



**THE STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY: DEFINING CULTURAL AND SEXUAL
IDENTITY ISSUES IN JACKIE KAY'S POETRY**

(Yüksek Lisans Tezi)

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Kütahya - 2022

T.C.
KÜTAHYA DUMLUPINAR ÜNİVERSİTESİ
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ
Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

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Bilimsel Etik Bildirimi

Yüksek Lisans tezi olarak hazırladığım “The Struggle for identity: Defining Cultural and Sexual Identity Issues in Jackie Kay’s Poetry” adlı çalışmanın öneri aşamasından sonuçlandığı aşamaya kadar geçen süreçte bilimsel etiğe ve akademik kurallara özenle uyduğumu, tez içindeki tüm bilgileri bilimsel ahlak ve gelenek çerçevesinde elde ettiğimi, tez yazım kurallarına uygun olarak hazırladığımı, bu çalışmamda doğrudan veya dolaylı olarak yaptığım her alıntıya kaynak gösterdiğimi ve yararlandığım eserlerin kaynakçada gösterilenlerden oluştuğunu beyan ederim.

...../...../2022

İmza

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Özgeçmiş

Serap Gürses Bozdoğan 1999 yılında Odaschool İlkokulu'nda eğitim hayatına başlamıştır. 2011'de Het Kwadrant Ortaokul/Lisesinden Ekonomi bölümünü bitirerek mezun olmuştur. Daha sonra, 2014'te Gilde Opleidingen Meslek Okulu Pazarlama ve İletişim, 2019'da Dumlupınar Üniversitesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı lisans, ve 2021'de Anadolu Üniversitesi Medya ve İletişim önlisans programlarından mezun olmuştur. 2017'de Erasmus Değişim Programı ile Hırvatistan Zadar Üniversitesinde bir dönem öğrenim görmüştür ve 2019'da Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi'nden Pedagojik Formasyon sertifikasını almıştır. Aynı yıl, Dumlupınar Üniversitesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Tezli Yüksek Lisans Programı'nda yüksek lisans öğrenimine başlamıştır ve bu süreç içerisinde Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Öğrenci Sempozyumu çerçevesi kapsamında ekofeminizm üzerine yazılmış bir makalesi vardır. Ek olarak, anadil düzeyinde Felemenkçe, C2 düzeyinde İngilizce ve A2 düzeyinde Almanca bilgisi vardır.

ÖZET

KİMLİK İÇİN MÜCADELE: JACKIE KAY'IN ŞİİRLERİNDE KÜLTÜREL VE CİNSEL KİMLİK SORUNLARININ BELİRLENMESİ

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Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı

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Haziran, 2022, 103 sayfa

Kimliğimizin oluşumu çeşitli iç ve dış faktörler tarafından etkilenebilir. İç faktörler kişisel ilgi alanları ve yetenekleri kapsayabilirken dış faktörler ise genellikle doğum yeri ve bireyin büyürken içinde bulunduğu kültürleri kapsama eğilimindedir. Bu faktörlerin farklı birleşimleri ise bireylerin kendilerine yakın hissettiği çok çeşitli kimliklerin oluşmasına yol açar. Ne var ki bu, her kimliğin, özellikle azınlıkların kimliklerinin, aynı şekilde anlaşılacağı ve tümünün aynı şekilde kabullenileceği anlamına gelmez. Kimliğin yanlış anlaşılması toplumdan dışlanmaya yol açabilir ve ırk, toplumsal cinsiyet, cinsellik, din ve siyasi görüş ayrımı olmaksızın bireyler arasında eşitliğe yer bırakmaz. Aynı zamanda bireyin kişisel kimliğinin toplumun onayıyla oluşmasını destekler. Anlaşılmayan ve kabul edilmeyen kimliklere örnek olarak verilebilecekler arasında cinsel kimlik çerçevesinde eşcinsellik, kültürel kimlik çerçevesinde ise melezlik sayılabilir. Yazar ve şair olan Jackie Kay hem İskoç hem de Nijerya kökenli eşcinsel bir kadın olmasından ötürü toplum tarafından algılanması güç olan marjinal kimliği ile azınlıkların bir mensubudur. Kay kendi kişisel düşüncelerini ve etrafındaki topluluğun tepkilerini ifade ederken yaşadığı zorlu koşulların izleri eserlerinde ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu nedenle, bu tez Kay'ın seçilmiş on yedi şiirini toplumdaki marjinalleştirilmiş bireylerin kimlikleri ile bağlantılı olarak yaşadıkları sorunları tespit etme amacıyla incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Jackie Kay, Çağdaş İngiliz Şiiri, Kimlik, Ayrımcılık, Toplum

ABSTRACT

THE STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY: DEFINING CULTURAL AND SEXUAL IDENTITY ISSUES IN JACKIE KAY'S POETRY

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Master Thesis, Department of Western Languages and Literature

Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Pelin KUT BELENLİ

June, 2022, 103 pages

Identity can be formed by a variety of internal and external factors. The internal factors may include personal interests and talents whereas the external factors tend to include the place of birth and the surrounding cultures one grows up in. The different combinations of these factors lead to a large variety of identities as individuals associate themselves accordingly. However, this does not mean that every identity will be understood and respected in the same manner, especially those of the minorities. Misunderstanding of identity may in its turn lead to exclusion from society which would mean that there is little space left for equality among all, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, religion, and political opinion. It also provides the idea that one's personal identity depends on the acceptance of the society. Examples of misunderstood and unaccepted identity traits could be homosexuality in sexual identity or hybridity in cultural identity. As poet and novelist Jackie Kay is a Black lesbian woman of both Scottish and Nigerian origins, she is one of the minorities with a marginal identity which may be less easy to comprehend. The hardships of the circumstances Kay had to go through can be traced back in her works as she expresses her personal thoughts as well as the reactions from the community around her. Therefore, this thesis analyses seventeen selected poems from Kay's poetry in order to recognize the identity issues of the marginalized individuals of society by presenting Kay's perspective on the concept of identity.

Keywords: Jackie Kay, Contemporary British Poetry, Identity, Discrimination, Society

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the support I received throughout this journey I wish to show my appreciation and gratitude.

First of all, I would like to thank Asst. Prof. Dr. Pelin Kut Belenli for her supervision throughout this journey. The encouragement, constructive feedback, and positive energy I received from her helped me finalize this thesis. The space she gave me to put my vision into action has been a prominent factor and her respectful manner of guiding me made me feel heard and understood. I also appreciate her lectures throughout the years which made me establish a stronger connection with the art of poetry.

I wish to extend my special thanks to Asst. Prof. Özlem Aydın Öztürk for her time and observation which helped me to improve my thesis and Asst. Prof. Dr. Anı Sev Ateş, for her valuable comments on my thesis and also her lectures throughout the years which helped me analyse the depth of literature.

I am indebted to Prof. Dr. Ayhan Kahraman, Asst. Prof. Dr. Ali Belenli, Lect. Mehmet Can Yılmaz, and Lect. Fatih Akdeniz for their valuable lectures and effort to convey their knowledge. They provided me with the insight and the foundation of knowledge I needed for this degree.

I would like to thank Lect. Vehbi Onur Demirciler for his encouragement, guidance, and support since the first day I set foot on the campus of DPU in 2015.

I am grateful to my dear friends Esra Aydın and Saadet Yetimoğlu for their mental support and words of encouragement throughout this journey. And also Cansel Kederli as we started this journey together while motivating each other throughout.

I owe my accomplishments to my family for which I am more than grateful for. I would like to thank my mother Süreyya Demirbaş Gürses for her unconditional love, patience, care, and encouragement throughout my life and my achievements; my late father Tefik Gürses who motivated me to put my English skills into use and who would have been very proud to experience this achievement; my brother Sadık Gürses who never fails to express his enthusiasm for my achievements and whose support and encouragement I excessively feel despite of us living in different continents; my sister-in-law Karina Gürses for the mental support whenever needed; my grandparents Nazmiye and Mehmet Demirbaş for always expressing their excitement and belief in me; and my loving husband Burak Bozdoğan for his encouragement, mental support, and words of confidence.

Lastly I dedicate this thesis to my niece Sophia Gürses, wishing her a prosperous and successful future. May she always be proud of her multicultural identity.

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THESIS TEXT

INTRODUCTION

The poetry of the contemporary British poet Jackie Kay includes issues concerning the various branches of “identity,” such as cultural, sexual, fluid¹, and hybrid identity. According to the *Oxford Dictionary* “identity” could be understood as “[t]he characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is” (Pearsall, 1999, p. 705). This definition of identity is important for this thesis as Kay’s poems are intersected by focusing on the cultural, and sexual characteristics of the personas, and the circumstances affected by these characteristics. This thesis puts its main focus on the issues in connection with identity in Jackie Kay’s selected poems which are “The Waiting Lists” (1991), “The Telling Part” (1991), “Generations” (1991), “Black Bottom” (1991), “The Red Graveyard” (1993), “In My Country” (1993), “Sign” (1993), “Hottentot Venus” (1998), “Crown and Country” (1998), “Pounding Rain” (1991), “From Stranraer, South” (1998), “Close Shave” (1991), “Dressing Up” (1991), “Twelve Bar Bessie” (1993), “Bleep” (1998), “Condemned property” (1993), and “Church Invisible” (1998). Focusing on Kay’s representations of various types of identity through poetry, this thesis bases its argument upon several central questions regarding identity: Which elements contribute to identity? Is identity solid or is there space for renewal? Do the opinions of outsiders matter while shaping an identity? And if so, to what extent can one be limited by this? After defining identity and its various forms in cultural terms, and clarifying how identity in general is constructed in the introductory chapter, Kay’s selected poems are analysed accordingly in the main chapters. The term identity functions as the foundation of many of Kay’s poems and therefore, the research questions which are discussed in this thesis reflect Kay’s own perception. The questions regarding Kay and her identity include: how did Kay experience discrimination? How did she reflect this in her poetry? What are her personal ideas regarding identity? And how does her direct circle get affected by discrimination? The answers to these questions are clarified by evaluating Kay’s choice of vocabulary and tone which will decide for the general mood of the poems and the attitudes of the personas. Furthermore, the focus lays on the integrated figures of speech as these help to decipher the poems’ deeper structure below the surface composition. Kay’s personal experiences as well as experiences of others in combination with the choice of literary elements mentioned above resolve

¹ Fluidity refers to the different aspects of identity which have no clear-cut boundaries as identity is open for change, modification, and reinvention (Elgezery, 2015, p. 125).

the main questions of this research. An elaborated indication concerning the analysed elements of literature is stated in the “Chapter Division” part near the end of this introductory chapter. Thus, this thesis presents Kay’s perspective on different types of the concept of identity through the study and analysis of her selected poems. The relevance of this thesis lays in reflecting the importance of self-expression in contemporary British poetry in terms of “personal identity” and thereby creating space for more consciousness concerning contrasting identities. By providing Kay’s own experiences as well those of others, Kay portrays the stories of the Black community through her poetry. Her experiences which are represented in her poetry collections *The Adoption Papers* (1991), *Other Lovers* (1993), and *Off Colour* (1998) show that hardships concerning identity are possibly caused by external forces as well as from within, driven by the need to belong. Kay’s poetry also exemplifies how these issues are possible to appear even in the smallest interactions and may concern various categories of “identity.” These categories include culture, race, sexual orientation, and gender. In addition to the importance of “personal identity,” Kay also points out the relevant setbacks related to adoption in general. She displays with her poetry the inconvenient thresholds during and after interracial adoption processes which might be unknown to outsiders of the process. The fact that these hardships do not apply to intracultural adoption processes indicates the relation between adoption and identity issues. Therefore, this research is important in order to highlight all the matters of identity handled in Jackie Kay’s poetry, whether in terms of culture, race, gender, or sexual orientation. The main objectives of this thesis include the explanation of how “hybrid² cultural identities” and less common sexual orientations are apt to be misunderstood, to the point where individuals may struggle to become part of the society they live in. These hardships are identified and proven via literary analysis in the poetry of Jackie Kay, in an attempt to figure out how and why she employed these topics in her works.

JACKIE KAY, DISCRIMINATION, AND POETRY

As Kay’s biography is inseparable from her poetry because she uses many autobiographical elements in her poems, it is important to get acquainted with this information before analysing her poetry. This information is also used throughout the analysis of the poems in order to grasp the issues of identity. The main source used to

² Hybrid identities are a mixture of multiple cultural backgrounds at once (Marotta, 2011, p. 189).

collect the information about Kay's life is her memoir *Red Dust Road* (2010) which gives a clear perspective of Kay's vision on her life and experiences in her own words.

Jackie Kay was born Jacqueline Margaret Kay in the year 1961 in Edinburgh, Scotland. Kay studied English at the University of Stirling, and as a poet, novelist, playwright, and short story writer she explored themes, such as identity, multiculturalism, and gender. Her most important pieces of work include her poetry collections *The Adoption Papers* (1991), *Other Lovers* (1993), and *Off Colour* (1998) together with her memoir *Red Dust Road: An Autobiographical Journey* (2010) which won the award of 2011 Scottish Mortgage Investment Trust Book of the Year. These collections and her memoir lay the foundation of this research as they express many personal and impersonal instances concerning the issues of identity for Kay. In 2016 Kay was appointed Scottish Makar, the Scottish variant of the honorary position of Poet Laureate, pointing out her strong bonds with Scotland (Ferguson, 2021). Kay's biological father and mother met in 1961 in Aberdeen where her father was a student and her mother worked as a nurse (Kay, 2010, p. 15). After keeping in touch for a while during her mother's pregnancy, her father returned to Nigeria while her mother had her daughter in a mother-and-baby home. The couple who Kay regards as her real parents adopted Kay five months after she was born (Kay, 2010, p. 3). This adoption journey marked for Kay the beginning of her multicultural life. She found out about her adoption at the age of seven, when she first realised that her adoptive mother Helen is not the same colour as she is (Kay, 2010, p. 12). Both of Kay's adoptive parents joined the Communist Party in New Zealand, and when they returned to Scotland after the first couple of years of their marriage, her father kept working for the Communist Party positioned as the Glasgow Secretary (Kay, 2010, p. 18). As Helen and John Kay experienced problems with conceiving children of their own, they decided to adopt. The adoption process did not proceed fluently as in the late fifties' adoption agencies were often run by religious organizations. This worked against Helen and John Kay since they did not pay any visits to the church as was expected from a couple preparing to adopt children (Kay, 2010, p. 20). Therefore Kay's adoptive parents also experienced forms of discrimination regarding their cultural and religious identities. Considering the fact that Kay and her brother were adoptive children of colour during the 1960s in Britain, the awareness should

have been created regarding the uncommon preferences towards orphans of colour during that time. This can be concluded from the fact that Kay's parents' adoption process fastened as soon as they mentioned their indifference about the colour of the child. Their search concluded with acceleration as they were soon offered Kay's older brother Maxwell for adoption in 1959 (Kay, 2010, p. 22). Kay covers her parents' problems concerning identity during the process of adoption in her poem "The Waiting Lists," in which she describes the racial, as well as (sub)cultural, thresholds of adoption during the 1960s in Britain, experienced from both ways including the adoptive child and the adoptive parents. Therefore, it could be stated that Kay's poetic inspiration is partly provided by her personal experiences as a former orphan of colour, put up for adoption, during the 1960s in Britain. Additionally, Kay's adoptive parents' involvement in her life also plays a role in the formation of Kay's cultural identity, as she explains:

[i]f I hadn't been adopted I wouldn't have got such a sense of black history, because my Scottish parents taught me about Nelson Mandela, Duke Ellington, Bessie Smith or Angela Davis, a lot of my black heroes. And on the other hand my African father had become so white through Christianity that he was rubbishing African culture in a way that my Scottish dad would never do. These are the complexities! It's not all black and white! (Thorpe, 2002, para. 20)

It is ironic how Kay's "white" parents created a space for her to admire her Black³ background while, in contrast, her biological father devalued this culture on behalf of religion.

As stated on many occasions by Kay, during her childhood and adolescence, Kay experienced various forms of racism and discrimination by not only children but also adults (Kay, 2010, p. 188; Flood, 2020, para. 4). In her memoir *Red Dust Road* Kay explains how she used to be bullied at school when she was little, as schoolmates shoved mud in her face exclaiming: "That's what you should eat, mud, because you're from a mud hut" (Kay 2010, p. 184), and how children especially waited for her, in order to spit in her face and shout "dirty darkie!" (Kay, 2010, p. 185). The adult acts of racism were, according to Kay, "more sinister and scary" than those of the children (Kay, 2010, p. 188). She recalls the first time of such an interaction happening as she finished her Coke in the park and put the can next to herself on the ground, after which a large man with grey hair approached in a rude

³ The capital "B" refers to the group of people whose ancestors were born in Africa and does not necessarily point out their skin colour (Appiah, 2021). It is rather a sense of shared identity and community (Laws, 2020, para. 1) and will therefore be used in this thesis with a capital as well.

manner by mentioning “Don’t you know we like to keep our land tidy? Where do you come from anyway? A little mud hut?” (Kay, 2010, p. 187). These stereotypical and discriminating remarks exemplify how people of different age groups in Kay’s environment did not behave respectfully in a multicultural society in white-dominated Scotland. According to Kay, the mixture of her complex identity has been a starting point of her writing (Rowell, 2008, p. 268). In an interview with Rebecca Wilson, Kay explained that she started writing because she felt isolated as a Black individual in Scotland as there were not many Black people around her, and also because nobody else was pointing out the matters she desired to highlight (1990, p. 121). The discrimination ultimately became the drive for Kay’s works, which she started around the age of eleven. She was initially triggered by her own ideas of things being wrong with the world. Therefore, she began writing poetry about apartheid, discrimination, and peace (“An Interview with Jackie Kay,” 2019, para. 3). Poetry also ensured a safe haven for Kay as she wrote revenge poems after being called out in racist contexts. Poetry was for her a place she could go for refuge and where imagination helped her to get through those times (“An Interview with Jackie Kay,” 2019, para. 3).

Plurality in terms of politics, religion, morals, and sexuality emerged throughout the twentieth century (Hulse, Kennedy and Morley, 1993, p. 15). Contemporary British poetry relates to the late twentieth century circumstances in Britain (Kennedy, 1996, p. 215) as it displays poetry and political concerns in connection with each other (Hulse, Kennedy and Morley, 1993, p. 16). In Kay’s poetry this can be regarded as discrimination within society on multiple matters is included. Within the field of contemporary British poetry, the themes of gender, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity are frequently used themes (Broom, 2006, p. 3). Contemporary British poetry highlights accessibility, combines humour with seriousness (Hulse, Kennedy and Morley, 1993, p. 16), and is the aestheticisation of cultural and political struggle (Kennedy, 1996, p. 18). Additionally, a willingness to challenge the centre is a characteristic of Contemporary British poetry (Hulse, Kennedy and Morley, 1993, p. 20). Therefore, there is a connection between contemporary British poetry and the cultural and political consensus since the 1970s (Kennedy, 1996, p. 17). Kay’s poetry contributes to the marginal becoming central as

her multicultural and homosexual identity, which she also includes in her poetry, challenges the existence of the centre (Hulse, Kennedy and Morley, 1993, p. 18).

Identity labels related to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality are convenient for recent cultural debates, by being unforeseeably fluid and open to argument as identity labels are apt to undergo revision and adjustments continually (Broom, 2006, p. 3). The idea of identity being fluid fits Kay's understanding of identity as she views identity as a fluid existence without a fixed form and which is not open for prejudices as it continuously changes (Elgezeery, 2015, p. 1). The fluidity of identity and the overlapping of identities do not imply fragmented individuals nor do they hold them from having consistent views, following coherent interests, staying loyal to their commitments, or being able to have long-lasting connections and dedications (Mostov, 2007, 139). Fluidity rather implies adaptability to one's environment and a continuing process of identity formation (Elgezeery, 2015, p. 126). Additionally, one of the valuable aspects of Kay's poetry is the capacity it has to examine the manner in which race, ethnicity, colour, and cultural history are embodied within relationships whether sexual or familial (Broom, 2006, p. 65). To achieve this end, Kay uses techniques such as the integration of a conversational style with multiple juxtaposing voices as in her collection "The Adoption Papers." Furthermore, the technique of the dramatic monologue is a recurring form in Kay's poetry and is used in most of the poems analysed in this thesis. The dramatic monologue covers the sort of poetry in which the historical or fictional persona, i.e. the dramatic speaker, speaks to an implied audience, revealing the mind of the persona (Baldick, 2001, p. 72). This form provides for a space in Kay's poetry in which the thoughts and feelings of the personas are accessible for observation resulting in a reveal of moods as well as it ensures the opportunity to formulate the issues of identity directly from first hand experiences. It allows to adopt the speaker's point of view as an unfamiliar point of view of familiar matters (Langbaum, 1963, p. 137). In this thesis the familiar matter is discrimination whereas the unfamiliar points of view are those of the discriminated individuals. Additionally, retrospective poetry which is distinctive for recalling past events (Pearsall, 1999, p. 1224), also comes forward in Kay's poems. In chapter one the poems "Black Bottom" (1991) and "Hottentot Venus" (1998) are retrospective in form considering the past events of Kay's personal experiences whereas the poems "Pounding Rain" (1999), "Close Shave" (1991), and "From Stranraer, South" (1998)

in chapter two related to this form are retrospective-prospective as these turn from past events to the present or future (Theune, 1999, p. 151). Kay also displays her affinity with Scotland by using Scots language and reflecting traditional elements of the Scottish culture (Broom, 2006, pp. 65-66). Therefore, Kay's origin, her themes of choice, and the employed literary tools and techniques contribute to the uniqueness of her poetic voice and the prominence of her place in Contemporary British Poetry.

RACISM IN BRITAIN AND BLACK BRITISH POETRY

To provide a deeper understanding concerning the racist interactions Kay has had to deal with throughout her daily life, the history of Blacks in Britain is a prominent segment of the origin of these interactions. By means of this background information it will become clear for how long the Black population has been living in Britain and how racism came into being, distinguishing the Blacks as the "other," and how Kay's identity as a poet has been formed by this history.

Lavinia Stennett, founder of The Black Curriculum⁴, explains how the Black British history is more than what is taught in the UK schools as follows: "We have existed in Britain and been pioneers, inventors, icons. And then colonialism happened, and that has shaped the experiences of Black people - but that is not all we are" (qtd. in Virk, 2020). Before the transatlantic slave trade there were already Blacks located in Britain participating as soldiers in the Roman army in Carlyle, as well as at the Court of Scotland during the sixteenth century where Black women in high positions were in control of their personal maids (Segal, 1996, p. 263). Additionally, the Court of Henry VIII included a Black trumpeter named John Blanke, selected to play the trumpet for entertainment during the Westminster Tournament⁵ of 1511 (Virk, 2020). However, Queen Elizabeth I was rather not pleased by the number of Blacks in the country by 1596 as she wrote letters to several mayors in which she stated: "Her Majesty's pleasure... that those kinde of people should be sent forth of the lande" (Elizabeth I, 1596/2021). As her letter did not have enough impact to conduct her wish, Queen Elizabeth I announced a declaration in 1601, encouraging Blacks to be banned from the country and justifying

⁴ The Black Curriculum is an organisation which teaches Black British history in schools (Virk, 2020).

⁵ The Westminster Tournament was an elaborate party held by Henry VIII to celebrate the birth of his son (Virk, 2020).

this action by pointing them out as “infidels having no understanding of Christ or his Gospel” (Elizabeth I, 1601/2016), as well as calling them an economic “burden” (Elizabeth I, 1601/2016). Nevertheless, the Queen’s expulsion resulted in being incomplete as Blacks still remained in the country (Segal, 1996, p. 263). Whether as slaves or free people, the Blacks in Britain endured a difficult time of existence since the seventeenth century. The slaves suffered from remorseless punishments of their ruthless slaveholders, whereas the free Blacks dealt with the hardships of finding jobs leading them to become beggars or even women entering prostitution. Leaving for smaller towns seemed the only option to find work as agricultural labourers, laundresses, nurses for children, or musical entertainers (Segal, 1996, p. 264).

The end of Britain’s commitment to the slave trade came to pass in 1807 which marks the first influential triumph during the resistance against slavery (Clarkson, 1836, p. 206). The foundations of slavery were destroyed from within by the emancipation of the Blacks through escaping and refusing to perform labour free of charge. The fact that Blacks spoke openly about their undesirable experiences was also part of this slavery discontinuing emancipation (Segal, 1996, p. 266). During the nineteenth century in Britain, the racism against Blacks increased among the middle class, especially against mixed-coloured romantic relationships. William Cobbett, activist for the rights of rural labourers, expressed in his own periodical how disgusted he felt about the mixed-race relationships as follows:

[w]ho, that has any sense of decency, can help being shocked at the familiar intercourse, which has gradually been gaining ground, and which has, at last, got a complete footing between the Negroes⁶ and the women of England? No black swain need, in this loving country, hang himself in despair [...] Amongst white women, this disregard of decency, this defiance of the dictates of nature, this foul, this beastly propensity, is, I say it with sorrow and with shame, peculiar to the English. (qtd. in Wood, 1999, para. 17, emphasis in original)

After the Second World War Britain experienced a shortage of labour, as there was need of post-war reconstruction and a demand for skilled workers (Mason, 1995, p. 24). The poorly paid and dirty jobs were filled by means of large-scale immigration of Caribbean emigrants which is a key factor in Britain’s multi-ethnic society (Mason, 1995, p. 24-25). As these people were defined by their different skin colours

⁶ Derived from the Latin word “niger” meaning black, the word nigger or negro means “a black person” (Middleton & Pilgrim, 2022, para. 1). It was established as a derogatory name in the early 1800s and is still a term of white racism carrying hatred and disgust (Middleton & Pilgrim, 2022, para. 2,4).

and cultural backgrounds, they were presented by the police, the media, and the politicians as a threatening factor to Britishness (Shukra, 1998, p. 50). This also ensured racial violence and harassment by police (Shukra, 1998, p. 45). The change of demography and the fear it created in Britain led to hostility against Black people in Britain which justified a different treatment, such as immigrant control and internal controls on Black people (Shukra, 1998, p. 1).

The relation between class and racism in Britain was mainly connected to the mindset of the educated people, consisting of the association between the economy and Black inferiority in the nineteenth century, most likely derived from slavery happening in the centuries before (Segal, 1996, p. 269). Hume did not hesitate to defend white supremacy while explaining his vision on the subject:

I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilised nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacture amongst them, no arts, no science [...] In JAMAICA indeed they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but 'tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly. (qtd. in Segal, 1996, p. 270)

During May and June of the year 1919, the violence against the Blacks in Liverpool extended in proportion and intensified with the occurrence of riots as well as personal violence. As a result of this, around one thousand Blacks were left with no chance other than taking shelter in fire stations and prisons. The struggles for identity of the Black immigrants were caused by the white supremacist practices of the media, churches, and academics (West, 1993, pp. 209-210). Various newspapers described the events by putting the blame on the Blacks which can be exemplified with the comment of the *Liverpool Courier* from 1919:

One of the chief reasons of popular anger behind the present disturbances lies in the fact that the average negro is nearer the animal than is the average white man, and that there are women in Liverpool who have no self-respect. (qtd. in Evans, 2019, p. 224)

The acts of self-defence of the Blacks were reported by the *Manchester Guardian* in 1919 as acts of evil intention: “The quiet, apparently inoffensive, nigger becomes a demon when armed with revolver or razor” (qtd. in Fryer, 1984, p. 310). As can be regarded, the Blacks in Britain were portrayed in the newspapers as “[c]onstituting a threat to white British society” (Gordon & Rosenberg, 1989, p. 3). The comments in these newspapers could be regarded as examples of false, racist depictions of Blacks by powerful mainstream media which are able to reach a great part of the common

households, and are therefore apt to spread hate more easily. As the individual attacks continued, newspapers and television broadcasts seemed to stimulate the racist actions, leading thousands of whites⁷ to go “nigger-hunting” while exclaiming “Let’s get the blacks!” (Segal, 1996, p. 279). Since the end of the Second World War there has been an increase of migrants in the United Kingdom (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2017, p. 1). The remaking of the British nation after the dissolution of the British Empire gave rise to British multiculturalism (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2017, p. 2). The British Nationality Act of 1948 provided a right to immigrate to the United Kingdom to a majority of individuals in the Empire, which led to an unexpected amount of non-white immigration (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2017, p. 5). In April 1968 Enoch Powell, who was a politician and former academic, highlighted with his speech “Rivers of Blood” his concerns about the nation being under threat and invaded by Blacks. This speech included Powell’s explanation of how white Britons were finding “their wives unable to obtain hospital beds and neighbourhoods changed beyond recognition, their plans and prospects for the future defeated” (1986). The great impact Powell’s speech had on the white British society became possible since “[P]owell could always count on sympathetic press coverage for his views on race” (Gordon & Rosenberg, 1989, pp. 3-4), providing him with a platform to influence the mindset of the British people regarding the Blacks in Britain. Jackie Kay recalls the moments following this speech, as one of her schoolmates enounced a statement in which she agrees with Powell in the matter that “black people should all be sent home” (2010, p. 195). However, she excludes Kay from the “problem” as she stated: “But not you, of course, Jackie. You’re one of us” (2010, 195).

Apart from the violence in Liverpool, the Blacks were also discriminated during their employments. They were usually assigned to carry out jobs levelled far below their capacities and experiences and which were unwilling to be fulfilled by white workers, such as cleaning or night work, leaving them humiliated and dissatisfied (Sivanandan, 1976, p. 349; Segal, 1996, p. 278; Ramazani, 2007, p. 207). The dissatisfaction and the bad living conditions are also depicted in the well-known poem “Inglan is a bitch” (1980) by the Black British poet Linton Kwesi Johnson. Additionally, discrimination also occurred within the field of finding

⁷ Capitalizing “white” brings the risk of following white supremacy and is therefore not capitalized (Laws, 2020, para. 1).

accommodation. Although the problem of finding decent housing began as war related with consequences for everyone regardless of race or culture, according to the Institute of Race this situation was a particular discrimination of Blacks:

Coloured migrants on arrival are naturally at the end of the queue for housing of any kind and they have to take accommodation where they can. Not only is there the general shortage but there is unwillingness in the country among white landladies and landlords to take in coloured tenants – whether they are workers, students or professional men. (qtd. in Segal, 1996, p. 278).

The need to take action in order to oppose racism was acknowledged by the Labour government of 1974-79, as this government established the Race Relations Act of 1976 which prohibited direct as well as indirect discrimination, including equality in job requirements for all (Abercrombie & Warde, 2000, p. 229). However, despite this Act, the discrimination of Blacks regarding employment and housing as well as in other social sectors continued in large numbers as the government refused to vindicate the consequences and realise the envisioned results (Segal, 1996, p. 281). After Margaret Thatcher replaced Edward Heath as Conservative Party leader in 1975, it became clear that the restrictions for Black immigrants were carried out in the name of negative feelings against them rather than maintaining social order. Thatcher spoke in the name of her adherents when she explained her worries about the immigrant flow in the following passage:

If we went on as we are, then by the end of the century there'd be four million people of the New Commonwealth or Pakistan here. Now that's an awful lot, and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people of a different culture. And you know, the British character had done so much for democracy, for law, and has done so much throughout the world that is there is any fear that it might be swamped, people are going to react and be hostile to those coming in. (1978)

The adding numbers of immigrants concerned Thatcher for loss of British influences within democracy and law, as she assumed the immigrants to be incapable of proper cooperation of civilized systems. Another statement was made by Thatcher a year later when she exemplified her worries about the happening change as she expressed:

Some people have been swamped by immigrants. They've seen the whole character of their neighbourhood change... Of course people can feel that they are being swamped. Small minorities can be absorbed – they can be assets to the majority community – but once a minority in a neighbourhood gets very large, people do feel swamped. They feel their whole way of life has been changed. (qtd. in Solomos, 1993, p. 97)

Along with this conservative mindset came the increasing cases of police brutality against Blacks including Black youth clubs being raided, individual Blacks being arrested without legit reasoning, and a refusal to protect Blacks from racially intended violence (Segal, 1996, p. 282). As a result, the exclusion of Blacks has been systematically going on for centuries, creating difficult life circumstances and positioning them as the scapegoats of society. The outcomes of these events can be traced back in some of Jackie Kay's works regarding the matter of exclusion, such as "Hottentot Venus" and "Crown and Country" both from the collection *Off Colour* (1998).

Black British poetry of the Eighties was influenced by the first inner-city riots which intensified around the black communities in 1981. The New Cross Massacre, which occurred in the beginning of this year, included the death of thirteen black youths. As D'Aguiar describes,

[a] generation of British-born and bred blacks had come of age only to find that Britishness did not include them. Jobs were not open to them, the police harassed them, there was an increase in racist violence, and subtler forms of racism, such as discrimination in the classroom, meant that black youths were underachieving in school and getting pushed into sport, or else signing on for the dole. (1995)

As the discrimination of the Black youths increased, they found a manner of communicating their experiences and their own innovative solutions through the medium of music and writing workshops during this time period (D'Aguiar, 1995, p. 59). Some of the prominent names of Black British poetry are Linton Kwesi Johnson, Benjamin Zephaniah, John Agard, and Grace Nichols. The themes of their works in the category of Black British poetry include cultural heritage, poetry as a political force, alienation, otherness, discrimination, exclusion from jobs, and violence against Blacks (Ramey, 2004, p. 133). For example, Agard's poetry is central to Black British poetry's attempt of rearranging the 1970s and 1980s race politics of Britain (Ramazani, 2007, p. 200) and Zephaniah challenges with his works the opinions and beliefs about life, history, and politics (Parker, 2006, p. 4) as his poems are direct and display everyday experiences as well as recognizable concerns (Macphee, 2021, p. 383). Black British poetry is also categorized as postcolonial poetry which is derived from a tradition of African music and rhythm, such as Reggae, Calypso, and Jazz (D'aguiar, 1995, p. 80). Black British poetry reflects the enjambment between post-colonies and the Western metropole which results in a cross-geographic experience

(Ramazani, 2007, p. 200). Therefore, Kay is relatable to these poets as her themes also include discrimination and suppression of Blacks in Britain. However, she also includes the themes of gender inequality and the LGBTQIA+⁸ community which separates her from the other Black British poets. Grace Nichols began with the exploration of Black women in history which is also one of the interests of Kay (D'Aguiar, 1995, p. 67). Nichols' works include satires about the socially ideal woman as she praises the overweight in her work *Fat Black Women's Poems* (1984) (D'Aguiar, 1995, p. 67). Kay similarly satirizes this concept in her poem "Bleep" (1998). Apart from the themes, the forms and use of language are also distinctive in Black British poetry. While Kay is inspired by blues music, Johnson and Zephaniah are inspired by Reggae and are known for their works of dub poetry⁹ (D'Aguiar, 1995, p. 54). Dub poetry is a form of performance poetry where it is important that the poetry is heard, seen, and properly understood as it relies on rhythm, intonation, gestures as well as it can rely on musical elements (Hoyles & Hoyles, 2003, p. 31). Black performance poetry is valuable for highlighting suppressed knowledge and marginalised political views, and offering role models. (Hoyles & Hoyles, 2003, p. 34). This is also what Benjamin Zephaniah did as he began performing spoken word poetry and became part of the cultural initiatives of the early 1980s which ensured a multicultural and politically-conscious platform that was excluded from the mainstream media during this time (Macphee, 2021, p. 385). Although Kay does not make use of music, she does perform her poetry as the impact of the Burns Suppers¹⁰ she attended in her youth lead her to love the idea of poetry being performed by poetic voices, with the purpose that the drama in the poem can be observed (Severin, 2002, para. 3). Moreover, Kay performed *The Adoption Papers* in its whole on BBC Radio in 1990 (Persoon & Watson, 2009, p. 4). In addition to the musical elements, Nation Language¹¹ is also an element of Black British writing of post-colonial era. (Walder, 1998, p. 116). Linton Kwesi Johnson, Benjamin Zephaniah, John Agard,

⁸ LGBTQIA+ is the abbreviation for the community of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual, and other subjects, such as pansexual, androgynous, and polyamorous.

⁹ Dub poetry, a term coined by Linton Kwesi Johnson, is poetry which emerged during the cultural interactions between the British and the Caribbean. The style which is used is vernacular and accessible. As it is mostly written to be performed it contains rhythms of Reggae and a mixture of British Caribbean speech (Macphee, 2021, p. 383).

¹⁰ The Burns Suppers are a Scottish tradition to celebrate the life and works of Robert Burns, the national poet of Scotland, accompanied by traditional dishes, where poetry is being read and performed.

¹¹ Nation Language, or Creole, is a language which has developed among people who do not share the same language, and which has been used to the extent that it has established itself as the mother tongue of a group of people, as a substandard form of the English language (Todd, 1984, p. 4).

and Grace Nichols all have included this in their poetry. Kay explains that she correlates her use of language in her poems to her own experience with language, by creating an experimental tone and fusing the rhythms and language of the blues with the rhythms and language of Scotland, resulting in a Black voice which is both “Scottish and Blue” (Gish, 2001, p. 179). In addition to the Scottish vernacular Kay uses in her collections, e.g. *The Adoption Papers* (1991), she also experiments with African American vernacular (Welsh, 2019, p. 347). Therefore, Kay’s Black Scottish writing represents a form of hybrid cultural vigour (Clanfield, 2002, p. 5).

Jackie Kay’s themes are closely related to the social concerns of Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. As different from the themes of the Black British poets, such as Agard, Johnson, and Zephaniah, her poetry challenges the social and biological norms of society for her poems voice and display lesbian women, transvestites, single mothers, and terminal AIDS patients through which a representation of Britain in the 1980s is being portrayed and challenged (Innes, 1996, p. 337). Additionally, the hardships of adoption are also presented. The adoption rates of the 1970s and 1980s declined with thousands as, by the Abortion Law Reform Act of 1967, the number of legal abortions rose and single parent families became more socially acceptable within society (Gaber, 1994, p. 14), resulting in a shortage of children available for adoption. The declining number of children available for adoption also became a threshold for Kay’s adoptive parents to find a baby for adoption. This explains the prominence of the theme of adoption in Kay’s poetry. Furthermore, Kay’s role models including Bessie Smith and Angela Davis, who are both female and Black, are related to the larger presence of Black feminists within the women’s movement during the 1970s and 1980s (Hargreaves, 2021, para. 13). Lastly, during the 1970s and 1980s, sexual identities apart from heterosexuality became more visible as homosexuals, transvestites, and same-sex parented families were more openly seen (Hargreaves, 2021, para. 17). Thus, the rising popularity of transracial adoptions, the prominence of Black female figures, and the visibility of homosexuality in the 1970s and 1980s in Britain, all played a important part in Kay’s life and poetry.

HOMOPHOBIA AND GENDER INEQUALITY

Gender inequality and homophobia¹² are also prominent themes of Kay's poetry. In order to understand the hardships of these two forms of exclusion, it is important to know about the environment in which it takes place. In the nineteenth century the word "homosexual" entered Euro-American discourse, denoting sexual behaviours. This development ensured that in addition to identify oneself as male or female, individuals could also identify as homo- or heterosexual (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1993, p. 245). During the 1950s in Britain, homosexuality was regarded as either a health deficiency or the result of failed parenting (Cohen, 2013, p. 170). It was also regarded as a social construct in which an individual could choose their sexual orientation instead of it being a biological given which is fixed (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1993, p. 258). The legalisation of homosexuality in Britain was recommended as the government assembled the Wolfenden Committee with the rise of imprisoned homosexuals, as is explained in the following passage:

In 1885 the Criminal Law Amendment Act made homosexual acts between men illegal and by 1954 the number of men imprisoned for homosexual acts had risen to over one-thousand a year. This led to calls for an enquiry into the legality of homosexuality and prostitution. [...] The report was published 5th September 1957 and attracted a large amount of publicity. The report proposed that there 'must remain a realm of private morality and immorality which is, in brief and crude terms, not the law's business' and recommended that homosexual acts between two consenting adults should no longer be a criminal offence. ("Wolfenden Report," 1957)

Although this recommendation became law in England in 1967, Scotland was still not in line with this legalisation until the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act of 1980 (Meek, 2015, p. 605). Besides the legality of practising homosexuality, the social side is also important as this is the area where daily confrontations of exclusion and discrimination take place. Rejection by family, suppression by authorities or the media, and exclusion in school or on the streets are examples of such discrimination (Galloway, 1984, p. vi). Additionally, homophobia has the power of leading homosexual individuals into feeling obligated to misrepresent their sexual identity for cultural reasons (Anderson, 2016, para. 7). As the LGBTQIA+ community undergoes transphobia¹³, this is also a prominent topic to discuss. During the late

¹² Homophobia is the term to depict an extreme and irrational aversion against homosexuality and people who identify as homosexual (Pearsall, 1999, p. 681).

¹³ Transphobia is the act of fearing, hating, or mistrusting people who identify as transgender or whose expression of gender do not meet the traditional gender roles (What's transphobia, n.d., para. 1).

1980s in Britain transvestism¹⁴ was regarded as a problem which could have been prevented in childhood and that masculinity can be imposed on the individual as gender identity was believed to be fixed rather than flexible (Woodhouse, 1989, p. 135). Rejection by family, living double lives, and not being able to live according to one's personal sexual identity standards are discussed in chapter two by means of the poems "Pounding Rain" (1991), "Close Shave" (1991), "Dressing Up" (1991), and "From Stranraer, South" (1998).

Gender inequality also has an important role within the poetry of Kay. The assumption of gender roles in which the human male is perceived as dominating, sexually aggressive, physically strong, and mentally dispassionate whereas the human female is regarded as submissive, sexually passive, physically weak, and mentally sensitive (Durell, 1984, p. 1) is one of the main causes of this inequality. Lacan argues that male dominance and identity are connected by the symbolic power of the phallus, while the identity of women is defined by its absence (qtd. in Smith, 2001, p. 207). As there are several forms of femininity and masculinity based on age, class, and ethnicity, the discourse which conveys the form is important (Abercrombie & Warde, 2000, p. 209). Therefore the poem "Twelve Bar Bessie" (1993) refutes the social norm of feminine qualities and the poems "Condemned property" (1993), "Bleep" (1998), and "Church Invisible" (1998) express the mental and physical burdens of the gender roles, the assigned beauty standards for women, and the domestic violence which remains a taboo in society, as the result of patriarchy¹⁵.

DEFINING IDENTITY AND DISCRIMINATION

As this thesis focuses on different types of identity while analysing Jackie Kay's poetry, the concept of identity should be clarified as a term from the perspectives of culture, race, sexuality and gender. In order to distinct these from one another and to comprehend the thresholds for these identities it is important to be aware of what they represent. "Identity refers to who people think they are, either individually or collectively [...]" (Smith, 2001, p. 241). Foucault and Lévi-Strauss suggest that individuals are not fully in control over their identities, and are rather

¹⁴ Transvestites are men who gain sexual or sensual pleasure by changing into a feminine appearance as they use female clothes, make-up, and wigs (Woodhouse, 1989, p. ix).

¹⁵ Patriarchy covers the system of social relationships between men and women, in which men exploit, dominate and oppress women (Abercrombie & Warde, 2000, p. 193).

constructed by cultural forces around them (qtd. in Smith, 2001, p. 208). Identities define who an individual is depending on a wide range of features varying from physical traits or belief, to one's ancestry. The individuals who share a trait are placed in the same group and therefore identity tends to reduce individuality (During, 2005, p. 145). This makes it easier to target a group with discrimination, as it becomes less personal. For the reason that identity is based on selected traits of an individual, During suggests that identity reflects the individual only partially instead of representing the individual in its whole (2005, p. 145). The partial traits of individuals on which their identities are based, such as skin colour, gender, nationality, socio-economic status, and profession (During, 2005, p. 146) are used in this thesis in order to portray the connection between discrimination and the identities of the individuals in the selected poems of Kay. Some of the cultural values and practices which are part of cultural identity are the constructs of ethnic identity, familism¹⁶, filial piety¹⁷, and acculturation orientations¹⁸ (Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Weisskirch, 2008, p. 636). As part of the acculturation orientations, the term assimilation¹⁹ is used in this thesis to point out the act of renaming an individual in the poem "Hottentot Venus," and as a means of language assimilation by force in the poem "Sign." The attachment to one's heritage-culture group (e.g. country or religion) and the engagement in practices reflecting one's heritage culture or the larger society in which one resides are related to cultural identity (Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Weisskirch, 2008, p. 638). The constructs of cultural identity come forward in this thesis in connection with the hardships of being excluded and discriminated based on the values of the individuals. Additionally, cultural orientations, values, and attachments relate to the person's overall sense of self as they tend to guide personal behaviour (Dien, 2000, p. 5). Thus, the cultural environments (i.e. the cultural norm²⁰) of the individuals in Kay's poems are in opposition to their personal norms and values, and therefore, it is important to

¹⁶ Familism is in general terms defined as the cultural value of prioritizing one's family over oneself (Schwartz, 2007, p. 101).

¹⁷ The social norm which points out that parents ought to love their children in which the children return love and respect towards their parents is called filial piety (Sung, 1998, p. 371).

¹⁸ Acculturation orientations refer to the individual's integration, assimilation, marginalization, or separation in relation to their (host) society (Erten, van den Berg, & Weissing, 2018, p. 2).

¹⁹ Assimilation is the act of adapting to the host culture while discarding initial cultural values and behaviour patterns (Munch, 1949, p. 780).

²⁰ The cultural norm defines what people are supposed to do in society, rather than what everybody actually does (Durell, 1984, p. 3).

highlight culture during the analysis of the identity issues in Kay's poetry. While ethnicity²¹ puts forward the cultural similarities of a group, race points out the physical similarities. Race, according to Krogman, is "[a] sub-group of peoples possessing a definite combination of physical characters, of genetic origin; this combination serves, in varying degree, to distinguish the sub-group from other sub-groups of mankind [...]" (1945, p. 49). In addition to race, biological identity is the combination of genetic identity traits, such as eye colour, hair colour, and diseases (Moffat, 2017, p. 65, 72). Furthermore, the identity connected to race is racial identity which refers to the sense of the collective identity of a group sharing a common racial heritage (Helms, 1990, p. 3). Racial identity is an important element in Kay's poetry and in this thesis as it is a prominent source of discrimination and racism. Racism can both be direct, such as verbal or physical abuse, and indirect, such as leaving out African history in textbooks (Helms, 1990, p. 46). Racism is explored in this thesis in both manners as Kay's personal experiences are exhibited as well as the historical events and figures Kay represents. The concepts of ethnic, racial, and cultural identities are connected to each other as they are often not easily distinguishable in practice (Bhugra, 2004, p. 133). And therefore, their combination is relevant to explain the cases of discrimination, racism, and exclusion in this thesis.

Sexual identity refers to the part of one's identity which clarifies the emotional and physical attraction towards a specific gender (Donaldson-Forbes, 2000, p. 7). It is a form of social identity which is in the case of homosexual people usually formed by stigma leading to shame and exclusion (Morrish & Sauntson, 2007, p. 4). The practises of shaming and excluding homosexual people are also discussed in chapter two of this thesis where Kay's poems highlight rejection by society as well as family members, leading the personas in question to adapt their lifestyles according to social norms. The term sexual identity is also used to cover whether a person is male or female (Diamond, 2002, p. 323). This is an important concept as well in this thesis as the hardships of women are examined through Kay's expressions. These hardships include the pressure of societal standards forced upon women and the suppression which comes along with it²². In connection with sexual identity, gender identity also

²¹ The common heritage of a group of people including their history, language, music, food, and rituals (Bhugra, 2004, p. 133).

²² The analyses in chapter 2 do not suggest that only women experience the pressure of societal standards. They rather highlight female representation through Kay's poetry.

takes part in the analysis of chapter two as the effects of cross-dressing is being analysed in this part. Gender identity covers the recognition and perception of a person's gender according to social norms in which a male is recognised as a man and a female is recognised as a woman (Diamond, 2002, p. 323). The focal issue in this part of the thesis is that societal expectations and assumptions contrast with an individual's manner of expressing their gender.

Identity is perceived in postmodernist terms as a compilation of many components without definite boundaries to them. According to psychotherapist Dr. Aaron Balick, postmodern discourse is against the image of a unified identity, but rather advocates multiple, fluid, and decentred identities (2014, p. 145). Decentring in this aspect is not to be comprehended in the light of removing the subject from the centre but rather as an implication that there is no central or single identity coming forward as a sole characteristic, as one of the numerous identities may appear during different conditions and points of view (Elgezeery, 2015, p. 126). The postmodernist vision on identity compromises with Kay's perception of the term. As the circumstances around a person in which he/she gets involved with keep changing or renewing, the person is also apt to keep changing and developing (Elgezeery, 2015, p. 126). Robinson explains that there is a link between self-identity being fluid, and personal identifications with diverse communities at once, which are usually also contradictory communities (2011, p. 8). According to Wright the Black cultural identities are interconnected with the concept of fluid identities, as the common aspects are "characterized by a fluidity and an advanced capacity to negotiate and shift in the face of change" (2000, p. 294). Tatum describes this as a manner of protection within unequal situations, where the oppressed focus on survival (2000, p. 12). This ability perhaps develops from a need to adhere to the norms of society, pushed by racist or discriminating interactions exemplified in Jackie Kay's poetry. Lorde also confirms this, as she believes that those who are oppressed have always been the ones to adapt by observing, learning the language and the manners of the oppressor, and even regarding them as a matter of protection (1980, p. 1).

The relation between the personal identity and its position within society is explained by Erikson. He suggested that the psychoanalytic segment of the individual self is controlled by the important elements including the social, cultural, and historical environments of the individuals throughout their lives (qtd. in Salett &

Koslow, 1994, p. 15). Along with this introduction, he also regarded the identity of the individual as an essential part of the above-mentioned environments, in lieu of being self-reliant (qtd. in Salett & Koslow, 1994, p. 15). In this fashion, the norms, values, ideals, and roles of the individual's surrounding community thoroughly form and take place within the personal identity (Salett & Koslow, 1994, p. 15). Therefore, the realisation of the bicultural self is also a possibility. The bicultural self covers the idea of using different personality traits in different situations. For instance, individualized personality traits are being employed in the workspace while the familial traits are limited to family relationships only (qtd. in Salett & Koslow, 1994, p. 21). The correlation between identity issues and racism lays in the suggestion that the dominant group highlights the unfamiliar identity traits of the subordinate and marginalized "others." This results in an extremely negative perception of the minorities (Salett & Koslow, 1994, p. 22). According to Lorde, subordinate groups of people within society are a result of the conditioned mind which focuses on each other's differences, as she explains:

Much of Western European history conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior. In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior. Within this society, that group is made up of Black and Third World people, working-class people, older people, and women (1980, p. 1).

Additionally, Tatum states that there are seven categories by which a person can be disclosed from the norm or be "othered":

People are commonly defined as other on the basis of race or ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, and physical or mental ability. Each of these categories has a form of oppression associated with it: racism, sexism, religious oppression/ anti-Semitism, heterosexism, classism, ageism, and ableism, respectively. In each case, there is a group considered dominant (systematically advantaged by the society because of group membership) and a group considered subordinate or targeted (systematically disadvantaged). (2000, p. 11)

Individuals, identities, and societies depend on each other and this is also how an individual becomes situated in society (During, 2005, p. 145) This is reflected in Kay's poetry through the actions of the discriminating individuals, and the discriminated individuals' position within society. Accordingly, the categories which are discussed and centralized within this thesis are race/ethnicity, gender, religion,

and sexual orientation. The division of these categories and the corresponding poems are specified in the chapter division of this introduction.

IDENTITY AND DISCRIMINATION IN JACKIE KAY'S POETRY

When it comes to Jackie Kay's understanding of identity, she suggests in an interview with *Poetry Archive* that a person will not stay the same kind of person forever as she believes that "identity's something that's fluid, it's not something that's static and fixed" ("An Interview with Jackie Kay," 2019, para. 7). Kay's enthusiasm of writing about this topic, therefore, also comes from her interest "[i]n identity, how fluid it is, how people can invent themselves, how it can never be fixed or frozen" (qtd. in Elgezeery, 2015, p. 125). Therefore, her poetry advocates "the capacity human beings have to create and to transform themselves" (qtd. in Elgezeery, 2015, p. 125). Identity, according to Kay, also tends to be influenced by environmental forces. To illustrate, she believes that adopted people "always have this possibility of having been somebody else" (Jaggi and Dyer, 1999, p. 59), considering another name and another set of parents would also provide another fate. In addition to this, Kay explains that, whether in the case of adoption or not, many people might have a feeling of the other character they could have embraced, as in the case of homosexual people who are not able to be honest about their sexual orientations, and therefore live constantly as somebody who they are not (Jaggi and Dyer, 1999, p. 59). Kay considers herself having a complex identity since she is both Scottish and African, and adopted by white, working class socialists in Glasgow where she was also brought up (Rowell, 2008, p. 268; Severin, 2002, para. 9).

The themes in Kay's works vary between motherhood, being Scottish, being Black, and being female, and she also writes about the ways how colour, nationalities, and gender are marked differently (Rees-Jones, 2005, p. 202). She manages to integrate in her works her blackness and sexuality while at the same time using her languages of Scots and English (D'Aguiar, p. 66). The theme of identity in Kay's work questions the meaning of identity, whether it is fluid, to what extent genes define a person, and whether it is possible to invent oneself by escaping the pressure of one's own DNA (Major, 2016, para. 2).

Kay's poetry also contains influences of both of her cultural backgrounds. The poetic traditions which have an influence on Kay as a poet and her work, are two

dissimilar ones. The first one is Scottish poetry itself, including the Burns Suppers, a Scottish tradition to celebrate the life and works of Robert Burns, the national poet of Scotland, accompanied by traditional dishes, where poetry is being read and performed and which Kay used to attend as a child (Kay, 2010, p. 47). Besides Burns, she is also influenced by other Scottish writers, such as Liz Lochhead, Tom Leonard, and James Kelman, as they inspired Kay to write in her own tongue (Rowell, 2008, p. 277). The second influence of tradition includes music. Kay explains in her interview with Charles Henry Rowell that music has always been a huge interest of hers (2014, p. 275). She conceives her poetry as being influenced by Jazz and Blues, along with Celtic folk music, which is the reason for her to include a lot of rhythms and repetitions in her poetry related to African and Celtic musical traditions (Severin, 2002, para. 3; Rowell, 2014, p. 275).

Jackie Kay expresses in her works and her interviews the difficulties of the concept of identity. One of these difficulties is being defined by others, which also contributes to setting a norm and excluding marginal identities. To illustrate, when Kay is being introduced with terms, such as “Black poet,” “Scottish poet,” and “feminist poet,” she is being labelled by others. Kay believes that it is liberating to use these labels as long as a person is defining themselves (Jaggi and Dyer, 1999, p. 57). However, when someone else uses them, the labels might give people the space to make assumptions about Kay’s work or her interests (Severin, 2002, para. 13). Therefore, prejudices against one and/or expectations about one, correlate to the category one is being put in by others. Kay also shares the opinion that:

[w]hen 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 the white person, the heterosexual person and the man are the norm and everybody else deviates from that. (Jaggi and Dyer, 1999, p. 57)

Similarly, Lorde stated that: “[f]or Black women as well as Black men, it is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves, we will be defined by others – for their use and to our detriment” (1978, p. 31). In addition to being defined by others, Kay also points out how whiteness is not categorized, and therefore not used while introducing a “white writer” whereas the statement “Black writer” is not uncommon, similar the case with sexuality as a heterosexual writer is not being announced in opposite to homosexual writers (Severin, 2002, para. 13). Apart from Kay’s

experience as a writer who is constantly introduced in an “othering”²³ manner, she also describes the challenges of proving oneself to belong to a certain place. Although the person in question might theoretically know every detail about their cultural heritage and background, there is still the possibility to be put in a position where one starts questioning their own cultural identity in the case of mixed cultural identities or adoptions. This can start at a very young age and is possibly triggered by the need to belong, as Kay explains in *Red Dust Road*:

Every time somebody in your own country asks you where you are from; every time you indignantly reply, ‘I’m from here,’ you are subconsciously caught up in asking that question again and again of yourself, particularly when you are a child. Children have an intense need to belong and anything that marks them out as different from all the other children will then form a straggly queue of uneasy, queasy questions in their head. (2010, pp. 38-39)

Due to Kay’s many experiences with racism coming from both younger and older people, she wonders what drives them to become filled with unreasonable fear and hate towards Black people as well as how it starts, and how it is able to stick with the person until almost the end of their lives (Kay, 2010, p. 191). One of the possible answers to these questions might already be answered by Kay herself, as she describes in *Red Dust Road* a very detailed portrayal of Africa presented during her early school years:

What did we learn about Africa in School? Not a lot – but I never relished Africa coming up in any way at all and always took the continent very personally because my classmates would look at me whenever Africa was mentioned (hardly ever individual countries, just a whole mass as if it was one country), sneakily turning round to stare and pull faces. (2010, p. 39, emphasis in original)

Kay reflects in these sentences how the actions of her classmates drove her to feel affiliated with the continent of Africa. In a way, the perceptions of her classmates directed Kay’s perception of her own cultural identity, associating herself with a foreign continent and the African culture. The stereotypical African “culture” which was imprinted on the children’s minds in Kay’s school, included primitivism as the general description behind the continent. Kay explains this as follows:

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. (Kay, 2010, p. 39)

²³ The postcolonial term “othering” refers to the usage of stereotypes while meeting and interacting with other people (Dervin, 2016, p. 43).

The same stereotypical treatment being applied to the inhabitants of the continent as well, ensured a narrative in which African people lack common sense and reasonable behaviour. Kay's following remarks focus on this issue:

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 irrational, hot-tempered. African people were more like stories and myths than rational, logical human beings. (2010, p. 39)

This quotation emphasizes the stories and myths which ensured a wrong impression about the people of Africa.

Kay's cultural exclusion connected to her appearance is constantly being reminded to her since she has been asked where she is from for all her life. Although she used to properly mention herself being from Glasgow, it would still be unsatisfying for these curious people until she would mention her biological father. Only then would she receive a nod and a "that explains it" expression on their faces (Kay, 2010, p. 193). More direct remarks on her colour are also easily made as she recalls her mother introducing her to an old woman who in return did not hesitate to tell her that her daughter is "awful tanned" and ask whether she is "that colour every day?" (Kay, 2010, p. 194).

Besides her interactions with other people regarding her cultural heritage, Kay also experienced the feeling of having to choose one culture. This is not a rare phenomenon as is concluded from the research among mixed racial identities conducted by Song and Aspinall, where the results indicate partially Black and partly white people to be regularly reminded of their Black identities by their environment (2012, p. 136). The number of people in Scotland who belong to the ethnic minority only stands at two percent of the population (Hopkins, 2008, p. 116). This indicates that Scotland is white dominated and that Black people in Scotland are exceptional. The location not being multicultural is also the reason for Kay's discrimination by the white people in her social circle. She confirms the uneven numbers of ethnic variety in Scotland as she mentions that she did not grow up in a Black community with a Black language (Jaggi and Dyer, 1999, p. 57) and that she and her brother were the only Black children in their village (Kay, 2010, p. 200). While Kay attended a meeting especially for women of African and Asian descent, she felt supported as well as she became able to acknowledge her African heritage (Kay, 2010, pp. 200-

201). And with the inspiration of Audre Lorde, Kay realised at the age of twenty-three that: “[she] could be proudly African *and* Scottish and that [she] should embrace both” (Kay, 2010, p. 201, emphasis in original), and created her own fluid identity. Although Kay accepted herself as both Scottish and Nigerian, her otherness shows itself as she is excluded from Scotland as well as from Nigeria, which is evident in the following lines from Kay’s *Red Dust Road*:

I spent some of my childhood wishing I was white like the other kids and feeling like I stuck out in Scotland like a sore thumb; and now, in Nigeria, I’m wishing I was black, and feeling like I stick out like a sore thumb. (2010, p. 216)

This quotation describes how Kay’s feeling of exclusion was long term and how she experienced the same feeling in both countries.

The exclusion of individuals from society in terms of cultural and sexual identity features, whether on large scale or personal level, is represented in Jackie Kay’s poetry. Kay does not write her poems to attract specifically Black or female readers. She thinks that “reading is just a search for ourselves and when we really like a book it’s because something in the book seems to have understood us, or seems to have known our secrets” and therefore, it might move people to think about their lives or become inspired by the text (Jaggi and Dyer, 1999, p. 57). Thus, she does not focus on a specific sector of the community as her target group. Although writing for a specific target group is not a requirement for Kay, she still has the groups of minorities being represented in her poetry. Kay creates the voices in her works with the purpose of having a powerful effect, being mysterious, engaging people, and being urgent as in having important matters to share with additionally, wanting the readers to possess a feeling of relating to the voices in her work in any way possible (“An Interview with Jackie Kay,” 2019, para. 6). The reactions of her readers explaining to identify themselves with her characters is one of the best things for her, which in its turn leads to the usefulness and helpfulness of her poetry to be the most exciting thing for Kay as a writer (“An Interview with Jackie Kay,” 2019, para. 6).

The represented minorities in Kay’s works include the culturally “othered” Black people as mentioned before. However, Kay does not want to represent the collective consciousness of Britain’s Black community and therefore deliberately and solely creates the personas in her poetry as individuals (Hácová, 2005, p. 64). She

conveys a personal experience of being Black and looks for a manner to preserve Black women's experiences which they get involved with outside of their home countries. She also remarks the importance of remembering women's oppression, including violence and cruelty, as remembering will become a counteract for the continuity of the oppression (Rees-Jones, 2005, p. 204). Another group of minorities represented in Kay's poetry is the homosexual community. Kay strives to make her gay characters live an ordinary life and be just like her heterosexual characters (O'Malley, 2014, para. 13).

The importance of poetry lays for Kay in the idea that it "gives a voice to the voiceless" and thus realises to convey the emotions of love, grief, loss, as well as other intense moments of people's lives ("An Interview with Jackie Kay," 2019, para. 1). These moments, which could be considered as hard to verbalize, are being captured and expressed by poetry. The "voiceless" in this matter is not to be considered one specific element as it might vary between a piece of land or an ignored person whose story is neglected (Major, 2016, para. 17). Kay also writes about Black individuals from the past whose stories are not known of or even became forgotten. In this manner she tries to evoke a curiosity with the hopes of provoking interest in further research about these individuals, in order to keep them alive as according to Kay, this will prevent them from disappearing as other Black people have done throughout history (Jaggi and Dyer, 1999, p. 58). For the reason that history is very selective and in Kay's words "middle-class," she is determined to "bring people to life as a writer" (Jaggi and Dyer, 1999, p. 59). In addition to this aim of Kay, Tatum also supports this idea of keeping important names from subordinate groups in the picture as she points out that the oppressed people of the past who tried and challenged the status quo often stay unknown as the dominant culture is uninterested in them. Therefore, the oppressed people who are in need of empowering representations close to their own identity profiles, are in need of this information (2000, p. 13).

Besides coming from a very personal perspective, Jackie Kay's poetry might also be capable of improving the issues it includes. Britain has a plural structure of voices where dissimilar cultures co-exist (Nasta, 2004, p. 2). As a result of this, contemporary British writing has become a mouth for many worlds (Nasta, 2004, p. 1). This also includes the field of poetry which emphasizes and represents plurality

and diversity (Deane, 1999, p. 6). The ensemble of diverse cultures and multiple voices of Britain moves Kay to interact with this plurality by means of her poetry (Innes, 1996, p. 339). Kay's reality is also multiple and plural as neither her cultural identity nor her sexuality are homogeneous. This makes Kay a noteworthy representative of the related state of affairs which this thesis concerns. Kay's poetry is directly related to contemporary issues of the world and have therefore the competence to make the reader review and challenge previously accepted assumptions and understandings (Burford, 1984, ix). In order to challenge previously accepted assumptions there is need of an approachable viewpoint from the other side. Tatum explains how the dominant groups lack knowledge of the oppressed groups, as follows:

The truth is that the dominants do not really know what the experiences of the subordinates is. In contrast, the subordinates are very well informed about the dominants. Even when firsthand experience is limited by social segregation, the number and variety of images of the dominant group available through television, magazines, books, and newspapers provide subordinates with plenty of information about the dominants. The dominant worldview has saturated the culture for all to learn. Even the Black or Latino child living in a segregated community can enter White homes of many kinds daily via the media. However, dominant access to information about the subordinates is often limited to stereotypical depictions of the "other." (2000, p. 12)

Thus, the uneven distribution of information correlates to the uneven knowledge between the dominant and subordinate groups. Additionally, the importance of telling stories is for Kay connected to her belief in the ability of human beings to understand matters which they were not able to grasp before. Therefore, she believes that telling stories which have been silenced before may have positive outcomes (Thorpe, 2007, para. 22). To set a personal example, since Kay is constantly questioned about her Scottish identity, she believes in the possibility of changing the image of what a Scottish person should look like (Flood, 2020, para. 5). A similar idea is also shared by Phillips who believes in the great role of storytelling during the process of understanding ourselves as individuals as well as a society in its whole, as given in the following quotation:

There is a directness about storytelling, involving as it does human beings as the central players, which means that we often look first to our writers for news of who and what we are. Words cohering into language form the bedrock of our identity, and to explain our human condition, our first port of call is generally words. (2011, p 57)

The key to generate empathy among these groups would in this matter include a form of spreading information consisting of explanations, possible hardships, or

even misunderstandings concerning the various identities. Kay includes in her poetry her experiences with racist interactions, explanations of her cultural heritage, hardships which the LGBTQIA+ community has to go through, and the confrontations during and after the act of adoption. Therefore, Kay's poetry might trigger compassion or awareness around these subjects while functioning as informal education.

Kay's poetry could also be regarded as a platform to blur the lines between the marginal and the central identities, in order to include the excluded. Rebecca Kay brings up the importance of identities outside of the norm, in other words the "marginalized people," who "often use identities, both individually and collectively, as a means of challenging normative assumptions and prescriptive values" (2005, p. 2). Therefore, the so-considered marginal identities could be regarded as a means of challenging the norms of a society, and in this matter resist distinctive actions such as discrimination and exclusion.

Another beneficial point of Kay's poetry is providing the reader with the insight of accepting their contrasting identities as a whole. During the years when Kay was younger, she never emphasized or even like her Scottish identity until 1984 when she met the African-American poet Audre Lorde. Lorde ensured Kay that both her African and Scottish identities could be embraced proudly as she believed that the existence of one, should not eliminate the other. Not having to decide between her cultural heritage was experienced by Kay as a moment of relief (Kay, 2010, p. 201). This was the moment when Kay realised the possibility of embracing one's clear contradictions and how those in fact could turn into strengths ("An Interview with Jackie Kay," 2019, para. 8). This realisation would in a manner create a sense of belonging to those who feel alienated or left out. The motivation behind this suggestion derives partly from Kay's own experiences of relief after having interactions with people who she can associate herself with, for they have gone through similar situations concerning their racial and sexual identities. In *Red Dust Road* she explains how connecting with others who have gone through similar experiences as herself worked in her favour as follows:

When I was eighteen, a friend of mine noticed that there was going to be a meeting in London of a group called OWAAD (Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent). I went down from Stirling, tentative at first, thinking that some people might

think I was not dark enough, and also worriedly wondering if I'd meet any other lesbians. At that point I thought I was the only black lesbian in the world. The meeting was life-changing for me. There were lots of women there my colour of skin, and fifty or so of us broke away to form a new group, the BLG, the Black Lesbian Group"...."At last there were other people who had experienced similar things. (2010, p. 200)

The last line of this quotation expresses Kay's relief in finding people similar to herself. In addition to the need to belong, there might also be the need of a role model, as a figure similar to oneself, or with similar experiences. Therefore, through Kay's poetry these same positive outcomes might be achieved, as the individuals with similar experiences might be able to identify themselves with the persona or integrated experiences.

CHAPTER DIVISION

The relation between Jackie Kay's poetry and issues related to identity, such as discrimination, racism, sexism, rejection, and violence, are analysed in this thesis on the basis of the poems' subjects, tones, figures of speech, and by unfolding the poems' narratives including the significance of persona, setting, situation, plot, and characteristics of the poem, through which Kay's messages are intensified. The themes and relations to real-life experiences are also enclosed as to signify the connection of Kay's poetry to actual experienced incidents. The interpretations of each analysed poem differ in criteria by relevance to the points mentioned above. The order of the poems is based on similarity of theme rather than chronology, in order to ensure cohesion.

The first chapter of this thesis puts its focus on the construction of cultural identity. This chapter discusses and points out the negative experiences of members of marginal cultures related to their oppressed cultural identities. The objectives of this chapter are to put forward the remarkable experiences Kay has encountered throughout her life so far as reflected in her selected poems. Furthermore, highlighting the difficulties of the minorities which Kay gives a voice by means of her poetry is also prominent in this chapter. The first part of chapter one covers the poems: "The Waiting Lists" (1991), "The Telling Part" (1991), "Generations" (1991), "Black Bottom" (1991), "The Red Graveyard" (1993), "In My Country" (1993), "Sign" (1993), "Hottentot Venus" (1998), and "Crown and Country" (1998).

These poems are analysed with a focus on exclusion, discrimination, racism, the non-biological family unit, and the position of the individual against these issues of identity.

Chapter two of this thesis focuses on issues of sexual identity by concentrating on women and highlighting the issues which the LGBTQIA+ community faces. This chapter is examined in a less autobiographical perspective as the experiences of the personas do not directly relate to Kay herself. The unit which reflects the issues of the LGBTQIA+ community covers the poems: “Pounding Rain” (1991), “From Stranraer, South” (1998), “Close Shave” (1991), and “Dressing Up” (1991). These poems identify rejection of family and hidden sexual identities. The remaining part of this chapter covers the poems which highlight the difficulties of women. These poems are: “Twelve Bar Bessie” (1993), “Bleep”(1998), “Condemned property” (1993), and “Church Invisible” (1998). These poems display domestic violence, the burden of beauty standards, and the weight of assigned gender roles. The results of both chapters display how Kay conveys the difficulties of the marginal groups of society by using her poetry as her medium.

The difference of this thesis in comparison to theses with similarly chosen titles lays firstly in the use of recent information, such as new interviews with Kay. Additionally, the chosen poems are also not completely identical to other studies related to Kay’s poetry. As some studies point out the stylistic features, such as typeface and colours²⁴ of the works, others highlight the narrative aspects while analysing Kay in combination with additional poets²⁵. The poems in this thesis are fully examined and connected to related issues in real life, such as historical events, Kay’s experiences, or general issues of society, while at the same time pointing out the figures of speech as well. Therefore, this thesis is unique as it focuses solely on Kay’s vision of cultural and sexual identity issues.

²⁴ Altın, M. (2019). *A Stylistic Analysis on the Redefinition of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Long Narrative Poetry* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Ankara, 2019) (pp. 1-302). Ankara. Retrieved February 23, 2022.

²⁵ Aydın, Ö. (2008). *Speaking From the Margins: The Voice of the "Other" in the Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy and Jackie Kay* (Doctoral dissertation, Hacettepe University, 2008) (pp. 1-121). Ankara.



CHAPTER 1
CULTURAL IDENTITY ISSUES IN JACKIE KAY'S POETRY

The focus of chapter one lays on Jackie Kay's selected poems representing cultural identity issues which Kay and her close circle have witnessed as well as the experiences of individuals from the past who are not close to Kay on a personal level. Although the focal point of analysis is race, the umbrella term of culture allows this chapter to also incorporate issues of ethnicity, religion, political preference, financial status, blood relations, and adoption in Kay's poetry. All these concepts are examined in the light of the issues that come with them, such as racism, discrimination, class distinction, and exploitation which are analysed through Kay's poems in this chapter. The most relevant lines are selected and dissected in order to highlight experienced and/or potential cultural issues.

In her collection *The Adoption Papers* (1991), Kay reconstructs her past mostly by intuition and creates space for three voices to speak up. These voices include her voice as the poet, the voice of her birth mother, and the voice of her adoptive mother (D'Aguiar, 1995, p. 66). This collection also includes second hand experiences, the experiences of Kay's parents, facing rough circumstances during the process of adoption. Apart from explaining these rough circumstances in interviews and in her memoir *Red Dust Road* (2010), Kay dedicated her poem "The Waiting Lists" (1991/2007a, p. 19) to highlight the setbacks of interracial adoption in Britain during the 1960s. This poem displays how the identities of both the adoptive child and the adoptive parents played an important role during the process of adoption. The beginning of this poem concerns an explanation of the various hardships Kay's parents endured during their adoption journey, voiced by the adoptive mother in the form of a monologue (ll. 1-14). Being devoted Christians, as the adoptive mother expresses in the poem, is one of the crucial criteria to meet for adoptive parents in general. Therefore, the adoptive couple's physical and spiritual distance with the church eliminated their chance of adoption through the first agency, as can be understood from the following lines: "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" (ll. 1-4).

Apart from the religious stance of the adoptive parents, the element of political preferences also played an important part during the adoption process. This is evident in this poem as the persona explains: "though we kept quiet about being communists" (l. 5). Further along the poem, the persona describes the detailed

preparations taking place before the qualification visit of the adoption agency as follows:

*I put Marx Engels Lenin (no Trotsky)
in the airing cupboard – she'll no be
checking out the towels surely*

*All the copies of the Daily Worker²⁶
I shoved under the sofa
the dove of peace²⁷ I took down from the loo*

*A poster of Paul Robeson²⁸
Saying give him his passport
I took down from the kitchen. (ll. 30-38)*

The mentioned actions in these lines indicate the adoptive mother's effort of hiding traces related to Communism. The importance of highlighting the factors of religion and political preference within this poem derives from the idea that besides the identity of the adoptive child, the identity of the adoptive parents is an important factor in the adoption process as well. They feel the need to keep their expressions of political preference out of sight as much as possible. This might also be regarded as a form of exclusion where freedom of expression is being averted. Besides religion, financial circumstances, political preferences, and long waiting lists as causes of extension, the cultural identity of the adoptive child is also taken into consideration. This poem demonstrates the situation in which Jackie Kay's adoptive parents had to provide the explanation that, for them, race was not a quality to dismiss the adoptive child which is evident in the following lines: "Just as we were going out the door / I said oh you know we don't mind the colour. / Just like that, the waiting was over" (ll. 15-17). Mentioning explicitly that there is no preference of colour fastened the process of adoption. The fact that this option was not offered to the couple by the agencies themselves, along with the fact that there were no waiting lists for children of colour, indicate how uncommon or undesirable the adoption of these children might have been during the 1960s in Britain. During the 1960s in Britain there were only five agencies which were proceeded to list coloured children for adoption (Gaber, 1994, p. 15). Additionally, Kay mentions in her memoir *Red Dust Road* how

²⁶ *The Daily Worker* is an American newspaper which has generally reflected the views of the Communist Party (Augustyn, 2019, para. 1).

²⁷ The dove of peace is the international symbol of the Communist Party designed by Pablo Picasso who was a devoted member of the French Communist Party (Gonzalez-Perez, 2001, p. 70).

²⁸ Paul Robeson was a committed activist of socialist causes who was against segregation, racist regulations, and nuclear weapons (Shea, 2019, para. 3).

her parents were reacted to after they had adopted her brother, who was the first child of colour they adopted:

Shortly after the day they brought my brother home, a minister arrived at my parents' door. 'I've heard that you've done a kind act and adopted a coloured child,' [...] 'We at the church just wanted to know if we could be of any assistance,' as if he were thinking of you both as noble savages. (Kay, 2010, p. 24, emphasis in original)

Through this comment of the minister, which is supposed to be an act of kindness, it can be concluded that adopting children of colour was uncommon and regarded as a kinder act in comparison to the adoption of white children.

The tone in this poem varies per occasion and it is notable that it gradually rises from a pessimistic point of view to an optimistic one. At first, the persona, candidate for adoptive parenthood, has a hopeless as well as weary tone as she mentions the times of unsuccessful experiences during her adoption journey in addition to the criteria of religion as mentioned above: “The second one told us / we weren’t high enough earners. / The third liked us / but they had a five-year waiting list. [...] The fourth agency was full up. / The fifth said yes but again no babies” (ll. 16-9, 13-14). Recalling these occasions contribute to the persona’s expression of helplessness, and also strengthen her sad tone in the lines: “I spent six months trying not to look / at swings nor the front of supermarket trolleys, / not to think this kid I’ve wanted could be five” (ll. 10-12), where she indicates to have lost time in this process. These feelings the persona conveys are mostly related to the factor of identity related discrimination as it either concerns the financial²⁹, religious, and political statuses of the adoptive parents or the racial identity of the adoptive child. The tone of the poem shifts to being more distressed as the persona’s attitude changes to being worried which can be understood from her concerned behaviour and utterances in the stanzas three to six where she hides her personal belongings related to her ideals as mentioned previously. This tone full of worry continues to occupy the next lines of the poem as the persona’s thoughts are made clear: “I pour her coffee / from my new Hungarian set / And foolishly pray she willnae / ask its origins” (ll. 43-46) and “Honestly / this baby is going to my head” (ll. 46-47). Besides her actions and anxious thoughts about the adoption intake, the adoptive mother admits that she went above and beyond to get through this process: “Hell and I’ve spent all morning / trying to look ordinary – a lovely home for the baby” (ll. 54-

²⁹ Income is a possible factor to specify class determination (Albertini, 2013, p. 28).

56). These lines show that she tries to fit in with the desirable identity classification including a nonleftist ideology and confirm that only ordinary homes were regarded as fit enough to qualify as a lovely home for babies. The ordinary homes mentioned above point out that there should not be political ideologies contrasting the norm. The moment of truth in stanza fourteen creates heavy suspense, which is amplified with personification in line sixty-one as follows: “But just as we get to the last post / her eye catches at the same time as mine / a red ribbon with twenty world peace badges” (ll. 60-62). Additionally, it is ironic that the symbols on her wall in the lines: “Clear as a hammer and sickle³⁰ / on the wall” (ll. 63-64) which should represent world peace almost hinder her adoption process as they could be regarded as a negative aspect of her political identity. She cannot express her real self although it includes the desire for peace. After the tense tone of the poem, the adoptive mother changes her mindset as she can no longer bear the suspense: “To Hell with this. Baby or no baby. / Yes I says. Yes yes yes” (ll. 66-67). She finally breaks free and chooses to represent her own ideals: “I’d like this baby to live in a nuclear free world” (l. 68). These lines of the poem represent relief and strength. The setting of the poem is also remarkable as the place she should feel the most at ease, her own home, becomes a place where she feels too anxious to be herself as the visits from the agency cause limitations in her freedom of ideology by means of regulations.

The detailed dramatic descriptions of thoughts and events, and the usage of varying tones make this poem immersive, which helps to convey the storyline in a more truthful manner. The issue regarding identity in this poem is the idea that the adoptive mother is aware of her unapproved cultural identity and thus attempts to alter the outlook on herself and her personal belongings. There is a helpless need to fit the requirements in order to pursue her goals and fulfil her wish.

Another poem which also voices the struggles of the adoption process is the poem “The Telling Part” (1991/2007a, p. 26). This poem is analysed in two parts under this subheading. The first part contains the dramatic thoughts and statements of the adoptive child, as she enters the process of understanding that she is adopted. The latter part contains the dramatic monologue of the adoptive mother relating to the same process. In this manner the attitudes and points of view of both the mother and

³⁰ The image of a crossed hammer and sickle used as an emblem of Soviet Russia was chosen as an image of productive work (Tresidder, 2008, p. 87).

the child are laid out as proof. This poem contains autobiographical elements as Kay explains in *Red Dust Road* (2010) that it was hard to comprehend for her what a real mother meant at the age of seven and that she became worried about the possibility of her mother dissolving or disappearing (p. 12). This poem also evokes compassionate sympathy which is intensified by the used pathos through the voice of the child.

Throughout this poem it can be understood that the adoptive child is being notified about her adoption by the adoptive mother, as the child expresses “Ma mammy says she’s no really ma mammy” (l. 5). Although the adoptive child questions the difference in skin colour between herself and her mother, as follows: “Mammy why aren’t you and me the same colour” (l. 10), the issue concerning identity in this text does not necessarily relate to confrontation with racist remarks. However, the child does endure the hardship of identity in an indirect manner as she is not instantly able to understand the concept of adoption, and therefore initially experiences the fear of her parent not being real at all, which is evident in the following lines: “After mammy telt me she wisnae my real mammy / I was scared to death she was gonnie melt / or something or mibbe disappear in the dead / of night and somebody would say she wis a fairy / godmother” (ll. 23-27). Instead of understanding the fact that she is not blood-related to her adoptive mother, the child believes that her mother is not a real person. The denotation of the word “real” as in “rightly so called” (Pearsall, 1999, p. 1192) is mistaken by the child with the denotation “actually existing” (Pearsall, 1999, p. 1192). By using the hyperbole “scared to death” (l. 24), and the metaphor “in the dead of night” (ll. 24-25), Kay exaggerates the anxiety of the adoptive child. The tone and diction used by the adoptive child decide for her attitude in relation to her moment of realising that she is adopted. The first stanza demonstrates the child explaining the situation in a childlike manner: “Ma mammy bot me oot a shop / Ma mammy says I was a luvly baby / Ma mammy picked me (I wiz the best) / your mammy had to take you (she’d no choice)” (ll.1-4). Her naive explanation also shows confidence as she knows and expresses that she was a desired child. However, the poem starts directly with the child explaining herself and her situation: an effort she has to make for the rest of her life. Her confidence continues to exclaim itself in the lines eleven and sixteen: “But I love my mammy whether she’s real or no.” The repetition of this line might look as if it

ensures emphasis on the adoptive child's opinion on the situation, although it can also represent a desperate try of convincing herself to adapt to the idea. The child then proceeds to express her fears in yet again a childlike manner:

*So the next morning I felt her skin
to check it was flesh, but mibbe it was just
a good imitation. How could I tell if my mammy
was a dummy with a voice spoken by someone else?
So I searches the whole house for clues
but I never found nothing. (ll. 27-32)*

In these lines the child contemplates her own fears and the possibilities of her adoptive mother's reality, pointing out her body (l. 27) and voice (l. 30). The child's quest continues and remains unfinished (ll. 31-32). This expresses how the adoptive child has to go through deep thoughts and re-evaluate her fears in order to understand her outstanding adoptive identity. These fears extend to the point where she is haunted by the thoughts of her adoption. This is evident in the dreamlike vision of her worries:

*Mammy's face is cherries.
She is stirring the big pot of mutton soup
singing I gave my love a cherry
it had no stone³¹.
I am up to her apron.
I jump onto her feet and grab her legs
like a huge pair of trousers,
she walks round the kitchen lifting me up.*

*Suddenly I fall off her feet.
And mammy falls to the floor.
She won't stop the song
I gave my love a chicken it had no bone.
I run next door for help.
When me and Uncle Alec come back
Mammy's skin is toffee stuck to the floor.
And her bones are all scattered like toys. (ll. 42-57)*

The child loses her confidence as her worries take over which can be noticed from her need of help (l. 54). Although the fact that the mother looks and acts friendly while cooking and singing (ll. 43-44), the possibility that she is fake still haunts the child as she feels the need to hold on to her mother (l. 47). When the child returns, her mother is not in the form she used to be (l. 57), therefore, the end of this stanza reflects the child's fear of being deprived of her mother. Thus, taking into consideration the anxious character of the adoptive child in this poem, it could be

³¹ The stone of cherries is symbolized as regeneration and fertility (Brauner, n.d., para. 2). Therefore, this line might be another emphasis on the non-existent biological relation between the adoptive mother and the adoptive child.

stated that the hardship of having to understand this part of her identity in an early stage of her life and trying to grasp the consequences it has on herself have great effects on her emotional state. The adoptive mother in the poem experiences varying emotions as well. Her side of post-adoption worries can be comprehended through her verbal expressions of her thoughts and feelings. The mother gets in a situation where she has to explain to her child how she is not her birth mother. The nervous behaviour of the mother is voiced by herself in these lines: “It’s a bit like a part you’ve rehearsed so well / you can’t play it on the opening night [...] My heart started rat tat tat like a tin drum / all the words took off to another planet (ll. 7-8, 12-13). By using the metaphor of a well-rehearsed play, the simile of comparing her heart to a drum, and the personification of her lost words, the mother implies how she has thought of this conversation many times before it took place and how she is too nervous to communicate her originally intended arguments. Apart from the adoptive child’s own inability to understand the process of adoption, there are also the reactions of the adoptive parents’ social circle, such as neighbours, family members, or co-workers. However, the adoptive mother is fully confident in the lines eighty-five to sixty-nine as she reflects no worries or doubts:

*Now when people say ‘ah but
it’s not like having your own child though is it’,
I say of course it is, what else is it?
she’s my child, I have told her stories
wept at her losses, laughed at her pleasures,
she is mine.*

*I was always the first to hear her in the night
all this umbilical knot business is nonsense
- the men can afford deeper sleep that’s all.
I listened to hear her talk,
and when she did I heard my voice under hers. (ll. 58-68)*

The adoptive mother’s need to explain their mother-daughter relationship can be understood by her statements in the lines above. Although she manages to counteract this conversation, as she recalls in the lines eighty-five to sixty-three, it is still an example of how people have difficulties of understanding the adoption process, and therefore ensure exclusion of the adoptive child and parents from society’s “norm” of a usual family unit. Through their opinions and reactions, these people might become an influencing factor during the formation of the individual’s identity, as it is possible to influence how the child perceives herself. This was also the case during the 1970s and 1980s in Britain, when it was only gradually getting normalized that a

family unit could exist other than the combination of both the biological mother and father of the child, and the loosening of society's strict moral customs of sexuality (Gaber, 1994, p. 14).

Therefore, this poem represents the difficulties which the adoptive mother and the adoptive child have experienced due to the process of interracial adoption in a location and time which were less tolerant to mixed families and adopted children. The adoptive mother's cultural traits, including her political preference and distance to religion, become obstacles as they contrast with the cultural norm of the society she lives in. The adoptive child's skin colour as her racial feature is the part of her cultural identity which hardens her adoption process in the same society.

In addition to the hardships of identity as an adopted person, Kay also experienced issues because of her skin colour at a young age, as can be regarded in the poem "Black Bottom" (1991/2007a, p. 29), which is a longer poem in comparison to the other poems analysed in this chapter. The 134-line long poem from *The Adoption Papers* (1991) voices the adoptive mother, the birth mother, and the adoptive child. Although the main focus of this analysis highlights Kay's bold attitude in her confrontation with racist remarks during her school times and her fascination with Angela Davis, it is still important to point out the adoptive mother's remarks about Kay's skin colour as the adoptive mother contemplates as follows:

*Maybe that's why I don't like
all this talk about her being black,
I brought her up as my own
as I would any other child
colour matters to the nutters;
but she says my daughter says
it matters to her. (ll.1-6)*

The adoptive mother, who stands for Kay's adoptive mother, expresses the important information that Kay's skin colour did in fact make a difference for herself. The voice of the adoptive child in this poem recalls one of the important and reoccurring experiences Kay has had to go through which led to her own awareness of her skin colour. In addition to the adoptive mother's first remark, she also recalls the moment of approval for the adoption of Kay:

*They told us they had no babies at first
and I chanced it didn't matter what colour it was
and they said oh well are you sure
in that case we have a baby for you—*

*to think she wasn't even thought of as a baby,
my baby, my baby. (ll.11-16)*

The dramatic monologue of the adoptive mother offers great insight into her experience of adoption. The repetition of the recalling of this turning point, for it was also mentioned by the adoptive mother in “The Waiting Lists” (1991), demonstrates the importance of this detail as it outlined the fate of a whole family and structured the identity of Kay. As the adoptive mother recollects this memory in retrospect, it becomes clear how the situation affected their futures.

The passages of Kay’s voice unravel some of her experiences with racism during school, including conversations with her classmates and teachers. Kay has had to deal with racist remarks many times throughout her life. In “Black Bottom” she gives an example of herself standing up against her classmate who interacted with her in a discriminating manner:

*I shove him up against the wall,
say that again you wee shite. Sambo³², sambo, he's crying now*

*I knee him in the balls. What was that?
My fist is steel; I punch and punch his gut
Sorry I didn't hear you? His tears drip like wax.
Nothing he heaves I didn't say nothing.
I let him go. He is a rat running. He turns
shouts Dirty Darkie I chase him again.
Blonde hairs in my hand. (ll. 21-29)*

This passage exemplifies how racist interactions happen at young ages and in places such as schools, which should be safe and equal locations for children. Although it might happen for a school to not be in control of each and every interaction among the students, the same pattern of stereotyping and racism does also come from Kay’s teacher who is supposed to have an exemplary function within the school. The next day Kay has to see a teacher as a result of the incident with her classmate. Instead of trying to grasp the cause of Kay’s aggressive behaviour, the teacher approaches her in an aggressive and accusing manner as indicated in the following lines:

*My teacher's face cracks into a thin smile
Her long nails scratch the note well well
I see you were fighting yesterday, again.
In a few years time you'll be a juvenile delinquent.
Do you know what that is? Look it up in the dictionary.
She spells each letter with slow pleasure.*

³² “Sambo” is a stereotyping name which flourished during times of slavery in the United States indicating an obedient and simple-minded black man. The word was initially used to signify slaves who were regarded as lazy and reliant upon their masters (Green, n.d., para. 4).

Read it out to the class.

Thug. Vandal. Hooligan. Speak up. Have you lost your tongue? (ll. 33-40)

The word “again” (l. 35) implies the repetition of comparable incidents before. The situation is not unique to the teacher, and therefore it would have been more responsible to examine the root of the problem instead of openly humiliating Kay in front of her class. However, the teacher’s “thin smile” (l. 33) and “slow pleasure” (l. 38) indicate the teacher’s lack of empathy towards Kay. The accusing words “Thug,” “Vandal,” and “Hooligan” directly charge the child with unreasonable acts of violence, instead of regarding it as a required act of self-defence. The lines “Do you know what that is? Look it up in the dictionary” (l. 37) and “Speak up. Have you lost your tongue?” (l. 40) also degrade the child by attempting to point out inabilities in a sarcastic manner. Therefore, this is not an example of an ideal conversation between a teacher and a student.

The following situation similar to the teacher accusing Kay, happens at a dancing rehearsal at her school: “I’m trying to do the Cha Cha and the Black Bottom / but I can’t get the steps right” (ll. 50-51). The reaction Kay receives from her teacher is rather humiliating than encouraging as evident in the following quotation:

*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. (ll. 53-56)*
[...]
*my feet step out of time, my heart starts
to miss beats like when I can’t sleep at night—
What Is In My Blood? The bell rings, it is time. (ll. 60-62)*

By using the expression “you people,” the teacher implies the binary opposition of us/them and therefore labels Kay as the “other”. The same idea goes for the expression “your blood,” suggesting that their (the teacher and Kay’s) blood and their abilities differ from each other. In addition, the comments of the teacher and her demanding tone make it seem as if the teacher has the privilege to treat Kay as a means of entertainment for the class, and also underline the teacher’s prejudices about Black people. Therefore, the lines “Come on, show / us what you can do” (ll. 54-55) evoke the association with the so-called “human zoos,” explained in *BBC News Magazine* as follows: “Over four centuries from the first voyages of discovery, European societies developed an appetite for exhibiting exotic human ‘specimens’ shipped back to Paris, London or Berlin for the interest and delectation of the crowd”

(Schofield, 2011). Kay describes the moment after the comments of her teacher as: “My skin is hot as burning coal / like that time she said Darkies are like coal / in front of the whole class” (ll. 57-59). These lines suggest Kay’s feeling of humiliation together with the idea that racist remarks are not just being forgotten by her, and come to the surface as soon as she is put in a similar situation. These remarks also leave her speechless and perplexed. Kay recalls in *Red Dust Road* (2010) the moment she encountered a racist remark of a random man in the park which she had no interaction with before:

I went home thinking up better retorts – which is one of the problems with racism; it is always, no matter how many incidents, unexpected, and so you never have the right answer ready. It often leaves you failing and humiliated wishing you had been quicker on your feet. (Kay, 2010, p. 196)

This occasion can be related to the moment in which Kay was discriminated by her teacher as both incidents left her speechless about the subject. This quotation also confirms the fact that both in her younger years and later on in her life she had to face such encounters.

The fact that Kay lacks a cultural role model in her life for the reason that Scotland is white dominated reappears in Kay’s poem “Black Bottom.” The idol mentioned in this poem is Angela Davis³³, and yet again Kay feels a connection because of their physical racial traits, such as skin colour and hair type:

*Angela Davis is the only female person
I’ve seen (except for a nurse on TV)
who looks like me. She had big hair like mine
that grows out instead of down.
My mum says it’s called an Afro
[...]
Her skin is the same too you know.
I can see my skin is that colour
but most of the time I forget,
so sometimes when I look in the mirror
I give myself a bit of a shock
and say to myself Do you really look like this?
as if I’m somebody else. I wonder if she does that. (ll. 105-109, 115-121)*

The lack of an ethnic role model for Kay is emphasized by her forgetfulness about her appearance as mentioned in line seventeen. The presence of the idol in “Black Bottom” is actualized through a poster on the persona’s wall as the persona describes: “On my bedroom wall is a big poster / of Angela Davis who is in prison / right now for nothing at all / except she wouldn’t put up with stuff” (ll. 95-98). This

³³ Angela Davis was an American black activist who faced charges of kidnapping, murder, and conspiracy during the early nineteen seventies (Parker, 1973, p. 79).

passage displays the support Kay shows towards a person who, according to her, refused to deal with ill treatments. Kay's aspiring aim sums up her idolization of Davis and hope for herself as she states: "If I could be as brave as her when I get older / I'll be OK" (ll. 110-111).

Thus, the main focus of "Black Bottom" is the setting in which Kay experienced discriminating interactions which is her school. Both the violent interactions with her classmate as a result of standing up for herself as well as the three different incidents of humiliation by her teacher in front of her class must have been some of the many moments for Kay to feel excluded from the crowd. As a result of these experiences Kay needs and looks up to racial role models whom she sets as an example for herself.

While the previous three poems in this chapter express the hardships of the early stages of adoption, the poem "Generations" (1991/2007a, p. 33) focuses on the adoptee as an adult, as an example of a cultural identity issue in which the person lacks information about her past is represented. As one's ancestry is an element of identity, identity is also an interpretation of one's history (de Lauretis, 1993, p. 84). In this poem the adopted person describes the confronting moments of her adult daily life in which medical knowledge of her cultural heritage is being requested. The speaker does this in the form of a dramatic monologue which unravels her mood in these lines:

*I don't know what diseases
come down my line;
when dentist and doctors ask
the old blood questions about family runnings
I tell them: I have no nose or mouth or eyes
to match, no spitting image or dead cert, (ll. 29-34)*

The words "nose or mouth or eyes" (l. 33) in this stanza are used as a metonymy for the blood-related persons who the persona neither had the opportunity to meet, nor has any personal information about considering their health statuses. In her statement: "my face watches itself" (35), Kay dramatizes the line as if the persona is speaking about someone other than herself. Perhaps the disconnection of the persona with her forefathers is causing the distress to the point where she feels disconnected with herself as well and starts to observe herself from an outsider's point of view. The tone in this stanza expresses uncertainty and creates a weak attitude as the persona uses the phrases: "I don't know [...]" (l. 29), and "I have no [...]" (l. 33).

Thus, in the fifth stanza it is clear that the persona accepts the fact that she is not in possession of any information to rely on concerning these questions. Despite the persona's acceptance of the missing pieces of her story, she still experiences frustration in this matter as evident in the following passage: "I have my parents who are not of the same tree / and you keep trying to make it matter, / the blood, the tie, the passing down / generations" (ll. 36-39). This frustration derives from Kay's experiences in real life as she suggests that society envisions the identity of adopted people as a false identity for the reason that those bloodlines are hard to be traced back, and therefore little is known about their ancestries (Gish, 2001, p. 173). The tone shifts as the persona's expression shows more certainty of her situation. The persona ensures in these lines that she is not the one trying to make this circumstance matter, while it is regularly highlighted by others who interact with her. The directly accusing statement "you" (l. 37) of the persona and the word "keep" (l. 37) she uses provide a confronting and irritated attitude from which can be understood how she is being reminded of her adoption frequently and in very ordinary situations. This tone also expresses the weariness of the persona, designating a fatigued mood throughout the poem. Then the persona proceeds to explain her blood out of frustration: "I know my blood / It is dark ruby red and comes / regular and I use Lillies. / I know my blood when I cut my finger. / I know what my blood looks like" (ll. 46-50). The irritated tone in this stanza, derived from the persona's repetitive lines, displays her exhaustion. She is being forced to explain herself and her blood to the extent that she starts explaining it literally. This might be a fed-up protest reaction to point out that it does not matter what her bloodline is. Additionally, the frequent use of the word "I" throughout the poem can also be regarded as a symbol. The repetition of a word serves to give emphasis (Boulton, 1953, p. 76). This creates the opportunity for the persona to express the importance of herself and how she centralizes herself in her life instead of other people to feel complete with. Throughout the poem, the persona also contradicts with herself as she admits to be curious about her family background: "I want to know my blood" (l. 45) and:

*It is the well, the womb, the fucking seed.
Here, I am far enough away to wonder
what were their faces like
who were my grandmothers
what were the days like
passed in Scotland
the land I come from
the soil in my blood. (ll. 51-58)*

These lines express how Kay stops resisting against the questions about her bloodline. The last stanza also confirms this thought: “Once would be enough, / just to listen to her voice / watch the way she moves her hands / when she talks” (ll. 99-102). Not even once did Kay have the chance to know any characteristics of her birth mother. In this last stanza there is a desperate and sad tone of the adoptive child confirming to yearn for the bare minimum possibility to set her biological mother as an example. The speaker’s blood becomes the symbolic vehicle to cultural belonging, self knowledge, and authentication of her identity (Brown, 2007, p. 223).

Thus, from the tone and word choice in this poem it is clear that the persona is frustrated and tired of her unidentified background which she keeps getting confronted with in her daily life. Within her monologue she keeps discussing how she already knows her blood, and yet wants to know her blood. These contradicting remarks reflect her confusion. In order to inform others about her own true biological identity, she is required to have information about her bloodline, and therefore, she is positioned as an individual with an unknown biological identity. Kay found herself in this situation more than once as she describes in *Red Dust Road*:

Often people would even use that expression, don't you want to find out the missing pieces to your jigsaw? No I'd say, not at all. I find that curious now, my defensiveness, but perhaps I felt it was being pointed out to me, in a more sophisticated manner, that I didn't belong in Scotland (2010, p. 193).

The connection between knowing one’s background and belonging to a society or country creates in this matter frustration as Kay has no control over this fact and therefore experiences uncertainty.

Kay’s appearance as a Black person also led to the lack of a role model which she could relate to in the context of her racial and ethnic identity. The poem “The Red Graveyard” (1993/2007b, p. 73) belongs to the collection *Other Lovers* (1993) and the speaker in this poem is Kay herself as a child as she recalls the impressive moments of finding herself a role model. The poem starts and ends with a rhythmic stanza which resembles an incantation:

*There are some stones that open in the night like flowers
Down in the red graveyard where Bessie³⁴ haunts her lovers.
There are stones that shake and weep in the heart of the night
Down in the red graveyard where Bessie haunts her lovers.* (ll. 1-4)

³⁴ Elizabeth “Bessie” Smith is an African American female blues artist who was active during the nineteen twenties. She was also the first African American superstar and the highest-paid African American music artist (Mahon, 2019, para. 1).

The tone of this repetitive stanza is mysterious as it uses personification for “stones” in the lines one and three, and eerie as it mentions a graveyard and the act of haunting in the lines two and four. The tone reflects the atmosphere of blues music as can be noticed when Kay recalls her feelings towards the genre in her book *Bessie Smith* as follows: “That’s what I liked about the blues, they told stories. The opposite of fairytales; these were grimy, real, appalling tragedies. There were people dying in the blues; people coming back to haunt the people who were living in the blues; [...]” (Kay, 1997, p. 10). In line one Kay compares stones to flowers. This comparison is very contradicting as stones can be related to lifelessness, cold, and harshness, in contrast to flowers which can be related to life, colour, and fragility. Therefore, the transformation of negativity into positivity, whether it is a mindset or feelings or wellbeing, is being represented by means of this line. According to the *Watkins Dictionary of Symbols*, the word “night” is “associated with primeval fears of the unknown, concealment, evil and the Powers of Darkness, witchcraft and haunting spirits, despair, madness and death [...]” (Tresidder, 2008, p. 134). In this perspective, this line represents the survival of hard times and setbacks in life. In contrast to the first line, line three represents the opposite. The stones are personified as they “shake and weep” (l. 3) which are signs of distress. The metaphor “heart of night” intensifies the fact that the setting is in the middle of the night. Unlike the first line which signs to rising positivity, this line expresses a feeling of continuing distress. The colour “red” (ll. 2, 4) symbolizes life, energy, festivity, passion, vitality, health, strength, and youth (Tresidder, 2008, p. 158). Taking these figures of speech into consideration, it can be suggested that yet another contradictive statement by means of an indirect juxtaposition is made by Kay as graveyards stand for the exact opposite of life, festivity, vitality, and strength. Contrast in poetry pushes the reader to join the writer in thinking about the subject (Boulton, 1953, p. 113), which is exactly what Kay aims to actualize for she suggests about poetry that: “[i]t can have multiple meanings and there can be many ways of interpreting it. [...] Every poem, even a poem that appears quite simple, should have lots of different ways of looking at it” (Severin, 2002, para. 21).

In the first stanza the name Bessie is mentioned which is a reference to one of Kay’s role models Elizabeth “Bessie” Smith. Bessie Smith (1892-1937) was a notorious character within the American popular culture and the African American

history. She was one of the leading figures to popularize blues music with her outstanding voice and stage performances during the 1920s in America, for she was also known as “Empress of the Blues” (Scott, 2008, p. 2). Bessie’s presence in Kay’s life is of great importance for Kay as it was the first person she felt related to in terms of physical appearance. She expresses this in her book *Bessie Smith* (1997) as follows:

In my street and in the neighbouring streets to Brackenbrae Avenue, I never saw another black person. There was my brother and me. That was it. The butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker were all white. [...] So the first time I saw Bessie Smith, it was like finding a friend. I saw her before I heard her. My father – a Scottish communist who loved the blues – bought me my first double album. [...] Her image on the cover captivated me. She looked so familiar. She looked like somebody I already knew in my heart of hearts. I stared at the image of her, trying to recall who it was she reminded me of. (p. 9)

This moment is also integrated into “The Red Graveyard” as follows: “I pick up the record cover. And now. This is slow motion. / My hand swoops, glides, swoops again. / I pick up the cover and my fingers are all over her face. / Her black face. Her magnificent black face” (ll. 27-30), as she recalls the moments of realising the resemblances between herself and Smith.

Kay emphasizes in her book *Bessie Smith* the prominence of Bessie’s skin colour once again as she amplifies how her skin colour was not alike anyone’s in her neighbourhood:

I could not separate myself. I am the same colour as she is, I thought to myself, electrified. I am the same colour as Bessie Smith. I am not the same colour as my mother, my father, my grandmother, my grandfather, my friends, my doctor, my dentist, my butcher, my headmaster, my next door neighbour, my aunt, my uncle, my mother’s friends, my father’s friends. The shock of not being like everyone else; the shock of my own reflection came with the blues. My own face in the mirror was not the face I had in my head. (p. 13)

Perhaps this moment of realisation was for Kay decisive in which she comprehended that she was the “other” within her surrounding society. Kay further explains how she felt the lack of a cultural and racial role model during her childhood and adolescence, meaning that she did not have an example to rely on regarding Black cultural traits and habits (Kay, 1997, p. 13). The lack of a cultural example figure directed her towards finding examples of such in public figures who shared similar cultural roots and racial traits as herself. This can be noticed in her poem “The Red Graveyard.” In this poem Kay portrays how Bessie Smith’s music was always present in her parental household. The presence of Bessie Smith’s music becomes clear as “her voice claims the rooms” (l. 11). Additionally, Kay compares the

presence of her mother's voice to the presence of Bessie's voice in the lines: "Why do I remember her voice and not my own mother's? / Why do I remember the blues? / My mother's voice. What was it like?" (ll. 13-15). While comparing the two voices the dramatic speaker contemplates why she does not remember her mother's voice in contrast to Bessie's. This statement demonstrates the remarkable absence of her birthmother whereas the repetition of these questions reflect the continuing dilemma in Kay's real life. Therefore, blues music can be regarded as a greater factor affecting the formation of Jackie Kay's cultural identity than her biological mother. Although Kay's birthmother is not from Black descent, these lines still represent the gap of a cultural example figure. In her interview with the *Scottish Book Review* Kay explains how the shortage of Black cultural examples affects her writing process:

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 or a Scottish-blues voice. I still haven't done that to the extent I'd really like to. I'm struggling to find a voice that is unifying. (Major, 2016, para. 19)

Kay acknowledges that she is "struggling" with establishing a poetic voice which expresses her colour. Kay further explains the reason of her inability to accomplish her envisioned poetic voice in the same interview:

There has to be a way linguistically of finding a voice that captures your own complexities. I envy writers that are half-Jamaican and half-English and who grew up with parents who already have that syntax and language to use, [but] I didn't have any black people growing up around me – no Nigerian blethers, no Jamaican patois. (Major, 2016, para. 19)

Yet another confirmation concerning the need to claim a cultural hero for oneself comes from Kay's book *Bessie Smith*. In this quotation Kay explains how she needed to claim foreign influential black figures as she was not familiar with Scottish ones:

I did not think that Bessie Smith only belonged to African Americans or that Nelson Mandela belonged to South Africans. I could not think like that because I knew then of no black Scottish heroes that I could claim for my own. I reached out and claimed Bessie. (Kay, 1997, p. 15)

As Kay reached the point of realisation that she lacked and was in need of a cultural/ethnic role model, she provided one for herself. Therefore, in connection with Kay's expressions in this interview, the lack of the "mother's voice" in "The Red Graveyard," and the representation of Bessie Smith as a prominent character throughout the persona's life, altogether convey how the absence of a cultural role model introduces the cultural identity issue of longing to, as well as the need to

search for cultural background information as a pattern to adhere to. She reflects with this poem the enlightening moment of coming across her role model within the walls of her safe space, her home.

Being regarded as a foreigner during Kay's adult life is also reflected in the poem "In my country" (1993/2007b, p. 82) from the collection *Other Lovers* (1993). This is a short but powerful poem of two stanzas including symbolic attributes to emphasize the message of the poem. The tone of the poem remains calm from the beginning to the end. The setting of the poem is also remarkable as it takes place outside in nature, which should be neutral as it is not within anyone's house or any building related to religion, belief, education, or work. The first three lines of the poem express the peaceful unity of nature: "walking by the waters / down where an honest river / shakes hands with the sea," (ll. 1-3). These lines reflect how the river and sea can both exist in harmony, as the motif of water is mentioned in all three lines. Water symbolizes purity, fertility, life, and the rejection of evil, as well as wisdom as water finds its own way through obstacles (Tresidder, 2008, p. 211). This harmonious atmosphere is being disturbed with the arrival of the woman: "a woman passed round me / in a slow watchful circle, / as if I were superstition" (ll. 4-6). The persona is being observed by the woman in a state of shock and she is fully aware that she is being observed. The observation in the slow watchful circle resembles the observation of the woman in the poem "Hottentot Venus", where the woman was regarded as supernatural as well. The persona even intensifies the description of the look on the woman's face: "or the worst dregs of her imagination" (l.7), which insinuates a fearful, concerned, or disgusted manner of facial expression. Kay suggests that "[t]he self is complex and often contradictory. It's all right for me, for instance to say I'm Black and I'm Scottish; it's not a contradiction for me, although lots of people regard it as such" (Gish, 2001, p. 173). This explains that the woman in the poem is staring at the persona for the reason that she cannot comprehend the contradiction. The second stanza concludes the previous tense moments in the first stanza: "so when she finally spoke / her words spliced into bars / of an old wheel. A segment of air. / *Where do you come from?* / 'Here,' I said, 'Here. These parts'" (ll. 7-12). The woman finally speaks out her thoughts after a while which is long enough for the persona to feel uncomfortable in, and decides for the persona that she does not belong to the place they are in at the moment, as she asks her the crucial and

silence breaking question in line eleven. The answer of the persona is short but confident. There is no hesitation which indicates that either she is not surprised by the question or it has become a regular topic of conversation. As mentioned in the introduction previously, Kay experiences these kind of questions regularly in her daily life as she explains in her memoir *Red Dust Road* (2010). Years before, in 1990, Kay explained to interpret the question of origin as a manner of suggesting to go back to her own country, or as a means of denying her Scottish identity (Wilson, p. 121). In 2020, Kay described how negatively loaded and excluding it can be to ask a person where they are from, as she explains in the following passage:

The question where are you from is always a loaded one; it contains an implication that you don't belong here. One of the most hurtful consequences of racism is that it divides people; it is ignorant, toxic and wasteful. It makes people feel uncertain, and often frightened, in their own land. (Kay, 2020, para. 4)

Additionally, in her interview with Allison Flood she further explains this as follows:

Even just the other day, this taxi driver said, 'Where are you from?' and I said Glasgow and he went, 'Oh, how do you explain that tan?' ... The image of a Scottish person isn't me, and I think that we need to try and change what we think of when we think of a Scottish person. (2020, para. 5)

It is important to highlight that these remarks are made years apart from each other which is an indication that Kay has dealt with the same continuing issue throughout the years. Kay also suggests that the image of the appearance of a Scottish person should change in order to reflect the recent image of the country (2020, para. 5). This is an important remark as Kay explains that she felt properly belonging to Scotland only when she became the Makar (Ferguson, 2021, para. 15).

Kay explains that besides her skin colour, her accent is also an element which creates confusion in the minds of the people she interacts with, as follows:

I can't separate one from the other. Other people always try. Like Scottish people will either refuse to recognize my Scottish accent, or my Scottishness, or they'll say, 'Are you American?' And Black people will just hear my accent or think it really funny and say they've never met such a person before. And so being Black and Scottish is always treated as a kind of anomaly, which I suppose it is. (Wilson, 1980, p. 122)

Hereby it can be understood that people from both of Kay's cultural sides find it hard to comprehend the duality of her cultural identity.

The issue related to identity in this poem displays how simple and peaceful moments within the daily life of Kay are being disrupted because people allow themselves to decide for her to belong somewhere else than the place she was born in. It is ironic how even the different elements of nature flow harmoniously while

people cannot become flexible about the co-existence of different races. Kay explains in *The Sunday Post* that she wrote the poem “In My Country” in her twenties when she already received questions about her origin, and is sad to express that the poem is still relevant in her fifties (2020, para. 1,7).

The process of discrimination also comes forward in the poem “Sign” (1993/2007b, p. 79) which is a poem of eight stanzas from the collection *Other Lovers* (1993). This poem covers the narrative of an assimilation process. The very first lines set the belittling and segregating tone of the poem since the language of the person in question is being disclosed from the category of languages, as the dramatic speaker opens the monologue with the lines:

*They did not see
the way she talked
as language. It was
a handshape. A movement. Located
in the wrong place at the wrong point
in time. That each symbol
was a sign was not thought
possible; no language at all. (ll. 1-8, emphasis in original)*

Additionally, by creating a separation between “them” and “her”, the two parties mentioned are positioned as opposites, thus perhaps as opponents. Either way, “she” is not included in the bigger mass, and is therefore excluded from the centre.

The act of separating one language from the other is further emphasised in the sixth stanza where the focus is not only put on language alone but where culture and religion are included as well: “All this / *distance* / between one language an another, one / culture and another; one religion / and another” (ll. 45-49, emphasis in original).

Culture and religion are similar to language in the matter of being a segment of identification (Jenkins, 2004, pp. 104-105). As culture, language, and religion are considered as parts of a person’s identity, and the previous lines (45-49) include a constant repetition of the opposition between the “one” and the “other,” it can be concluded that there is discrimination based on identity traits represented in this poem. In addition to discrimination based on language, culture, and religion, the tone in the following lines also becomes violent: “[...] *little* languages / squashed, stamped upon, cleared out / to make way / for the big one, better tongue” (ll. 49-52, emphasis in original). These lines evoke memories about the colonizing Western countries, who imposed language onto the colonized people by systematically forbidding them

from speaking their native languages by means of humiliation and physical abuse with the aim of conquering the subordinated groups of people through defeat of lingual and cultural structure (Shakib, 2011, pp. 117, 119). Language and identity are considered intertwined as Le Page and Tabouret-Keller claimed that “[t]he language spoken by somebody and his or her identity as a speaker of this language are inseparable: This is surely a piece of knowledge as old as human speech itself. Language acts are acts of identity” (qtd. in Tabouret-Keller, 1997, p. 315). Therefore, not acknowledging and taking away the language of the persona in this poem should be regarded as an attack on her identity as well. The language assimilation continues through stanza seven and the following lines also carry an important message conveyed through the symbolism of the plant named as the black-eyed Susan: “The day they forced her to speak / their tongue, she lost / the black-eyed Susan” (ll. 56-58). The black-eyed Susan mentioned in these lines is a plant which originates from North-America, and is believed to be named by British colonists. This plant was originally used by North American tribes as a medicine to cure illnesses, such as snake bites, parasites, cuts and scars. The medical features ensured the plant to maintain itself for a time span of hundreds of years. The symbolic meanings behind this plant are connected to its features of being a cure and managing to remain for many years. On the one hand this plant represents resilience, endurance, and survival. On the other hand, it symbolizes justice and truth (“Black-eyed Susan symbolism,” 2021). Therefore, the loss of the black-eyed Susan represents the loss of these mentioned features, the loss of survival, justice, and health of the person in question in contrast to the second stanza:

*When she talks,
she uses space: a room,
a field, an ocean. Her words,
a camera lens: everything she sees,
she hears, zooming
into the
sound of a black-eyed susan,
and out
to span a wide-angle; the clearances, fossils, folksongs. (ll. 10-18)*

In this stanza the persona still has her freedom of movement and speech, her own vision on the world, and her own cultural history. Lastly, the girl's faith ends in tragedy, as expressed in these lines: “They say her voice is strange. / They tie her hands behind her back. / They say repeat after me until / she has *no language* at all” (ll. 61-64, emphasis in original). Line sixty-one emphasizes the foreignness of the

girl's voice. Considering the term "strange" as an equivalent for the term "exceptional," it could be said that "they" regard the girl's voice as extraordinary. According to Tatum, "[t]he aspect of identity which is the target of others' attention, and subsequently of our own, is often the element which sets us apart as exceptional or 'other' in their eyes" (2000, p. 11). Therefore, the collective thought of "them" (l. 61), makes the girl's voice regarded as "strange" (l. 61). The forceful tone in the next line "They tie her hands behind her back" (l. 62) could be figuratively comprehended in addition to its literal meaning of physically being tied. Believing this line to represent helplessness, the girl has no choice other than to cooperate. Tatum points out the anticipating manner of acting of the subordinate groups as an approach of preventing conflict, as she explains with these words: "In a situation of unequal power, a subordinate group has to focus on survival. It becomes very important for subordinates to become highly attuned to the dominants as a way of protecting themselves" (2000, p. 12). Therefore, this line might be metaphorically suggesting the manner in which the girl is left no choice. The last two lines of the poem (ll. 63-64) further describe the forceful manner of the dominants trying to control the language of the girl. The girl's language is taken away from her by means of assimilation. This situation is comparable to, and is possible to represent, the acts of assimilation during colonisation where language was being altered for the reason that accepting lingual identity of the subordinates would result in acknowledging independent identity (Shakib, 2011, p. 118).

The tone of the poem supports the story of the oppressor and the oppressed. The oppressor expresses a demanding, violent, and proud attitude in contrast to the experience of the girl who is helpless. Thus, the importance of this poem considering identity issues lays in the act of assimilation of identity through force and violence.

The act of exhibiting foreign races and cultures mentioned in "Black Bottom" also comes forward in Kay's poem "Hottentot Venus" (1998/2007c, p. 132) from her collection *Off Colour* (1998). "Hottentot Venus" is a twelve-stanza poem consisting of quatrains. The title of the poem refers to the real-life person Sara Baartman, a South African woman who was taken to England in 1810 by the colonist Alexander Dunlop, among the import of exotic plants, animals, and human beings as a presentation of colonial success and also as a source of income (Qureshi, 2004, p. 235). The poem is written in the form of flashbacks in which the persona Sara recalls

her past experiences in retrospect. The use of first-person narration in combination with flashbacks stimulates ethical evaluation and judgement. Kay's choice of words and language are also noticeable, which can be described as detailed and descriptive since the persona recounts her segregating exhibition process. Sara became a symbol for an era of oppression and colonialism (Holmes, 2007, p. 104) In less than a day after her death her body was delivered to the Museum of Natural History (Holmes, 2007, p. 95). The reactions of the visitors of the exhibition display that Sara's agony did not end even after her death. By giving a voice to Sara, Kay emphasizes Britain's colonial past and highlights the voice of those who suffered racial intolerance.

Throughout the detailed descriptions of this dramatic occasion, a feeling of pity is evoked by the use of shocking portrayals of acts towards the persona in the lines: "They made a plaster cast of my corpse / took wax moulds of my genitals and anus, / my famous anomalous buttocks / till the last sigh in me left my body" (ll. 1-4). These first lines designate the tense tone of the poem by including the subject matters of death and dehumanization, leaving the persona to be regarded as an object rather than a human being equal to the oppressors. The shocking details continue as suffering of the persona is retold: "I made a noise I never heard before / when the man with the glinting knife / whispered 'posterity' and dissected my brain" (ll. 5-7). The emphasis made with irony in line seven points out the man's concern of the next generations during the act of dehumanizing Sara and using her as an object, portraying his selective and prioritized mindset.

Sara is regarded as an experimental subject rather than a human being who is as worthy as they are. It is remarkable and ironic how Sara indicates them in a manner of respect as a "lady" and "gentlemen," whereas they treat her with utmost disrespect. Especially the physical treatments exemplify provocative and unequal actions, leaving Sara discriminated and alienated. According to Miller, unjust social relationships between the dominant group and the subordinate group are experienced as nothing extraordinary and therefore, creates an environment in which discrimination becomes tolerated in many circles, differing from speaking in a derogatory manner about a group, to excluding the minorities from social domains (i.e. work environment or neighbourhood) (qtd. in Tatum, 2000, p. 12).

The persona proceeds to narrate her situation as she moves further from the exhibition setting to the conversation with her owners, as she explains: “They asked me in my own bush tongue / if I wanted to be exhibited in this fashion. / I said the English words I’d heard them say often. / Money. Freedom. My Boer keeper smiled” (ll. 33-36). Sara describes her own language as “bush tongue” (l. 33) and chooses to respond in the English words she learnt from her keepers. Her derogatory manner of indicating her own language and her preference for using English is most likely the result of the suppressing acts of colonization. The colonization of language was significant as it indicated symbolic domination (John, 1989, p. 284). Sara and her slaveholder agree upon collaboration and their relation proceeds, as can be noticed in the lines: “He could still walk me, dance me / hold his stick to me. He promised me riches. / Bring in the literati, the artists, the famous. / Let them view the buttocks of the Hottentot Venus” (ll. 37-40). These lines indicate the unequal relationship between a slave and her holder. Her exploitation continues to enforce her an underserved downgrading life. These details and the manner of conveying Sara’s experience, contribute to stimulating senses. The types of imagery used in “Hottentot Venus” can be regarded on the basis of the persona’s descriptions of the circumstances she is being put through. At first, visual imagery is used in the lines “[t]he man with the glinting knife” (l. 6), “The rest of me is here now, Natural History Museum, / my brains, my woolly hair, my skeleton.” (ll. 15-16), “the look on the white lady’s face” (l. 19), “Her gloved hands. Her small stone eyes.” (l. 21), “On the wall I was framed: ugly, deformed, a cartoon.” (l. 44) and “I was wearing a skin coloured dress” (l. 45). These lines are helpful to imagine the location and the helpless circumstance of the speaker. Additionally, the use of auditory imagery can be recognized in the lines: “I made a noise I never heard before” (l. 5), “Her English squeal of surprise at my size” (l. 22), and “I heard their laughter like money shaking in a tin” (l. 43). These lines create tension and suspense. At last, the use of tactile imagery ensures to possibility to imagine what the speaker physically endured in the lines: “When she poked her parasol into my privates (l. 20), “When the gentleman prodded me with his cane” (l. 26), and “My heart inside my cage pounded like a single drum” (l. 41). These types of imagery convey the misery Sara experiences by encouraging to imagine the situations with more sensation, as concrete imagery strengthens the poem (Boulton, 1953, p. 166).

Considering the representation of racial issues, the title of the poem also contains acts of racism and inequality. The nickname “Hottentot” was appointed to a South-African tribe by Dutch colonists, as the colonists claimed the tribe to be singing “hot, hot, hot” during their traditional dance sessions (“Hottentottententententoonstelling,” 2019, para. 1). The inequality in this matter derives from the act of renaming which is overpowering and belittling towards slaves since “[r]enaming constituted an act of erasure, underscoring the rupture between the people they had been and the non-people they were to become” (Abel, Tyson & Palsson, 2019, p. 337). This also applies to the Dutch name “Saartjie” as it was given to this woman during times of extreme colonial violence, and identified her as a colonist’s servant (Crais and Scully, 2009, p. 9). Sara’s birth name given by her parents remains unknown and is said to be vanished during the violence (Crais and Scully, 2009, p. 9). Therefore, along with the overpowering aspect, renaming also plays a role during the assimilation of the inferior cultural identities. This outcome of assimilation can also be detected in this poem as the persona adds: “My country is a dream now. Or maybe it did not exist” (l. 31), suggesting the vague presence of her roots.

Issues of racial inequality continues throughout the poem as well. The lines “My famous anomalous buttocks” (l. 3), “Not so long ago people paid handsomely / to see my rump, my apron, my non-European genitals” (ll. 8-9), “Men said the size of my lips were unnatural” (l. 12), and “Her English squeal of surprise at my size” (l. 22) indicate interest of European perspective in exhibitions of the uncommon racial/cultural features as well as the existence of the Western concept of “normal” and “natural” based on the binary opposition us vs. them. The persona then proceeds to describe her situation during the exhibition with these words: “I paced my cage, backwards / an orang outang, forwards, a beast on a chain” (ll. 10-11) and hereby explains how she is not being looked upon as a human being regardless of how she moves herself. She is either observed as a monkey or a beast.

Thus, the poem displays how difference of identity and race ensured this woman to become property of the white Western man and function as a means of income due to her physical traits which were looked upon as “different,” causing her to become “othered” as well as taken advantage of. The reason for Kay to highlight this specific story is her manner of giving a voice to the voiceless in order to provoke

interest in further research, aiming to keep Black people such as Sara alive, as she mentions in her interview with Maya Jaggi (1999). In the same interview Kay supports this action by describing the underrepresentation of Blacks throughout British history:

I think the history that children are taught in schools, British history or Scottish history or English history, doesn't really include black people, and yet black people have been part of this country's history long, long before the Windrush that everybody seems to talk about as a marker date. (p. 58)

The persona repeats the information of her skin colour which intensifies the significance of it, in the lines: “My sigh is black. My heart is black” (l. 23), “My walk is black. My hide, my flanks. My secret” (l. 24), “My brain is the size of a black woman’s brain” (l. 25), “from my dark eyes. I tell no lies” (l. 28).

While giving a voice to the voiceless, Kay also manages by means of her poems to bring to the foreground the zeitgeist of both the past and present of the Blacks in Britain. By using her characters as representatives of her attributes, Kay highlights the prevailing moods of the different periods in which Blacks were and are prone to discrimination. Although Kay does not focus on a certain target group, and does not specifically aim to end discrimination towards Black people, her poetry is a possible means to accustom discriminating mentality and worldview to the mindset of discriminated individuals.

The last analysed poem of this chapter is “Crown and Country” (1998/2007c, p. 121) from the collection *Off Colour* (1998) which explores social and racial issues by means of dentistry imagery as it compares the status of teeth to social statuses (Háčová, 2005, p. 64). The poem consists of four stanzas narrated in first-person narration where the persona focuses on comparisons between two opposite groups of people in a degrading yet informative manner. The tone which decides for the attitude of the poem varies from cynical, sarcastic, mocking, and downgrading to instructive and demanding. The use of teeth as a symbolic attribute is what makes the poem remarkable as well as the setting which is the home country of the dramatic speaker. In the first stanza it becomes clear that the persona envisions two camps which oppose each other:

*When you come to our country
you will realise we are big on dentistry:
at the border your mouth will be opened, flossed
and an elegant silver filling stamped into D10.*

*Then you will catch the hygienic autobus, Tooth
 Fairy Express smiling the improved smile of our people.* (ll. 1-6, emphasis in original)

The persona suggests by using the words “you come” (l. 1) and “our country” (l. 1), and “you” (l. 2), “we” (l. 2) and “our people” (l. 6) that the two parties are antipoles of each other, and inserts by this statement the binary opposition of “us” versus “them.” Elbow highlights that binary or dichotomous thinking builds dominance and privilege which results in the formation of hierarchy (1993, p. 22). The persona also expresses an elevated spirit of self-reflection as uplifting vocabulary is used for the description of his/her people and their tools, such as “an elegant silver filling” (l. 4), “the hygienic autobus” (l. 5), and “the improved smile of our people” (l. 6). The last one also eliminates the possibility of the “others” being in possession of an improved dental condition. The emphasis put on the separation between the two opposing groups of people enhances the act of discrimination as the intended reader is not regarded as co-owner of the country. By including the “*Tooth Fairy Express*” (l. 6, emphasis in original), Kay might subtly suggest that the whole idea around social statuses is manmade and untrue and thus she criticizes and mocks the ones who support and believe in systematically excluding groups of people. In addition, the persona expresses in the second stanza that these people “all know dentures are more crucial / than culture” (ll. 8-9). These lines could be interpreted in a manner in which artificial looks from the outside are considered as more important than cultural values. In this matter, the people of the country of the persona are shallow and closed minded as they do not look further into a person than his/her teeth. Taking the indication of “teeth” in this poem as the tenor for “appearance,” it could be said that these lines are correlated to racism and xenophobia in real life as, according to these people, appearances are enough to classify and define the worth of a person. While determining the value of life according to appearances of others, these people also do not give away the personalities of themselves, as the speaker explains: “We do not talk much, we say / cheese; pints of creamy gleaming teeth, / pouring out our white grins, our gold caps; smirks / Just across the border, people have hellish holes, / gaping gaps, rotten roots, abscesses” (ll. 8-12). The lines eight to ten emphasize the ignorant mindset and shallow lifestyle of the people the persona speaks in name of, as they do not feel the need or interest to genuinely know and understand each other or anyone else. For them, their appearance and visible wealth is enough to socialize and show their status. The lines eleven and twelve explain the outlook of these

people regarding to the people abroad. Their “gaping gaps” (l. 12) represent their poverty, “rotten roots” (l. 12) refer to their ethnical roots, and “abscesses” (l. 12) point out their unhealthy conditions. The description of these people who are regarded as less worthy, in addition to the description which the persona gives about their own dental status (ll. 9-10), is yet another form of discrimination. The lines “[w]e identify people by their bite. / The lower class have most unusual bites. / They are sick to the back teeth” (ll. 13-15) again oppose the two groups by making use of the “us” versus “them” binary opposition. This comparison indicates that the people of this country feel to be in possession of the privilege to determine outsiders as less worthy than themselves.

Richardson suggests that Kay’s poetry is “concerned with how black people in the United Kingdom come into political and personal consciousness of their multifaceted identities in nations that reject their claims to the nation by regarding them as permanent outsiders and ‘newcomers’” (2012, p. 363-364). The excluding tone of the speaker of “Crown and Country” also verifies this act in which outsiders are steadfast regarded as the “other” without any attempt of including them.

Thus, the inequality of the groups of people is out in the open known by the privileged group. Although the privileged group is fully aware, they do not seem to be occupied with the thought that something has to change.

Altogether this chapter displays how cultural identity issues can be related to race, ethnicity, religion, political preference, financial status, blood relations, and adoption. Kay’s poetry shows these issues to occur in different time spheres as well as a variety of locations as they are provoked by individuals from different ages and statuses.



CHAPTER 2:
SEXUAL IDENTITY ISSUES IN JACKIE KAY'S POETRY

Chapter two of this thesis is designed to bring to the foreground the issues of identity surrounding the cases of gender and sexuality in Jackie Kay's selected poems. This includes sexuality in the matter of being homosexual, as well as the hardships of being a woman. This chapter includes homosexual discrimination from not only female but also male points of view. Through an analysis of the selected poems it becomes clear in what aspects those involved in discrimination are hindered or hurt. The book *Prejudice and Pride: Discrimination Against Gay People in Modern Britain* (1984) contains the stories of discrimination based on sexual orientation experienced by different people in different places in Britain. During the publication of this book Kay was twenty-three years old and therefore potent enough to realise any form of discrimination against sexual preferences. This time span and geographical location of events also indicate the potential similarity of experiences between these people and Kay. Therefore, this book is used within this chapter to endorse shared experiences of homosexual discrimination in various settings. Another main reference used in this chapter is *Fantastic Women: Sex, Gender, and Transvestism* (1989), which is a feminist study of transvestites in Britain during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and therefore can be associated with Kay's worldview of the time as well. Being a woman is also a significant part of Kay's identity. Therefore, this chapter also focuses on the strength of women, violence against women, and the burden of female beauty standards as represented by Kay in her selected works. Furthermore, all poems in this chapter are written in the technique of the dramatic monologue, which allows to identify with the speaker and stand in their position (Langbaum, 1963, p. 137).

The poem "Pounding Rain" (1991/2007a, p. 49) was published in the collection *The Adoption Papers* (1991). The dramatic speaker in this poem is a homosexual woman recalling events between herself and her lover, while her lover is also the silent listener. The retrospective-prospective form of this poem ensures the understanding of the change of events over time. In the first stanza it becomes clear that the privacy of the couple is not taken into consideration as the speaker indicates how the whole town is informed about their private situation: "News of us spreads like a storm. / The top of our town to the bottom. / We stand behind the curtains / parted like hood; watch each other's eyes"(ll. 1-4). By using the simile "like a storm," the speaker emphasizes the extent of area which the impact covers within a

short period of time. However, the storms are also associated with punishment of divine anger (Tresidder, 2008, p. 9). Therefore, figuratively, the storm can also represent the judgments of the inhabitants of the town. This is a remarkable comparison as homosexuality is not approved within religious matters (Gramick & Nugent, 1989, p. 9). The “curtains” (l. 4) symbolize concealment (Tresidder, 2009, p. xii). The speaker and her partner have to conceal themselves after the news spreads, which points out a threshold to the speaker and her partner’s harmonious relationship and their true identity. The reason for the couple to conceal themselves derives from the outlook of society upon their sexual orientation. For in the 1980s in Britain, the social and sexual activities of homosexual people were regarded as criminal as this group experienced assault, harassment, and ignorance by family members, police, on the streets, and in schools (Jarett, 1984, p. vi). The dominant groups set the criteria which influence the structure of society and this also includes the validation of relationships (qtd. in Tatum, 2000, p. 3). This also influences the actions of the couple as the speaker then recalls the moment they considered moving: “We talk of moving to the west end, / this bit has always been a shoebox / tied with a string; [...]” (ll. 5-7). This indicates that they cannot live in the town while openly being in a relationship with each other, as the place feels too small and suppressive. The speaker also recalls previous relationships of both herself and the silent listener: “[...] I started dating Davy;” (l. 13) and “A while later I heard you married Trevor Campbell” (l. 17). These relationships are both with the opposite sex which means the women could not yet be open about their sexual orientation. Reasons for lesbian women to engage in a relationship with men include avoiding confrontation with society’s norms and the expectation of their families as this might result in rejection by these structures (Coleman, 1989, p. 122). This seems to withhold the women in the poem from coming out as well. Kay has encountered the threshold of coming out as a lesbian after reading the book *The Women’s Room* (1977) by Marilyn French. Therefore she insists for the importance of literature to make decisions one would otherwise not make (Wilson, 1990, p. 124). Thus, the self acceptance of an individual can help to prevent losing years to leading a double life.

Near the end of the poem it becomes clear that the dramatic speaker and the silent listener meet again after years of living a heterosexual life. The attraction of both is still present which leads the silent listener to invite the speaker to her house. The moments they experience during this meeting unravel their true feelings:

*We sat and stared till our eyes filled
like a glass of wine. I did it, the thing
I'd dreamt a million times. I undressed you
slowly, each item of clothing fell
with a sigh. I stroked your silk skin
until we were back in the Campsies, running
down the hills in the pounding rain,
screaming and laughing; soaked right through. (ll. 29-36)*

The moments they spent together after not seeing each other for a while make them rather emotional, which most likely indicates the realisation of their lost time, as “[t]he shock realization of reciprocal feeling is intensified by the shock realization of mutual gayness” (Silver, 1992, p. 56). The speaker also points out that she thought of this moment many times before, which she intensifies by using a hyperbole in line thirty-one. As they have physical contact near the end, the speaker compares the feeling of being together to moments of their past together. Therefore, this poem also includes a nostalgic tone, creating space for the awareness of their lost time. Additionally, the feelings of sadness and longing for each other reflect how this poem depicts homosexual love no different than heterosexual love and in a sense normalizes it.

By the choices made by these women and the state of their emotions, it can be concluded that the main issues interwoven in this poem regarding homosexual identity are the pressure of society’s judgements, the need to live deceptive lifestyles, and the loss of valuable time throughout one’s life.

Another poem about the hardships of homosexual individuals is “From Stranraer, South” (1998/2007c, p. 147) from the collection *Off Colour* (1998) which is a seven-stanza poem consisting of quatrains. The speaker is a lesbian woman who describes the aftermath details of her coming-out to her mother. In the first stanza the main concern of the dramatic speaker becomes clear as she describes in the following lines: “Looking back, I can say, with my hand on my heart / that my mother got sick the day I said I was in love / with a girl who lived round the corner – / and never got better” (ll. 1-4). The speaker uses an idiom in line one to exclaim her belief that her sexual orientation is the reason for her mother to become ill. It is ironic how a

positive notion as “love” can feel disastrous to someone else. Perhaps this feeling comes along with the mother regarding herself as entitled to force her opinions on her daughter as well as her being influenced by the norms of society which regard the love between two women as conflicting. Additionally, the retrospective-prospective form of this poem is also revealed in the first stanza as the speaker affirms that there is no change in the status of her mother as she compares the past to the present. The next two stanzas display the choice of the speaker considering her relationships with her lover and her mother:

*So Aileen McLeod left the day after my mother collapsed.
She caught the afternoon train from Stranraer, south.
My mother wouldn't open her mouth –
and never got better.*

*Friends brought me news of Aileen, here, there,
and she herself sent me two letters.
The first said come now; the second don't bother; yet my mother
never did get better. (ll. 5- 12)*

It is evident in these stanzas that although the speaker breaks up with her lover to satisfy her mother, the mother still does not get better. Distressing relationships between homosexual people and their families also happen in real life as can be understood from the following passage: “In 1981, a caller to London Lesbian Line said that she had been admitted to the hospital with concussion and a fractured arm when her father had thrown her downstairs after she told him she was lesbian” (Durell, 1984, p. 15). This reflects that help is needed in situations where friction with family happens. Kay is also aware of the need for help as she mentions in the following lines:

I want the reader to find an echo, a reflection, a friend, a helping hand, another side of their self, a route, a path, a way of understanding themselves better, something memorable that sparks them off that reminds them of something similar that has happened to them at one point. (Rowell, 2008, p. 272)

Instead of conducting physical harm to her daughter as happens in the quotation of the London Lesbian Line, the mother in the poem hinders her daughter with psychological pressure by making her daughter feel responsible for her medical condition. In the stanzas four and five the speaker hints to her mother's real intentions which she comes to realise when she takes on her mother's personal care, as she announces:

*I don't know if it's me or if it's her, but I'm sure
a certain expression of satisfaction crosses her cheeks
when I give her a bed bath, as if she's taught me a lesson –
it will never get better.*

*I see myself in our hall mirror smiling my mother's smile,
 complicit, apologetic, I know what you're up to.
 No matter what I do I can't wipe that look from my face.
 It will never get better. (ll. 13-20)*

The speaker is aware of her mother's motive for acting in a helpless and impotent manner. Perhaps evoking pity and distracting her daughter from her own purposes is her actual goal in this matter. The speaker realises this which can be noticed from the lines: "a certain expression of satisfaction crosses her cheeks [...] as if she's taught me a lesson –" (ll. 14-15), and "I know what you're up to" (l. 18). As the speaker points out the complicit and apologetic smile of her mother (ll. 16-17), she identifies the helpless state her mother is in which most likely derives from her mother's norms, values, and intentions to fit in the society. The last stanza confirms the mother's oppressive behaviour as the lines follow:

*better than this, for what is a life for but to be a good daughter
 and love your mother's weakness and moisten her lips
 and listen to the sound of her dreams in waves
 and see the stars outside flicker and waver, uncertain. (ll. 25-28)*

The daughter believes the best she can do in life is be a good daughter rather than choosing her own happiness. The narration of this poem represents homosexuals who are left with no choice but to choose the priorities of their family above their own wants and needs related to their sexual orientation, perhaps in fear of rejection. Children whose parents reject their sexual orientation develop mental health problems and are more likely to suffer from depression and become suicidal more frequently than their peers whose families show less or no rejection at all (DeAngelis, 2009, para. 2). The tone of the poem is set by the speaker who sounds hopeless and pessimistic by regularly using the line "it will never get better" (l. 16) in various forms at the end of each stanza. She has no positive outlook on the future which she sums up in one word at the very end of the poem: "uncertain" (l. 28).

Kay recalls her own coming out to her mother in which her mother did not directly react positively:

I came out to her when I was 17 [...] The language I used was conditional. I said, "How would you feel if I were to tell you I was a lesbian?" and she said, "I would be very upset." I asked, "Why?", and she said, "You would be becoming something I don't know and understand. You wouldn't be Jackie anymore." She's very relaxed about it now, though. (Brown, 2010)

Thus, the issue related to sexual identity in this poem is the rejection of parents towards their children's sexual orientation and the exclusion from society that comes along with it. This is a result of homosexuality being unknown and unexpected for

the parents as well as its opposing position against the societal norms. The rejection creates inbetweenness in the child's mind and worldview. The freedom of the child is taken away as he/she is not able to decide for their own sexual orientations in a state of anxiety to disappoint the parent(s).

There are also homosexual individuals who feel the need to hide their true sexuality which is reflected in the poem "Close Shave" (1991/2007a, p. 61) from Kay's collection *The Adoption Papers* (1991). This poem represents sexually repressed miners (Silver, 1992, p. 56). To begin with, the title indicates a need to avoid something, as "close shave" means "to have a narrow escape from something dangerous" (Spears, 1998, p. 136). The dramatic speaker is a male miner with a wife and children, who leads a double life as he is not able to be open about his true sexual orientation, and his retrospective-prospective manner of evaluating the events reflects how there has been no change of circumstances for him. In the first stanza it becomes clear that his family is not aware of his situation:

*The only time I forget is down the pit,
right down in the belly of it,
my lamp shining like a third eye,
my breath short and fast like my wife's
when she's knitting. Snip snap.
I've tried to tell her as many times
as I've been down this mine. I can't
bring myself to, she'd tell our girls
most probably. It doesn't bear thinking. (ll. 1-9)*

Through the metaphor of the mine it becomes clear that the speaker has a secret he keeps from his family however he is not yet transparent about the details. Taking into consideration that a cave covers the image of shelter (Tresidder, 2008, p. 29), it could be stated that the mine symbolizes a safe space for the speaker where he can avoid the dilemma of facing the reality of his double life. He claims that the issue regularly occupies his mind as he informs that only his hard work down the mine distracts him from his concern (ll. 1-4). His second matter of worry which becomes clear in this stanza is the awareness of his daughters. This is also the obstacle for telling his wife about his secret. By using the line "I've tried to tell her as many times" (l. 6) the speaker indicates again the amount of time his secret has taken from him. It is a long time ongoing issue which the speaker deals with by himself. In the third stanza the details of the speaker's secret are unravelled: "We've only slept the night together twice: / once when my wife's sister died, / once when the brother in law committed suicide" (ll. 21-23). By using the word "only" (l. 21), the speaker expresses his

feeling of disappointment, indicating the quantity “twice” (l. 21) being a low number of occasions. It is also ironic how the others’ deaths create opportunity for the speaker to live his reality, as death ensures the speaker’s ability to consummate love according to his own principles (Aydm, 2008, p. 91). The speaker cannot break the norms and live his intended life openly. The two times when he did live up to his personal needs were after the fatal ends of others. Therefore, there is a contrast between life and death here.

According to Miller homosexual men who are in a heterosexual marriage keep their secret to themselves: “Because the men have considerable financial, domestic, career, ego, and social investment in being perceived as heterosexual, they see homosexuality as something that could ruin their lives” (1987, p. 176). The speaker explains his main concern to be his daughters and emphasizes this again near the end of the poem while relating his past justification of his behaviour to his lover: “I said to him; it’s my daughters that worry me” (l. 34). Miller points out that one of the areas gay men in heterosexual marriages experiences problems with is their relationship with their children (1987, p. 175), perhaps that is reason enough for the speaker to keep his secret to himself. He feels the same about his co-workers as evident in the following lines: “Course I can never tell the boys down the pit / When I’m down here I work fast so it hurts” (l. 35-36). Miller also suggests that “[g]ay family men have unstable self concepts. [...] Realizing that their behaviour is inconsistent with their publicly presented heterosexual identity, these men try to reduce cognitive dissonance by compartmentalizing gay and nongay worlds with elaborate rendezvous strategies and facades” (1987, p. 176). The facade of the speaker in this matter would be his profession as a miner since miners could be perceived as tough and masculine due to the tough nature of their job. Kay believes that society is looking for single truths but insists on truth being multiple (Random Acts, 2017). This idea comes back in “Close Shave” as society’s single truth would describe a tough miner to be heterosexual and happy with his family. Instead, the speaker is living according to multiple truths where he has to hide his true identity. Regardless of what the reason is for the speaker to be situated in a heterosexual marriage, he still expresses the feelings of being trapped as he is not able to tell his wife, children, and co-workers about his real sexual orientation. The neglect of this psychosexual issue can develop in distress syndrome which includes mental issues,

such as depression, anxiety, guilt, and nervousness as well as physical complications, such as eating and sleeping disorders (Miller, 1987, p. 175). Some of the reasons for homosexual men to marry women are: the desire to have children, heterosexual marriage looking natural, the thought that their sexual orientation could change, and pressure from family (Higgins, 2002, p. 24).

Thus, although the reason for the speaker to engage in a heterosexual marriage is not clear, it is still obvious that the speaker struggles. Firstly, he carries the burden of his secret as he cannot share this with his family or his co-workers. Secondly, he cannot live up to the standards of his real identity, and therefore he is not able to put his own priorities first.

The last poem considering the issues of the LGBTQIA+ community is “Dressing Up” (1991/2007a, p. 62), from the collection *The Adoption Papers* (1991). This is a five-stanza poem consisting of all quintets, with the use of run-on lines between the stanzas which ensures a smooth transition between the stanzas. This poem represents a moment of interaction between a transvestite man and his mother, and emphasizes the importance of acceptance, open-mindedness and priorities. Although, the main issue of the poem is not clear in the first two stanzas, it is apparent that the speaker experiences frustrations in his relationship with his family in the following dramatic monologue:

*My family is all so squalid
I'm trying to put it behind
me – real typical working-class
Scottish: Da beats Ma drink it off.
I couldn't stomach it, banging

doors, turning ma music up top
blast. I told ma ma years ago. She'd
rather I murdered somebody than
that. She wasn't joking either. (ll. 1-9)*

In the first two stanzas it is evident that the speaker faces the issue of not being accepted by his family while also reflecting his frustration. He is trying to move forward from it (l. 2), and he is trying to ignore it as he cannot bear their behaviour (ll. 5-6). The speaker's attitude towards his family also expresses their current relationship which is unpleasant. The second stanza expresses how displeased the speaker's mother is with his decision of dressing up as a woman since according to her norms and values, murder weighs lighter than the performed action of the speaker.

The following stanzas clarify what the matter of disagreement between the speaker and his mother concerns:

*Nobody gets hurt, it's not for
the image even I'm just dead
childish. Mascara I like, rouge,
putting it on after powder.
I love wearing lots of layers.
Ma ma always dresses boring,
no frills. See at Christmas I had
on black stockings Santa would kill
for and even Quentin Crisp³⁵ would
look drab beside my beautiful
feather boa – bright fucking red. (ll. 10-20)*

The speaker explains that his actions are innocent and do not hurt anyone (l. 10) before proceeding to describe his affection for feminine clothing and makeup. This is his moment of coming-out in the poem as a transvestite person meaning he cross-dresses as an obligation of his needs and for the joy of it (Woodhouse, 1989, p. ix). Stanzas three and four also define the tone of the speaker as he radiates confidence by means of his choice of vocabulary and his certainty about his appearance. Additionally, Kay uses vulgarisms as the speaker exclaims the word “fucking” (l. 20) which puts emphasis on his frustration. Swearing in literature is used to deliver a realistic dialogue and to supply more emotion to the articulations of the speaker (Norrick, 2012, p. 25). The last stanza adds up to the degree to which the speaker’s mother believes her son does wrong: “Ma ma didn’t touch her turkey. / Finally she said What did I do / I know what they call you, transvite. / You look a bloody mess you do. / She had a black eye, a navy dress” (ll. 21-25). In these lines the mother loses her appetite and contemplates whether her own manner of upbringing influenced her son’s behaviour. The reason for his mother to think in this manner derives from the environment she grew up and developed in, as Woodhouse presents the existing reasons for people to feel offended by transvestism:

The revelation that a person's gender appearance is not a direct reflection of their biological sex is unexpected and can be disturbing. Sex, gender and appearance form a sort of trinity which runs deep in our social and psychological expectations of how our lives should be lived. (1989, p. ix)

This quotation represents the background of the mother’s feeling of shame. The masculine dominance of Western society insists on gender divisions and sexual politics to accommodate the appearance of a person as well, which ensures

³⁵ Quentin Crisp was a writer and performer who was a feminine gay man born in London (Marcus, 2021).

appearance to be the primary target of transvestism. Therefore, the assumption of physical appearance to indicate a person's biological sex and inner gender identity is the reason for transvestism to bother the norm (Woodhouse, p. xii). Regardless of her own situation with domestic violence, the mother is more worried and occupied with the appearance of her son. By the choice of his vocabulary and his arguments against his mother it can be regarded that the speaker is trying to make a statement in a confident but frustrated manner. This also decides for the tone of the poem to be assertive.

Thus, in addition to the helplessness of the speaker's inner frustration, this poem also highlights the rejecting attitude of family members and the negative connotation of transvestites weighing heavier in comparison to domestic violence and murder. The speaker is not being heard, his family thinks he is a disgrace, and his true identity is not being accepted.

The issues of women are also discussed in this chapter and the first poem covering this issue emphasizes the strength of women, in contrast to the ideas of society about female strength. The poem "Twelve Bar Bessie" (1993/2007b, p. 75) is a poem from Kay's collection *Other Lovers* (1993). Although Bessie Smith is mentioned previously in this thesis for her Black roots, she will be mentioned again but this time for her position as a powerful woman and as an idol for Kay. And although this poem deals with the subject matter of racist actions against the Black community, the focus of this analysis is Bessie Smith and her powerful moves as a woman as represented by Kay in this poem. The reason for including Smith as a woman apart from her cultural identity is that Kay also looks up to Smith for her strength and confidence as a woman as she mentions in the following passage:

Bessie just shone to me, and I started to imagine her alive. At one point she was the richest black woman in America, and because she got so fed up with Jim Crow segregation she got her own yellow Pullman train car. She would arrive at the station and they'd say: Bessie Smith's in town! So that seemed pretty fantastic. (Major, 2016, para. 24)

This quotation displays how Kay is inspired by Smith's power, authority, and influence on people around her. In the first stanza of the poem the persona puts forward the main problem:

*See that day, Lord, did you hear what happened then.
A nine o'clock shadow always chases the sun.
And in the thick heavy air came the Ku Klux Klan
To the tent where the Queen was about to sing her song.* (ll. 1-4)

The expression “Lord” is used in a state of surprise or shock (Sinclair, 1988, p. 464) which exclaims the mood of the speaker in the first line. This ensures a higher tension and paves the way for a bigger expectation of the following dramatic events in the poem. The tension is also built by mentioning the arrival of the Ku Klux Klan³⁶ which is known for its violent belief in white supremacy (Heinrichs, 2003, pp. 11, 13). Confrontations with the Ku Klux Klan were not inevitable for Smith, as Kay explains: “Touring the racist South was a nightmare for the blues performer. The Ku Klux Klan were at their height in the 1920s, exactly the same time as the heyday of the classic blueswomen” (Kay, 1997, p. 82). Smith’s name is not directly mentioned in the first stanza; however, the nickname “Queen” (l. 4) raises the expectations for Smith as it praises her and puts her in a valuable position. Therefore, the first stanza announces the confrontation between two opposing groups: the Ku Klux Klan and their opponents. The following two stanzas explain the intentions of the intruders and Smith’s actions:

*They were going to pull the Blues Tent down.
Going to move the Queen out of the town.
Take her twelve bar beat and squash it into the ground.
She tried to get her Prop Boys together, and they got scared.
She tried to get her Prop Boys together, and they got scared.
She said Boys, Boys, get those men out of here.
But they ran away and left the Empress on her own.
She went up to the men who had masks over their head (ll. 5-12).*

The brutal, interrupting, and racist actions of the Ku Klux Klan in combination with the impotency or fear of the prop boys ensured Smith’s sole confrontation with violence against her identity as a Black person. However, instead of drawing back she stands her ground. And again, Smith is referred to as “the Queen” (l. 6) and “the Empress” (l. 11) which raises expectations from her and portray her as a powerful woman. Her actions are described as follows:

*With her hand on her hips she cursed and she hollered,
‘I’ll get the whole damn lot of you out of here now
If I have to. You are as good as dead.
You just pick up the sheets and run. Go on.’
That’s what she done. Her voice was cast-iron.
You should have seen them. You should have seen them.
Those masks made of sheets from somebody’s bed.
Those masks flying over their heads. Flapping.*

³⁶ The Ku Klux Klan originated as a group to fight lawbreakers by punishment and fear. During the time when Black people became free citizens, the focus of the Ku Klux Klan was aimed at them for white people in the towns regarded Black people as a threat (Heinrichs, 2003, pp. 11,13).

*They was flapping like some strange bird migrating.
Some bird that smelt danger in the air, a blue song.
And flew. Fast. Out of the small mid western town.
To the sound of black hands clapping. (ll. 13-24)*

Emphasis is put on Smith's brave behaviour and her exclamations which display her fearlessness. Kay describes this deed of Smith as "admirable" (Kay, 1997, p. 106). The tone of stanzas four to six ensures a confident portrayal of Smith by describing her body language (l. 13), her threats and commands (ll. 14-16), and her voice (l. 17). The repetition of the line "You should have seen them" (l. 18) shows the admiration in the tone of the dramatic speaker and her satisfaction by Smith's confrontation with the Ku Klux Klan. The members of the Klan, on the other hand, are displayed as intimidated and worthless by the description of their costumes (l. 19) and the manner of escaping (l. 20). In order to accentuate the fear of the Klan, Kay uses a simile to make a comparison between the sound of the flapping masks and the sound of flapping wings of fleeing birds in the sixth stanza. The event retold in this poem is based on real life experiences of Smith. Kay describes this moment in her own words in the following passage:

The empress just howls them blues out. [...] Then she goes on to strut her stuff, when one of her musicians, overhot, goes out and finds a bunch of hooded men about to drop her tent. [...] The Queen commands her prop boys to follow her round the tent. She doesn't tell them why. So when they see the Klansmen they make a speedy retreat. The Empress, on her own, confronts the Klansmen 'I'll get the whole damn tent out of here if I have to. You just pickup those sheets and run.' The Klansmen, shocked stand and gawp whilst the Empress shouts obscenities at them until finally they disappear into the darkness. 'I ain't never heard of such shit,' says the Empress, walking over to the prop boys. (Kay, 1997, p. 107)

The last line of the poem indicates her consciousness of her own braveness and courage as she accuses her prop boys of being cowards: "And the Empress saying, '[a]nd as for you' to the ones who did nothing" (l. 25). Although the line seems unfinished, Kay finishes the line in her book *Bessie Smith*: "And as for you, you ain't nothing but a bunch of sissies" (Kay, 1997, p. 108).

Therefore, despite the fact that the attack of the Ku Klux Klan was intended for the Black community and not an attack of gender, this poem explores Bessie as a courageous and independent woman apart from her Black identity. It breaks down the gender role of men being aggressive and women being sensitive (Abercrombie & Warde, 2000, p. 208), as well as the misconception of women being in need of male heroic figures, as Smith's actions portray her as an invincible female who stands up

for her rights and safety. Thus, not only was this an act of self defence, but it also proved Sexism³⁷ wrong.

In addition to the uncredited strength of women, there is also the issue of beauty standards for women. The poem “Bleep” (1998/2007c, p. 141) from the collection *Off Colour* (1998) covers the load of imposing unrealistic beauty standards which is another difficulty women have to face. On the surface level of the poem “Bleep” the dramatic speaker describes her obsession with artificial beauty, as she clarifies in the following lines:

*I am the unreal voice speaking.
I will not be told I am real.
I care for the inauthentic, the disingenuous.
Deceit makes me shiver with glee.
I fall for false tears, false modesty.
false eyelashes, false teeth.
[...]
Wigs with synthetic hair, I hold dear.
Plastic hips. Silicone chips.
The wee tuck here and there. (ll. 1-6, 11-13)*

The speaker claims to value fabricated personal identity features as she prioritizes false voices (l. 1), false emotions (l. 5) and false physical appearances (ll. 6, 11, 12, 13, 19, 20, 22), as she proclaims:

*I dote on everything false
from the moment I wake up from my faked sleep
for the rest of the fabricated day.
Bleached skin, shrunk arse,
wee tits, tiny hips, nae chin.
There's nothing like women faking it.
See my nose, it used to be a tomato. (16-22)*

The obsession of the speaker with being fake consumes all of her time as even her sleep and daily routine are inauthentic (ll. 17-18). The emphasis on how she praises being fake can be regarded through the lines: “I care for the inauthentic, the disingenuous. / Deceit makes me shiver with glee” (ll. 3-4), and “I dote on everything false” (l. 16). Additionally, the tone of the speaker is very confident as she also makes a statement in the lines: “I will not be told I am real” (l. 2), and “There's nothing like women faking it” (l. 21).

Although the surface structure of the poem presents the speaker's admiration for artificial beauty, the deeper structure of the poem suggests that the speaker is representing society's imposed opinions. The so-called beauty myth covers the idea

³⁷ Sexism is the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex and thereby the right to dominance (Lorde, 1978, p. 31).

that beauty is a quality which women universally must want to own in order to be more reproductively successful and desired by men, which is an untrue perception as beauty is lead by politics with the aim to keep male dominance unbroken. (Wolf, 1992, p. 12). As the speaker in this poem describes her preference for false beauty standards, she leaves out the exact reason why she likes changing original features by means of procedures. Kay “[wants] to effect some kind of change. [she wants] to make people think about things they haven’t necessarily thought about before, or remember they’ve forgotten” (Wilson, 1990, p. 124). This could also apply to women’s need for cosmetic procedures as they might have not thought through the beauty myth. The beauty myth is not about women but men’s power (Wolf, 1992, p. 13), and therefore, the cosmetic procedures which women undergo could be taken as an indirect act of cooperation with patriarchal ideals. This poem represents the glorification of fake beauty and a fake lifestyle as well as distancing from real identity.

Another issue women are confronted with is domestic violence which is reflected in the poem “Condemned Property” (1993/2007b, p. 108), from the collection *Other Lovers* (1993). This poem covers the account of a mother who is exposed to domestic violence by her son. The main focus of this analysis is the visualisation of women who suffer domestic violence and who are in a position of self-blame. This is related to traditional gender roles since one of the assigned gender roles for women is the motherhood mandate which covers the dedication of women to childcare and the constant availability for their children’s needs (Lindsey, 1990, p. 136). The dramatic monologue of the speaker, who is the mother, starts with the description of a recent action of violence committed by her son in these lines: “My son hit me. / It’s my fault my son hit me. / If I had said something else / he wouldn’t have, surely. [...] / What kind of mother am I?” (ll. 1-4, 9). The first line clarifies the whole problem in a manner which is short but impactful, as the speaker literally presents herself as a victim of domestic violence by her son. This line evokes interest for the remaining details as it is very personal and “[a] social taboo remains over the subject of domestic violence so that victims do not voluntarily disclose their problems because of shame, self-blame, denial and fear” (Cann et. al, 2001, p. 89). Self-blame is the focal point of issue for the speaker as she blames herself and believes that her actions could have changed the course of events (ll. 3-5). This goes

further as she questions herself as a mother (l. 9). Throughout the poem the mother continues to present ways in which she could have acted differently:

*More placid, more docile, you could have been
more placating – soothed him, sushhh, sushhh.
I could have used reason like some use floss.
[...]
I definitely shouldn't have screamed.
And when he knocked me over,
I should not have tried to get up.
Because he wouldn't have had to, then,
knock me over again. My lovely boy. (ll. 30-32, 39-43 emphasis in original)*

As the traditional mindset attributes women with the main responsibility for the children, women take on the blame and guilt as soon as anything goes wrong with their children for it becomes the women's fault as a result of the assigned gender roles (Lindsey, 1990, p. 137). This is exactly what happens in the poem as the child turns out to be a violent person and the mother takes the blame on herself. Thus, the core of the speaker's thoughts and feelings which make her blame herself is fed by this belief. Additionally, the speaker sums up the qualities of being "placid" (l. 30), "docile" (l. 30), "placating" (l. 31), and "soothing" (l. 31). These personality traits are attributed to women when oppositions are made between male and female qualities, as the central stereotypes of femininity and masculinity teach boys to be aggressive, outgoing, strong, and demanding whereas girls are supposed to be neat, tidy, gentle, and obedient (Abercrombie & Warde, 2000, p. 208). Moreover: "[i]n the UK, state ideologies govern assumptions about family roles, with women being seen as the 'civilising' influence and as naturally suited to a caring, nurturing role" (Pryke & Thomas, 1998, p. 18). The regretful tone of the mother as she mentions what she could have done differently ensures a sense of pity and compassion towards her son. Besides the burden of the assigned gender roles, the speaker is also the victim of physical violence. The reason why the violence in this poem is considered a crime against women and not only a crime against a person is for the reason that during the 1980s in Scotland "[d]omestic violence against women was acknowledged as not a 'domestic' problem, but a problem of male violence against women, of abuse of power" (Norquay & Smyth, 2002, p. 79).

Thus, from the thoughts of the speaker in this poem it can be concluded that the connection between traditional gender roles can affect the behaviour of women within the family unit. The qualities attributed to women by society can make women believe that they need to take full responsibility for the actions of their family

members even when the women themselves are the victims. Additionally, the problem of domestic violence caused by men is also highlighted.

The last poem of this chapter explores the discreetness of domestic violence against women in the poem “Church Invisible” (1998/2007c, p. 155), from the collection *Off Colour* (1998). In this poem the speaker specifies the reasons why she is exposed to physical violence by her husband. The husband is not directly mentioned in the poem while describing the dramatic occasion. The speaker lives in a vicious circle in which no matter what her actions are, she is beaten. In the first stanza she explains her physical appearance to be the reason for battery:

*And because he once said,
My belly was set about with lilies,
He set about to beat me.
And because he once said
My navel was a round goblet,
He turned my stomach.
And because he wore a collar³⁸,
No one suspected him. (ll. 1-8)*

The frequent use of the word “because” puts emphasis on the fact that there are lots of excuses for the man to beat the speaker. These excuses are his justifications. The speaker also mentions the man’s professional position and religious status which make him seem remote from being an abuser. His authority remains unquestioned which is usual in cases of domestic violence as is explained in the following passage:

When a woman is involved in an abusive relationship with a man who has a clearly-defined status within the community (such as a doctor, lawyer, dentist, schoolteacher or Member of Parliament), it is even less likely that her stories will be believed. In fact, because of her partner’s position it is unlikely that she will confide in anyone, since to do so would damage his reputation and professional status. (Horley, 1988, p. 15)

In addition to the professions the abusive men commit to, they are also not suspected for the reason that domestic violence usually happens in private, as Horley explains:

Women abuse³⁹ is rarely discussed. It happens in secret and, because the woman usually lives with the man who assault her, it is very seldom that anyone outside the home knows the abuse is taking place. Most people do not seem to realise that countless women are being deprived of their basic human rights. (1988, p. 1)

The violence being private and unquestioned is a reason for the woman to feel lonely. This poem could therefore be a source to relate to for women who have similar experiences as Kay “[wants] other people to be able to read and think it may

³⁸ The Roman collar is a symbolic accessory which is a white band that goes around the neck of a priest (Kosloski, 2017).

³⁹ Women abuse is the term used for repeated, habitual, and random use of intimidation, which can be both physical or verbal, as a means to force a woman to submit to her partner’s demands (Horley, 1988, p. 1).

be their experience. [...] [She wants] people to be able to relate to what [she's] saying when [she] write[s] something" (Wilson, 1990, p. 123). The second and third stanzas display the helplessness of the speaker:

*And because I was unworthy,
He grew to loathe me.
And because I worked hard,
He despised my rough hands.
And because I was his wife,
I submitted to him. (submission)
And because I failed myself,
He punished me more.

And because he became angry,
I saw his fury everywhere.
I could feel the colour
Of his rage on my skin.
And because I was beaten,
I was moved out of my house.
And because I was battered,
I was driven out of my Parish. (ll. 9-16, 17-24)*

As abuse is not only physical but also often emotional and psychological (Horley, 1988, p. 1), it is important to highlight that these stanzas bring forward the psychological abuse in addition to the physical abuse of the speaker. This can be noticed from her choice of words as she recalls the past events of her abuse speaking out that she is "unworthy" (l. 9) and she failed herself (l. 15). The overall recital of the abuser's justifications in which the speaker always happens to cause trouble whether it is because of her appearance (l. 12) or her position as his wife (l. 13) also contribute to the psychological abuse. The emotional abuse is also very damaging to the victim as Horley explains:

When you are suffering from emotional abuse it is easy for the reality of your situation to become distorted. The longer you are abused the more you believe your partner's insults. His persistence and your dependency on him make you more vulnerable to his criticisms. (1988, p. 11)

Additionally, another problem of domestic violence can be picked from the third stanza as the speaker explains that she had to leave her house in the lines twenty-one to twenty-four. She is the one who has to move in order to be safe instead of the abuser who causes all the trouble and torment. The last stanza of the poem is conclusive as it sums up the burden of the speaker which includes having to be submissive to her abuser as she mentions: "For he is the Lord in the Lord's place / And I am his servant" (ll. 25-26), and "I am she who cannot stop / Seeing his raised hand" (ll. 31-32).

Therefore, the taboo which often causes domestic abuse to be ignored and not to be spoken about publicly is the focal problem of this poem as it bereaves women from their right of safety. The poem displays this by the speaker's helplessness of being believed, submission to her husband, and psychological weakness.

To sum up, the analyses of some of the poems in this chapter display the suppression of the LGBTQIA+ community. The poems portray a vision of individuals living double lives and their fear of rejection by family and society. These result in inner conflict in the form of an identity crisis where the individuals of this community prioritize family before their own preferences and needs. Additionally, the suppression of women is also clear in this chapter. Cases of domestic violence, assigned gender roles, normalised beauty standards, and the underestimation of women are all involved. The analyses also display how women hold themselves accountable for the torment from which they suffer and how they can be convinced that the standards of society are equal to the standards they create for themselves. Altogether, this chapter shapes the view of two groups of minorities whose identities are considered by society to be a reason as well as an opportunity for abuse and suppression.

CONCLUSION

Jackie Kay's identity positions her as a noteworthy representative of the marginalized groups. As she is Black, Scottish, female, lesbian, and adopted, Kay is part of a variety of traditionally marginalized groups who often collide with the conventional societal norms. Kay's position as a poet and former "makar" ensures a platform where she can spread her views and experiences, making it possible to challenge the norms openly. Therefore, it is also no coincidence that her drive for writing poems was motivated by her experiences with racism and her views on discrimination starting from a young age. The analysis of the selected poems in this thesis displays how Jackie Kay's poems exemplify the connection between identity and various issues related to identity within a variety of time periods, contexts, and personalities.

With identity being a broad concept, the issues which are related to identity also vary on a wide range. This thesis describes the cultural, racial, sexual, and gender identities since individuals who have them undergo discrimination, racism, exclusion, and suppression based on identity traits, such as skin colour, ethnicity, being female, being part of the LGBTQIA+ community, and being an adopted child. This study shows that there is a general understanding of identity being fluid rather than fixed, while also being able to align with the environment of the individual. This theory coincides with Kay's ideas on identity as well since she also believes it to be fluid and influenced by one's environment. Kay also suggests that defining one's own identity by means of labels is preferable only when someone defines themselves, for when others use labels to define a person it may lead to judgements and assumptions. Another remarkable point is that the poems in chapter one are more personal to Kay as the poems "The Waiting Lists," "The Telling Part," "Generations," "Black Bottom," "The Red Graveyard," and "In My Country" are autobiographical poems in contrast to the poems in chapter two which are not written based on Kay's personal experiences. Kay shares her personal experiences and portrays the experiences of others while using a variety of voices including men, women, children, Blacks, LGBTQIA+ members, and historical figures. This points out that in company with her personal experiences and feelings, she also intends to share the stories of others, both fictional and real. From the interviews it also becomes clear that, according to Kay, the issue of racism has yet to be solved.

The poetry analyses and discussions in the two main chapters of this thesis have shown how Kay represents the diverse forms of identity and the manners in which a variety of individuals experience identity. As is explained through the examples of the poems in both chapters, the core of discrimination and identity issues is the fear of the unknown, the unusual, and the unexpected cultural and sexual identities. These poems portray the issues of identity from a broad perspective, and display how these issues can be experienced regardless of age, location, or status. Chapter one focuses on the cultural identity issues and the first poem analysed in this thesis, "The Waiting Lists" (1991), shows how religion, political preference, and skin colour can affect the process of adoption. Along with the adoptive mother's effort to hide her real identity, this poem also shows how the procedures and norms of Britain in the 1960s were able to determine the faiths of both Kay and her parents based on all their identities, such as the political and religious identities of the adoptive parents as well as Kay's Black identity. The voice of the adoptive mother is also retraceable in "The Telling Part" (1991) which displays both the points of view of the adoptive mother and the adoptive child. The child's skin colour is the matter which is discussed by the adoptive mother as she aspires an environment in which each skin colour is equal. Additionally, the mother also feels the need to anticipate questions about the bond with her adopted child. This poem also expresses how the adopted child questions the reality of her adoptive mother and feels anxious, as she is not yet capable of understanding the concept of adoption. The frustrations of an individual's unidentified biological identity are reflected in the poem "Generations" (1991). The accelerator of this frustration is the constant confrontation with situations in which the speaker has to clarify that she is unfamiliar with this information. Being unfamiliar with one's identity is also reflected in "The Red Graveyard" (1993) where Kay describes how she was in need of a Black role model which she could not find in her direct circle. The speaker experiences relief of finding a cultural role model as she now has a pattern to adhere to. Kay's experiences with racism at a young age in school are displayed in "Black Bottom" (1991) as the poem narrates how both her classmates and teacher bothered her with degrading acts regarding her skin colour. A poem which is not based on Kay's own experiences but nevertheless shows discrimination of culture and skin colour is "Hottentot Venus" (1998) which recalls the story of a colonized woman in South Africa who is being "othered" by the white colonists. Although the poem is not about Kay, the degrading acts are similar which

points out systematic racism against Blacks. The oppressing atmosphere is also present in the poem “Sign” (1993) in which the gradual act of assimilation can be recognized as the oppressed culture remains helpless against the oppressor. The poem “Crown and Country” (1998) presents how a privileged group of people easily judge foreigners by comparing and contrasting their abilities in a degrading and underestimating manner, creating a division between the groups. The act of making divisions between groups within society can also be regarded in the last poem of chapter one “In My Country” (1993) which is also personal and loaded with autobiographical elements as Kay was inspired to write this poem after interacting with many people who questioned her origin. This poem represents the many looks and questions Kay receives regarding her appearance, which mostly indicate her belonging to somewhere other than Scotland.

Although Kay is both female and lesbian, the poems examined in chapter two are less personal to Kay’s life in comparison to chapter one. This fact does not eliminate Kay’s representation of the identity issues experienced by these groups of minorities. The first poem of this chapter “Pounding Rain” (1991) describes how repressed sexual identity may result in loss of time, caused by a fear based on society’s opinion. A similar case of leading a double life can be seen in “Close Shave” (1991) where the persona is a homosexual man in a heterosexual marriage, contemplating the rejection of his family and colleagues while living up to his homosexual norms in secrecy. Contrasting norms are also present in the poem “Dressing Up” (1991) which displays disapproval of a mother towards her son who likes to cross-dress, as she believes this is worse than violent actions. The pattern of disapproval by parents is also evident in “From Stranraer, South” (1998) where the mother of a lesbian girl manoeuvres her way to her goal which is breaking up her daughter and her girlfriend. As women are also a systematically suppressed and underestimated group within society, the issues of female identity are represented in this thesis as well. The representation of this issue by Kay in her poetry is evident in “Twelve Bar Bessie” (1993). This poem describes a real experience of Kay’s role model Bessie Smith. The poem also disproves the underestimations of women and portrays Smith as a courageous, independent, and strong woman. Another representation of the same issue has been observed in the depiction of the woman in the poem “Condemned property” (1993). She is portrayed by Kay as a woman who

undergoes domestic violence by her son. Regardless of the cruel actions of her son, she blames herself for the incidents as she agrees upon the societal norms in which women ought to be gentle and calming which shows that women's mind is shaped by these norms to a great extent. Another burden for women identified in this thesis and discussed in Kay's poetry are the beauty standards assigned by society. The poem "Bleep" (1998) is a great example of Kay's representation of these beauty standards as the persona sums up her admiration of fake appearances, imposed to her in disguise of the term beauty. Along with these various issues concerning women, the poem "Church Invisible" (1998) exposes the vulnerability of women who endure physical and psychological violence by their husbands. In addition to the female persona's suffering, her husband's professional position as a member of the clergy makes it harder for her to break the taboo on domestic violence.

The importance of illuminating these issues through literature lies in the informative effect it has for the oppressed and the oppressor as well. Kay explains to have found her cultural role model remote as there was no person near her who she could relate to. Therefore, the individuals who find themselves categorized in the marginal segment of society will most likely relate to the issues of cultural identity discussed in Kay's poetry. Additionally, Kay admits to coming out as a lesbian only after reading *The Women's Room* (1977) by the American feminist author Marilyn French. Kay describes in her poetry the issues of the LGBTQIA+ community, which qualifies her poetry to become a safe place for this community as well. Therefore, one of the qualities of Kay's poetry is to help understand the individual's own identity structure, encouraging them to confidently become part of their society. Furthermore, the plural nature of the voices in Kay's poetry also contributes to bring alertness to the voices of the marginalized. The evaluations in this thesis illustrate that both Kay and the featured theorists of identity share the opinion that discrimination and rejection develop from the unknown and unexpected. The analyses of the poems also show they agree upon the benefits of sharing stories considering oppression. Kay's poetry with all its detailed issues of identity is a means to create awareness, understanding, and empathy.

The variety of represented voices in Kay's poetry shows how the issues of identity are represented in an inclusive manner. Kay includes the hardships for mothers in the poems "The Waiting Lists," "The Telling Part," and "Condemned

Property.” Additionally, the struggles of Black people as children or adults are also included in the poems “Black Bottom,” “The Red Graveyard,” “In My Country,” and “Hottentot Venus.” The point of view of adoptees as minorities of the society is also integrated in the poems “The Telling Part,” “Generations,” and “The Red Graveyard.” Chapter two shows outlooks of the LGBTQIA+ community and hereby reflects the difficulties they experience in the poems “Pounding Rain,” “Close Shave,” “Dressing Up,” and “From Stranraer, South.” Moreover, although women are not necessarily less in number than men, their hardships as a suppressed group in society are displayed in “Condemned Property,” “Bleep,” and “Church Invisible.” In contrast to the hardships for women, “Twelve Bar Bessie” challenges the standards of society and praises the strength of women. Kay’s attempt of honouring significant individuals from the past is also noteworthy and can be regarded in both chapters through the poems “The Red Graveyard,” “Hottentot Venus,” and “Twelve Bar Bessie.” Contradictory to the points of view of the various oppressed group within society, the analysed poems in this thesis also shed light on the viewpoints of the oppressors. These viewpoints disclose the fact that discrimination and rejection can come from adults as well as children as can be regarded in the poem “Black Bottom,” men as well as women as seen in “In My Country” and “Hottentot Venus,” and strangers as well as family members as exhibited in “Pounding Rain,” “Dressing Up,” and “From Stranraer, South.” Therefore, in addition to the diverse oppressed groups of people, there is also diversity in the oppressing groups.

It is also notable that the poems in chapter one reflect discrimination by society whereas the discrimination in chapter two also includes rejection by family members in the poems “Dressing Up” and “From Stranraer, South,” the fear of rejection by family members in the poem “Close Shave,” and violence by family members in the poems “Condemned Property” and “Church Invisible.” Also, the biological parent/child relationship in chapter one is more desired, loving, and respectful in contrast to the biological parent/child relationships in the poems “From Stranraer, South” and “Dressing Up” which are clearly toxic.

The variety of tones and figures of speech Kay uses in her poems ensure greater delivery of the messages. Her conducted interviews in different time spheres in addition to the facts about Britain during the dates of the poems, and the scientific observations regarding the concept of identity confirm the points of view of Kay’s

poetry analysed in this thesis. As the techniques and literary forms Kay uses in her poetry, such as the dramatic monologue and shift of tones intensify the communication of her narratives, it is important to highlight her recurring literary elements.

The shift of tones Kay presents in her poetry contribute to the expression of the intensity of emotions of her personas. The poems in both chapters reflect how discrimination in the areas of culture and sexuality can evoke strong feelings within the discriminated individual. It is remarkable that the actions of discrimination, racism, and rejection in the analysed poems lead to similar outcomes when deciding for the mood of the speakers. Frustration can be observed in the tone of the adoptee in "Generations" and the son in "Dressing Up." In addition, uncertainty and helplessness are also recurring tones expressed by the adoptive mother in "The Waiting Lists," the adoptive child in "The Telling Part," the adoptee in "Generations," the adoptive child in "Black Bottom," the adoptive child in "The Red Graveyard," and the girl in "Sign." In chapter two this tone proceeds through the lesbian couple in "Pounding Rain," the miner in "Close Shave," the mother in "Condemned Property," the daughter in "From Stranraer, South," and the wife in "Church Invisible." The tones of the oppressors in the poems are also similar to each other. The clearly demanding and mocking tones are reflected by the teacher in "Black Bottom," the observing woman in "In My Country," the exhibition visitors in "Hottentot Venus," and the speaker in "Crown and Country" show that a lack of empathy is what these oppressors have in common. The oppressors in chapter two who are family members also express these attitudes as the behaviour of the mother in "Dressing Up," and the mother in "From Stranraer, South" are revealed. Although the tone in these poems reflect the personal feelings of the personas, the pattern also shows the power division between the oppressors and the oppressed.

What most poems of chapter one and two have in common is the use of dramatic monologue. It is important to emphasize this feature as the analysis in this thesis exhibit the benefit while defining personal and sensitive topics as discrimination and racism. The used retrospective form likewise contributes to conveying personal experiences in the poems "Black Bottom," "Hottentot Venus," "Pounding Rain," "Close Shave," and "From Stranraer, South." Understanding or

relating to the speakers in these poems becomes easier as they give insight on their thoughts.

The analyses of the poems in this thesis also demonstrate the limitations which an individual experiences while being discriminated. First of all, the oppression by a demanding authoritarian can be regarded in the poems “Black Bottom” and “Sign.” Being humiliated also reappears in the poems “Black Bottom,” “Hottentot Venus,” and “Crown and Country.” It is also remarkable that the discriminated individuals in this thesis cannot openly live to the ideals of their identity as there is a need to live double lives like the adoptive mother in “The Waiting Lists” and the miner in “Close Shave,” or having to be discreet as the couple in “Pounding Rain.” The need to adapt to societal expectations is also a limitation for the individuals as demonstrated in “Bleep” and “Sign.” And the limitations for the adoptive individuals are firstly being in need of a role model as in “The Red Graveyard” and also constantly being questioned about one’s background as in “Generations” and “In My Country.”

Altogether, according to the results of this thesis, it could be stated that the issues of identity in Jackie Kay’s poems are caused by unawareness and ignorance of the mass of the population which makes the traditional norms weigh heavier than the acceptance of alternative identities. This creates a space for the marginalized identities to be perceived as the “other,” resulting in experiences of sorrow and exclusion experienced by these marginalized individuals as the aftermath of racism, discrimination, and rejection by society as well as close family. In addition to her own experiences, Kay also provides a platform for the identity issues of others and aims to prevent the disappearance of historical Black people. Change in discourse is a possibility to challenge the norm step by step and create awareness leading to acceptance of all identities.

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