

## Shifting Notions of Home, Identity and Belonging in Kwame Kwei-Armah's Drama

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### Abstract

The story of black British theatre is the story of people of African descent in the United Kingdom; it is a story that represents, among other things, their struggles over identity and social attitudes embedded in popular cultural representations that demonstrate difference in simple binary opposites, for example, Europe and Africa, black and white, dual heritage and white. These are inscribed in both the European and African/Caribbean imaginary, which when in dialogue with audiences, raises complex questions. I will examine three plays, *Fix Up* (2004), *Elmina's Kitchen* (2005) and *Seize the Day* (2009a) by Kwame Kwei-Armah that interrogate the foregoing issues and concerns.

### Introduction

The representation of (racial) identity, colour and place, which is the primary concern in Kwei-Armah's writing, underlines the idea of belonging within the Africa and Caribbean diasporic community. His drama helps accommodate multiple diasporic identities and connections, which evidence attempts to 'reconstruct' in/through performance the basic unity of people of African descent whom colonialism and slavery as well as post-colonialism have dispersed across the African diaspora. In my exploration of Kwei-Armah's plays, I will consider the notion of black British-ness as an intersection of different cultures and identities that are mostly founded on Paul Gilroy's claim that the black British community and identity is somewhat recent. Gilroy further asserts that this identity has been 'unified' by 'the experience of migration rather than the memory of slavery and the residues of plantation slavery' (Gilroy, 1994, p. 96). It

could also be attributed to what he calls the 'post-World War II period' experiences that include racism, post-independence conflicts and forced migration. Consequently, black British theatre is based on 'the formation of syncretic racial subcultures' that depend "'heavily [on] a range of 'raw materials' supplied by the Caribbean and Black America" and Africa (Gilroy, p. 96).

Kwei-Armah has been at the forefront of an inspiring and emerging black theatre genre in the United Kingdom that puts black people, more specifically people of dual (black and white) heritage, at the centre. In an interview with Deirdre Osborne, he admits that a 'cultural perspective that is supported by my Pan-Africanist politics' underpins his work (Osborne, 2007, p. 253). He explains that his 'politics is a diasporic black politics influenced by the philosophies of Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X and the writings of James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka' (Osborne, p. 253). These ideologies are important to a cross-section of his writing, for example, *Seize the Day* and *Fix Up*; and as with other African diasporic writing since the late twentieth century, they have informed the development of a new identity of black British-ness. By staging black British dramas in mainstream theatres such as the National Theatre, Kwei-Armah re-inscribes theatre as a vehicle for black expression.

Black British people of African descent are diverse, each with their discrete history, identities and cultures; however, to reduce their identity to a single meaning of black, or their imagination of who they are to a single meaning, is to strip them of other aspects of their ancestry and to ignore the competing histories that constructed it. People of African descent have come to Great Britain for different reasons: their journeys have been different, and each individual's identity possesses traces of the journey that has brought them 'here' (the diaspora). One cannot talk about the journeys, which show how 'here' is 'negotiated', in the same way because for these people they reflect the relationship with 'there' (Africa or the Caribbean). Gilroy echoing W.E.B Du Bois, an early African-American philosopher-critic, argues that black people in the diaspora possess a double-consciousness because their identity has been transformed by the 'routes' taken to arrive in the West<sup>1</sup>. This view identifies the interrelationship between 'roots and routes' which relates to group and individual identity (Gilroy, 1993, p. 133). Further, the idea of travelling implied in 'routes' suggests the creation of hybrids of culture, identity and performance which, according to Neil Campbell, resonates with the 'diasporic migration' and 'established, settled life' (Campbell, 2008, p. 143). Elsewhere, Gilroy (1994, p.93) suggests significant ways of examining black British performance when he postulates that '[a]rtistic products and aesthetics codes' belonging to people of African ancestry have been

transformed 'by the passage of time or by their displacement, relocation or dissemination through wider networks of communication and cultural exchange'. Thus, plays by Kwei-Armah or other African diasporic playwrights such as Oladipo Agboluaje and Mustapha Matura should be assessed according to their contemporary contexts.

Accordingly, the cultural and linguistic continuities between the people 'there' and those living in the diaspora, and ways in which language, music and theatre performance signify the 'here' and the 'there' of home, is significant in black British theatre. The notion that (black) identity is fluid and dialogic, always metamorphosing to produce new identities, underlines Kwei-Armah's view of the diaspora, and informs his construction of multi-voiced characters.

Significantly, similar to other black British writers, who are positioned outside the mainstream theatres, Kwei-Armah locates his work within a political performance space, which allows him to draw on African and Western forms. Therefore, his work is informed by Western theatrical styles, but, at the same time, it is self-consciously informed by his migrant subjectivity and the traditions of diasporic performance forms, for example, storytelling, call-and-response and song. This in-between location is also similar to Agboluaje's and other black British dramatists', such as Mustapha Matura, Tunde Ikoli, Patricia Elcock and Kofi Agyemang, who have emerged as a result of slavery, racism, post-colonial conflicts and re-location in the diaspora. The double-consciousness created by his position as a diasporic subject signifies upon the texts and their performances; therefore, his plays can be visualized as enacting cultural continuities, using culturally specific codes, even as they draw attention to the way people's lives have been ruptured by migration and slavery. In creating the link between past and present, Kwei-Armah suggests that black British people have a shared ancestry and experience that lives on, therefore, the conflicting relationships between his characters demonstrate how these people deal with it today.

### **Diaspora Performance Narratives**

*Seize the Day* is diasporic in its representation of London's urban life, family, and social relationships within and outside the black community, and black inter-generational links. While concentrating on London as a location of complex relationships, the play uses the London mayoral elections as a focal point to explore the interracial relationships and nuances of black identity. Its most important innovation is the presentation of a middle-class black mayoral candidate, Jeremy Charles, who abandons his new-found celebrity status as a television presenter, a 'dry

do-gooder' (Kwei-Armah, 2009a, p. 128), to stand for a key political position in the British capital.

Jeremy, struggling to distance himself from his African-Caribbean/Jamaican roots, has internalized the white imaginary of black people, and as Lavelle comments: 'My Mum said you look like the kinda black man that ain't been near anything black for a lifetime.' (Kwei-Armah, 2009a, 132) He is surprised that Lavelle, the urban youth, whose mother, Sheila, has instilled in him the notion of traditional African-Caribbean/Jamaican values and integrity, can express himself articulately in both Standard English and Black English, or what I would describe as the post-patois dialect:

**Jeremy:** 'You have a very interesting vocabulary; Lavelle [...] I don't understand street black stuff and then nice words...

**Lavelle** (*laughs*): Nice words, what the hell are they?

**Jeremy:** Ones I might not expect from someone your age –

**Lavelle:** Like?

**Jeremy:** 'Coerce'

(Kwei-Armah, 2009a, p. 128)

The virtues and values of the Caribbean past are guarded by the old generation, such as Sheila, who dislike the lack of manliness among the youths in the diaspora. When Jeremy blames Sheila, for failing to 'chastise' Lavelle for using a knife, she defends him because the "boy he was 'roughing' had thrown acid in a girl's face'. The boys, Sheila states, 'were doing what men like you were suppose to, but don't have the balls to' (Kwei-Armah, 2009a, p 156). This altercation shows the complex generational and class relationships as well as knife crimes that Kwei-Armah is keen to investigate. Crucially, in response to Jeremy's accusations that he had burgled his house, Lavelle affirms his integrity:

**Jeremy:** I don't care [...] Lavelle, no doubt you've done this a million times before and are very skilled at leaving no trace of yourself; but I care about my home being breached, being made insecure, I care about the trust that you have just broken.

**Lavelle:** [...] My mother taught me one thing. There are consequences to

your actions, blud. You do good, the universe finds a way to pay you back; do bad, it hits you where it hurts you most, soon as it can... I lie, Mum?

**Sheila:** No son, you do not, that's how I raised you.

(Kwei-Armah, 2009a, p.154)

The African-Caribbean culture and values revealed in him and his mother is what the performers, and the audience, engage with to understand critically the black British experience.

Tensions between Lavelle and Jeremy are driven by their conflicting understandings of, and dialectical relationship to, race, color and diasporic conditions. This is dramatized in Scene Five when, after he discovers that Jeremy is married to a white woman, Lavelle takes Jeremy on a metaphorical journey to rediscover his memory and roots. In their conversation in this scene, he references his mother when he tells Jeremy "he looks like the kinda black man that ain't been near anything black for a lifetime" (Kwei-Armah, 2009a, p. 132). Later, once again repeating his mother's comments, he criticizes Jeremy's attempts to acquiesce with white people: 'the only kinda black people that are successful are the wannabes. They may be black to most people, but to those that can really see those tainted ones ... the mask is all apparent'. (Kwei-Armah, 2009a, p. 133) Judging from these statements, Lavelle is able to reject 'whiteness,' hence asserting his class and subjectivity through referencing his mother's teachings. His performance in this scene compels awareness of the porous boundary that separates the performance worlds of Kwei-Armah's characters from the real circumstances in which they are constructed. In *Seize the Day*, Kwei-Armah creates a play that echoes Hamid Naficy's discussion of the way diasporic communities look after their 'real and symbolic boundaries' and 'maintain a measure of collective identity that distinguishes them from the ruling [...] ideologies' (Naficy, 2001, p. 15). What the play achieves is introduce two worlds, Lavelle's and Jeremy's, that are occupied by black people with opposing viewpoints; hence, addressing multiple issues such as racism, dislocation, violence, which relate to the African presence as a lived experience.

Central to *Fix Up* is the examination of the notions of ancestry, colour, history, and race underlined by specific polarized views, within which the black British community emerge to construct 'particularistic conceptions of cultural [and racial] difference' (Gilroy 1994, p. 86). The play's central character, Brother Kiyi, owns the Fix Up Book Store, which is located in a room that contains '*many shelves and bookcases that jam and*

*squeeze up against each other*' (Kwei-Armah, 2004, p. 3); significantly, the books concern the history, heritage and literature of black people. This is a play with multiple narratives, from the ever-present cultural conflict between black and white communities, black and Asian communities, to intra-black generational and religious conflicts. By beginning the first act with a recording of one of Marcus Garvey's 1920s speeches, spoken in a Jamaican accent, Kwei-Armah states the importance of the African-American struggle against cultural/social oppression as well as Pan-Africanism to the play and signifies its relevance to the creation of a contemporary diasporic identity. Interwoven in the dialogue are references to the importance of African ancestry as one of the signifiers of black British identity to this community. This is further underlined by the conversation between Brother Kiyi, Carl, a 'care-in-the-community' delivery boy, Kwesi, a 'militant Black activist' and Norma, a 'part-time barber, preacher and photographer' (Kwei-Armah, 2004, p. 2). Their discussion reflects on African history, slavery, and conflicting views of the 'African family' and African identity. Similarly, Norma's controversial reference to Rastafarian dreadlocks as that 'nasty', 'Rasta ting', 'symbol of rebellion stupidity' (Kwei-Armah, 2004, p. 12), deliberately sets the tone for the play's interest in symbols of black culture, identity, and religion, memories of the Caribbean and African diaspora and the critique of split African identities. Through these conversations with history, Kwei-Armah's play can be seen to be in dialogue with the 1950s-1960s civil rights debates, movement and campaigns in which issues of black cultural identity were fore-fronted. The play, therefore, becomes a complex space where cultures clash, people with divergent ideas meet, controversial ideas are discussed and challenged, and communal tensions are examined.

Kwei-Armah visualizes these layered strands of culture, history, identity, intertextuality, memory and politics through different aesthetic forms and performance style as well as different characters and relationships that highlight the themes of the play. For example, in *Fix Up* and *Elmina's Kitchen*, he is 'deliberately dialogical' (Campbell, p. 250), drawing on multiple performance forms and traditions which he builds into his framing narratives of urban diasporic identity. In particular, *Fix Up* uses an eclectic mix of Western and black theatrical styles to present black British people's lived experiences; for example, the device of play-in-play and call-and-response, which presents Brother Kiyi playing a cassette that '*throws out a very percussive rhythm made up of hand-claps and foot-stomps. [He] starts to sing an old slave work chant. It's a call and response. Brother Kiyi is calling, the recording responding.*' (Kwei-Armah, 2004, p. 46) During the performance, he '*begins to dance with it, as if he is picking cotton from the*

ground and then cutting cane with two cutlasses.’ (Kwei-Armah, 2004, p. 46) The performance is interrupted by Norma who tells him to ‘Turn that blasted ting down’, and as Brother Kiyi settles down he accuses her of behaving like English people who are ‘‘Fraid a noise!’ (Kwei-Armah, 2004, p. 47) In the final scene Brother Kiyi, Norma and Carl are presented emptying the Fix Up bookshop. Their performance, as they ‘*work and speak narratives from the books*’ (Kwei-Armah, 2004, pp. 77 – 78), taking paragraphs from James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, and Brother Kiyi’s slave narratives in turn, emulates the call-and response style represented earlier in the play; in addition, it underlines the interconnected lines of history and performance that Kwei-Armah has drawn. As Gilroy has pointed out, this use of call-and-response, ‘the principal formal feature of these [African diaspora] musical traditions’, by black writers/performers may be regarded as “a bridge from music into other modes of cultural expression, supplying, along with improvisation, montage, and dramaturgy, the hermeneutic keys to the full medley of black artistic practices.” (Gilroy, p. 261) His observations illuminate Kwei-Armah’s performance practice in different ways, for, as a writer of African and African-Caribbean descent, he brings an alternative set of performance practices, ideological positions and values to the theatre, consciously presenting black British actors presenting black characters on stage.

The plays present a space where black British concerns are addressed; various characters, for example, Baygee, Digger, Ashley and Lavelle, speak patois and ‘black English’,<sup>2</sup> languages ordinarily used by first generation African-Caribbean immigrants and black British youths, respectively. In this way, Kwei-Armah shares views of how the assertion of linguistic identity is intrinsic to the creation of a black (British) community articulated by critics including, among others, Kobena Mercer. He maintains that, “across a whole range of [black] cultural forms there is a ‘syncretic’ dynamic which critically *appropriates* elements from the master-codes of the dominant culture and ‘creolises’ them, disarticulating given signs and re-articulating their symbolic meaning otherwise” (2002, p. 255). Indeed, ‘this hybridising tendency”, as Mercer argues, ‘is most apparent at the level of language itself where creoles, *patois* and Black English de-centre, de-stabilise and carnivalise the linguistic domination of English [...]’ (Mercer, 2002, p. 255) He further explains that this control is achieved ‘through strategic inflections, re-accentuations and other performative moves in semantic syntactic and lexical codes’ (Mercer, 2002, p. 255). Thus, Kwei-Armah is ‘very mindful’ to create characters who ‘[are] speaking in a way that most black people do [...] with each other’ because ‘in modern theatre, black people spoke what I called “chocolate-covered” kind of black talk that I just didn’t recognize and

found inauthentic.' (Osborne, p. 257) This underlines the 'critical process of dialogism' (Mercer, 2002, p. 255), evident in black British theatre practice, whereby, for example, Lavelle in *Seize the Day*, or Digger and Baygee in *Elmina's Kitchen* 'appropriate[s] the word adapting it to [their] own semantic and expressive intention' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293-4). Through slavery and colonialism, black people acquired English and other European languages which they appropriated and modified into their own 'inter-languages' (Okagbue, 2009, p. 206), pidgins or patois for their internal use. As evidenced in Lavelle's use of black English, the domestication of the English language is a dynamic process for, as Okagbue notes, there is a "similarity between the 'dialect' and 'patois'" both of which are 'very refreshing and dramatically realistic and effective as markers of African and African-Caribbean identities". (Okagbue, p. 207) The role of tricksters in the African storytelling tradition is to turn everything upside down in society in order to reveal and represent the values and hypocrisy in society; thus in many ways, Lavelle plays the role of the trickster storyteller with the ability to use a blend of patois, black and Standard English that forces the audience to rethink established uses of words. He is consciously offensive, displaying the 'street' black British youth stereotype that Jeremy hates; for example, using the expression, 'innit' (Kwei-Armah, 2009a, p. 129) which, according to Roger Hewitt, has 'made the move from creole into local vernacular, probably via the London English of black adolescents' (Hewitt, 1986, p. 132). Lavelle's role in the play is to create self-awareness in Jeremy, forcing him to confront his past and leading him to reconcile with his African-Caribbean roots. While standard English may not adequately describe the black experience, theatre 'depends on language for its effectiveness', therefore, black British writers' use of black English which is understood by a wide cross-section of young people, and patois that is mainly spoken by black people, alienates white audiences who are the major patrons of mainstream theatres. In this way, they would still regard the genre as 'other'.

### **Race, Colour and Identity**

Employing a succession of self-conscious references to the black British imaginary and iconic figures, for instance, Diane Abbott<sup>3</sup> and Bernie Grant<sup>4</sup>, Kwei-Armah's play demonstrates the view that writers of African descent can counter the imaginary definition that equates 'black' to 'street' (Kwei-Armah, 2009b). Through this approach, his work is eclectic and mirrors his background as a second generation writer of African descent brought up in a working-class family; further, it reflects the 'the narratives of the street that [have] so formed the outlook and morality of

many from the under classes.’ (Kwei-Armah, 2008) The plays, particularly discussed here, take the audience on a journey to the worlds informing the construction of the characters’ double-voiced identities. These two worlds are manifested in different ways, through various characters and their identities. For instance, Jeremy, an educated black, who tries to deny his working class roots, Lavelle, the street ‘hoodie’ in *Seize the Day*, Brother Kiyi, Alice and Norma in *Fix Up*; and Digger, the ‘bad man’ (Kwei-Armah, 2005, p. 4) in *Elmina’s Kitchen*. Their color tones and languages add a dimension to this development suggesting that their identities are in transition.

In his drama, Kwei-Armah appears to challenge a society where belonging is defined as sameness and as not being the ‘other’ (Edward Said, 1979), since in the ‘bipolar conversation’ (Stephanie M. Wildman, 1997, p. 324) of race, dual heritage people (with white and black biological parents) are not ‘positioned with whites’ (Wildman, p. 324). In the British context, being of dual heritage identity becomes markedly implicated in blackness/British-ness and depending on the lightness or darkness of their skin color or tone, may place the individual in either a ‘dominant’ or minority ‘fold’. (Wildman, p. 324) In *Fix Up*, Alice’s mother is English so, as a black person whose roots are in Somerset, she embodies the transcultural experience. Nevertheless, conscious of her dual heritage identity that locates her in ‘a liminal space between blackness and whiteness’ (Bansley E. Brown, 2001, p. 282) Alice appears to be struggling to find a place for herself in the community. As such, caught between two races, white and black, she is arguably the symbolic embodiment of the ‘traditions of one culture collid[e] with those of another even as new’ black British ‘tradition[s]’ and identities are ‘established’ (Jorge Huerta, 1999, p. 154). Notably, when, in Scene Two, Brother Kiyi informs Alice that one of the few customers who had bought his book was ‘mixed’ she suggests ‘person of dual heritage’ (Kwei-Armah, 2004, p. 39) is the correct term, thus shifting the audience’s focus back to the question of what or who is black/African British. Further, enraged by Brother Kiyi’s attitude to whites and people of dual heritage, she comments, ‘We are the future’ and ‘You’re borrowing from us and you don’t even know it.’ (Kwei-Armah, 2004, p.74) Finally, in order to emphasize the significant contribution of dual heritage people to black culture she asserts, ‘Bob Marley, mixed race. Alexandre Dumas mixed. [...] Most of your so-called black heroes are mixed. All of us are mixed!’ (Kwei-Armah, 2004, p. 74 – 5)

As Alice’s paternal identity is ‘retrieved’ from a box hidden in Brother Kiyi’s office, Kwei-Armah constructs a scene in which she self-consciously peels off layers of both her identity and Brother Kiyi’s, her biological father. In an interview with Osborne, Kwei-Armah says he

“used the character of Alice to explore the theme of dual heritage” and to demonstrate ‘the pressure on young people of dual heritage to be black or white’ (Osborne, p. 261). Alice reflects Hall’s idea of identity as a complex concept, “not so much from the fullness of identity which is already inside us as individuals, but from a lack of wholeness that is ‘filled’ from outside us, by the ways we imagine ourselves to be seen by others.” (Hall, 1992, p. 287) Alice’s comments: “‘Cos I’m brown, everybody expects me to somehow know everything black. And I’m Like, ‘Hey, how am I supposed to know [...] I’m from Somerset’” (Kwei-Armah, 2004, p. 34), capture Kwei-Armah’s thematic concerns, in both *Fix Up* and *Seize the Day*, of problematizing the fixed notion of black British or black identity. Interestingly, the insertion of Garvey’s, Baldwin’s and McKay’s voices, and texts in *Fix Up*, not only sheds new information on black people’s history, but also it interrupts the audience’s social and political reality; their presentation maps out an ‘affective space for critical reflection’ (Mercer, 2003, p. 252) on the thematic concerns of the play. These intertextualities articulate the links between past and present, and the ‘here’ and ‘there’ discussed earlier, giving a counter-discourse of black people’s history and notion of place. As Alice and other voices in the plays remind us, the in-between space is a difficult place to live, especially if you forget your roots; but it is the contemporary experience in London with all its multiple issues of race and violence.

### **Counter-discourse in Kwei-Armah’s Theatre**

Kwei-Armah’s theatre performs “a critical function in providing a counter-discourse against those versions of reality produced by dominant voices and discourses” (Mercer, 2002, p. 339) in British theatre. Its political vision reveals a more nuanced attempt to account for multiple aspects of black diasporic identity. In *Elmina’s Kitchen* and *Fix Up*, the characters are outsiders, living in a kind of constrained existence in Britain since the blood in their bodies suggests a home on distant shores. In fact, this suggests an in-between location where they are neither Africans nor Jamaicans. Echoing Ana Rodriguez’s description of how new identities are constructed, or have been constructed by Salvadoran migrants in the US, Kwei-Armah presents characters such as Digger, the drug dealer in *Elmina’s Kitchen*, who ‘cannot be expected to be and feel [British] until he can identify and reconstruct himself as a [black British] with multiple experiences, identities, histories, and memories incorporating his multiple homeland conditions.’ (Rodriguez, 2006, p. 200) Geographically, not having left England, Brother Kiyi tries to create Africa from abroad (the diaspora), and he often surprises his customers with his admiration of

Marcus Garvey. In this way, *Fix Up* is presented as a narrative of multiple identities, from the African identity to those constructed through the varied travels that have resulted in the intersection of people at their ultimate points of settlement. In *Elmina's Kitchen*, Kwei-Armah's exploration of the changing racial landscape and his plea for the community to change is reflected in his decision to locate the action of the play in a restaurant he names Elmina's Kitchen. The setting immediately allows the play to draw upon the history of Elmina Castle as a reference point. While the name is a self-conscious reference to the colonial castle on the West African coast, where the Dutch held African slaves in dungeons before transportation to America, in the play it is where people get odd jobs and food. In addition, Digger uses it to nurture, manipulate and victimize people.

Although, as George Elliot Clarke has suggested, black British people 'cannot avoid assimilating African-American influences' because both peoples were 'forged in the crucible of the slave trade, an enterprise the British aided, abetted, and affirmed', (Clarke, 2002, p. 491) one would argue that multiple influences such as popular culture, film and music can account for this phenomena. Brother Kiyi and Carl's discussion of the 'voices of the past' (Kwei-Armah, 2004, p. 9), based on their reading of the extracts from the book of slave narratives, which focuses on the experiences of the enslaved and the various journeys/routes people have made/travelled to the diasporas, sets the tone for the play's interest in migration and the multiple African diasporas. In addition, the slave narratives underline the significance of people learning about their identity through narratives written by black people.

What black British drama has in common with other African diasporic drama is "the staging of arguments, conversations, debates, discussions, and other forms of verbal intercourse' and the 'unspeakable subject of [their] history: slavery' (Clarke, 2009, p. 14) that reflect their shared history and lived experience. (Veit Erlmann, 2000, p. 84) Kwei-Armah examines the simplified understanding of colour, identity, race and place 'to produce a richer and fuller comprehension' (Campbell, p. 62) of black diasporic performance. In this context, he invokes Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's idea of 'minor literature' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 18), also known as 'minor cinema' (David Martin-Jones, 2006, p. 36), which indicates a revolutionary cinema, and in Kwame's case, drama, that uses 'its language to displace or question dominant' (Campbell, p. 62) forms and points of view. Similarly, Bhabha speaks of the "'third space'" which 'displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.' (Bhabha in Jonathan Rutherford, 1990, p. 211)

In relation to Bhabha, Deleuze and Guattari's concerns that texts by minority writers can become part of the national discourse, it is worth considering black British drama's role in constructing new forms, new identities and challenging dominant ideologies. In this way, it is possible to think of the plays discussed here, along with other black British plays as developing a new theatre that speaks from the "third space" whilst also acknowledging their relationship with the dominant theatre.

## Notes

- 1 Although slavery was one of the largest forced migrations of people from Africa, other people have continued to move to the diaspora either voluntarily or because of the recurring post-colonial conflicts. In addition, many descendants of the formerly enslaved people in the Caribbean have migrated to Britain and/or North America; similarly, in the 1860s, formerly enslaved Africans escaped from America to Canada.
- 2 Also see Lars Hinrichs and Joseph T. Tarquarson (2011) *Variation in the Caribbean: From Creole Continua to Individual Agency* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing).
- 3 Diane Abbott, the first black British woman to be elected to the House of Commons. She has been a Member of Parliament since 1987.
- 4 Bernie Grant was the first person of African descent to head a local authority in Britain. One of the first Black Members of Parliament, he was elected to the House of Commons in 1987.

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