive since it portrays national identity as a fixed set of experiences and characteristics from the past, Davidson's statement is also likely to imply that in a manner similar to Burns, Kay draws from the old heritage while adopting new ways of constructing language and imagining the nation. She quotes Alex Watson to support her argument: "Burns' creolisation of English and Scottish resists the linguistic totalitarianism that is a key aspect of both eighteenth-century to enforce English as a universal tongue within Britain and the concept of nationhood itself" (qtd. in Davidson 125-126).

Apart from navigating between the English language and Scottish dialects, Jackie Kay brings together Igbo words and different versions of Scots; such plurilingualism in her poetry becomes a means to transcend linguistic barriers and destabilise the monolithic model of identity. In the poem 'Kamso, Kedu' whose two-word title and alliteration convey the sense of duality, Jackie Kay brings to the fore her two selves – Nigerian and Scottish:

Kamso Ozumba



You turned up on a Thursday,  
In the middle of the night in February. Kedu?

Kamso Ozumba  
Your braw face reflects wisdom from the auld yins.  
When you came doon, the bricht stars shone, wee one.

Kamso Ozumba  
You landit into love waiting for you here  
from Chi Chi and Kachi, your mither and faither.

Kamso Ozumba  
We'll put some whisky in the silver quaich  
and bless your fine and handsome face. Slàinte mhath! (22)

Kay juxtaposes Igbo words with the different forms of Scots, including Burnsian phonetic Scots, the Gaelic expression 'Slàinte mhath', and some words which exist both in Scottish and standard English and which are not phonetically transcribed in the text. Despite describing the speaker's openness and welcoming attitude towards his/her addressee, the poem also seems to celebrate the openness and fluidity of language which can include different dialects, voices and selves. Such a hybrid language, which consists of words that mostly Scottish and Igbo speakers are likely to understand, becomes Kay's idiosyncratic language mirroring the complexity and multiplicity of her identity. In the article entitled 'The Poetry of Civic Nationalism: Jackie Kay's "Bronze Head from Ife"', Anne McFarlane analyses the way the author of *Fiere* re-imagines the pronunciation of an Old Scots word in order to pursue her artistic purposes:

The word 'fiere' is an Old Scots word for 'friend' and Kay shows her comfort with the language and some ownership over it as she alters the pronunciation of the word so that it fulfils her own poetic needs in 'Fiere' (Kay 2011, 1), the poem that gives its name to her collection. She explains it in an article, 'I pronounced fiere – feeree, not fear; the latter is the correct pronunciation but I liked the ee ending since it afforded me more rhymes, and also sounds more like friend to me, dearie fiere' (Kay 2012). Hence, in 'Fiere' we find Kay rhyming fiere with 'weary' in the lines 'And noo we're suddenly auld, fiere ; / oor friendship's never been weary'" (2017).

As the alternation of the pronunciation of 'fiere' is necessary to maintain the rhymes in the text, the reader is likely to automatically adopt Kay's pronunciation. The shift in pronunciation might be one of the author's strategies to convey her own voice: a voice which recognises the past (hence the use of the Old Scots word) but, at the same time, looks forward to the future.

The idea is further developed in Kay's 'Bronze Head from Ife', as illustrated in the line 'Ye tak the words frae my tongue. Looking back and forward in time...' (55). The poem enables the reader to observe that Jackie Kay brings together her Scottish voice and her 'black pen' to meditate on identity and history:

Open the granite gneiss, my friend,  
And tak yer share o' happiness.  
Forget the auld days o' disgrace,  
Locked in the lang gone since.  
Crunch yer kola nut fir luck.  
It's time tae raise ye rheid.  
Look into ye rain een, startling,  
defiant. Examine the hole in yer chin,  
the caved-in bit o' yer face.  
Ye tak the words frae my tongue.  
Looking back and forward in time,  
Ye could hae been forgotten,  
dug up, as ye were, by accident:  
but naw, ye're here and a' een  
are on your een that hae seen a'things  
- even when yer back wis turned  
yer een had the talent o' the chameleon;  
ye've been here and ye've been gone  
sin auld lang syne. Gies yer haund!  
Miracle that ye are, yer braw face  
lifts my heart; naebody can doo tyer art.  
I would hae loved tae ken yer maister;  
I wid hae liked to ken his name.  
Mind hoo at first they thought ye were  
fray the Lost Atlantis. They couldnie  
credit ye, made fray  
zinc and brass and loss.  
Inside the granite gneiss,  
you'll clock the shocking past, the sadnesses,  
the ships, the human clearances.  
But noo, it's time tae raise yer gless!  
Take a cup o' kindness yet.  
Here's tae the return o' the long lost!  
Here's tae ye, thing o' beauty!  
Yer no a mask, yer no a disguise.  
Here's tae that timeless look in yer eyes (55-56).

The speaker directly addresses the bronze head and encourages it to ‘forget the old days o’disgrace’. S/he asks it to no longer remember the past and instead ‘look forward, both metaphorically and literally, so that the head can be viewed by the speaker’ (McFarlane 12). The poetic persona then admits that the artifact ‘[has] seen a’things’ and that it will ‘clock the shocking past, the sadnesses, / the ships, the human clearances’. The word ‘clock’ which here functions as a verb may have a double meaning: on one hand, it implies that the bronze head has viewed and ‘registered’ the events from the past, and, on the other, it connotes the image of a timepiece, suggesting that the precious object will always remind others of what happened in the ‘auld days’ (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, the image of ‘the ships, the human clearances’ seems to draw an analogy between Scottish history and the Nigerian past:

These references in the Nigerian context could be read as slave ships and the removal of African people from their native lands. However, the choice of words and the context of Scots language that surrounds them draw connections between the Nigerian bronze head and the Scottish speaker. ‘The ships’ can also be read as the forced emigration of many Scots due to the economic situation in Scotland over the course of the twentieth century, and to the ‘clearances’ of Highlanders from their homes. The poem does not explicitly compare the two, but shows that the language itself creates resonances between the Nigerian and the Scottish experience (*Ibid.*).

It is worth noting that Jackie Kay reconciles the Nigerian and Scottish experiences of the past through her apt choice of words. The presence of the bronze sculpture on Scottish soil also reminds the reader of the country’s infamous involvement in colonialism. The idea seems to be reflected in the speaker’s first attempt to encourage the artwork to forget the past. In such a way, the poet portrays Scotland’s tendency to disregard its colonial past. She shows that though generally we associate England with imperialism and slave trade, Scotland, as part of Great Britain, has equally benefited from those practices. Hence, writing about the bronze head becomes a means of approaching Scotland’s ‘days o’disgrace’ without forgetting its double status of being both the colonial oppressor and the state oppressed by the English.

In addition to colonialism, the lines ‘at first they thought ye were / fray the Lost Atlantis’ also refer to racism prevalent in white societies. While referring to the history of the discovery of the ‘bronze head’, McFarlane explains that

[w]hen the first bronze head was found by German explorer Leo Frobenius he theorised that it must have been produced by a settlement of Greeks, provoking the speculation that the heads could be evidence of the lost Atlantis, a mythic Ancient Greek settlement.

This theory was inspired by the assumption that Africans did not have the skill to create such a complex piece of art. The speaker reflects on these origins as a sign of the colonialist mind set of those who discovered the head... (*Ibid.*).

The speaker in the poem pinpoints the idea that the bronze head has wrongly been considered a mythical creation. Through the lines 'I wid hae liked to ken his name', Kay acknowledges the human creator of the African artifact and pays tribute to his ingenuity. With her 'black pen', she records the truth about the history and origin of the 'bronze head' and also writes into existence the talented African sculptor: 'In imagining the head's creator as a named individual the speaker gives credit to him for his creation and, by extension, to the Nigerian culture which produced such a fine piece of art. Through this act of recognition, the poem moves towards healing the past by recognising the value of Nigerian culture within the language of Scots culture' (McFarlane 14).

The concluding couplet of the poem shows that Kay's Scottish voice and her 'black pen' create an authentic image of black Scottishness (*Ibid* 15). According to McFarlane, [t]his is not an adoption, or a voice that she chooses to use and can take off as easily as a mask' (*Ibid.*). Writing in old Scots and drawing stylistically and thematically from Burns's 'Auld Lang Syne' become the author's way of asserting her Scottish identity while also linking it to the Nigerian context. In such a way, as Toni Morrison once said, '[t]he past is more infinite than the future... It's avoiding it, deceiving ourselves about it, that paralyzes growth'. By letting Burns's voice inhabit her poem and her black pen re-write the history, the author of *Fiere* demonstrates the power of her poetry to reinvigorate the past and carry one's history and identity to the future.

Musicality and linguistic identity in Kay's poems: 'a Black voice that is Scottish and blue'

Like time, music can conflate the past, present, and future. It has, indeed, a capacity to cross the temporal and generational boundaries, as Kay demonstrates in one of the chapters from *Red Dust Road*, 'Mull'. Simon Frith, a specialist in music, explains that '[m]usic is thus the cultural form best able both to cross borders—sounds carry across fences and walls and oceans, across classes, races and nations—and to define places; in clubs, scenes, and raves, listening on headphones, radio and in the concert hall, we are only where the music takes us' (qtd. in Concannon 22).

This transgressive and transformative potential of music is explored in Kay's poetry.

It becomes an important tool for the author to enact her black voice and, as Severin notes, proves pivotal in ‘her construction of a black subjectivity’. In her 1997 biography of Bessie Smith, the writer reveals that ‘[she] will always associate the dawning of [her] own realization of being black with the blues, and particularly Bessie’s blues’. As a child, Kay grows up listening to Smith’s songs and staring at her father dancing to them, as recounted in ‘The Red Graveyard’. The talented African American singer becomes her role model, among other famous black women such as Angela Davis. Yet, as Severin wittingly observes: ‘...Kay’s fascination with Smith is not just as a black role model but also as a socially engaged artist who drew on the traditions of blues music as a repository for the past and a mechanism for moving forward’ (53). That music is both ‘a matter of aesthetics and ethics’ is demonstrated by Baker:

First,...identity is mobile, a process not a thing, a becoming, not a being; second,...our experience of music—of music making and music listening—is best understood as an experience of this self-in-progress. Music like identity is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual, the individual in the social, the mind in the body and body in the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics (qtd. in Concannon 23).

Music finds its place in Kay’s poetry. For her, the interrelation between the two genres is natural since ‘[p]oems are musical’ (*Scottish Review of Books* 2016). Both are about expression, flow and rhythm; both use cadences, repetitions, stanzas, and turns. Because of their arrangement, some poems might echo specific musical genres: ‘[a] twelve-bar blues will echo a sonnet because there’s a turn at the end, and it has a similar structure, and there is a great freedom to be found in the structure’ (*Ibid.*). Jackie Kay portrays the naturally fluid relationship between poetry and music, suggesting permeability between the musical and poetic texts.

This generic mobility and the characteristic flow of poetry/music align with her concept of identity as involved in constant movement. It is thus not surprising that she decides to adopt the blues form in her writing: as this form synthesises many voices, it is also likely to accommodate Kay’s different selves. In ‘The Red Graveyard’, the first stanza follows the twelve-bar beat:

There are some stones that open in the night like flowers  
Down in the red graveyard where Bessie haunts her lovers.  
There are stones that shake and weep in the heart of night  
Down in the red graveyard where Bessie haunts her lovers.

The next stanzas are dedicated to the speaker's meditation on voice and interestingly enough, Kay succeeds in reconciling the blues with her Scottish voice. On listening to the poet's reading of her text, Gish observes that 'Kay reads these lines in an educated, Scots-inflected English with the distinct accent of her adoptive mother's Glasgow, yet she describes the poem as having an echo of a twelve-bar beat...' (188). Just like the blues represents 'the voice of synthesis' (Baker in Concannon 21), so Kay's poetry combines the different rhythms, voices, and forms of experience in order to reflect her complex and multivocal identity. Interviewed for the *Scottish Review of Books*, she explains how she has looked for ways to capture her own voice: 'When I started writing – unless I was writing about black people – I couldn't find a way of expressing my colour on the page because my voice is very Scottish, so I used a lot of blues forms and mixed them up with Scottish forms to create a blues-black voice' (2016). The concept of multivocality as a means to approach one's identity and experience a sense of recognition can be found in Kay's *Red Dust Road* where Jackie, on meeting her Nigerian brother, claims: 'My world feels like it has expanded accordion-fashion and music is coming and blaring through the stadium speakers, a high-life mixture of Celtic and African music' (275).

Music, therefore, allows the author to express her multiple identities as well as engage in the critique of monolithic and essentialist selfhood and nationhood. The idea is further explored in the article by Laura Severin who underlines the role of African-American music in Scottish women's writing:

Though it has received little attention, this Celtic/African American kinship also resurfaces in Scottish writing, perhaps most interestingly in the works of contemporary Scottish women poets, where the alliance acts as a challenge to essentialist, and masculinist, notions of national identity. This phenomenon can be traced, at least partly, to the fascination among Scottish artists with American culture, since, as Cairns Craig argues, the United States represented an "alternative center of gravity that released Scottish writers from the hegemonic pull of England" (350). But it is noteworthy that Scottish women writers such as Liz Lochhead, Valerie Gillies, Jackie Kay, and Carol Anne Duffy have gravitated, at certain moments in their careers, to a particular variant of American culture, African-American music, because it provides an example of how a marginal group can voice its concerns within a larger, mainstream culture. In the stylistic and social traditions of the blues, rap and jazz, they found a powerful model for remarking British and Scottish culture to include women's voices and experiences' (46).

Kay thus explores the potential of the blues to ‘empower, resist and reveal’, as Fred J. Hay notes (xxxii). Apart from its unique aesthetic value, the genre also embodies motion in its cultural creativity and its ongoing investigation of the place of the individual within the community. For Severin, ‘African-American music provides the example of a rich tradition of social critique’ and, contrary to the Western tradition, considers the musician not as an autonomous figure but rather as an active spokesman of a community, thus giving him a voice and ‘both a right and an obligation to speak’ (47). In such a way, through cross-cultural influences, Jackie Kay can voice her concerns as both a Scot, a black *person*, and a woman. Inviting the blues within her poetry therefore offers a possibility towards redrawing the boundaries of the Scottish nation and culture so that it will ‘become more open and inclusive’ (52).

In this subpart, we have observed that voice is not only an important marker of identity but, more interestingly, it gives a political force to the author so that she is able to voice her concerns about identity and nation. Barring its exquisite aesthetic value, Kay’s poetry always enters a dialogue with her homeland, Scotland. That is why the author’s multi-layered and synthetic voice not only illustrates the complexity of her personal identity but also brings to the fore the novel conception of national selfhood which she celebrates through her adoption of cross-cultural themes and sounds. It is thanks to her sharp mind, unusual artistry, acute observation of society, and the power of her poetry to write the new scenarios for the country’s identity that Jackie Kay ‘has moved from marginal voice to national treasure’ (Tranter).

The voice *of* and *from* Scotland: Jackie Kay as the Scots Makar

A recipient of many literary awards and a highly respected author, Jackie Kay earned the title of the National Poet for Scotland in 2016. This ground-breaking moment in her career opened up a new pathway in her life and enabled her to gain a new distinct identity – that of the Scots Makar.

In her Ph.D. thesis on makars in Scotland, Christelle Ferrere reflects on the different ways poetry has participated in the construction of national identity and has played a significant role in politics since the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Indeed, the evolution of Scottish poetry, as she demonstrates has always coincided with the changes occurring in the social, political, and cultural landscape. She observes that the country has traversed many periods of rebirth –

‘renaissances’ - and this can also be associated with the re-emergence of makars by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

‘L’histoire culturelle de l’Ecosse est marquée par de nombreuses renaissances, auxquelles on pourrait ajouter – dans une moindre mesure, peut-être – la renaissance du titre de makar en 1999, qui est autant le fruit de tous les événements qui précèdent et qui ont donné au poète écossais sa place dans le pays, que des événements qui lui sont contemporains comme les referendums depuis 1979 et la réouverture du Parlement écossais’ (489).

The contemporary makar becomes an important figure in Scotland’s history and his or her presence is institutionalised through the official elections by either political or literary bodies, depending on the geographical zones (490). Ferrere points out the importance of such institutionalisation of the title of makar which provides him or her with a distinct place in the country, region, or community and which further cements the tight relationship between poetry and Scotland: ‘Cette institutionalisation du titre rend officielle la voix du makar et elle l’inscrit dans l’histoire du pays, de la région, de la ville ou de la communauté. Il personifie la relation étroite que l’Ecosse entretient avec sa poésie’ (*Ibid.*).

On becoming the Scots Makar, Jackie Kay marked her place in Scotland, with her poetry and voice embedded in the rich and ever-evolving history of the Scottish nation. While introducing Kay as the third national poet succeeding Edwin Morgan and Liz Lochhead, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said that ‘[p]oetry is part of Scotland’s culture and history, it celebrates our language and can evoke strong emotions and memories in all of us. The role of the Makar is to celebrate our poetic past, promote the poetry of today and produce new pieces of work that relate to significant events in our nation’ (qtd. in Creative Scotland 2016). Hence, the national poet embodies Scotland’s strong connection to poetry as much as he or she represents the country’s hopeful project to expand the potential of poetry in the future: ‘Le makar contemporain est à la fois le symbole du lien que le pays entretient avec sa tradition poétique et le symbole de l’espoir mis dans sa future génération de poètes’ (Ferrere 491).

According to Sturgeon, poetry is also a means to beget in the Scots a sense of national belonging. It brings people together through the common emotions and experiences it is likely to evoke. As Scots Makar, Kay explores the power of poetry to redefine the nation and open the door to many voices and selves. As she explains: ‘Scotland has become a multi-tongued, multi-ethnic community. Poetry holds up a unique mirror to a nation’s heart, mind and soul. As Makar, my ambition is to reflect the face of today’s Scotland. Syrian refugees, Doric Scots,



Nigerian Scots, Muslim Scots, Gaelic Scots... We're all Scots and poetry can help brings us together' (qtd. in the Scots Magazine 2018). In her poem titled 'Threshold' which she wrote for the 2016 Opening Ceremony of the Scottish Parliament, she voices Scottish identity as inclusive and multiple. The text is written in many languages, reflecting the multi-tongued Scotland and, consequently, raising public awareness about the complex and mobile nature of nationhood. It encourages Scotland and its people to open the country's gates to new challenges and possibilities, rather than keep its borders shut.

For Jackie Kay, being appointed the National Poet for Scotland has marked the beginning of an 'incredible journey'. This journey can be understood both metaphorically and literally, bearing in mind the author's engagement in bringing poetry to different people and places in Scotland. She, indeed, came up with a project to travel across Scotland in order to promote poetry in 'unexpected places'. This, of course, highlights the mobile quality of poetry: in the sense it moves us - begets strong emotional responses - but also makes individuals feel they are part of a family that grows beyond dialects, ethnicities, and local geographies.

By inviting poetry to different geographical locations in her home country, Jackie Kay also fights against the marginal status of the literary form. In the 2001/2002 interview with Laura Severin<sup>8</sup>, she recognises the inferiority of poetry in relation to mainstream literature and, more precisely, fiction:

... I think poetry is regressing slightly at the moment. It's not quite as exciting a time. Poetry is less in book shops. It is receiving fewer reviews in the newspapers. There are still as many readings going on in stores and festivals, though; there will always be a grass roots hard core poetry scene where the poetry lovers keep poetry going. What poetry really needs to do is break out of being a thing that just poets read and make it something that all people read.<sup>9</sup>

Travelling across Scotland and reading poetry to the inhabitants of the country's various regions may thus be an attempt to make poetry a common experience. Undeniably, by reciting and/or reading her poems while using the power of her voice and the different elements of body language, Jackie Kay underlines the fluid nature of poetry, always being in motion and re-inventing itself, always drawing from or/and establishing a dialogue with other forms and voices.

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<sup>8</sup> The interview is based on three conversations with Kay which took place in 2001 and 2002. See SEVERIN, Laura. 'Interview with Jackie Kay.' 2001/2002, <https://freeversethejournal.org/issue-2-summer-2002-jackie-kay-by-laura-severin-interview/>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Above the space of writing: performance, performativity and poetry

In the late 1910s, Amy Lowell complained that poetry was confined to the printed page and therefore its aesthetic potential could not be fully developed:

Poetry is as much an art to be heard as is music, if only we could get people to understand the fact. To read it off the printed pages without pronouncing it is to get only a portion of its beauty, and yet it is just this that most people do (qtd. in Elmougy 154).

By comparing poetry to music, she highlights the former's acoustic quality; something which came to be further explored in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the growth of performance poetry (*Ibid.*). This form of popular poetry emerged as a consequence of renewed interest in orality boosted through audiobooks, broadcasts, audio-visual productions and the number of literary festivals. It enabled the poems to move off the printed page to public spaces - hosting literary festivals or 'open mic' events - and other venues, such as universities and libraries. This relocation of poetry also had an impact on the politics of its representation. We may thus wonder: what is performance poetry?

Nathan Penlington defines it as 'a form of poetry that is performed', thus echoing Elmougy's statement that the subgenre represents 'poetry put in the performance mode' (Penlington in Novak 31; Elmougy 155). Despite their quite diverging ideas on what performance poetry is, Russell Thompson and Lucy English both agree about the importance of the poet's acknowledgement of, and interaction with, the audience (Thompson and English in Novak 30). For Julia Novak, the term can be treated loosely, as 'a mode of presentation' (32). If performance poetry is considered a manner of presentation, then its nature is unfixed and open to possibilities. The subgenre's flexibility is explored by Jackie Kay who releases poetry from the confines of the printed page by performing it during numerous literary events and especially on her tour of Scotland. Her presentation of poetry does not involve simple reading practice – in fact, she uses different theatrical devices in order to engage with her audience.

Before reciting her 'Darling' poem which has been recorded and shared via Youtube by University of Salford, Jackie Kay greets her audience ('Hello again everyone'), while staring at the camera, smiling, and slightly lifting her arms. From the very beginning, the author uses her body language in order to create a welcoming atmosphere. Her way of looking into

the camera, as if she wanted to establish an eye-contact with her spectators, suggests that she creates an illusion of communicating with the audience. In addition to this, the direct form of address ('How you all doing?') creates an atmosphere of intimacy as well as encourages the viewers to enter the dialogue with the poet and, more interestingly, to respond imaginatively and emotionally to the poem that she is going to recite. The question that Kay asks also breaks the spatio-temporal barriers between herself and the viewer, urging them to accept that what happens during the recording is not staged but 'real'. Through the willing suspension of disbelief, the audience can become emotionally invested in Kay's performance.

The author further creates the impression of reality when she confesses that the poem has been written for a friend of hers, Julia Darling. She says that the poem deals with loss and death and is dedicated to all the people who has lost someone in their lives. The information which she shares with her audience is, to follow Gérard Genette's concept, 'para-textual'. It cannot be found within the poem, yet, it becomes essential to the understanding of it and the construction of its meaning. Furthermore, by sharing information from her personal life in her performance poetry, Kay conflates the authorial voice and the speaker's voice. This can be observed particularly through the poet's creative delivery of 'In My Country' which recounts one of the situations that often happen in her life:

People often ask me where I'm from, even in my own country – I seem to have a whole collection of strange anecdotes of people doing that. I'm going to sit down in a pub on a chair in London and this woman went "You cannae sit in that chair. It's my chair." And me saying to her, "Oh right, you're from Glasgow aren't you?" And she says, "Aye, how did you know that?" And I said, "I'm from Glasgow myself," and she went, "You're not are you? You foreign looking bugger!" So that kind of thing happens a lot, and it happens so often I decided I'd just write a poem about being black and Scottish (qtd. in The Poetry Archive).

In a short video published by PBS NewsHour on YouTube, Kay is reciting her poem in lovely green surrounding. Because the poem is based on a real experience and the poet is physically present and uttering the first-person pronoun 'I', there emerges a form of confluence between the author and the persona, between the poet's 'I' and the lyrical 'I'. The voice of the poem is now attributed a real physical voice, that of Jackie Kay, and also a specific identity, since the author speaks with her Glaswegian accent which confirms her Scottishness. For the audience, therefore, the poet and the speaker may be identical. The boundaries between what is real and

what is performed seem to collapse. In ‘Semiotics of Theatrical Performance’, Umberto Eco, Italian writer and semiotician, speaks about two simultaneous speech acts:

In a certain sense every dramatic performance (be it on the stage or on the screen) is composed by two speech acts. The first one is performed by the actor who is making a performative statement – “I am acting.” By this implicit statement the actor tells the truth since he announces that *from that moment on* he will lie.

The second one is represented by a pseudo-statement where the subject of the statement is already the character, not the actor. [...] Because of the first performative act, everything following it becomes referentially opaque. Through the decision of the performer (“I am another man”), we enter the possible world of performance, a world of lies in which we are entitled to celebrate the suspension of disbelief (115).

It should be noted that the poet-performer is not an actor impersonating a fictive character and therefore the clear distinction between him and the character is rendered difficult in performance poetry. In an abstract from her article on the performativity of poetry and its implications in relation to the poet and the audience, Julia Novak observes that

[...] unlike in theatre live poetry audiences cannot usually draw on a conventionalised distinction between a real-life actor and an easily identifiable character whose name can be listed in the programme brochure. The poet-performer physically presents him- or herself rather than representing a fictitious character. [...] The poet’s twofold role of “poet-performer” is also the reason why the person of the poet is more easily confused with the persona in the poem in live poetry. As the fictive “speaker” emerges in performance through the person of the author, the conceptual split of author/speaker is much harder for the audience to realise in live poetry than when dealing with print. (Novak)

The scholar mentions Anthony Howell who coined the term of a ‘performance self’ which, as she explains, describes ‘a personality projected by the poet in performance’ (*Ibid.*). The recurring lyrical ‘I’ in Kay’s poetry may thus be, what Tönnies, Brüning and Sand call in their article, ‘an extension of and addition to [her] “performance self”’ (314). According to Stephen Wade, ‘the performance poet has to make the reading of the poem seem authentic’ (23). Authenticity can be achieved in different ways, including self-reflexivity. Despite intertwining her poems with some *biographèmes* – in Barthes’s sense of the term, Jackie Kay blurs the spatial boundaries between herself and the speaker in her poem ‘In My Country’.

In the text, the persona is walking by the river when a lady approaches her. Similarly, in the video published by PBS NewsHour, Jackie Kay is walking by the water. When she utters

the line: ‘a woman passed round me in a small watchful circle’, she moves her hand in a circular way. She then repetitively opens and closes her hand, as if there was a kind of tension or conflict going on. This, of course, can be observed in the final couplet when the lady finally decides to ask the speaker the question ‘Where do you come from?’ Jackie Kay then recites: ‘Here, I said. Here. These parts.’ She gestures towards the Scottish landscape, thus physically showing that she comes from these areas. The use of repetition in the last line accentuates the speaker’s statement that she, indeed, is from Scotland. The phrase ‘I said’ reminds the listener of the oral quality of Kay’s poetry but also becomes the re-affirmation of her identity, once asserted during the conversation with the lady and now re-enacted through her performance. The last words she utters - ‘These parts’ – accentuate her belonging to Scotland, yet through the plural form of the word ‘parts’, we can perhaps observe that her identity is not confined to one particular location. Eventually, ‘these parts’ is a set phrase in Scotland but may also reflect the multiplicity of Kay’s selves, as it is nicely represented through her performative act which blurs the boundaries between herself and the speaker in the poem.

### The road to change: destabilising boundaries, broadening horizons

Taylor underlines that performance is an integral component of Kay’s work. She observes:

The dynamics of the activity of ‘performance’ itself, the use of the body and the voice in gesture, eye contact, expression, all create a more fluid text than the fixity of the material text. The meaning of performance poetry is never constant. Like the identities Kay is exploring it is very much located in the specifics of time and space. In this way the poetry is closer to drama and theatre (309).

For her, performance represents a fluid, unfixed ‘space’, contrary to the material text which is somehow constant, fixed on the page. Its meaning is built all along with the audience to whom Kay often responds. In such a way, her poetry not only moves off the page but also destabilises generic boundaries – between poetry and drama- as well as barriers between the author, the lyrical I, and the spectators who participate in the construction of the performance.

Both the author’s body and voice become storytellers, and she explores the potential of her performed poems to generate meaning through the vocal and visual elements of her performance. For the audience, seeing Kay’s black face and listening to her Scottish voice becomes a way of defying hurtful assumptions that behind ‘being black and Scottish’ lies a

strong contradiction. According to Stuart Hall, identities are produced through representation that does not reflect the already existing reality but rather becomes a creative force enhancing ideas and discourses (Hall 1993, 392). In science, law, media and art, the image of one's identity can be perpetuated and that is why, the only means to (re)construct identity is to use forms of representation. Through her highly performative poetic act, Kay promotes the reinvigorating concept of boundary-free identity hoping that it will first appeal to the viewers' imagination and then remain legitimate and authentic in their daily lives. The performance itself represents a meeting point between the author's Scottish and Black inheritance, as this form that merges poetry and drama has always been an important practice in both communities.

Further, Judith Butler aligns performance with gender and identity. She believes that gender is not a biological fixed, essentialist phenomenon but rather a cultural construct, something that is produced within society. For her, gender is thus a matter of 'becoming', a highly performative subject. Taylor further observes that Kay's use of body and voice in her performance poetry is what challenges the products of culture, such as gender and national identity:

Kay's physical performance and the importance given to the speaking voice aligns her also with those theories which focus on the 'speaking subject' in feminist theory and in particular the work of Cixous. Central to Cixous' work is her linking of writing and performance with the destabilising of gender and national identities. Cixous' exhortation of women to write the body and thus speak their subjectivity is realised much more vividly in the context of performing poetry than writing it. Cixous's association of language with voice privileges the pre-oedipal mother/child dyad, a time where sound and rhythm as well as touch are privileged more than the visual... The very placement of the female body voicing her own work positions a woman and her sexuality as speaking subject, threatening the patriarchal structure with the revolutionary text of her own body (311-312).

Kay's performances are likely to subvert the patriarchal expectations of women's performances as mothers and wives as much as they call for the re-definition of both gender and womanhood. When Kay reads *The Adoption Papers*, her voice synthesises all the three voices of the daughter, biological mother, and adoptive mother – they somehow become her own, and she then functions as a spokeswoman for all those female voices and subjectivities.

Eventually, what is also interesting is that performing becomes not only an activity that deconstructs national identity and gender but also seems to be a universal human experience.

In a manner similar to actors who perform different roles in the theatre, we ourselves are assigned or/and adopt various roles in society. This idea dates back to Shakespeare's plays, notably *Hamlet*, in which he claims: 'All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players; / They have their exits and their entrances, / And one man in his plays many parts...'. Life is thus compared to performance, and people to actors, playing several roles or wearing masks which in Kay's poems become a symbol of authentic and manifold identities (from the *Latin* persona meaning a mask, character played by an actor).

As performance involves the movement of both body and vocal cords, as well as invites ideas and portrays emotions that are supposed to move the viewer, we can argue that this artistic act which, as far as Kay is concerned, oscillates between poetry and drama, becomes a new way of both lyricising and dramatising the self that is re-enacted 'here' and 'now' during the performance. Hence, the line 'Here. These parts' in Kay's poem may also reflect the theatrical dimension of her poetry – as parts can be found in plays – but also the plurality of human identity and experience that cannot be confined to single categories.

Hence, through performance, Kay invites the audience to break the barriers that should no longer constrict us. Especially, in today's increasingly globalised world where geographical borders are more often abandoned and/or erased through trade, travel, and consumerism, the author also encourages us to destabilise other types of boundaries – be them national, generic, related to one's gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Though categories help to define people, they are nonetheless reductive – as Kay aptly shows, her creative act arises from her wilful decision to break free from what constricts and confines us. Although, refusing social labels might be a radical attitude, at times impossible to maintain, the author nonetheless persuades her readership and audience to walk on the road 'less travelled' in order to embark on the multifaceted and multivocal journey to selfhood while rejecting the idea that identity can be immediately imposed on someone, as in the case of 'Do You Think I'm a Mule'.

## Conclusion

‘Once you have traveled, the voyage never ends, but is played out over and over again in the quietest chambers.

The mind can never break off from the journey.’

Pat Conroy

A road to selfhood is a long and winding road, bending at every corner. It consists of various pathways meeting at one point or diverging like the branches of the tree. That road does not seem to have a particular destination but it does not matter. The destination is ambiguous or left undecided. Only the road is the finding place; that is where the memory lane and the path to the future intersect. The road is both what we leave behind and what emerges before our eyes. Though there might be forks on the road, the route never ends – one way or another, there is going to be a new direction to discover.

The road to selfhood in Kay’s prose and poetry becomes a metaphor for celebrating the ever-renewed possibilities of finding and re-defining identity. The author does not seek a particular destination for the journey depicted in her works; rather, she rejoices in the multiplicity of roads which, like arteries, lead to her heart.

In the first part of my thesis which focuses on Kay’s *The Adoption Papers*, we have observed the various directions that the protagonist takes in order to make sense of and establish her identity. Journeying between maternal and other female voices, moving between the past and the present, between her biological and cultural identities, the persona from the 1991 collection of poems experiences the different moments of her life as part of an ongoing diversified journey. Through the use of shifting perspectives (from mother to daughter and vice versa) as well as the depiction of the protagonist’s sense of displacement and her imaginary border crossings, Kay conveys the image of identity as unfixated and mobile.

The mobile quality of identity can further be observed through Kay’s deliberate re-use of the themes of road and selfhood – in such a way, in order to grasp those two notions, one has to read her memoir and poems together. In the second chapter of my thesis, I thus show the extent to which Jackie Kay enables the two different but complementary paths – those of prose and poetry – to meet on the same road to selfhood. We have seen that the protagonist’s search for roots, initiated in *The Adoption Papers*, is re-explored and further developed in *Fiere* and *Red Dust Road*. Her desire to learn about her ancestry, to fill in the ‘cracks’ and ‘crevices’ on



her life road, then leads her to discover that her quest for identity should be freed from the confines of fatality and wholeness. Instead of focusing on the roots, immobile and deeply fixed in the ground, she decides to explore the routes and crossroads which pave a way for the exploration of her new identities as well as personal and family affiliations, as in case of her immediately developed bond with her half-brother Sidney.

In the last part of my thesis, another angle of the road to selfhood is explored: it is represented in her search for a voice that could capture her complex identities. In this section, I have analysed both the author's voice on the page as well as her physical voice, accompanied by her body language, during her performances and readings of poetry. Through the analysis of 'The Old Tongue' poem, we have observed that a forced journey (exile) may impact both language and identity. For Jackie Kay, the language, and especially voice, can, on the one hand, root us in a particular space and time, as much as they are both constantly evolving, open to various dialects and selves, as shown in 'The Threshold'. The author succeeds in capturing her multiple identities both through writing and performing – the second activity allows her to deconstruct the boundaries, geographical, generic, related to sexuality, gender and national identity – in order point her readers towards a 'road less travelled', a new pathway to change their preconceptions concerning identity and to accept that difference and diversity lies at the core of human experience.

The analysis of identity and roads in Kay's prose and poetry, notably in *Fiere*, *Red Dust Road* and *The Adoption Papers*, is illuminating and fundamental to the understanding of the author's exploration of new ways of thinking what and who decides who we are. Identity, though conceptualised by many theoreticians, still remains a mystery to most of us. In *Red Dust Road*, when Jackie Kay wonders whether the pods of her moringa tree will take root, she underlines the unpredictable, unconceivable nature of our life and experiences. Writing, however, becomes, to some extent, a means to access some of our identities yet unknown: 'We often write because we have a secret self', claims Kay. It is thanks to writing, especially through her 'poignant and honest words' as Sturgeon has once said, that Jackie Kay has revealed her previously secret self to the numbers of readers in Scotland, the whole of Britain and different parts of the world. If there are now any labels to describe her, they should be the following: a stunning writer of poetry, fiction and drama, a great spokeswoman for the people, and a promising voice that stretches to the future.



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