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# ENGLISHNESS, BLACKNESS AND DISCOURSES OF BELONGING IN SELECTED WORKS OF KWAME KWEI-ARMAH

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my children; Afuhmbeng Junior, Christ-Reigns Arrey and David  
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## ABSTRACT

This work entitled “Englishness, Blackness and Discourses of Belonging in Selected Works of Kwame Kwei-Armah” sets out to show how Kwei-Armah portrays conflicting and irreconcilable identity signifiers between Englishness and Blackness in *Elmina’s Kitchen*, *Fix Up* and *Statement of Regret*. Kwei-Armah attempts at defining the place of the black British in contemporary England, not only by stepping into history through the voices of black political artists, thinkers and writers of the past but by also condemning the excesses and conceptions of black British settlers. The work therefore presents Kwei-Armah as one who indulges in a political act aimed at asserting a black British auditory aesthetic, reflective of the black urban truth. Against this backdrop, the work shows how the playwright responds to two political questions: the relationship between the English and the black British, and between public opinion (national/popular culture) and individual freewill. By focusing on diverse aspects of his plays, particularly on the reductive influence of Englishness on the black British, the work explores black identity articulations and indications that can largely stand as both inclusive and exclusive identity signifiers such as ethno-centrism and globalization. Through qualitative research method, the work is analysed from the New Historicist, Psychoanalytic and social identity theoretical frameworks. New historicism does not only place Kwei-Armah’s dramatic art in context but sheds light on the perspective from which he views power relations. Psychoanalysis on its part analyses Kwei-Armah’s realism and artistic ingenuity, which can only be understood if we take into account the playwright’s psychological insight. The triptych is a unity of past, present and future representing ideas and discussions on black identity in contemporary Britain.

## RESUME

Cette étude intitulée « Englishness, Blackness and Discourses of Belonging in Selected Works of Kwame Kwei-Armah » vise à décrire la manière dont Kwei-Armah dépeint les signifiants identitaires conflictuels et inconciliables entre l'anglicité et l'africanité dans *Elmina's Kitchen*, *Fix Up* et *Statement of Regret*. Elle présente l'approche qu'utilise l'auteur pour définir la place des Britanniques d'origine africaine au sein de l'Angleterre contemporaine. En plus de procéder par une immersion dans l'histoire à travers les voix des artistes politiques, des penseurs et des écrivains noirs engagés du passé, l'auteur condamne également les excès et les conceptions des colons britanniques noirs. L'étude présente à cet effet Kwei-Armah comme cet auteur qui se livre à un acte politique visant à affirmer une esthétique de l'écoute dans la littérature noire britannique, reflet de la vérité urbaine noire. Dans ce contexte, l'étude présente les réponses qu'apporte le dramaturge à deux questions politiques, notamment la relation entre les Anglais et les Britanniques d'origine africaine, et celle entre l'opinion publique (culture nationale/populaire) et le libre arbitre individuel. En se concentrant sur divers aspects de ses pièces, notamment sur l'influence réductrice de l'anglicité sur les Britanniques d'origine africaine, Kwei-Armah explore les articulations et les indications de l'identité noire qui peuvent largement se présenter comme des signifiants identitaires à la fois inclusifs et exclusifs, tels que l'ethnocentrisme et la mondialisation. À travers une méthode de recherche qualitative, l'œuvre est analysée à partir des cadres théoriques du nouvel historicisme, de la psychanalyse et de l'identité sociale. Le nouvel historicisme ne place pas seulement l'art dramatique de Kwei-Armah dans son contexte, mais aussi d'éclairer la perspective dans laquelle il envisage les relations de pouvoir. La psychanalyse, quant à elle, nous aidera à analyser le réalisme et l'ingéniosité artistique du dramaturge, qui ne peuvent être compris que si l'on tient compte de la vision psychologique de ce dernier. Le triptyque est une unité du passé, du présent et du futur représentant des idées et des discussions sur l'identité noire dans la Grande-Bretagne contemporaine.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                          |            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>DEDICATION .....</b>                                                                  | <b>i</b>   |
| <b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>                                                             | <b>ii</b>  |
| <b>ABSTRACT .....</b>                                                                    | <b>iii</b> |
| <b>RESUME .....</b>                                                                      | <b>iv</b>  |
| <b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>                                                                | <b>1</b>   |
| Statement of the Research Problem .....                                                  | 10         |
| Research Questions .....                                                                 | 10         |
| Hypothesis .....                                                                         | 11         |
| Aim of the Study .....                                                                   | 11         |
| Significance of Study .....                                                              | 12         |
| Methodology .....                                                                        | 12         |
| Scope and Limitation of the Study .....                                                  | 13         |
| Definition of Key Terms .....                                                            | 13         |
| Structure of Work .....                                                                  | 16         |
| <b>CHAPTER ONE .....</b>                                                                 | <b>18</b>  |
| <b>REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....</b>                              | <b>18</b>  |
| Literature Review .....                                                                  | 18         |
| Theoretical Framework .....                                                              | 29         |
| <b>CHAPTER TWO .....</b>                                                                 | <b>45</b>  |
| <b>INFLUENCES ON THE AUTHOR AND REPRESENTATIONS OF BLACK BRITISH CONSCIOUSNESS .....</b> | <b>45</b>  |
| Biography of the Author .....                                                            | 46         |
| Historical Influences .....                                                              | 53         |
| Literary Influences and Authorial Voice .....                                            | 57         |
| <b>CHAPTER THREE .....</b>                                                               | <b>72</b>  |
| <b>DOMINANT NOTIONS OF ENGLISHNESS AND BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS .....</b>                     | <b>72</b>  |
| Englishness and Black British Experiences .....                                          | 72         |
| Traumatic Syndrome .....                                                                 | 83         |
| <b>CHAPTER FOUR .....</b>                                                                | <b>92</b>  |
| <b>DISCOURSES OF BELONGING AND RESILIENCE .....</b>                                      | <b>92</b>  |
| African Ancestral Heritage and the Question of Belonging .....                           | 92         |
| Strategies of Resilience .....                                                           | 106        |
| <b>CONCLUSION .....</b>                                                                  | <b>114</b> |
| <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>                                                                | <b>119</b> |

## INTRODUCTION

Twentieth Century Black British literature by West Indian authors has its beginnings with the arrival of the Slave Ship Empire Windrush in 1945. With a small immigrant population agreeing to work menial jobs, Britain witnessed a phenomenal growth of a first-generation West Indian population. It is the children of these immigrants that we refer to as the Black British generation. Black British writing was then born out of the struggles and dislocation of these new generations of Black citizens. Black British literature, better called the literature written in English by the Caribbean, African and Asian writers and their descendants, comprises of the literary aesthetics produced by successive generations from ex-British colonies in Britain.

This literature is a representation of this generation's overall experiences in Britain, London in particular. According to Mark Stein's *Cultures of Hybridity: Reading Black British Literature*, Palgrave Macmillan, their writings addresses the iconography of Britain as well as the exertion of cultural power. He regards the writings of those people as novel, and by extension, a literature of transformation which does not only portray changing Britain but, crucially, is partly responsible for the changes witnessed today.

Before the 1970s, on the whole, the African (Diran Adebayo, Oladipo Agboluaje) and Caribbean (Darren Jordon) dramatists and theatre practitioners living in England were more concerned with depicting the changes experienced in the hostland expressed in creole "strange" language. One Caribbean writer, who concerns himself with the literature of transformation, while exposing the ill treatment by London society towards black immigrants, is Samuel Selvon. Selvon's literature is known for its often dismal (gloom and depression) exemplification of London. Ranging from his work *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *Moses Ascending* (1975), *Moses Migrating* (1983), *Those Who Eat the Cascadura* (1972) and others.

Plays about the black experience in Britain though few, were often represented by white dramatists such as Shelagh Delaney in *A Taste of Honey*, Penguin books (2010), which narrates a story of an alcoholic single Heleen and of Jo, her white teenage daughter who is in a relationship with a black sailor and Lorraine Hansberry. Attempts at running black theatre companies were short lived as black theatre practitioners struggled to operate professionally

(Kershaw Baz, p.324). Kershaw Baz cites the Negro Theatre Company (1948), initiated by Edric Connor; the West Indian drama Group (1956-9); the Ira Aldridge Players (1961), both initiated by white directors from Unity, Joan Clarke and Herbert Marshall respectively; Lloyd Reckord New Day Theatre Company (1960); Clifton Jones The New Negro Theatre Company (1960) and Edric and Pear Connor's Negro Theatre Workshop (1961-1968) as examples of African and Caribbean theatre companies that shot their doors after only few years of operation.

Most critics of black British drama like Deidre Osborne, Barry Reckord, Debbie Tucker, Michael Christopher Pearce, Stuart Hall just to mention a few, hold that a continuous tradition of black playwrights engaging directly with the black experience in Britain began with the birth of the alternative theatre or fringe (outer edge of area or group) in the 1960s. During this period, "the theatre, inspired by the revolutionary fervour of the student, civil rights and anti-war movements, sought to explore important socio-political issues and to challenge the status quo of the mainstream (Kershaw, Baz, 357). The political and cultural inspiration, which fuelled artistic experimentation, resulted in a flourishing international traffic in culture "predominantly through the Atlantic axis" (Kershaw, Baz, 357). For black theatre in Britain, 1968 marked the beginning of a major shift. Young Mustapha Matura, a prominent Trinidadian playwright and screenwriter, who in the late 1960 described the changes which were occurring in the USA and filtering across the Atlantic as political and artistic fertilizer which would nurture the voice of the new generation of black artists in Britain:

*Then 1968 arrived. The social and economic changes amongst young people began to create other forms of expression: the fringe, the underground – the alternative culture was born. It was the time too of the Vietnam war; flower power; revolutionary politicians cohabiting with peace and love devotees; rallies at the Roundhouse in London, political as well as artistic in content. It was also a time of serious personal and psychological changes for the colonized people around the world; for as well as flower power in 1968 there was also Black Power. Information and knowledge about their lives and history was arriving at breakneck speed, the effects of which were so dramatic and inspiring. (Mustapha Matura, ix).*

These changes sweeping across the USA and the transatlantic ocean saw the "new" generation of African and Caribbean dramatists such as Kwame Kwei-Armah who felt the urge and the need to speak, to tell it like it was/is, to pass it on and to inform the rest of their



contemporaries. This alternative culture gave birth to alternative theatre, which later attracted African and Caribbean dramatists and novelist of the likes of William Roy, Bola Agbage, and Bernadine Evaristos, respectively. These playwrights saw the need to explore the times, not just by presenting the politics of the homeland, but by representing what life was really like for blacks in Britain. They understood that the easiest way to fail as an African or a Caribbean writer living in Britain was to content themselves with the imitation of British elegance and homeland inelegance, refusing to see the reality of black's lives in Britain. This alternative theatre by American Black Power movement greatly influenced black theatre in Britain. The American Black Power movement emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a response to the civil rights movement, emphasizing the need for racial dignity, equality, economic and political self-sufficiency, the struggle of African Americans to broader anti-colonial and liberation movements globally, advocating for solidarity with oppressed peoples worldwide and empowerment for African Americans. Prominent figures associated with the Black Power movement included Stokely Carmichael (who popularized the term "Black Power"), Angela Davis, Malcolm X (whose ideas influenced the movement), and leaders of the Black Panther Party such as Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. It marked a shift from integrationist approaches, like those advocated by figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., to a more militant stance, focusing on Black pride and cultural identity. Its activists believed in the necessity of self-governance and control over their own communities, advocating for the development of independent institutions, businesses, and political structures.

The movement encouraged African Americans to embrace and celebrate their Black identity, heritage, and culture. It promoted the idea that Black people should be proud of their history and ancestry. The radical movement was often associated with more confrontational tactics and the belief that systemic change required challenging existing political structures. Groups like the Black Panther Party, played a significant role in this aspect, advocating for armed self-defense and community programs. Economically, the movement stood for equality and justice, with efforts directed at combating unemployment and poverty within Black communities, promoting Black-owned businesses, and demanding fair wages. The Black Power movement left a lasting legacy on American society, shifting to the British society, influencing subsequent movements for racial justice and continued to resonate in contemporary discussions about race, identity, and social justice.

To understand the artistic influence of American Black Power movement on black theatre in Britain, it is necessary to examine the way in which Black Power in the USA found artistic representation through the work of the Black Arts Movement (BAM). The BAM, an African American-led art movement made up of politically motivated black poets, artists, dramatists, musicians and writers who emerged in the wake of the Black Power Movement. The poet Imamu Amiri Bakara is widely considered to be the father of the BAM, which began in the 1960s and ended in 1970s. The movement was widespread, with Harlem its epicentre, and comprised of a number of poets, playwrights, intellectuals and artists of which Jones / Baraka, Ed Bullins, Larry Neal, Sonia Sanchez, Askia Touré and Marvin X are its most distinguished contributors. The BAM defined itself as “the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept” (Larry Neal, (29-39).

The goal of the political movement as described by Baraka was “to create an art, a literature that would fight for black people’s liberation” (45). And also, to put forth the black hyper masculinity in response to historical humiliation and degradation of African American men. The BAM proposed to reveal the particularities, struggles, strengths and celebration of African Americans through the creation of prose, poetry, visual arts, and theatre. The BAM rejected standard English and its syntax in favour of Black English, a more colloquial and vernacular language filled with chants, dialects and slogans. They peppered it with street language and idiomatic phrases that were simple and direct and often irreverent. The alternative literature became filled with what William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (W.E.B. Du Bois) terms “Negro theatre” polished with Black aesthetic near the mass of ordinary Negro people; The Black Arts Movement believes that your ethics and your aesthetics are one. That the contradictions between ethics and aesthetics in western society is symptomatic of a dying culture (31).

This belief channelled a didacticism in their works and as the BAM’s desired and attempted to express and define a black aesthetics, writers like Roland Rees, Ed Berman and Mustapha Matura translated the BAM ideology and style to England. In the 1970s, a white British director Roland Rees who had recently returned from the US, began to stage works in London written by some radical playwrights of America’s BAM, and between 1968 and 1970, “Rees directed five British premieres political acumen that he found totally lacking in British playwriting” (quoted by Roland Rees (73). Mustapha Matura, a British playwright of Indian origin took the relay in spreading this new literary form and ideology of BAM. He made his

debut with a series of short vignettes entitled *Black Piece's* staged alongside the world premiere of "*Bees Dat Way*", "*Clara's Ole Man and Jones*" (Michael Conveney "*All messed up and nowhere to go*" 76). Matura constructed works "... around the lesson that white consumer culture erodes and impinges on the development of black consciousness and self-determination" (78). Generally, he staged a group of men whose lust after a white girl gets in the way of survival. Another remarkable aspect of his short vignettes and that will influence the next generation of writers like Kwame Kwei-Armah, was his depicting of the black experience in London in a dialect. They were attracted to Matura's commitment and public service. A number of black British plays exhibit the BAM's – and "Black Power's-influence", evidenced in their thematic and stylistic approach.

Michael Pearce argues that a number of contemporary dramatists also waived "education" with "entertainment in their works, such as Sol B. Rivers in *Collections-River Plays 1 and 2* and Kwame Kwei-Armah in *Elmina's Kitchen* (47). These plays are also non-linear and echo the symbolism and revolutionary tone of plays by the BAM's members from whence second generation playwrights like Kwei-Armah got his inspiration.

General review of lackness, Englishness and belonging ....Kwame Kwei-Armah is an actor, writer and director and has worked extensively in theatre, television and radio. His debut play, *A Bitter Herb* (2001), was written in 1999 and produced at the Bristol Old Vic in 2001. Meanwhile, in 1999, *Big Nose* (2001), based on Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* and co-written with Chris Monks, opened at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry. That same year his soul musical, *Hold On* (then entitled *Blues Brother, Soul Sister*) (2001), premiered at the Bristol Old Vic before touring nationally. In 2003, *Elmina's Kitchen* (2003) premiered at the National Theater's Cottesloe theatre, before transferring to the Garrick Theatre in 2005 where it became the first drama by a black British-born writer to be staged in the West End (67). Kwei-Armah followed *Elmina's Kitchen* with two new plays, both of which also premiered at the Cottesloe: *Fix Up* (2004) in 2004 and *Statement of Regret* (2007) in 2007. Together the three plays comprise what Kwei-Armah refers to as his "triptych". After *Statement of Regret*, he has written two other plays, *Let There Be Love* (2009) and *Seize the Day* (2009), both of which premiered at London's Tricycle theatre in 2008 and 2009 respectively and were directed by Kwei-Armah. His plays are all set in contemporary London, demonstrating his commitment to representing the contemporary metropolitan black British experience. *Elmina's Kitchen* was also performed in Baltimore and Chicago, making it as one of a handful of plays written by

black Britons to have the Atlantic. In 2011, Kwei-Armah relocated to the United States of America where he became Artistic Director of the Center Stage in Baltimore.

The President of the board of Centerstage in Baltimore Lynn Deering, calling the young director “my friend”, had this to say while introducing Kwei-Armah in 2008 Theatre Communications Group (TCG) National Conference:

*He arrived in Baltimore in 2005 for the premier of Elmina’s Kitchen, one of the trilogy of plays set in London’s West Indian community, that eloquently tackles family and fatherhood, violence and responsibility. It was also the first play by an African Caribbean playwright to be produced in London’s West End. When he spoke of his personal connection to this play, and his own role and responsibility as a father, he touched people deeply and personally and, at the same time, he was a catalyst for difficult conversations across our community. He is a natural conduit for public discussion. (Quoted by Lynn Deering, 1).*

Deering holds that Kwame’s many pursuits are fuelled by great passions and he has the rare ability to make fruitful connections in his myriad roles as poet, musician, television and stage actor, commentator, director, playwright, goodwill ambassador. The world is his stage. In moments of disagreement, Kwei-Armah creates common ground, not confrontation. Kwei-Armah personifies the creative, unifying force of the arts. “I love his big thinking and his great heart. He has a global reach, a personal touch and inspires all of us to be unconstrained by boundaries”, said Deering.

Kwei-Armah’s determination to be at the service of his people started as far back as when he was eleven or twelve years old, when he came to understand the meaning of “slave” and “root”. Lynn Deering reports that “Kwei-Armah was 12 years old when he started pondering over African, Caribbean and British” (4). He remembers that after watching a particular TV episode (*Roots*), he ran up to his mother and said, “Mum. That’s what I’m going to do. I’m going to trace our ancestry and I’m gonna get us back to our African roots. I’m gonna give us back our African name” (5). He knew that he could achieve this through playwriting since the stage had already been set by Roland Rees, Ed Berman and Mustapha Matura whose BAM ideology thrilled Kwei-Armah. He therefore produced literary works with an authentic voice of the black working-class, “rustics” and gangsters like Digger, Dougie, Clifton, Kwesi, Brother Kiyi, Kwaku etc, who struggled to belong in Britain. His representation of themes of belonging, black self-consciousness, latent racism, outright discrimination and

reparation takes a political dimension in plays like *Elmina's Kitchen*, *Fix Up* and *Statement of Regret*.

The television series of *Roots* had a profound impact on the young Kwei-Armah (then Ian Roberts): "It was on when I was 11 and I changed my path. It inspired me to start connecting myself with Africa and to find my true identity" (80). Kwei-Armah identified strongly with the African American sense of rootlessness. Born in Britain to Grenadian parents, Kwei-Armah felt disconnected from his parents' culture and struggled to find his place in Britain. Looking back at his youth, Kwei-Armah expresses a profound sense of dislocation:

*When I was young I never had a home. I used to call myself at sixteen famously a "universal alien". When I walked out on the streets in London, they'd say "Go back home, you black bastard". When I went to the West Indies they'd say, "You're English". When I go to Africa, they say "Go home. Look at you, Bob Marley". I'd never had a home until I discovered that I was an African and that actually, I was a diasporic African (quoted by Davis, 247)*

This triggered his search for his true identity and a return to his roots- liberation, he yearns to belong. The feeling of belonging distinguishes by the need to establish close and safe ties that generate a sense of security, care, and affection. It is an interpersonal relationship in which the emotional bond with the other becomes significant and necessary for an individual's overall development (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kindermamm, 2008). According to these authors, bond perception is essential to the belonging theory, and it makes people establish a minimum amount of meaningful relationships.

Abraham Maslow in *The Need to Belong: Rediscovering Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, argues by attributing significant value to the sense of belonging and social acceptance throughout life. The primary interest of belonging is a psychological sense of being in a state of communion with others or a safe unit. Human beings need to live collectively or belong to a group that allows rooting and generates identity and social reference. Sense of belonging is the biggest reason to form groups, communities, and societies. All people feel the need to belong to be part of something through identification.

According to Ana Allen Gomes' belonging mediation conveys the mediate to establish links that will anchor and provide a life story construction. She emphasized that:

*A human being needs to feel at home in order to maintain his/her mental health, in other words, he/she needs to belong to something, to recognize and be recognized, to identify and be identified by his/her peers, to have certain relationship, and to be part of a greater whole that welcomes and protects him/her. Belonging to something, beyond decentralizing from an egocentric omnipotence, nurtures a sense of pleasure and communion, since human beings cannot respond alone to their existential issues (36).*

This is why in his mid-twenties, young Ian Roberts went to Ghana where he traced his family genealogy and changed his name to Kwame Kwei-Armah on his return. His identification with Afrocentric ideology was the direct result of his experiences of racism and marginalization while growing up in the United Kingdom in the 1970s and 1980s. Defining himself as a “diasporic African” gave Kwei-Armah a sense of belonging to a Black Atlantic community. Kwei-Armah sees himself occupying an interstitial position between three cultures which define his identity:

*I call myself tri-cultural: I'm African, Caribbean and British. And each one of those has an equal part to play and I can be one or all at the same time depending on what it is” (quoted by Davis, 240).*

Kwei-Armah’s sense of self and political consciousness as a “diasporic African” is not refracted through the Caribbean, but rather through black America. It was through *Roots* that Kwei-Armah literally “discovered” Africa and decided to change his name. Similarly, his Pan-African, Afrocentric politics stems in the main from African American cultural nationalist thinkers. On his political influences that have shaped his works, he states:

*My work comes from a cultural perspective that is supported by my Pan-Africanist politics [... ] My politics is a diasporic, black politics influenced by the philosophies of Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X and the writings of James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka. It is non-apologetic politics (quoted in Deidre Osborne, 253-263).*

In an interview Kwei-Armah said “I also wanted to look at the issues of being ‘mixed race’ or ‘bicultural’ in a world that divides itself often into straight black and white”. The ideas of the African American Cultural nationalists like Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X sharpened his political triptych evident in *Fix Up* that he claimed would be the last new play of his that his

mother would see, and at the end of the final performance, she thanked him for telling that story. That of itself was worth more than every prize in the world. It was every prize in the world. Brother Kiyi is a Rasta man just like Bob Marley and the music he listens to is Marcus Garvey and Pan-African characters are seen through posters, and in some cases, their voices are heard on tapes played or in books read out aloud. Apart from Garvey, the above mixture of activists and writers are all African American and even Garvey spent a substantial time in the USA. Therefore, black America is also an influence that has shaped his identity, politics and arts.

In a number of plays, African Americans provide a starting point for Kwei-Armah's engagement with the black situation in Britain: *Elmina's Kitchen*, presents characters who identify with British immigrant community and, in-line with the trend in the USA of writers using slave names at the centre of the play, a character who reflects his African heritage, thus rejecting earlier plays (written by black British) such as *A Raisin in the Sun* for aligning to British values and dramatic traditions.

The play *Fix Up* (2004) was inspired by a book of African American slave narratives that Kwei-Armah received as a gift from his agent at the opening night of *Elmina's Kitchen* (2003), where he continues to echo the aims and the style of the BAM, incorporating themes of diaspora such as the generation gap between first-generation immigrants and their British-born children. In *Statement of Regret* (2007), Kwei-Armah bases the play's central theme on African American social scientist Dr Joy De Gruy Leary's theory of "*post-traumatic slave syndrome*" in her book of the same title. In her book, Leary argues that the trauma of slavery continues to impact upon the psychological development of black Americans. *Statement of Regret* deals with black life in Britain; how they escape from the realities of being a black man, and how they refuse looking at the world in any political context. Focus is about escapism, reparation and resilience: how frustrated they became because reparation and not bothering about issues that relate to their roots and define their true identity, thereby concealing their pains and worries which led to different forms of trauma. Therefore, in representing the specific black British reality in their linguistic idioms and jargons, Kwei-Armah indulged in a political act aimed at asserting a black British auditory aesthetic, reflective of the black urban truth.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Kwei-Armah's dramatic triptych explores the intersections of Englishness, blackness and discourses of belonging within the context of contemporary British society. However, the research problem envisaged in this study is to examine how Kwei-Armah's plays engage with, and potentially challenge dominant narratives around national identity, race, experiences of inclusion/exclusion of black British individuals and also, it seeks to reiterate the regret over centuries of discrimination that exists between the black and the white, and more especially, between the mixed-race and the Blacks, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is problematic. These notions have to do with the representations of dual or hybrid cultural identities as well as portrayals of the tensions and contradictions inherent in claims of an "English national identity" from the perspective of Black British characters.

### **Research Questions**

The author presents Britain as an oppressive society but the question that comes to mind is, does he leave Britain and the Black British in that same doldrums? That anguish effects imprinted in every Black British creates an inner sensation of belonging to a minority in their own country as this has been emphasized with respect to the plight of three generations of Black British immigrants. In an attempt to understand the above conceptions in Kwei-Armah's selected works, the following research questions keep recurring:

- How does Kwei-Armah's triptych plays represent the lived experiences of black British characters and the negotiations of dual or hybrid cultural identities?
- In what ways do the selected texts engage with and challenge dominant notions of Englishness and black consciousness?
- How does the playwright portray discourses of belonging and resilience?

Kwei-Armah is driven by the link between current affairs, the history of slave trade and colonization which provide insights into the urgent need to resolve the pain and anger of the past and the continued degradation and humiliation faced by the black immigrants. The work therefore presents the playwright as a victim interested in creating narratives that condemn the history of slave trade and colonization, celebrate cultural inheritance while challenging negative stereotypes in the society. The above questions will be answered in the course of the study.



## **Hypothesis**

This work is based on the assumption that a distinctive new voice is needed to liberate the Black British community from British social conventions and institutionalized modes of existence believed to be guarantors of British aesthetics. Faced with this ambivalence, we hold that Kwei-Armah is wittingly giving a voice and a call for reparation, to the generation that came from the Caribbean, West Indies and Africa who did not choose to come to London; as children, they walked the streets of London when it was cold, and end up losing their roots. Under this study, the concept of belonging only becomes a problem when it is politicized with one group seeing itself as being superior to the other.

## **Aim of the Study**

The aim, purpose, and objectives of this work titled “Englishness, Blackness and Discourses of Belonging” is articulated as follows:

The primary aim of the study is to explore the interconnections between constructions of English identity and Black identities in contemporary discourse, focusing on how these identities negotiate and challenge ideas of belonging within British society. This work will investigate how notions of "Englishness" are constructed, challenged, and redefined in the context of growing multiculturalism and the experiences of Black individuals and communities in London.

The specific objectives are: To analyze how these identities are represented in various cultural productions, such as literature and public discourses, in this case, the selected works of Kwame Kwei-Amah and how these representations impact social perceptions of belonging.

To explore the intersection of race, class, gender, and other social categories in the construction of identity and belonging, examining how these intersections complicate simple narratives of inclusion or exclusion by looking at the implications of national policies, public attitudes, and social movements on the experiences of Black individuals in relation to English identity.

This work also seeks to demonstrate how black British individuals embrace their African heritage and the question of identity with regards to discourses of belonging and resilience.

## **Significance of Study**

This research work is significant in that, it will contribute to scholarly discussions around representations of race, identity, and nationhood in contemporary British literature and theatre. It will also enhance critical understanding of how Kwei-Armah's works engages with and intervenes in ongoing debates around the boundaries and meaning of Englishness. Although Kwei-Armah wrote about a people far from his society, his plays remain very relevant to our society today. This work will provide insights into the dilemma of blacks in Britain with regards to their experiences and identity, showing how Black British over the time have endeavoured to create a space for themselves in a highly complex society and, even though much has been done towards improving the minority's welfare (even in our country), many of the issues Kwei-Armah raises in his works are still relevant to communities with minority problems like Cameroon. This means that the socio-political and cultural significance of this work to Cameroon in particular and to other countries in the world at large, cannot be underestimated. By drawing from his revolutionary plays, and because of the playwright's willingness to go into the cabins of the poor Black British immigrants' societies where racism/tribalism, Belonging-Anglophone/Francophone, violence, imprisonment, drug, and other crimes flourish, his plays are well-placed to diagnosed Cameroon's socio-political problems. The work will therefore cast a long shadow of memory in communities with minority issues.

In summary, "Englishness, Blackness and Discourses of Belonging" could serve as an important tool for examining and understanding the intersections of race and national identity, fostering dialogue and reflection across British, Black British, African and Cameroonian contexts.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative analysis will form the basis of data collection and interpretation. In this study, data on the topic under discussion is primarily taken from the selected texts under study while secondary sources of information are gathered from documented materials from the libraries and from the internet. This will comprise of works from other authors, critical materials that have been written by other researchers and critics on the works of the playwright and critical works related to the topic under study. For a better understanding of the issues raised, criticisms from Black British and African American with regards to other theories like

psychoanalytic, new historicism and social identity theory will be explored to interrogate the discursive constructions of race, ethnicity and national identity as well as discourses of belonging in the selected plays.

### **Scope and Limitation of the Study**

This work is limited to the trilogy of Kwame Kwei-Armah: *Elmina's Kitchen*, *Fix Up* and *Statement of Regret*, with *Elmina's Kitchen* which sets the tone for his political and social writing exposing the imitation of the British elegance and its repercussions although, Kwei-Armah has written many other texts. As far as “Discourses of Belonging” are concerned, these three texts accurately and compassionately describe the communities’ intersections of Englishness, blackness, expressions of belonging and exclusion of black individuals. (act as a “catalyst for a debate” within them). These plays unfold in “forums” of various kinds, peopled by characters who both represent and question the social, racial, and generational categories they belong to. In terms of contextual considerations, the research situates Kwei-Armah’s works within broader socio-political and cultural landscape of contemporary Britain, considering how they engage with and respond to ongoing debates around race, immigration and national identity.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The fact that words change their meanings when used in different contexts warrants a definition of key terms and phrases used in this study. The key words are: “Englishness”, “blackness”, “discourses of belonging”. The word “Englishness” has been defined by Ailsa Henderson and Richard Wyn Jones as an “ethnic nationalism which sees only ethnically ‘pure’ English people as truly English” (ix). In *Real England: The Battle against the Bland* by Paul Kingnorth, “Englishness is part of a historic notion with specific markers and traits, and with a sense of itself and a place in the world” (21). Therefore, drawing from the definitions above, “Englishness” is that civic nationalism that goes with the English ethnic group. In this light, and as Mark Perryman puts it in *Breaking up Britain* ... “Englishness is being born or settled in England, and fully belonging to all that is remotely English” (43). This means that it is not enough to have been born or to have settled in England, or to have desired to belong, but it is the duty of the native English to make them belong. As the work will show, the black British dwellers were given a place and not a sense of belonging. Kate Fox attempts to describe some

features of the English mentality in her *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* where she defines Englishness on the basis of the central – “core”– characteristics and three “clusters”, and in this respect, the core of the English mentality stands for “social dis-ease”. Under this label, Fox lists all the “chronic social inhibitions of the English, namely inability to engage in a normal conversation without being overly polite, awkwardness and embarrassment in all social situations. She claims that both the “English reserve” and “English hooliganism,” first being famous and the latter being infamous, are results of this dis-ease. Indeed, the English tend to be moving between two extremes – they are either overly polite and restrained or loud and violent. It will be postulated in this work that Englishness has developed into a particular conservative nationalism whose construction has led to an exclusive rather than inclusive identity.

According to the *New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary*, “Blackness” is “the fact or state of belonging to a population group that has dark pigmentation of the skin: the fact or state of being black”. To Encyclopedia “... it refers to people of African descent and the degree to which they look like the African stereotype before and after their biological mixture with other groups in the Atlantic world”. This descriptive category referred to in the above definitions began with Africa’s contact with Europe and continued with the slave trade, the rise of colonialism, and the creation of African communities in the New World. But blackness as a concept does not always self-constitute. To Richard Schechner in *Performance Studies: An Introduction to Blackness*, it “defies categorization, is slippery and is ever beyond the reach of one’s grasp” (2). Other critics have however tried to define it. For Annemi Conradie in his PhD Thesis, titled *Cultural Appropriation and Commodification of Historic Blackness in Post-apartheid fabric and décor design*, “dreadlocks, vernacular speech, living in a particular part of town, etc. as the components of the template from which blackness originates” (98). E. Patrick Johnson in *Appropriating Blackness, Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* holds that “blackness is black culture [whose] notion implies the existence of its opposite, the fake, and this dichotomous construct” (153), and this is at the heart of what makes blackness. Like “Englishness”, “blackness” operates within very specific and narrow boundaries guided by a particular political, social and cultural understanding. As shall be discussed in the work, Kwei-Armah places these concepts of Englishness and blackness side-by-side and presents them as born from loss and anxiety, and as a result fight to either gain or maintain recognition over the other.

The idea of belonging remains highly politicized and represents a reoccurring thematic concern in literary works. The concept of “Belonging” refers to an individual’s sense of being part of a particular group, community, or place. It encompasses the feeling of connection, acceptance, and identity within that group or environment. “Belonging” is often addressed in terms of national belonging as it is understood, is a thicker concept than citizenship but the two are often discussed in tandem. Ulf Hedetoft in *Discourses and Images of Belonging: Migrants between “New Racism”, Liberal Nationalism and Globalization* opines that discourses of belonging is crucial when discussing concepts of identity and narratives of nation and national identity as the case is in this work. What is common in all these definitions of discourse is that it is something that frames understanding and gives meaning to experience). He further argues that:

*when we first start to think of it, “belonging” is a concrete, innocent, almost pristine notion, closely interwoven with and imbricated in the notion of “home”. In fact, our home is where we belong, territorially and culturally, where “our own” community is, where our family, friends and acquaintances reside, where we have our roots, and where we long to return to when we are elsewhere in the world (11).*

Hedetoft, further discusses the “moral ambiguity of sources of identity based on belonging” (Qtd in Judith Lichtenberg, 171), because belonging (meaning national belonging in this context) is both egalitarian and ascribed that which is not based on individual choice or accomplishment, and therefore in a certain sense clashes with liberal notions of the individual freedom to choose: Lichtenberg abandons all analytical and moral distinctions only to take note of the fact that:

*for most people cultural belonging is very important. It is hard to say a great deal about this in analytical as opposed to poetic or literary terms, perhaps because it is basically so very simple: for most of us, our native culture provides us with a sense of being at home in the world. (...) we can recognize the superior virtues of other cultures, but still feel the attachment bred of familiarity our own culture affords. The features of a culture that produce this sense of familiarity and well-being are its language and folkways, its sounds and dressing, trivial customs and practices and ways of life we grow up with (173).*

Her account no doubt gives a wider picture of Belonging as related to various aspects of life, such as social, cultural, familial, or psychological, and it plays a significant role in shaping one's sense of self and well-being. It is a complex and multifaceted concept that can be influenced by factors like shared values, relationships, and a sense of connection to a particular group, community, or place. It encompasses both physical and emotional dimensions: Social Belonging involves feeling accepted and connected within a group of people, such as family, friends, or a community. It is about having a sense of identity and shared values within a social context. When belonging relates to one's connection to a particular culture or heritage is it called cultural belonging. It involves identifying with the traditions, customs, and values of a specific cultural group. It often involves a deep emotional connection to a place. Psychological belonging refers to an individual's internal sense of being a part of something greater, a philosophical belief, or a spiritual connection. Discourses of Belonging as used in this study is a fundamental human need in Kwei-Armah's plays, as it influences characters' self-esteem, mental health, and overall life satisfaction. It is important for individuals to have a sense of belonging as it contributes to their overall well-being sense of purpose and identity. This mean that the ideology and symbolic representation of the characters, institutions and behavioural codes and norms define their belonging.

### **Structure of Work**

The work comprises of an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. The introduction presents a brief survey of the origin and development of Black British drama, the research problem, research questions, the hypothesis, the purpose/aim, significance of study, the methodology, scope of study and the definition of key terms.

Chapter one which is entitled "Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature" is divided into two. The first part of the chapter focuses on related literature to this study with the intension of showing how similar and how different our work is with the others. The second part duels on the literary approaches, new historicism, psychoanalysis and social identity theory used in the investigation of the hypothesis and the analysis of the texts under study.

The next chapter is captioned "Authorial Influences and Representation of Black British Consciousness", establishes Kwei-Armah's works in relation to his life, experiences, influences and his vision of life as portrayed in the selected works; while examining the history

of the Black British from the period of slavery with the intention of helping us better understand the playwright's stand on issues of white and black British identities. The aim of this chapter therefore is to trace the origin of the ideological representation in the texts and more importantly, the relationship between the plays and the world that produced them, thereby placing these plays within their historical, social, intellectual and political contexts. This chapter also includes the biography of the playwright.

The third chapter is titled "Challenging Dominant Notions of Englishness and Black Consciousness". The playwright uses these plays under study to show that English distinctive mannerism (moral philosophy), dressing code, language and national pride, play a role in defining the behavioural patterns of the second and third generations of Black British immigrants. As the chapter demonstrates, those who hold on to these English mannerisms either end up as weaklings, as they are over powered, resign to frustration as a result of rejection, or end up as gangsters as they try to replicate the power structure of their White British counterparts. The argument in this chapter therefore is that Kwei-Armah holds that, those who embrace the British mannerism and life style end up frustrated, and the effect is that they either resign and live a defeatist life or fight back through gang culture.

Chapter four labelled "Discourses of Belonging and Resilience" focuses on Kwei-Armah's ideology on Black British identity and on what the black British should adhere to in order to overcome frustration and attain fulfilment. The chapter brings out the impact of colonization, racism, identity, the role of the "Father Figure" on the upbringing of Black British youths, while stressing on the Black British's need to stay resilient in the face of these challenges (in contact with his African roots) and the importance of forgiveness.

The general conclusion summarizes the main arguments and ideas raised in the work and equally presents the findings and possible suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER ONE

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter examines related critical literature on Kwame Kwei-Armah with the intention of identifying areas of divergence and convergence and ultimately showing the various arguments raised that are in relation to this study. The chapter also discusses psychoanalysis, social identity theory and new historicism as theories that best investigate the combined reading of Kwei-Armah's *Triptych*, with a view of showing how psychological trauma in the characters reflects the condition of Black British immigrants in the host land. This review is done with the intention of highlighting the contribution of the study to the existing body of knowledge. In this light, the review will focus on what critics, reviewers and researchers have written about the texts and to some extent, the topic under study.

#### **Literature Review**

Kwei-Armah's plays have been explored from different critical perspectives since his works lean towards presenting not only his society, but also a variety of universal socio-political issues that are relevant to most societies. A review of some of these works will enable us highlight the contribution of this study to the existing body of knowledge on his works and reveal the multidimensional view of the subject in question.

The quest for freedom from repressive forces by Africans and Caribbean living in Britain is one of the peculiarities of the twenty-first century black British literature, and Kwei-Armah's plays are a representation of this quest. This is probably why James Hodgkinson in his book *British Urban Fiction: Twenty-first Century Narratives* argues that Kwei-Armah's plays are an important contribution towards black diasporic liberation as "his search for black freedom is pursued without prejudice and doubt" (69). In this light, Couritta Newland expresses the concern that "... as a non-white minority, it is impossible that Kwei-Armah should not be conscious of ethnical differences" (180). By focusing on this political dimension of his works, Newland indirectly declares that Kwei-Armah chooses to write politically, perhaps as a response to black British living in London, using *Deli* to suggest that black British should make their surrounding free from criminal activities, hence the idea of freedom. This advice is plausible as Sara Salih reckons that "*Deli* will obtain success in his business if he can make the



atmosphere of his restaurant and its surroundings conducive” (126). Unfortunately, until the end of the play, Deli does not succeed in resisting to Digger’s existence and exploitation.

This study, like those of Newland and Hodgkinson, examines how repressive the Black British social environment is, and how the characters suffer problems of historical magnitude as they struggle to cope with the issues that derive from the community’s refusal to fully accept them. The work however, goes further to show that Kwei-Armah subjects his characters to these environmental and historical forces with the intention of creating a new black British consciousness.

Stuart Hall in *New Ethnicities*, states that “Kwei-Armah’s works are fashioned towards referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain ... and provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance” (223). Hall, who gives a general overview of black British writing hails “the current generation of black British writers in pushing beyond the category of the postcolonial”, (93) and in adopting a different take on Britain because they are writers born and educated in Britain. In this respect, Hall considers that Black British authors are not offended as they consider themselves British citizens rather than colonized people. Hodgkinson and Hall, backing on Kwei-Armah who calls himself tri-cultural by seeing himself as a diasporic African occupying an interstitial position between three cultures that define his identity, concludes that contemporary black British writers manage to reconcile their politics and their art, without compromising either. This work highlights the tension within characters as they attempt to strike a balance between their Caribbean and African origins and their nationality, but shows how difficult it is for the characters to be both British and black without jeopardizing either.

However, D. Keith Peacock in *Black British Drama and the Politics of Identity* posits that “the identity of Afro-Caribbean descendants in Britain, notably those who are young, is influenced by the gang and gun culture” (49). Using the setting of the play, Murder Mile-Hackney, London, she analyses a Black British society well-known for violence and crime; a social environment which affects the identity formation of the people. To Peacock, “violence and crime have become the dark side of the youth/Black British life in Britain” (6), Kwei-Armah resonates Peacock’s postulation on violence and highlights this context through “a one-notch-above tacky West Indian food takeaway restaurant” (3). In *Elmina’s Kitchen*, when a minority community is disempowered through racism and discrimination, the marginalised

dissect brutality through the barrel of a gun. Violence is evident as Deli's brother is mysteriously shot dead as he exits prison.

In *Shifting Identities in Black British Theatre*, Lynette Goddard explores the themes of identity and cultural heritage in *Statement of Regret*, and argues that the play "speaks to the experiences of the African-Caribbean community in London, while also addressing universal themes of family, love, and loss" (29). Goddard argues that the play offers a powerful exploration of the experiences of the African-Caribbean community in London, and that it also addresses universal themes of family, love, and loss. The play's protagonist, Kwaku, struggles to be a good leader and manager of the thin-tank but cannot maintain peace, love and trust in his family. However, the relationship between father and son is hanging on a thread line. In this article, Goddard notes that the play explores the complex relationship between the African-Caribbean community and the wider British society, and that it offers a portrayal of the experiences of its characters. She also highlights the play's use of humour and its incorporation of elements of African and Caribbean culture, which she argues help to give the play a distinctive and compelling voice. However, unlike Goddard's work, this work explores the realities of Englishness and its consequences on the black British.

Goddard, Peacock, and Yusri Fajar therefore acknowledge the effects of the Black British social environment in shaping the identity of Black British, but stretches the argument by showing the role of African ancestral heritage and the global youth culture in their identity structure. Fajar uses the African guitar, which to him is the unique and artistic product of the African culture to show its crucial function in constructing the cultural identity of Black migrants in Britain. Kwei-Armah opens *Elmina's Kitchen* with a mysterious man, in a costume, holding a gurkel (a one string African guitar famed for possessing a power to draw out spirits) in his hands. The African guitar, which is regarded as a unique and artistic product of the African culture has a crucial function in constructing the cultural identity of Black migrants in Britain. This musical instrument serves to connect the Black British characters with the African continent where ancestors dwell and create the African arts. Thus, the formation of the Black British identity can be scrutinized not only through the dialogue between the characters but also through some devices, such as African musical instrument and music, which are employed by Armah. The specific music genre narrated in this play is reggae: —Baygee changes to an old-time kinky reggae rhythm. Clifton instantly recognizes it. (52). Here there are two Black British characters, Baygee and Clifton, who are very familiar with reggae which represents Afro-

Caribbean culture. Music forms part of the black British identity as this is the source of comfort taking them to their roots in Africa.

*The stage is in darkness. A single spotlight slowly reveals a costumed man (Digger), standing absolutely still with a gurkel (a one-string African guitar famed for possessing the power to draw out spirits) in his hands. [...]The music starts. It is a slow lament-sounding concoction of American blues and traditional African music. (Kwame Kwei-Armah, *Elmina's Kitchen*, p.3)*

*Black British identity in Kwame Kwei-Armah's Elmina's Kitchen* by Yusri Fajar discusses strategies, including musical instruments that serve to connect the Black British characters to their African ancestry, but does not make the Caribbean diasporic society spectators. The music genre, reggae, is isolated and treated as a representation of Afro-Caribbean culture with very profound roots in Jamaica, an island nation situated in the Caribbean Sea. Thus, reggae in this case gives paramount contribution to the construction of the identity of Black British characters. As the work demonstrates, how characters from both African and Caribbean origin negotiate past and present identities and insist on transgressing the negative stereotypical of Black British which is imbued with crimes and violence. Kwei-Armah in *Elmina's Kitchen* through *Fix Up* to *Statement of Regret* bases the plays' central exploration on the continuing impact of slavery on the black psyche.

DeGruy Leary in *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* argues that past slavery has affected the psyche of all its descendants in the United States of America and Europe with such a trauma. Leary refutes the fact that "racism is the only concern of Black British writers, rather history, heritage and the effects of past slavery are inherent in African American and black British writings" (15), and most of them in Britain are living in "the illusion of inclusion", especially the older generations (16). With Kwei-Armah, this is one of the dimensions this work takes: the past influences the reality of the characters from the first and second generation immigrants even though it does not count for the youths who have little connection with their ancestral history that led them to be marginalised. Those youths are mistakenly led into believing that violence is the key to a stable life in a society that does not accept them because of their colour. This work therefore projects concurrent themes that emerge around identity and

the importance of historical knowledge as well as the search for truth if individual and collective freedom is to be achieved.

There are a couple of critics who focused on Kwei-Armah's biographical information as a reflection of the black British experiences in Britain. In this perspective, Jennifer Gale Roma states that his multicultural background was almost never omitted in reviews of his plays, demonstrating just how preoccupied critics are with his ethnic background. This critical interest in Kwei-Armah's biography ensured that the themes critics associated to the author's life, such as miscegenation, hybridity, syncretic ethnicity, post-colonialism and multiculturalism, were also the ones most highlighted as concerns in his plays. This demonstrates how an author's race is a key consideration for critics of Black British drama. Lynn Deering claims that "he wrote for black readers. If white readers enjoyed his fiction, that was fine, but they might need to read with "black" eyes" (89) insinuating that not all authors are concerned with British curiosity and criticism and that they do not write for the white majority. This study also focused on Kwei-Armah's biographical information as a reflection of the black British experiences in Britain as it brings a new voice to expose multiculturalism, mixed race society and the effects of colonialism. However, unlike Roma's work, this work explores the pros and cons of being minority in a white dominant society.

Mustapha Mantura in *Black Slaves, White Chains* categorizes black British writers as those who "commonly speak fictionally of a dually linked heritage, as it may be familiar to them ...their works have been an exploration of their past, their works are all about family and trying to understand it. It is them filling in their own gaps in their fiction" (30). In this light, Michael Billington just like Mantura, comments that black British fiction consists of "guesswork or comes from reading accounts of immigrants coming here" (59). To him, people arguably prefer to read true accounts and memoirs". As such, if a black British author is to write about their culture fictionally, he thinks "people may not think to take that intention into consideration" (89). This means that black British literature relates more to memoirs than to arts. Kwei-Armah shares the opinion that:

*In black British theatre, it's hard to find anything new. It's hard to read a play that break rules that have never been broken. But what's much, much harder than all of this is to find a play of aesthetic quality to bring the change, or try to change, the way they think (289)*

Contrary to Billington and Mantura's thoughts, this work does not only express the racial restraints, family issues, heritage and concerns of contemporary black British fiction, but brings to light the aesthetic qualities through which Kwei-Armah assembles a truly multicultural twenty-first century Briton. The history of black people in the United Kingdom which this work discusses is complex and enigmatic and is linked to Kwei-Armah's experimentation with form. For example, the first, second and third generation characters in Elmina's *Kitchen* and *Fix Up* can only come to terms with their sense of belonging if they understand the history of black people in Europe, and these ghostly intermissions are marked by formal shifts from prose to poetry as the characters are forced to recognise their own heritage. In his use of poetry and prose to signpost the juxtaposition of the contemporary with the historical, the 'real' with the 'imaginary', Kwei-Armah's plays releases the potential of literature to "fill in the gaps". This work therefore illustrates that black British do not sacrifice style for content, but render a belonging bound up in the very aesthetics of the works of Black British authors.

Samantha Elizabeth Reive in her PhD thesis entitled "Between the Black Atlantic and Europe: Emerging paradigms in Contemporary Black British Writing," argues for a "positioning of Europe as an alternative dwelling place which allows for new trajectories of travel for the black British subject" (4). Consequently, her thesis interrogates the implementation of collective cultural solution for the black British memory. She opines that there is a transformative energy within contemporary black British fiction as it moves on from the language of identity, crosses the boundaries of nationhood and memory. This work equally considers Kwame Kwei-Armah as one who offers a new vocabulary for the articulation of cultural belonging, and this can be collective, contrary to what Reive proposes. As the work suggests, Kwei-Armah present characters who attempt to trace the trajectory of their ancestry, narrate their history through poster and music, and who connect with their blackness by adopting new ways of life for example.

Bernadine Evaristo, Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies in their collection *A Black British Canon* argue that "contestations over the meaning of the terms "British" and "black British" should not be swept aside since they foreground the ideological and discursive imprint of key political signs" (5). They argue that "placing Black British texts within a narrowly racial or national framework can obscure the ways in which they postulate new trajectories of travel" (7). This argument seems out of place since locating the work of the black British authors

within such “narrow frameworks” also permits critics and the writers themselves to address the contra-influences of their multi-heritage backgrounds. In this thesis, this argument takes a step further by maintaining a focus on the race and origin of the playwright, thereby constraining our reading and understanding of British literature as a whole.

Stuart Hall in *Whose Heritage?* argues that “constructions of British heritage must include the active production of culture and the arts as a living activity”, and so must also include the aesthetics of Black British cultural production (4). Hall argues that in order to engender a sense of belonging for all citizens, the multicultural society must be a place where all members see themselves reflected. Hall identifies the potential of Black British aesthetics to facilitate “one of the most important cultural developments of our time . . . the local-in-the-global, the pioneering of a new cosmopolitan, vernacular, post-national, global sensibility” (13). Hall foresees a post-racial society where the potentials of all are valorised accordingly. We do not view fascinating face as a possible development in the near future, since cases of racism are still visible here and there. In constructing the black British identity, the black British must rely on themselves for their own liberation. What’s fascinating to note here is that their interest of the local-in-the-global will be helpful. Global culture focuses on connecting with many countries and connecting globally, whereas local culture focuses on culture in one place with common interest and connects locally. The Black and the British cultures seem like they would not mix, and in *Fix Up*, Brother Kiyi flung his locks at Norma. She rebukes him for keeping the rebellion “hair style” and asked him to wash it. On this, Brother Kiyi too rebukes her for wearing “alien hair” both blaming another for mixing cultures.

Culture is one of the driving forces of African-American culture that influenced Black British authors. Michael Pearce argue that the influence of African American culture was one of the driving force of Black British authors. This is the reason why Pearce in his work *Tracing Black America in black British theatre from the 1970s* examines “The adoption of African American culture by black Britons as an inappropriate imitation based on cultural imperialism” (8). Pearce argues that Roy Williams’ and Kwame Kwei-Armah’s works were inspired by August Wilson, arguably African America’s most successful playwright. But it is in Kwei-Armah’s work that Wilson’s influence is most prominent, particularly in the Triptych plays *Elmina’s Kitchen* (2003), *Fix Up* (2004) and *Statement of Regret* (2007). Similarly, Tucker Green, a black British playwright, raises the concern that the influence of African American music occurs at the level of black Britons writings. She attributes singer/songwriters Lauryn

Hill and Jill Scott as influences on her poetic style. Homage to African American singers and music appears in a number of works by black Britons. It features in a play's soundtrack, such as Felix Cross and Paulette Randall's *Up Against the Wall* (1999) for Nitro, a tribute to the "blacksploitation" film genre and the funk, soul and disco music of the 1970s. African American music references also appear in plays' titles which borrow from songs, such as Caryl Phillips' *Strange Fruit* 1980, named after the song made famous by Billie Holiday; and Kwei-Armah's *Let There Be Love* 2008, after the Nat King Cole version. Femi Elufuwoju Jr. uses Sammy Davis Jr.'s biography in his play *Sammy* 2002 as a means to draw attention to the challenges facing blacks in the performing arts. These songs are songs of victory, they do not only rekindle joy or hope, they also expose the cultural identities of black immigrants. For example, Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" and American blues as seen in *Fix Up* and *Statement of Regret* music plays a central role in the African-Caribbean civil rights struggles and objects linked directly to political activism bring to light the roles that music plays in movement for equality and justice like the "Black History Movement" and "Institute of Black Policy Research".

This work however, does not focus on this connection, but shows how Kwei-Armah's plays draw attention to the history of the Black British experience and highlight the persistent impact of the past on the present, employing the spirit world as an aesthetic device to reiterate this notion. The culture, icons and myths of Africa have provided potent inspiration for black British dramatists. As African American culture gained prominence in the United States of America, its accoutrements from hairstyles to slangs have travelled across the Atlantic to Britain, and this is reflected in the plays under study. Equally, the adoption and adaptation of African American culture in the British context draws the playwright's attention to the experience of marginalisation and racism that has often forced blacks in Britain to seek identification and inspiration beyond the nation.

Mark Stein in *Cultures of Hybridity: Reading Black British literature*, suggests that black cultural production should be understood in terms of "plural alliances model" (17). In this light, as he puts it "blacks in Britain claim the UK as a site of identity while also embracing and retaining a number of cross-cultural and transnational affiliations" (106). Thus, when examining Black British theatre and its output, we are confronted by a practice that is rooted within and without the nation. What Stein fails to understand is that "black" does not refer to a homogenous group with a singular history and culture. His critique however acts as a

supporting document to the present study in that he gives an insight as to why Kwei-Armah's works are rooted within and without the host land, which leads us to Kwei-Armah's notion of multiculturalism.

The debates as to what multiculturalism means was and is one of the peculiarities of the twenty-first century Europe and Kwei-Armah's Triptych are a representation of this multicultural society. That is probably why the black critic Briton Trevor Phillips, as chair of the then CRE, sparked the debate over multiculturalism versus integration with his speech entitled: "After 7/7: Sleepwalking into Segregation", in which he argued that "in Britain, we have focused far too much on the 'multi' and not enough on common culture" (qtd in McGhee, 87). Drawing from the reading of black British and white British poems, he arrives at the conclusion that "the British society is one that encourages intermixture, multiculturalism and preserves and promotes separatism" (qtd in McGhee, 178). The emphasis placed on foreigners to accept the homeland's values and way of life have become increasingly strong in discourses around immigration and national unity. As Lindner et al hold that:

*these issues have also been influenced by political fears that the transnational affiliations of migrants and their descendants might make it impossible for these people to feel sufficient respect for and undivided national loyalty towards the British state, its laws, and its monopoly on force. Thus, cultural diversity and transnational affiliations are seen to always harbour a danger of unruliness and political unreliability.*  
(xxxii)

Kwei-Armah is rather concerned with the vexed question of multiculturalism. As this work shows, the playwright presents its fallouts, showing how black British unsuccessfully try to relate. The "limited" and "bleak" stereotypes of the blacks presented throughout the play reinforces social division that push black youths to crime. In *Fix Up* Kwesi tries so hard to take over Brother Kiyi's Bookstore which is a "Black Conscious bookstore" in order to open an Afro Sheen and Dyke, bringing diversity in the community, destroying the reading culture and African hair style in young black Africans while embracing the Western tradition and life style.

Hannah Arendt who discusses the limitations inherent in gang culture uses plays by Williams Roy to argue that violence can always destroy power, for "out of the barrel of a gun



grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never can grow out of it (violence) is power” (8). Arendt’s discussion on violence and threat of violence and how it does not enhance the power of those who embrace it is one of the issues discussed to show the limitations involved in copying the oppressor. Bagavathy Rajan in *Identity Crisis and the Impact of Violence in Kwame Kwei-Armah’s Elmina’s Kitchen* concurs with Arendt when he argues that the identity that Deli had liked to establish proved to be fragile because of his son’s involvement in violence because in the beginning Deli did not like informers” (109). In this regard, Ashley’s disastrous end in *Elmina’s Kitchen* is the result. Violence in *Elmina’s Kitchen* and in the other plays does not create any power for the black. On the contrary, it damages the identity and confidence of optimistic people like Deli and Brother Kiyi. Furthermore, the Yardies like Digger will continue to grope in the dark (violence) for betterment, thus the need to embrace other discourses of belonging such as shared interest and team work, respect for family values and social bonds. As this work examines, the characters’ struggle to repress their feelings and anger due to the traumatic past, rejection and broken relationships are made worse when they indulge in violence.

Shideler Ross in *Black British Drama and the Name of the Father* contends that the plays dramatize the destructiveness of the weakness of parenthood on the black diasporic society and its ongoing breakdown. Ross elaborates various aspects of father and mother domination and maximisation, thus presenting them as the bases of their children’s predicaments. The conclusion is that the playwrights’ commitment to change the older generation is dramatized without prejudice. Ellen Hartman in *Kwei-Armah’s Motherless Children* gives a new interpretation behind the success of black British women. In her opinion; Kwei-Armah’s intention in *Elmina’s Kitchen*, was to produce a play with mothers who could stand the destructive colonial constructs, and this can only be possible if these women are dead. That the most significant woman in *Elmina’s Kitchen* rules the play from her grave, is worthy to note.

Dorothea Zeitler on her Master’s thesis entitled “Bonds and Bondage: An Examination of Family Dynamics in the plays of Kwame Kwei-Armah” examines the conflict between fathers and children in Kwame Kwei-Armah’s political Triptych plays, and shows how the influences of race, social class, and education affect and destroy filial bonds. She argues that the tragic heroes in his plays are black fathers who often fail their children and families because they are suffering from the long-term effects of institutionalised racism, the bondage of slavery

and discrimination. She uses Ashley who is embarrassed by his father, who works too hard for too little money to show how the younger generation of black British long to be taken under the wing of the influential. She concludes that Kwei-Armah's black youths embrace violence and reject education, business and fathers' advice and embrace gun and gang culture thereby forfeiting family ties. Zeitler's study focusses on the causes and effects of poor family ties in the works of Kwei-Armah. This dimension is useful to this work as we intend to discuss how family negligence from parents and children aggravate the black British plight. But this work, unlike Zeitler's discusses the playwright's artistic vision in relation to family values and how, if properly considered can stand as a discourse of belonging.

In "Memory of Trauma and the History of Colonization and Slavery" in J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and Kwame Kwei-Armah's *Elmina's Kitchen*, Didachos Mbeng Afuh sets out to show how J. M. Synge in *Riders to the Sea* and Kwame Kwei-Armah in *Elmina's Kitchen* respectively update identity politics narrative in Ireland and the contemporary British society. In his work, he tried to link the impact of slavery and colonization to the continues degradation and humiliation of black people in general and the colonized in particular, and how this manifest in a range of topical identity-related issues raised in their plays. He uses the playwrights' unsettled stereotypical ideas on the effects of slavery and colonization seen in the absent or dysfunctional colonized/black parents who foreground their parental struggles to act as role models for influencing the next generation. He examines the issues Kwei-Armah raises pertaining to gun crime and violence in the black British community and sees them as "debates about how contemporary black identity politics are articulated within attitudes of dual heritage identities and intra-cultural conflicts" (78), relating them to Synge's description of scenes that reflect the harsh reality of the islanders. He concludes that both playwrights are therefore driven by the "recognition of things that trouble them and their contemporaries that is, their colonial/black past and their multicultural societies" (87)

In the same direction as Afuh, David Ian Rabey's review of *Elmina's Kitchen* in *The Contemporary British Playwrights* presents the play as a reflection of the complex and often fraught relationship between Britain and its former colonies, particularly in terms of the legacy of colonialism and the struggles for cultural identity that have ensued. Rabey argues that the play addresses issues of cultural identity and the legacy of colonialism in a nuanced and complex way. Rabey also highlights the play's use of language and its incorporation of elements of African and Caribbean culture, which he argues help to give the play a distinctive

and powerful voice. Overall, Rabey's review positions *Elmina's Kitchen* as an important contribution to contemporary British playwriting, and praises the play for its exploration of complex and important themes such as father-son relationships, which is the most important theme as it involves four generations of Deli's family: from his father to his son's baby. We also have the theme of peer pressure to conform and cycles of violence, gun crime and retribution, particularly amongst young black males, are integral in the play.

The above studies by Afuh and Rabey relate to the major concerns of this study which are history and culture. Such links between current affairs and the history of slavery and colonisation provide insights into the urgent need to resolve the pain and anger of the past and present. This work therefore goes further to show how the playwright creates narratives that condemn the history of slavery and colonization, celebrate cultural inheritance while challenging negative stereotypes.

In all, Kwei-Armah's place as a political writer lies in the fact that he is out to criticize abstract ideological issues in which lies the question of power and personal motivations among black British communities. His travels round the world, especially to Africa and the congested districts of the Caribbean Islands exposed him to new and challenging political issues related to black identity, making him to realize that the misery on the marginalized black British was as a result of history, existing social mores and stiff beliefs adopted by black British youths to overcome black stereotypes. The challenging historical and political issues related to the identity of black British citizens are some of the issues that warrant us to analyse Kwei-Armah's works under study from the theoretical paradigms of new historicism, psychoanalysis and social identity theory.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The principal theories used in this study are new historicism, psychoanalytic criticism and social identity theory which will enable us to explore the experiences of Black Africans in Britain, and examine cultural heritage, ethnic identity, psychological trauma, black politics and many others. These theories and their relevant proponents will help us to identify and define the forces that condition the characters and their relationships in the selected works.

New Historicism is a movement in literary criticism that began in the 1980, propounded by Stephen Greenblatt. Its main claim is that the themes and meaning of literature are not

universal and cannot be derived from the text alone. Rather, they are products of the author's time, history and cultural situation thus, this theoretical approach to literature emphasizes on the historical and cultural contexts in which a work is produced and received. When applied to "Englishness, Blackness, and Discourses of Belonging," several aspects of New historicism can be vital for the understanding of this work: by applying this theory, we can analyze how different historical periods—colonialism, migration, and contemporary issues-affect notions of belonging and identity.

This approach encourages the examination of texts in relation to other works and discourses of their time. This approach also allows for the exploration of how various texts reflect and influence social values, how "Englishness" and "Blackness" are represented in literature, art, and popular culture, allowing readers to see the interconnectedness of ideas surrounding race and identity, acknowledges the role of the reader's own historical and cultural background in the interpretation of texts. Apart from Stephen Greenblatt, other proponents emerged indicating their views on new historicism.

Michel Foucault (1988), Gerome McGann (2000), Catherine Gallagher (2000), Forrest Robinson (2017) and a host of others had been clamouring for an academic study of literature that goes beyond traditional historicism. To this effect, as related by Greenblatt and Gallagher, a series of meetings were held with the intention of coming out with a more practical and or acceptable framework in the analysis of literature. New historicism came up as a result of the lapses inherent in the previous theory- New Criticism or text based approach. In a hand book of *Critical Approaches to Literature*, Guerin et al view New Historicism as a “practice rather than a doctrine.” (321) Thus, New historicism being considered as a practice entertains the historical and cultural conditions that produce a literary text and its interpretation. Forrest Robinson as quoted by Syprya Ray and Murfin also say that:

*Literature is socially produced and socially productive, always existing within a particular socio-economic context and always transforming that context as well, at the same time it re-historicizes the text, the new historicist textualises history. (322)*

This quotation shows that a literary work is the product of the society from which it emanates and therefore, contributes to the development of that society. Literature can also be situated within a particular socio-economic context.

Furthermore, Rose Murfin and Syprya Ray also indicate their view on new historicism in *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. They contend that

*New Historicists believe that criticism should incorporate diverse discourses ... New Historicist critics assume that works of literature both influence and are influenced by historical reality, and they shared belief in referentiality, that is, a belief that literature both refers and is referred to by things outside itself. (239-40).*

When Murfin and Ray talk of New Historicists as people who believe that criticism should incorporate other discourses, they are in effect admitting the fact that new historicism is a broad theory. It involves other branches like sociology, anthropology, philosophy, history, politics, and economic. The quotation equally indicates that literature is motivated by historical realities and it also influences history.

Other views have been held on New historicism by Bonnie Klomp and Larry Stewart as seen in *A Guide to Literary Criticism and Research*. They affirm that:

*It is a critical method that perceives a literary text as a communal product rather than the expression of the author's intention; that disputes the autonomy of the work of art and reconnects it to its cultural contexts, that scrutinises artistic production as disciplinary boundaries. (53)*

From the above affirmation, New Historicism is viewed as a theory that considers a work of art not as the writer's conception but as an outcome of societal happenings. The critics above reject the autonomy of the work of art and established a link between the work and its cultural context. Klomp and Stewart also quote Greenblatt in the following words to support their views "works of art however intensely marked by the creative intelligence and private obsession of the individual are the product of collective negotiation and exchange." (54) Although Stewart and Klomp quote Greenblatt to support their view, one notices that Greenblatt unlike them acknowledges the intelligence and creative ability of the writer.

Lois Tyson also raises a good argument about New Historicism. He concurs that ... new historicism deconstructs the traditional opposition between history (traditionally thought as factual) and literature (traditionally thought as fiction). For new historicism considers history as a text that cannot be interpreted in the same way critics interpret literary texts and it considers literary texts as: Cultural artefacts ... operating in the place in which those texts were written. (283)

Tyson insinuates that both history and literature can be deconstructed in order to come out with the weaknesses that lie in their assumptions. In this case, the implicit meaning embedded in the texts can be brought to the limelight. Tyson also makes it clear that historical texts can be interpreted in the same way as we interpret literary texts. Like other new historicists, Tyson recognises the fact that a literary text is linked to the cultural issues of the society that produces it. He believes that the literary text can inform us on social happenings taking place in a particular place and time. From Tyson's argument. We get to understand that New historicism helps us to come out with certain issues which historians do not inform or indicate overtly.

Indeed, Tyson also highlights the views of the New Historicist, Michel Foucault, who claims that power does not operate only at the top but also at the bottom. He reiterates that:

*According to the French philosopher Michel Foucault, whose ideas have strongly influenced the development of new historicism, power circulates in all directions, to and from all levels at all times. And the vehicle by which power circulates is a never-ending proliferation of exchange. (281)*

The quotation above introduces the fact that power is also noticeable among the people of the lower class. The people of the lower class are also dynamic, realized through positive and negative initiatives. This is evidenced in Kwei-Armah's *Statement of Regret* where black people are able to come up with their own political party. Their intension is to fight class distinction caused by racism. Foucault insists that the particular discourse formation of an era determines what is considered as knowledge and truth, as well as what is considered abnormal, illegal and criminal.

Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt in *Practicing New Historicism* indicate their experience and point out that:

*We wanted also to use the anecdote to show in compresses form the ways in which elements of experience lived enter into literature, the ways in which everyday institutions and bodies get recorded. And we wanted, controversy to show in compressed form the ways in which poetry, drama, and prose fiction play themselves out in the everyday world, since men and women repeatedly find themselves*

*speaking the language of literature not only in their public performance, but also in their intimate or passionate moments. (30)*

The above citation indicates that New Historicism includes biographical and socio-economic experiences. It is clear that new historicist critics take into account those elements which feature in the text yet, evidence in the author's life and society. The above critic also claim that literature influences the lives of men and women in the society. They could not understand why man's social and political circumstances were excluded in the interpretation of literature, when literature is in English. To them also, the time has come to move away from the narrowly formalistic American text-based approach to literature, to a new historical approach. The play *Elmina's Kitchen* is beautifully written with great use of naturalistic, provocative but lyrical language, jumping between West Indian slang, London English and US-influenced black street talk. The author uses these genres to show how characters are distinct and well-drawn from different historical background.

New Historicism also takes a Marxist approach especially as it looks at the struggle between two groups of people. The historical stratification of the society with regards to politics and material wealth which new historicists equally study reveals a Marxist dimension is embedded in New Historicism. In this study, our analysis of class struggle in the political Triptych of Kwei-Armah will echo Marxist theory and ideologies in relation to new historicism.

In a similar vein, ideology is defined in Norton Anthropology of Theory and Criticism in the following terms:

*Ideology consists of ideas, beliefs, form and values of the ruling class that articulate through all the cultural spheres. Members of the working class who ascribe to bourgeois ideas and values exhibit "false consciousness" since such values and ideas ignores the socio-economic realities of the own working-class lives. (14)*

The above speech does not consider ideology within the Marxist parameter as a positive thing. The ruling class spreads ideas and values which do not depict reality. Thus, making the working class to function on false hope and beliefs. These beliefs are false because they do not take into account the socio-economic realities of the working class. Ideology can be viewed as the control force behind capitalism, class structure and discriminatory societies. It is the use of non-violent means to exploit and dominate the working class. Class struggle has been one of the topical issues addressed by Marxist critics. Henderson and Brown quotes the following

lines from the Introduction of Marx's *Communist Manifesto*. "the history of all Hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."

This shows that class struggle has characterise human society as a whole. In Kwei-Armah's texts under study, class struggle is one of the major issues portrayed by the author. Henderson and Brown also describe the ruling class as a slave owning class. They claim that the ruling class owns the slaves and the land which they assign the slaves to work for them. The slaves and their children belong to the low working class. In *Statement of Regret*, class struggle is evident reason why the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, ruled out a formal apology for Britain's part in slavery. But we get from the text that he will chair an advisory committee overseeing preparations for the commemoration, at which proposal for a statement of regret are expected to be discussed. The only reason that the present generation of white Americans are in a position of economic strength ... is because our fathers worked for their fathers for over four hundred years with no pay ... we were sold from plantation like you sell a horse, or a cow and many more thus, the London society is product of the author's time and cultural situation.

Power, to new historicists, does not emanate only from the top and socio-economic structure. Power to them is everywhere. To show how power works, Michel Foucault, one whose ideas have strongly influenced the development of new historicism, opines in *The Older of Things: Archaeology of Human Sciences* that "power circulates in all directions, to and from social level at all time" (281) As a result, there is power exchange in buying and selling process, in teaching and learning, in gambling, in business, in marriage, adoption and in all other forms of life.

Kwei-Armah's political Triptych plays deal with power and subjectivity and show that power is everywhere; at the level of the family, city, state, and other structures. There is power tussle between father and son (Deli and Ashley/Deli and Clifton (Ashley's grandfather) in *Elmina's Kitchen*, father and daughter (Brother Kiyi and Alice) in *Fix Up*, black and mixed-raced, slave and master in *Statement of Regret (Black immigrants at the Institute of Black Policy Research-IBPR)*, black and black as exposed in *Statement of Regret* as Kwaku Mackenzie and Idrissa.

Critics of New Historicism have questioned its appropriateness because they claim, it ignores the artistic aesthetic in literature. Herder Conrad posits that the risk of analysing a text



from the culturally conservative point is that “it makes the critic lose sight of what is uniquely precious;(in the work) the high art” (48). To Heyden, “New Historicism fosters the weakening of aesthetic projects” (18). This charge is difficult to accept because new historicists “have never given up or turned (their) backs on the deep gratification that draws (them) in the first place in the study of literature” (Greenblatt and Gallagher, 16). As such, New Historicism as an approach to the study of literature, takes into account the style the writer uses in his presentation of cultural realities. Kwei-Armah’s complex style and inspiration for his triptych of plays, *Elmina’s Kitchen*, *Fix Up* and *Statement of Regret*, was a production of August Wilson’s *King Hedley II* (1999, USA; published 2005) which he saw while in Washington, D.C. in 2001. In an interview in The New York Times about *Elmina’s*, Kwei-Armah recounts:

*I was so touched by the magnitude of this man [August Wilson] and his commitment to talk of and chronicle the African-American experience through the art form [...] I went back to my hotel room that night and said, “O.K., I now know what I want to do; I want to chronicle the black British Experience” (qtd in Wolf, 205).*

Kwei-Armah’s triptych takes its lead from Wilson’s Pittsburgh Cycle. For the Cycle, Wilson wrote ten plays, each set in Pittsburgh and each play representative of a decade in the twentieth century. Similarly, Kwei-Armah sets all three plays in London and although the plays occur within the first decade of the 2000s, they are divided according to class: *Elmina’s Kitchen* – the underclass, *Fix Up* – the working class and *Statement of Regret* – the middle class. The three texts form a trilogy which explores issues of race, immigration, reconciliation and complex family stories. For Gallagher and Greenblatt,

*The new historicist project is not about “demoting” or discrediting aesthetic pleasure; rather, it is concerned with finding the creative power that shapes literary works outside the narrow boundaries in which it had hitherto been located, as well as within those boundaries.*  
(12)

The New historicist does not simply reduce literature to the “footnote of history”, as it is claimed among its detractors, but sees literature first as a work of art before considering it as a product of history. This approach differs from the formalistic approach in that, it sees the style and techniques of presentation as historically conditioned. This will be very helpful to the study as we intend to examine the complex style that Kwei-Armah uses to present his political ideas.

New historicism, though important, would not be enough in the investigation of the stated hypothesis. This is because Kwei-Armah's innovative styles coupled with his background knowledge of the black African culture and his experiences are forces that conditioned his characters' mind-set hence, the psychological trauma they go through which, hitherto, requires a psychoanalytical perspective in this study to show how the works under study reflect the life of the author and the black British citizens. This theory will aid us to understand the behaviour of the characters in the texts and how they reflect the societies they find themselves in.

Psychoanalytic theory enables an examination of the internal conflicts individuals face regarding their identities. This theory will help us uncover the unconscious biases and motivations that shape societal attitudes toward race and nationality hence, Englishness and Blackness particularly in the context of belonging and alienation. It allows for an exploration of how historical trauma, cultural memory, and individual psychology intersect with collective identities. Sigmund Freud first coined the term "psychoanalysis" following the study he made on the functioning of the human mind, and for the next forty years of his life, he developed its objectives, techniques and methodology. When Freud developed this idea, it was to help man understand unconscious human motivations, but today, the theory describes a vast dimension of related disciplines notably culture, religion, literature and other forms of art. Today, it is known as a comprehensive theory that points to the general direction of truth. Freud and his followers (Lacan, Jung, and Bloom etc) demonstrated that like the iceberg, the human mind is structured so that its great weight and density lies beneath. Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, his concept on desire, his model of castration concept and his theory of language are useful in the development of this study.

Jacques Lacan's theory of the Mirror Stage is, as Sean Homer opines, "the most interdisciplinary of his technical contributions to the reading of Freud" (31). This is probably because "the mirror stage is one of Lacan's best formulations" (Gallop, 38). Lacan's first contribution to psychoanalysis is therefore his theory on the Mirror Stage. To understand his theory, one should first consider the traditional meaning behind a mirror.

A mirror is that object which reflects a self in a less faithful likeness and semblance. In Lacan's theory of the Mirror Stage, when a child first stumbles upon a mirror, he/she is suddenly confounded by an image of himself. The view about himself changes from a fragment

to a whole. This gives the child a sense of coherence and a sense of “I” as the child becomes aware of himself and the external world. Considering the interpretation of this concept by Homer, he insists that Lacan’s Mirror Stage is based on:

- *The child’s first recognition of a distinction between itself and the (m)other/mirror);*
- *The recognition of lack or absence whether this is the absence of the mother or an absence of the gratification of need;*
- *The child dependence on the (m) other with a self-reliance. The Mirror Stage is a compensation for the child’s acceptance of lack. It provides a promise or anticipation of self-mastery and controls the subject’s lack and which the mother provisionary covered over gratifying the child’s needs;*
- *The advent of an internalized psyche, sensory image of the self and the object in the world. It marks the child’s earliest understanding of space, distance and position. (32)*

Homer’s interpretation points to the fact that the child’s first recognition of himself/herself creates in him/her an awareness that permits him/her to see his/her environment differently, especially in terms of the position he/she occupies. From all indications, Lacan’s theory of the Mirror Stage is the projection of the self, where the child become aware of his identity. Jane Gallop upholds the same view when she says that Lacan’s Mirror Stage:

*Marks the first stage of the child’s acquisition of an identity independent of the mother, the genesis of a self of personal unity, the origin of the child’s sexual drive, and the first process of social acculturation; a socially structured psychological relation between itself, others, and its body image. (24)*

In this stage, the child acquires awareness about himself and equally recognizes his own image and can now think of the world as “I” and “you”. In *Fix Up*, Alice, the mixed race young lady, is psychologically stressed up as she goes looking of her father and her identity, only to get more traumatised as she learns that she is born of a white British woman and black slave. Though the child celebrates the recognition of his/her image, she does not immediately understand why the father murdered the mother. The child therefore celebrates a possession and a relation he/she does not understand.

Lacan’s theory of the “Mirror Stage” is very much related to this study in that, it helps in our analysis of individual characters who after a life of passive acceptance, torture,

marginalisation, and imprisonment under oppressive regimes, trauma, fear and tension, grow to a sense of wholeness, which in this context stand for a mirror. Ashley, Alice, Adrian McKay in *Elmina's Kitchen*, *Fix Up* and *State of Regret* respectively, start thinking of themselves not as “children” who have the duty to protect, love and relay their parents but as human beings with an identity. Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* opines that just like in the Mirror stage, where the child's projection is “high tragedy: a brief moment of doomed glory” (Ponty,3), their search for self-realization, identity and freedom. Like the child in the Mirror Stage, Ashley, Alice, Brother Kiyi and Kwaku Mackenzi can be compared to Adam and Eve, who after eating from the tree of knowledge anticipate mastery, but what they harvested is horrifying.

Lacan's concept of desire which some critics consider as his only original contribution to psychoanalysis (Homer, 13) is equally important to this study. According to Lacan, “desire” is “the essence of Man” (qtd in Homer, 16) and is brought to existence through speech. Homer furthers quotes Lacan to have said that “it is formulated and named in the presence of the other ... that desire appears in full sense of the term” (16). To make his readers understand what “desires”, Lacan distinguished it from “need” where the latter is purely biological and emerges according to the need of the organism. “Need” can be satisfied even if only temporarily. Commenting on this distinction, Gallop writes: “Unlike need which can be satisfied and which then ceases to motivate the subject until another need arises, desire can never be satisfied. It is constant in its pressure but cannot be acquired” (13). But since one's desire is the desire of another, “desire” is human only if it desires the desire of the other, that is to say if he wants to be desired or loved or rather recognised in his human value ... is finally the desire for recognition (Homer, 31). In order to achieve a desire therefore, the subject must risk. By desiring what another person has or desires, the subject has to make the other recognize his right to possess what is desired and thus make the other recognize his superiority.

In *The Significant of the Phallus*, Lacan draws back to Freud's theory of Castration Complex and gives it his own reading. How? One may ask, is Lacan's model different from that of Freud? The two models cannot be the same because as Jane Gallop tells us “although Lacanian theory of [the Castration Complex] is founded upon Freud and follows Freud's, the Freud that it follows is shaped and constructed by Lacan's reading” (91). In order to show how Lacan's theory of the Castration Complex differs from that of Freud, and how important this

theory is in our study, it will be necessary that we say, in brief, what Freud's Castration Complex is all about.

Sigmund Freud first described the Castration Complex in 1908, arguing that the child, on discovering the difference between the sexes (the presence and absence of the penis), makes the assumption that this difference is due to the fact that the female penis has been cut off (Gallop, 92). The consequence is that the boy fears that his own penis will be cut off by the father who is considered by the child as a rival over the love for the mother. Freud calls this phase the "Phallic Phase"; a phase during which the child knows only one genital organ-the penis.

As mentioned above, Lacan gave Freud's Castration Complex a new reading by seeing it as "a symbolic lack of an imaginary object" (Glover, 9). Understanding Lacan's model of the Castration Complex is not an easy task. Much of the misunderstanding is at the level of Lacan's use of the word "phallus". Borch Jacobson in *Lacan; The Absolute Master* argues that "the phallus is a privileged signifier of desire" (21). Furthering this argument, Gallop writes that "Lacan is frequently accused of Phallucentrism, an accusation fairly easy to level at a theorist who proclaims that 'the phallus is the privileged signifier'" (133). To John Miller and William Richardson, the word "phallus" "assumes a new ambiguity between its role as signifier and its role as real or imagined organ" (143). They further argued that,

*The clerical fact is that it is the mother's castration and not the subject's which is decisive, [in Lacan's Castration Complex] a point Lacan makes clearly at the beginning of his essay [The Significant of the Phallus]. The subject might or might not have a real phallus (144).*

Lacan's phallus as Miller and Richardson rightly assert can either be real or imaginary. It should be noted that the words "threat" and "nostalgia" come up over and over in Lacan's essay. "Threat" is the fear of losing what the object has as his mother lost hers, while "nostalgia" is the female's regret for what she does not have. Both the boy child and the girl child experience anxiety. In this respect, Miller and Richardson assert that while "the boy is threatened with loss, the girl is deprived" (15). The girl child therefore envies what she has not got. Lacan's theory of the Castration Complex is related to this study comes through our argument that Kwei-Armah's characters suffer under autocratic and colonial leaderships where

the African had his language, religion and culture taken from him/her to make them beasts of desire for freedom, identity and liberty. Those in power fear the loss of the power (phallus) and control. The playwrights present characters who are not on the same platform; the slave and the master, good and bad, and citizens (belonging) and immigrants (not belonging): The consequence is that those who are in leadership positions fear to loss what they possess while those who are not in position of power are filled with anxiety and desire for what they do not have and would stop at nothing to be fulfilled. Deli, Brother Kiyi and Kwaku Mackenzi who somehow are in power at the start of the plays.

Another of Lacan's theory that is useful to this study is that on language. One of Lacan's preoccupation as a psychoanalyst was to restore the Freudian originality on the experience of the unconscious under the banner that "The Unconscious is Structured like Language". Roman Jakobson asserts that Lacan first announced this return to Freud in "The Rome Discourse" of 1953. He quotes Lacan to have written in his preface to "Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" that:

*The different conception of which I was accused precisely of my argument defending the necessity to return to Freud, the urgent task is disengaged from the concepts that are being deadened by routine use of the meaning that they regain both forms as a re-examination of their history and from reflexion on their subjective foundation. (qtd in Jakobson. 33)*

Lacan was concerned with the temptation for analysts to abandon the foundation of speech in Psychoanalysis. In this regard, Lacan adds that "we should find it easy enough to find the fundamental distinction between the signifier and the signified and to begin to use the two no-overlapping networks". (qtd in Jakobson, 41). The result is that we are forced to end up with a strictly individual and subjective arbitrariness of the sign. Lacan makes mention of "glossolalia" which, as Jakobson puts it, "is the ability to invent and speak new languages that are completely incomprehensible to anyone but the speaker" (8). Jakobson further explains that the linguistic form becomes even richer because of certain "fixity" in the association of the signifier and the signified. This association produces something that is often astonishing.

What Kwei-Armah wants to show is that language is the representation of the reality. Language is symbolic in that it runs alongside the capacity to speak and obscure at the same time, a signal interest of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Altogether, psychoanalytic concepts have become part of our everyday life. Freud, Lacan and Jung did not invent these principles; they discovered them operating in human beings. In other words, they simply named and explained these principles of human behaviours. So, the interpretation of any literary text, like the ones under discussion, may include psychoanalytic concepts and explore some key notions about human experience.

The third theory used in this work is Social Identity Theory (SIT). This theory offers a comprehensive analysis of Englishness and Blackness that accounts for historical context, psychological nuances, and social identities, and a perfect platform for discourses surrounding belonging. This theory is a component of social psychology theory which explores the influence of group membership, processes and intergroup relations on individual self-concept and self-esteem.

The development of SIT can be attributed to Henri Tajfel, who was motivated by his personal experience of discrimination and intergroup conflicts. Tajfel sought to understand how individuals who had previously coexisted as family members, friends, neighbours or colleagues could suddenly perceive one another as dangerous or enemies, even in the absence of rational evidence. (Tajfel, 1974,1975,1978a,1978b,1978c).

Subsequently, Tajfel and his colleague John Turner formulated the Social Identity Theory as a “Theory of Intergroup Conflict” (Tajfel & Turner 1979). Exponents of this theory include Michael Hogg, Alex Haslam, Dominic Abrams, Rupert Brown and Steve Reicher, just to name few. According to Tajfel and Turner, people strive towards the establishment of more inclusive and maturing milieu. Importantly, this distinctive aspect will be subject to the continued examination and exploration of subsequent chapters.

From a critical and psychoanalytical perspective, Social Identity Theory (SIT) is highly valuable in understanding human behaviour within social contexts. It offers important insights into the social identity foundations of discrimination, prejudice, and intergroup conflict by emphasizing group based categorization and safe-enhancement motives. This aspect makes it

particularly relevant for this work as it helps in understanding group dynamics and promoting intercultural ties.

An effective approach to cultivating an understanding and appreciation of an opus, involves engaging with existing scholarly discourse that pertain to the subject matter whose ultimate goal is in directing researchers' intellectual trajectory while safeguarding against ethical transgression of plagiarism. With this in mind, Kwame Kwei- Armah's Triptych has received diverse scholarly critics. Nonetheless, certain researchers and critics have found the texts captivating and have given an appraisal of it from diverse vantage points.

Abraham Maslow in *The Need to Belong: Rediscovering Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, argues by attributing significant value to the sense of belonging and social acceptance throughout life. The primary interest of belonging is a psychological sense of being in a state of communion with others or a safe unit. Human beings need to live collectively or belong to a group that allows rooting and generates identity and social reference (2010). Sense of belonging is the biggest reason to form groups, communities, and societies. All people feel the need to belong to be part of something through identification.

Maslow's appraisal likens that of Tony Tambi Kelechi Mbuagbaw in their exploration of multicultural dynamics, wherein individuals grappling with cross-continental discrimination engage in a process of identity negotiation striving towards a future marked by principles of inclusiveness and acceptance. Given these points, Tony Tambi Kelechi Mbuagbaw has a strong personal resonance:

*as a Nigerian-born, Cameroon-raised filmmaker based in Los Angeles, ... it successfully captures that dual feeling of beauty and loneliness when you are caught between two cultures simultaneously being both insider and outsider blood. (Blurd)*

In effect, this statement touches on the process of dealing with and figuring out one's identity when belonging to multiple cultures just like Kwei-Armah, who never had a "home" until he discovered he was African not a universal alien. "When I was young I never had a home. I used to call myself at sixteen famously a "universal alien". ... I'd never had a home until I discovered that I was an African and that actually, I was a diasporic African (p.247)



This triggered his search for his true identity, a group/class and a return to his roots-alienation, he yearns to belong. The feeling of belonging distinguishes by the need to establish close and safe ties that generate a sense of security, care, and affection. A universal alien seeking for emotions and inclusiveness. This theory has major tenets which are insightful and relevant in understanding this research and they include social categorization, social identity, social comparison, self-esteem hypothesis, positive distinctiveness, out-group homogeneity which will be used in the course of this work to illustrate and show how this affects and shapes individuals' identities in the Triptych of Kwame Kwei-Armah.

Social categorization, the first stage of the social identity theory, a central concept of SIT, involves individuals classifying themselves and others into social groups based on shared characteristics like gender, age, ethnicity, occupation and nationality. After a careful observation, this happens all the time without you even thinking about it. This simplifies the social world, fostering identification with in-groups and perceiving out-group members negatively. For instance, individuals may identify as Bamileke, Bakossi, Anglophone or Francophone based on language and ethnicity. Social categorization leads to self enhancement and positive evaluation of in-groups, while promoting intergroup bias, discrimination, prejudices and stereotypes. This comparison process influences attitudes, behaviours and intergroup relations shaping individuals' social identities.

The self-esteem hypothesis, a concept which suggests that people derive self-esteem from perceiving their own social group positively. This means that individuals feel good about themselves when they see their in-group as valuable or superior. They boost their self-esteem by emphasizing their group's positive qualities and achievements, fostering a sense of pride and belonging. Positive distinctiveness reflects a strong desire to perceive one's group as superior or distinct from others, driven by the need for social identity and self-esteem enhancement. It involves highlighting a positive quality and characteristics of the in-group to create a sense of superiority and uniqueness. On the other hand, out-group homogeneity refers to perceiving out-group members as more similar to each other than in-group members. This perception can lead to stereotypes and prejudices. Given these points:

Social Identity Theory stems from marked categorization to a given crew that leads people to discriminate the house group members and favour the in-group as part of social

processes. Here, the classification process allows individuals to perceive themselves as part of groups to which they identify, and feel a sense of belonging. Moreso, individuals will strive for positive distinctiveness, meaning that individuals will tend to seek or establish a favorable comparison between the in-groups and out-groups and this pressure is being too motivated by the desire to ensure or enhance self-esteem and maintain a positive self-image (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This is so to say that in the process of making such silent US versus THEM distinctions, individuals tend to discriminate and stereotype people from out-groups (Smith1999), seeing themselves superior and others inferior. In this regard, they further affirm:

*Some writers including Gregor and McPherson, 1966; Milner, 1975, 1981; Morland, 1969) have argued that the status relations between dominant and subordinate groups determine the latter's identity problems. (By social status, we mean a ranking or hierarchy of perceived prestige). Subordinate groups often seem to internalize a wider social evolution of themselves as "inferior" or "second class", and this consensual inferiority is reproduced as relative self-derogation on a number of indices that have been used in the various studies. (p.280)*

This implies that the relationship between dominant and subordinate groups plays a vital role in shaping individuals' identity challenges of the subordinate group in particular.

For an effective and empirical inquiry into the complexity of identity negotiations in Kwei-Armah's Triptych, social identity theory will serve as a lens since, these texts centers on the intricate dynamics of identity negotiation within diverse cultural contexts; we believe that by employing this well-established critical theory, we are convinced to deepen our understanding of how individual navigate their identities in multicultural environments. These tenets provide insights into group behavior, identity formation, and the roots of prejudice and discrimination, highlighting the complex interplay between individual identity and group dynamics.

In summary, using new historicism, psychoanalysis, and social identity theory equips this work with diverse perspectives and analytical tools, providing readers with a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding Englishness, Blackness, and belonging.

## CHAPTER TWO

### INFLUENCES ON THE AUTHOR AND REPRESENTATIONS OF BLACK BRITISH CONSCIOUSNESS

This chapter attempts to trace the link between the complex relationships in Kwei-Armah triptych plays and the world from which they got their existence. It also seeks to examine the socio-cultural and political backgrounds against which Kwei-Armah wrote with the aim of showing that the playwright's drama reflects the conditions of his upbringing and the spirit of his age. The analyses are drawn from the perspective of New Historicism to discern various historical and literary influences of Kwei-Armah's selected works under study.

Many critics argue that the significant progress of dramatic art has been towards making the art an expository medium for the expression of ideas. As such, the intellectual ideas of the last decade of the twentieth century became the hidden source that fuelled art. Drama during this period concerned itself first and foremost with ideas. Robert Ferguson holds that:

*It [post-war drama] has been created out of a world of thought, peopled by speculative mannikins, circumscribed in a technique prescribed by logic, and directed to understanding. It started in the terms of abstract ideas, and ... personal living. In post-drama, life has been reduced to formulas. Now, every great drama from Beckett stems from ideas. (2)*

The key issue had therefore been for writers to present in his works their thoughts of and that of intellectuals. This intellectual influence on literature had become so strong that it had to be recognized as one of the factors of social existence. As Ferguson puts it, "he who ignore it, is a bad teacher, statesman, or artist" (4). Literary works are not therefore mysteriously inspired; rather they are formed by perceptions, constituting the general ideology of the age. The influence of cannons of thoughts in post-war drama has been enormous in that it has governed the choice of characters and themes.

The chapter thus seeks to review some biographical details about the author, his various philosophical, religious, artistic influences and inclinations, with the intention of showing that

the various influences helped to shape his dramatic vision, a vision that stands opposed to the status quo and thus deconstruct twentieth century British norms. The chapter is divided into three. The first part relates Kwei-Armah's biography and shows that there is an interplay between his upbringing and the characters in his plays. The next section focuses on the influence of the American Black Power Movement and its influence on black British drama in general and Kwei-Armah's triptych. The last section of this chapter brings out Kwei-Armah's literary influences showing how it shaped his dramatic vision.

### **Biography of the Author**

The words below by Dorothea Zeitler summaries Kwei-Armah's life in London:

*Kwame Kwei-Armah born in 1967, is a black British actor, director and playwright. Born Ian Roberts, he is the son of West Indian immigrants who early in his life instilled in him the importance of education and hard work. As a first-generation black British citizen, he faced discrimination and adversity, which pushed him to seek his African roots. His parents worked multiple jobs to send him and his siblings to private school. It was this dedication to education and social responsibility that spurred Kwei-Armah toward playwriting. In the introduction to his selected works, Kwei-Armah writes: "It had been ingrained in me as a child by my brilliant mother that whatever occupation I found myself in, serving the greater community through that occupation had to be a goal, an aim. Anything less was selfishness (Kwei-Armah, X).*

The name Ian Roberts reveals his affiliation to his British inclination, while Kwei-Armah reflects on his African roots, heritage and a sense of self-discovery by tracing his roots to Ghana in Africa. This linguistic feature represents his African identity and rich cultural background. This return to his roots strengthens his social identity as could be evidenced in his works. Though young, Kwei-Armah had already developed huge hatred and indignation against his society and the white British, seen in a report on "Theatre as a Foreign policy" by Lynn Deering, where he throws back on the first time he heard the word "slave". He said:

*I was about five years old, actually, and my best mate at the time was a guy called John, a white guy, and we were having a—I don't know—a fight that five-year-olds have. "My dad is stronger than your dad!" kind of fights. And he said to me, "Anyway, shut your mouth! You were once my slave!" he said he did not know what that is but it sounds bad so, "I'm gonna beat on you some more (ix).*

The above depicts racially biased cognitive frameworks deeply ingrained within the Caucasian community, perpetuating discriminatory attitudes towards members of the Black community. The white guy reinforces the notion that, Kwei-Armah as a black individual is inferior and unworthy of belonging to a white community or declaring power, hence Englishness.

Englishness is often associated with ideas of national pride, heritage, and the folklore that has shaped the nation over centuries. England, as one of the four countries that make up the United Kingdom, has a unique cultural tapestry woven from its history, exemplified by traditions ranging from the monarchy to quintessentially English pastimes such as tea-drinking and football. This collective identity has been influenced by the island's geography, historical events, and evolving societal norms. Englishness is therefore a multifaceted concept that encapsulates the cultural, social, historical, and linguistic characteristics associated with England and its people. At its core, it reflects the identity of individuals who identify themselves as English and their connection to the broader historical narrative of England. The exploration of Englishness can be traced through various lenses, including national identity, cultural practices, language, and regional differences.

As we narrow our focus, Englishness can be examined through its historical evolution. The Anglo-Saxon period laid the groundwork for a sense of national identity, further influenced by the Norman Conquest, the rise of the British Empire, and the impact of two world wars. Each of these events not only shaped the political landscape but also left an indelible mark on the cultural psyche of England. The notion of Englishness has been shaped by literature as well, with authors like Shakespeare, Austen, and Orwell exploring English identity through their works, intertwining cultural motifs with social commentary.

Delving deeper, we encounter the distinctive aspects of English life that contribute to Englishness today. Language, for instance, is a cornerstone of this identity. The English language has evolved over time, absorbing influences from Latin, French, and numerous other languages, thereby reflecting the country's history of invasions, trade, and cultural exchange.

Regionalism adds another layer of complexity. The concept of "Englishness" differs significantly when viewed through the lens of local customs and identities. For example, someone from Yorkshire may express their Englishness in ways that diverge from how a Londoner perceives their own identity. Cultural practices, local history, and even food contribute to this local flavour, reinforcing that Englishness is not solely a national construct but also one grounded in localized experiences.

Finally, contemporary discussions about Englishness often grapple with its implications in an increasingly multicultural society. As England continues to confront the challenges of globalization, immigration, and cultural integration, the definition of Englishness is being reexamined and reshaped, inviting dialogues around inclusivity and the notion of what it means to be English in the 21st century.

Localized experiences in the 21st century English society made Black British writers like Kwei-Armah to question his belonging. Why would a boy of his age refer to him as a slave? This appellation did not help his social standing as it rather provoked indignation and discontent. This situation is replicated in his plays through immigrants who are clamouring for reparation over British involvement in slave trade. In *Fix Up* and *Statement of Regret*, characters cannot stop asking why their language, religion, tradition and culture were taken away from them to make them beasts of burden, and that caused generations of immigrants not knowing where they originated from. In these plays, the playwright carefully and wittily shows the grief for the loss of an identity, culture and family, and the pain of living second-class lives in first-world settings, signifying the non-belongingness of Black British. So, what then is Blackness?

Blackness refers to the condition of being Black, often relating to individuals or cultures of African descent. It encompasses a wide range of identities, experiences, and expressions linked to people who identify as Black. The concept of Blackness has been shaped significantly by historical events, including the transatlantic slave trade, colonization, and the civil rights

movements. These historical contexts influence how Blackness is perceived and experienced today. The assertion of Blackness has important political dimensions, particularly in the context of resistance against racism, discrimination, and inequality. Movements advocating for Black rights, such as Black Lives Matter, seek to elevate awareness and address systemic injustices faced by Black individuals and communities.

Blackness is deeply rooted in cultural identity and heritage. It includes the traditions, languages, art, music, and social practices that have emerged from African cultures and those of the African diaspora. This cultural dimension can also involve the celebration and acknowledgment of shared histories and experiences. It is crucial to recognize that Blackness encompasses a diversity of experiences and identities. Issues such as colorism, intersectionality, and regional differences highlight that being Black is not a monolithic experience but rather a spectrum of identities and realities. Blackness in Black British literature encompasses a complex and multifaceted exploration of identity, culture, and experience, particularly within the context of the United Kingdom. It reflects the historical, social, and political realities faced by Black British individuals and communities, often shaped by a legacy of colonialism, migration, and systemic racism.

As a young child, the then Ian Robert did not choose to come to London, he walked the streets of London when it was cold, grew up in Southall-West London and observed fraught relationships between the white, African Caribbean, and Asian communities living there, relations that he tries to fix in *Elmina's Kitchen* and *Fix Up*. Southall, in the 1970s saw Asian families moving in and white families moving out, ... and Kwei-Armah perceived animosity from the Asian community towards the Afro-Caribbean community. Pearce reports that:

*One day, at a time of the April 1979 Southall riots, his father came home after the evening work shift and took him out to see the Hambrough Tavern on fire. Kwei-Armah saw a police van arrived; when the police started to charge at the crowd using batons and shields, he ran home frightened. From the upstairs front room, he saw the police chasing black and Asian boys along the street, followed by the skinheads, who also had batons and shields, chasing behind the police (112).*

To Kwei-Armah, as Pearce further alludes, racism in the British society was hell. He lived in a period of naked aggressive racism; the type of racism where nearly all of his cousins

and friends were either chased, stabbed or cut on a daily basis. The event shocked him, making him feel that he was living in an alien environment, and reinforced his resolution to do well in his education, to look for a sense of belonging. Belonging is a deep emotional experience characterized by a sense of acceptance, connection, and community. It is the feeling that one is an integral part of a group, environment, or relationship, and it encompasses several key aspects.

The legacy of colonialism, migration, and the Windrush generation plays a significant role in shaping narratives of belonging. Writers reflect on the historical and ongoing impact of these experiences on individual and collective identities. Belonging in Black British literature often explores themes of identity, community, displacement, and the search for a place in society or a home. This literary corpus examines the complexities of belonging in the context of race, ethnicity, culture, and the historical experiences of Black individuals in Britain. Black British writers, like Kwei-Armah, frequently grapple with their cultural heritage, negotiating between Afro-Caribbean, African, and British identities. Characters may seek to affirm their cultural roots while also finding their place in a predominantly white society.

Evidently, all through his life, issues like racism, minority, gangsterism and violence was stereotyped into many young blacks, and this makes repeated appearances in his plays, most notably *Bitter Herbs*, *Elmina's Kitchen*, and *Fix Up*. Deli and Alice are presented as those wanting to belong in a society that has rejected them, openly and aggressively practicing racism.

According to Social Identity Theory, people tend to categorize themselves or identify strongly with a group and whenever they encounter new culture totally different from theirs, this leads to some sort of uncertainty and doubt or discomfort. Kwei-Armah became anxious and decides to trace his roots as he is confronted with prejudices and stereotypes among his peers. This highlights the shock and sense of belonging which are tenets of social identity theory that individuals tend to identify with or encounter in their new abodes, thus creating feelings of rejection, confusion and discomfort.

Moreover, as Kwei-Armah observes the events unfolding while growing up in Britain, he becomes witness to the struggles faced by Africans and West Indians ferried as slaves to Britain, as they encountered all forms of discrimination as immigrants. They faced the challenge of being marginalized on two fronts-: for their immigrant status and their identity as



Black British. Consequently, they confront prejudices not only from “native-born” Britons but also from individuals within their own community both white and black. The Black British navigating these complex dynamics of race, ethnicity and imagination status find themselves in a challenging situation. Kwei-Armah strives for a better life while simultaneously contending with the additional burden of dual marginalization.

At the age of 19, he decided to trace his origin and his family history through slave trade back, to his ancestral African roots in Ghana and after watching the television series *Roots*. His early life was marked by a strong connection to his African heritage, as he spent his formative years in Ghana. This dual cultural background played a pivotal role in shaping his artistic sensitivity and themes found in his works. Kwei-Armah finally began to understand that he and many others were taken from Africa to the West Indies and then, their parents went to Britain. In his plays, even characters who have no link with slavery, are in the dilemma of double identity. Alice in *Fix Up* cannot be linked with slavery but is entangled in the nest of dual identity and the effects of slavery and slave trade.

Kwei-Armah’s closeness with his African heritage remains one of his greatest influences. In his speeches and write-ups, he gives testimonies of his mother being the trigger of the multifaceted person that he becomes: British actor, playwright, director, singer and broadcaster. If he is considered sometimes of the renaissance man today, it is because of the example of his mother. “I am my mother’s son”, he countlessly declares, and even after her departure, she is still with him and he reference the mother all the time, in everything that he does from his plays to his speeches:

*I grew up seeing my mum minding, nursing, being a hairdresser on Saturday mornings at the house, and crocheting. I saw her doing so many things” so to me doing music, acting, singing, directing and writing – I am fortunate that these are artistic and brilliant things but I am just following the tradition of my mother that we turn our hand to whatever blessings we have been given (Kwei-Armah, xi).*

This blessing, indeed reaped dividends, writing multiple successful plays, “notching up prestigious awards including the added triumph of being the first person of African-Caribbean descent to have a play aired in the West End” (102). This is because he identifies positively

with his motherland and environment, he is able to have outstanding performances in school, yielding multiple successful writings, and maintain positive social relationship. This strengthens his social identity.

Although the playwright avoided any active involvement in politics, he remained an activist. Peacock reports that “centuries back it was rare for people or artists to openly talk or debate on the effective abolition of Slave Trade service” (183). Due to his artistic stand point, the government of Britain invited Kwei-Armah to speak at the Bicentenary on the Abolition of the Slave Trade service at the Westminster Abbey before the Queen of England, and the Queen’s Palace was once again opened to Caribbean, and writers like Kwei-Armah became active in the political scene of the colonial master.

On the merit of his works, Kwei-Armah is an actor, writer and director and has worked extensively in theatre, television and radio. He has made significant contributions to contemporary theatre and literature, exploring issues of race, identity, and social justice. His debut play, *A Bitter Herb* (2001), premiered at the Bristol Old Vic in 1998. Meanwhile, in 1999, *Big Nose* (2001), based on Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac* and co-written with Chris Monks, opened at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry. That same year his soul musical, *Hold On* (then entitled *Blues Brother, Soul Sister*) (2001), premiered at the Bristol Old Vic before touring nationally. In 2003, his nationally acclaimed *Elmina’s Kitchen* (2003) premiered at the National Theatre’s Cottesloe theatre, before transferring to the Garrick Theatre in 2005 where it became the first drama by a black British-born writer to be staged in the West End. *Elmina’s Kitchen* was followed with two new plays, both of which also premiered at the Cottesloe: *Fix Up* (2004) and *Statement of Regret* (2007). Together the three plays comprise what Kwei-Armah refers to as his “triptych”. After *Statement of Regret*, he has written two other plays, *Let There Be Love* (2009) and *Seize the Day* (2009), both of which premiered at London’s Tricycle theatre in 2008 and 2009 respectively, and were directed by Kwei-Armah himself. His plays are all set in contemporary London, demonstrating his commitment to representing the contemporary metropolitan black British experience. *Elmina’s Kitchen* was also performed in Baltimore and Chicago, marking it as one of a handful of plays written by black Britons to have crossed the Atlantic.

## Historical Influences

The history of the largest immigrant community (African American) influenced the black British playwright's identification with other black cultures borne from the post-war, slavery and slave trade experiences, of racial exclusion and marginalization (Brenda, 40). Elisa Brenda also highlights that "the persistence of a tradition of cultural borrowing and adaptation which has always marked black theatre in Britain as an artistic practice is the product of negotiations with multiple histories, politics, cultures and traditional performances" (45).

The Black Power movement that emerged in the United States of America in the mid-1960s has had significant consequences to black British theatre. Although Britain did not experience the mass political mobilization among blacks that occurred in the USA, Black Power, with its emphasis on collective opposition, self-determination and self-consciousness, strongly motivated the younger generation, especially black activists and artists.

The spirit of Black Power was provoked in Britain with visits by Malcolm X in 1965 and Stokely Carmichael and Angela Davis in 1967. In 1967 Nigerian playwright Obi Egbuna became president of The Universal Coloured People's Association, Britain's first Black Power organization. A year later, Egbuna founded the British Black Panther Movement – the first Black Panther organization to be formed outside the USA. Enoch Powell's infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech, delivered on 20 April 1968, envisaged a future for Britain marked by racial conflicts through direct comparison with the race riots erupting across the USA in the wake of Martin Luther King's assassination.

The results were immediate, because "the year 1968 marked the beginning of a major shift for black theatre in Britain (Brenda, 89). For the young Trinidadian Mustapha Matura (born Noel Matura: who has changed his name, just like Ian Robert to Kwame Kwei-Armah, to reflect his non-white ancestry), it was a time of heightened self-awareness and inspiration:

*as well as flower power in 1968 there was also Black Power. Information and knowledge about my life and history was arriving at breakneck speed, the effects of which were so dramatic and inspiring. I felt an urge, a need to speak, to tell it like it is, to pass it on, to confirm (ix).*

Matura just like Kwei-Armah felt an urge to tell the "the goodam stori as it is" (Matura, xi) about the lives of their ancestors and the history of generation of Africans, and their coming

to a foreign land where their names, language, religion and culture have been severally trampled on the ground.

1968 was also the year that white British director Roland Rees, recently returned from the United States of America, and began to stage works in London by the radical playwrights of America's Black Arts Movement (BAM). The BAM, with Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Ed Bullins at its vanguard, defined itself as "the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept" (Neal, 29). Its members, were inspired by "the message of black political and cultural nationalism expounded by activists like Malcolm X and the anti-colonial writings of Franz Fanon, the imperative to create a theatre about, by, for and near blacks advocated" (Neal, 30).

In theatre, when Berman decided to stage a "Black and White Power Season" at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), Rees convinced him that the season should have a black British presence (Brenda, 81), and in 1970, Mustapha Matura made his debut with a series of short vignettes entitled *Black Pieces*. Matura's plays are not only remarkable for depicting the black experience in Britain, they are also strikingly similar in theme, style and tone to the BAM plays that Rees had imported. The BAM plays, therefore, provided more than an impetus to find a black British voice; they also provided a model for its early utterances. In this light, Brenda writes that "in their quest to create a Black aesthetic, the members of the BAM aligned their plays' messages with Black Power ideology, aiming them at ordinary people living on the front line (90). They rejected what they perceived to be a Western model of "art for art's sake", embracing instead a theatre with a clear social function aimed first and foremost at black people. In the words of Larry Neal, a key member of the group, the Black Arts Movement believes that your ethics and your aesthetics are one. That the contradictions between ethics and aesthetics in western society is [sic] symptomatic of a dying culture (31).

In order for their art to mirror the political quest for autonomy and self-consciousness, the BAM advocated "a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic" by developing a Black art with "a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology" (29).

A number of black British plays exhibit the BAM's – and Black Power – influence, evident in their thematic and stylistic approach. This is particularly apparent in plays written from the 1970s and 1980s, during which time, "increased social tensions in the United Kingdom ensured that the imperatives of community and self-empowerment remained

pertinent” (29). Revolutionary-style plays which convey a message of solidarity and critique the white establishment include Linton Kwesi Johnson’s performed poem *Voices of the Living and the Dead* (1973), Michael McMillan’s *On Duty* (1983), Jimi Rand’s *Say Hallelujah* (1977) and Michael Ellis’ *Chameleon* (1985).

In line with the above listed BAM playwrights came a didactic tone from contemporary dramatists who weaved education with entertainment, with Sol. B. Rivers and Kwame Kwei-Armah taking the lead. They focused on the ghetto and street life which emerged strongly in Kwei-Armah’s plays where black youths in urban settings involve in crime and violence as evident in *Elmina’s Kitchen*. His dialogue has been described as “black street vernacular” – a trademark of Williams Roy’s *Ed Bullins*’ and Sonia Sanchez’s plays. These playwrights seek a dramatic language that reflects the realities of black urban life in Britain, and this is an instructive tool to teach and conscientize African immigrants.

These themes and aesthetics which emerged in black British drama and African American theatre practitioners who periodically settled in Britain also brought ideas and trends from the USA to the UK and played an important role in shaping black British theatre. Rufus Collins moved from New York to London in the 1970s where he worked as a director for Dark and Light and the Keskidee Centre (Brenda, 134). As Brenda further explains, he brought with him his experience of working for the experimental Living Theatre as well as a Black Power political awareness fostered in Harlem during the 1960s (135). Collins directed a number of British premieres of African American plays, including a number of premieres by Edgar Nkosi White who also spent time in London.

Homage to African American singers and music appears in a number of black British and African American plays. It features in Caryl Phillips’ *Strange Fruit* (1980), Kwei-Armah’s *Elmina’s Kitchen* (2003), *Fix Up* (2004) and *Let There Be Love* (2008). Kwei-Armah and other black British and American playwrights used these sound tracks as a means to draw attention to the challenges facing blacks through performing arts. The stage description of the opening scene of *Elmina’s Kitchen* reveals that:

*the walls are littered with ‘Dance Hall’ advertisements and Whey and Nephew-type posters. Amid the Budweiser series of posters celebrating African-American heroes... The TV that is attached to*

*the left wall closest to the counter is blaring out ragga tune 'Sufferer' by Bounty Killer .... Standing behind the counter is Deli, ... he has his head buried deep in a letter while mouthing the words of the song being played on TV. 'Born as a sufferer, grow up as a sufferer (1).*

The biographies of African Americans who played an important role in Black history have also been dramatized. In *Fix Up*, the playwright introduces us to a modern Black Renaissance which opens with a speech (it is an old 1920s recording) by early Black leader Marcus Garvey who is articulating in a 'Trumanesque' style. He implores the scattered sons and daughters of Africa to recognize their inherent worth, to don their history like a royal cloak, and to aspire to a grandeur that lay just beyond the horizon. In the text, Brother Kiyi is showing a deep concern for the future of younger generation of Africans like Carl, Kwesi and ... urging them to understand and embrace their own value and potential, to take pride in their heritage and history found in the bookshop for it is their protective garment for empowerment that is, their identity of greatness.

Black American protagonists prefigure the political difference between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X (McLeod, 29). Indeed, the conflict between integrationist, propounded by Martin Luther and separatist, represented by Malcolm X camps defines a number of character relationships in black British dramas such as Kwei-Armah's *Statement of Regret* (2007). The continued importance placed on African American political figures as role models is highlighted for young people with the phrase "I have a Dream" (by David Levi Addai (2011), about Martin Luther King Jr. and Kwei-Armah's *Seize the Day* (2009) which, inspired by Obama's election victory, imagines a black mayor of London.

In a number of plays, the names of famous black icons from around the world are listed as a means of emphasizing black achievement and solidarity. However, the names of African Americans are the most prominent, underlining the degree to which African America has captured the black British imagination. Names invoked in plays of Kwei-Armah such as *Elmina's Kitchen* (2003), *Fix Up* (2004) and *Statement of Regret* (2007) include, among others, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Paul Robeson, James Baldwin, Booker T Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois.

The adoption of African American culture by black Britons like Kwei-Armah is not without its critics. Some see it as an inappropriate imitation based on cultural imperialism. It has also been noted that the programming of black theatre by mainstream venues in Britain is often dominated by African American plays. However, the acknowledgement of the impact of African America is not a slight to the field. Neither does it assume a cultural hegemony. Rather, the African American influence draws attention to black British transnational identification with other black cultures borne from the post-war experience of racial exclusion and marginalization. It also highlights the persistence of a tradition of cultural borrowing and adaptation which has always marked black theatre in Britain as an artistic practice characterized by negotiations with multiple histories, politics, cultures and performance traditions.

### **Literary Influences and Authorial Voice**

In 2011, Kwei-Armah relocated to the United States of America where he became Artistic Director of Centre Stage in Baltimore. Morgan Freeman's "Why Black Actors Quit Britain" a newspaper article about black British brain drain to the USA, particularly among actors, gives reasons why Africans see America as a cultural and symbolic resource. He develops the view that Kwei-Armah's relocation to the USA follows a long infatuation with African American politics and culture, citing two African American writers to have played a decisive role in Kwei-Armah's life. To him,

*Alex Haley, whose books, Roots (1976) and The Autobiography of Malcolm X, co-authored with Malcolm X (1965), re-configured Kwei-Armah's identity and honed his political consciousness; and August Wilson, who inspired him to become a playwright and whose style has highly influenced Kwei-Armah's dramaturgy (9).*

Freeman later quotes Kwei-Armah to have said "they [Wilson and Haley] made me the writer I am today". The frequently talked about television series, *Roots*, surely had an impact on the young Kwei-Armah (then Ian Roberts) for "It was when [he] was 11 and [he] changed [his] path. It inspired me [him] to start connecting myself with Africa and to find my true identity" (qtd in Davis, 272). But it was August Wilson's works that really influenced Kwei-Armah. He identified strongly with the African American sense of rootlessness and non-

belonging projected in Wilson's plays. He felt disconnected from his parents' Grenadian culture and struggled to find his place in Britain. Looking back at his youth, Kwei-Armah expresses a profound sense of dislocation that is why he will always recall his youth saying he never had a home and he used to call at sixteen famously a, "universal alien...." (qtd in Davis, 247).

In his mid-twenties, the then Ian Roberts went to Ghana where he traced his family genealogy and changed his name to Kwame Kwei-Armah on his return, which is a way to reconnect with his Ghanaian heritage. This name change reflects the theme of identity and cultural reclamation. Through this act, Kwei-Armah embraced his roots which is particularly significant for individuals navigating diasporic identities. This transformation also plays a role in his work as a playwright, where themes of identity, belonging, and cultural dialogue often permeate his narratives. His identification with Afrocentric ideology was not just the direct result of his experiences of racism and marginalization growing up in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s, but his spiritual and physical connection to August Wilson.

In 1990, Kwei-Armah attended the first August Wilson play, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* at London's Tricycle Theatre where he admits he became a devotee of Wilson in the following words: "I really got turned on to August in a big, bad way. I was smitten by its spirituality, by its haunting refrain to Africa, its exploration of the pain of the diaspora" (qtd in Edwardes, 206). He noticed that Wilson's plays "draw attention to the history of the black American experience and highlight the persistent impact of the past on the present, employing the spirit world as an aesthetic device" (Craze, 201) and that his theatrical expression of Afrocentric and black cultural nationalist politics can be a powerful role model for his plays.

In an interview in *The New York Times* about *Elmina's Kitchen*, Kwei-Armah recounts:

*I was so touched by the magnitude of this man [August Wilson] and his commitment to talk of and chronicle the African-American experience through the art form [...] I went back to my hotel room that night and said, "O.K., I now know what I want to do; I want to chronicle the black British Experience" (qtd in Wolf, 2005).*

Kwei-Armah's triptych takes its lead from Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle. For the Cycle, Wilson wrote ten plays, each set in Pittsburgh and each play representative of a decade in the



twentieth century. Similarly, Kwei-Armah sets all three plays in the triptych in London and although the plays occur within the first decade of the 2000s, according to class stratification: *Elmina's Kitchen* – the underclass, *Fix Up* – the working class and *Statement of Regret* – the middle class.

In *Elmina's Kitchen*, the action takes place in a fast-food restaurant called Elmina's Kitchen in Hackney's notorious "murder mile". The play examines the failed attempts of a restaurant owner, Deli, to keep his son Ashley from entering into a life of gangs and crime. Brother Kiyi's black-consciousness bookshop provides the setting for *Fix Up*. In the play, Kiyi's struggle to keep his shop afloat is undermined by his lodger Kwesi, who plans to take over the premises and turn it into a black hair products shop. The conflict yields a debate centred around whether black self-determination is best won through intellectual or economic means. When Kiyi's mixed-race daughter arrives, looking for the father who gave her up for adoption and for an explanation as to the whereabouts of her mother, a concurrent theme emerges around identity and the importance of historical knowledge, and truth, if individual and collective freedom is to be achieved. *Statement of Regret* is set in a black political think-tank. The play explores the role of black politics in contemporary British society and the differing generational and ethnic approaches taken by the think-tank's black British, West Indian and African employees. At the play's core lies an examination of the continued legacy of slavery and its impact upon the black psyche.

Themes of inter-generational conflict and the struggle against racial oppression and racial identity are as central to Kwei-Armah's work as they are to Wilson's. The echoes of August Wilson's thematic concerns and style in Kwei-Armah's work are frequently commented upon. Writing in London Theatre News, Matt Wolf commented:

*For all that the suited black British characters exist an ocean apart – and an economic class or two above – the black milieu unforgettably chronicled in the US by the late August Wilson, Statement of Regret seems in numerous ways to want to answer many of Wilson's ongoing concerns, adapting them for a UK audience. The result makes for an intriguing theatrical case of call-and-response, whereby one feels very directly the cultural and thematic baton being passed from one important dramatist to another (Wolf, n.d.).*

A number of thematic and situational similarities exist between Kwei-Armah's triptych and Wilson's ten-play cycle. In *Elmina's Kitchen*, Deli, an ex-boxer and convict, is determined to reform his and his son's life. The relationship is reminiscent of Wilson's *Fences* (1985, USA; published 1986). In *Fences*, Troy, the play's protagonist, like Deli, is an ex-convict, an ex-sportsman whose dreams never came true and who struggles in his job to provide enough money for his family. However, the relationship between father and son in *Fences* is reversed in *Elmina's Kitchen*. In *Fences*, Troy's jealousy prevents his son going to college on a football scholarship. In *Elmina's Kitchen*, Deli is desperate to remove his son from a world of gangs and violence and his motives are entirely altruistic (unselfish).

Nevertheless, the father-son relationship is destroyed in both plays. Both plays feature climactic scenes in which father and son fight, fracturing the family and marking a turning point in the dramas. Cory abandons the family home after his fight with Troy and Ashley decides to turn against Deli in his desperation to become gang leader, Digger's right-hand man, a decision that cause him his life. The similarity lies in both plays' exploration of the themes of failed ambitions, the inability of the father to prevent history repeating itself and of death. In *Fences*, Troy challenges Death, determined to outmanoeuvre him. In *Elmina's Kitchen*, Death has been allowed to enter into the blackstreets of Hackney and now stalks the family and permeates the peace with its presence. Although *Fences* ends with hope when Troy's death brings about the possibility of the family to unite and heal, *Elmina's Kitchen* tragic ending, which sees Ashley shot by Digger in front of Deli, highlights how the gang world has perverted the natural order of things whereby a father must attend the funeral of his son.

When Kwei-Armah's *Elmina's Kitchen* was produced by Centre Stage in Baltimore and directed by Marion McClinton, a leading August Wilson director, the reviewer for *The Washington Post* could not help but draw a comparison between Kwei-Armah and Wilson:

*Elmina's Kitchen* clearly owes a debt to, among other dramatists, Wilson; the play's setting - a funky diner in a marginal black neighbourhood is practically interchangeable with that of Wilson's "Two Trains Running" (Marks, 65).

However, while the setting may be familiar, the themes of *Two Trains Running* (1992) more closely resemble the issues explored in *Fix Up*. The setting of *Two Trains Running* in the

declining neighbourhood of the Hill District in the 1960s, which was once a politically and culturally vibrant black area, resembles Kiyi's struggling black-consciousness bookshop. In both plays, the setting (Memphis' restaurant in *Two Trains Running* and Kiyi's bookshop in *Fix Up*) provides the locus for the exploration of a generational and gendered debate on approaches to black political activism and the route to self-determination. In *Two Trains Running*, Memphis represents the older generation of African Americans who adhered to the non-violent integrationist philosophy of the Civil Rights Movement, while the younger politically-active Sterling adopts the more hard-line approach of Black Power.

Evident in *Two Trains Running*, Memphis scorns Sterling's involvement in a Black rally and disagrees with Sterling's confrontational approach, preferring to navigate life without provocation. On the other hand, Risa, a woman who works in the restaurant, and her relationship with Sterling highlights the hypocrisy of blacks who critique white oppression, yet continue to oppress black women. Her disinterest in Sterling's rally reveals the way in which Black Power excluded women. In *Fix Up*, there is a similar generational conflict between Kiyi and Kwesi. Whereas both men are political, Kiyi's approach is based upon emancipation through knowledge, while Kwesi views economic power as the only means to achieve self-determination. Their divergent positions draw attention to the malleability of Black Power ideology: Black Power, an idea conceptually diffuses enough to be claimed by Black capitalists as well as Black communists, revolved around the notion of economic independence and cultural self-determination (Ongiri, 2).

Like Risa, the mixed-race Alice in *Fix Up* highlights the male-centricity of black intellectual and political leaders and her exclusion from black discourse as a mixed-race woman. The inter-generational political debate is continued in *Statement of Regret*. Within the middle-class, political-intellectual environment of the think-tank, the younger generation led by Idrissa comes into conflict with the older, Kwaku. Idrissa challenges Kwaku to replace the think-tank's old politics of blaming whites with a more internalized approach which examines the black community's inner and self-perpetuated failings.

In much the same way that the triptych describes three individual yet correlated pieces of art intended to be appreciated together, *Elmina's Kitchen*, *Fix Up* and *Statement of Regret* are linked by a common thematic thread: despite differences in age, gender, birthplace, sexuality and ethnicity, Kwei-Armah asserts that commonality may be found in a legacy of oppression

which began with slavery and continues to manifest itself in the present. The most striking echo between Kwei-Armah's Triptych and Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle is the treatment of the impact of the past on the lives of the characters in the present. The interplay between past and present is a hallmark of Wilson's work and defining element of his dramaturgy. In plays such as *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1988), *The Piano Lesson* (1990) and *Gem of the Ocean*, (2006) Wilson inserts moments which pull apart the unities of time and place, and force the characters into a space in which they must confront not only their specific pasts but the collective past of African Americans. It is only by going through this terrifying process that the deep lacerations of past injustices, still festering in the present, can begin to heal. Wilson encases his explorations of the relationship between the past and present within a dramaturgy which melds realism with ritual, and which allows for the collapsing of the time and space of the present with that of the past. This unique style is achieved through a combination of music, African American folk traditions and mythology and ritual re-enactment. In *The Past as Present* in the Drama of August Wilson, Harry Elam writes:

*Wilson (w)rights history by invoking rites that connect the spiritual, the cultural, the social, and the political, not simply to correct the past but to interpret it in ways that powerfully impact the present. In a space and time outside of time, within the liminal dimensions of theatre, Wilson (w)rights history (2004: 4).*

In the same way, Kwei-Armah's plays attempt to access a larger cosmos. Although the settings of a restaurant (*Elmina's Kitchen*), a bookshop (*Fix Up*) and a small, floundering think tank (*Statement of Regret*) are parochial, Kwei-Armah inserts devices which link the ordinary people of his plays with the larger historical events of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism. The plays' themes in common (inter-generational conflict, the struggle against racial oppression, and the search for identity) are placed within a broader continuum of black experience. In *Elmina's Kitchen*, contemporary Hackney is firmly planted on the foundation of slavery. *Elmina's Kitchen*, named after Deli's mother, is a reference to the Elmina Castle, which was used as a slave trading post in Ghana. The reference to the Atlantic slave trade suggests, as Wilson does, that the origins of intra-racial violence lie in the violent historical treatment of blacks by whites. Although the references to slavery point to an underlying cause of the intra-racial violence in the play, Kwei-Armah is also at pains to highlight that, it is through knowledge of the history of black suffering and a connection with one's cultural and

spiritual roots in Africa that blacks in the diaspora can find healing. The play's prologue situates the play in a historical and ritualized time/space from the onset:

*The stage is in darkness. A single spotlight slowly reveals a costumed man, standing absolutely still with a gurkel (a one-string African guitar famed for possessing the power to draw out spirits) in his hands [...] The music starts. It is a slow lament-sounding concoction of American blues and traditional African music. The man then covers the length and breadth of the stage flicking handfuls of powder on to the playing area (5).*

Traditionally, the gurkel is an instrument associated with exorcising malevolent spirits and the sprinkling of powder implies that the space is being consecrated and that a healing is about to take place. Although there is no interaction between the African figure and the characters in the play, his appearance (a similar female figure appears at the start of act two) signifies the presence of the ancestral past in the present and suggests that the play is a ritual re-enactment which will bring about collective healing. Such a figure is redolent of Aunt Ester, a recurring character in some of Wilson's plays, who represents the past and often draws attention to how the characters' in Wilson's plays have lost touch with their history.

In *Fix Up*, the melding of past and present is more fully realized and embodied. The setting, comprised of towering bookshelves, encases the performance space. The towers of books draw attention to the substantial contribution of black intellectuals and artists, reinforcing the idea that the play's setting within a black conscious bookshop is a space which harbours the thoughts, dreams and creativity of the past contained within the tomes. The most vivid depiction of the melding of past and present occurs when Alice, alone in the shop, begins to read from a volume of slave narratives that Brother Kiyi has recently purchased. These slave narratives provide the catalyst for Alice's self-discovery. Alone in the shop, Alice begins to read aloud about a mixed-race slave from Grenada named Mary Gould. Gould recounts the difficulties facing the mixed-race "Yella's" (133) children who occupied a social positioning between the black slaves and the plantation owner's white children. Betrayed by her colour, a visual reminder of the plantation owner's infidelity, Mary Gould was routinely whipped and then sold on by the owner's wife. The extract plunges Alice into the dark truth of her mixed-race ancestors. As she reads, she takes on the voice and persona of Mary Gould. The transformation is accompanied by a shift in the lighting state to a spotlight upon Alice and a physical transformation as Alice's voice changes and takes on a Grenadian accent. Possessed

by the “spirit” of Mary Gould, Alice is forced to confront an aspect of her history that had otherwise been unavailable to her growing up with white foster parents in Somerset. The event further provides Alice with an understanding of her feeling of dislocation in the present. She is now able to begin the process of coming to terms with growing up without a father or mother, and her isolation from her black heritage.

Kwei-Armah’s debt to Wilson also has a political dimension located in Kwei-Armah’s cultivation of a Black aesthetic. Accordingly, his plays draw on a plethora of black British cultural and linguistic forms so as to represent the complex cultural heritage of the black community in Britain. Kwei-Armah acknowledges Wilson as an inspiration for this approach:

*What he was doing with the African-American community, with his own community in Pittsburgh, inspired me to create what I perceive as the theatre of my front room. Validating your language, giving equal cultural status to the syntax, to the rhythm in which your own people speak: this is cultural equality (qtd in Edwardes, 224).*

Kwei-Armah uses language; the West Indian and Black London vernacular, calypso to show his representation of multiple generations with different cultural backgrounds, as a means of resistance. Kwei-Armah’s self-described aesthetic “theatre of my front room” reveals a front room as a transnational hub through which diverse cultures move, meet and form anew. Through Kwei-Armah’s plays’ depiction of multiple generations and ethnicities, we are presented with the genealogical diversity of the black community, which encompasses different histories, cultures and geographies. Kwei-Armah’s very specific stage directions, indicating the characters’ accents, reveal his acute awareness of language as a primary marker of such complex identities. In *Elmina’s Kitchen*, “Digger’s accent swings from his native Grenadian to hard-core Jamaican to authentic black London” (6), Anastasia, who is black British, is able to use “authentic, full-attitude Jamaican at the drop of a hat” (17) and Clifton, who is from Trinidad, “uses his eastern Caribbean accent to full effect when storytelling” (34).

Identity is further complicated in *Fix Up* through the character of Alice, who is mixed-race but was brought up in an all-white environment, and whose physical appearance is in conflict with social assumptions. At one point, she remarks: “Cos I’m brown, everybody

expects me to somehow know everything black. And I'm like, "Hey, how am I suppose to know what ... raaasclaat means, I'm from Somerset" (128).

And in *Statement of Regret*, Kwei-Armah explores intra-racial identity contrasting Junior's speech with that of his Caribbean father and African mother. The inclusion of multiple generations fulfils Kwei-Armah's aim to chronicle the black British experience by grounding it within its historical context, which takes into account the remembered history of colonization, the Caribbean migration of the Windrush generation and the contemporary phenomenon of large-scale African migration to the UK. However, like Wilson, Kwei-Armah's approach to aesthetics is one that combines an educational aspect, demonstrative of his commitment to using theatre as means to raise the self-awareness of his (black) audience. When asked by Osborne if he agreed with Linton Kwesi Johnson that "no black writer working in England today can afford "art for art's sake", Kwei-Armah responds: "Correct, and I believe in that. Let's not mince words here, my work is political work" (Osborne, 253).

In his emulation of Wilson, Kwei-Armah's politics reflect the legacy of the BAM. In Wilson's seminal speech, *The Ground on Which I Stand*, delivered at the Theatre Communications Group at Princeton University on 26 June 1996, Wilson states how he came to be formed as a "race man", holding the perspective that race "is the largest, most identifiable, and most important part of our personality" that his racial identity and his art were inseparable (1998: 494). He acknowledges that the Black Power Movement of the 1960s was "the kiln in which [he] was fired" and highlights his debt to the playwrights of the BAM:

*It was this high ground of self-definition that the black playwrights of the 1960s marked out for themselves. Ron Milner, Ed Bullins, Philip Hayes Dean, Richard Wesley, Lonne Elder III, Sonia Sanchez, Barbara Ann Teer and Amiri Baraka were among those playwrights who were particularly vocal and whose talent confirmed their presence in the society and altered the American Theater, its meaning, its craft, and its history. The brilliant explosion of black arts and letters of the 1960s remains, for me, the hallmark and the signpost that points the way to our contemporary work on the same ground (496).*

Wilson's strong impact on Kwei-Armah's playwriting, places him as an inheritor of this same tradition. As a result, Black Power cultural politics distinctly informs the aesthetic in his

triptych. Kwei-Armah's plays are written with a black audience foremost in mind. The absence of white characters in all three plays signals Kwei-Armah's reluctance to enter into a discussion of racism or protest art which centres white people as the principal subject by attacking them:

*I'm not interested in talking about race. What I'm interested in is presenting stories from my cultural lens that are about my humanity [...] What I'm saying is, we must not define ourselves purely in relation to racism (qtd in Newland, Norfolk, & Kwei-Armah, 13).*

As the African-American theatre scholar Larry Neal, quoting Knight, made clear,

*[...] implicit in the act of protest is the belief that a change will be forthcoming once the masters are aware of the protestor's "grievance" (the very word connotes begging, supplications to the gods). Only when that belief has faded and protestings end, will Black art begin (qtd in Neal, 30).*

Kwei-Armah's aesthetic aligns ideological didacticism with black cultural forms in order to provide a vehicle for black consciousness and self-determination. Like Anastasia's collection of self-help books which she passes on to Deli, the principle of self-help informs the message of Kwei-Armah's plays, which explain the plays' multiple references to black intellectual, political and cultural icons. In August Wilson's plays, characters with shamanistic powers such as Bynum and Aunt Ester provide the bridge between individuals and the healing, liberating space of the collective memory. In *Fix Up*, the space of the bookshop offers such a resource for the play's characters. In the *dramatis personae* Kwei-Armah lists three "non-present characters": Marcus Garvey, James Baldwin, and Claude McKay. Their presence throughout the play is given voice. For instance, at the start of the play, Kiyi is playing a tape of one of Garvey's speeches; Kiyi cites Baldwin in his conversations; and Carl reads McKay's poem, *If We Must Die*. Through references and quotations, the intellectual, political, and cultural life of these seminal black icons imbues the piece with their legacy and provides intellectual and spiritual nourishment to the characters and audience. Norma comments that Kiyi has taught her to love herself: "...you love Black. And all of my life, I have been taught to fear it, hate it. That ain't right!" (119).

Kwei-Armah's authorial voice is clearly of the opinion that black improvement lies in knowing one's racial history. For those that embrace it, such as Deli, there is hope; for those that do not, there is darkness, plainly demonstrated with Ashley's death at the end of *Elmina's*



*Kitchen*. The need to know yourself, your roots, your history, your people rings throughout the three works. For Kwei-Armah, pride in one's history is as important as coming to terms with the painful experience of the collective past. His plays provide a wealth of examples of extraordinary black achievement. As he states in an interview:

*Art is there solely to reflect ourselves. And it is only in that reflection that we are able to be self-critical and able to improve and remove some of the subconscious inferiority that has been placed in us since slavery (qtd in Davis: 243).*

Running in parallel with Kwei-Armah's depiction of characters struggling in life is a strong seam of positivity to bolster and nourish the audience and characters if they choose to see it. Kwei-Armah's "borrowing" from Wilson also opens his work to interpretation through an Afrocentric lens. Kwei-Armah creates characters grounded in African mythology as a means to root his plays in an African cosmology. (Although it is possible that Kwei-Armah sourced these archetypes from West African culture directly, as he never references African writers, it is plausible, as seen with his other depictions of Africa such as the gorkel player, that he has accessed such knowledge from African America). Paul Carter Harrison argues in his essay, "August Wilson's Blues Poetics", that characters in Wilson's work such as Troy in *Fences*, and Herald Loomis in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* are examples of the Yoruba figure of the trickster, Esu. Harrison argues that Wilson's appropriation of an African deity reflects "a culturally specific African American cosmological world view forged from ancestral memory" that in turn "informs the aesthetics of his work" (qtd in Shannon, 175). Similarly, Kwei-Armah's characters can also be seen to reflect this cosmology. In *Elmina's Kitchen*, Anastasia is juxtaposed to the male-dominated world of the play. She arrives unexpectedly carrying a home-made macaroni pie and looking for a job. Her superior cooking secures her the job and she quickly becomes a major force of change in the play. She convinces Deli to clean up the image his restaurant is projecting by getting rid of patrons like Digger, whose presence Anastasia describes as giving off "the stench of death" (45). She also helps Deli to give the restaurant a fresh image and new name, and exposes him to self-help books. Her positivity strengthens Deli's resolve to extricate Ashley from mixing with gangs. As a character, she is almost too good to be true. There is something artificial about her, leaving the impression that she is more archetype than a three-dimensional representation. The stage directions describe her entrance in the following way:

*We hear the chime that accompanies the opening of the shop's door. The boys look up. Enter Anastasia (forty-two). Although dressed soberly, we can see that she has the kind of body that most men of colour fantasise about. Big hips and butt, slim waist and full, full breasts. There is something incredibly sexual about her presence. ...Although black British, she too swings into authentic, full-attitude Jamaican at the drop of a hat. She speaks very confidence if not a little attitude (17).*

It is the macaroni pie, a traditional southern American “soul food”, that further hints at her more supernatural purpose. The power of food is not underestimated, as Digger comments before Deli takes a bite: “Mind she obea you, boy!” (18). Yet from his first taste of the food, Deli’s life begins to change for the better and Anastasia secures a place in his life. As Harrison writes, “Black Theatre is not merely the social inscription of victimization arrested in the lens of social realism” (5). Its critical engagement, he argues, requires an understanding of African diasporic cultural traditions:

*It is not uncommon to discover in the ritual forms of Black Theatre characters that are more representative archetypes than individuated, full-dimensional characters located in the conventions of realism. Characters configured as archetypes serve a universe that allows both the living and the dead to drive the actions of a dramatic event (2002: 5).*

The stage directions describe Anastasia in such a way that supports this idea: “we can see that she has the kind of body that most men of colour fantasize about. Big hips and butt, slim waist and full, full breasts” (17). The description that stresses her African physicality renders Anastasia as representative of an African “Earth Mother Goddess” archetype. Anastasia has come to save Deli and his family. Yet for all the positive changes, she brings, her influence is destroyed by the jealous Clifton, who sees her as a threat to his ambitions for his son’s attention and financial assistance. Clifton seduces her and then blackmails her to leave Deli for good. Here, Kwei-Armah critiques a male-dominated culture that has lost respect for its women and any spiritual connection to their goddesses. Osborne criticizes this particular stage direction as one among other examples of “sexual denigration” of women within the play (Osborne, 92). Kwei-Armah’s intentions, however, seen through a non-Western value system, are in fact the reverse. Yet, as Osbornes’ critique reveals, the stage direction exposes the heterosexist and

patriarchal values of a traditional African world-view and of the Black Power movement. The play, therefore, reflects a conservative world-view by dint of it being rooted in 1960s Black radical politics. An American reviewer noted that the play dealt with themes that may be new to a British audience, but to an American one, it trod upon familiar territory pioneered by the likes of Langston Hughes and August Wilson (Marks, 25).

Another archetypal figure emerges in *Statement of Regret* through the character of Soby. When Kwaku is desperate for money to keep the business afloat, it is Soby who offers to help him on the condition that he reject his African name and take on his West Indian birth name, Derek, and that he stands up against the Africans and asserts West Indian superiority. This separatist approach within the multicultural office ends up destroying the organization and Kwaku loses everything. Only at the end of the play do we discover that Soby is the ghost of Kwaku's father. The character of Soby can be seen as fulfilling the role of the "trickster". Descended from West African mythology, namely the Yoruba god Esu, the trickster takes numerous forms (animal / spirit / human) and emerges in cultural traditions in Africa and the New World. As Euba highlights, however, although the trickster figure is commonly seen as a hero and his dissembling powers an example of black survival against white oppression, he is more complicated than that. Euba argues that Esu's manifestation in the New World embodies the "fateful / fatal satiric complex". In other words, he is not always a hero but instead his presence has the objective of "affecting human awareness" (167). Soby leads Kwaku down the wrong path to near destruction. He tempts him with rhetoric of division which tests Kwaku's capability as a leader of the organization. Through his interaction with Soby, Kwaku's pride and associated inability to make clear judgments is revealed as damaging to his family and to the community. As Euba concludes:

*Esu-Legba, in his fateful / fatal oppositional constitution, suggests a more complex and functional purpose than mere dissembling, one that has the potential to deflate human excesses and stupid rives, such as arrogance, megalomania, and pompousness, thereby forcing self-awareness and, ultimately, self-mastery (178).*

Kwei-Armah provides two possible endings for the piece. In the first (the ending staged at the RNT), Kwaku is left alone and confused and unsure of what he has done. However, the alternate ending (used in his radio adaptation) provides redemption and showing resilience. Lola, his wife comes back to him and they are reconciled:

*LOLA: ...The battle had changed, Kwaku. Maybe it's time we rest.  
 Maybe it's time we let the young ones make their mistakes.  
 KWAKU: Maybe. Take me home, Lola (102).*

In the first ending, Kwaku remains deceived and his life is in shreds. In the second ending, Soby brings about an eventual self-awareness. The inclusion of such trickster and archetypal characters is in line with Kwei-Armah's approach, which seeks to root his drama beyond the purely social and place it within a larger mythological cosmos of the African diaspora. However, Kwei-Armah's route to these African cultural practices is mediated through African America. This explains the almost romantic and non-specific employment of African forms.

Kwei-Armah's incorporation of the African American experience and culture into his dramas also has a musical dimension. The blues features prominently in *Elmina's Kitchen*, and in *Fix Up*. In the prologue to *Elmina's Kitchen*, the African griot is accompanied by music described as "a slow lament-sounding concoction of American blues and traditional African music" (5). The mixture of American blues and African music traces in sound the movement of slaves from Africa to the USA. As the scene is meant to contextualize the action of the rest of the play, set in Hackney, the mélange of musical styles seems oddly placed. The music of the blues is used a second time at the opening of the second act during the funeral of Deli's brother, when the cast sing "You Gotta Move". Kwei-Armah also uses the blues in *Fix Up*. At the end of the play, Kiyi's cuts off his dreadlocks and sings the blues slave chant 'Adam in the Garden'. Tellingly, Kwei-Armah signifies slavery and its impact on contemporary black Britishness in such a way that does not yield identification with the African Caribbean experience but rather locates it in an African American context.

The blues permeates beyond providing a soundtrack to the plays to influence their tone. Kwei-Armah's plays tend to end on a melancholic note. *Elmina's Kitchen* ends with Deli covering the body of his dead son. In *Fix Up*, Brother Kiyi cut off his dreadlocks and is forced to leave his shop and has been exposed as a father who abandoned his daughter, and in *Statement of Regret*, the positive work of the think-tank hangs in the balance after Kwaku's nervous breakdown. Nevertheless, the plays balance moments of light heartedness, songs and comic relief. The result is a bittersweet tone that epitomizes the blues. Although this tradition has nothing to do with Africa or the Caribbean, it seems Kwei-Armah uses the blues not to

signify cultural specificity, but rather as a means to evoke an atmosphere of shared history. In this way, its usage can be seen as a “call and response” with not only a musical form, but with African American dramatists such as Baldwin, Baraka, and Wilson renowned for infusing their work with the spirit of the blues.

In conclusion, the playwright depicts the historical, literary and psychological influences of the British societies. Kwei-Armah’s early contact with the ideology, style, and dramaturgy of the BAM, the works of Matura and Wilson greatly shaped the form his drama took, as it conditioned their characters’ fight for survival, identity, marginalization, and belongingness in a society that treats immigrants as second-class citizens. From a socio-cultural perspective, many young black immigrants scorned education and turn to drugs, violence and consequently end up in prison. The first-generation male in these plays have no moral or filial borne with their children. In this chapter, Kwei-Armah presents beneath the surface of these very specific black British plays, the influence of black America. August Wilson has been an important factor in the shaping of Kwei-Armah’s plays, especially with regards to his plots and characterization. However, partly through Wilson and partly through the BAM, and a strong identification with African American black radical cultural politics which emerged in the 1960s, Kwei-Armah’s plays reveal an indebtedness to an African American ideology that does not distinguish between art and politics. It is an approach which seeks to collapse aesthetic and ethical distinctions and one which places the black subject at its centre.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **DOMINANT NOTIONS OF ENGLISHNESS AND BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS**

This chapter examines the conservative aspects of Englishness and its effects on the black British characters in Kwei-Armah's Triptych through New historicism, Social identity theory and Lacan's psychoanalysis. The chapter examines the playwright's representation of various forms of attitudes such as class consciousness, gangsterism, parenthood, dressing code and other English cultural beliefs that the immigrant population adopt so as to be like, or move closer to becoming white British. Kwei-Armah uses the triptych to show that English distinctive mannerisms (moral philosophy), dressing code, language and national pride play a role in defining the behavioural patterns of the second and third generation Black British immigrants. As the chapter demonstrates, those who hold on to these English mannerisms either end up as weaklings, as they are over powered, resign to frustration as a result of rejection, or end up as gangsters, as they try to replicate the power structure of their white British counterparts. The argument in this chapter is that Kwei-Armah holds that those who embrace British mannerisms and life style end up frustrated, traumatized, resign and live a defeatist live or fight back through gang culture. This chapter is therefore divided into two; the first section explores themes of "Englishness and black British experiences" in the triptych as it offers a multifaceted exploration of the black British experiences in the host land. The second section entitled "Traumatic Syndromes" shows the extent to which the immigrants' inability to fit into British conservative norms has brought more untold misery and disillusionment on the black British characters in selected texts.

#### **Englishness and Black British Experiences**

Englishness is a multifaceted concept that refers to the cultural characteristics, customs, traditions and identity associated with the people of England. It encompasses various aspects of the English society, history, language, literature, values, attitudes and behaviours. In Kwame Kwei-Armah's triptych, there are several conservative aspects of English distinctive mannerisms that play a role in defining the behaviours of the second and third generation black British immigrants. These conservative elements include social norms, language, and cultural expectations that influence the characters' actions and identities. Kwei-Armah has extensively explored themes of Englishness and black British identity in his works. His plays often reflect

his own experiences as a black man growing up in Britain, as well as his dual heritage and the complexities of navigating multiple cultural identities. In the context of Englishness, Kwei-Armah's triptych of plays - *Elmina's Kitchen*, *Fix Up*, and *Statement of Regret* - offer an exploration of this black British experiences. These plays delve into issues such as cultural assimilation, systemic racism, and the generational clash between traditional values and modern aspirations. Kwei-Armah presents a diverse range of characters who struggle to define their Englishness reflect the broader challenges faced by black British communities in a predominantly white society.

The whole idea begins with the migrant's individual's desire to find a root, a home, a name, political consciousness and an identity, but the unchanging realities and challenges faced by their living in the diaspora push them to adopt and imitate the British forms. The playwright, Kwei-Armah, faced this reality and consequently, the characters in his plays. Born to Grenadian parents, he identified strongly with the African diasporic sense of rootlessness. Kwei-Armah felt disconnected from his parents' culture and struggled to find his place in Britain. Looking back at his youth, Kwei-Armah expresses a profound sense of dislocation in London for Black immigrants: *He said that when he walked out on the streets in London, they'd say 'Go back home, you black bastard.' When I went to West Indies they'd say, 'You're English.' When I go to Africa, they say 'Go home. Look at you, Bob Marley.' I'd never had a home until I discovered that I was an African and that actually I was a diasporic African (qtd in Davis 247).*

Despite being British by birth and living in the UK, witnessing displacement due to colour discrimination and the violence of not only white-on-black, but black-on-black youth was agony in itself to Kwei-Armah. That anguish imprinted in him the inner sensation of belonging to a minority group in his own country. His identification with Afrocentric ideology was a direct result of his experiences of racism and marginalization growing up in London in the 1970s and the 1980s, as well as his discontentment with his contemporaries who tried to become white in colour and actions. It is this view that Kwei-Armah summaries in his triptych presenting characters who project English mannerisms, encouraging assimilation while rejecting African heritage and adopting Eurocentric lifestyle.

In *Elmina's Kitchen*, Digger is pressured to conform British cultural beliefs of gangsterism and class consciousness. James Densley in "An Introduction to Gangs and Serious

Youth Violence in the United Kingdom” explains that gang crime and robbery in the UK “calls into question explanations based on fixed biological characteristics, deep-seated psychological characteristics, or slow-moving social characteristics” (59). Timothy R. Lauger in *Street Culture and Street Gangs* considers that in England, gangs form subtly unique cultures are also immersed in a broader street culture that is pervasive in selected urban neighborhoods. Black British that get involved in criminal activities adopt a more conventional white British path. Ashley, in *Elmina’s Kitchen* is unconscious of the danger that will follow him if he goes the conventional way. He is so unconscious that he sees his father as a failure with a defeatist attitude, and rejects his advice and warnings. Because the third-generation black immigrants want to equal the lifestyle of the white British, Ashley joined Digger’s gang, just like other gangs that have ruined the lives of many immigrants including his uncle- Dougie, and even his own father.

From the opening scene, Kwei-Armah warns his audience and especially the youths via the protagonist Deli. He owns Elmina’s Kitchen, a West Indian takeaway and delivery restaurant in ‘Murder Mile’ Hackney. In the walls of the restaurant is a big sign: “NO DRUGS ARE PERMITTED ON THESE PREMISES. RESPECT” (1.1.1). Deli has served prison term and it is generally believed by most white British that “there is no black that doesn’t take drug” and this means that whenever a black British gets into crime, violence, murder, they end up in jail because the British that they are influenced by drug. But Deli is an embodiment of respect and responsibility. His desire is to bring up his son in a respectable and responsible way in order to avoid seeing him becoming a drug addict, joining a gang, being murdered in Murder Mile or going to prison like him. But the writer’s introductory remark in the stage setting, proves otherwise: “Ashley, Deli’s son, hooded street clothes, headphones, he has his hair in two bunches, trousers falling off the arse... Has no respect for anyone older than himself except for Digger” (1.1.30).

With regards to behaviour, Ashley and his father are poles apart. Deli is very polite and dignified in his behaviour and dealings while Ashley disrespects elders and shows a fascination towards Digger, the Yardie gang master. He finds fault in Deli’s amiable behaviour with others. Because Deli is not ready to fight with people who cause them troubles, everyone calls him “Deli the sissy punk”. This creates an ill feeling in Ashley, pushing him to fight, especially against the rival of his father’s shop - Roy. Ashley is angry with his father for not having dealt properly with Roy, the owner of a takeaway across the road, who has had an argument with



Deli. This tension is exacerbated by Ashley's racist attitude, an attitude mostly associated to the white British, as he compares his father's attitude:

**Deli:** *What you sitting down for? Can't you see there's ting waiting here to get delivered?*

**Ashley:** *Looks at his dad's cut head.*

**Ashley:** *(nonchalantly) It's raining out there, you know! Give me a second to catch my breath.*

**Deli:** *You wanna catch you arse out street and deliver the people dem food.*

**Ashley:** *Nigger needs to chill, boy!*

**Deli:** *Hey, I ain't no nigger with you.*

**Ashley:** *(to himself almost) No you're not, what they calling you on the streets now? Deli the sissy punk.*

**Deli:** *What?*

**Ashley:** *How am I supposed to walk the street an look my bredrens in the eye when mans all grip up my dad by his throat and you didn't deal with it?*

**Digger:** *(still confused) What?*

**Deli:** *doesn't answer. Ashley does.*

**Ashley:** *Roy from over dere coarse up my dad ... (1:1:11)*

Ashley thinks that his father is too tolerant and not bold enough like Digger .... which further alienate the black British characters in the play, father-son relationship is seriously affected. Hence, in a snatched moment, out of his father's earshot, Ashley asks Digger if he can join his gang and dealings. He feels so uncomfortable with his father's attitude, and consider him different.

Superiority versus minority groups; Ashley glamorizes gang life and sees the money and power that come from hustling. How can Deli compete with British culture when the example he sets is full of hard work and respect? Life of the white British offers Ashley power, money and a surrogate father in the character of Digger. In her paper titled *Gangs as Alternatives Transitional Structures: Adaptions to Racial and Social Marginality in Los Angeles and London*, Jewelle Taylor Gibbs describes Ashley's anger at his father as a typical family pattern among immigrant families in London. She writes:

*In London, several of the respondents had joined their immigrant parents as adolescents and often felt excluded from the family unit and estranged from an unfamiliar culture. Their involvement in anti-social activities and their casual acceptance of violence might reflect the displacement of their anger at their parents onto more acceptable social targets (89).*

For Ashley, this anger stems from his belief that his father is “less a man”, someone who will not stand up for himself, feelings of alienation and inferiority. This is evident in the following dialogue from Act II, scene ii, after Ashley joined the gang, made enough to purchase a BMW and wants his father to be proud of his success, but he rather gets reprimanded, which pushed him further away to becoming a public nuisance.

**Deli:** *Do you honestly expect me to come out in your car and sanction your nastiness?*

**Ashley:** *(angry) No, I expect you to be happy for me, happy at my progress. What I don't expect, want or need, is you fronting your jealousy with petty excuses!*

**Deli:** *(even angrier) Jeaslousy? I'm a hardworking man who's survived because I don't watch other people's tings. What makes you think I'd be envious of your stupid car, I haven't even seen it? {...}*

**Ashley:** *(laughs) You're a punk, Dad. I was giving you a chance. A chance to let the whole area know that ooooooh you're Ashley's father and so we roll! But no, you want to stay small insignificant, weak. You, you disgust me. I will be back for my clothes. (2:2:85)*

Deli's identity formation is furthermore engulfed by his intension to protect Ashley from violence and crimes. He tries to become a good model for Ashley and always encourages him to become a good son. Having the intension to extricate himself and Ashley from the bad influence and exploitation of the gangster, Deli becomes more confrontational toward Digger. Deli warns Digger to stay away from his life and to not recruit Ashley as a gang member: “How much dirty youth out there you (Digger) you gonna recruit, you gonna take my son? I don't want you anywhere near anything of mine again, Digger. My son, myself, my shop!” (81). Here, it is profound that Deli considers Digger as a trouble maker and a dangerous threat for his

family. As the influential member of the gangster, Digger can potentially make Ashley and Deli's lives miserable.

*Elmina's Kitchen* is Kwei-Armah's pictorial experiences in London as shown through the lens of the central protagonist in the play who valiantly resists violence and crimes. Deli serves to deliver the important message—which is addressed to the black British people - that involving in crime cannot upgrade one to the white British; rather it results in tragedy. Like the death of Ashley because of the gunshot at the end of the play proves that the consequences of involving in gangsterism and crime are really devastating. What happens to Deli also haunts Kwame Kwei-Armah, the author of the plays. As a black British playwright who has two sons, Kwei-Armah is also concerned with their involvement in crime. In a certain interview Kwei-Armah confesses that he wrote *Elmina's Kitchen* as a therapy for his eldest son. Apart from this confession, it is worth noticing that the struggle of Deli to take Ashley away from criminality indicates Deli's resistance toward the black British culture of violence. He attempts to challenge the crime and violence carried out by black British criminals...on their fellow blacks (immigrants).

Kwei-Armah portrays a society where the future and life itself is a gamble field filled with impossibilities and depression. Deli recalled the words of his father about black's life in England: "We have entered a stranger's dream, and for trespassing he has rewarded us with his worst nightmare" is what [his] father use to say about living in England" (1.3.64). He however refuses to take after his father, Clifford by giving it up and running after a white woman, leaving his family to suffer. He does not adopt the oppressor's trait of taking drugs and indulging in gang life. Rather, he remains optimistic and believes that things can change if the black immigrants look back to their cultural identity and their tradition. This is why he rebukes Baygee, a West Indian door-to-door salesman, for indulging in gambling.

**Baygee:** *Hey, Delroy, give me a quick shot of Clark's and have one you yourself, I win ten pounds on the lottery today. What James Brown say? ...*

**Deli:** *You still playing that stupidity? (1.1.15)*

Later in the play, when he meets Digger watching the horse gambling show on television, he reproaches him saying: "take the horse gambling off, Digger" (1.1.82). Deli remains constant in his vision of life and is not happy with the atmosphere of violence,

bloodshed and atrocities. He acknowledges the injustices that the immigrant populace suffers and that they are not treated as equals, yet he knows that the way out is not by taking after them. He believes that creating an identity for themselves will not only make them different, but create an impact in the English society.

In a discussion with Digger, he expresses his desire to go to the bank for a loan, and Digger mocks him:

***Digger:*** *Busts out laughing*

***Deli:*** *What you laughing at?*

***Digger:*** *What bank is going to give you money, nigger?*

***Deli:*** *One that could recognize I've been a businessman from morning ...*

***Digger:*** *... And one that ignore your black skin?*

***Deli:*** *Ahhhhh fuck that old school shit, Digger. That was some old eighties shit you talking. (1.2.28)*

Kwei-Armah through his character Digger, makes the audience to understand the height of discrimination that comes with being black in London. No matter your credibility and your business portfolio, you cannot be granted a loan because the white British will not ignore your black skin. Your colour disqualifies you for so many privileges enjoyed by the native English.

Michel Pearce, a playwright and journalist, explores the complexities of black British identity within the context of Englishness. Pearce argues that Englishness should not be exclusively tied to white British people or a singular national experience. He challenges conventional notions of Englishness and believes that it can be redefined to include multicultural and diverse identities. In his work, Pearce highlights the contributions of black Britons to English culture and argues for an inclusive perspective that recognizes and embraces the diversity of identities within England. Cultural differences make a large contribution to unity and multiculturalism celebrates that contribution. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can maintain their identities, take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging. According to the International Federation of Library Association and Institutions, the concept of multiculturalism includes coexistence of diverse cultures including racial, religious or cultural groups within a single jurisdiction. In this case, multiculturalism is characterized by the presence of multiple identities that mutually shape and influence one another.

In *Fix Up*, the feeling of cultural detachment, coupled with the desire to substitute it with a “higher power” is clearly corroborated in different characters’ views, reverberating/echoing the cultural shift within the black British community. Just as in the prologue of *Elmina’s Kitchen*, there are African representations in the man in African costume with a gürkel in his hands but who is not clearly identified, so is the case in *Fix Up*, for there is also “a lone female figure in traditional African headgear playing the gürkel” (51). Besides, the playwright also identifies three “non-present characters in its dramatis personae. These characters are only apparent via allusions to their works and that endows the play with their ancestral presence. In admiration, Brother Kiyi quotes or refers to those three characters, Marcus Garvey, Claude MacKay and James Baldwin in one of his methods to cling to his heritage and identity through them. But this feeling soon shifts when Norma and her hair style is introduced.

*Fix Up* is full of cultural and historical references, but hair also becomes an important symbol used throughout the play. Not only do the readers encounter the over-arching theme of a beauty shop taking over the bookshop, but also hair is a marker of cultural identity. Brother Kiyi’s “greying unkempt locks” mark him as one in touch with his African heritage. Kwei-Armah presents a contrast to this in Norma, who wears wigs, a hair and dress code indicating her inclination to the white British lifestyle. Her hatred for Africanized forms is evident all over the play. For example, speaking of Kiyi’s dreadlocks, she says: “Boy, don’t shake that ting at me. One sum’ting I don’t like, that Rasta ting you have on your head ... I don’t care about your symbol of rebellion stupidity. You should have dropped that jail nonsense years ago. You wash it?” (1:1:19).

Norma associates Kiyi’s locks with negative black stigmas, like prison time, rebellion, drug use and uncleanness. However, Kiyi believes Norma’s fake hair is just as bad as the oppression black British suffer. Brother Kiyi asks “A next-animal ting you have on you head. Is it still alive?” (1.136). Kwei-Armah associates Norma’s wigs with her desire to separate herself from her native culture and fit in to a more socially dominant western style of beauty. Norma presents a unique dilemma, for while her preoccupation with her physical appearance would suggest she is trying to attract men, perhaps Brother Kiyi, her banter and interactions with him are decidedly male. Carl describes their relationship: “Norma’s like a man to Kiyi! They like blokes, buddies and shit, stuff” (1.142). Brother Kiyi and Norma’s relationship is strictly

platonic because Kwei-Armah does not write Norma as female, and therefore her sexuality does not upset their bond. They trade insults about each other's hair in a light-hearted and humorous manner.

Hair is also dealt with more seriously in the play with Alice, whose hair marks her as different from the rest of her type. She reveals how little she knew about her own hair in the following lines: "Actually, you know what? There is a book over there that I wish was out when I was a kid. Caring for black hair. I didn't know you could wear your hair other than in two bunches until I was seventeen" (1:1:28).

Alice's ignorance of her cultural identity separates her from the other characters in the play, especially Brother Kiyi, and aligns her to the white British. Norma may have a different wig for every scene, but Norma associates her issues with hair as part of the black experience. Alice's dissatisfaction with her hair makes her feel as if she does not belong to any group. The bottom line is that black youths are detached from their community and are looking for alternatives elsewhere. According to Social Identity Theory, people tend to categorize themselves or identify themselves strongly with a group and whenever they encounter new culture, totally different from theirs, this lead to some sort of uncertainty and doubt or discomfort. Alice finds herself in an environment where discriminatory practices prevail and she witnesses the prevalence of biases and stereotypes as black immigrants are detached from their community because of their black hair. Though British-born, Kwame Kwei-Armah himself experienced the feeling of displacement in the sixties and seventies, in an interview with Davis, the playwright admits that as a young man, he suffered in the land of his birth and felt no sense of belonging to a culture. He relates that:

*I never had a home. I used to call myself at sixteen famously a "universal alien". When I walked out on the streets in London, they'd say "Go back home, you black bastard". When I went to the West Indies they'd say, "You're English". When I go to Africa, they say "Go home. Look at you, Bob Marley". I'd never had a home until I discovered that I was an African and that actually I was a diasporic African. And it just so happens that I can call myself now Black British (Davis and Fuchs, 247).*

He reemphasizes the feeling of cultural detachment and void was so strong that it came with the need to substitute it with that associated with economic power is clearly corroborated in different characters' views, echoing the cultural shift within the community. As Kwei-Armah observes the events that unfolded in his life, he becomes witness to the struggles faced by Black British immigrants who encounter discrimination within the British community. They face the challenge of being marginalized on two fronts: -for their immigrant status and for their identity as Black British. Consequently, they confront prejudices not only from native-born British but also from individuals within their own communities both Blacks and Whites. Kwei-Armah could not identify himself with the Britons, the West Indians and the Africans. Kwei-Armah finds himself grappling with a profound identity crisis. The collision of his various cultural and ethnic affiliations creates a sort of chaos, of conflicting expectations, social pressures and internal struggles.

In *Fix Up*, the presence of African and Caribbean cultural affinities is felt morally and spiritually through references to works, speeches, poems and music; yet such allusions are senseless to black youths who no longer care for intellectual and spiritual food. The stage direction at the start of the play reveals that Garvey's speech is played via "an old 1920s recording" (1.101). Part of a speech by Baldwin is recited by Brother Kiyi, while McKay's poem, "If We Must Die", is read by Carl with Brother Kiyi's assistance. The different perspectives of Brother Kiyi and Kwesi again accentuate that. Brother Kiyi insists on the importance of the knowledge of history and considers it as a living that resides in his books and in other slave narratives. The youths must therefore continue adhering to them so as to keep them connected to their past and heritage. The younger generation on the other hand, does not regard the importance to relate to history. Kwesi adopts the then current trend of economic rather than cultural or traditional power and, hence, the unimportance of having a place with books that fail to find readers. To that young black British, such narratives are "shit", to which "Old Kiyi is addicted" (2.133), as he comments to Alice. Kwesi's main goal is to endorse the current trend towards economic survival, even if it means disposing of the bookstore and embarking on the trendy business of a beauty salon:

**KWESI:** . . . *People don't want – books. They wanna party, and look good, have the latest hairstyles, and nails and tattoos. That's where niggers be at,*

*Kiyi. They ain't spending shit in here. Why should the other man take our money? That's why we powerless, cos we ain't where the money at.*

**BROTHER KIYI:** *It ain't about money!*

**KWESI:** *That's why you're on your knees picking up books people don't wanna buy, innit? Where's the respect in that?*

**BROTHER KIYI:** *Selling Afro-sheen gonna get you respect?*

**KWESI:** *It's gonna get me into the position that when you want to renew your lease you come to me! (1:1:42)*

For Kwesi, self-determination and asserting oneself in a racist community could only be attained via bridging the gap between the white British and the black British in terms of fashion which, to Brother Kiyi, means further detachment from his cultural identity. Michael Pearce asserts that this “provides the locus for the exploration of a generational and gendered debate on approaches to black political activism and the route to self-determination” (134). The replacement of the bookstore, which is the house of history and culture, for a hair and beauty shop is forcefully emphasized in the last scene when its owner is extremely devastated at the loss of his cultural treasure.

Still in the field of fashion, clothing is of cultural value to Kwei-Armah in indicating identity shift. Brother Kiyi is presented in African-British clothing, for he is “dressed in an African-shaped Kente shirt on top of a thick woolly polo-neck with jeans” (1.102). He is trying to cling to his West Indian past while living in the reality of western outfit. Also, Val, who sticks to cultural beliefs of fasting and praying in *Statement of Regret*, wears “Hawaiian shorts and top” (1.1.179) on his first appearance, then is later seen in a Native American clothing in “headgear but not the full feathered business” (1.2.188), and in the third outing, wearing a white gown in a third instance (1.3. 211). The stage directions instantly reveal African cultural identity, and traditions even in clothing modes that have been transmitted to the Caribbean, but which may have also been influenced by the Native American as seen in Brother Kiyi in *Fix Up* or Val in *Statement of Regret*, rendering the scene a diasporic atmosphere which Kwei-Armah intends to emphasize. He endows it with the sense of Africa/the West Indies to communicate to the audience the dire need towards discussing or debating the current situation of the contemporary hybrid black British community.



Altogether, the conscious quest for the black British identity preoccupied Kwei-Armah when he wrote *Elmina's Kitchen* and *Fix Up*. While Deli and Brother Kiyi reject English mannerism, choosing to embrace their own ethnic background and heritage, Ashley, Alice and Norma allow themselves to be assimilated. These examples highlight the complex and diverse experiences of black British immigrants and their descendants thus, challenging the idea of a homogenous “black British” identity. The adverse experiences of Black British immigrants have far-reaching repercussions on their self-esteem and over-all wellbeing. The sense of being perpetually stereotyped and rejected by the dominant culture, the White British and more, creates a more profound sense of disjunction. This manifests in deep-seated low self-esteem coupled with intense pervasive dissatisfaction of a trajectory life. The complex relationship between individual's identity and the social demands they navigate can often give rise to a profound identity crisis, resulting in a wide range of psychological repercussions.

### **Traumatic Syndrome**

Kwame Kwei-Armah's works are famous in representing black British identity and are usually considered as voices within the dominant white narratives and cultures. Peacock insists that Kwei-Armah and other “black British playwrights have gradually obtained opportunities to express their ideas and voices in Britain through theatre, although they have been regarded by white majority to be outside mainstream culture” (48). As someone with a clear socio-political and cultural agenda, Kwei-Armah strikingly condemns the excesses of the black community in Britain, highlighting not only the distinct ways of its members to survive in the British society, but also the effects of these excesses on their immediate community and Britain at large. As this section will show, the black minority group imbued with white British mannerisms in their dressing, speaking, customs, thinking and behaving end up facing grievous consequences such as rejection, trauma and death.

In *Statement of Regret* just like *Fix Up*, Kwei-Armah, characters grapple with various forms of trauma that manifest as a result of their experiences and past relationships. While the texts address a range of personal and collective traumas, a key syndrome is seen when characters cope with memories of distressing events and this could manifest in flashbacks, anxiety, and challenges in developing new relationships. Val Thomas, late forties, born in Trinidad, came to Britain with parents when he was three years, is an eccentric, glorified postman who has been with Kwaku from the beginning and strongly thinks that fasting is the traditional custom for cleansing after the death of someone and when the spirit leaves the earth

for the last time. Val uses this flashback to show memories of distressing events, a customary fashion that Val wants to kick off as Kwei-Armah uses tradition as a burden of guilt and regret in the protagonist's internal conflict regarding cultural customs, such as prayer and fasting. He feels trapped by the tradition "I don't think fighting for a Minister of Race is old school. Neither do I think that fighting for reparations for the holocaust of slavery is ...". While Idrissa Adebayo, thinks that tradition is better than reparation as he says "Reparation is a dead dog. When those children are killing each other on the streets like animals, think anyone cares about reparations?". However, tradition serves as a catalyst for change in the play when the protagonist decides to break free from his family and the Institute of Black Policy Research (IBPR) think-tank policy to pursue his own idea. By defying the status quo, he is able to create a new path and ultimately finds destruction as it affects his psychology, when he becomes insane (needs healing in the first ending and in the second ending), Kwaku is helped by his wife, Lola who has returned from Nigeria.

**Lola:** *I said, get up, Kwaku...*

*After a few beats, he slowly rises.*

**Kwaku:** *What you are doing here Lola? Thought you were in Nigeria. (trying to gather himself.) Excuse my appearance right now, I'm just ...*

**Lola:** *I'm taking you ... we going to find someone to heal you, let us find someone*

...

Kwaku's anxiety for reparation of slavery and slave trade perpetrated by the British colonial masters never saw the light of the day. Reason why he could not support the stress, emotional turmoil and a constant re-evaluation of their own worth and experiences as immigrants in Britain.

Many characters may display signs of emotional detachment or numbness as a protective mechanism against further pain, leading to difficulties in expressing feelings or forming close connections. This is the case with Brother Kiyi the socio-political and even economic situation that the second generation immigrant faced in London caused a "cold war" between father and children hence, their trauma. We learnt about the built-up anger and resentment due the absence of a father in the lives of most black British immigrants is the greatest source of discomfort and emotional detachment as portrayed in this play. At the end of the play, Brother Kiyi cuts off his hair, his dreadlocks symbol of the African resistance and

African identity due to trauma. He worked all his life trying to improve his community, but constantly meets opposition from those whose mannerism points to a different direction, trying to hid the pain of the past when his daughter was taken away from him. So confused and frustrated, thinking that comfort will come when every black British will read the narratives of slavery from his bookshop, and decline ill-treatment rather plunged him into depression, psychological torture and regret for killing the mother of his only daughter.

In *Fix Up*, Brother Kiyi symbolises the loss of black mental culture when he chops off his hair. He loses all he has vainly tried to uphold and, in a compelling moment, it all collapses and vanishes into thin air. He cuts his hair, his most treasured cultural identification (dreadlocks), destroying another link between him and the past. Moral, mental and physical torture as his hair is a symbol of his identity, that identity which is now cut-off, that Root is now off-rooted:

*Brother Kiyi is sitting in the middle of the store. He is both physically and mentally in a world of his own. Slowly he starts to chop off his locks. When all are gone, he runs his hands through what remains of his hair. His hands eventually fall on his face. He screams. (1.6:88)*

In a remarkable statement Boles reflects on how that incident is dramatized, postulating that, as the place is emptied from books and the bookshelves are taken out of the audience's sight, this "suggest[s] the grandness of the ideas contained in the bookstore while also reflecting its emptiness" (725). In an ironic reversal of what he has all along been against, the current hair and beauty shop business will eventually replace his long-kept bookstore. He screamed out his depression and surrenders his identity and decides to move on.

Interpersonal struggles due to unresolved traumas, stemming from rejection, marginalization, outright discrimination and violence, characters face difficulties in their relationships, which led to cycles of conflict, misunderstanding, and isolation. From the opening pages Kwei-Armah highlights the context of violence by describing the setting of the play *Elmina's Kitchen*: — "We are in Elmina's Kitchen, a one-notch-above-tacky West Indian food takeaway restaurant in 'murder mile' Hackney". The adjective "murder mile" suggests that the situation of Hackney is unsafe because of the numerous murders and assassinations.

Kwei-Armah's depiction of the setting Hackney at the very beginning of the play foregrounds the rest of the interlocking events which resulted to violence. The face of the black British youths is presented through Ashley who tends to indulge with white British youth culture, and who prides on becoming an influential gangster, capable of rivalling his white counterparts and struggling to belong. Through him, we see how violence and murder was the quotidien of black British youths.

As a result of unsolved trauma, Ashley grew from worse to worst: He throws away his college books in the dustbin and decides to join Digger's gang. Along with Digger, he burns Roy's restaurant, and is always ready to pick a fight with his father, Deli, when he reprimands him to fix his behaviour. Realizing that his son will end up in prison, Deli decides to put an end to Digger and his influence upon his son. He orders Digger out of his son's life and plans to leave Murder Mile-Hackney, abandoning his business. He wants to provide his son with a better, conducive atmosphere, filled with love and respect. When Digger learns of Deli's plans, he considered it as a betrayal and ordered Ashley to shoot his father. As Ashley hesitates to gun down his own father as instructed by Digger and he takes the gun from Ashley, shoots and kills Ashley. Violence, bloodshed, lack of affection and irresponsibility has that much attraction to third-generation immigrants and Ashley became a victim. Trauma of having to bear with a defeatist father was so mysterious that it put Ashley in a position to kill even his beloved father.

Rajan asserts that a clear example of violence and Yardie is Digger and since black street gangsters like him have a huge negative influence on the younger generation, as reiterated by Baygee, "get dazzled by those Yardies that eating up Hackney. They giving children BMWs, who could compete with that, eh?" (26). The only time killing is put on stage, not only in this play but in the whole trilogy is at the tragic ending of the *Elmina's Kitchen*. Though Ashley manages to join Digger and obtain the BMW yet, the cost of it, is his own life; he simply loses everything. Ironically, at the moment Digger manages to exercise his authority over Ashley after the latter becomes part of his gang, Digger himself orders the young man to kill his father for acting as an informant to the police on their latest murder act mentioned in the news. Ashley's hands "are shaking a little" so, in a sudden unexpected action, Digger "pulls out his gun and shoots Ashley dead", then "looks to Deli . . . [and] . . . exits", leaving the horrified father described as kneeling by the dead body of his son, covering him then "With one final glance around, he stares at the picture of his mother, then walks out of the restaurant" (95). This

is how most black British get frustrated and depressed, turn to violence, crime and gangster lifestyle which dazzles the youths, the third-generation immigrants which the playwright wants to raise awareness towards addressing the issue in society.

Deli is frustrated, psychologically defeated and shattered because his objects of love are all taken away through violence. In a flashback we learnt how Deli loved his mother, but she was abandoned by his father (a man whose show of affection was through violence) and lived a miserable life before dying. His beloved wife, Ashley's mother abandoned him. Later, he thought of living a happy life with his rich brother – Dougie, who unfortunately became a victim to violence. He was shot dead the same day he left prison. Then, he had a liking for Anastasia, whom his father openly told him that, "I fucked her to prove I was right. She was a thieving little whore who was only after you and Dougie's money" (2.2.89). Now, his most beloved son became a victim to violence. The psychological impact of Dougie's and Ashley's death on Deli is profound and multifaceted. Deli grapples with feelings of fear, grief, guilt, and anger, which are common emotional responses to the loss of a loved one. Their deaths signify not only the loss of a family member but also the loss of potential and hope for a better future, which deepen Deli's sense of despair. We can also say that Deli may also experience a shift in her worldview, as the death challenges his beliefs about safety, existence, and the struggles they face. These tragic events can lead to an existential crisis or psychological trauma, leading to feelings of isolation or a sense of being trapped in Britain. Overall, Ashley's death serves as a catalyst for Deli's character development and highlights the broader themes of murder, resilience, and the struggle for identity within the play.

The identity that Deli had liked to establish is made fragile by those who think otherwise. Kwei-Armah in the beginning did not present Deli as an informer. He admonished that along with Digger: "Deli/Digger Man fe dead lick a shot inna informer man hend" (1.1.23). Later, he turned out to be one, meaning he never really loved what was happening in and around Hackney, but his family is destroyed by that which he feared the most. Violence does not create any power for the black or for Digger and his gang members. On the contrary, violence damages the identity and confidence of optimistic people like Deli and so the Yardies like Digger will continue to grope in the dark (violence) for betterment. Deli has always denied violence and his quotation on life shows his refined tastes and optimistic views:

*Life is beauty, admire it. Life is wealth, keep it. Life is love, enjoy it. Life is a dream, realize it. Life is a challenge, meet it. Life is a duty, serve it. Life is a game, play it. Life is a mystery, know it. Life is an opportunity benefit from it. Life is a promise, fulfil it. (1.1.3)*

Ashley's frustration comes from his yielding to the English decorum which was poorly managed, leading to his own dead. This example suggests that the younger generation of black British immigrants struggled with the idea of adopting English mannerisms as they felt disconnected from their cultural heritage. Apart from physical violence, black British characters also suffer traumatic experiences as a result their adherence to British mannerism, causing their existence to be continuously warped in pain and desperation. Peacock aptly captures this picture when he says:

*The stares and whispers in the streets, the subtle racism in the workplace, and the constant feeling of being othered – these were the uncomfortable realities of being a black British immigrant. It was a constant battle to find acceptance and belonging in a society that saw me as different, and often treated me as such. (432)*

With this, the life of black people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century England is presented as one that is constantly longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.

It is even more traumatizing to think you belong when actually, you do not belong. Blacks do not easily accept mixed races or consider them “pure blacks”, but believe they just cling to the privileged side which is why Kwesi is suspicious of Alice (Brother Kiyi's mixed-race daughter). He considers her and similar mixed-race to stick to blacks only when they feel it befits them:

**KWESI:** *I don't do your type!*

**ALICE:** *My. . . and what is my type exactly?*

**KWESI:** *West Indians. You guys are weak. . . I don't trust you type of people. I see you coming in here trying to be down, so when the white man thinks he's choosing one of us you're there shouting, 'Hey, I'm black.' But you ain't. (1.2.45)*

In *Statement of Regret*, the past haunts Kwaku. His late father, an old businessman called Soby, who is only physically visible to Kwaku whereas his son, Adrian, could only hear his voice without seeing anybody in the room and, accordingly, considers that his father is in a confused state of mind for talking to himself. Kwaku is the only character haunted by the ghost of his father or, more specifically, confused and feels depressed for not living up to his deceased father's desire in upholding his Caribbean culture. Due to that he focuses on drinking to forget, hence post-traumatic syndrome. Soby rebukes him for changing his British born name to an African instead of a West Indian name, affirming that ... *"name-changing thing you did, I know is a long time ago, but I didn't like it . . . it embarrasses all of us when you West Indians go and change your name to some African something. You're not African."* (1:2:43)

Kwaku is confronted with a stark reality that brings about various challenges related to his background, identity, name, and skin colour. Post-traumatic Syndrome is one of the concerns that plague Kwaku, living in illusion of a possible reparation, of a "statement of regret" from the colonizers. When he sees white policeman hit the black British really hard, just like they did to their fore- fathers long ago, the word "sorry" cannot help. The ghost of the father further traumatizes him, leaving him in a confused state. He goes depressed and loses his memory and is thus assigned to a madhouse. His African wife, Lola from Nigeria, opposes Michael for asking that Kwaku be taken to a madhouse saying: "I don't want to put my husband in madhouse ... you know what they do to black people in those places", further showing her dejection and frustration towards the British society. Kwaku's depression and loss of memory shows feelings of confusion, bewilderment and fear which are emblematic of the complex psychological processes involved in navigating an identity crisis.

Kwei-Armah uses sounds to show the state of frustration, depression and trauma that exists in the conscious and sub conscious mind of most Black British immigrants. The gesture sound of kissing teeth, or sighing which when louder, indicates the intensity of the worry. This act is recurrent in the stage directions. That feature is a slang oral form that produces a sort of hissing sound made by sucking air via clenched teeth, implying different significations. Victor Tuner describes it as one of a collection of "aural . . . wordless slang", (291) while to Dorvlo "is a click which usually lasts for some few seconds (but can also be extended into several seconds) to indicate varying degrees of disgust or contempt" (127). Its meaning becomes more powerful in relation to the performer's pitch and the length of time it takes, for the higher the

pitch and the longer it takes, the more negative its connotations are depending on the intention of its producer (Dorvlo 127). Kissing teeth sound is found in different instances in the different plays. The very first scene of *Elmina's Kitchen* presents the “vexed” Digger producing it. He is angered and “kisses his teeth in Deli’s direction” (1.1. 6) when the latter gets irritated and disapprovingly rebukes him for using a vulgar comment. Deli, aspiring to be a good parent to Ashley, finds difficulty in achieving his goal though he rejects the use of slang gang language in the café. Besides, the uncertainty at the arrival time of his own released brother from prison in the following scene, Deli “kisses his teeth” in response to the inquiry of Baygee’s commenting, “Ahh you know Dougie, he said today sometime but I’ll believe it when I see him” (1.1. 22). In scene three of the same act, Deli’s negative attitude and internal trauma is reflected in that same sound. When Anastasia tears a page from her Acts of faith which suggests learning lessons from disasters and sticks it to the counter, Deli contemptuously comments, “What rubbish . . . rubbish” while “kissing his teeth” and in disbelief and despair outbursts in Jamaican accent that he uses when vexed:

**Deli:** *Ah my life me ah talk ‘bout you na! and you know what me discover? Man is not supposed to want. I wanted, I could have been da don, and what happen? Bam, it get mash. I wanted to, I fucking worked hard to be there with Ashley and his mum! Bam, it get mash. I wanted my brother home, here with me and what happen? One step from the fucking gate, bam, he get mash. Don’t tell me about my life. (2:1:73)*

The devastating events inflicts deep psychological and emotional wounds in the mind of Deli. Their sense of belonging, safety and trust is brutally fragmented, leaving him grappling with an over whelming identity crisis. The gesture sound therefore stands for different emotions, responses or reactions. In most cases, it could signify disapproval, disdain, anger, contempt, vexation, or blame.

In conclusion, challenging dominant notions of Englishness and black consciousness is essential for fostering a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of identity within contemporary British society. This endeavour not only encourages the celebration of multiculturalism but also explores how trauma influences the characters' lives and their interactions with others. The narrative serves as a poignant reflection on the impact of trauma



and the human desire for connection and healing while facilitating a critical dialogue about belonging and representation in the context of a rapidly evolving social landscape. Embracing a more pluralistic view allows for the coexistence of multiple identities, ultimately enriching the collective narrative of what it means to be both English and part of the broader view of black consciousness. Such an approach contributes to a more equitable society, where individuals are empowered to express their identities authentically and without constraint.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISCOURSES OF BELONGING AND RESILIENCE

This chapter aims at investigating Kwei-Armah's perspective of black British identity by emphasizing the power of acceptance and the importance of self-empowerment and self-determination for black people in the UK. As shall be seen below, the formation of black British identity in Kwei-Armah's works is affected and conditioned by the African ancestral heritage, youth culture, and black British social environment. The objective of this chapter therefore is to demonstrate how black British individuals embrace their heritage and cultural identity, while also working towards creating opportunities for themselves in their new community. The chapter is divided into two subsections. The first section, titled "African Ancestral Heritage and the Question of Belonging" explores the playwright's longstanding belief that "reconciling with one's past is the first step towards self-identification" (qtd in Mike, 60). The second part of the chapter focuses on Kwei-Armah's strategies towards resilience. As this section shows, belonging is achieved through the individual's strive for economic empowerment, education and political representation, hence globalisation. The playwright encourages black British to support each other, build stronger social networks base on their culture and challenge systemic barriers that prevent them from achieving success.

#### **African Ancestral Heritage and the Question of Belonging**

Returning to one's ancestral heritage in this age of globalization in search of inner peace remains a concern to most black British writers and to Kwei-Armah in particular. Drawing from the Caribbean's specific history of slavery with multiple colonial masters, Kwei-Armah in *Elmina's Kitchen* emphasizes the process of cultural (dis)continuity and contemplate their complex historical and contemporary relations with the Britons. The playwrights thus make a conscious effort to examine the close-knit relationship between the frustrations of slavery and colonialism in Africa Caribbean. Kwei-Armah therefore sustains the idea of (de)acculturation of a people with the aim of stressing the importance of moving on from the past traumas of slavery, colonization, discrimination and racism. His advice is that in order to move forward as a society and as a people, there must be healing, and for healing to take place, there must be forgiveness. The black Britons cannot undo what has been done to them by outside forces and the British Empire, but they must not let that hold them back anymore.

Judith Lichtenberg resolves the ambiguity of belonging at the end of her article “moral ambiguity of sources of identity based on belonging” that:

*For most people cultural belonging is very important. It is hard to say a great deal about this in analytical (as opposed to poetic or literary) terms, perhaps because it is basically so very simple: for most of us, our native culture provides us with a sense of being at home in the world. (...) we can recognize the superior virtues of other cultures, but still feel the attachment bred of familiarity to our own culture affords. The features of a culture that produce this sense of familiarity and well-being are its language and folkways, its sounds and smells, the innumerable subtle and, in the scheme of things, trivial customs and practices and ways of life we grow up with (173).*

From the above quotation, the author addresses the complexity of identity formation, the ethical implication of belonging to certain groups and how these create moral dilemmas.

Today, “belonging” is part of both mainstream discourse and of competing, alternative discourses, undoubtedly not in spite but because of this rapidly transforming context, “belonging” is ungluing globality. “Belonging” denotes “roots”, “stasis” and “traditionalism” in the context of bounded territoriality and national identity, the notion of “belonging” is now universally applied in discussions about identity, ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, migration and multiculturalism--as a matter-of-course feature of an identity which is being constantly threatened; as a desirable objective; as an argument for minority groups making claims to autonomy or increased recognition; as part and parcel of political discourses either for or against multicultural societies. Belonging is a concrete, innocent, almost pristine notion, closely interwoven with and imbricated in the notion of “home” and “root”. In fact, our home is where we belong, territorially and culturally, where “our own” community is, where our family, friends and acquaintances reside, where we have our roots, and where we long to return to when we are elsewhere in the world.

The importance of roots and home pushed Kwei-Armah to take decisions that defined his career, and consequently his identity as a black British writer. In his mid-twenties, the then Ian Roberts went to Ghana where he traced his family genealogy and changed his name to

Kwame Kwei-Armah on his return. After closed observation, he categorized the world around him in different groups and identify himself with a particular group. Just like Henri Tajfel, his identification with Afrocentric ideology was the direct result of his experiences of racism and marginalization growing up in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s. Defining himself as a “diasporic African” gave Kwei-Armah a sense of belonging to a black Atlantic community. Today, he sees himself occupying an interstitial position between three cultures which define his identity:

*I call myself tri-cultural: I'm African, Caribbean and British. And each one of those has an equal part to play and I can be one or all at the same time depending on what it is (qtd in Davis, 240).*

From the above, the author underscores the complexity of identity formation as discussed in Social identity theory. By identifying as tri-cultural, Kwei-Armah acknowledges membership in three distinct cultural groups. According to SIT, this multiplicity can enhance one's self-esteem and provide a richer framework for social identity. Embracing a tri-cultural identity indicates an appreciation for diversity and an ability to navigate different cultural contexts. From a SIT perspective, this can enhance intercultural competence, leading to more positive interactions with diverse groups and reducing prejudices.

Kwei-Armah's sense of self and political consciousness as a “diasporic African” is not refracted through the Caribbean, but rather through black America. It was through *Roots*, a television series, that Kwei-Armah literally “discovered” Africa and decided to change his name. Similarly, his Pan-African, Afrocentric politics stems in the main from African American cultural nationalist thinkers. On his political influences that have shaped his work, he states:

*My work comes from a cultural perspective that is supported by my Pan-Africanist politics [...] My politics is a diasporic, black politics influenced by the philosophies of Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X and the writings of James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka. It is non-apologetic politics. (qtd in Osborne, 253)*

His vision as a writer therefore is to present characters of similar decent with the intention of helping black British, and other diasporic people to first consider their origin, its values and aspiration in the construction of their new identity.

Character identity in *Elmina's Kitchen* is warped in the horror associated to the history of colonization and slavery. The play presents Clifton, an immigrant from the eastern Caribbean, who moves to London with his family, and upon arrival abandons his wife and two sons for a young Irish woman (the only references to black/white relations in the play). Though there are no other white characters in the play, the “white man” remains the oppressor and the reason behind the different forms of trauma and frustration the black immigrants and their descendants suffer. The only direct reference to the white man in the play points to fact that Kwei-Armah is concerned with the long-term effects of institutionalized racism and the bondage of slavery:

**Clifton:** The most witchcraft is practiced by the white man. How do the  
arse you think he managed to take Africa away from we. The white man-

-

**Deli:** (Explodes)... Don't bring none of your white this and dat in here

**Clifton:** I don't want to hear that. (1.2.40)

Clifton thinks that his son's anger at him is misdirected, and he should agree with him that the white society is to be blamed for the many atrocities they have been subjected to, and this to him, and to Kwei-Armah, started from when the white man took “Africa away from [them]”. In a review for the *New African Journal*, Kissy Agyemmann describes the racial tensions beneath the surface of the play as “riddled with references that create a sense of ‘them and us’ and suggest that the white man has a lot to answer for the black man's ills strong” (qtd in Mike, 63) and Kwei-Armah makes no apologies for it either. The playwright does not focus on race relations, but recognizes the effects that it has on his characters' lives. As Agyemmann notes, he does not back away from the controversy of black versus white. However, he realizes that to make the play solely about race, will force critics to delegate his works to a certain category. For abandoning his wife and two sons, Clifton may have betrayed his family but he is attributing all these to their forceful movement from Africa, draws the attention of the reader to the neglected issue that prevents the normalization of black British life.

Taylor Gibbs attempts to provide an answer as to why many first-generation black British youths are drawn to gang culture: “For Afro-Caribbean youths ...the gang may function as a bridge between the Afro-West Indian culture of their parents from which they are alienated,

and the British culture” (93). This means that when they are excluded from the mainstream British society, immigrants make their own communities since they cannot return to that which their parents lost as a result of slavery. The memories of slavery and colonisation and their deferred hopes from being unable to intergrade to the mainstream encapsulates trauma; the source of gang culture among black British people. In this light, Digger is proud of not assimilating to the British culture. When Deli alleges that he is as “British” as he is, Digger is outraged and responds: “Never! I was born in Grenada, and I’ve lived in jailhouses all over the world. I know who the fuck I am, don’t you ever include me in all your stupidity” (1.1.17).

Digger has risen through the ranks of the Afro-Caribbean gangs to a position of “respect” in the community. He represents resistance and the pinnacle to which many youths aspire because of money, power, and respect he commands in the community. To him, and to other black British, this is the appropriate way of fighting the slave traders and the oppressors. His desire to dominate and control should be seen as a fightback of the past. In addition, his West Indian native black British accents, (“Digger’s accent swings from his native Grenadian to hard-core Jamaican to authentic black London” (1.1. 6), and his deliberate and continuous attachment to it reveals his strong desire not to assert himself in the midst of the pain of slavery and colonisation. Digger uses his accent to his advantage depending on the person he is addressing. For example, early in the play, he threatens Ashley in a very Black British way, when Ashley uses a “Viking expletive” (1.1. 32), and when, towards the end of act one, he is frustrated with the influx of Jamaican gang members fresh off the boat, he speaks in a thicker West Indian accent to demonstrate his street credit: “Me have fe talk it. Me just have talk it. I’m not vex, you nah. I’m vex na pussyclat” (1.2. 48). Digger return and recollect the past so as to fight back the slave traders and oppressors his ..., by insisting on his native accent, convinces and reassures himself of both his power and authenticity. Through this culture, Digger and his followers attempt to shape their individual as well as collective identity(ies) vis-à-vis that of the new community(ies) they now find themselves in.

Another character in *Elmina’s Kitchen* through whom the memory of slavery is evoked is Elmina. Although not physically seen in the play, she is Deli’s mother and the restaurant’s namesake. Deli holds his mother’s memory on a pedestal, and in a stage direction, the reader is told that a “huge picture” of Elmina is hanging above the door to the kitchen. She is the image of a dedicated single mother, working hard and raising her kids so that they can have a better life. However, for this model woman, Kwei-Armah, gave her the name Elmina, the same name

of a fortress on the coast of Ghana. “Elmina refers to the name of an old slave fortress on the west coast of Africa” (Bunzil, 46). Anastasia describes the link between Elmina, the mother and Elmina the slave fortress in the following lines: “You know what I mailed my son last night? I tell him that me walk into a restaurant named after a slave castle but couldn’t see the castle” (1.1. 20). The decision to name the lead character’s mother and thus the play after a slave castle ties the play and its action to the past. This past is not just Ghana, but the entire journey the characters and their ancestors took from Africa to the Caribbean and then to England. The name Elmina is reminiscent of Elmina Castle at the Cape of Gold Coast-Ghana, which symbolises slavery and colonialism. The pains of slavery and Africans transported as slaves to Europe and America. The castle acted as a depot where enslaved Africans were brought in from different Kingdoms in West Africa and shipped to Europe.

The voices from the slave narrative in *Fix Up* that Alice reads aloud are the other major “non-present character”. Of the two stories Alice reads, one is about mixed-race children whose father is the white master and their mother is described as “that yella gal” (133). The lesson the speaker recounts is that “No sir, it don’t pay to be pretty and yella” (133). The other story is about a mother losing her child who is about to be sold away. Alice reads the story aloud:

*When me mudder see that Mr. Reynolds had come to collect me to sell with the other ten or so pickney, she fell to her knees and begged him to spare me. When she seed that it weren’t no good, she simply stood up and asked Him to ask whoever it was dat buyed me, to raise me for God. ... I never seed my modder again in all my living days. (150-151)*

Both stories relate to Alice personally: the differential treatment of lighter slaves reflects the difficulties she feels being of mixed ancestry; and the above stories about children being separated from parents moves her because she feels abandoned by her biological parents. She feels she was given away, and this child is being taken away by force. Alice says: “I tried to imagine the pain of this mother, what this mother felt, this parent felt, but I simply couldn’t” (Kwei-Armah, Plays 151). Alice’s feelings are clear to the audience, but the quote also foreshadows, Kwei admitting that Alice was taken by child protective services, not given. Feelings of separation and frustration since she is incapacitated to help her child from being sold out. Racism plays hard on the slaves that made them questioned their identity and sense of

belonging. Alice returns to her African Ancestral heritage that is her African folktales, language, accent, songs ...where she finds a sense of familiarity.

By placing Elmina's post at the centre of the play, Kwei-Armah does not only give the play a sense of the past, but equally situates the characters' thoughts, actions and aspirations as products of the distant past. James Bunzil reflects on the dichotomy of both a personal and public history of slavery. He writes that "Elmina, the mother, represents both the hope and future that all immigrants share when coming to a new country to find a better life, but she is also the past (their songs, music, dance, accent ...), the countries they come from and the subjugation that colonial powers inflicted" (726). Kwei-Armah goes as far as establishing a hierarchy of black life in Britain with the intention of showing that native African Caribbean suffer post traumatic slave syndrome. In the introduction to his collected works, he writes that he "wanted to explore the themes of reparation for the slave trade ... whereby the African has his language, religion and culture taken from him/her to make them beasts of burden" (xiii). Her image portrays a slave history and the bondage contemporary Britain and the post-colonial world has created and is still creating for blacks. The fate of characters like Deli and his son, Ashley, is directly linked to this past, and it seems like there is no way out for them. The conflict between father and son, which culminates to blood flowing on stage at the end of the play is the result of the characters' struggle to find a better model of survival.

The tension raised between the colonialist and the colonized continue to lie at the very heart of debates around human cultures as well as issues of racism, nationality and belonging. In *Elmina's Kitchen*, these tensions are presented as issues that can be resolved and overcome through a network of connections that will shape and transform the lives of people of these communities. In order to root the discussion in a material and lived reality, the space of the nation forms a central part of the investigation as a site that shapes the understanding of blackness. Kwei-Armah therefore uses the colonial and slave narrative to explore socio-economic issues, foster healing and encourage colonized and black communities to rise above traditional concepts otherness.

In *Elmina's Kitchen*, the playwright presents Deli who stands against "Black-On-Black Homicide-A Psychological-Political Perspective" (Poussaint, 167) as he attempts to provide answers to the fundamental question of how black British youths can overcome their unfortunate circumstances in a society blurred in generational intolerance. Deli's show of



understanding of the black British problem, his adoption of a happy spirit, his celebration of African heroes, his stand on deviant behaviour and his sensitive and dialectic approach to questions on and about the black community place him as the author's voice in the play.

The impression the audience gets of Deli when they first come in contact with him is that of a dedicated high-spirited young man who is full of life and positive thoughts. In the stage direction, we are introduced to a frame laminated poster on one of the walls of the restaurant which reads "life is beautiful, admire it ... life is wealth, keep it, life is love, enjoy it" (1.1. 2). This optimistic and high-spirited nature of Deli is emphasized in the words of the author in the stage direction: "standing behind the counter is Deli (thirty-four), a happy spirit. He's born struggler and optimist ... with an athletic body" (1.1. 2).

Apart from being optimistic about life, Deli can be described as a crusader against deviant behaviour. He confronts Digger for involving himself in an illegal business, and when challenged to a fight, he walks away. His involvement in a takeaway and delivery restaurant, a legitimate business, is a pointer to his type. What is even more interesting is the seriousness and honesty with which he runs this business. He tells one of his customers that because of distance, he can only deliver in forty-five minutes. Digger thinks that he should have lied for the customer might get discouraged. Deli's respond is the type that one will get in a business school: "you can't build a business on lies" (1.1. 4).

Ashley (Deli's son) and Digger glamorize gang life instead, and see the money and power that come from hustling as a motivation in this model. Life as a thug boy offers Ashley power, money and a surrogate father in the character of Digger. In her article titled "Gangs as Alternative Transitional Structures: Adaptions to Racial and Social Marginality in Los Angeles and London", Jewelle Taylor Gibbs describes Ashley's anger at his father as a typical family pattern among immigrant families in London. She writes that "in London, several of the respondents had joined their immigrant parents as adolescents and often felt excluded from the family unit and estranged from an unfamiliar culture" (89). In this respect, their involvement in anti-social activities and their casual acceptance of violence and thug culture reflects the displacement of their anger at their parents for failing to fight back at the white man. For Ashley, this anger stems from his belief that his father is less a man, someone who will not stand up for himself, the same way his ancestors did not stood up for themselves. Ashley returned to his African heritage to say that Deli just like his fore-fathers, could not fight the

Whiteman against slave trade. This is evident in the following dialogue from Act II, scene ii, after Ashley has moved in rang in the gang, enough to purchase a BMW and wants his father to be proud of his success:

**Deli:** Do you honestly expect me to come out in your car and sanction your nastiness?

**Ashley:** (angry) No, I expect you to be happy for me, happy at my progress. What I don't expect, want or need, is you fronting your jealousy with petty excuses!

**Deli:** (even angrier) Jealousy? I'm a hardworking man who's survived because I don't watch other people's tings. What makes you think I'd be envious of your stupid car, I haven't even seen it?

**Ashley:** (laughs) You're a punk, Dad. I was giving you a chance. A chance to let the whole area know that ooooooh you're Ashley's father and so we roll! But no, you want to stay small insignificant, weak. You, you disgust me. (2:2:85-86)

Ashley's identity is warped by the glamour of gang culture because he insists that that which his father is proposing as inferior and unauthentic. The tension builds to the tragic twist at the end, in which Deli, in a final attempt at saving Ashley from that world, snitches to the police on Ashley's mentor, Digger. He does not realize that to Ashley, reporting to the police is the most cowardly act a man can commit. This leads to the play's climax where Digger shoots Ashley in front of Deli.

In trying to illustrate why many people view Deli's decision to report on fellow members of his community as cowardly, Michael Pearce writes that "the stakes are high, the mind can't decipher that the guns can point to his direction" (76), if he decides to be indifferent. To Spencer, and to Deli as well, calling the police is the only responsible choice. Deli thinks that the identity of the black British youth is not wrapped in guns, but about making tough choices and doing what is best for the community.

Through Ashley's death, Kwei-Armah points to the far-reaching consequences of colonization and slavery on the colonized and the black diasporic life. Deli's father, model of abandoning the family for a white Irish woman is the result of their inability to cope in an

oppressive environment. Deli sees the model his father is proposing as ineffective because it leaves the black immigrant not only at the lower rang of the society, but as perpetual slaves to the white, hence inferiority and minority or US versus THEM “otherness”. He needs something different from what his grandfather, his son and the British society are proposing, and he finds this in the continuation of the legitimate business his mother left behind. To Deli, in a foreign land with limited ties to one’s roots, high-spiritedness, dedication and honesty come to represent power and stability.

W.E.B. Du Bois in the first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* writes:

*The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, —this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face. (5)*

This is applicable to the black people in England also. Deli embodies the traits mentioned by W.E.B. Du Bois in the above quotation. He tries to establish an identity on his own. He owns Elmina’s Kitchen, a West Indian take away and delivery restaurant in the ‘Murder Mile’ Hackney. In the walls of his restaurants is a big sign: “*NO DRUGS ARE PERMITTED ON THESE PREMISES. RESPECT*” (I.I. 123). Deli draws from the general saying that “the white man knows only two facts about every black man: that there is no black that does not take drug and that black fathers are always in prison while their wives groom the children. The black man does not “belong” even in his own family” (1.3. 75). Because of this, he is so determined to empower himself and be a model for black fathers in his community and second generation immigrant in London. The more he strives for the respect of African ancestral heritage and self-empowerment, the more his only son gets attracted to violence, crime and gang culture, and this frustrates him the more. By placing the son’s recalcitrance as

an obstacle for Deli achieving his goals, Kwei-Armah's message is that, overcoming the pain of the past is a gradual and continues process.

Kwei-Armah's *Fix Up* scrutinizes the second and third generation immigrant youths' increasing isolation from their heritage, tradition, roots and how this will affect black society as a whole. The play takes place in the political and fictional bookstore during Black History Month (which in the UK is the month of October). Brother Kiyi, an older black British runs the bookshop and is eager to share the voices of past generations. Brother Kiyi, a second generation immigrant who is identified as a Rastafarian, portrayed as being isolated from the traditional Christianity. Also his hair style, which consists of long dreadlocks, is seen as unconventional and rebellious. In Jamaican culture, dreadlocks are often associated with Rastafarians and it is seen as a symbol of African identity and resistance to societal norms. By choosing to maintain his dreadlocks, Brother Kiyi demonstrates a refusal to conform to mainstream expectations which creates a division between him, his tradition and his cultural heritage. It is his interactions with the other four characters that sets the play's action and exposes their disconnection from their heritage, tradition and roots.

These characters include Brother Kiyi's neighbour, Norma, who is a pillar of the local community and an old friend of Kiyi's, who has known him since he spent time in prison with her husband. Norma is described by the playwright as a woman who has adopted the habits and customs of the dominant culture, such as speaking English, wearing wig, and Western clothing. In the text she made mentioned and mocks the love her father had for trotters (a pig's foot used as food) and attacks Brother Kiyi for keeping Rasta. Ironically she is wearing a wig, a Whiteman's hair, she estranges herself from her heritage-the local creole, her tradition with Western dressing and her roots as a result of assimilation. Although they are good friends, these issues set Brother Kiyi apart from Norma who has accepted the host land's culture and tradition. Kwei-Armah shows how duality can create identity conflict or a sense of being an outsider, which is also recognized in Social Identity Theory.

Kwesi is a young black man who rents the space above the shop for his militant activist causes. Kwesi is constantly changing his behaviour and attitudes towards Brother Kiyi; at one moment he is friendly and supportive, and the next, he is hostile and dismissive. The unpredictable nature of Kwesi creates tension and uncertainty in their relationship making it difficult for Brother Kiyi to anticipate Kwesi's action. Kwesi's nature is also because he is

unresolved with Brother Kiyi's reasons for keeping a shop which can be used for commercial purposes. To him there is really no need for black history bookshop, no black wants to know how his fore-fathers crossed the Atlantic Ocean and worked as slaves. Unlike Brother Kiyi, Kwesi is utterly disconnected from his roots and care less about the story or history of his past.

Finally, Alice, who is described as "a beautiful, but troubled visitor to the store" (Kwei-Armah, plays 100), is mixed race and this marks her different from the rest of the characters because she was adopted and raised by white parents. Unlike Kwesi and Norma, Alice comes to the shop in search of information about her roots, black cultural background and her belonging. She explains: "Cos I'm brown, everybody expects me to somehow know everything black. And I'm like Hey, how am I supposed to know what ... raaasclaat means, I'm from Somerset' (Kwei-Armah, Plays 128). This lack of acceptance, discrimination, rejection from where she thinks she belongs, disconnects her from her ethnicity and cultural community, hence the question of "where do I belong"? Alice's quest for knowledge about her heritage and roots is because she felt she is an out-sider or out-group individual. The bookshop is where Alice finds her true identity and where she truly belongs, and eventually connects with her father, get to meet the murderer of her mother and why she has been treated like an outsider.

Carl, a local caregiver in the youth community, who has had trouble with drugs and the law, but who idolizes Brother Kiyi as a father figure that has helped him transitioned, reformed to a successful individual, managed from a troubled past. Brother Kiyi serves as a beacon of hope for Carl, showing that it is possible to overcome struggles with substances and the law and lead a positive and fulfilling life. Carl looks up to Brother Kiyi as a role model and inspiration for his own journey towards rehabilitation and personal growth. Drugs, lack of a father figure and gangster took him away far away, from his culture and tradition as he wanted to imitate the excesses of the hostland.

In Kwei-Armah's *Fix Up*, disconnection from the father, heritage, tradition and roots greatly affects the Black society even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This may lead to the loss of cultural identity, lack of historical understanding (little or no knowledge of ancestors' struggles, battles and achievements), and psychological impact which greatly affects individuals and the black community as portrayed through Alice, Brother Kiyi and Norma. This feeling of loneliness, isolation and rejection may lead to trauma, rebellion, and low self-esteem which are symbols of lack of belonging. In an interview, the author Kwei-Armah opines that:

*I'm not interested in talking about race. What I'm interested in is presenting stories from my cultural lens that are about my humanity [...] What I'm saying is, we must not define ourselves purely in relation to racism (qtd in Davies 241).*

The playwright says by defining oneself beyond the lens of racism, individuals may be encouraged to seek solidarity with “others” based on shared interests, values, or struggles that extend beyond victimhood or racial issues. It also suggests that while acknowledging that the impact of racism is crucial, excessively focusing on it could hinder personal growth and healing. Emphasizing that other aspects of identity can foster resilience and personal development.

Brother Kiyi’s mixed race daughter arrives, looking for the father who gave her up for adoption and for an explanation as to the whereabouts of her mother, a concurrent theme emerges around identity and the importance of historical knowledge and truth, if individual and collective freedom is to be achieved. Alice’s determination to know where she belongs is most vividly depicted at the melding of past and present. When Alice is alone in the shop, she begins to read from a volume of slave narratives that Brother Kiyi has recently purchased. These slave narratives provide the catalyst for Alice’s self-discovery.

Kwei-Armah’s cultivation of a Black aesthetic shows his dying need to prove in his triptych that the Black people belong somewhere. Accordingly, his plays draw on a plethora of black British cultural and linguistic forms so as to represent the complex cultural heritage of the black community in Britain. Kwei-Armah acknowledges Wilson as an inspiration for this approach:

*What he was doing with the African-American community, with his own community in Pittsburgh, inspired me to create what I perceive as the theatre of my front room. Validating your language, giving equal cultural status to the syntax, to the rhythm in which your own people speak: this is cultural equality (qtd in Edwardes, 2006).*

Kwei-Armah does this deftly through his use of West Indian and Black London vernacular, calypso and his representation of multiple generations with different cultural backgrounds. Kwei-Armah's self-described aesthetic "theatre of my front room", reveals a front room as a transnational hub through which diverse cultures move, meet and form anew. Through Kwei-Armah's Plays "depiction of multiple generations and ethnicities are presented with the genealogical diversity of the black community, which encompasses different histories, cultures and geographies. Kwei-Armah's very specific stage directions, indicating the character's accents, reveal his acute awareness of language as a primary marker of such complex identities. In *Elmina's Kitchen*, "Digger's accent swings from his native Grenadian to hard-core Jamaican to authentic black London" (6), Anastasia, who is black British, is able to use "authentic, full-attitude Jamaican at the drop of a hat" (17) and Clifton, who is from Trinidad, "uses his eastern Caribbean accent to full effect when storytelling" (34). These characters abandon standard English and code switch to the native accents as a way of resistance from the forces of oppression and at the same time, declaring their sense of belonging.

In all, Kwei-Armah's place as a playwright lies in his understanding of the historical circumstances that impacted, and continue to impact the lives of his contemporaries; issues in which lies the question of power and personal motivations. His experiences as a black immigrant have made him to realize that the misery on the different generations of black immigrant parents and their children is the result of slavery and colonial atrocities. Emphasizing the historical in *Elmina's Kitchen* does not negate the representation of political and social realities of his society. But through overt and specific references to slavery and colonialism, and through crucial interactions between characters and their aspirations, in *Elmina's Kitchen* shows how atrocious oppressions strip the people of their dignity and hope, thereby emphasizing the need to redefine new perspectives. By highlighting the long-term background, the dramatists invite the audience and the British politician to develop a deeper understanding of the black experience in Britain, which can lead to debate and, ultimately, to change. Kwei-Armah, therefore, sustains the idea of (de)acculturalization of a people with the aim of stressing the importance of moving on from the past traumas of slavery, colonization, discrimination and racism.

## Strategies of Resilience

A key aspect of Kwei-Armah's vision as a dramatist is refusing to advance in a monolithic and homogeneous history, culture, and identity for all blacks. While growing up, Kwei-Armah felt disconnected from his parents' Caribbean culture and struggled to find his place in Britain. Looking back at his youth, he expressed his regret that he never had a home. I used to call myself at sixteen famously a 'universal alien'. When I walked out on the streets in London, they'd say 'Go back home, you black bastard.' When I went to the West Indies they'd say, 'You're English.' When I go to Africa, they say 'Go home. Look at you, Bob Marley.... (qtd in Davis, 247)

For the playwright, and for a number of black people growing up in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s, this was their situation; lack of a mainstream black British cultural presence, no precedent of a critical mass of British-born blacks and a racist environment meant that youths had to look elsewhere for their cultural and political reference points. To promote continuity of Africanness in the global context, Kwei-Armah thought that it was necessary for the black British to remain resilient despite the odds that came with rejection. Resilience to the playwright is not fighting hard to remain African at all cost, nor pushing to be British, but being yourself, promoting what you believe in whether accepted by the others or not, yet staying out of crime.

In Kwame Kwei-Armah's trilogy, resilience is one of the central themes that cuts across through the experiences and struggles of the characters, particularly in the context of their socio-economic environment, in-groups and personal relationships. The plays explore issues such as identity, family dynamics, and the impact of systemic inequalities. The playwright presents characters who try to cope with adversity, stay hopeful, and find strength amidst their struggles. The characters face various challenges, including poverty, inequalities, violence, and personal trauma, yet they exhibit a determination to persevere and improve their circumstances. Resilience is often depicted through their interactions, their aspirations for a better future, and their efforts to support one another despite overwhelming odds. Kwei-Armah uses resilience in his trilogy (*Elmina's Kitchen*, *Fix Up* and *Statement of Regret*) to highlight the complexity of the human experience, showing that while characters may face systemic disadvantages, their spirit and will to survive and thrive remain powerful forces. This theme resonates with the audience, inviting reflection on broader societal issues and the individual capacities to overcome hardship.



In the play *Elmina's Kitchen*, resilience manifests through the experiences and struggles of the main character, Deli. In the play, the protagonist, faces significant challenges in his life, such as poverty, imprisonment, crime, and family tensions. From the opening of the play, we are presented to Deli, a young black British with mighty inner strength, proprietor of a not very popular West Indian takeaway in Hackney, North London, is abandoned and rejected by his father, lived and raised by the mother, was excited that his older brother, Dougie, is due out of prison. Deli has been in prison too, and during his stay in prison, he must have learned that crime does not pay although, he was not able to conveyed this to his son, Ashley, and to his brother. In an environment where blacks are considered to be drug addicts, gangsters, school drop-outs, Deli choose to be a good man and flee violence, crime and drugs to the best of his ability. He preferred to stay focus in his business by avoiding anyone or anything that may cause him returning to prison again. A man of refined character, portrayed via the writings on the walls of his restaurant with a big sign: *"NO DRUGS ARE PERMITTED ON THESE PREMISES. RESPECT"* (1.1.123). The inscription on the wall clearly shows his resilient nature, his alienation from crime and his desire to define his own trajectory, different from that defined by his immediate community, not minding the racist world he lives in.

The projected sign on the wall is followed by an optimistic view of hope and resilience saying:

*Life's beauty, admire it. Life is costly, care for it. Life is wealth, keep it, life is love, enjoy it. Life is a dream, realize it. Life is a challenge, meet it. Life is a duty, serve it. Life is a game, play it. Life is a mystery, know it. Life is an opportunity, benefit from it. Life is a promise, fulfill it" (1.1.1)*

The above simplifies life and shows the optimistic nature of the protagonist; he surrenders to good things and to a better and acceptable way of life; and his ability to continue pushing forward, despite these difficulties that he and his black counterparts endured while in prison, exemplifies resilience. He craves for a life of his own, defined by his principles of life. He engages in a business that will make him economically viable and also a good father to his adolescent son. The struggles he endures and their determination to seek a better life reflects his inner strength. Deli's understanding about life is that man is not supposed to want and no one is allowed to talk him about his life:

**Deli:** ... *I wanted, I could have been dad don, and what happen? Bam, it gets mash. I wanted to, fucking worked hard to be there with Ashley and his mum! Bam, it gets mash. I wanted my brother home, here with me and what happen? One step from the fucking gate, bam, he gets mash. Don't tell me about my life.*  
( 1.1. 48)

Despite the misfortunates, he still demonstrates resilience through his ability to adapt to changing circumstances in order to define his own belonging. Whether it is finding new ways to make a living or coping with loss, he displays a remarkable capacity to pivot and survive in a world that often seems hostile to people of his race. These elements combined create a rich tapestry of resilience in *Elmina's Kitchen*, highlighting the complexities of the characters' experiences and their enduring spirit against life's challenges.

Just like Deli, Brother Kiyi in *Fix Up* is confronted with a painful past. He experienced slavery and slave trade (through the books he sells and reads and the music he listens to), gross discrimination, racism, to mention a few. Norma, discussing with Brother Kiyi, thinks he is unable to pay his rents at the bookshop because he is spending all his money on women. But this is not true. Due to the unfortunate incident that happened in the past, where he killed the mother (white lady) of his only daughter, Brother Kiyi has to change his name from Peter Allan, given by his colonial master to Brother Kiyi. To make matters worse, this child was adopted, “and raised by the very people [he is] educating [his] community against” (1.5.80). In order to overcome this pain and keep moving in life, he decides to get engaged in an activity that brings happiness to his body and soul. By returning to his ancestral past, that is the books and stories, he is bent at alienating himself from the British society. It is true he is educating his community with narratives on slavery and slave trade, but the principal reason for opening the bookstore was to heal his pain through books and music before picking up an economic activity. Through the songs he constantly plays in his shop, he sends across messages of resilience.

Slavery and colonization has separated families, destroyed the essence of love and marriage, inflict pain and depression in the hearts of the black British, who did not choose to come to a land void of culture and unity. The pain of a thwarted historical trajectory is submerged with victory songs and colonial/historical narratives. Despite the bleak

circumstances, there is an underlying sense of hope among the characters. Their aspirations for a better life and the desire to break forth from the cycles of violence and desperation revealing a resilient spirit. This hope drives them to take action, to sing out sorrow even when the odds seem stacked against them. We hear the voices of all characters singing a slow blues called “You Gotta Move” symbolizing resilience.

**All**

*You may be rich*

*You may be poor*

*You may be young*

*You may be old*

*But when the Lord gets ready you ga'da move*

*You may be black*

*You may be white*

*You may be wrong*

*You may be right*

*But when the Lord gets ready you ga'da move (2:1.55-56)*

The song shows the need for black British to trust and believe in God, the author and finisher of life. There is therefore hope in Him. Their ability to acknowledge and deal with their histories, rather than being defined by them, illustrates a form of resilience. The process of personal growth and healing is depicted as a challenging but necessary journey.

In *Fix Up*, the struggles of the characters often involve emotional challenges, such as grief, isolation, and despair. Brother Kiyi, and Alice, the mixed race, daughter of Brother Kiyi suffered grief, isolation and despair in the hands of the slave masters, and outrageous discrimination from the whites and even from black self-hate. Brother Kiyi fell in love with a white young lady, and because of this he suffered rejection, grief, isolation and despair. His love was disallowed by the white society and the parents of this lady. Things became worst when she became pregnant for a black man. He was tortured and put into prison due to this frustration, on his release, he killed her leading to a conflict that exacerbates his emotional turmoil. Kwei-Armah shows how his protagonist in *Fix Up* does not fit in societal norms or expectations, grappling with his sense of self and how he is perceived by others. Brother Kiyi experienced betrayal and lack of support from the woman he loved and from his community

members, which leave him feeling unwanted and undervalued. He decided to move, accepting his identity, his class and build up a desire to make his culture known to fellow immigrants hence, the main reason why he opened a “Black conscious” bookstore to cover his crime and identity.

In the same vein, Alice, the mixed raced daughter of Brother Kiyi also went through emotional stress as she struggles to situate her roots, her culture, her belonging and her identity. She comes to the bookstore to seek for knowledge about her culture and her identity. She notices everybody around her is either black or white, but she is brown. In the bookshelves, she searches for historical and colonial narratives and revolutionary songs. Towards the end of the play, she falls on the private album of Brother Kiyi in the bookshelf and discovers that “the cute baby with the ribbons and the silly dress” (1.5.80) looks a lot like her. Full of grief and disappointment, she confronts Brother Kiyi in a loud voice:

***ALICE:*** I AM YOUR CHILD!

***BROTHER KIYI:*** You know that’s exactly what your mother would do to me. Twist me up. Lose her temper and start to scream and I wouldn’t know what to do. It’s her spirit in you come to haunt me, innit? You come to haunt me, Chantella?

***ALICE:*** My name is Alice!

***BROTHER KIYI:*** Your mother named you Chantella.

***ALICE:*** How did she even lay with a beast like you? You forced her, didn’t you?

***BROTHER KIYI:*** What the fuck are you talking about? What do you know about your mother? You don’t know nothin’! You don’t know what she took to be with me, what shit I took just walking down the street, just fucking being with her. What do you know? What do you know? What does your blast generation know? Do you have people spitting to you in the street? Do you have shit smeared on your window? Do you have the pressure that makes you strike at the ones you love?

***ALICE:*** I want to know why I don’t have a mother!

***BROTHER KIYI:*** Of course, you have a mother.

***ALICE:*** Why I don’t have a mother that is here!

***BROTHER KIYI:*** I don’t know – isn’t your mother down there in Somerset or wherever you come from?

***ALICE:*** No. I don’t have a mother, and I want one!

**BROTHER KIYI:** Well, you can't, because I killed her, alright? Is that what you want me to say? Is that what you want?

I killed her, I did not mean to but I did, alright? I'm sorry. (1:5:86-87)

From the above we see the negative effects of slavery and colonization: parent-child relationship is altered, she is filled with grief and betrayal as this revelation led to profound emotional trauma and the need for psychological support. Kwei-Armah presents Alice with all the energy in her drained. Despite this sudden revelations, the playwright carefully portrays their level of resilience as Alice comes back the next day at the bookstore calmer and Brother Kiyi, continued apologetically saying "... You weren't abandoned, you were taken" (1.6.84). Their ability to still find the strength to talk to each other shows their desire to move forward, confront and process these emotions, while still forging ahead in life, thus highlighting their resilience.

*Statement of Regret* also explores the characters' desire to hold on to their fight on compelling the British Government to issue a statement of regret to the blacks on the injustices they perpetrated on them. Though there are no immediate signs that this will happen soon, kwei-Armah's message is that they should keep putting pressure, for this is the only way to appease the blacks. The founder of the Black Policy Research tink-tank, clamours for this reconciliation. Through him, Kwei-Armah presents the dire desire of his protagonist, Kwaku, to get the British, a former colonial master, to make an official apology to minimize the atrocities of slavery and colonization, so that the future generation will have a sense of belonging wherever they are. Val, a forty-year-old man, born in Trinidad, came to Britain with his parents when he was three, expresses a degree of inhumane treatment and segregation immigrants face in Britain. In his words, they "were not slaves, [they] were not slaves ... [they] were enslaved ... people, human beings" (2.3. 86). Both Val and Kwaku have been expecting the British Prime Minister, to declare a formal apology for British's part in enslavement, all to no avail, the main reason for Kwaku's trauma and disappointment. The height of the situation comes when Michael asked Lola to put her husband into a madhouse. Their journeys involve coming to terms with their regrets and finding the strength to move forward. This process illustrates resilience as they work through their emotional turmoil and seek redemption as Lola said, "...the battle has changed, Kwaku. Maybe it's time we rest..."

When *Statement of Regret* was published, The Guardian newspaper understood this agenda and wrote the following words:

*The government is considering issuing a statement of regret for the slave trade on the two-hundredth anniversary of its abolition. Commemorations are held across the UK on 25 March, two centuries after the passing of an 1807 parliamentary bill outlawing the trade in the British empire. The deputy prime minister, John Prescott, rule out a formal apology for Britain's part in slavery earlier this year. But he will chair a meeting next month of the advisory committee overseeing preparations for the commemoration, at which proposals for statement of regret are expected to be discussed. (Guardian, 22 September 2006)*

From the above, the legacy of trauma is brought to light because of the absence of formal apology, showing the collective trauma experienced by descendants of enslaved Africans two hundred centuries, (legacy of trauma), after the passing of an 1807 parliamentary bill outlawing the trade in the British empire. Acknowledgment of the past wrongs is often seen as a necessary step toward healing and reconciliation.

In *Statement of Regret*, Kwaku thinks that no injustice can be compared to “(shouts) What is that in comparison to selling us, Michael? ... Many people benefited from it when we were being raped in our hurts, being brutalized, dying in the fields and made half fucking human” (2.3.85). The struggle to let go of the past and the desire to rebuild relationships embodies a form of resilience—choosing to face emotional pain rather than avoiding it.

Overall, *Elmina's Kitchen*, *Fix Up*, *Statement of Regret* present resilience as a multifaceted concept, intricately linked to personal growth, cultural identity, and the capacity for forgiveness. The characters' journeys reflect the struggles inherent in cultivating resilience, ultimately suggesting that it is through facing our pasts that we can build a more hopeful future. This exploration of resilience also invites audience to reflect on their own experiences with adversity and the ways in which they can find strength in vulnerability. Kwei-Armah's plays certainly exhibit a deep awareness of the characters' desire to stay strong to the challenges faced. More interestingly, they stage the unique ways in which they have moved on. Arguably, however, Kwei-Armah's sense of self and political consciousness as a 'diasporic African' is not refracted through the third space of Africa but rather through black America. For instance, his Pan-African, Afrocentric politics stems in the main from African American cultural nationalist thinkers. On the political influences that have shaped his work, he states: My work comes from

a cultural perspective that is supported by my Pan-Africanist politics [...] My politics is a diasporic, black politics influenced by the philosophies of Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X and the writings of James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka. It is non-apologetic politics. (Qtd. in Osborne253).

Some critics have argued that Kwei-Armah's treatment of the socio-economic inequalities that stem from colonialism and slavery is often questionable. Elmond Strachan insists that the playwright is "dangerously close to accept[ing] black powerlessness and to viewing inequalities as unchangeable" (210). This is because of his attachment to the history and trauma of slavery. But as this chapter has argued, Kwei-Armah's return to history in most of his plays is tied to the optimism and confidence that the characters adopt after their encounter with their history. The history does not just show how divided and unequal the world is, but also how important for one to understand his past in order to embrace the future. His works therefore provide answers to the questions plaguing black communities in Britain. To him, the solution lies in their understanding of their past, their withstanding their present circumstance and their embracing self-defined ways to building their economics, culture and politics.

In conclusion, the discourses of belonging and resilience are intricately intertwined, shaping individual identities and community dynamics in profound ways. Belonging fosters, a sense of acceptance and connection, serving as a fundamental human need that can provide emotional support and stability. In contrast, resilience equips individuals and communities with the tools to navigate challenges, adapt to change, and emerge stronger from adversities. As we explore these interconnected themes, it becomes evident that fostering environments that promote belonging enhances resilience among individuals and communities. When people feel valued and connected, they are more likely to draw on their inner strengths and support each other in times of crisis. Conversely, resilience can deepen feelings of belonging, as shared experiences of overcoming challenges can strengthen bonds and create a sense of unity. Ultimately, cultivating discourses that celebrate both belonging and resilience is essential for building inclusive societies that empower individuals. By prioritizing emotional well-being, social connections, and collective strength, we can create spaces where everyone feels a sense of belonging and is equipped to face life's challenges with courage and confidence. This holistic approach not only enriches personal lives but also contributes to the overall health and vibrancy of our communities.

## CONCLUSION

The work set out to defend the view that a distinctive new voice is needed to liberate the black British community from English social conventions and institutionalized modes of existence believed to be guarantors of British aesthetics. The work analysed how Kwei-Armah portrays conflicting and irreconcilable identity signifiers between Englishness and Blackness in *Elmina's Kitchen*, *Fix Up* and *Statement of Regret* as he attempts to define the place of the black British in contemporary England, not only by steeping into history through filled voices of black political artists, thinkers and writers of the past but by also condemning the excesses and conceptions of black British settlers. The work therefore presented Kwei-Armah as one who indulges in a political act aimed at asserting a black British auditory aesthetic, reflective of the black urban truth. Against this backdrop, the work demonstrated how the playwright responded to two political questions: the relationship between the English and the black British, and between public opinion (national/popular culture) and individual freewill. By focusing on diverse aspects of his plays, particularly on the reductive influence of Englishness on the black British, black identity articulations and indications that can largely stand as both inclusive and exclusive identity signifiers the need for the characters' adoption of resilience was explored.

From the analysis of the texts in relation to the above, the work was divided into four chapters, and new historicism and psychoanalysis used to define the different perspectives from which the playwright views and interpret history, culture and the politics that surround black British life. Lacan's concepts of the mirror stage, castration and desire, and his notion of the signifier and the signified, have been used to define Kwei-Armah's idealism which can only be understood if we take into consideration the characters' psychic insights. The review of related literature established that critics on Kwei-Armah's works read the playwright as one concerned with the history of slavery and colonisation, and with the plights of black British settlers as he provides insights into the urgent need to resolve the pain and anger of the past and present. This work therefore goes further to show how the playwright creates narratives that condemn the history of slavery and colonization, celebrate cultural inheritance while challenging negative stereotypes, while striving to move forward.



The concern in Chapter Two was to show how Kwei-Armah depicts in his works the socio-cultural, religious and political backgrounds of his time. Some biographical details about the author, his various philosophical, religious, artistic influences and inclinations were reviewed with the intention of showing that the various influences helped to shape Kwei-Armah's dramatic vision, a vision that stands opposed to the status-quo and thus deconstruct twenty-first century British norms. To better show this, the chapter was divided into three. The first part related Kwei-Armah's biography and showed that there is an interplay between his upbringing and the characters in his plays. The next section focused on the influence of the American Black Power Movement and its influence on black British drama in general and Kwei-Armah's triptych. The last section of this chapter brought out Kwei-Armah's literary influences showing how they shaped his dramatic vision.

Chapter Three examined the conservative aspects of Englishness and its effects on the black British character through new historicism and Lacan's psychoanalysis. How Kwame Kwei-Armah's represented various forms of attitudes such as class consciousness, gangsterism, parenthood, dressing code and other English cultural beliefs that the immigrant population adopt so as to be like, or move closer to becoming the white British constituted the focus of the first part of the chapter. The argument was that English distinctive mannerism (moral philosophy), dressing code, language and national pride play a role in defining the behavioural patterns of the second and third generation Black British immigrants. As the chapter demonstrated, those who hold on to these English mannerisms either end up as weaklings, as they are over powered, resign to frustration as a result of rejection, or end up as gangsters, as they try to replicate the power structure of their white British counterparts. The argument in this chapter was that Kwei-Armah holds that those who embrace the British mannerism and life style end up frustrated, traumatized, resign and live a defeatist live or fight back through gang culture. This chapter is divided into two; the first section explores themes of Englishness and black British identity in the triptych as it offers a multifaceted exploration of the black British experience in the host land. The second section entitled "Traumatic Syndromes" showed the extent to which the immigrants' inability to fit into British conservative norms brought more untold misery and disillusionment on the black British character.

Chapter Four investigated Kwei-Armah's perspective of black British identity by emphasizing the power of acceptance and the importance of self-empowerment and self-determination for black people in the UK. It showed that the formation of black British identity

in Kwei-Armah's works is affected and conditioned by the African ancestral heritage, youth culture, and black British social environment. The objective of this chapter was therefore to demonstrate how black British individuals embrace their heritage and cultural identity, while also working towards creating opportunities for themselves in their new community. This chapter is divided into two subsections. The first section, titled "African Ancestral Heritage and the Question of Belonging" explored the playwright's longstanding belief that reconciling with one's past is the first step towards self-identification. The second part of the chapter focused on Kwei-Armah's strategies towards overcoming frustration, thus showing that belonging is achieved through the individuals' strive for economic empowerment, education and political representation, resilience. The playwright therefore encourages black British to support each other, build strong social networks base on their culture and challenge systemic barriers that prevent them from achieving success.

To Kwei-Armah, the idea has not been to create a black British out of socio-cultural constraints. His hatred for injustice and violence, and his determination and intellectual ingenuity and love for progress, while adhering to his rich African culture make him stand out above the ordinary. He presents characters who believe that life does not depend on luck, and no one trying to be like another, but on the individual's ability to take chances in making daring and challenging decisions. In *Elmina's Kitchen*, Kwei-Armah presents Deli who possesses extraordinary leadership qualities. He is mentally and physically vigorous, his character and strength of mind are outstanding. His views are neither shaped by the white British manners nor by his circumstances, and his ideas are devotedly oriented around progress, economy and sustainability, peace and living together. He holds that man must not subject himself to circumstances; rather, he should remain strong and steadfast in the face of these difficulties. This explains why he encourages to acquire education and abandon gun culture. He is equally ready to abandon his business, leave town and save his son. That Ashley, whom he is trying so desperately rescue by all means dies, but this does not indicate that all is lost for the black British youth. Rather it means that the fight is serious and must be taken seriously, and he must remain steadfast and resilient.

In *Fix Up*, Kwei-Armah presents us with glimpses here and there of elements of black British tragedy. But this side of the play is overshadowed in the final phase by a comprehensive move to resolve the conflicts which have been brought to light and to lay a new start for an inartificial world. Brother Kiyi, after many year trying to build an intellectual black British

African mind through books, music and religion, building his honour and fame on loyalty to the African history and culture, comes to self-realization that the world has evolved. It is not therefore surprising to the readers that they decide to transform his bookshop to a fashion shop where many can identify, and through which much money can be made. For a few moments, he risks to be condemned by his followers, but then seizes control once more, showing them that life must move on positively no matter what. After having presented himself as one who does not believe in change by holding strong to ancestral values, he subjects himself to the judgment of the new world by accepting to life again. His ability to embrace change makes him sit securely more than ever before at the centre of the community.

Unlike the other two plays, *Statement of Regret* unfolds in a distinctly upper-middle class and academic environment in which debate is a central idea. Aware of the fight between black British of Caribbean descent and black British of African origin, the playwright focuses on interactions and disagreements between these two Britons, basing his clashes on the differences in race, class, and ancestry. By so doing, he examines the long-term effects of slavery and bondage, such as the loss of culture and history, and the effects of this loss on the psychology of today's black British with the intension of showing that the people need to be healed from it and fashion out a way forward; no doubt his main character, Kwaku is founder of Institute for Black Policy Research. While revealing many personal thoughts of the character, the monologues expose many universal feelings about what it means to be an African Caribbean in the today's world. Though Kwaku's search for reconciliation, first with his father and then with his two son's end up in a disappointment, his resolution to move forward is significant. Through the different theories developed in the play, the audience can hope for a reconciliation between Adrian and Junior, a symbolic union of a divided black culture.

If viewed from left to right, the triptych is a unity of past, present, and future representing ideas and discussions on black identity in contemporary Britain. *Elmina's Kitchen* questions why black youths are dying in the streets and why no one is stopping it. *Fix Up* creates a discussion about the treatment and acceptance of people of dual heritage, and *Statement of Regret* raises awareness for the polarizing idea of post traumatic slave syndrome. Kwei-Armah's plays generate discussion and debates for every audience that encounters them, and while it might be too soon to grasp the long-term legacy of this young playwright, Kwame Kwei-Armah is making his voice heard. He realized that the black British need not give up even when everything around them suggest so. Belonging is not forced but worked out with the

possibilities that show up. What they must do is built upon what has been achieved, not lost, in a postmodern world, co-operative tasks have certainly become far more difficult, but for people to sustain openness to one another is far more rewarding. To the playwright, the task is more urgent.

There are widespread global interests in the works of Kwame Kwei-Armah. For this reason, the theme “Kwei-Armah Across Cultures” can be an interesting area for future research. This theme can prompt further questions and areas about what constitutes a cultural boundary, the ways in which dramatic texts and performances are culturally marked and about the importance of Kwei-Armah’s drama in relation to other cultural contexts outside Africa and the Caribbean. In this light, a comparative study between Kwei-Armah’s works and those of European and American playwrights like Henry James, T.S. Eliot, Stephen Jeffreys, Christiana Anderson and Thomas Kilroy could be carried out to show how the socio-political issues raised by Kwei-Armah relate to European life.

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