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Fluid Identity of the Daughter in Jackie Kay's *The Adoption Papers*

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Abstract

This paper deals with the issue of fluid identity in the Scottish poet, novelist and dramatist Jackie Kay's first poetry collection *The Adoption Papers* (1991). Having African roots and being adopted by a white Scottish family lead Kay to employ some elements from her real life in creating a sequence of poems that fictionalizes different manifestations of identity and shows their interplay and apparent contradictions at the same time. Kay views identity as a fluid flux that does not take a fixed form and that distances itself from any preconceptions because it is a continuous and changing formation. She negotiates, questions, fantasizes, reinvents, modifies, imagines, fictionalizes, synthesizes, and even lyricizes her different and multi-faceted identities in an open-ended poetic presentation.

Keywords: Jackie Kay, fluid identity, textual history, linguistic identity, ethnic identity, social identity, self-discovery, identity dramatization

1. Introduction

Jackie Kay (1961-) is one of the most important Scottish writers today; she writes poetry, plays and fiction. She was born to a Nigerian father and a Scottish mother in 1961, and she was adopted by a Scottish couple, John and Helen Kay. She has got many prestigious awards such as the Saltire Society Scottish First Book Award, Somerset Maugham Award, and the Guardian First Book Award Fiction Prize. Currently, she holds the position of Professor of Creative Writing at Newcastle University. However, she is one of the contemporary Scottish women writers whose work, according to the remark and complaint of Nancy Gish, "is neither read nor heard by more than a few outside Scotland or England" (Gish, 2013, 47).

Jackie Kay's poetry celebrates "the capacity human beings have to create and to transform themselves" (Arana and Ramey, 2004, 5). She regards her identity as a whole-life-engaging process, because she is always "interested in identity, how fluid it is, how people can invent themselves, how it can never be fixed or frozen" (Kay, 1999, 73). In an interview in *Poetry Archive*, Kay argues that no one can have the same identity forever: "identity's something that's fluid, it's not something that's static and fixed and I'm really interested in writing about identity and how fluid it is" (Kay, 2005).

Kay's adoption places her in a trans-cultural environment and makes her have different familial, social, ethnic, cultural affiliations. Literature on "transculturality" describes it as oscillating "between hybridity and purity, fluidity and fixation, globalization and localization" (Ambos, 2011, 267). This oscillation in theory may turn to be a symbiosis in practice, with the person living in a transcultural community moving between the poles of such dichotomies without inhabiting either pole. I argue that Jackie Kay, in her *The Adoption Papers* (1991), tends to adopt hybridity and fluidity as the main markers of identity in a trans-cultural community. This collection "explores cultural identity and genetic origin" (Korzeniowska, 2013, 421) and fictionalizes elements from her real life in a poetic sequence that portrays identity as a process whose formation never ends.

In this paper, I will study the fluidity of identity in Kay's titular poetic sequence of *The Adoption Papers*, which occupies the first part of her collection bearing the same title. Fluidity here means that the various aspects of identity may have no clear-cut boundaries among them, because identity is subject to change, modification, reinvention, and even questioning. Although this sequence is presented through three different voices, each one having her fears, expectations and versions of identity, subjectivity and selfhood, and the contrast between these voices can shed light on the various dimensions of the issues of identity involved in this sequence, I will limit my discussion to the voice of the daughter because fluidity of identity is a paramount issue for her, as she goes on an incessant quest for her identity throughout the sequence which may stand for a journey of self-discovery and identity apprenticeship. I will start with a brief survey of the concept of fluidity with reference to identity. Then I will analyze the first appearance of the daughter, before the start of the sequence, in the three captions that precede it. Next, I will follow the different manifestations, representations, and dramatization of the daughter's fluid identity throughout the sequence.

2. Identity and Fluidity

Fluidity is a concept that differs from the hybridity of identity as propagated by structuralist theory which sees it as "a construct, a hybrid in its many forms and one that is predicated upon a ruse, a performance, a *stade*" (Phipps, 2003, 10) because structuralism denies the agency of the subject and regards it as an abstraction. It also does not recognize meaning or subjectivity, although they are integral part of personhood, individuality and subjecthood. Andrew Robinson maintains that "human agency … leads to a conception of a fluid-yet-fragile self-identity, a conception of community as context of value, and a conception of personal autonomy as situated autonomy" (Robinson, 2007, 8). This agency makes the identity of a person "fluid" because no one keeps the same traits or conceptions forever. He/she keeps changing and developing with the new or changing circumstances they get involved in and the new ontological questions they raise or face. These circumstances make the person situated within community, time and place whose conceptions and manifestations are not static or fixed. Robinson correlates fluidity of self-identity with "identifications with multiple and often conflicting communities" (Robinson, 2007, 8). Such conflict largely results from the perceptions that one receives from the intersections of cultures and ethnicities.

Postmodernism conceives of identity as a multiplicity consisting of many parts that do not have clear-cut boundaries. According to Aaron Balick, "postmodern discourse … argues strongly against unitary expressions of self in favour of identities that are multiple, fluid, and decentred" (Balick, 2014, 145). Decentering should not be understood here in a structuralist light, that is, the subject is removed from the center. Rather, it implies that the subject has no central or single identity that can underscored as a unitary and characteristic marker. He/she has multiple identities that are subject to different conditions and angles of vision. Grad and Rojo attribute this fluidity to the "complexity and context sensitivity of identities" because individuals "even within one setting may appeal to a range of identities" (Grad and Rojo, 2008, 5). They also call our attention to the fact that "fluidity does not call continuity into question" (Grad and Rojo, 2008, 10) because fluidity is a mode of existence that aims at maintaining the adaptable continuity of individuals' lives within cultures and communities.

Julie Mostov argues against fixing identities because it serves "to naturalize relationships of domination and reject the notion of persons as interdependent actors and potential political agents" (Mostov, 2007, 139). The fluidity, multiplicity and overlapping of identities in the same individual do not suggest the fragmentation of individuals or prevent "them from holding consistent views, pursuing coherent interests, making and keeping commitments, and having long-lasting affiliations or allegiances" (Mostov, 2007, 139). In this light, fluidity implies adaptability, personal quest, and a never-ending process of identity formation.

Michael Ostwald argues that the fixedness or fluidity of identity "is linked to the way in which the individual is prompted, by the characteristics of the environmental bubble, to alter their projected persona" (Ostwald, 2001, 194). He establishes a strong connection between identity and the environment. This can be true as long as it does not exclude individuals' personal contributions to the formation and shaping of their identities because a person's longings, aspirations, self-image, worldview and even self-performance play significant roles in their views of their identities and how these identities are manifested or performed.

Rebecca Kay attributes agency to individuals in forming, performing and adapting their identities which "may be the result of a very individual process of reflection and choice and an empowering expression of beliefs, tastes and values" (Rebecca Kay, 2005, 1). She also focuses on the importance of identities for the "marginalized people" who "often use identities, both individually and collectively, as a means of challenging normative assumptions and prescriptive values" (Rebecca Kay, 2005, 2). Identity is seen here as a form of resisting stereotyping and racism, and of ethnic survival. Beth-Sarah Wright finds common aspects among the cultural identities of "the Black Diaspora;" these identities are "characterized by a fluidity and an advanced capacity to negotiate and shift in the face of change" (Wright, 2000, 294). Negotiation, shifting, adaptability, and resistance are integral parts of components of the fluidity of identity.

3. Identity Thresholds

Jackie Kay highlights three captions on the page that immediately precedes the first part of "The Adoption Papers" sequence of poems, and these captions embody the microcosm of the sequence as a whole. They highlight the dialogic nature of this sequence and introduce the three voices that will populate it: the adoptive mother, the daughter and the birth mother respectively. As the voices of the birth and adoptive mother dramatize forms of identity that do not directly relate to the identity interests of the daughter, especially maternal and gender identity, and their view of identity are not characterized by fluidity, I will focus only on the caption belonging to the voice of the daughter because it encapsulates many of the issues that will be foregrounded throughout the sequence as a whole.

The voice of the adopted daughter is highlighted in the second caption that precedes the sequence. This caption deals with a scene from the babyhood of the daughter:

> I was pulled out with forceps
> left a gash down my left cheek
> Four months inside a glass cot
> but she came faithful
> from Glasgow to Edinburgh
> and peered through the glass
> I must have felt somebody willing me to survive;
> she would not pick another baby (Kay, 1991, 10)

The reference to the "forceps," which is a product of culture, implies that culture dominates nature and that the baby is forced out of the belly of her biological mother. However, the "gash" on the cheek of the baby foreshadows the conflicts and struggles experienced by the daughter later on in her life because they stand for the problems resulting from adoption in a conservative culture that looks down upon adopted children, especially when these children have a color different from that of the dominant group. The "gash" also suggests how the daughter was harshly detached from the womb of her birth mother, as if her birth act was an act of liquidating blood relationships between her and her biological mother and putting them to a forced end. This will give rise to the daughter's search for her (partial) identity through blood-marked lines although she is aware that blood ties are not significant.

The daughter's non-reference to the birth mother in this caption anticipates the absence of this mother from the life of the daughter throughout the sequence, an absence which urges the daughter to search for her textual history and textual identity.

The phrase "somebody willing me to survive" creates a tension between biological identity on the one hand and adoptive and social identities on the other; this tension persists throughout the sequence and motivates the daughter's never-ending quest that leads her to change her initial view of identity and adopt a more flexible conception of her own identity. In addition, the infant's wish for survival re-emerges in the adult daughter's enduring resistance to all forms of racism and challenges to her identities in her "foster" community.

Describing the adoptive mother as "faithful" and highlighting the spatial universe of "Glasgow" and "Edinburgh" complicates the multi-faceted relationships that the daughter will be involved in throughout the sequence and sheds light on the not-easy-to-resolve-or-synthesize manifestations of social, political, linguistic, cultural, and even biological identities that the daughter will get engaged in via their interrelated network.

The line "she would not pick another baby" implies that the daughter is an unwanted baby. This is later concretized through three main incidents in the sequence: the adoption agency's view of the black baby as lacking babyhood, the birth mother's indifference to her daughter, and the white community's racism against the daughter. All these implications have different impacts on the daughter's sense of identity and push her to question stereotypical views of identity and her own view of self-identity.

That Kay is a black girl adopted by white parents leads some critics to assume that the sequence is directly autobiographical. This view cannot be accepted because Kay employs three voices throughout the narrative, and the narrative itself was originally written for performance and it was actually "broadcast in BBC Radio 3's *Drama Now* series in August 1990," as Kay herself declares in the "acknowledgement" page before the table of contents in the first edition of the collection. Dramatization, fictionalization, and lyricism cast the author's autobiography into an artistic form that has its own life away from the life of the author. Also, adding the voice of the birth mother, who is always absent, and depending on fantasizing in important sections of the sequence underline the fictionalized form of the text.

Partial autobiography is manipulated artistically and aesthetically to convey the poet's view of the interconnected issues of identity. Kay herself asserts that her work is not a writing of her own life: "Sometimes people read too much into what I'm trying to say about myself. It is not as autobiographical as people think it is" (Kay, 2002b). She highlights its mixed character, as its composition is subject to the blending and synthesizing processes of the imagination and seeks "to take a bit of the real and a bit of the imaginary, a bit of the familiar and a bit of the strange, and blend those things together in some sort of way" (Kay, 2002a).

This act of blending changes the nature of the blended elements in such a way that makes them transcend their former "fixed" meaning and significance and places them in a border-zone that is neither here nor there. Perhaps this blending explains the fluid character of identity as explored in the poems of "The Adoption Papers" sequence. Kay says about *The Adoption Papers*, "I think that we write often in order to try and discover or understand ourselves and so *The Adoption Papers* was a cathartic book for me to write. I wrote it before I had ever traced a birth parent and it made me think about nature and nurture and the conflict of identities. It was a searching book to write and in the end it did feel healing too" (Kay, 2010). Writing the sequence is a journey of exploration, self-discovery, understanding, self-expression, and getting conflicts out so that she can understand them and get purged of their negative impacts. Thus, the poet's presentation of the issue of identity can be regarded as a process of identity-meaning production that has many phases without a definite product. It is characterized by a fluidity which de-stabilizes any preconceived or prescriptive ideas of the manifestations of identity. Her exploration of her own identities is marked by continuity and successive mutability, implying that identity formation and conceptualization are a continuing construction that lasts throughout a person's life.

4. The Daughter's Multi-faceted Quest for Identity

The first appearance of the daughter in "The Adoption Papers" sequence is in the second poem "Chapter 2: The Original Birth Certificate" where she begins a quest for her ethnic and biological or blood identities. She tries to squeeze any data related to her birth origin from the man at the desk in the birth registration office. She wants to get "my original birth certificate," and begins a search for her birth or biological parents. She waits for these data in suspense and alarming expectation:

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

Outside Edinburgh is soaked in sunshine
I talk to myself walking past the castle.
So, so, so, I was a midnight baby after all. (12)

She attaches great importance to these things which may seem trifles to other people because they are the roots that plant her in place and time. The contrast between the "sunshine" and the "midnight" sheds revealing light on these "origin" data. She feels that she does not belong to this sunshine which covers Edinburgh, as she hypothetically or originally affiliates with the midnight/black ethnicity. In this context, she reverses the conventional connotations of sunshine, as she transfers them to the midnight, in order to endow blackness with positive attributes.

Concomitant with her search for her ethnic identity through the blood ties that link her with unremembered infancy are the birth mother's reaction to the birth of her unwanted daughter and the adoptive mother's search for her gender identity through adoption. The birth mother's reaction occupies the rest of "The Original Birth Certificate", while the adoptive mother's quest inaugurates, and occupies the greatest part of, the next poem "Chapter 3: The Waiting Lists". Rajeev S. Patke establishes a connection between this search for ethnic or biological identity and the daughter's textual history: "Whatever she may have thought she was, up to that point, will have to be revised depending on what the document reveals about her birth and origin" (Patke, 2004, 39).

This revision is apparent in the daughter's reviewed view of the "sunshine" which stands in the context of the poem for Edinburgh/white British. Her birth certificate makes her realize that she is associated with the "midnight" of Nigeria (her father being a Nigerian visiting Edinburgh when he met her mother), not the "sunshine" of Edinburgh/her birth place/Britain at large. However, this association is only temporary, as the daughter's quest leads her, later on in the sequence, to accept association with and dissociation from her roots and to accept this sort of "contradiction."

In "The Waiting Lists", the daughter receives some information related to her birth and her mother:

Your mother was nineteen when she had you.
You weighed eight pounds four ounces.
She liked hockey. She worked in Aberdeen
as a waitress. She was five foot eight inches. (Kay, 1991, 14)

These data do not have any identity markers because they relate only to factual matters that do not help the daughter in her identity quest. Consequently, she asks "the counselling agency in Edinburgh" "to trace through marriage certificates" (Kay, 1991, 19). The unavailability of sure knowledge about her ethnic identity weighs heavy upon her mind, and she begins to contemplate the relationship between biological/blood inheritance and the self:

That night I turn it through till dawn
a few genes, blood, a birth.
All this bother, certificates, papers.
It is all so long ago. Does it matter?
Now I come from her,
the mother who stole my milk teeth
ate the digestive left for Santa (Kay, 1991, 20)

Here she considers how the factor of heredity may influence her identity or self-image. This influence relates to a mere moment in the past when "a few genes" were transmitted into her through "a birth". Although she sometimes questions the great importance of this biological past for the construction of self and identity in the present, the photograph "Human chromosomes" on the cover of the whole collection foregrounds this biological variety of identity. However, this foregrounding may be ironic because the sequence as a whole shows how society's preoccupation with what is "natural" or hereditary negatively constructs the daughter as an inferior other. Nevertheless, the cover of the collection may refer to "the symbolic importance of the birth mother and the weight she carries for an individual" (Taylor, 2001, 264). This symbolism is related to one's roots and the importance these roots have for him/her. One's origins are part of his unconscious and conscious memory. In this context, it is significant to recall Langston Hughes's "Afro-American Fragment" where he expresses his longing for Africa, and at the same time he realizes that going back to Africa is impossible and that his life is a fragment that has nothing to complete although Africa is already there.

Textual history is an important aspect of this biological identity. Along with "genes" and "blood", there are "certificates" and "papers" whose significance cannot be reduced or neglected because they give the sequence, and the collection as a whole, its title. It appears that the title of the collection is symbolic because it foregrounds the papers that the daughter regards as both important and unimportant, and it correlates these papers with "adoption" as if this title creates a symbolic coexistence or symbiotic existence between nature, biology, roots, blood ties, and history one the one hand and culture, environment, community, nurture and the present on the other.

Although the daughter tries to locate herself "within the perceived certainties of a biological past" (Lumsden, 2000, 80), she realizes that her birth mother has violated the terms of this biological relationship because she "stole my milk teeth". The mother is portrayed unfavorably as a woman who does not observe her maternal duties and who is ready to eat "the

digestive" allotted to the celebration of Christmas. Although the daughter cannot form a distinct notion of her biological identity, "she may acknowledge the limits of a biologically grounded notion of self" (Lumsden, 2000, 80).

While "Part One," which covers the first two years of the daughter's life, ends with the adult daughter's intricate search for her biological roots, "Part Two: 1967-1971" begins with the six-years-old daughter's discovery that her (adoptive) mother is not her real mother. Here she explores her identity in the light of the model which posits it as "a social and familial construct" (Lumsden, 2000, 79). The family represents the backdrop to which this child resorts to consolidate her view of the self at this early age:

> Ma mammy bot me oot a shop
> Ma mammy says I was a luvly baby
>
> Ma mammy picked me (I wiz the best)
> your mammy had to take you (she'd no choice)
>
> Ma mammy says she's no really ma mammy
> (just kid on)
>
> ……
>
> She says my real mammy is away far away
> Mammy why aren't you and me the same colour
> But I love my mammy whether she's real or no
>
> ……
>
> She took me when I'd nowhere to go
> my mammy is the best mammy in the world OK. (Kay, 1991, 21)

First, the daughter shows how she is admired in the family. Within her family, her personal identity is actualized. This supports her self-image, as she regards herself as the best girl: she interprets her being "picked" by her mother as a sign of her being the best child. The daughter presents her personal identity through the mirror of her social identity. The personal and the social interact with one another and provide the daughter with a satisfactory self-image. In other words, thinking that she is the best child, she brings the personal to interact with her social identity represented in her belonging to her adoptive family. Her satisfaction with her minor social milieu gives her some sort of personal satisfaction, and consequently fulfills some of the requirements of personal identity.

However, someone, perhaps a child belonging to the white community where she lives, tries to de-stabilize this self-image, confronting her with the fact that her mother had "no choice". Although this fact shocks her, she internalizes it and goes to her mother for support and clarification. Now she takes her mother's earlier revelation that she is not her real mother seriously. She begins to accept the separation between biological identity (nature) and the social/familial one (nurture/socialization). Despite this separation, they do not negate or annul each other. This is emphasized by her insistence on loving her mother "whether she's real or no". “It is in the capacity of the identity to indicate spaces of liminality and difference *within itself* that presents new challenges to previous theoretical paradigms of identity formation” (MacDonald, 1998: 10).

These “new challenges” are represented here in the “adoptiveness” of her mother. That her mother is only adoptive, not real, makes her check her earlier concept of identity. This act of checking results in her acceptance of the non-lineal relationship between her and her mother. It also leads her to reformulate her concept of social identity. As the context in which the daughter’s conscious search for, or exploration of, identity constantly changes, her formulation of her identity can never be a finished product; it is better to view it as a process that goes on non-stop.

The difference in colour between the daughter and the adoptive mother does not appall the former with reference to her social/familial identity which she sees in a new light, but it pushes her to resume her search for biological roots. Her recognition of that difference and separation enables her to feel much gratitude to her adoptive mother who has guaranteed her survival, transferring the epithet "the best" from herself at the beginning of the above extract to that mother at its end. However, this revelation inculcates in her mind the insecurity of her familial identity:

> After mammy telt me she wisnae my real mammy
> I was scared to death she was gonnie melt
> or something or mibbe disappear in the dead
> of night and somebody would say she wis a fairy
> godmother. So the next morning I felt her skin
> to check she was flesh, but mibbe it was just
> a good imitation. How could I tell if my mammy
> was a dummy with a voice spoken by someone else?
> So I searches the whole house for clues
> but I never found nothing. Anyhow a day after
> I got my guinea pig and forgot all about it. (Kay, 1991, 22)

She dramatizes her fears through the language of the fairy tales in which she is used to think as a child. This dramatization reflects how she attaches great importance to her familial identity without which she will have little scope for any sense of identity, as she now realizes that her birth mother is "away far away". She fears that her adoptive mother might not be real, a fear which pushes her to question the phenomenal presence of that mother. Anyhow, the shared linguistic identity (Scottish) implicitly turns us to the assertion of both forms of identity. For "language is seen to serve as one of the principal means by which a sense of common ethnic identity is maintained, the loss of which necessarily corresponds to a diminished community" (Woods, 2006, 44-45). If one loses her ethnic identity, she will lose all other aspects of identity and turn into an identity-void sign. Moreover, language is the first step to identity which "is by definition a never-ending quest in which we constantly seek permanence: first in language and then beyond it" (Crawshaw et al., 2001, 103). Without this symbolic representation of the self through language, the self will turn into a mere corporeality that has nothing else within or beyond.

Although the daughter's ethnic identity, or more exactly the figures who might give her a sense of ethnic belonging – her birth mother and her Nigerian father – is/are not present, she shares the ethnic identity of her adoptive mother. The first step to the actualization of this identity is language. Her use of Scottish here implies that she has the ability to move freely across the boundaries among the different aspects or concepts of identity. Moreover, the shared linguistic identity between the daughter and the adoptive mother intersects with their shared political identity which is manifested in activism and fighting racism and oppression.

Paul Mercieca argues that "Cultural identity is more fluid than ethnic and social identity, and is typically influenced by such experiences as language learning and migration" (Mercieca, 2014, 30). His argument is verifiable in so far as it gives equal fluidity to cultural and social identities. As we have seen, the daughter's natural use of Scottish in the poetic sequence attests to the fact that she linguistically regards herself as having a Scottish identity. Also, the harmonious social relationships she has within her Scottish adoptive family and the antagonistic relations she has within the community at large show how she can easily move between two markers of her social identity. The stereotypical views the community have of a Black girl or woman in a white society and the intimate and parental attitude of a family belonging to the same white society towards the same girl demonstrate that social identity is not fixed because the daughter both belongs and does not belong to the same society. Thus, "stable identity is eroded" (Kouta and Saleh, 2013, 218), but this erosion does not engender identity loss. It opens space for identity to be freely and multiply manifested in a continually changing act of identity formation.

In "Black Bottom", the daughter explores the dangers that threaten her ethnic identity in a society biased against ethnic minorities. Her schoolmates call her "*Sambo Sambo*" (Kay, 1991, 24), an epithet she cannot accept. Her dissatisfaction with such racist names externalizes her violent drives and she punches the guts of her mate. But as soon as she lets him go, he calls her "*Dirty Darkie*"(Kay, 1991, 24). This collective racism becomes manifest in the reaction of their teacher who blames her alone, "warning" her that "In a few years time you'll be a juvenile delinquent", and calling her names such as "thug", "vandal", and "hooligan" (Kay, 1991, 25).

The whole atmosphere at school smacks of ethnic derision. When students practice for "the school show" and try to "do the Cha Cha and the Black Bottom" dances, the daughter cannot "get the steps right", a situation which any student might find themselves in. But the teacher blames her on ethnic grounds:

> my teacher shouts from the bottom
> of the class Come on, show
>
> us what you can do I thought
> you people had it in your blood.
> My skin is hot as burning coal
> like that time she said Darkies are like coal
> in front of the whole class – my blood
> what does she mean? I thought (Kay, 1991, 25)

The school atmosphere is full of rampant clichés and stereotypical racist views of the daughter and her ethic roots. This kind of stereotypical categorization which regards all blacks as very good at these dances does not allow for any exceptions as if it were unquestionable truth. Although the daughter cannot perform these dances, the teacher does not question her own clichés about "Darkies", as if the former were responsible for de-stabilizing these clichés. In other words, instead of acknowledging an exception which should make her doubt the universality of these clichés, the teacher wants to perpetuate them by forcing the daughter to comply with them. This racial confrontation pushes the daughter to get into a reflective process that questions many of the static concepts related to identity and society. In other words, the daughter's interaction with the school community leads her to question the bases of the construction of her ethnic identity in such a community. This questioning deconstructs the stereotypical image and explores other possibilities.

The daughter's inability to perform a dance that most Africans are hypothetically used to dance attests to the fact that the daughter's Black identity is not a given or inherited fact and removes "any notion of an essentialist Black identity" (Schrage-Früh, 2009b, 70). If identity was essentialist, the daughter would have danced this dance naturally. This implies that identity is a process that the person is continually involved in, or a skill that can be acquired at any time. This supports our view in this paper of how the concept of identity is a conception that continuously develops

throughout one's life, and highlights Jackie Kay's understanding of "identity as constantly and flexibly changing" (Hácová, 2005, 63), and the poetic "sequence does not provide any clear-cut answers to the question of [the daughter's] core identity" (Schrage-Früh, 2009a, 171).

These group images are stereotypical and cast whole communities into an undifferentiating and uniforming mold. They do not leave any space for personal or individual identity. The community in which the daughter lives assumes a superficial and stereotypically fixed identity for her and deals with her accordingly. However, her exclusion from those "group we-images" does not disappoint her. It only urges her to search for her blood. This quest makes her search for other figures who belong to her ethnic group and look like her. Therefore, she identifies with the American political black activist Angela Davis:

> Angela Davis is the only female person
> I've seen (except for a nurse on TV)
> who looks like me. She had big hair like mine
> that grows out instead of down.
> My mum says it's called an *Afro*.
> If I could be as brave as her when I get older
> I'll be OK.
> Last night I kissed her goodnight again
> and wondered if she could feel the kisses
> in prison all the way from Scotland.
> Her skin is the same too you know.
> I can see my skin is that colour
> …
> I worry she's going to get the chair.
> I worry she's worrying about the chair.
> My dad says she'll be putting on a brave face.
> He bought me a badge home which I wore
> to school. It says FREE ANGELA DAVIS.
> And all my pals says 'Who's she?' (Kay, 1991, 27)

Both have the same origin, colour, and perhaps fate. The daughter regards the similarity of her colour and hair with those of Angela Davis as an identity marker. She is not alone in having such physical characteristics. Being shared, these characteristics highlight a sense of belonging to an ethnic group, albeit in diaspora. Moreover, she wishes to attain the bravery of Angela Davis in fighting racism and defending the rights of Afros. That is why she is concerned about her destiny and takes up the slogan "FREE ANGELA DAVIS". This slogan serves a symbolic or indirect purpose as well. It expresses the daughter's desire for fighting racism in her own community. Fighting her schoolmate back earlier on in the sequence suggests her child-suitable activism.

The daughter's identification with this Black activist is not a mere identification with someone who has the same ethnic roots. It is a means of fighting racism at school whose ignorance of that activist highlights the mystifying educational apparatus that sheds darkness on any ideologically opposing existence. However, the role of the daughter's adoptive parents in fighting this deep-seated racism highlights the role of the family in supporting identity. Although her parents are white, they do not share their community's inherent racism against ethnic minorities. This divergence from public consensus may be due to their different political orientations: both are communists who fight for social equality, human rights, and world peace. This favorable familial milieu encourages the daughter to stick to her political identity. The daughter's fighting for the cause of Angela Davis equals fighting for her own cause in a society which does not acknowledge her right to exist within its boundaries and hierarchies.

The implications of this intricate social and ethnic web for the daughter are quite revealing. She has no clear-cut boundaries between the various aspects of identity. While she seeks her ethnic roots, she finds self-actualization within "her" white family. She acknowledges "the tension between essential and constructed models of identity" (Lumsden, 2000, 82). This tension does not take the form of conflict. Rather it has a symbiotic nature where both models coexist and do not negate one another. Also, her political identity cannot be separated from her ethnic one, as this identity is supported by her parents' political affiliations.

The poem "Generations" that inaugurates "Part Three: 1980-1990," which covers the life of the adult daughter, visualizes her fluid conceptions of her biological past. As she has no concrete model before her, she has to conceptualize this past through her mirror image:

> I don't know what diseases
> come down my line;
> when dentists and doctors ask
> the old blood questions about family runnings
> I tell them: I have no nose or mouth or eyes
> to match, no spitting image or dead cert,
> my face watches itself in the glass" (Kay, 1991, 29).

This shows how she is completely ignorant of her biological roots, an ignorance which tortures her and pushes her to get any knowledge about these roots whatever subjective it might be, because Kay and other ethnic identity-seeking writers recall roots in "their endeavour to find their ancestry" (Little, 2011, 244). The reference to "diseases" implies that white doctors and dentists take it for granted that her color is correlated with diseases and that her "blood" is not pure or clean.

However, this situation leads her to question the great importance people attach to blood and biological difference from her adoptive:

> I have my parents who are not of the same tree
> and you keep trying to make it matter,
> the blood, the tie, the passing down
> generations.
> We all have our contradictions,
> the ones with the mother's nose and father's eyes
> have them;
> the blood does not bind confusion,
> yet I confess to my contradiction
> I want to know my blood. (Kay, 1991, 29)

She finds in her adoptive parents real parenthood. The reference to the "tree" implies that parenthood is a concept that transcends the barrier of blood; biology does not play a decisive role in her sense of familial and social identity. The pronoun "you" in this extract questions the reader and the immediate audience of the previous dramatic presentation of the poem. However, it can have another interpretation in the light of the "contradiction" mentioned later on in the extract. It appears that the daughter dramatizes her two internal voices: one recognizing that actual parenthood does not have a direct relationship with blood and biology, and the other feeling a need for knowing her biological parents. However, these contradictions are not regarded as negative; they attest to the symbiotic nature of the different aspects of identity.

This attempt at knowledge does not necessarily imply a desire to get unified with these blood roots; it is only an act of contemplation that indulges in the symbolic importance of these roots:

> It is the well, the womb, the fucking seed.
> Here, I am far enough away to wonder –
> what were their faces like
> who were my grandmothers
> what were the days like
> passed in Scotland
> the land I come from
> the soil in my blood. (Kay, 1991, 29)

The daughter expresses her longing for getting information about her matrilineal relatives. She realizes that the family plays a role in the construction of her identity represented in "the soil in my blood." But this is not its only role, as there is another role played by "the land I come from." Both soil and land imply roots, a fact which suggests that familial construction of identity is as important as the biological one. The daughter cannot get sure knowledge about her "grandmothers." She can only speculate on "the well, the womb, the fucking seed." All these things are potential metaphorical roots that she does not know anything about. She feels that biology is part of her identity, and she searches for her biological roots just because she wants to get some knowledge about the different manifestations of her identity. The well may stand for Africa in general, the womb for the mother, and the seed for the father. These three things mix biology, ethnicity, and even textual history, things which belong to an unknown past that the daughter tries to reconstruct. This act of reconstruction shows that many aspects of identity formation are only tentative and do not take a fixed form because imagination plays a major part in their (re-)construction. "While Kay recognises in her writing the fictional nature of our identities, she is also aware of the need for those fictions to give us a sense of ontological security" (Taylor, 2001, 246).

Then the daughter tries to figure out the landscape of that "land"/her mother. This act of visualizing a never-seen figure largely fails, as it does not engender specific details:

> She is faceless
> She has no nose
> She is five foot eight inches tall
> She likes hockey best
> …
> She was a waitress
> …
> She wears no particular dress
> …

She is faceless, she never
weeps. She has neither eyes nor
fine boned cheeks (Kay, 1991, 30)

This formless body implies that the birth mother does not have any form of existence in the life of her daughter. She is tough-hearted, and does not appear in the life of the daughter except as a mere abstraction which cannot be concretized. Thus, the daughter does not identify with her. Her quest for her mother is for the sake of mere knowledge, knowledge which cannot alter the status quo. Therefore, she wishes to see her once: "Once would be enough, / just to listen to her voice / watch the way she moves her hands / when she talks" (Kay, 1991, 30). This wish of the daughter aims only at making sure that her birth mother has a physical presence, not a mere abstraction that exists in her mind only. This may suggest that biological identity is less important than the familially and socially constructed ones. For the former is portrayed here as a mere idiosyncratic formulation or fabrication on the part of the daughter. She only wants to know that she has a biological mother.

In order to highlight this idiosyncratic formulation, the poet concludes the sequence with the daughter imagining a meeting with her birth mother to lessen the emotional shock that might result from a real meeting:

If I picture it like this it hurts less
We are both shy
though our eyes are not,
they pierce below skin.
We are not as we imagined (Kay, 1991, 32)

Here the daughter focuses on the contrast, if not the contradiction, between appearance and reality. Reality, like the real meeting, hurts much. The apparent shyness of both shows how they are strangers to one another. There is nothing that might relate them together, and their imaginative meeting places them in an embarrassing situation. On the other hand, the real piercing looks maximize the inquisition which is concomitant with utter difference between them, a difference between reality and the mental image each one has formed of the other.

It appears that this inquisition does not bring any intimate or positive results. None of them can tolerate even the physical presence of the other:

There is no sentiment in this living-room,
a plain wood table and a few books.
We don't cuddle or even shake hands
though we smile sudden as a fire blazing
then die down.
Her hands play with her wedding-ring,
I've started smoking again.
We don't ask big questions even later by the shore.
We walk slow, tentative as crabs
No, so what have you been doing the past 26 years.
Just what are you working at, stuff like that. (Kay, 1991, 32-33)

Their meeting does not bring about any form of intimacy; even the signs of minimal intimacy, such as shaking hands, are absent. Here smiles represent a form of inauthentic compliment, and they disappear as quickly as they have appeared. In addition to the absence of intimacy, there is some sort of discomfort with the meeting as a whole: the mother plays with her wedding-ring (this wedding-ring suggests that she has her new familial world and that the daughter represents, for her, a mere phase of her past life), and the daughter resumes smoking. In other words, they cannot tolerate one another; and their meeting represents a burden for both.

This uncomfortable meeting turns out to be a nightmare. It leads to the death of the original meeting "dream" of the daughter with her mother:

If I picture it like this it hurts less

One dream cuts another open like a gutted fish
nothing is what it was;
she is too many imaginings to be flesh and blood.
There is nothing left to say.
Neither of us mentions meeting again. (Kay, 1991, 33)

The daughter realizes that reality is completely different from what she has dreamt of. Her biological identity is nothing but a never-realizable dream. Her biological mother is a mere mental and emotional image in her own mind. This image is projected upon an abstraction which the birth mother fails to concretize. Thus, another meeting will effect nothing but spoil this image.

The last lines of the sequence are as follows:

> I lie there, duvet round my shoulders
> fantasising the colour of her paper
> whether she'll underline First Class
> or have a large circle over her 'i's. (Kay, 1991, 34)

Although the daughter is aware that her birth mother is far away from her on all levels, and that she comes to realize that "blood" does not have much importance for her, she engenders fantasies about the supposed letter that her birth mother would send her. She has earlier met her birth mother in a dream that has proved the futility of a real meeting between them. However, in these last lines of the poem she wants to have a factual meeting, not with her mother, but with her handwriting, a desire that recalls the daughter's search for her textual history, symbolized in her "birth certificate," at the very beginning of the sequence. The end of the poem does not have the daughter searching for such a history; rather she longs for a textual-identity present through the expected letter from her birth mother. "The desire for written communication is a desire for a reading of her mother's identity physically, through her own inscription" (Kanneh, 1998, 187).

The act of fantasizing at the very end of the poem opens this end and symbolizes the continuity of the quest and of the wilful and fluctuating formation of self-identity. The end of the sequence does not resolve the questions that the daughter poses throughout it. It opens the sequence and does not fix or contain the issues of identity. It is apparent that identity for the daughter is a continuing process that cannot come to an end because it is related to the changing questions that the daughter as a multifaceted ontological subject poses to herself, society, culture, and existence at large.

This imaginative dimension of identity creates some sort of intended fragmentation which equals complementation and integration, as different and even separate manifestations and presentations of the identity amount to a synthesis that mixes many not-usually-mixable identity components. This fragmentation does not mean that her identity is lost because when reality fails to provide her with some missing aspects of her identity, she imagines and reconstructs, or rather constructs, them. For Jackie Kay, "confident assertions about identity are difficult precisely because of the multiplicity and irresolvability of her own" identity (Thurston and Alderman, 2014, 207).

In brief, biological and ethnic identities depend on much fantasizing and imagination. The imagined meeting with the biological mother shows that imagination and fantasy play a major role in the formation, or rather construction, of both kinds of identity. The daughter's quest for her biological and ethnic identities has proven that these identities have no stable form. Moreover, they are largely metaphorical and symbolic because they are invented through an imaginative discourse that tries to give shape to a mother who is "faceless."

5. Conclusion

Through the imaginative autobiographical journey that the daughter makes in the poetic sequence of "The Adoption Papers," Jackie Kay adopts a flexible view of identity that does not essentialize or fix it. She accommodates different manifestations of identity that do not exclude one another. She recognizes that her multi-affiliative identities are interconnected or linked together, at least in the creative and imaginative act of writing a semi-autobiographical sequence where they become integrated and where the fictional cannot be separated from the real or factual.

Kay does not regard Black or ethnic identity as essentialist because the sequence creatively or artistically proves that it is a marker derived from socialization and personal relationships. When the daughter expresses her confusion regarding her teacher's stereotypical view that she must know how to perform the bottom dance, she repudiates the essentialist view of a whole race because she is black and cannot perform this dance. The same can be said about biological identity. In her imaginative meeting with her mother, the daughter does not feel intimacy with her, and sees her as a strange person she does not know. The anxiety and boredom felt by both daughter and birth mother during this meeting show how biology is not an important marker of identity.

In a diasporic or trans-cultural community, linguistic identity does not relate to roots or innately acquired language, as the daughter, and the poet behind her, sometimes uses Scottish within the sequence which is mainly written in English. This shows that Kay regards herself as Scottish, and that she uses Scottish in an English text in order to resist the cultural and linguistic hegemony of English. Resistance here implies that she adopts Scottish as a manifest marker of linguistic identity. This linguistic identity proves the fluidity of her overall identity because Scottish society has racist and discriminatory practices against her just because of her different color. In other words, she affiliates with Scotland in some aspects and distances herself from it in others.

The sequence foregrounds the interrelated issues of identity, or rather identities, in a way that makes use of dramatization, narration, and lyricism and mixes them together, a mixture which symbolizes the flux of identity formation in the sequence. This sequence represents identity as a riddle that engages Kay in a long-term quest for a solution that is never reached, or rather that does not take a stable form because it is always changing.

The self in Kay's poems is reinvented in many forms that show how identity formation is a creative act that is frequently performed so that the self can undertake a renewable process of self-discovery and self-actualization. Kay highlights the imaginative or inventive character of identity and how it can be made for a specific purpose. The acts of fantasizing and dreaming and the fictionalization of autobiographical elements in the sequence show how identities can be imagined, dramatized and performed. Kay's presentation of these acts of imagination, dramatization and

performance in an imaginative, creative form that can be received by readers at any time and place emphasize the view of identity as a flux, process and symbiotic fluidity.

The findings of this paper repudiate the traditional view which regards the search for identity in trans-national or diasporic communities as a search for roots and originary/original homelands. The daughter in Kay's poetic sequence searches for her roots temporarily in her attempt at getting knowledge of these roots, mere knowledge that does not make her take action to get united with these roots. The figure of the biological father does not appear as a character in the sequence, and the daughter does not regard him as having a role in her quest for multi-faceted identity.

Even biological roots as represented in the figure of the biological mother prove to be less important than what they are taken to be in studies on adoption. Genetic factors are not in harmony with paternal/maternal love. In the imagined meeting between the daughter and the birth mother, the daughter realizes that she does not know or love her birth mother, and that her familial identity does not relate to the biological one because she finds her truthful familial identity in her adoptive family.

The daughter's search for her biological or birth mother proves to be a search for having a sufficient background about her biological roots, without necessarily having to get united with these roots. This makes us reconsider previous studies on adoption such as that of Katarina Wegar (1997) who maintains that "The adoptee is doomed to stand outside the natural order of things" (103) or that "the overwhelming majority [of the adoptees] initiate the search for the biological mother" (63) because the daughter stands inside such a "natural order" in most cases except at school where the school community regards her as a misfit or looks down upon her. But within her adoptive family, she has her "natural" place. Moreover, both the birth and adoptive mothers are white Scottish women, and the birth and adoptive fathers do not appear as characters in the poetic sequence. This shows that familial identity is largely matrilineal, and that the absent Nigerian father does not matter in the daughter's process of identity formation.

In brief, the daughter's quest for her roots is largely hypothetical in the sense that it takes the form of a theoretical exploration that aims at getting sure information for the sake of knowledge only. The daughter herself, as we have seen in our discussion above, realizes that she is contradictory and that she is aware of her own contradiction because she knows well that blood and roots do not matter because she has a satisfactory image of familial identity and her search for blood and roots does not mean that she wants to have reunion with her birth mother.

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