

Imagining Mother: Representations of Contested Maternal Identities and Loss in Jackie Kay's *The Adoption Papers* and Isha McKenzie-Mavinga's 'Yearning To Belong'

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INTRODUCTION: MATERNAL IMAGININGS¹

The article explores representations of contested maternal identities² in Jackie Kay's poetry collection *The Adoption Papers* (1991)³ and Isha McKenzie-Mavinga's autobiographical essay 'Yearning to Belong'(1988), published in the anthology, *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women* (1988).⁴ Whilst Kay's text has deservedly received considerable critical attention for her groundbreaking treatment of the topics of adoption and mother-daughter relations in her poems, little, if any, scholarly work has addressed McKenzie-Mavinga's essay, or commented on the relevance and poignancy of its depiction of the process of reparation and healing following a fractured mother-daughter relationship. This article aims to give the scholarly attention to McKenzie-Mavinga's writing that it deserves, and to add further dimension to the study of Kay, suggesting that, by exploring and comparing representations of 'the maternal' in these texts, new ideas may be brought to light which will add important dimensions to feminist scholarship on psychoanalysis and motherhood. Representations of contested maternal identities are interrogated, as are ideas of 'adoption' and 'loss,' in specific contexts of fractured relationships complicated by absence. The term 'adoption' is used literally as well symbolically, to suggest that maternal as well as filial identities are constructed and in process; 'adopted' rather than innate, thus reflecting current debates around the maternal, and acknowledging Sara Ruddick's idea that: 'all mothers are 'adoptive' (Ruddick 51), and that maternal positions are constructed, not simply biologically determined, an idea which is enabling in positive terms for non-biological maternal figures and caregivers. The article explores the interaction between such linguistic representations and feminist psychoanalytic readings, and the resulting attention to 'other' maternal perspectives and mothering practices, interrogating constructed identities, and 'the reconstitution of selves through time' (Toplu).

WRITING THE SELF, IMAGINING THE MOTHER

Kay and McKenzie-Mavinga's texts are concerned with issues of identity, origins, and belonging in contexts of contested maternal identities.⁵⁶ Kay's *The Adoption Papers* is constructed around the concept of three distinct speaking voices, daughter, biological mother, and adoptive mother, indicated in the text by three different typefaces, to illustrate and evoke their separate, yet intertwined, subjective narratives and personal journeys. Kay's poems explore the processes of establishing filial and maternal identities, which are fraught by the complicated negotiations of the daughter persona's relationships to both her biological and adoptive maternal figures. Meanwhile, McKenzie-Mavinga, in her autobiographical essay, reflects on being 'spurred on by my own need to 'belong'—a need that in itself culminated from feelings of isolation as a child brought up 'in care' (McKenzie-Mavinga 241). Although the anthology, in which McKenzie-Mavinga's essay is included, situates this particular piece of work in the context of 1980s feminist efforts to render visible Black and Third world women's perspectives, her piece is equally concerned with

discovering her personal roots, both biological and constructed, and with articulating the daughter narrator's maternal (and paternal) imaginings.⁷

The two texts specifically explore contested maternal perspectives, and the daughters' 'yearning to belong', in relation to race,⁸ in the case of Kay, growing up as an adopted black child in a white family,⁹ and in McKenzie-Mavinga's case, the complex heritage of growing up as a black Jewish girl in a white 'in care' context. The Jewish identity of McKenzie-Mavinga's mother is first mentioned in an inserted letter written by her father, dated January 1943, a realisation that supports the reader's gradual understanding of the double (triple?) marginalisation in her family's ethnic and faith history. Her father's letter reads: 'My wife is a Jewess, and I am a Negro – the two races are classed as inferior by Hitler and my race is so calss[sic]ified by all the other white peoples in the world, including the English' (McKenzie-Mavinga 244). This emphasizes the idea of identity as constructed, assembled from a variety of different, often contradictory sources, with no single origin or destination, affected by experiences of adoption/care: 'subjectivity [is] understood as multiple' (Cockin 281).

Although different generically, the texts cross over between textual forms (poetry/fiction, essay/autobiography) and academic disciplines (literature, psychoanalysis, social studies). Kay and McKenzie-Mavinga use strategies from 'life story work' to inform their texts, a type of reflective/reconstructive writing of the self which 'has become an integral part of the process of working with children who have been fostered or adopted.'¹⁰ The use of autobiographical writing in both Kay and McKenzie-Mavinga foregrounds the connection between 'writing the self' and 'life story work'. This connection highlights the role language plays in constructing and re-imagining maternal and filial identities,¹¹ a point echoed in Toplu's assertion that: 'the journey for a self-discovery [...] is a fluid and ongoing process of cultural negotiation and relocation. It has no final destination point, yet the subject may express and relocate the self through narration' (Toplu). Both texts insist on the importance of language and writing in constructing filial and maternal identities, and achieve this through using images of 'texts within-the-text'. The process of 'writing the self, imagining the mother', through textual means, such as documents registering origins, identities, and processes of naming, and through poetry and autobiography, thus takes on intense significance. Kay's persona recalls the enormity of the moment when she is presented with her original birth certificate: 'I say to the man at the desk/I'd like my original birth certificate' (Kay 12). Similarly, McKenzie-Mavinga's autobiographical essay includes fragments of personal documentation inserted into the text, which the narrator uses to piece together her story of the past, her family, and the journey to become the person she is now: 'Plate I is a contract which my mother made to place me 'in care'. I was fortunate to have access to these documents' (McKenzie-Mavinga 242). This imaginative engagement through writing seeks to respond to the question: 'What is a mother? What is maternal?' (Hirsch 163). Kay and McKenzie-Mavinga's foreground the politics of mothering, interrogating constructions of 'the maternal', and representations of maternal affect, and tackling difficult areas of mother-daughter relations and maternal experience, such as the 'abandoning' mother and other contested maternal identities.

MATERNAL BODIES, ABSENCE AND LOSS

Representations of the maternal in Kay and Mc-McKenzie-Mavinga's texts foreground motifs of doubleness, maternal absence and/or loss, and ambivalence towards the maternal body. Their disruption of notions of unity and wholeness in relation to maternal identity enables them to evoke: 'subjects who both construct and are constructed as plural and neither integrated into a unity nor broken off from it but rather functioning as a coalition' (Gish, in Novy ed 184). Kay and McKenzie-Mavinga's texts explore the perspectives of daughters, but also interrogate marginalised and contested maternal perspectives, such as those of the adoptive mother, the 'abandoning' mother and the 'mother without child'. Elaine Tuttle Hansen, who coined the idea of the 'mother without child', comments on the challenges to conventional constructions and definitions of 'the maternal' posed by this figure: 'The figure of the mother without child usefully derives from and elucidates a broad spectrum of experience, ranging from the literal circumstances of a woman who loses or relinquishes custody of a biological child to the psychological condition of a woman who miscarries or never becomes pregnant' (Tuttle Hansen 15).

Both texts represent the poetic person or narrator's problematic negotiation of their relation to maternal origins. Kay states that she has: 'always had, and I think all adopted people do at some level, an imaginative – an imaginary – birth mother that I've carried around with me' (Gish, in Novy ed. 2004 171). She further explains that it was only when she herself was pregnant with her own son, when she was in her twenties, that she began thinking about meeting her birth mother (Delgamo), and that this was a creative impetus behind writing *The Adoption Papers*: 'I hadn't met my birth mother, although I was in the process of tracing her, which made me write the book.' (Gish, in Novy ed. 2004 171) Likewise, McKenzie-Mavinga writes that she needed to confront the implications of absence and loss, in order to break a cycle of negativity that might affect her own mothering of, and relationship with, her children:

The feeling of loss which had occurred with my separation brought about a resentful attitude I had known before and projected towards my mother. I had to explore these feelings in order that I could come to terms with my general attitude towards the mother I had never had. This, I felt, was not only important for myself as a Black woman, but also for my children. I thought it was necessary to make my children aware of these difficulties. (McKenzie-Mavinga 242)

Kay and McKenzie-Mavinga's maternal imaginings reflect the doubleness inherent in Tuttle Hansen's figure of the 'mother without child' as an embodiment of paradox: 'the figure of the mother without child is *both* one thing – a mother – and another – a not-mother' (Tuttle Hansen 236). Elsewhere Kay discusses the ambiguity associated with adoptive maternal identities: 'Those seeming opposites – how can someone be your mother and not be your mother? How can somebody be real and not real? - are just at the heart of what it means to be adopted; you have to contain both those supposed opposites together' (Gish, in Novy ed. 2004 173).

Therefore, the maternal body is a site of contestation in both Kay and McKenzie-Mavinga, representing both multiplicity and excess, as well as absence. This supports Hirsch's recognition that the maternal corporeality, remains an area of difficulty for feminism: 'Nothing entangles women ore firmly in their bodies than pregnancy, birth, lactation, miscarriage, or the inability to conceive. Most areas of feminist analysis have been terribly careful to rule out an identification with the body.'(Hirsch 166) Kay's poetry portrays the plurality of maternal bodies, through the birth mother and the adoptive mother's voices. The opening poems depict the adoptive maternal body's lack and failure to procreate; in contrast, the birth mother's body identified first with excess and loss of control then with maternal rejection. The contrasting representations of Kay's birth mother and adoptive mother, their racial identities, bodies, and fertility, foreground the complexity of Kay's linguistic representation of the maternal. The biological mother's persona ponders the prospect of an unwanted baby, the result of her body's fertility:

I never thought it would be quicker

Than walking down the mainstreet (Kay 11)

Whereas for the adoptive mother, the passing of time serves as an insistent reminder of her own perceived 'failure' to conceive, and becomes a representation of absence:

[...]

I can't believe I've tried for five years

For something that could take five minutes (Kay 11)

For the biological mother's persona, however, the maternal body is a signifier of excess which ironically also represents the absence of (birth) control:

I lived the scandal, wore it casual

As a summer's dress, Jesus sandals.

These descriptions of the maternal body, worn like a 'summer's dress', contrast with the adoptive mother's pain at not conceiving, and of being deprived of the physical markers of maternity and the sense of merging corporeal boundaries in pregnancy ('swollen bellied', 'crave', 'pain' waters break', 'push', 'scream'):

I want to stand in front of the mirror

Swollen bellied so swollen bellied (Kay 11)

Later, however, the adoptive mother concludes that maternal affect and mother-daughter attachment are not based on a biological bond, but on the experience of caring and 'mothering'. This recognition has given her confidence in herself as a mother to withstand others' judgements:

Now when people say 'ah but

It's not like having your own child though is it',

I say of course it is, what else is it? [...]

All this umbilical knot business is nonsense.'(Kay 23)

Kay's representations of maternal bodies and voices challenge the notion of a unified, whole, maternal body, insisting on the plurality of maternal corporeal experience, echoed in Tuttle Hansen's assertion that: 'no whole woman's identity or subjectivity (should such things exist) can be constructed out of her maternal parts, nor are her maternal feelings necessarily unifying, unitary, or constructive. Nor can all women be unified into a category based on traditional motherhood' (Tuttle Hansen 49). These insights contribute in important ways to feminist discussions of maternal bodies as diverse and subject to change.

Both writers portray the haunting figure of the 'abandoning mother'. Kay's poetry achieves this by using a poetic voice identified with the birth mother's perspective, while McKenzie-Mavinga's essay includes letters and documents which give authenticity to the maternal voice and the idea of the 'abandoning mother': 'The position of the mother without child is not only a traumatic present reality but also a logical impossibility, a taboo, and therefore a site of instability' (Tuttle Hansen 26). However, voicing maternal perspectives, including those of the abandoning mother, is crucial, if we are to understand and empathize with the position of 'birth mother' in adoption/care narratives, because: 'The figure of the mother without child [...] can hold and foreground the real contradictions of motherhood as a relational identity' (Tuttle Hansen 235). Hirsch furthermore argues that developing new maternal stories may provide opportunity to explore the contradictions inherent in the maternal position, and acknowledge all aspects of maternal affect, including taboo emotions such as anger and aggression (Hirsch 198-9); therefore consideration of such perspectives is important for feminist research on the maternal. In Kay, at times, the voice of the birth mother's persona articulates transgressive, threatening, and silenced aspects of maternal experience, such as fantasies about infanticide, withholding maternal nurturing, and kidnapping: 'I'll suffocate her with a feather pillow/bury her under a weeping willow/or take her far out to sea' (Kay 13). Gish discusses Kay's construction of the birth mother's maternal voice and its textual quality which: 'represents the birth mother she has never met as 'not as real' as, 'more ethereal' than the adoptive mother [...] yet the birth mother is both an imaginative construct of the adopted child and a real person inaccessible but known to be there.' (Gish, Novy ed. 2004 186) Troubling aspects of maternal are reflected in Kay's portrayal of imagined sensationalist tabloid newspaper headlines: 'MOTHER DROWNS BABY IN THE CLYDE [...] MOTHER GIVES BABY AWAY.'(Kay 17) Such phrases are indicative of judgmental social attitudes towards 'failing' and/or abandoning maternal figures, which the birth mother persona has internalised. Such challenging maternal affect is contrasted with the physical signifiers of maternal nurturing:

She came in by the window,

my baby Lazarus

and suckled at my breast.’ (Kay 18)

Kay highlights the contrast between the newspaper headline’s sensationalist use of language, which silences maternal affect and objectifies both mother and baby, and the evocative poetic tones used to evoke the haunting figure of the baby Lazarus, returning to suckle by the abandoning mother, refusing symbolic rejection through repression. Such contrasting discursive modes reflect the ambivalent maternal imaginings projected by the poem’s daughter persona towards her biological mother and maternal affect. In Kay’s poems, the white adoptive mother’s voice defends her protective love for her mixed-race daughter;¹² the poem, however, highlights the difficulties securing appropriate placements with adoptive parents for black and mixed-race children in Britain then and now.¹³ “The Adoption Papers” has been appreciated in a non-literary context for its innovative act of ‘rethinking’ the issue of transracial adoption’ (Cockin 281). However, although legal steps have now been taken to ensure sensitivity to the backgrounds of adoptive children and children ‘in care’, Kay’s poems reflect on the significance of race as a marker of the physical separation and difference between adoptive mother and daughter, mirrored in the adoptive mother’s persona’s sense of shock at the visual reminder of difference which she has understandably repressed:

In all these months I’ve never put a face to her

That looks like my daughter – so picture me

When I see those lips. She looks a dead spit

Except of course she’s white; lightning white.’(Kay 19)

The adoptive mother’s shock recognition of their shared skin colour is reflected in the word ‘lightning’ which foregrounds the physical sensation of surprise. However, such representations of ambivalent maternal fantasies and trans-racial adoption issues are counterpointed by the adoptive mother’s acceptance of maternal ‘adoption’ of responsibility of care (Ruddick 17), as being of greater importance, thus resulting in the successful adoptive placement described by Kay’s adoptive maternal poetic persona:

I brought her up as my own

as I would any other child (Kay 24)

This portrayal reflects Ruddick’s point about mothering as an ‘adopted’ position: ‘Maternal practice begins in a response to the reality of a biological child in a particular social world. To be a ‘mother’ is to take upon oneself the responsibility of child care” (Ruddick 17). Novy also insists that all mother-daughter relationships are in a sense constructed, based on the idea of ‘adoption’: ‘the relationship of a parent and child who have always been together, the relationship of a reunited birth parent and child, and the relationship of an adoptive parent and child – all of these are in some sense constructed relationships’ (Novy 2007 31-2). Such representations invite feminist psychoanalytic readings, and challenge the reader to expand their understandings of the maternal and of contested maternal identities.

Narrating from the daughter's perspective, McKenzie-Mavinga associates the biological maternal body with absence and alienation: 'having only met her twice, I never had the chance to get to know her' (McKenzie-Mavinga 241). Understandably, deprivation of maternal and familial bonds resulted in the narrator seeking to compensate in adult life by attempting to recreate a 'family': 'my yearning to belong compelled me to seek a family and consequently I married the first young man that came along' (McKenzie-Mavinga 242). Her attempts to impose control on her body and emotions are a result of growing up 'in care': 'I could feel my throat beginning to tighten as tears of relief welled up inside me, but I did not cry. This was a thing I had been used to as a child, trying to find a private corner to cry in. I had found my own private corner within myself.' (McKenzie-Mavinga 247) Her alienation is compounded by the fact that her mother's family belonged to a minority faith group, having fled persecution in Eastern Europe. Elsewhere, McKenzie-Mavinga has explored her maternal background, revealing her mother's displacement and marginalisation due to her belonging to a minority ethnic group and being Jewish:

The story of my family is fragmented. I only know bits. My maternal grandmother fled from the pogroms in Lithuania, with her children and her husband [...] My grandmother and some of her children ended up in Birmingham, and others in the family went to Florida. My mother suffered as a Jewish woman married to a Black man, with Black children. There was some tension in her family, some rejection of my father. I'm not surprised she got ill and died early. She suffered loneliness and poverty. (14)

McKenzie-Mavinga's narrating position as daughter represents feelings of loss and anger; however she also voices empathy and identification based on a shared maternal position, and a shared struggle for acceptance. She describes the sense of rejection and abandonment shared with others in similar predicaments: 'Everyday hundreds of children are placed in residential institutions [...] They are often bewildered and left to wrestle with feelings of desertion or rejection. Perhaps the hardest thing to cope with is the incompleteness of the family tree' (McKenzie-Mavinga 241). All-encompassing life changes lead the narrator to rethink her own past and confront her loss: 'In 1979, when my divorce was imminent, my thoughts were once again directed towards my own family.[...][no] permanent shelter of family life. It brought home to me that I was alone yet again' (McKenzie-Mavinga 242). McKenzie-Mavinga's essay was part of the effort in the 1980s by black and third-world women based in Britain to articulate hitherto marginalised and silenced perspectives (Niesen de Abruña, in Werlock 272), and she specifically focuses on the lack of black maternal figures she experienced growing up 'in care' in 1940s-50s Britain: 'One of the results of growing up 'in care' was my inner confusion derived from a situation in which I was overwhelmed with surrogate white 'aunties' (the establishment was run by an all white female staff), but no mother as such' (McKenzie-Mavinga 242). McKenzie-Mavinga regrets the absence of a black maternal dimension in her childhood; however she seeks to recoup this on visiting the Caribbean, whilst understandably also expressing regret: 'I realized how very caring my people are. In the Caribbean there is no question of fostering and adoption and children going into 'care' situations. It is natural for families to take on adopted children' (McKenzie-Mavinga 248).¹⁵

McKenzie-Mavinga describes her difficulty in admitting to and expressing feelings as a result of maternal loss: 'Leaving is so traumatic. I have begun to withdraw into myself. These are familiar feelings. In a way, I feel it is so unfair – I have tasted a life which was denied me and now I am leaving it behind.' (McKenzie-Mavinga 248) Her essay does not 'blame the mother'; rather, it proposes a mother-daughter bond based on a shared maternity with which the reader engages through (or between the lines of) the various official documents inserted into the text of the essay. The 'Agreement' (McKenzie-Mavinga 243), couched in the unemotive language of officialdom, interrupts the autobiographical prose, forcing the reader to consider the functions of legalistic discourse. The document, a formal agreement to place her daughter under the guardianship of a Jewish children's home, reflects the difficulty of reconciling identities of race and religion.¹⁶ This fact highlights the importance of the maternal bond for McKenzie-Mavinga, in her later identification with Jewish identity, passed on through the maternal line. However, within her essay the main focus is on the issue of black female identity, and although McKenzie-Mavinga has discussed her mother's marginalisation elsewhere, in this essay she does not engage in a detailed discussion of her mother's marginalisation. The impersonal and official discursive tone of the 'Guardianship' agreement document contrasts with McKenzie-Mavinga's birth mother's deeply personal letter, written, it is assumed, to the director of the children's home, informing them of her husband's death, in 1949, and of her wish that her children should be told of this: 'please break the news gently to my dear children as I am too heartbroken to write to...[sic] I would not be able to tell her, he was asking for her when he was dying' (McKenzie-Mavinga 248). This rare inclusion of maternal feeling reveals a fractured mother-daughter relationship and the difficulties in representing the painful realities of McKenzie-Mavinga's haunting maternal imaginings.

McKenzie-Mavinga's feelings of regret at not having known her mother, and her emotional deprivation 'in care', are reflected in the honest way in which she admits to her own feelings of resentment: 'My fears of not being part of anything were highlighted when my marriage and relationship came to an end. The feeling of loss which had occurred with my separation brought about a resentful attitude I had known before and projected towards my mother' (McKenzie-Mavinga 242). However, this acknowledgement of negativity leads McKenzie-Mavinga to a recognition of her 'yearning to belong', which suggests a need to (re)connect with that maternal figure, in turn sustaining her relationship to her own children: 'This, I felt, was not only important for myself as a Black woman, but also for my children' (McKenzie-Mavinga 242). These words embrace maternal perspectives in positive ways and allow the narrator to begin a healing process.

An important aspect of this process is the relationship she builds with her half-sister, Lynda, in adult life. She is reunited with Lynda, whose existence she had previously been unaware of, first in London, then on a visit to Trinidad that she has undertaken in search of her black roots, on her father's side of the family. McKenzie-Mavinga's description of connecting with Lynda suggest the latter's 'mothering' function, making Lynda's character a site for the articulation of maternal affect and, echoing Ruddick, the acceptance, or 'adoption', of maternal responsibility (Ruddick 17). Lynda is also an adoptive mother: 'Yesterday we visited Lynda's adopted daughter Vilma. Lynda had taken her on as well as her own ten children.[...] It appeared to me that every adult [in the Caribbean] is a parent of all children. This was confirmed for me when

Lynda suggested that if she had known my plight, she would have taken me on as well' (McKenzie-Mavinga 248). This demonstrates the importance of sisterly bonding in women's writing, as discussed by Hirsch: "'Sisters' can be 'maternal' to one another [...] sisters are better mothers, providing more nurturance and a greater encouragement or autonomy' (Hirsch 164).¹⁷ Kay and McKenzie-Mavinga, using differing textual strategies, provide complex portrayals of contested maternal identities, thereby exploring the plurality of maternal experience, and the implications for mother-daughter relations and for sisterhood.

CONCLUSION: WRITING SELF AND (M)OTHER

Interesting questions are asked of feminist re-visionings of the maternal by the perspectives presented in these texts, which are speaking from outside conventionally defined mother-daughter relationships, such as the representations of voices of adoptive mothers, or birth mothers who have relinquished their children, or the 'mother without child'. Such perspectives contribute valuable insights to feminist discussions surrounding the maternal and contested maternal identities: 'The story of the mother without child...brings us closer to that frequently stated goal of feminist study; seeing maternal points of view more fully, hearing maternal voices more clearly and variously, understanding maternal subjectivity more deeply and complexly' (Tuttle Hansen 20). Kay and McKenzie-Mavinga courageously tap into their own lives and stories, to represent maternal and daughterly perspectives with the imaginative poignancy they deserve, and testify to the emotional and creative strength for both mothers and daughters to survive complex situations of absence and/or loss.

Notes

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented as a paper at the conference 'M(o)ther Trouble', Birkbeck College, England, 30 May 2009.

² Such as the 'abandoning' mother, the 'adoptive' mother, the 'mother without child' (Tuttle Hansen's term)

³ Jackie Kay's text is divided into two separate parts. This article focuses only on the part entitled 'The Adoption Papers'.

⁴ This article will not be drawing on other works from the extensive oeuvres of both writers, but acknowledges here that Jackie Kay has published a series of poetry collections, fictions, and drama:

<http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth54> [accessed 6 July 2009].

Isha McKenzie-Mavinga is a psychotherapist, writer, and performance poet
<http://www.i-mckenziemavinga.com/writing-publications.html> accessed 3 November 2009]

⁵ McKenzie's piece is prefaced by the dedication 'To my father, who I never knew' (p241), and is to a large extent preoccupied with the process of discovering who he was, and through that, her own roots as a black woman. Interestingly, in many ways, the essay is about piecing together both paternal and maternal identities. However, my discussion here is concerned with the voicing of maternal perspectives in the piece.

⁶ Elsewhere, together with her sister, Thelma Perkins, McKenzie has written more extensively about the arduous process of rediscovering her family roots, and celebrating her father's identity as a black man. Their book *In Search of Mr McKenzie* (Women's Press, 1991) movingly describes their efforts to piece together their family roots.

⁷ Whilst acknowledging the individual generic and linguistic specificities of each text, this article does not offer detailed discussions of the poetic strategies of Kay or the experimental discourses of McKenzie-Mavinga – instead, this article focuses mainly on the texts' thematic content and its implications.

⁸ Issues of race and maternal identities in Kay's *The Adoption Papers* are also discussed in Kadiatu Kenneh *African Identities: Race, Nation and Culture in Ethnography, Pan-Africanism and Black Literatures* (Routledge, London, 1998), pp186-7

⁹ Elsewhere, critics have discussed Kay's representations of Scottishness in some detail, and this aspect of her poem will not be treated here.

¹⁰ Treacher, Amal and Ilan, Katz, 'Narrative and Fantasy in Adoption', *Adoption and Fostering* 25.3 (2001), pp.20-28 (p.25) Cited in Cockin 288.

¹¹ The use of autobiographical writing in Kay is also discussed in Toplu

¹² Cockin states, "The Adoption Papers" is [...] effective not merely as a critique of a racist humanism which erases difference and as a *representation* of the experience of transracial adoption from the perspectives of the three main female actors, but also as creating a "way of knowing" that exceeds these ideological and culturally specific features.' (Cockin, pp.281-2)

¹³ Contemporary placement practices in care and adoption are discussed by Beverley Prevatt Goldstein and Marcia Spencer, who argue that emphasis now is on the importance of acknowledging race and ethnicity in placement: 'Maintaining continuity of the heritage of their birth family in their day to day life is important to most children; it is a means of retaining knowledge of their identity and feeling that although they have left their birth family they have not abandoned important cultural, religious or linguistic values.' Department of Health 1998, p4, cited in Goldstein and Spencer 6.

¹⁴ 'The art of dis/appearing: Jewish women on mental health'

¹⁵ Such informal adoption practices contrast of course with the regulated and formalised adoption processes in Britain described by Kay.

¹⁶ McKenzie-Mavinga's mother was a Lithuanian Jewess

¹⁷ I have also found the discussions of sisterhood and female relations in Paulina Palmer's book *Contemporary Women's Fiction: Narrative Practice and feminist Theory* helpful in thinking through these issues.

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