

# ***THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES***

## **Kwame Kwei-Armah's Triptych Technique in Delineating the Black British Community**

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**Abstract:**

*This paper analyses the three plays of Kwame Kwei-Armah's triptych, *Elmina's Kitchen* (2003), *Fix Up* (2004) and *Statement of Regret* (2007), in light of Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of semiotics. Kwei-Armah attempts to record the experience of Afro-Caribbean immigrants in Britain and, in so doing, his technique depends on employing the sign notion of this theory. In his *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure illustrates that semiotics is a science which studies signs in a social milieu; hence signs are not mere verbal words but there is meaning behind the connection that reflects the reality that people are living in their societies. The study reveals that the playwright uses this entity to signify elements of the Caribbean culture in the context of the triptych which is a feature of his plays that no previous work has mainly focused on in detail.*

**Keywords:** Kwei-Armah, Saussure, sign model, culture, triptych, *Elmina's Kitchen*, *Fix Up*, *Statement of Regret*

In his trilogy or triptych, as he calls it, comprising his first full-length play, *Elmina's Kitchen* followed by *Fix Up* and *Statement of Regret*, primarily performed at the National Theatre in the first decade of the millennium in 2003, 2004 and 2007 respectively, and later included in a publication as *Plays: 1* in 2009, Kwame Kwei-Armah endeavors to record the experience of black West Indies immigrants in Britain. To use his own words, his aim in writing it was "to chronicle the black British experience" (as cited in Wolf, 2005, para. 2). His triptych has mostly been tackled with regards to the issue of political identity, sense of oneself or critique of his characters as symbolic figures, but a detailed analysis of the technique used in delineating his community has not been thoroughly addressed. Elements of the Caribbean culture reflected in the setting, stage directions, the past, music and sound have barely been attempted in depth whereas they serve as signifiers for cultural, historical or social implications. They act as signs that permeate the atmosphere of the plays and are crucial to their understanding. This paper will, therefore, analyse the dramatic technique via which Kwei-Armah explores such aspects while exposing the cultural suffrage of that community. This is to be exhibited with special reference to the semiotics theory founded by the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, and, more specifically, his notion or model of the sign. In applying that to the triptych, signified cultural aspects are revealed, emerging from their hybrid nature in which ethnic origin and race issues still exist. An exposition of Saussure's sign notion will first be presented to be followed by an analysis of its use by the playwright towards the above-mentioned cultural intent. The analysis will chiefly focus on *Elmina's Kitchen* while referring to the other two plays as relevant to exhibit how they complement each other towards Kwei-Armah's target.

To begin with, an initial brief reference to the playwright's life experience is crucial to this paper's analysis. Kwei-Armah, who belongs to the second generation of Caribbean immigrants, has been writing and acting for the black theatre. Originally born in Britain in 1967 to Grenadian parents as Ian Roberts, he was shattered by the issue of his identity as a young man, then was influenced by Alex Hailey's *Roots* in his early teens. With the latter's journey in finding his roots bearing on his mind, the playwright decided to trace his own. He therefore went on a trip to Ghana in his twenties, which resulted in changing his name to reflect his cultural identity. In an interview with Davis, he elaborates the meaning of the new name he chose for himself to be "to find the way" (Kwei-Armah as cited in Davis and Fuchs, 2006, p. 239). Despite being British by birth and living in the UK, witnessing displacement due to colour discrimination and the violence of not only white-on-black, but black-on-black youth was an agony in itself to Kwei-Armah. That anguish imprinted in him the inner sensation of belonging to a minority in his own country. It was an excruciating experience that has led to "his identification with Afrocentric ideology" (Pearce, 2013, 104) after his Ghana trip and this granted him inner peace in the fulfillment of his sense of identity. With that sense of fulfillment, Kwei-Armah has considered himself a tri-cultural person, and this engulfs the image of an original hybrid diasporic identity. He admits,

*I call myself tri-cultural: I'm African, Caribbean and British. And each one of those has an equal part to play and I can be one or all at the same time depending on what it is. (as cited in Davis and Fuchs, 2006, p. 240)*

From that emerged the writing of his triptych.

In his introduction to *Plays: 1*, Kwei-Armah states how the idea of the triptych commenced. He mentions that the night he started the first scene of *Elmina's Kitchen*,

*The idea of writing, of seeking to look beyond headlines to ask fundamental questions of our young men, was born: why were they not trying hard enough to overcome their circumstances, and why was society not trying hard enough to remove the circumstances they had to transcend? (2009, pp. x-xi)*

Inspired by August Wilson whom he considers his role model in recording the African-American society in his play, *King Hedley II*, that was produced in the United States in 1999, Kwei-Armah's own intention was to make the theatre domain as "a palace of thought" (2011). To accomplish that, he employs signs that reflect aspects of culture within his marginalised society. In delineating that community, Kwei-Armah's technique depends on signification especially with reference to the young members of the third generation of immigrants who are detached from their parents' and ancestors' past and thus torn between two cultures.

Signification is an essential element on which Saussure's semiotics theory is founded. Primarily, he coined it as 'semiology' but it was later termed as 'semiotics' by C.S. Peirce, has been universally adopted since then and is employed as such in this paper. It is that part of Saussure's theory and not the linguistics that concerns the analysis here. Saussure considers semiology as "a science which studies the life of signs within society" (1971, p. 16). It is not just mere verbal words used as signs but there is meaning behind that connection that reflects the reality people are living in their societies and, hence, echoes the relationship between the individual and society. In his *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure explicates that "Language is a system of signs that express ideas"; he initially defines it as a "linguistic sign that unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image" (1971, p. 16) or pattern, laying the emphasis on the individual's mental concept that parallels that sound image. To further clarify his notion, he names the sound image signifier and the concept signified but considers the connection between them to be arbitrary, created by people in a society so, accordingly, it is not static. Consequently, words can signify different things in relation to the bond between both signifier and signified. As such and since he views the sign present in a social milieu, Saussure links it to social psychology (Underwood, 2007, para. 13), so it ultimately has a collective/individual concept. It is noteworthy to elaborate that he considers it a psychological process which creates a significant form or body that bears a significance or image in the mind. That image-signifier may not necessarily be actually uttered or written words as has been noted, for Saussure:

*was not referring to spoken or written words, but to the mental impressions made on our senses by a certain 'thing.' It is our perception, or how we view this 'thing,' together with the sound system of our language that creates the two-part mental linguistic unit he referred to as a 'sign'" (Lanir, 2012, para. 6).*

The linguistic sign is, then, the relation between two things and, as such, Saussure's theory follows a "dyadic tradition" or "two-part model" (Chandler, 2007, p. 14), the signifier and the signified as an entity referring to a sign form as the word, for example, and a concept that gives it meaning. The signified is the representation of the signifier, so it is meaning formed through signification. That pattern:

*is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it "material", it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract. (Saussure, 1971, p. 66)*

Hence, how a person psychologically interprets that sound pattern endows it with the material representation in the mind and this distinguishes it from the linguistic sign as the abstract concept associated with it.

Berger (2014) further elucidates Saussure's notion of the sign and its presence in a social milieu highlighting that the meaning of signs is formed by and within society; thus, semiotics conveys not merely the method of reaching the meaning of signs but it is meaningful in itself. However, since signs are socially based so they are likewise liable to change according to any change in the codes (Berger, 2014, p. 26). Meaning is dynamic, created and formed within society based on its norms and codes, and so the concept is abstract as Saussure indicates in the above quotation. This establishes the relation between signifier and signified and is reflected in Kwei-Armah's technique. The concept or idea behind his signifiers constitute the signified and is related to society's contemporary reality. Society dictates the reality of its members who, in the case of the triptych, is the black community's ordeal. In his "Basic Tasks of Cultural Semiotics", Posner (2004) confirms that,

*The mentality of a society is composed of its mentifacts, that is, of its ideas and values and the conventions that determine their use and expression. 'Ideas' here mean all categories with which a society interprets itself and its reality. (p. 65)*

Here appears the connection or correlation between signifier and signified within a meaningful code. Such a shared system of signs by a society and its members could be named "mental culture" (Posner, 2004, p. 65). Within that system of signification, everything structurally exists. Fiske further demonstrates how the reality of a culture is perceived through signs or codes by clarifying that,

*"Reality" is already encoded, or rather the only way we can perceive and make sense of reality is by the codes of our culture. There may be an objective, empiricist reality out there, but there is no universal, objective way of perceiving and making sense of it. What passes for reality in any culture is the product of that culture's codes, so "reality" is*

*always already encoded, it is never "raw." . . . Some of the social codes which constitute our reality are relatively precisely definable in terms of the medium through which they are expressed. (as cited in Rivkin and Ryan, 2004, p. 4)*

From the above analysis, that specific entity is embodied in Kwei-Armah's triptych through the medium of signs. Of the most remarkable, the first signifier to be analysed is the setting with its detailed stage directions. A significant technique of Armah's is that the cultural context is established before the commencement of the action, mainly via the stage directions. The three plays are set in different single locations in contemporary London, confined to small black-owned premises as a restaurant in *Elmina's Kitchen*, a small bookstore in *Fix Up* and a contained think-tank in *Statement of Regret*, with casts of black characters. Even other figures who are not physically present on the stage but mentioned as past leaders or artists, are all mostly from the West Indies and Africa. The only white feature in the triptych is in the mixed-race character, Alice, in *Fix Up*. This is integral to the playwright's use of stage directions as signifiers.

With the start of the triptych, *Elmina's Kitchen* commences the semiotic analysis. Act One begins with a very short prologue composed of stage directions preparing for the initial setting of the black cultural atmosphere:

*The stage is in darkness. A single spotlight slowly reveals a costumed man, standing absolutely still with a gurl (a one-string African guitar famed for possessing the power to draw out spirits) in his hands. His head moves sharply as if smelling something distasteful. The music starts. It is a slow lament-sounding concoction of American blues and traditional African music.*

*The man then covers the length and breadth of the stage flicking handfuls of powder on to the playing area. The music ends.*

Blackout. (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 5)

At the outset, as can be inferred, an initial African environment with mystic rituals is set, not confined to black British or the Caribbean but associated with African heritage as well. Historical and cultural aspects embellish the place. On the walls of the restaurant are posters of African-American heroes alongside different signs prohibiting drugs and expecting customers' respect of the rule as well as advertisements of a kind of brand lager developed in the West-Indies. The restaurant that serves as the title of the play and which is described in the stage directions as "a one-notch-above-tacky West Indian takeaway restaurant" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 5), is so called after Deli's West Indian deceased mother, Elmina. The mother's name itself goes back in history to a medieval castle on the coast of Ghana which was the main gateway for the slave trade industry back then. It was the spot from which slaves were packed into ships before reaching the Middle Passage to America and the playwright intentionally uses it for that reference, "I used the term *Elmina's Kitchen* because of the reference to the slave fort . . . because the kitchen is supposed to be the slave cell for me" (Kwei-Armah as cited in Davies and Fuchs, 2006, p. 245). Elmina opened and ran the place for many years of over two decades and her huge picture on the wall is a signifier for the whole historical triangular trip with Africa as the starting point of the journey of slavery across the Atlantic to the Caribbean then later to Britain as an immigrant destination. It serves as a link signifying the historical past of the play's characters, their tensions and feeling of displacement together with the influence of the colonial past still projected in their lives (Zeitler, 2013, p. 18). The place, therefore, signifies the past for, as Bunzli (2005) comments, it "references both family and slave history, [and] alludes to these themes of displacement" (p. 726).

On another note, though no reference is made to the type of costume the man figure in the prologue is wearing, yet from his actions described in the stage directions, it is assumed he is African even though not physically obvious, and so acts as a griot figure. The use of African clothing here is of cultural value to Kwei-Armah in indicating identity and is employed in the three plays of the triptych. African clothing is also emphasized in *Fix Up* where, with the opening of the play, Brother Kiyi is presented in African-British clothing, "dressed in an African-shaped Kente shirt on top of a thick woolly polo-neck with jeans" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 102). He is trying to cling to his West Indian past while living in the reality of western outfit. Val, who sticks to cultural beliefs of fasting and praying in *Statement of Regret*, wears "Hawaiian shorts and top" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 179) on his first appearance, then is later seen in a Native American clothing in "headgear but not the full feathered business" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 188), or wearing a white gown in a third instance (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 211). The stage directions instantly reveal African cultural traditions even in clothing modes that have been transmitted to the Caribbean, but which may have also been influenced by the Native American as seen in Brother Kiyi in *Fix Up* or Val in *Statement of Regret*, rendering the scene a diasporic atmosphere which Kwei-Armah intends to disseminate. He endows it with the sense of Africa/the West Indies to communicate to the audience the dire need towards discussing or debating the current situation of the contemporary hybrid black British community.

With the refurbishing of *Elmina's Kitchen* after Dougie's funeral, the restaurant setting is shown having empty walls with the exception of only two pictures, that same framed one of Elmina's and the other for Deli's late brother while all previous posters and signs have been removed. Deli has also changed its name to "Elmina's Plantain Hut" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 51), taken after popular Caribbean food which is also reverberated in the special dish of macaroni pie that Anastasia has prepared before going to apply for a cooking job at the restaurant, as well as the Jamaican ginger cake that Lola prepares in *Statement of Regret*. This emphasizes the core Caribbean atmosphere after the renovations but within the reality of living in the British community. The action is resumed inside the place and Kwei-Armah maintains it internally for the purpose of keeping aside the street life of gangs and violence off stage. Significantly, no violent street action is physically witnessed on the stage, but "an understanding of the street world outside is refracted through the responses of the characters inside the café" (Goddard, 2015, p. 48).

It is that extremely perilous life of violence held off stage which Deli frightfully sees attracting his son towards BMW cars and criminal power of gang culture or, to be more specific, the Jamaican 'yardie' gangster style of life that infatuates young blacks torn between the two cultures, so that when Ashley exits at one instance, Deli "stares at the door . . . with great concern in his eyes" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 15). It likewise sets father and son at extreme ends or "poles apart", as Rajan asserts (2013, p. 1) and the stage directions even exhibit that difference indicating that Ashley "has no respect for anyone older than himself except for Digger" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 12), describing a feature of the young generation that is also reverberated in Kwesi in *Fix Up* who "makes his way to the back of the store almost as if he doesn't want to say hello to Brother Kiyi and Carl" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 105) on his first appearance on stage. A clear example is Digger since black street gangsters like him have a huge negative influence on the younger generation of men who, as reiterated by Baygee, get dazzled by those "Yardies that eating up Hackney. They giving children BMWs, who could complete with that, eh?" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 26). The only time killing is enacted, not only in this play but in the whole triptych, is at the tragic ending of the play. Though Ashley has managed to join Digger and obtain the BMW, yet the cost of it is his own life; he simply loses everything. Ironically, at the moment Digger manages to exercise his authority over Ashley after the latter becomes part of his gang, Digger himself orders the young man to kill his father for acting as an informer to the police on their latest murder act mentioned in the news. However, Ashley's hands "are shaking a little" so, in a sudden unexpected action, Digger "pulls out his gun and shoots Ashley dead", then "looks to Deli . . . [and] . . . exits", leaving the horrified father described as kneeling by the dead body of his son, covering him then "With one final glance around, he stares at the picture of his mother, then walks out of the restaurant" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 95). That highlights the problem of how the Jamaican gangster lifestyle dazzles those youth and which the playwright is focusing on to raise awareness towards addressing the issue in society.

As an outcome of that feeling of displacement that has led the black minorities to see themselves "through prisms of cultural alienation and national detachment" as Napier (2005) envisions (p. 120), such marginalised communities tend to create a different or substitute culture of their own to face the one they are unaccepted in and, as a result, are unable to belong to. They withdraw from that atmosphere or environment and establish one of their own, even if it accentuates crime, violence and gun culture. Such understanding is best expressed in Bird's (2003) review of *Elmina's Kitchen*,

*When a minority community are disempowered through racism and discrimination, the marginalised community often responds by building an alternative culture. The culture they build can be one that re-enforces positive elements from their traditional values and beliefs or one that can internalize their own repression, elevating the very forces that have led to their own alienation. (para. 2)*

Such repression resulting from racism is the dominant feeling with the characters. Unfortunately, the culture they build differs between Deli, a second generation immigrant who fails in upholding and propagating the cultural heritage of his ancestors and the young third generation of immigrants born in Britain as his son. Amid such a society that still does not fully accept or include diversity of race and colour, several black youth prefer to join the gang culture in a reaction to their feeling of repression and alienation as previously indicated. Apparently, joining gangs gives black youth the fake sense of security they lack in society but, which they erroneously believe, grants them with the power to survive in the community. It bestows on them an elusive sense of belonging but which results in their becoming criminals due to reverting to violence and murder. What Gibbs' (2000) explicates chronicles the extent of how such gangs function among youth, as well as justifies and confirms Bird's claim above. She elicits that the gang:

*becomes an alternative structure through which these marginalized minority youths can achieve certain basic psychological needs (social identity, self-esteem/self-image, sense of security, and redirection of anger and aggression), basic social needs (social structure, social support and social activities), and basic socioeconomic needs (source of income, social status)". (p. 91)*

They lead a fake life of power and illusive sense of security that mostly amounts to a counter-reaction. Eventually, they have been related to stereotype crime life, as in the case of Ashley which is an issue of great concern to Kwei-Armah. What the playwright is focusing on is presenting the situation of those youth to raise the awareness of society to address that issue and avoid its dangerous consequences in criminality. He raises that question, pushing towards society to join and discuss how an action has to be taken. According to him, the priority in writing these plays is not their critical success as much as "the achievement of having something that my great-grandchildren could read and say, 'That was my ancestor's view of the Britain he found at the turn of the century'" (2009, p. xi). It is obvious then that, to Kwei-Armah, history is of vital importance for within it is the making of one's social and political identity. According to Mirza (1997), the issue of blackness in Britain is an obvious signifier:

*Being "black" in Britain is about a state of "becoming" (racialised); a process of consciousness, when colour becomes the defining factor about who you are. Located through your "otherness" a "conscious coalition" emerges: a self-consciously constructed space where identity is not inscribed by a natural identification but a political kinship. Now living submerged in whiteness, physical difference becomes a defining issue, a signifier, a mark of whether or not you belong. Thus to be black in Britain is to share a common structural location; a racial location. (p. 3)*

This is again reflected in the other two plays of the triptych. The setting atmosphere in *Fix Up* and *Statement of Regret* are also very indicative of black cultural aspects. Just like *Elmina's Kitchen*, the action is all set in one place, *Fix Up* black consciousness bookstore owned by Jamaican Brother Kiyi. It is located in Tottenham that is mainly a hybrid West Indian

inhabited area. Throughout the action, it is clear that the place is itself the main cultural signifier, and the stage directions show very specifically that it is

*Black History month. . . We are in 'Fix Up', a small, old-school, 'Black conscious' bookstore. The place is much too small to hold the many shelves and bookcases that jam and squeeze up next to each other" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 101)*

then continues to describe how Brother Kiyi, who has changed his British 'slave' birth name, keeps the place well organized with signified cultural emblems,

*Although at first sight the shop looks chaotic, with no subject labels or even indicators, to the trained eye it is perfectly arranged. Starting at the shelf closest to the door, each subject is in alphabetical order. . . . Sitting nobly on each and every bookshelf . . . are African statues and carvings of giraffes, busts of great leaders, . . . Ashanti stools . . . Various Kentes and African cloths are hung on what little wall space there is left. Hanging from the ceiling in a less ordered fashion are a few dusty-looking male and female African outfits. . . .(Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 101)*

The stage is set in a cultural aspect that is linked to black heritage significance; black celebrities, clothing, statues, stools, recording and books. The reference to Garvey's speech recording recalls heritage via the name that is not physically present in the play. Brother Kiyi endorses that as an essential element in his life or so it appears; he has suffered from racist outlooks for marrying a white woman to the extent that he later killed her, was sentenced in jail and his daughter was raised among a white family. To him, clinging to revive the bookstore legacy is his weak ambitious faith that knowledge through education is the key towards liberation.

Knowledge/education is a key element with Brother Kiyi. Kwei-Armah manifests how black education and economic status are in a state of conflict with the contemporary youth who are detached from the struggle of their ancestors and their culture. In *Elmina's Kitchen*, Ashley discards his studies as he considers education to be senseless; it brings no revenue or award a person a good economic status. The result is that he has been against Deli all along, even refusing to perform his food delivery role; all this in a reckless desire to join Digger's gang life that would offer him a higher economic status as he reckoned. When he tries to approach Digger, he does that by first "checking to see that his dad can't hear" as described in the stage directions (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 14). Such a situation is also an indication of the ruthlessness of black political activists who do not focus on the economic problems of black youths, but rather direct themselves towards the British whites. An evident reference in *Fix Up* is the setting that is being discussed here. Despite the fact that there are very few customers who currently care to read, Brother Kiyi still insists on struggling hard to maintain the bookstore in order to uphold black consciousness for the nourishment of the mind. Deep inside he is in a conflict between what he upholds and his inability to repay the loan and keep the place running. Though the stage directions elicit that "over the door and above [his] till enclosure is a sign reading 'CLOSING DOWN SALE,'" yet another sign above the bin reads "HELP US KEEP OPEN – ANY DONATION WELCOME" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 101). He even encourages Carl, the "local care-in-the-community delivery boy" as described in the dramatis personae, to read and also provides him with support to do so. For him, reading black history books is an essential and vital factor in asserting identity, voicing his author in this stance. That is why he keeps upholding his belief and, consequently, his heritage business. Though also on the verge of having his bookstore business terminated due to its financial losses and debts, he goes even further and keeps ordering more slave narratives that he treasures to the extent of prohibiting their being borrowed, but allows any interested readers to view them inside.

To Kwei-Armah, as to Brother Kiyi, the bookstore is the embodiment of heritage. Kwei-Armah believes that the knowledge of one's black heritage is the initial step towards reaching peace with oneself and one's own identity and would free blacks from what Goddard (2015) describes as the "impact of the legacy of slavery on black lives in contemporary Britain" (p. 15). In the triptych introductory notes to *Fix Up*, the playwright endorses that belief by highlighting that, "A community without knowledge of itself, its history, soon self-destructs because the present isn't big, strong or robust enough to sustain the needs of fully rounded human beings" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. xi). History bequeaths them with their cultural identity but which black youth are detached from and, ultimately, that negatively affects the whole of their community; so detachment is not the key to a solution. Though British-born, he himself experienced the feeling of displacement in the sixties and seventies. In the same interview mentioned above with Davis, Kwei-Armah admits that as a young man he suffered from that and felt no sense of belonging to a culture:

*I never had a home. I used to call myself at sixteen famously a "universal alien". When I walked out on the streets in London, they'd say "Go back home, you black bastard". When I went to the West Indies they'd say, "You're English". When I go to Africa, they say "Go home. Look at you, Bob Marley". I'd never had a home until I discovered that I was an African and that actually I was a diasporic African. And it just so happens that I can call myself now Black British. (as cited in Davis and Fuchs, 2006, p. 247)*

That feeling of cultural detachment but which is coupled with the desire to substitute it with economic power is clearly corroborated in different characters' views, reverberating the cultural shift within the community. In scene two, the conversation between Brother Kiyi and Norma, his "long-time best friend", evinces the perspectives about books and the outlook of economic seizure that Kwei-Armah is indicating and which he opposes. Norma, who already wears trendy wigs which Brother Kiyi criticizes for it is a clear detachment from Caribbean culture, attempts to convince him to address his financially losing bookstore. After numerous years striving to maintain an intellectual outlet for educated black middle class minds, his business would be changed into a beauty shop that is currently in vogue. His frustration stems from such a

distressful concern, that the beauty of the mind would turn into a physical appearance business. Brother Kiyi and Kwesi represent that clash in their contradictory perceptions of the bookstore, the setting signifier of knowledge/education.

Linked to the above is further cultural representation in the setting. Just as in the prologue of *Elmina's Kitchen* there are African representations in the man in African costume with a gurkel in his hands but who is never clearly identified, so is the case in *Fix Up*, for there is also "a lone female figure in traditional African headgear playing the gurkel" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 51). Besides, the playwright also identifies three "non-present characters" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 100) in its dramatis personae. These characters are only apparent via allusions to their work and that endows the play with their ancestral presence. In admiration, Brother Kiyi quotes or refers to those three characters, Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay and James Baldwin in one of his methods to cling to his heritage through them. Their presence is felt morally and spiritually through references to their work whether speeches, poems or music. The stage directions mark that Garvey's speech is played via "an old 1920s recording" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 101) before the action of the play commences, part of a speech by Baldwin is recited by Brother Kiyi (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 112) while McKay's poem, *If We Must Die*, is read by Carl with Brother Kiyi's assistance (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 123). Yet such allusions are senseless to black youth who no more care for intellectual food. The different perspectives of Brother Kiyi and Kwesi again accentuate that. Whereas the former insists on the knowledge of history as if living it in his books as well as slave narratives and still organises the books very carefully on the stacked shelves, the latter cannot and does not regard it important to relate to history. Kwesi adopts the then current trend of economic rather than cultural power and, hence, the unimportance of having a place with books that fail to find readers. To that young black activist, such narratives are "shit", to which "Old Kiyi is addicted" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 133), as he comments to Alice. Kwesi's main goal is to endorse the current trend towards economic survival, even if it means disposing of the bookstore and embarking on the trendy business of a beauty salon:

KWESI. . . . People don't want – books. They wanna party, and look good, have the latest hairstyles, and nails and tattoos. That's where niggers be at, Kiyi. They ain't spending shit in here. Why should the other man take our money? That's why we powerless, cos we ain't where the money at.

BROTHER KIYI. It ain't about money!

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

BROTHER KIYI. Selling Afro-sheen gonna get you respect?

KWESI. It's gonna get me into the position that when you want to renew your lease you come to me! (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 161)

The above conversation explicates that juxtaposition. For Kwesi, self-determination and asserting oneself in a racist community could only be attained through economic power which, for Brother Kiyi, means further detachment from his cultural identity. Pearce (2015) confirms that this "provides the locus for the exploration of a generational and gendered debate on approaches to black political activism and the route to self-determination" (p. 134). The replacement of the bookstore, the signifier of culture, by the hair and beauty shop is forcefully emphasized in the last scene when its owner is extremely devastated at the loss of his cultural treasure and, as per the stage directions:

*Brother Kiyi is sitting in the middle of the store. He is both physically and mentally in a world of his own.*

*Slowly he starts to chop off his locks. When all are gone, he runs his hands through what remains of his hair. His hands eventually fall on his face. He screams. (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 164-05)*

This action functions as a clear signification of his status and that of the community. The playwright skillfully symbolises the loss of black mental culture with the chopping of his hair. He loses all he has vainly been upholding to maintain and, in a compelling moment, it all collapses and vanishes into thin air. He cuts his hair, his most treasured cultural-style dreadlocks that is another link between him and the past. In a remarkable statement Boles (2005) reflects on how that incident is dramatised, postulating that, as the place is emptied from books and the bookshelves are taken out of the audience's sight, this "suggest[s] the grandness of the ideas contained in the bookstore while also reflecting its emptiness" (p. 725). In an ironic reversal of what he has all along been against, the current hair and beauty shop business will eventually replace his long-kept bookstore.

Moving to the setting of *Statement of Regret*, the black think-tank office encompasses African, black British and Caribbean employees. Again, Kwei-Armah has no action operating outside the office as in the whole triptych. It is conspicuous how Kwei-Armah presents the characters as all-black, yet there is inter-racial or inter-ethnic tension between them pertaining to their origins. Likewise, just as the two preceding plays, the setting signifies the black atmosphere the playwright conveys as the first lines plainly state:

*We are in the offices of the Institute of Black Policy Research (IBPR) – a privately run political think-tank. . . .*

*On the walls are geopolitical maps of the Black world: Africa, the United States, the Caribbean, Australia, etc. Socio-economic breakdowns of Britain and America are mixed in with pleasant Afrocentric art – Chris Offili, etc. (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 173)*

The office decoration, as the restaurant in *Elmina's Kitchen*, includes some art of Offili, the black British painter and others as indicated above. The eight characters who physically appear and engage in the action throughout are mainly eight while there is also the feature of a non-present one just like the other two preceding plays. However, all are black British from different origins, Caribbean, Nigerian, West African or Trinidadian. Ironically, rather than collaborating together as a unity, there is racial antagonism between them that rises to the surface at certain moments of disagreement as seems to lend itself between

Alice and Kwesi in *Fix Up*. Blacks do not easily accept mixed races or consider them pure blacks, but believe they just cling to the privileged side which is why he is suspicious of Alice. He considers her and similar mixed-race personalities to only stick to blacks when they feel it befits them as is clear in the following conversation:

KWESI. I don't do your type!

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

KWESI. West Indians. You guys are weak. . . I don't trust you type of people. I see you coming in here trying to be down, so when the white man thinks he's choosing one of us you're there shouting, 'Hey, I'm black.' But you ain't. (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 134-05)

That type of antagonism is much more intensely vivid in *Statement of Regret*. The office setting discussions expose the tensions between educated blacks who are hypothetically expected to think together intellectually and to provide a better political and economic status for blacks in society. It indicates that, within the British experience, the black community itself has tension between the different ethnicities pertaining to their genealogical origins, so the problem is not just white versus black, but black inter-racism as well. Such tension in minorities causes problems and hostility among its members. It leads Kwaku to demand slavery reparation to blacks of West Indian descent only regardless of the other ethnicities in the office, which creates hard feelings among the employees. Racism has not yet been eliminated but is still existing and dividing black ethnicities. Kwei-Armah's serious call is to bring the issue to the surface so that inherent feeling could be healed. Once that is accomplished, then from it would emerge the involvement in society as diasporic black British without sharp distinction of their genealogy, be they African, African-Caribbean or from any other black context.

Connected to the setting and stage directions as signifiers in the triptych is the element of the past. It permeates the plays in different means and varying degrees, conveyed in the setting, the music, the references to slavery and the need to proceed by exorcising that feeling of displacement as has been tackled in *Elmina's Kitchen*, for example. The stage directions in the prologue mentioned above, Elmina's picture on the wall of the restaurant besides the man in African costume playing the gurkel and performing a ritual are all signifiers of the past cultural atmosphere, whether African Caribbean or the original African one back in the ages of slavery. Further elaboration would be what Peacock (2008) remarks that the action of the African man could be a ritual performance that could participate in the "eradication of present evils" (p. 54) in social practice towards blacks or the internal slavery memories of the suffrage of that community. It would be of value to refer to Dr. DeGruy Leary's theory on what she calls "Post traumatic slave syndrome" (2005). It is the title of her book which has inspired Kwei-Armah in writing *Statement of Regret* and is even mentioned in it by Adrian and Idrissa (2009, 201-202). Her study exposes how past slavery has affected the psyche of all its descendants in the United States of America with such a trauma. Leary considers history, heritage and the effect of past slavery is inherent in African Americans and Caribbeans and comments that those of them in Britain are living "the illusion of inclusion" (2007, para. 16), especially the older generations. With Kwei-Armah, the past influences the reality of the characters from the first and second generation immigrants whereas it does not count for the youth who have little connection with their ancestral history that led them to be marginalised. Those youth are mistakenly led into believing that violence is the key to a stable life in a society that does not accept them on terms of race.

The repercussions of past history are even more prominent in *Fix Up*. Brother Kiyi is living in the past of black icons, mostly African American leaders, activists, poets, artists and others. His bookstore is loaded and packed with volumes that contain black memories of the past through such figures. The man is torn between the past he envisions as glorious heritage and the present racist British society that is heading towards a consumer culture of appearances. Consequently, he focuses on directing the younger generation towards knowing their past, for his "remedy is to educate the young in Black history which British schooling has neglected or suppressed" as Lucas elicits (2007, p. 244). Kwei-Armah vividly divulges how Brother Kiyi deals with the ordered boxes of books delivered by DHL, stating that he "comes swiftly towards the boxes. He approaches them with reverence" (2009, p. 104); then when the slave narratives are noticed by Carl, Brother Kiyi keeps pulling out a book after another from the box, "carefully opens it and looks through", while glorifying the black celebrities in them to Carl, "You know what these are? . . . These are the great voices of we past. Twenty-four volumes of truth!" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 105). While pointing towards slave narratives at another moment, he asserts to Norma, "This is history" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 115). Kwei-Armah insists that such "tremendous community resources – the black bookstores – were dying out, and with them, I believed, the knowledge and wisdom those stores were set to impart" (2009, p. xi). Voicing his creator's stance, Brother Kiyi believes that the knowledge of a community's historical legacy is the key to life. Alice also acts as a signifier embodiment of the tension between that great past that Brother Kiyi and the playwright regret losing. Described in the dramatic personae as a "beautiful but troubled visitor to the store" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 100), the audience witness her coming to terms with self-realisation when she reads the slave narratives in the bookstore and learns about that harsh issue of racism and the difference in treatment between dark and light-skinned blacks.

From *Fix Up* to *Statement of Regret*, the past is embodied Kwaku, the old businessman Soby, and Val as its character signifiers. Soby is only physically visible to Kwaku whereas his son, Adrian, could only hear his voice without seeing anybody in the room and, accordingly, considers his father in a confused state of mind for talking to himself. Kwaku is the main character haunted by it or, more specifically, confused and feels depressed for not living up to his deceased father's desire in upholding his Caribbean culture; due to that he focuses on drinking to forget. Soby rebukes him for changing his British born name to an African rather than a West Indian one, affirming,

*That name-changing thing you did, I know is a long time ago, but I didn't like it . . . it embarrasses all of us when you West Indians go and change your name to some African something. You're not African." (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 208)*

He confirms the issue where inter-cultural tension arises as priorly mentioned.

The third sign to be analysed and which is intermingled with the setting and the past is music. It serves as an obvious signifier of culture addressed in the triptych. In the earlier mentioned prologue to *Elmina's Kitchen*, the West African musical instrument, the gurkel, has been introduced. Kwei-Armah (2009) defines it in the prologue as "a one-string African guitar famed for possessing the power to draw out spirits" (p.5). It is a traditional musical instrument used in rituals to exorcise malicious spirits towards spiritual cleanliness. The same ritual here formulates an African/Caribbean rather than a British setting which, though detached from the reality of the scene, suggests ancestral rituals that are part of a cultural origin aiming towards malady healing of a hybrid nature. Pearce (2015) supports that as well by specifying that the action provides "a bridge to the liberating space of the collective memory" of blacks in the West Indies and Britain (p. 137).

The reference to the gurkel is significant. That musical instrument the man is holding still in his hands, the music and the powder serve here as signifiers to the African and African Caribbean ancestral past. To link it to the past history, it is quite significant that the music played is a "lament" song giving the audience an impression that "traces in sound the movement of slaves from Africa to the USA" (Pearce, 2015, p. 142) or the Caribbean. In addition, at the beginning of Act Two, the stage directions again mention the same musical signifier during the funeral of Dougie, who got killed in prison on the day he was expected to be released, which is another clear indication of the spirit of violence and gang culture discussed before. As previously mentioned in the analysis of the setting, a single solitary female in a traditional African head coveris playing the gurkel (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 51) for a slow blues song sung by all the cast before the action commences in scene one. The song, "You Gotta Move" is quite an indicative signifier and is what Kwei-Armah is trying to address. While there is no public action taken for black British people to effect a change in their status yet, whatever the status, life is just moving along without improvement:

You may be rich / You may be poor  
 You may be young / You may be old  
 But when the Lord gets ready you ga'da move  
 You may be black / You may be white  
 You may be wrong / You may be right  
 But when the Lord gets ready you ga'da move . . . (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 51)

From here arises the need for raising awareness towards the issue of the community status. Society must commence addressing such critical issues that marginalise blacks and affect their presence, education and jobs in society. Through music as a signifier, culture and identity are pushed to the forefront. To further illustrate, alongside that song, the play includes several other instances of music that are likewise rich with connotations. When Clifton, Deli's father who has arrived to attend his son's funeral, sings in a state of semi-drunkenness and ironically refers to colonial history and blacks in England, the picture is even more vibrant yet dimmer in portraying racism and the feeling of displacement. He admits, "They use to call me culture master", then starts the song that painfully foreshadows the black's political and social status in the country. Though the song mentions Clyde Best, the Bermudan best football striker in the West Ham league in the late sixties and seventies, yet the audience would still shout in the stadium, "Go home you black bastard":

Oh England, what a wonderful land,  
 In England what you must understand,  
 Is whatever you do, wherever you rise,  
 Please realise, you could never disguise  
 You's a black man in a cold land. (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 55)

The words, though sung merrily, project the inherent painful sense of displacement that blacks consider is their reality which commenced with the first generation of immigrants to Britain. But though they are given the British nationality yet, due to skin colour, he is confirming that the same sensation is continuing throughout their descendants, his son's and grandson's lives which, to him, would also extend onwards. The situation of his son and grandson is itself a verification of the meaning behind the song. Over decades in Britain, Caribbean immigrants of the first generation onwards have not yet been able to properly mingle in its society; they are still living in Hackney's Murder Mile, mainly a dangerous black neighbourhood surrounded by a majority of Jamaican descent yardie gangsters.

Just as music plays a major role in *Elmina's Kitchen*, Kwei-Armah likewise refers to it several times in the other two plays. In one instance in *Fix Up*, music is allied to African dancing. As soon as scene three of this one-act play commences, the stage directions present the main character, Brother Kiyi, having a cassette recorder on with a tape of American blues of African origin music that "gives out a very percussive rhythm made of hand-claps and foot-stomps" at which he sings "an old slave work-chant". That song here signifies past colonial times of Caribbean slaves in the cotton fields; he dances to the music "as if he is picking cotton from the ground and then cutting cane with two cutlasses" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 135). Another example is when, at the end of the play, he is shattered for facing the reality of his bookstore's turning into a beauty shop and soberly sings the "blues slave chant 'Adam' to himself. Very slowly, void of emotion". The song is also very significant in its being reminiscent of their colonial past in the West Indies as helpless slaves, "Ohhhhhh Eve, where is Adam. Ohhhhhh Eve, Adam's in the garden picking up leaves" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 165).



Besides the inclusion of songs, there are references in the stage directions to Jamaican reggae and ragga music. At the beginning of scene one, there is emphasis on the use of the Jamaican reggae and ragga music. Using strong rhythmic drum beats accompanied by electric guitars, reggae music emerged in the late 1960s then swiftly became a characteristic of the country due to its being "widely perceived as a voice of the oppressed" (Cooper, 2006, para. 1). It has later swiftly spread across the Atlantic to become very popular not only in the West Indies, but in Britain as well. Similarly, ragga music followed and started with the political outbursts in the late 1970s to also later become a significant feature of Jamaica. It is associated with fast strong rhythms combined with offbeats and rap as a sort of dancehall music that has developed into the contemporary deejay type of music (Cooper, 2014, para. 1). Both types are referred to several times in the plays. In *Elmina's Kitchen*, while "the ragga tune 'Sufferer' by Bounty Killer" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 5) is being stridently played on the television, its words fluctuate back and forth between British and Caribbean accents and complete the connection with the past time conveyed,

*Born as a sufferer, grow up as a sufferer, struggle as a sufferer, fe mek it as a sufferer, fight as a sufferer, survive as a sufferer, move against the ghetto ah most ah dem ah sufferer ah!"* (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 6).

The music fills the atmosphere with its strong rhythmic beats reflecting the pain of displacement that the black British community still suffer from, however relative it is to each generation of immigrants. In *Fix Up*, Carl, being the main character influenced by Brother Kiyi and his insistence on history, starts the DJ with a reggae song on one's historical roots, "Me love me roots and culture, murderer, / How black people dem a suffer – murderer!" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 140). Likewise, in *Statement of Regret*, reggae music is utilised again as a threaded signifier in the triptych. As a specimen of that, the stage directions designate the playing of "Max Romeo's roots rock reggae classic 'One Step Forward'" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 188) after the conversation between Kwaku and Issi at the end of the play's first scene. Kwaku's disappointment at the failure of black organisations in maintaining consistency in their thoughts has made him reach a standstill point at which he believes they are unable to step forward. In scene three of act two, during a loud discussion between Michael and Kwaku on racism, the former, as basically Nigerian, announces that Africans were "a great civilization"; he thus intimidates the latter, as a West Indian and so Kwaku screams, "If you were so great why didn't you come and get us? Why didn't you come and reclaim us when we were dying in the fields". At that moment, Kwei-Armah brings in the blues to be chanted angrily and vociferously by Val, "We were not slaves, we were not slaves, we were enslaved . . . people, human beings" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 239). That chant terminates the heated discussion. Kwei-Armah thus significantly employs black ragga music and the blues towards cultural significance in the plays.

Drumming is also reverberated as an indication of black rhythmic music. It is abundantly referred to in the stage directions, amounting over fifty five times in the triptych. Beats are used as intervals at various situations in the plays. Kwei-Armah culturally contextualises that; the more the situation gets tense or agitating, the more the beats reflected. With the exception of songs and the blues, it is interesting to note that Kwei-Armah does not have any other accompanying musical sound to indicate the situation, the shift between scenes or a given remark except that of rhythmic beats. Historically, beats and drumming follow rhythmic patterns from African or Sub-Saharan heritage that have been transmitted across the Atlantic to the Caribbean and black music chiefly depends on that. They constitute the effect of West Indian indigenous folk form influence of African rhythm or drum beats. Such beats function as signs and, more importantly, they are a means of communication via a discipline outside language. In ethnomusicology, the tradition of African rhythmic drumming is a medium of expressive communication depending on the situation as well as contributing to its meaning as a means of cultural expression. This could best be expressed in the words of Anyahuru, the Nigerian musician, "I kotala ihe nkwa ma di ika?", the translation of which is, "Do you understand what my drum is saying?" (Nzewi, Anyahuru & Ohiaramunna, 2001, p. 2). As a core element of African culture, it is an intrinsic factor that plays a significant role in shaping the life and identity of its peoples. The use of beats as such on the stage is characteristic to remind the audience that, though the reality of the location is in Britain, yet the African/Caribbean repercussions are surrounding them and in their minds.

Drum beats are mentioned in varying situations to communicate certain attitudes or feelings. They may reflect rebuke, warning, suspicion, threat, tension or others. In *Elmina's Kitchen*, rebuke occurs during discussions between Deli and several characters. In the presence of Anastasia in Act One scene two, a talk is in process between Deli and Ashley when the former rebukes his son for his apathetic attitude and rejection to assist in the restaurant delivery, so beats are played when the son drops down his face in embarrassment (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 28). At another moment in Act Two scene one, they are more frequently played as both men get highly tense while shouting at each other in anger as Deli reprimands him for discarding his college books and dropping his education (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 65). Likewise, in the final scene of the play in Act Two scene four, a suspense beat is played as Ashley raises his gun at his father with shaking hands before being shot by Digger; then "a few beats" are played after Digger's departure coinciding with Deli's palpitations before he could eventually rise from the floor and leave the restaurant (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 95). Rebuke, warning and threats between Deli and Digger also invite beats. Deli's intention to protect his son leads him to warn Digger several times, once against harming Ashley, another for using bad language in the café (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 50) or for that gangster's suspicious threats regarding informers of the gang to the police (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 82). In *Fix Up*, the beats are mentioned when Carl is suspicious of Kwesi's intentions towards the bookstore, when he notices him together with Alice (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 158) and when Brother Kiyi finally discovers the truth about Kwesi's turning the bookstore into a beauty shop in the last scene of the play (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 160). When Brother Kiyi is alone in that same scene, devastated and tense at the loss of his bookstore,

beats are played while he sadly imagines hearing character voices and the different art forms from his books (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 147). Similarly, in *Statement of Regret*, beats are presented in moments when pain and tension grow between the different employees' ethnic groups in both scenes four of Acts One and Two (Kwei-Armah, 2009, pp. 215, 245-6), also during the rebuking confrontation between Soby and the drunk Kwaku in Act One scene three (Kwei-Armah, 2009, pp. 208-09) besides other instances. Employing the beat rhythms with such density allows for the signification of cultural space within the action of the plays. It is remarkable how Kwei-Armah utilises such forms to provide the action with the black atmosphere that serves his purpose.

Alongside the above analysed signs, sound is also an evident signifier of culture. The gesture sound of kissing teeth, or sucking teeth, is repeatedly recurrent in the stage directions. That feature is a slang oral form that produces a sort of hissing sound made by sucking air via clenched teeth, implying different significations. Patrick and Figueroa (2004) define it as a "velaric ingressive airstream modulated by a dual closure" (p. 383), while Victor (2011) describes it as one of a collection of "aural . . . wordless slang", adding that the expression is "widely recognised in its 'headword' form or understood from the sense of the words employed" (p. 291). Dorvlo (2011) further elaborates it stating that the sound itself "is a click which usually lasts for some few seconds (but can also be extended into several seconds) to indicate varying degrees of disgust or contempt" (p. 127). Rickford and Rickford (1980) as well as Dorvlo (2011) assert that its meaning becomes more powerful in relation to the performer's pitch and the length of time it takes, for the higher the pitch and the longer it takes, the more negative its connotations are depending on the intention of its producer (p. 357; p. 127). That gesture sound is, therefore, a code signifier of different emotions, responses or reactions. It could signify disapproval, disdain, anger, contempt, vexation, blame or otherwise that is understood by both partners involved in the situation. Such a characteristic sound is commonly encountered in Jamaica, Trinidad and the Bahamas, mainly the West Indies (Patrick and Figueroa, 2004, p. 384) in general and is naturally expressed by the characters in situations that invite it as relevant, be it produced "intentionally or unintentionally, directly or indirectly" (Figueroa, 2005, p. 86). As also noted by Patrick and Figueroa (2004), it is considered as a linguistic feature of the region that extends to the whole African diaspora; a sound that characterises Afro-Caribbeans and is regarded stereotypical of West Indians in Britain (p. 388). Its performance is genuinely rooted in the communal social norms as a characteristic feature of discourse (Patrick and Figueroa, 2004, pp. 389-390) and, hence, a means of cultural communication that is naturally comprehended among people of that geographical area.

Kissing teeth sound is found in different instances in the plays. The very first scene of *Elmina's Kitchen* presents the "vexed" Digger producing it. He is angered and "kisses his teeth in Deli's direction" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 6) when the latter gets irritated and disapprovingly rebukes him for using a vulgar comment. Deli, aspiring to be a good parent to Ashley, finds difficulty in achieving his goal though he rejects the use of slang gang language in the café. Such utterance Digger makes infuriates him and he objects, "How many times I got to tell you about language like that in here, Digger?" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 6). Besides, the uncertainty at the arrival time of his own released brother from prison in the following scene, Deli "kisses his teeth" in response to that inquiry of Baygee's commenting, "Ahh you know Dougie, he said today *sometime* but I'll believe it when I see him" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 22). In scene three of the same act, Deli's negative attitude is reflected in that same sound. When Anastasia tears a page from her *Acts of faith* which suggests learning lessons from disasters and sticks it to the counter, Deli contemptuously comments, "What rubbish . . . rubbish" while "kissing his teeth" and in disbelief and despair outbursts in Jamaican accent that he uses when vexed:

*Ah my life me ah talk 'bout you na! and you know what me discover? Man is not supposed to want. I wanted, I could have been da don, and what happen? Bam, it get mash. I wanted to, I fucking worked hard to be there with Ashley and his mum! Bam, it get mash. I wanted my brother home, here with me and what happen? One step from the fucking gate, bam, he get mash. Don't tell me about my life. (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 43)*

At a significant incident, with the start of Act Two scene three when Deli enters the restaurant alone and the television is on with the newsreader mentioning a murder incident with huge gunshot, he switches to the God channel. He then hears the words of an American preacher shouting, "It shouldn't be no surprise our inner cities are burning up. It is the sinnnnnnnns of the *fathers* bearing down on our youth". In sudden resentment and contempt, "kisses his teeth" and immediately searches for the music channel where a video of 'Satan Strong' song is playing. Kwei-Armah (2009) pictures him at that moment looking "as if stiff, he moves his fists, almost warming-up style, and punches the air" (p. 76). That has been bearing hard on him for his relation with Ashley after divorcing his mother, a continuum of the same pain he himself has lived with a divorced mother and no proper relationship with his own father, Clifton. This recalls to mind an incident in the previous seen when Clifton gets furious and upset at Baygee's remark on noticing Deli turning cold since his father's arrival to the country, the former is described as "kissing his teeth" and with a shaking hand shouts,

*Man should be glad not mad to see him fadder. . . what happen between his mother and me is between his mother and me. He's a fucking divorced man, he should know that" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 60).*

In *Fix Up*, Kwesi makes the same sound when Carl confronts him with his suspicious discovery of the hidden hair products in the former's boxes. Carl's suspicion around Kwesi's sly intentions have risen to the surface, confirming all what he has been noticing in him throughout (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 144). As for *Statement of Regret*, it is mainly Val who makes that sound at different instances, whether for a direct or indirect emphasis. In a conversation between Michael and Idrissa, the latter makes a comment on the genealogical history of African Caribbeans, illustrating that Liberians and West Indians have a percentage of white blood that thwarts them from being purely black. Instantly, Val gets upset and angrily disapproves by

protesting, "That's not a very nice thing to say, is it?" as he "kisses his teeth loudly" (Kwei-Armah, 2009, p. 189) in disdain and disapproval. This matches what Dorvlo refers to above, that the higher the pitch sound, the more intense negative effect results. It bears the negative connotation of the inner clashes between different racial origins of the black community in Britain. In the political think-tank, there can be no homogeneity when such a scornful attitude is apparent and, as Kwei-Armah (2009) realizes that, here he rings a bell for the black community to unite in order to appropriately debate their issues, "talk, fight and argue" (p. xiv) as one entity. This is also a repercussion of what Leary (2007) confirms, "If we can have unity, there is nothing that can stop us, nothing" (para. 17).

In conclusion, this paper analyses Kwei-Armah's technique in documenting the experience of the black British community in the triptych. As no previous work has mainly focused on that aspect, the paper tackles it in depth while verifying how the playwright manages to utilise it towards attaining his goal. In so doing, the basis on which the argument is built is the sign notion of Saussure's semiotics theory that he considers as an entity existing in a social milieu, thus reflecting the relation between the individual and society. Saussure's labelling of the sign as engulfing signifier and signified or the sound image and concept contributes to the comprehension of the triptych and its signification. Moreover, the analysis reveals how Saussure's sign entity is employed by the playwright to reflect aspects of Caribbean/West Indian culture and its link to the African diaspora. Those signs are represented in the setting, stage directions, references to the past as well as music and sound. The interpretation of that signification enriches the meaning of the cultural issues encompassed in *Elmina's Kitchen*, *Fix Up* and *Statement of Regret* as a threaded continuum, to reach the ultimate goal of the playwright in raising communal awareness among the black community, not only to just debate issues, but try to address them. Blacks from different areas in the globe need to be aware and proud of their cultural heritage in order to proceed. Realizing that would assist them in their being united and liberate themselves from the ordeal of the feeling of displacement in their country.

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