

# **Black British Theatre: A Transnational Perspective**

Volume 1 of 2

Submitted by Michael Christopher Pearce, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Drama, January 2013.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines post-war black British theatre through a transnational lens. It argues that the hitherto prioritization of a national paradigm in discussions of black British theatre is not sufficiently complex to chart the historical processes that have shaped it and the multiple spatial, cultural, and political contexts in which it has been generated. This thesis finds that a transnational optic exposes a network of connections – physical, ideological and psychic – between blacks in Britain and other global black communities which have shaped and transformed the lives of Britain's black communities and their cultural production.

The thesis is divided into three chapters: the USA (chapter 1), the Caribbean (chapter 2), and Africa (chapter 3). Each chapter represents a specific geo-cultural-political space with which black British theatre has an important relationship. Each chapter follows the same broad structure: the first half of the chapter establishes a particular transnational process and mode of analysis which frames the ensuing historical discussion; the second half is devoted to an analysis of two contemporary black British dramatists.

The USA chapter examines black British theatre through the lens of Americanization and Black Power. The first half traces the influence of black America on black British theatre's formation, organization and expression in the post-war period. The second half examines works by Kwame Kwei-Armah and Mojisola Adebayo.

The Caribbean chapter applies the process and theory of creolization to a discussion of the rise and consolidation of Caribbean culture in black British theatre. The chosen case studies for this chapter are Roy Williams and Bola Agbaje.

Finally, the African chapter discusses the recent flux of immigrants from Africa since the 1990s and, using the concept of diaspora as an analytic model, explores the impact this has had on black British theatre. The second half focuses on works by Inua Ellams and Debbie Tucker Green.

Dividing the thesis into the spaces of the USA, the Caribbean and Africa allows one to filter and track the origination and circulations of particular sets of ideas, practices and / or people. The divisions reiterate that I am looking at complex heterogeneous material informed by multiple strands of influence. Nevertheless, connections between the chapters emerge, which illustrate historically embedded circuits of influence and exchange that have routinely transgressed national borders. Taken as a whole, the thesis supports the idea that black British theatre not only merits a transnational approach, but is, in fact, a transnational practice in itself.

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