

Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain

This is the first monograph to document and analyse the plays written by Black and Asian women in Britain. The volume explores how Black and Asian women playwrights theatricalize their experiences of migration, displacement, identity, racism, and sexism in Britain. Plays by writers such as Tanika Gupta, Winsome Pinnock, Maya Chowdhry, and Amrit Wilson, among others – many of whom have had their work produced at key British theatre sites – are discussed in some detail. Other playwrights' work is also briefly explored to suggest the range and scope of contemporary plays. The volume analyses concerns such as geographies of un/belonging, reverse migration (in the form of tourism), sexploitation, arranged marriages, the racialization of sexuality, and asylum seeking as they emerge in the plays, and argues that Black and Asian women playwrights have become constitutive subjects of British theatre.

GABRIELE GRIFFIN is Professor of Gender Studies at the University of Hull. During the 1990s she edited four volumes of plays with Elaine Aston. Her recent publications include HIV/AIDS: Visibility Blue/s (2000), Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies (with Rosi Braidotti, 2002), and Who's Who in Lesbian and Gay Writing (2002). She is co-editor of the journal Feminist Theory.



CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN MODERN THEATRE

Series editor David Bradby, Royal Holloway, University of London

Advisory board
Martin Banham, University of Leeds
Jacky Bratton, Royal Holloway, University of London
Tracy Davis, Northwestern University
Sir Richard Eyre
Michael Robinson, University of East Anglia
Sheila Stowell, University of Birmingham

Volumes for Cambridge Studies in Modern Theatre explore the political, social, and cultural functions of theatre while also paying careful attention to detailed performance analysis. The focus of the series is on political approaches to the modern theatre with attention also being paid to theatres of earlier periods and their influence on contemporary drama. Topics in the series are chosen to investigate this relationship and include both playwrights (their aims and intentions set against the effects of their work) and process (with emphasis on rehearsal and production methods, the political structure within theatre companies, and their choice of audiences or performance venues). Further topics will include devised theatre, agitprop, community theatre, para-theatre, and performance art. In all cases the series will be alive to the special cultural and political factors operating in the theatres examined.

Books published

Brian Crow with Chris Banfield, An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theatre Mario DiCenzo, The Politics of Alternative Theatre in Britain,

1968-1990:7:84 (Scotland)

Jo Riley, Chinese Theatre and the Actor in Performance

Jonathan Kalb, The Theatre of Heiner Müller

Richard Boon and Jane Plastow, eds., Theatre Matters: Performance and Culture on the World Stage

Claude Schumacher, ed., Staging the Holocaust: the Shoah in Drama and Performance

Philip Roberts, The Royal Court Theatre and the Modern Stage

Nicholas Grene, The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel

Anatoly Smeliansky, The Russian Theatre after Stalin

Michael Patterson, Strategics of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights

Elaine Aston, Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights, 1990–2000

Gabriele Griffin, Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain



Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain

Gabriele Griffin
University of Hull





PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011–4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org © Gabriele Griffin 2003

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Trump Mediaeval 9.25/14 pt. System LATEX 2E [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data Griffin, Gabriele.

Contemporary Black and Asian women playwrights in Britain / Gabriele Griffin.

p. cm – (Cambridge studies in modern theatre)
Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 81725 0

English drama – 20th century – History and criticism.
 Feminist drama,
 English – History and Criticism.
 English drama – Women authors – History and criticism.
 English drama – Black authors – History and criticism.
 English drama – Asian authors – History and criticism.
 English drama – 20th century – History and criticism.
 Women, Black – Great Britain – Intellectual life.

9. Feminism and literature – Great Britain. 10. Women and literature – Great Britain. 11. Woman, Black, in literature. 12. Asians in literature. 1. Title.

II. Series.

PR739.F45G75 2003 822'.914099287 - dc21 2003048991

ISBN 0 521 81725 o hardback

The publisher has used its best endeavours to ensure that the URLs for external websites referred to in this book are correct and active at the time of going to press. However, the publisher has no responsibility for the websites and can make no guarantee that a site will remain live or that the content is or will remain appropriate.



Contents

List of plates vi Acknowledgements viii

- 1 Introduction 1
- 2 Diasporic subjects 36
- 3 Geographies of un/belonging 77
- 4 Unsettling identities 109
- 5 Culture clashes 138
- 6 Racing sexualities 170
- 7 Sexploitation? 195
- 8 Living diaspora now 224

Notes 238
Bibliography 265
Index 285

v



Plates

- Adele Selim as Sultana and Ashvin Kumar as Khuda Buksh in Kali Theatre Company's 1999 production of *Black Shalwar*.
 Photo courtesy of Suki Dhanda. 18
- 2 Shiv Grewal as Bobby Siddiqui, Parminder Sekhon as Zara Metha, and Shelley King as Seema Siddiqui in Kali Theatre Company's 2001 production of *River on Fire*. Photo courtesy of Sheila Burnett. 20
- Parminder K. Nagra as Kiran Siddiqui in Kali Theatre Company's 2001 production of *River on Fire*. Photo courtesy of Sheila Burnett. 23
- 4 Ella Wilder as Irma in the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs 1991 production of 'Talking in Tongues'. Photo courtesy of Simon Annand. 82
- 5 Joanne Campbell as Leela and Cecilia Noble as Sugar in the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs 1991 production of 'Talking in Tongues'. Photo courtesy of Simon Annand. 88
- 6 Glenna Forster-Jones as Medusa and Ellen Thomas as Frieda in Black Theatre Co-operative's 1993 production of Zindika's 'Leonora's Dance'. Photo courtesy of Sheila Burnett. 117
- 7 Judy Hepburn as Leonora, Ellen Thomas as Frieda, and Glenna Forster-Jones as the intervening spirit in Black Theatre Co-operative's 1993 production of Zindika's 'Leonora's Dance'. Photo courtesy of Sheila Burnett. 119
- 8 Doreene Blackstock as Daphine and Toshie Ogura as Melisa in Black Theatre Co-operative's 1993 production of Zindika's 'Leonora's Dance'. Photo courtesy of Sheila Burnett. 122

vi



List of plates

- 9 Joanna Bacon as Eileen and Sayan Akkadas as Kamla in Kali Theatre Company's 1990 production of 'Song for a Sanctuary'. Photo courtesy of Shangara Singh. 150
- 10 Simon Nagra as Pradeep and Kusum Haider as Rajinder in Kali Theatre Company's 1990 production of 'Song for a Sanctuary'. Photo courtesy of Shangara Singh. 155
- Poster for 'Money to Live'. Photo courtesy of Black Theatre Co-operative (now NITRO). 197



Acknowledgements

I first started thinking about this monograph whilst teaching an MA course on 'Race, Ethnicity and Gender' at Kingston University. My thanks therefore go to the students on that course with whom I had many lively debates about these issues, and in particular Ise Obumhense and Honorine Ranivoharisoa whose views, insights, and experiences informed my thinking on these matters. Thanks also go to former colleagues from Kingston University, in particular Tom Betteridge, who offered much stimulating conversation.

In the spring of 2001, Kingston University granted me a sabbatical which enabled me to progress the research for this volume, and in the autumn of 2001 I benefited from an AHRB grant under their leave scheme which gave me important respite from teaching and other duties when I moved to the University of Hull. A grant from the Faculty Research Committee of the University of Hull enabled me to spend some valuable time at the British Library. I would also like to acknowledge the British Academy whose grant enabled archival research at the Bristol Theatre Collection, the Theatre Museum in London, picture research, and the reproduction of the photos in this volume.

Many Black and Asian women playwrights provided time, scripts, production images, conversation, and information. Among them I'd like to thank most particularly Rukhsana Ahmad from Kali Theatre Company who dug through the company's archives for photos, scripts, and information, gave generously of her time and was a delightful visitor to an undergraduate course on 'Contemporary Women's Theatre' I taught at Kingston University. I'd also like to thank Zindika who provided scripts, as well as much insight into her work and into the experience of those children who were left behind

viii



Acknowledgements

in the West Indies as their parents sought to make a life in Britain, and who pointed me in the right direction regarding production photos. Ketaki Kushari Dyson gave me generously of her time and made me aware of the difficulties of living between two cultures in which one's standing as a writer is not the same. Rani Drew answered my emails promptly and provided me with copies of her playscripts in an act of great generosity – my thanks to her. I'd also like to thank Felix Cross of NITRO, formerly the Black Theatre Co-operative, who gave me time and looked through their archives for relevant material and images.

Professor Peter Thomson from Exeter University, Professor Viv Gardner, and Professor David Mayer from Manchester University were among the first to read and comment on my book proposal. Their encouragement and support was important for the project, and I thank them for these. I'd also like to thank Professor David Punter from the University of Bristol, whose paper entitled 'The Hatred of Europe: Postcoloniality, Psychoanalysis, Culture', delivered at the ESSE conference 2000, helped me to shape my own thinking. The two anonymous readers of my original proposal to Cambridge University Press offered useful comments which influenced the scope of this project – my sincere thanks to them.

Staff at the Theatre Collection of the Drama Department of the University of Bristol, in particular Frances Carlyon, were most helpful whilst I stayed there. I also received support from staff at the Theatre Museum in London, including Susan Croft with whom I emailed briefly, from staff in the manuscript collection of the British Library, and from staff in the Special Collections of Leeds University Library, which holds archival material from West Yorkshire Playhouse. At West Yorkshire Playhouse Stacey Arnold graciously and swiftly provided some source material.

In the hunt for production photos the following photographers were particularly helpful: Sheila Burnett, Suki Dhanda, Shangara Singh, Simon Annand, Tim Smith. Their work in all bar one cases appears in this volume.

Among my PhD students Anjona Roy, Sarah Yetunde Tuakli, and Honorine Ranivoharisoa have been particularly important;

ix



Acknowledgements

discussions about their work have impacted on my own writing. Elaine Aston, Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Lancaster, has been a friend for many years, and our collaboration during the late 1980s and first half of the 1990s, when we interviewed women's theatre groups together and co-edited four volumes of plays by women, provided some of the impetus for this work. My thanks to her.

Finally, I'd like to say thanks to Simon Gunn for his unstinting support, advice, suppers, and \dots