

“EVEN I DON’T KNOW WHO I AM:” THE SEARCH FOR A NEW SCOTTISH
NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE POETRY OF JACKIE KAY

By

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2018

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To my parents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank the many wonderful professors and teachers that I have had over the years who have helped me learn and grow and get to this point in my academic career. I would especially like to thank Dr. Kelly Ball, Dr. Christine Cozzens, and Dr. Aimee Taylor who encouraged and supported me throughout my time at Agnes Scott College and encouraged me to go to graduate school. I would not be where I am today without your guidance. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Marsha Bryant and Dr. Trysh Travis, for always pushing me to be better.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family, especially my parents, who have provided me with the resources, love, and commitment to succeed that have gotten me this far. Thank you.

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May 2018

Chair: Marsha Bryant
Major: Women’s Studies

Poetry can reveal to us possibilities beyond our imaginations. It explores the undreamt of, the unexpected, and the miraculous. The poetry of Jackie Kay is an exercise in the exploration of individuals and their experiences, and what that means in a larger context. For Kay, that larger context includes the ways in which Scottish national identity can be broadened to include those identities which have historically been marginalized, including those of immigrants, refugees, and people of color. The exploration of what it means to be Scottish can be framed in several ways, including the concept of rebellion. The language used in Kay’s poetry represents a linguistic rebellion as she uses language forms and dialects that are not traditionally valued. She also homes in on Scotland’s embracing of its own rebel identity. Scotland sees itself as the champion of the disenfranchised, a vision which is always in opposition to Britain. Kay does this to point out the ways in which Scotland is complicit in the oppression of various groups of people, while also making a case for the seamless way that marginalized people could be included in Scottish national identity if a shift in perspective were to occur. Kay’s poetry presents the very real experiences of immigrants, refugees, and other marginalized people, and uses them to critique both

how Scottish identity is constructed today and imagine how it could be constructed in the future.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Poetry as a genre allows for the exploration of themes surrounding complex notions such as identity in ways that are different from other genres. It also allows for more fluidity and exploration of a sense of self and subjectivity, which other genres do not allow. Poetry is uniquely positioned in order to facilitate the creation and exploration of feminist thought and transgressive forms of language. The poetry of Jackie Kay that is examined in this thesis represent a kind of linguistic rebellion where Kay uses broken English, various regional dialects, and various languages to push back against what is traditionally valued in terms of language and elevating language that is considered unintelligent and unnecessarily parochial. The poetry of Kay is an exercise in the exploration of individuals and their experiences, and what that means in a larger context. For Kay, that larger context includes the ways in which Scottish national identity can be broadened to include those identities which have historically been marginalized, while at the same time recognizing the role Scotland has played in marginalizing those identities in the first place. Kay's use of poetry to explore Scottish national identity allows for more room to explore that identity in the past, the present, and the future.

The title of this thesis is a line from Kay's poem "Push the Week." This poem, along with the others that Kay included in the Amnesty International's collection, *Here I Stand*, explores some of the experiences and challenges faced by refugees in Scotland. While this line may seem pessimistic, it encapsulates the difficulties surrounding fractured identities, but the poem itself holds hope for the future, not only for the speaker in the poem whose sense of self is fractured, but the poem also holds hope for the future of Scotland's national identity. The poems explored in this paper come from

Kay's latest collection of poetry, *The Empathetic Store*, and from her entries into Amnesty International's collection of poems and short stories centered on the experiences of refugees. In several of her most recent poems, Kay addresses the unique experiences of immigrants and refugees in the United Kingdom. For her poems on Refugees such as "Constant" or "Push the Week," Kay draws on conversations she had with refugee women who were resettled in Glasgow. Kay also explores the immigrant experience in poems such as "Would Jane Eyre Come to the Information Desk?" The experience of the immigrant is one that is much closer to home. Though Kay is not herself an immigrant, Kay was adopted by a white Scottish couple when she was a baby. Her biological father immigrated to Scotland from Nigeria, and this deeply influences Kay's identity and how those in Scotland view her in terms of her nationality.

The poems explored in this paper have a sense of place, both material and abstract, that is central to both the poems themselves, and the larger message they convey. This message is one that addresses Scotland, Scottish identity, and the place of people like Kay herself, who are often left out of the mainstream Scottish narrative. Scotland is at a moment of transition and reevaluation as it reimagines and reconstructs itself amidst a political climate that includes Brexit, the concept of "little Britain," and increasing support for Scottish independence. Kay is calling for the stories illuminated in her poetry to become a part of the recognized Scottish identity, because these stories are every bit a part of the fabric of Scotland as the stories of William Wallace or the Scottish Highlands.

Scottish National Identity

Scotland's national and cultural identity is defined by a sense of place, sense of history and a sense of self. It is defined by what it means to be Scottish; to live in

Scotland; to have an affinity to Scotland; and to be able to participate in Scottish society. In addition to a larger national identity, many Scottish people strongly identify with a regional identity. Parts of Scotland, like Glasgow, the Outer Hebrides, the north east of Scotland, and the Scottish Borders retain a strong sense of regional identity, alongside the idea of a Scottish national identity (Lynch xxiv). This larger national identity is understood to be composed of several key components. Central to the Scottish national identity are language and various cultural icons. The Scots language and Scottish English are distinctive, and people associate them together as Scottish. The cultural icons that are central to the understanding of a national identity include the bagpipes, the tartan and the kilt. These icons can trace their establishment as symbols for the whole of Scotland, especially in the Lowlands, to the early 19th century. This was an age of “pseudo-pageantry” which began with a visit of King George IV to Scotland, which was organized by Sir Walter Scott. Scott, who was at the same time “a great populariser of Scottish mythology” through his writings (Sievers 22). This led to a renewal of interest in all things Scottish and to these symbols becoming more entrenched in the cultural understanding of what it meant to be Scottish.

The stereotypical Scot is red haired and fair skinned, thrifty, reserved, hard-working, and fiercely patriotic. This is a stereotype that is repeated again and again in representations of Scottish people in film and television. While some Scots do embody these characteristics, this is not true for all Scottish people, especially when it comes to the physical appearance of a Scottish person. Despite the fact that this is recognized as a stereotype and not an accurate representation of the entirety of the Scottish

population, these stereotypes have still found their way into the mainstream understanding of what it means to be Scottish.

In her article examining various national identities within the larger British Identity, Victoria Weber stresses the need to acknowledge that “Scotland always was heterogeneous and that one single Scotland national narrative as it still is taught in schools and underlies many public institutions obscures this fact” (6). The very language that surrounds the conception of “ethnic minorities” and the idea that they need to be integrated into larger Scottish society, evokes

a false picture of a large homogenous majority and various equally homogeneous minorities, failing to acknowledge both the internal diversities of these groups and above all the increasingly fluid boundaries between them (Weber 6).

Herein lies the problem that Kay calls out in her poetry. Her poetry recognizes the heterogeneity of Scotland and the mixing of cultures that the large immigrant and refugee populations in Scotland promote. Kay’s poetry also recognizes that this fact is often ignored, with a homogenous view of Scotland promoted instead.

The concept that Scotland is separate and distinct from the rest of Britain also plays a central role in the conceptualization of Scottish national identity. The Scottish National Party (or SNP) is a political party in Scotland which seeks to remove Scotland from the United Kingdom in favor of an independent Scottish state. The establishment of a devolved Scottish Parliament in 1999 provided the SNP with a platform to win elections. In 2014, the Scottish Parliament approved the holding of a referendum on Scottish independence from the UK. The result of the referendum was that 55.3% voted against independence and 44.7% voted in favor (Curtice 12). After a few years without much representation, the SNP returned to office as a minority government in 2016.

The First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, said in the immediate aftermath of the 2016 UK EU membership referendum that a second referendum on Scottish independence was "highly likely" after the majority of Scotland voted to remain within the EU (Curtice 3).

Research conducted by the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey in 1979 found that more than 95% of those living in Scotland identified as "Scottish" in varying degrees, with more than 80% identifying themselves as "British" in varying degrees (Bryson 139). When forced to choose a single national identity between "Scottish" and "British," 57% identified as Scottish and 39% identified as British (139). British national identity entered a sharp decline in Scotland from 1979 until the establishment of a devolved Scottish parliament. In 2000, when forced to choose a single national identity between "Scottish" and "British," 80% identified as Scottish and only 13% identified as British, however 60% still identified as British to some degree (Bryson 139).

The vast majority of those identifying their national identity more as "British" support Scotland remaining a part of the United Kingdom, with a majority of those identifying their national identity more as "Scottish" supporting Scottish independence (Curtice 17). However, many independence supporters also identify as "British" in varying degrees, with a majority of those describing their national identity as "More Scottish than British" being supportive of Scottish independence (Curtice 17). These studies demonstrate that Scottish national identity is complex and has evolved over time. Central to this evolution has been a distinction between Scotland and the rest of Britain, along with a distinction between what it means to be Scottish and what it means to be British.

Jackie Kay

Kay, born in 1961, is a Scottish poet and novelist. She was born in Edinburgh, Scotland to a white Scottish mother and a Nigerian father. She was adopted as a baby by a white Scottish couple and grew up in a suburb of Glasgow. She studied English at the University of Stirling and her first book of poetry, *The Adoption Papers*, was published in 1991 and won the Saltire Society Scottish First Book Award (Rustin). This collection acts as a kind of memoir of Kay's early years and tells the story of a black girl's adoption by a white Scottish couple. This intimate and powerful collection of poetry is told from three different viewpoints: the adoptive mother, the birth mother, and the daughter. It is a collection of poetry that deals with identity, race, nationality, gender, and sexuality. Kay's other awards include the 1994 Somerset Maugham Award for *Other Lovers*, and the Guardian Fiction Prize for *Trumpet* (Rustin).

In addition to writing poetry, short stories, and non-fiction pieces, Kay writes extensively for stage and screen. Her 1988 play *Twice Over* was the first by a black writer to be produced by the Gay Sweatshop Theatre Group (Rustin). Her drama *The Lamplighter* is an exploration of the Atlantic slave trade and was broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in March 2007 (Rustin). In 2010, she published *Red Dust Road*, which is an account of her search for her biological parents, who had met each other when her father was a student at Aberdeen University and her mother was a nurse (Rustin).

Kay was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 2006. She is currently Professor of Creative Writing at Newcastle University and is a Cultural Fellow at Glasgow Caledonian University. In March 2016, it was announced that Kay would take up the position of Scots Makar, the poet laureate of Scotland, succeeding Liz Lochhead, whose tenure ended in January 2016.

Throughout all of her writing, Kay's various identities always play an important role in the content of her work, how it is analyzed and interpreted, and how it is categorized. Her identity as a lesbian is one that is not present in these poems, unlike some of her other identities. Kay is often put into the category of women poets. This category, however, often erases or overlooks her race and the significance of her position as a Black woman in Scotland. Kay is not only a Scottish poet, a Black poet, a lesbian or a woman poet, she is all these things and more. The Scotland that Kay calls for embraces each of these identities, both separate and together.

Many critics have written about the ways that Kay draws connections between blackness and Scottishness. In an essay in *Contemporary Women's Poetry*, Joanne Winning writes that Kay joins the two identities by writing about colonialism and colonial oppression (242). In the introduction to the anthology, *New Women Poets*, Carol Rumens writes about the importance of oral tradition in Kay's poetry and its importance in many different cultures and nations. This demonstrates how Kay draws connections between different aspects of her identity. She is tying two traditions together, that of the Scottish and the African oral traditions. Kay struggles with identity and struggles with feelings of belonging because of that.

Art, and especially poetry, is able to construct new worlds and present new ways of imagining the way we live our lives, the relationships we have with each other and with institutions. Kay pushes boundaries in her poetry as she discusses people and their identities that are often overlooked. She centers situated knowledges and the experiences of the marginalized in order to spread awareness of the difficulties they face and present a new vision of the future. As bell hooks explains in her book *Art on*

My Mind, “since images that are counterhegemonic are necessarily provocative, their seductiveness, their allure lie in the freshness of insight and vision” (96). Through her art, Kay is constructing a world of female bodies that resist and revolt, that intervene and transform, that rescue and recover, and through the representation of these women, she is arguing for a more expansive definition of what it means to be Scottish today. Much of Kay’s poetry is working to resist hegemonic ideals, recover lost stories, and transform and broaden the notion of what it means to be a Scottish woman.

Kay is not only arguing that Scottish identity needs to include the stories of these marginalized voices, she is arguing that it needs to be done now in this moment of reevaluation of Scottish identity. Scotland embraces its position as the rebel, and a major component of Scottish identity is the way in which Scotland is positioned in opposition to England. Kay argues that if Scotland truly stands for independence and freedom and is a place for the disenfranchised, then it needs to value the stories and experiences that she illuminates through her poetry. Kay also notes that Scotland has to recognize the role it plays in the oppression and marginalization of various groups of people, both historically and continuing until today. Scottish history and identity has to include the stories of people like Kay, and people like the refugee women she highlights, but it must also recognize the harm that it has done them and continues to do.

Kay’s poetry is a commentary on the realities of life for those who possess marginalized identities in Scotland. As a white woman, and as an American, I will never be able to fully understand the experience of Kay and the women she features in her poetry. Her poems though, provide a literary representation of the experiences of

refugees, immigrants, and women of color as they navigate Scottish society. These poems not only validate the experiences of those women, and provide them with a space and a voice, they also work to promote understanding. While my experience is distinctly different from that of Kay, her poetry provides a glimpse of what it means to be a woman of color in today's Scotland. Alternate forms of knowledge production, such as art and literature, can explain experience in ways that other forms cannot. Kay's work does this by exploring her experience as a raced and gendered subject in Scotland. Her work also forces those who possess certain privileges, especially racial privilege, to confront the uncomfortable realities of racism that continue in Scotland even today.

Many scholars look closely at how Kay navigates her black and Scottish identities and how she works to integrate her dual heritage. Kay is "driven by the desire to invent a heritage for herself," as such, she "engages in a romanticised, mythical relationship with Africa, which also serves as an alternative (home) to the pressures experienced in Scotland" (Tournay-Theodotou 18). Kay "reaches beyond the obvious duality in her own identity" (Pittin-Hédon 2). The women in her stories, and Kay herself, often assume "many different identities, with different names, different families and different lives" (Pittin-Hédon 2). Kay demonstrates the complicated nature of identity and the difficulties that arise when different aspects of one's identity are in conflict with one another.

Not only is Kay struggling to find her Scottish identity, Scotland itself is in the midst of reconstructing and creating its own identity. In discussing the move for a more independent Scotland, Joanne Winning queries,

What space might be allowed within the much longed-for, much imagined new Scottish identity for previously troubled markers of difference such as ethnicity or sexuality? Might a more independent Scottish identity effectively erase difference rather than allow expression of it? (283).

Through her poetry, Kay argues that a new Scottish identity, one that truly embraces championing the disenfranchised, would need to be inclusive of markers of difference. Anything less would simply be reproducing the same harmful cycle of oppression that effects the women in Kay's poetry. Scotland's cycle of oppression is especially harmful as it is shrouded in a narrative of equality and open-mindedness, while in reality it only privileges the few. Winning also quotes Christopher Whyte who asks, "if we want to bring back a Scotland that once was, what place will there be in it for blacks or lesbians or the children of Pakistani immigrants" (qtd. Winning 283). Kay's most recent work demonstrates the affect this move to bring back this past Scotland has had on various groups of people. This move to embrace the Scottish identity of the idealized past, an identity that is rooted in whiteness, has been especially detrimental for immigrants and refugees as they find it increasingly difficult to discover a space to belong. As Scotland reimagines its own identity and position in the world, Kay calls for the creation of a completely new identity. This identity should be one that embraces all of the good of Scotland and rejects the bad, while still recognizing the role that Scotland has played in the othering of those it marks as different.

CHAPTER 2 CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS

This review of the existing literature on the work of Kay is divided into four sections. These sections are divided based on common themes that many scholars of Kay's work point to when writing about her poetry. Kay has been writing and publishing for decades in a variety of genres. The scholarship on her work covers a variety of topics and themes, but there are several threads that many scholars pick up. Scholars write about Kay's relationship to the black diaspora and how she explores her Afro-Scot identity. They also write about the ways in which Kay takes trauma, anger, and affect and makes them a site for political action and creative possibility. Memory and language are also central, and Kay uses them as she explores identity in her work. Two themes that connect all of these are that of displacement and belonging, themes that several scholars, including Valerie Popp, pick up and discuss in their work.

Black Diaspora

Many scholars draw connections between the writing of Kay and other writers of the black diaspora. Kay has "engaged thematically as well as linguistically with both her Scottish and her African heritage throughout her writing career" (Tournay-Theodotou 15). Kay does this by employing various dialects including Scottish, Nigerian, and dialects found across the black diaspora. In her poetry focusing on immigrants and refugees, Kay highlights race and dialect and the ways in which they mark the subject as other within the UK. Throughout her poetry, Kay explores the importance of race and the tradition of black women's writing (Winning 240). She also makes a point to center women of color in her work, giving them a place and a voice. Kay participates, along with many black writers, in the project of enquiring "into terrors that exhaust the

resources of language amidst the debris of a catastrophe which prohibits the existence of their art at the same time as demanding its continuance” (Gilroy qtd. “Love Letter” 180). This is a paradoxical project, and critic Petra Tournay-Theodotou uses this framework when analyzing *The Lamplighter*. She writes that the work can “be conceptualized simultaneously as a historical reclamation and as a challenge to contemporary forms of racism, enslavement and the enduring exploitation of human beings in pursuit of profit” (“Love Letter” 180). Kay

Tactics used by black writers across the diaspora that can also be found in Kay’s work. One such device is humor. Humor is a device used by many writers of color as they explore their reality. This does not mean, however, that humorous writing is frivolous or inconsequential. Rather, humor is a device used by writers of color to come to terms with the horrors of the past which have resulted in historical trauma that has carried through generations and, at the same time, coming to terms with the consequences of race in today’s society. This use of humor is reflected in Kay’s work and despite the “deceptive lightness” of much of her poetry, the content of the poetry is often rooted in trauma and contentious identities (Tournay-Theodotou 16). The use of humor counterbalances the trauma and forms of oppression that are so central to much of Kay’s poetry. The use of humor, in addition to being found within the poetry of many black poets, is also commonly associated with the New Generation poets. Though not explicitly included among the poets of the “New Generation,” Kay is commonly understood to share many characteristics with them and several authors have contended that the topics she explores and the scope of her work places her within that category. The New Generation poets deal with accessibility, democracy, and use humor

and satire to write about the serious issues within their writing. In much the same way, Kay utilizes humor as a device through which she explores the difficult topics addressed in her poetry.

Memory, Trauma, and Anger

Memory, which is often associated with trauma and anger, is also an important thread that scholars follow throughout Kay's writing. Tournay-Theodotou contends "Kay's sensitive re-inscription of the history of slavery from the point of view of black women" in *The Lamplighter* can, in fact, be defined as "feminist postmemory" (180). Similar to ways in which feminist postmemory can be found in Kay's work, so can "race memory" (Pinto 272). Kay often explores these forms of memory in her work. She specifically explores ways in which it lends a sense of belonging to a person as it connects them to people and events of the distant past. Kay's exploration of memory also includes its relationship to the black diaspora. As Pinto writes,

Kay introduces us to the difficulties of reading diaspora, not the least of which are the operations of memory, desire, culture, familiarity, and genealogy, and their relationship(s) to the construction, recognition, and maintenance of racial identity (268).

The complicated nature of diaspora, memory, and family is used by Kay in her exploration of identity and belonging. The ways in which memory allows an individual to feel a sense of family, history, and home is central, as are the ways in which memory allows for the recreation of history.

Additionally, memory plays an important role in Kay's Scottish identity. History and memory are central components of the Scottish identity, and through memory and history blackness and Scottishness can be linked. As Joanne Winning writes, "brutal moments within Scottish history, such as the Highland Clearances, mirror and overlap

the history of Black slaves in the West Indies” (242). These traumatic moments in the histories of these different peoples are used by Kay to draw connections between her various identities. It also explains why Kay’s poetry set in the highlands is the most welcoming and comes with the greatest sense of belonging. Kay traces both of these forms of memory and they become “historical memory-traces in her consciousness” (Winning 242). Memory is a site of connection for Kay’s different identities, one in which they can meet and interact in ways that are not possible in other spaces.

Trauma, anger, and affect play a central role in Kay’s work. These are all emotions that are closely tied to the fractured sense of self and loss of a stable identity that accompanies much of Kay’s exploration of her own identity, as well as the immigrant and refugee women featured in her latest poetry. Samantha Pinto writes about the ways in which “the trauma of black diasporic history as well as the silenced desires of black feminist/queer culture” appear in Kay’s work (271). Valerie Popp’s work examines how “shared language” can “mitigate the traumas” (312). This shared language and exploration of trauma is evident in Kay’s *The Adoption Papers*. *The Adoption Papers* focuses on Kay’s exploration of her identity especially in terms of her African ancestry and her upbringing as an adopted child. Kay describes this as “trying to have two lives simultaneously as one” which Tournay-Theodotou describes as a “traumatic split” (Kay qtd. Dyer 60, Tournay-Theodotou 16). This traumatic split is what Kay tries to navigate through her poems as she comes to terms with her position as an adopted child, a Scottish woman, a Black woman, and the daughter of a Nigerian immigrant.

The anger and trauma that Kay explores are not only destructive forces. In writing about anger in Kay's work, Jacqueline Ellis writes, "Kay's anger is energizing and provides her with an affective foundation, not just a pragmatic strategy, from which to understand her experiences" (219). Ellis contends that "anger needs to be described, understood, expressed, and recognized as a rational and legitimate response to racism" (215). When the anger expressed in Kay's work is understood this way, it can become "politically transformative" (Ellis 215). Ellis emphasizes the necessity of examining "these turbulent emotional spaces" because, as Sara Ahmed writes, "feelings might be how structures get under our skin" (Ahmed qtd. Ellis 225). Kay embraces these "turbulent emotional spaces" and turns them into sites of literary production. The embracing of the disruptive and the turbulent is a common theme in Kay's work. Samantha Pinto writes about the way in which Kay uses "home" as a "site of disruption within continuity, the foreign within the familiar" (271). She continues, "Kay's work represents an impulse to bring discussions of the exterior and the interiority of black subject formation together through black cultural and aesthetic productions" (Pinto 271).

Kay and the Search for Identity

The use of spaces and feelings that could very well remain simply destructive, static spaces, and using them instead to create and to imagine, is one of the hallmarks of Kay's work. Kay leans in to the turbulent to understand not only her own history, but her place within a larger narrative. In discussing Kay's play, *The Lamplighter*,

Apart from stressing the dialectics of memory and forgetting and providing silenced female voices with an identity and a past, Kay makes it a point to commemorate how slavery financed and powered the industrial revolution and how Britain, and thus her native Scotland, profited and prospered from the trans-Atlantic slave trade ("Love Letter" 162).

Here Kay connects individual voices and histories with the larger narrative of Scotland and Great Britain. Kay is not only reconstructing a forgotten and overlooked history, she is taking the turbulent emotional spaces and making them into a political statement. In Valerie Popp's essay, she examines Kay's construction of identity in *The Adoption Papers*. Popp writes that the "moments of oral communion in Kay's texts" serve to "counteract the moments when her feet are at their most unsteady, thus ensuring that her voice is strong even-and especially-when she feels that her body is rootless" (315). Popp further argues that other black British writers, many of whom are associated with postcolonial thought, also explore this paradox. This unsteadiness that Popp describes is something that is found throughout Kay's poetry and is embraced as she talks about the difficulties faced by immigrant and refugee women in her most recent work. Despite this rootlessness, and in fact because of it, Kay develops a strong voice that grants her power and purpose.

Like much of what she writes, this is a personal issue for Kay. She tells a story about talking to a woman who, completely overlooking her accent, which is very clearly Scottish, asks Kay "Where are you from?," because she only sees the color of Kay's skin (Gray 157). Kay comments, "clearly my colour and being Scottish were mutually exclusive and a challenge for many people" (Gray 156). Despite having a Scottish accent and understanding the way language operates in Scotland, Kay is still called out for being not Scottish enough. Whiteness

In much of Kay's work, language plays an important role in her exploration of belonging, with the "importance of the mother tongue" being central (McClellan 119). In her work "Big Milk," Kay writes, "When I take up my old life, old words will come out of

my mouth. Words that local people will understand,” words that were learnt with “mother’s milk” (Kay 32). This reflects the “dream of familial bonds” that becomes merged “with a sense of national belonging” (Winning 288). Kay struggles, because despite using “words that local people will understand” she still feels a sense of distance and displacement within her native country. She uses her writing, then “to inscribe this identity, literally writing it into existence” (Winning 241). Kay’s writing is the medium through which she explores and creates identities.

Much of Kay’s poetry explores what it means to be Scottish and what it means to be a woman of color in Scotland, and how those identities work with and conflict with her identity as a poet. For Kay, this search for belonging, for home, is a never-ending journey with no closure. Identity and “home” are never “stable or static” (Winning 241). Kay contends that the history of the Afro-Scots and immigrants are a part of Scottish history and have always been a part of that history. More and more Scottish people are forced to confront this idea with increasing tension and hostility towards immigrants and refugees in Scotland. In discussing her poems inspired by refugee women in Glasgow, Kay states,

Destitution faced by asylum-seekers is a very important issue, but a hidden issue, and it’s close to my heart. The way a country treats its immigrants says a lot about that country. It stirs memories because for a lot of the time I was growing up, I was treated like someone who didn’t belong (Christie).

The poetry of Kay demonstrates the heterogeneity of life in Scotland and the connections between her own experience as a black woman in Scotland with the experiences of others, especially those of refugee and immigrant women, through the themes of belonging, displacement, and national identity.

Nationhood and National Identity

Feminist literary critics have examined the complicated relationship women writers have with the nationalism, national identity, and belonging in different contexts. Adrienne Rich's "Notes Toward a Politics of Location" addresses the relationship between women writers and the nation. In her piece, she quotes Virginia Woolf who wrote "as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (Rich 211). This quote, and this idea, is one that is repeated by several others in their concern with women and their connection to the nation and country. Another piece by Adrienne Rich that is relevant to my project is her essay, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." This essay discusses the complexities of being a woman writer and having to navigate and exist in a world that aims to exclude her. The essay states that a woman writer must try to find a new language to use to describe the new environment in which they find themselves, as well as a past that they were not a part of.

In her book, *Poetic Epistemologies: Gender and Knowing in Women's Language-oriented Writing*, Megan Simpson looks at women writers and their contributions to feminist epistemological poetry. The capacity of poetry to explore different forms of language is especially evident in Kay's poetry as she used different regional dialects to explore the connection between language, identity, and the nation. In her book, Simpson argues that the poetry also reveals a sense of awareness of the limits of writing and of language to ever perfectly capture reality or someone's true sense of self.

In many ways Kay continues with many of the themes outlined here, using them to tackle some of the relevant topics of the 21st century. Within her poetry collection *The Empathetic Store*, in addition to her contributions to Amnesty International's *Here I*

Stand: Stories That Speak for Freedom, Kay continues to be socially engaged and she continues to work on these autobiographical issues. Kay is also branching out and drawing connections between what she has long written about, such as the topics of race and belonging, and connecting them to the experiences of others who often feel out of place in Scotland. She continues to explore the themes of belonging, displacement, and what it means to be Scottish, but through the experiences of refugees and immigrants, other groups who are left out of the mainstream conversations in Scotland about Scottish national identity.

CHAPTER 3 POLITICS OF GENDER, PLACE, AND RACE

The Empathetic Store

The Empathetic Store is Kay's latest collection of poems. It includes and explores a variety of topics as it explores worlds known and worlds imagined. These poems explore Scotland and its landscapes, its cities, and its people, while also contemplating what it means to be Scottish and what it means to belong. The form that this collection takes is relevant in several ways. Firstly, it comes in the form of a chapbook, a form that is cheaply and easily reproduced and spread to the masses. This suggests that the audience of these poems is a broad one and it is an audience that might find a chapbook easier and more affordable than a large bound volume of poetry. It is a collection of poetry that is meant to be read by a wide range of audiences and the poems seek to be relatable and revealing as they demonstrate to the reader ways of life that they might be familiar with and ways of life that they might not.

The political and the personal are closely tied for Kay, and both are present throughout the poems in *The Empathetic Store*. Kay's poems demonstrate how wonderful it is to be welcomed and how disturbing it is to be turned away. Despite Kay's love for Scotland, there is always a tension present as she navigates a society where her identities are at odds with what is considered Scottish. There is no overarching theme in the poems in the collection, but instead there is a common thread that can be found in the way that Kay explores Scotland, its natural landscape, and the people that are found there, and how each of these shapes the other. Kay highlights typical Scottish landscapes, such as the Scottish Highlands, and emphasizes how these places have welcomed her. While some might find it odd that Kay, who has been dismissed as not

Scottish enough, would feel so at home somewhere so quintessentially Scottish, Kay highlights the similarities she finds between her narrative, and the narrative of the wild and untamed Highlands. The people of the Highlands have their own histories and stories that are filled with defiance against those in power and traumatic events. The people of the highlands also have a history of being discriminated against and having their identity stripped from them. It is in these experiences and these histories that Kay finds similarities between herself, the Highlands, and the stories of many immigrants and refugees. She also highlights people and stories who are just as Scottish as the highlands but are dismissed as foreign and unwelcome. In this way, Kay explores the worlds known and worlds imagined, and writes those imagined worlds into existence.

The title *The Empathetic Store* comes from the poem “Lochaline Stores” in “The Ardtornish Quintet.” The name suggests a place where understanding and empathy are laid away for preservation. It also suggests a place where this understanding and empathy can be bartered, bought, and sold. In her poems about marginalized experiences, empathy is often sorely lacking. Those who hold the most power trade in empathy by using lofty narratives of inclusiveness and open-mindedness, while in reality ensuring that the powerless remain powerless. The preservation of empathy is reflected in other poems in this collection. Some poems instead demonstrate instances where empathy could have been a benefit to a certain situation, for instance, Kay’s poem “Would Jane Eyre Come to the Information Desk?.” These poems paint a picture of home that is at times both comforting and contentious. A collection of five poems within *The Empathetic Store*, “The Ardtornish Quintet,” illustrates the belonging and beauty of highland villages. There is a sense of welcoming in the way that Kay discusses the

Highlands, which is in opposition to the way that the other poems in the collection discuss cities such as London or Glasgow.

“Ardtornish Quintet:” Scotland, Family, and Memory

The landscape of Scotland closely tied to how Scotland’s national identity is shaped. Kay has found, however, that this identity is not as welcoming as that of the highlands and the community of people who live there. The poems included in the “Ardtornish Quintet” portray the sense of belonging and beauty that can be found in small highland villages. Ardtornish is a highland estate on which a castle, a set of ruins, and Ardtornish House can be found. The estate and the residences found there have a long history. They were the ceremonial seat of Clan Donald and have played significant roles in several Scottish rebellions. It also has literary connections, as Tennyson once stayed at Ardtornish House. This estate and its featured position within these poems provides a link between the Scotland, and the literature, of the past and the present.

The first poem in the quintet is titled “Rose Cottage” and is a poem about the speaker reminiscing about their past. The cottage in the poem is a place where the speaker’s “mother carried [her],” it is a place filled with family, warmth, and good memories (Kay 26). The speaker finds that landscape of the Highlands provides “solace in the spill of yellow fields” (Kay 26). The Highlands are a place of comfort and a place of sanctuary. The concept of sanctuary is revisited in Kay’s poems about refugees and immigrants as they search for a respite from the difficulties they face both in Scotland and elsewhere.

As the speaker visits the cottage years later they are comforted to find that the river is “running still” (Kay 26). As the speaker exits the cottage and looks out they think,

And there’s my river running still.

Relief-it hurries on: nobody's will.
The years are somehow carried over

This is a place that is frozen in time and acts like a time capsule of all of the good memories of the past. The highlands are characterized in this poem as a mother figure, as someone who comforts and guides and provides a home for those who are wandering and those who are lost.

The third poem in this quintet is called "Ardtornish Dark" in this poem the speaker drives down the road to the Ardtornish estate from Lochaline in the dark. Despite the darkness and the lack of signs or landmarks the speaker does not feel afraid and is easily able to find their way home.

Even in the dark, my friend, the river Rannoch rushing
In the deep over the moss and the rocks and the years,
Down Beat, Up Beat and under the small bridges,
You find, to your surprise, you've lost all you fear (Kay 29).

The wild and untamed highlands is a welcoming place in this poem, a place that can guide a visitor easily back to their home. These poems that are centered on the Highlands highlight a landscape that is uniquely Scottish. The highlands are characterized as a place of home and of family, where anyone can go and feel welcome, no matter who they are or where they come from.

These poems give a glimpse of the sense of belonging that Kay finds the Highlands hold for her. These poems also serve as proof that Scotland can be a welcoming and inclusive place for a diversity of people and voices. The landscape of the highlands is a quiet place filled with history, a history Kay finds that she can deeply relate to. Throughout her poetry, Kay finds that the Highlands, in stark contrast to the

cities, is welcoming place. The contrast of this center of home and belonging is seen in her poetry centering the voices of immigrants and refugees in the cities of the UK.

“Would Jane Eyre Come to the Information Desk?”

The displacement and the loss of belonging that Kay herself describes experiencing, is explored through the eyes of a woman in Heathrow Airport in the poem, “Would Jane Eyre Come to the Information Desk?.” The poem showcases the difficulties that come when identity is marginalized. This poem is composed of a single stanza and details the deportation of a Jamaican woman from the perspective of an onlooker. It continues in the tradition of *Wide Sargasso Sea* as it reclaims Bertha, the mad woman in the attic from the novel *Jane Eyre*. The poem takes place at Heathrow Airport, outside London. It is told from the point of view of the people watching the deportation and it is written in a Jamaican slang. Both the point of view and the dialect it is written in position the reader on the side of Bertha, not on the side of the British who are deporting her. This poem explores the emotions and experiences that come from being an immigrant in the United Kingdom. These experiences and emotions include that of rejection, the continuous feeling of not belonging of constantly being watched, and of being policed. In the first lines of the poem, a woman they call Jane Eyre is called to the information desk. The voice comes over the loudspeaker with,

Would Jane Eyre come to the Information Desk?
The speaker voice at Heathrow Airport said.
I stood and waited for her to appear, Jane Eyre.
And when she came near, she was shouting.
My name is Bertha; my name is not Jane Eyre.
I come from Kingston, Jamaica. Look Here. (Kay 18).

The speech in the poem is italicized, marking it for emphasis. The majority of these lines are spoken by Bertha, though after she is dragged away by immigration officers her

voice is overtaken by that of the spectators and the information desk workers. Though Bertha is the central character of this poem, by the end she has disappeared. As a woman of color from Jamaica, it is all too easy for those who are in a position of authority to take her voice away.

Significantly, the poem includes lines directly from *Jane Eyre*. These lines are spoken by Bertha in the middle of her confrontation with immigration officers. As she is placed in handcuffs she shouts, "*I have as much soul as you, / She was shouting to the immigration officer, / And full as much heart. My name is Bertha.*" (Kay 18). She says, "*I am no bird and no net ensnares me. / I am a free human being with an independent will.*" (Kay 18). The first thing that Bertha shouts as she is placed in handcuffs is about her soul. The fact that she has as much soul as the immigration officer is a marker of her value as a human being, a value that is just as high as anyone else's. The soul is something that is ephemeral and difficult to define; it is not something we can see or survey. As such, the soul is the one thing that is above the policing and surveillance that Bertha's body endures. The way that Bertha describes the soul here suggests that it is quantifiable and, in some way, has real presence in everyday life. The speaker notes that these lines that Bertha speaks are said "in a voice come down from century" and the comments that "Eh eh-for a minute I thought I was dreaming" (Kay 18). The world in which Jane Eyre spoke these words not only feels like centuries ago, it also feels like they were spoken in a dream world, despite the fact that Bertha and the speaker are currently in the very country where Jane Eyre resided. Here Bertha is speaking the same words as Jane Eyre does in the novel, but Bertha is not Jane Eyre. For the immigration officers, her name does not matter, for whether she is Bertha or Jane Eyre

she is from Kingston, Jamaica and will be detained. After her declaration of humanity, Bertha is taken away by the immigration officers,

But wait! Just as suddenly as she appear by Hinformation
She disappear: pulled across the floor, kicking, screaming.
And a long queue instantly forming
Like a giant question across Terminal Four (Kay 18).

Bertha is swept away as quickly as possible. As an immigrant woman of color, she is out of place within the dominant narrative. She does not fit the mold of the model citizen, and she is punished for it. In the void that Bertha left, people create a line in the shape of a question mark. The question of the reasoning behind her detainment and the larger question of immigration regulation looms over the entire poem.

The poem continues as the spectators to Bertha's detainment gather around commenting on how appalling it was to witness Bertha's interactions with immigration officers, and they question how they could treat a woman that way. Despite these protestations, none of the people are moved to action. In response to questions about Bertha, the information desk workers are left saying "We are not at liberty to say anything" (Kay 18). To which the speaker replies, "We are NOT at liberty! Know what I'm saying? / And it's me they accusing of paranoia! Ting ting!" (Kay 18). The speaker recognizes the paranoia and the fear that drive much of the push towards limiting immigration. While others might call the speaker paranoid for recognizing and being weary of that fear and its consequences, the events of this poem show that the speaker has a real reason to be afraid.

The final lines of the poem suggest that the scene at the center of the poem is one that is not unusual, and it is one that will happen again and again. As the poem

continues with its critique of the treatment of immigrants, especially women of color, it ends with the lines,

When you hear that name on the loud speaker calling
Would Jane Eyre come here? You know!
It's a crazy, crazy, world we're living in (Kay 18).

These lines question the sanity of denying a person a space based on any aspect of their identity. Here, Bertha, as a black Jamaican woman, faces multiple oppressions and the speaker in this poem, after witnessing a very visceral example of the effects of those oppressions, questions a government, and a world, that would allow such a thing to happen. In this poem, Heathrow represents London which then represents Britain as a whole. Through her representations of welcoming and unwelcoming environments Kay is providing a very timely and relevant critique of those on the right as they call for further restriction of immigration.

The use of Jamaican slang in “Would Jane Eyre Come to the Information Desk?” as well as Kay’s use of Scots in other poems, demonstrates what Tournay-Theodotou calls Kay’s commitment to engage with both her Scottish and African heritage. Kay often plays with dialect, especially as it relates to history, identity, family, and heritage. In *The Empathetic Store*, the use of Scots is most prominent in the poems “A Lang Promise” and “Bantam.” The use of Scots explicitly ties Kay to the Scottish poets who came before her and through this use of the language, she claims Scottish literary heritage for herself.

“Would Jane Eyre Come to the Information Desk?” is one of the most explicitly global poems in *The Empathetic Store*. It is a commentary on and a challenge to contemporary forms of racism and exploitation. Kay once stated in an interview,

Poetry often speaks for minorities on the outside of things or on the border of a country, and that fits in with the Scottish sensibility and the way we see ourselves. We're a bit like a small country in the Caribbean in that sense (Avis).

Here Kay recognizes the power poetry has to speak to the experiences of marginalized people. In this quote, she is also drawing connections between Scotland and the Caribbean, through their literature and the way that they discuss difficult and complex topics. The experiences of Bertha in the poem are representative of the experiences of many people of color. They are marked as other and denied citizenship and the rights that come with it, poetry as a literary form is able to give a voice to that experience.

CHAPTER 4 POLITICS OF RACE AND REFUGEES IN SCOTLAND

Here I Stand

Branching out from poetry centered on her own experiences, and the experiences of immigrants, Kay explores the place of refugees in Scotland. In her writing about refugees, Kay continues to utilize poetry as a way to speak to the experiences of marginalized people. This is especially important in times of uncertainty. It is during this time of political turmoil and reevaluation of identity in Scotland that Kay wrote these poems about the experiences of refugee women who were resettled in Scotland's urban centers. The poems Kay published in 2015 serve as a commentary on the specific political environment of Scotland, Europe, and much of the world at the time. As Kay stated in an interview,

It seems to me that we're living in times of political turmoil that I've never seen in the course of my lifetime. None of us has seen this level of uncertainty, this level of a lurch to xenophobia, this very worrying insularity and racism, or such a massive divide between parts of the UK (Kay qtd. in Allan).

Kay's consciousness of the "massive divide" and political turmoil both within the UK and around the world is especially evident in her contributions to Amnesty International's *Here I Stand: Stories that Speak for Freedom*. It is a collection of pieces from twenty-five authors that explore the human rights that are under threat in our world today. The three poems that Kay contributes to the collection were written in conjunction with the Scottish Refugee Council for an arts project highlighting the experience of refugees in Scotland. Though Kay is not a refugee, she does have a deep understanding of what it is like to be othered and feel like you do not belong in Scotland. She has drawn inspiration for these poems directly from women refugees who know what it is like to seek sanctuary in a strange land far from their home.

The introduction to the collection begins with a retelling of the Battle of Stirling Bridge, during which, despite being vastly outnumbered, the Scottish managed to win a decisive victory against the English. *Here I Stand* begins with this story because of a line spoken by Wallace, or rather spoken by Mel Gibson playing Wallace, in the film *Braveheart*. The line, “They may take our lives, but they will never take our freedom” is one of the most famous and recognizable lines from the film. The introduction argues that this line is significant in that it “was tapping into the deep truth that the freedoms we enjoy today are worth dying for; and have in fact been paid for, in blood, many times over” (7). This story and the line from the film emphasize the goal of the collection, which is to illustrate the freedoms that so many people still do not have access to. It also aligns Scotland on the side of those fighting for human rights, against all odds. Though as Kay makes evident, Scotland is nonetheless complicit in the oppression and the refusal to grant human rights to some groups of people, specifically immigrants and refugees. The inclusion of the reference to *Braveheart* and William Wallace is interesting in the context of Kay’s poetry, as many Scottish people would count Wallace and his followers as quintessentially Scottish, but not the many immigrants and refugees who call Scotland home. Kay draws connections between the Scottish past and the Scottish present to show that the love of freedom and independence that marks Scottish history and legacy, should mean that Scottish people of all identities should be recognized as equally Scottish. Kay’s poetry also demonstrates that, unfortunately, in Scotland up to this point, the superiority of whiteness has overshadowed any love of freedom and independence.

Kay contributed three poems to the collection, “Glasgow Snow,” “Constant,” and “Push the Week.” Some kindness and protection are offered in “Glasgow Snow” but there is little dignity or long-term safety. In “Constant” and “Push the Week,” the speakers express their fear, homesickness, and loss of identity. These poems explore the significance of various diasporic communities in Scotland, both their similarities and differences. These poems were written in response to stories told to Kay by three different refugee women whom Kay had been put in contact with by the Scottish Refugee Council. Kay found in these stories common threads not just between the experiences of these refugee women, but also between her own experiences and the experiences of others who have been marginalized in UK society.

“Glasgow Snow:” Searching for Sanctuary

Kay’s first contribution to *Here I Stand* gives the reader a glimpse at the experience of a refugee searching for sanctuary. The poem is written in second person, implicating the reader and making them a character. It forces the reader to relate to and empathize with the speaker from the start. It puts the reader in the position of someone who has nothing and is supported by no one and must search for a way to keep their fractured sense of self from breaking apart completely. The speaker of the poem journeys from Africa and across Europe to Scotland, searching for sanctuary and safety. The poem begins,

You were found in the snow in Glasgow
Outside the entrance to Central Station.
Your journey took you from an Ethiopian prison
To the forests in France... (38).

The journey of a refugee is a long, difficult, and often dangerous one. The journey that the speaker details is not at all unusual, and here it includes at least three countries.

These long journeys across countries and even continents further allow for the fracturing of the refugee's identity as it is connected to home and belonging. Throughout this journey, the speaker is denied access to so many things. She states,

No public fund, no benefit, no home, no sanctum,
No haven, no safe port, no support,
No safety net, no sanctuary, no nothing.

The repeated use of the word no is discouraging and demoralizing. The agent of these "no's" is every institution that has stood in this refugee woman's way to finding a place where she can belong, including the government of Scotland. Without a sense of home or security, the speaker is left wondering who she really is and if she will ever be able to call a place home again.

Despite the fracturing of identity that is addressed, this poem is the most optimistic of the poems included in this collection, as it does present the hope of finding some sort of sanctuary. In those forests in France, "luck and chance / Showed you not all white men are like the men / In *Roots* – a film you watched once" (38). These people-smugglers,

Didn't treat you like Kizzy
Or Kunta Kinte, brought you food and water by day,
Offered you shelter in a tent, and it was sanctuary.
These lines offer a sense of hope that is absent from much of the rest of the

poem. In the midst of the suffering and the rootlessness that fill the speaker's existence, there is some hope of sanctuary and there are some people that are willing to provide it. For while there was "no, safety net, no sanctuary, no nothing," this was only "until a girl found you in the snow, frozen, / And took you under her wing singing" (38). By highlighting hopeful moments, Kay is giving the reader a glimpse of the Scotland that could be, the Scotland that these poems are calling for.

“Constant:” The Problem That Has No Name

The poem “Constant” explores the complicated, inescapable, terrifying feeling that accompanies being a refugee. The world is now facing its largest refugee crisis since World War II, and this poem approaches the crisis from the point of view of one refugee woman. While political rhetoric on immigration is far from poetic, the United Nations refugee agency reported more than 60 million people are now displaced by wars, conflict, and persecution across the world (UNHCR). One statistic reports that one in every 122 humans on earth is either a refugee, homeless and persecuted in their own country, or risking great danger to seek asylum in a new land (UNHCR). Too often the biggest hurdle of being a refugee is assumed to be getting out of a refugee camp and being placed in a new home country. This poem and the others that Kay contributed to this collection make it evident that things do not necessarily get easier once these people reach their new home, which is in this case, Scotland. The prejudices and fear that they encounter once they arrive in Scotland are unique and terrifying, and always present. The poem begins,

It is following you and you can't escape.
You cannot hold your head up or be happy.
You lose your confidence. You turn a corner: it is there.
You cannot step on it; make it disappear.

These first lines emphasize the inescapability of these feelings, or the label “refugee.” It is everywhere you look, and it is everywhere you go. It colors how others perceive you, and how you perceive yourself. These lines describe a visceral feeling that takes up a person’s whole being. The feeling that is expressed in this poem is everywhere all the time, yet the speaker cannot find a name for it.

The next lines of the poem emphasize the fact that though they are in Scotland, Scotland alone does not make them feel safe, and, in fact, Scotland and its government is often at the root of this terrible feeling. It is often assumed that once a refugee has been relocated to a new country, their difficulties are over. Kay's poems reveal that these women are instead just presented with a different set of challenges, some of which are created, or at the very least, maintained by their new countries. This includes the racism, sexism, and classism that many face in their new countries. These lines of Kay's poem emphasize that human rights can be denied or abused, even in countries like the UK,

You are imprisoned in your own life.
Every time you go to the Home Office, there it is.
They make you feel inhuman. Every word you speak
A complete lie. An untruth. You cannot begin
To imagine. It is always there. Constant.

The one word ending of this is significant as it emphasizes the relentless surveillance that the speaker must endure. Here the Scottish government, with the Home Office specifically, is called out and marked as one of the sources of this constant state of inhumanity that these refugee women are faced with. When speaking about the refugee crisis, Kay remarked, "destitution faced by asylum-seekers is a very important issue, but a hidden issue, and it's close to my heart. The way a country treats its immigrants says a lot about that country" (Christie). The issue of the refugee is hidden just like the feelings expressed in this poem. Everything about the refugee is marked as invisible and other.

The interdisciplinary field of critical refugee studies, "reconceptualizes 'the refugee' not as an object of rescue but as a site of social and political critiques, whose

emergence, when traced, would make visible the processes of colonization, war, and displacement” (Espiritu 174). The figure of the refugee in Kay’s poetry is not an object of rescue but rather a subject that can allow for the examination and critique of colonization, conflict, belonging, and displacement.

“Push the Week:” Loss of Identity

Kay’s third contribution to the collection is a poem entitled “Push the Week.” In this poem, the speaker wrestles with the loss of her identity as she is stripped of all the things that make up who she is. As a refugee, the speaker is given a card that she can use to buy food and clothes, the basic necessities that are needed to survive. These basic necessities, however, are not enough to make up for what she has left behind and what she now no longer has access to. What is still lacking in her life, and what makes her transition to life in Glasgow so difficult, is central to the poem. The speaker laments,

This card don’t buy me African food
Or let me shop in *Marie Curie*
(although they have nice things in there).
Only in the Salvation Army Store.
(Where the clothes are a bit of bore.)
You think just because you’re an asylum seeker
You don’t care what you wear?

The speaker in the poem is unable to buy the African food she really wants or the clothes she would prefer to wear. It is assumed that because she is a refugee, she is thankful for everything that she receives and dreams of nothing more. Once refugees are housed and given the bare necessities, the government washed their hands of them. As the speaker states, “the Home Office never consider / How it feels to be dispersed to Glasgow” (Kay 282). By giving them clothes, food, and shelter, the government considers these people taken care of, they do not think about their well-being beyond that. The woman in “Push the Week” is not saying that the government

does not provide her food and clothing, she says that it does not provide her the food and clothing that would make her feel secure and at home. As the speaker states, early on in the poem, she is only able to shop at the Salvation Army store, and she laments that if only she could get some kachumbari,

My spirits would lift, eh?
Not so worthless, not so angry.
Ugali would make me less depressed!
Not so homesick. Myama choma (Kay 282).

The clothing that she is allowed to buy with her card is not the nice clothing that might make her feel good about herself and that would instill her with confidence. Even if she could find the ingredients to make the food that would make her less homesick, she would not be able to buy it.

The poem is not about a woman who wants to wear fancy clothes and eat nice food, it is a woman who wishes she had control over what she eats and what she wears, because that would mean that she has some control over her own life. The real problem that the poem highlights is a loss of any feeling of security, a sense of place, and identity. The total loss of identity that is felt by this refugee woman is emphasized midway through the poem. The speaker says,

If my mother were here she would say:
That woman is not my daughter.
Even I don't know who I am.

The speaker in this poem is not able to choose the clothes or the food she would want to buy, and she is surrounded by people who do not understand her language or her culture. Without the community of people that she was used to, a community of people who understand her, and the things, like clothes and food, that make up a part of her identity, she feels so lost that even her mother would not know who she is.

The poem includes a litany of words that would be unfamiliar to many native-born Scottish people, and many of the people who go on to read the poem. The words used are not English or Scottish Gaelic and are instead words used by immigrants and refugees who come from a wide range of different countries. The speaker dreams about all the food she would make if she could. She reminisces about kachumbari, chapatti, mbazi, gari, sukuma wiki and more. The typical English speaker who would be unfamiliar with these words is then required to look up these words and their definitions in order to have a full understanding of the poem and the significance of the immigrant's navigation across countries and cultures. The fact that these words are untranslated marks the words as important, important enough to not be translated or explained. These foreign words come from several different languages and represent different groups of refugees who have sought refuge in Scotland. These words work to create a kind of "every person" refugee. The speaker in this poem is every refugee or even immigrant who has felt homesick because they could not make the food they were used to at home, to everyone who felt isolated and looked down upon because of the food they eat and the customs they choose to follow.

The feeling of being constantly watched and surveyed is something that Kay herself claims to have experienced. Oppressed populations are often surveilled by institutions of power because of a deep-rooted fear that the powerful will not remain that way. Surveillance is often used to further the oppression of various groups of people, leading to a vicious cycle. Kay explores this in her poem, "In My Country." In this poem, she explores the feeling of being a foreigner in your own country.

a woman passed around me
in a slow, watchful circle,
as if I were a superstition (Kay 11)

Here the speaker is perceived as out of place and something to be studied and to be feared. The poem as a whole, highlights the disorienting consciousness possessed by Kay and others like her who are in search of home. The poem continues with the woman asking, “Where do you come from?” and the speaker replying, “‘Here,’ I said, ‘Here. These parts.’” (Kay 11). Kay wrote this poem in the early 1990s after realizing that she had a whole collection of anecdotes where people asked her where she was from, even in her own country. The experience of being black and being Scottish is similar in many ways to the experience of displacement and rootlessness that the refugee women that Kay talked with felt.

The women in these poems are perceived by wider Scottish society as unseen, unknown, and inhuman. They are constantly surveyed and are stripped of their identities giving them a fractured sense of self. Despite this, Kay contends that Scotland now is “a country that wants to have different values” (Kay qtd. in Allan). These poems provide glimpses of hopeful moments that suggest a better Scotland and a more inclusive Scottish national identity. By writing these poems, Kay is placing her poetry in the national conversation about refugees. Kay is especially interested in “the idea that poetry should get out and about and not be seen as a small thing” (Kay qtd. in Allan). As the Scottish Makar, the national poet of Scotland, Kay has a unique opportunity to be a part of and shape the national conversation. Through her poetry, Kay is attempting to change the face of Scotland and present both Scotland and the world with a depiction of Scotland that includes everyone, not just “a white man with red hair in a kilt” (Kay qtd.

News Hour). Poems like the ones included in *Here I Stand*, take a strong position on the side of those who have ever been asked “Where are you from?” Kay is given a platform through which she can shape what Scotland is to become, while still reminding it of its past.

CHAPTER 5

POLITICS OF PLACE: SCOTLAND AND SCOTTISH IDENTITY

Kay illustrates that a person can both love a place and point out its flaws.

Scotland is a place where Kay can find a sense of belonging and of home, but she also recognizes that it can also be an uncomfortable place that is unwelcoming to those that it labels as other or different. Kay recognizes that Scotland is not a monolith and it has changed over time. She also recognizes that the diversity of Scotland and what is accepted are different in the cities and in the highlands. She remarked in an interview “in rural Scotland now it feels absolutely fine to be a lesbian in the Highlands and islands” (Kay qtd. in Allan). Kay calls for a Scotland that embraces difference without erasing it. She also calls for a reflexivity when it comes to Scottish history and Scottish identity.

Kay’s work is important because poets can accomplish this in ways that historians cannot. Poetry encompasses experience and feeling in ways that history, in its search for objective truth, cannot. History and heritage are important themes in many of Kay’s poems. She sees poetry as playing a special role in providing a reflection of humanity, or as Kay puts it “Poets tell the time” (Kay qtd. in *The Guardian*). Poetry is especially important in times of turmoil and conflict. The poem “Bantam,” a ten-line poem in which Kay’s adoptive father at 87 remembers his father at 17. It was inspired by her great grandfather, but it is also a response to Siegfried Sassoon’s “Survivors,” and is another example of Kay laying claim to British literary heritage. Kay argues, when we “look back at the first world war, it’s the poets we turn to tell that story in a way that the historians don’t” (Kay qtd. in *The Guardian*). Poetry that describes trauma and

traumatic events such as war, can convey the horror, destruction, and the effect it had on people's lives in more nuanced ways than a historical record could.

“Bantam:” The poem is told through the voice of Kay's adoptive father and the 'Bantam' here is a term used to describe the small men, little more than boys, that were sent out to fight in, when height restrictions were dropped. The poem begins, “It wisnae men they sent tae war. / It wis boys like the Bantams” (Kay 14). Here Kay's father is referencing World War I and the young men that were shipped off to Europe at age 17. The generation of young men from across the United Kingdom that were lost during the war, and its effect on those left behind, is well documented. This poem while referencing a specific conflict, poses a wider critique of the practices of war and the way that human life is disregarded in the process. Kay argues, “it's important that we don't just glorify our past or that we don't become too much like people in a shortbread tin come to life. We have to be self-critical as well as self-congratulatory” (Kay qtd. in Allan). For Kay, the Scotland of the future should be constantly re-evaluating itself. This poem emphasizes the importance of Scottish history and heritage as well as the importance of family. It demonstrates that it is important to remember the past, both the good and the bad.

The men who are central in this poem have a name that is used to describe a variety of things. If someone were to say the name, Bantam, it would mean nothing specifically, and more clarification would be needed in order to ascertain exactly what kind of Bantam was being discussed. The Bantams then are everything and nothing, and were eventually sent to fight and die, and received nothing in return. The Bantams in this poem were “wee men named efter / a small breed o' chickens, / or later: a jeep, a bike, a camera.” (Kay 14). The first prototype of what later became the Jeep was

produced by the American Bantam Car Company (Carter). That early prototype was named the Bantam Reconnaissance Car and its designs led to the production of the Jeep that was used by the American military in World War II (Carter). The Schwinn Bantam was a convertible bicycle that has been in production since the 1950s. The top bar of the bike was removable, so it could be used by both boys and girls. The camera referenced here is the Kodak Bantam which was introduced in 1935. It was an extremely compact folding camera that was in production until 1957 ("Bantam Camera"). All of these Bantam items are utilitarian in some way. These lines demonstrate the far-reaching influence of the military industry. These Bantams, who were called to war after the restrictions were lifted and were once named only for a breed of chickens, are now named after a tool of war.

As the war continued, the military became less and less discerning, as their only goal became gathering bodies to send to Europe. The Bantams, those "wee men," were drafted because "That needy fir soldiers they drapped height / restriction; so small men came to war" (Kay 14). As the war continued, many of the restrictions were dropped as the military became more and more desperate to enlist soldiers to fight in the war. The fate of those small men is revealed in the last three lines of the poem,

As prisoner, my fairther's weight fell.
And years later, the shrapnel fray the Somme
Shot oot, a wee jewel hidden in his right airm. (Kay 14).

The shrapnel in the last line is described as jewel as if it were payment for fighting at the Somme. These little men, these boys, who were sent off to France were rewarded with capture as prisoners of war or shrapnel in the arm. These men were sent to fight, and received nothing in return except for wounds, and shrapnel left in their arms.

The critique of war that this poem presents is emphasized by being written in Scots. The Scots language is closely linked to the traumatic and brutal moments in Scottish history which have influenced the language, its words, and its construction. Scots then has the capacity to articulate these kinds of tragic and traumatic events. This poem, its subject matter, and Scots, also speaks to memory. Joanne Winning writes about “historical memory-traces in [Kay’s] consciousness” in Kay’s earlier poetry (242). This historical memory, as well as the idea of postmemory, is present as Kay’s father relates events at which he himself was not present. Despite not being present, certain moments, especially traumatic ones, are seared into a broader form of memory that can travel through generations. In this poem, Kay refers to the Scottish tradition of memory and family and emphasizes the importance of the Scottish language. She places herself within that tradition, both literary and cultural, through her father, and through the act of writing the poem. This is significant as she is a subject who is often deemed un-Scottish within this tradition and society. As she displays through her inclusion of poems written about immigrant and refugee women, Kay calls for this same inclusion for other women and their stories.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

Many would consider poetry frivolous and unimportant, and the study of poetry even more so. Those who see poetry as inessential would question why anyone would take time to study it when there are such big problems in our world that need to be solved. The poetry of Kay proves that not only can poetry be used to try to understand and tackle the challenges that face our world today, they are absolutely essential. Poetry can reveal to us possibilities beyond our imaginations. It explores the undreamt of, the unexpected, and the miraculous. Kay's poetry presents the very real experiences of immigrants and refugees who are often not considered Scottish, alongside the experiences of those who typify traditional Scottishness, and she writes about these experiences using the language of our daily speech. The combination of words that are known to us, tangible experiences, along with a vision of the future, allows the reader to take a journey along with the poem, and to continue to dream beyond it, imagining for themselves what the Scotland, and the Scottish identity, of the future could look like.

The exploration of Scottish national identity in these poems can be framed in several ways, including the concept of rebellion. Kay's use of poetry and the figure of the rebel allows for more room to explore Scottish national identity in the past, the present, and the future. The language used in Kay's poetry represents a linguistic rebellion as she uses language forms and dialects that are not traditionally valued. Kay also homes in on Scotland's embracing of its own rebel identity. Scotland sees itself as the champion of the disenfranchised, a vision which is always in opposition to Britain. She does this to point out the ways in which Scotland is complicit in the oppression of many people, while also making a case for the seamless way that marginalized people

could be included in Scottish national identity. Kay's use of poetry to explore Scottish national identity allows for more room to explore that identity as it is and as it can be.

There is a juxtaposition posed in Kay's poems. Poems such as "Would Jane Eyre Come to the Information Desk?" portray rejection and displacement, while the poems set in the highlands of Scotland provide a sense of belonging. Kay references traditional Scottish spaces where she feels welcome to showcase how Scotland can welcome these different people in the future. Kay draws connections between traumas to demonstrate connections and similarities between Scottish history and that of the diaspora. While Kay pushes for the recognition of the role that Scotland has played, and continues to play, in the oppression and marginalization of various groups of people, many of her poems also contain some hope for the future. Her poetry illustrates the potential Scotland has to become a welcoming place for people of all identities, one that would embrace rather than reject people based on their differences.

The fact that the majority of the speakers in the poems in these collections are women is an important one. It is especially important as Kay emphasizes these female figures whose race, class, and nationality put them at odds with the society's conceptualization of Scottish womanhood. It is important to note that the women in these poems have stories that are not exactly like Kay's. As she was born and raised in Scotland, she in some ways has an advantage. Despite this, Kay often experienced the pain of not belonging. It is this shared pain that Kay emphasizes in her poetry and that she argues for its inclusion in a more expansive understanding of Scottish identity. This new understanding of Scottish identity would embrace those figures who have been left

out or removed from an understanding of Scottishness in which whiteness is valued above all else.

Kay's work pushes situated knowledges to the forefront and values oppositional histories. Many of her poems speak to the difficulties of being a woman, a person of color, and/or a refugee in a society whose hegemonic ideals are always out of reach. Poetry is uniquely positioned in order to facilitate the creation and exploration of feminist thought and transgressive forms of language. The capacity of poetry to explore different forms of language is especially evident in Kay's poetry as she used different regional dialects to explore the connection between language, identity, and the nation.

Kay creates a space where pushing back against hegemonic ideals is celebrated, while at the same time recognizing that is not always possible, or safe, to do so. Her poetry is not situated within the dominant discourse, rather it is situated in a discourse of black womanhood and black artists. This creates poetry that is able to imagine beyond the dominant discourse and examines what it meant to be a Scottish citizen in the past and gives a more expansive definition of what it means to be a Scottish citizen in the present. Being a black woman in much of the world means your body is viewed as a commodity that can be violated and bearing witness and claiming a place in history is a revolutionary act. The women in Kay's poetry assert the power and worth of their knowledge and their experiences by speaking out in their own voice. Thus, they bear witness and claim their place in history, and they create an alternative space outside of dominant, oppressive structures.

The time to reevaluate Scottish identity is now, while Scotland is in this process of transition and is reevaluating its position within the United Kingdom and its

relationship with the wider world. A national identity that does not include the voices and experiences of people like Kay, and of the immigrants and refugees that are featured in her poetry, disfigures the national image. A national identity that values whiteness above all else is not one that many people who consider themselves Scottish can be a part of. These women, people of color, and other marginalized groups, have a presence in Scotland, and must be included if an accurate representation of Scotland is desired. As Scotland imagines what place it will hold on the world stage, what it means to be Scottish will change and that is the time that the marginalized voices who have so often been silenced should finally be included. Kay and her poetry argues that the time for this is now.

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