



“Reshaping Girlhood, Reimagining Womanhood”: The Female Child Protagonist and the Post-diasporic Condition in Jamaican Female-authored Children’s Literature

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Abstract: The female child protagonist has always been a major figure in the work of several Jamaican female fiction writers. More recently, however, Jamaican female writers from across the diaspora have begun to reveal a new kind of poetics through the presentation of their female child protagonist and the situations they encounter. This paper will explore the use of an emerging post-diasporic poetics in the work of Jamaican Children's Literature author Diane Browne, which introduces fluid female identities constructed through the realities of globalisation and post-diasporic conditions. The female child protagonist represents a newly emerging female sensibility and consciousness, which enables readers to access both girlhood and womanhood through realities and perspectives tied to the migrant experience across different periods of time. Each protagonist portrays a self which exists beyond boundaries and outside of the dictates of the social ideals framing femaleness and the female migrant experience, embedded for so long in the Jamaican culture. Browne challenges both traditional and to some extent postmodern models of womanhood and female identity, through the way each of her female child protagonists are portrayed as they move through a post-diasporic process of navigation of both self and space in Browne's texts.

Key words: girlhood, womanhood, postdiasporic, Caribbean children's Literature, Diane Browne

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“I have come
Without papers
To tell you
I am me”
(from “Third World Girl”)

The journey of Caribbean people can never be characterized as static and linear. We have had a long history of moving across national borders and immersing ourselves in communities other than our own with the hope of gaining economic stability and social mobility. As Franklin W. Knight comments, “[m]igration has been fundamental in the Caribbean experience” (7). As a result, it has been common practice for us to navigate socially constructed realities often alien to our own identities and cultures. Each journey has caused us to constantly acquire new ways of accessing and adjusting to systems in ways that would open doors of possibility for ourselves and our families. Tied to migration is the factor of gender. Gender becomes deeply interwoven into the context of migration because of the large number of Caribbean women who have exited their local Caribbean spaces and entered foreign places with the hope of offering “support [to] their weakened households” (Crawford 2012, 323). The experience of Caribbean women who have sought to explore different avenues through which to provide for their children through migration has been well documented over the years. This reality has constantly situated motherhood as being intricately associated with the experience of migration for, as Charmaine Crawford asserts, “[w]orking-class African-Caribbean women play a central role in their families, as both providers and caretakers of children and of others, marking the interconnectedness of their productive and reproductive roles” (324).

It is important not to utilize the terms “migration” and “diaspora” synonymously for though one has led to another, migration, Meredith Gadsby reminds us, speaks of “the movement and dislocation, whether voluntary or involuntary, of peoples of African descent, from one place to another” (13). The term “diaspora” pulls much more into the equation. As Avtar Brah states in *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996), “at the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of a journey” (182). It is not, Brah explains, that every moment of casual travel is to be associated with the diasporic experience but rather that it is the historic framing of that journey that pulls into existence the concept of diaspora. The concept of diaspora can be complex and contradictory, but through the work of writers like Paul Gilroy, it is now being interrogated more fulsomely by Caribbean literary critics and historians. What tends to remain scant, however, is a representation of the emotional and mental dimensions of the immigrant existing in the diasporic condition.

Many Jamaican female writers have presented the psyche and experiences of the child protagonist as part of their own poetics in the exploration and reconstruction of Caribbean female identity and experience in Caribbean society. Diasporic explorations have been foregrounded in many of the short story collections written by Jamaican writers such as Olive Senior, Velma Pollard, Lorna Goodison, Alecia McKenzie, Curdella Forbes and Paulette Ramsay, to name a few. For decades, these writers have been inscribing the condition and experience of Caribbean women (and men) as they move away from the small, cuddling embrace of the homeland to inhabit foreign spaces which often complicate their identities, creating feelings of displacement and invoking a sense of anxiety. Many of these stories have featured the “foreign mother” whose relationship with her child is severed by the ocean between them but restored through the barrel or the letter that is excitedly received in the local space, especially because it has arrived as the main means of connection between parent and child. There is a way then, that diaspora has always been a felt, if not known, category.

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The migrant experience is therefore not new to Caribbean literature but, without attempting to provide a historical account of migration in the Caribbean, it is noticeable that, as Brah documents, "there has been rapid increase in migrations across the globe since the 1980s" (33). This is due to varied realities: economic inequalities, the desire for better opportunities and political wars, among other factors. The socioeconomic and political shifts brought about through the constantly evolving presence of globalization have, in varied and multiple ways, transformed the experiences associated with diasporic realities. Already associated with notions of diaspora are such experiences as displacement, loss and the never-ending search for an identity or set of identities that will aptly reflect the Caribbean self and community. It is this never-ending search and the need to adapt to constantly shifting time periods and changes in societies across the globe, which has enabled the production of what Brah has termed "new diasporas". For Brah, our understanding of the diaspora needs to accommodate an account of "a homing desire which is not the same thing as [the] desire for a 'homeland'" (189). This homing desire shifts the gaze away from a longing to return to the homeland, to an acceptance of inhabiting geographical spaces away from the homeland, but at the same time being desirous of embracing and establishing in psychological and spiritual ways, a clear set of images and experiences of the Caribbean self, individually and collectively. Such an outlook eliminates notions of fixity and, according to Ngong Toh, "disregards absolutism" in its varied forms (54). Additionally, by moving away from focusing on the notion of the diaspora as a group of people yearning to return at some point to their homeland, this homing desire of which Brah speaks, seems to move us into an understanding of why the term "postdiaspora" has become important. As is usually the case with anything "post", postdiaspora as a concept contains the foundation seeds of the concept of diaspora but extends the boundaries to enable the inclusion of new responses to new realities and new ways of being, within a space that continues to transform and evolve.

The theoretical notion of postdiaspora follows the shifting patterns being introduced by the structures of nations and states as they evolve and begin to

create possibilities for immigrants who are no longer relegated, Michel Laguerre argues, to an “outsider status” (2). Laguerre explains that “[p]ostdiaspora is the latest phase in the evolution of the status of immigrants and their descendants” (17). To speak of the postdiasporic condition then, is to engage in discussion about a new experience for Caribbean immigrants as they are now able to acquire citizenship, which enables them to combine and embody both homeland and hostland identities and realities. The term postdiaspora can therefore be used to speak of the experience of those who inhabit spaces that are both away from the homeland physically and away from the feeling of home psychologically. It speaks of the formation of a community of people who have now begun to embrace notions of difference while at the same time charting a course of and for unity and togetherness, regardless of the “away” space they occupy. As it has been described by Ngong Toh, postdiaspora speaks to a mode of existence where Caribbeanness is celebrated and accepted, based on a system of the coexistence or merging of various cultures, races and classes, to promote progress amongst members of the group. Such a system would be used to enable the construction and/or reconstruction of what he states is a “discourse suitable for Caribbean people attempting to negotiate space in the global stage” (54).

These definitions of postdiaspora are significant because they enable a new way of reading Caribbean literary texts which continuously fuse together past, present and future realities as experienced or constructed not simply by the protagonist in the texts, but also those connected to the protagonist, who must also maneuver their way through the factors and processes resulting from both the act of migration and the consequent changes in their modes of existence. What has not received enough attention however, is the representation of girls and women who experience postdiasporic conditions in Caribbean children’s literature by female writers. Caribbean children’s literature tends to be marginally recognized for the power it contains to articulate the constantly shifting paradigms for children who have had to experience the region through the eyes of globalization, where the foreign space and the local space conflate in complex and ambiguous ways. The Caribbean children’s literature texts which

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deal with this reality often highlight the journey of both the children and the adults as they struggle to understand and survive the diasporic conditions they encounter both in and outside of the foreign space.

In her short story “Girl”, Jamaica Kincaid details the expectations of the process of growth from girlhood into womanhood and the painstaking ways in which this occurs. Though this story is not about migration, diaspora or postdiaspora, what we receive in this story, is a clear indication of the ways in which many Caribbean females are socialized in the home space based on patriarchal traditions and practices which relegated them to conditions of inferiority and oppression because of their identities and experiences. As females, they are constantly being subjected to and suffocated by dominant ideologies emerging out of colonial spaces. The point here is that even when outside of the foreign space, Caribbean women have been accustomed to having their bodies and psyche read and interpreted by outsiders for more than a century and have consequently been a part of a perpetual process of being misunderstood and stifled. They, therefore, have often needed to navigate between foreign impositions of identity and experience forced on them and their own natural states of existence based on the environment and culture of their own “lived reality” in their homeland (Forbes, 27).

The child character has always been an important one in Caribbean literature because he/she was commonly used in literary production to symbolize the growth of the newly independent nation at the end of the colonial period. Caribbean female authors continue to use the child character to play significant roles in their stories but many of these examples are housed within texts that are written for the adolescent/young adult reader. Very few critics have examined the experience of the child negotiating the diasporic and postdiasporic spaces she occupies within children’s literature texts.

The focus of this article is an exploration of the journey of the female child and the female adults with whom she engages in their varied encounters of

postdiaspora realities both in and outside the Caribbean. I examine these representations in two Caribbean children's literature texts written by Diane Browne: the short story collection *Every Little Thing will be Alright* and the chapter book *Island Princess in Brooklyn*. My critical attention is predominantly on the world of the female child protagonists explored by Browne and all they reveal to us about the internal and external conditions of postdiaspora and the possibilities this space and experience offer in helping to reconstruct identity and experience for the Caribbean female. Browne provides new ways of reading the experience of the female child in the twenty-first century through a seemingly calculated presentation of the female consciousness of the child protagonist and through her, the female adults participating in her socialization. This consciousness displays the complexity involved in the navigation of the self as it participates in postdiasporic realities. It highlights the struggle of mothers and daughters, mothers and grandmothers, granddaughters and grandmothers, mothers and aunts and nieces and aunts in the postdiasporic space as they all attempt to retain their own identities and sense of self-worth in spaces which often reject and devalue both these characteristics and the ways in which the female must participate to enable progress and growth at various stages of her life. Significant representation is made of the grandmother figure so commonly present in the historical accounts of the migrant experiences of Caribbean women. Browne allows an exploration of the emotional and mental challenges experienced by different generations of females as all attempt to remain true to themselves and at the same time facilitate the necessary processes that will enable a better life for all.

By presenting the female child in her stories, Browne creates two significant effects. Firstly, she reshapes the way the Jamaican female child sees herself in a world that has become dominated by globalization and as a result has characterized her (her appearance, behaviour, cognitive processes) based on "outside", "foreign" standards, rather than those more naturally suited to her based on her cultural traditions, beliefs and realities. Secondly, Browne portrays the way the Jamaican woman has slowly reconstructed herself based on the circumstances within which she has had to exist. By providing an intimate display

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of the female child's consciousness through her narratives, she reveals the female psyche as it negotiates this diasporic/postdiasporic space and displays the ways in which the Jamaican adult world surrounding the child plays a key role in imposing continued classist, racist and sexist attitudes upon the child, through the traditional perceptions being used by adults to guide the child. By striving to become other than "other", and to be deeply Afrocentric and against all things European, some of Browne's stories demonstrate the ways in which the very same women, affected by prejudice and inequality in the diaspora/postdiaspora, perpetuate age-old practices which are misunderstood and ultimately rejected. What becomes more significant however, is the way healing is enabled through the willingness of the child female protagonist to position herself at a midpoint which enables her to fuse together generations of experiences and emotions in order to chart a new course forward.

It is customary for Caribbean literature to provide models which counter or offer an alternative to Western models, but it is noteworthy that this kind of example is also present in Caribbean children's literature. It is the structure of Browne's stories and the way she utilizes characterization with much more focus on the mental processes of the individual and connects these beautifully with the dialogue and action in the text, that enable us to comprehend the impact of the social on the literary and vice versa. Browne's characterization and narrative technique allow for a practical understanding of the ways in which postdiaspora produces and harnesses much more possibility for hybrid formations of both self and community, which help to reshape patriarchal constructions of girlhood and womanhood in Caribbean society. Additionally, her use of the first-person narrative in many of her books and short stories enables a thorough, intimate presentation of the female sensibility and consciousness in ways that produce deeper understandings of the realities she represents. Critical explorations of Browne's work highlight three main factors present in postdiasporic literature on the Caribbean, which are revealed to the reader through the Caribbean female's participation in and response to postdiasporic conditions: 1) the ability to refashion her identity as Caribbean and as female in both the local and the foreign space; 2) the act of rejecting

Eurocentric patriarchal notions of motherhood and mothering which encourage feelings of alienation, displacement and abandonment for both the mother and the child in the act of migration, and replacing these with what has become known as “transnational motherhood” (Crawford, 331); and 3) the process of reinterpreting the female Caribbean experience within the postdiasporic world.

In her collection of short stories, *Every Little Thing Will be Alright* (2003), Browne demonstrates how diasporic/postdiasporic experiences affect the Jamaican female child in both subtle and overt ways. What is different about Browne’s representation of these conditions however, is that it extends discussions on the emergence of a new kind of response to diasporic realities which subsequently pulls into the equation the postdiasporic condition and the extended notions it offers of ways of negotiating identities and participation in foreign and local spaces. Rather than focusing her stories mostly on the plot of the story, Browne spends significantly more time presenting the thought processes and internal reactions of the child protagonist as she moves through imposed negatives. This introduces a critical principle on the navigation of the new generation of females through the diasporic and into postdiasporic conditions. It is that rather than being focused on fixed moulds shaping the response of black women in previous generations, these female protagonists are choosing more fluid, integrative responses to the challenges they face as citizens, receiving help from immigrant parents or as immigrants themselves who are struggling to adjust in a foreign space. The concept of postdiaspora becomes much more easily comprehensible through the literary representation Browne provides of the way her female child protagonists function within a new diaspora.

Identity has always been an important issue in any critical discussion on diaspora. As Shalini Puri reminds us, “...the Caribbean has had to negotiate its identities in relation to Native America; to Africa and Asia, from where most of its surviving inhabitants came; to Europe, from where its colonizing settlers came; and to the United States of America, its imperial neighbour ” (2). Browne’s female protagonists, who have been born into the twenty-first century, are not

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presented as victims of identity crises. They do struggle with understanding who they are and how they fit in (both in the local space and the foreign space), but Browne quite clearly places the root of this struggle on the shoulders of the adults surrounding these female children. Additionally, despite the complexities they face in attempting to negotiate an understanding of who they are and how they fit in, this generation of female children in the text are insistent on remaining true to themselves, no matter what. Although they may experience the feelings of alienation and displacement so commonly associated with diasporic realities, their responses stretch beyond those associated with the women and men of previous generations. As a result of globalization and the advancement of the information age, the Jamaican female protagonists in Browne’s stories have often already encountered the processes and products associated with the foreign space because of the occurrences intricately tied to the parent-child relationship when at least one parent or guardian (usually the mother) lives in the foreign space. They also have access to images, sounds and experiences associated with the foreign space, which they are able to gain, through technology. The main female character in *Island Princess in Brooklyn* for example, constantly compares the reality she experiences in the foreign space with the sensory details of the space she has encountered through what she has watched on television while living in Jamaica. As she attempts to mentally and physically navigate the foreign space she has only recently encountered, she shudders to think of having to face weather that is colder than what she is already presently experiencing. “It got colder than this? But of course it did. I had seen it on TV; America covered in snow. When we found out that I was really going to live with Mom, Granny and I had watched more American TV movies than usual, searching for clues to Mom’s life, which would soon become mine” (Smith 2011, 4). In an effort to help her adjust psychologically to what she is currently physically experiencing, she uses the knowledge of the foreign space she previously accessed through the media when she was at home.

Through the parent, relative or sibling abroad, the child is introduced to a kind of postdiasporic experience long before she encounters the actual physical reality of living in a foreign space. Her identity is already challenged by the absence of

the mother figure and the deep yearning for that mother. Her sense of identity and belonging are, however, intricately tied to both the local and the foreign space, as though she is physically in the local space, her heart and mind are constantly attuned to the need for the mother, who exists in the foreign space. The female child therefore comes into contact with the psychological, emotional and mental realities associated with the diaspora long before she experiences the physical reality of this space. The diasporic/postdiasporic conditions therefore become well-absorbed and internalized by children at a very early stage in their lives. Though prior to migration they are still in their physical “homeland”, they are often still not “at home” because of the impositions being placed on them regarding how they ought to behave and the kind of values they need to internalize in the hope that they might someday enter the migrant space. An example of this can be found in Olive Senior’s “Bright Thursdays” where, though the grandmother, Miss Christie, is “the lady the female child now lived with” (p.36), it is the son’s new wife who proposes that the marvelous conduct and speech of the child are more closely aligned to the foreign space than the rural, local space she currently occupies. A similar trend occurs in Alecia McKenzie’s fiction, though what McKenzie presents is not restricted to the female child. In her collection of short stories *Stories from Yard* (2005) , both her adult male and female characters the adult male and female struggle to place themselves in the migrant space and have a difficult entry into life in the foreign metropolis, predominantly because of the narratives embedded within them through their mothers’ voices from their childhood past about what ought to be seen as acceptable sociocultural norms and practices. There is the constant pressure therefore to align their conduct with certain ideologies governing behaviour and appearances so that these individuals will be seen as functional, *normal* social beings and not deviant, *merely* third world participants in the foreign space who will eventually become alienated by their inability to fit in to the society. This script is read and re-read to the child in the local space long before she or he encounters the foreign space.

Though we observe the impact of childhood on adulthood and experience the childhood realities of many female characters in Caribbean female-authored

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fiction, we are rarely able to completely access the sensibility of the female child in a way that enables us to observe the mental and emotional processes of the navigation of experiences of diaspora and postdiaspora for the Caribbean child. Browne provides this kind of access by displaying the mental and emotional journeys of her female protagonists as they attempt to understand the identities of their parents and their own identity in spaces that stretch them beyond the experiences of local frames of reality and pull them into a reality marked by a fusion of experiences tied to different worlds within which they must exist and learn to function.

This process of refashioning is evident in *Island Princess in Brooklyn* (2011) where the reader is introduced to a young thirteen-year-old girl who has moved to the United States to be with her mother. For the first half of the book, Princess, the main female character, moves between both the local and the foreign space in her mind, while she is at home with her grandmother in Jamaica, thinking about her mother in Brooklyn. When her mother sends for her and she is about to embark on her journey to Brooklyn, she suddenly experiences extreme anxiety while at the airport bidding her grandmother farewell. She feels torn and conflicted as she tries to determine to which space she is most strongly attached and to which she ultimately belongs - with her mother in the foreign space or with her grandmother in the local space. Her thoughts reveal these feelings to the reader when in her mind she declares that "...all of a sudden, I began to worry that a mistake was being made, I began to feel that I should turn back before it was too late" (8).

Identity is tied to home and home for the female protagonist seems naturally to be tied to a place and the people who occupy that place. Princess is at first solely focused on trying to determine which space she ought to see as home. She struggles with leaving her grandmother but believes she cannot stay because "[t]here are just some things that you know you cannot do. I had to go to my mother. I belonged to her and she had sent for me" (Smith 2011, 8). Within moments, however, the reader sees her wondering if she has made the right

decision by coming to live with her mother, when she exclaims, “Home! My new home, and already something was very, very wrong... This was all a big mistake” (9). Browne illustrates the initial struggle of her female protagonist to locate herself and her identity. Towards the end of the story, however, the reader encounters a much more mature Princess, who has slowly begun to survive through use of her collected memories of Jamaica tied with the lessons she learns from her mother and through her experiences at school in America. “And I thought perhaps everything was going to be okay after all. America with mom might be okay and there were little bits of Jamaica there for you when you needed them” (111). Although she struggles therefore with maintaining a sense of completeness about her existence, Princess, at the same time, comes to a place where she realizes that she might belong in both worlds. Gradually therefore, she moves away from the guilt surrounding her initial need to choose one over the other and accepts that both now form an important part of her female identity.

We find a similar situation in the short story “Jenny’s Great Gran” which forms a part of Browne’s short story collection entitled *Every Little Thing Will Be Alright*. Jenny, Browne’s main female character, is embarrassed that she takes her grandmother for walks in the garden surrounding her house in England. Jenny already struggles with being different in a foreign space. The story immediately introduces us to the conflict she faces with having the other children see her walk around with a gran who wears “a headtie” when no other grandmother in the country, in Jenny’s mind, would do that. Such apparel she believes is associated with “old time Caribbean people” (Smith 2003, 28). Browne, it seems, inserts this form of apparel into the story to highlight its cultural value and connection even in a contemporary, global space. Jenny has chosen to more closely identify with the foreign space and the modernity of the apparel and customs attached to it and so struggles to accept the local space as part of her identity. The story also introduces the common situation of the young feeling embarrassed by their associations with their older relatives due to peer pressure and the need to fit in with a peer group.

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The reader observes as Jenny painstakingly takes her grandmother for walks, based on her mother's demands and is teased by her friends based on this action. It is not that she does not love her grandmother, but Jenny's struggle at first is based on the notion that one cultural experience and place is superior to the other. Through establishing the grandmother's presence as central to the story's plot, Browne demonstrates the need for a balance through the interconnection of both cultures, rather than the placement of one over the other. Jenny becomes agitated by the idea of her grandmother being called up to the stage at school to make a musical presentation at a school function put on for Parents' Day. This is because she is striving to *fit in* and believes her grandmother's cultural presentation will highlight how different she is from the other children in the school. “This can't be happening, Jenny thought. But it was. There were Mum and Gran, and Dad helping Great Gran – slowly, ever so slowly, up the steps onto the stage” (Smith 2003, 35).

Browne represents Jenny's journey to the reader by allowing us to observe how Jenny works herself through this problem. She also demonstrates quite clearly that very often it is the adult's response that helps to solidify the reaction and feelings of the child. Through the teacher's compliments about her grandmother's presentation, which highlight the value of Caribbean culture and family life, Jenny begins to experience a sense of pride about the four generations of women inhabiting her home. She comes to realize that choosing one space or the other is not a feasible option for her because she is rooted to both spaces – a postdiasporic reality. Eventually, the narrative states, ‘Jenny felt very proud walking around the garden with her Great Gran’ (38): she even manages to have a more positive response when she is teased because she has come to the point of embracing the local space as part of her past and her future in the same way as the foreign space has now become a part of both timelines for her. As Ngong Tou insists, “for postdiaspora to be all it can be, there has to be a negotiation of diasporic identity which bears the past in mind” but which at the same time reconstructs itself to represent the differences which have surfaced (54). Jenny is still able to preserve her difference; she is not like her grandmother and does not associate with all aspects of the “old time”

Caribbean culture out of which her gran has emerged, but she is also able to arrive at a point of unity by embracing who her grandmother is through the understanding she gleans about her from her mother and her teacher.

The last line of the story strongly exemplifies the new postdiasporic response to the negotiation of identity when Jenny says “...you can’t always change people’s minds about things, but you can change your own, and sometimes that is enough” (Smith 2003, 38). The mother-figure therefore plays a crucial role in the construction and negotiation of the Caribbean child’s concept of self and negotiation of identity, particularly in the foreign space. This relationship deserves much more attention by Caribbean critics not simply as it relates to the complexity of the characters’ existence but also as an element of Caribbean female-authored children’s fiction which enables more in-depth depictions and understandings of the paths navigated by the Caribbean female child experiencing life in postdiasporic spaces. The mother-daughter relationship in Caribbean female-authored fiction functions as an important signifier in any discussion surrounding diaspora and postdiaspora as it reveals the slight shift from an old diasporic mode of existence to an evolving postdiasporic mode which places both mother and daughter in a new space as they negotiate their own self-identities while at the same time crafting a new identity for their relationship with each other. This is especially the case with *Island Princess in Brooklyn* where we gain access, through the narrative technique, to an intimate display of the mother-daughter relationship as both attempt to learn about each other defensibly and carefully, each not wanting to be hurt by the other.

Charmaine Crawford introduces a crucial point through her exploration of the situation of motherhood in diasporic/postdiasporic conditions. She argues that one of the major struggles both mother and daughter endure is one that is imposed upon them by a Eurocentric, patriarchal set of principles which emphasises motherhood as being tied to physical presence and “exclusive mother-child relations primarily within the nuclear family unit” (327). Browne seems to be establishing a similar conceptual framework through her

representation of Princess and her mother in *Island Princess in Brooklyn*. The main question which plagues the female protagonist as she gets ready to leave the local space and enter the foreign space at the very start: "Would my mother be there?" (Smith 2011, 1). It is a question that also recurs throughout the novel as she attempts to locate and comprehend herself and her environment. The physical and emotional presence of her mother is, it would seem, crucial to Princess's confidence in herself and her abilities to negotiate the spaces she occupies. She constantly fights the fear of being abandoned and rejected throughout the early parts of the chapter book because of her memories of her mother's absence during her earlier years of childhood. Browne does not pretend that this is not an important reality for the female as she grows and matures. She does not make light of the complexity framing the mother-daughter relationship, but she also shows the two sides of that story, making it clear that the mother also struggles with the idea that she will not be "good enough" for her daughter or that she will not be seen as the central maternal figure in her daughter's life.

The reader notes how betrayed Princess feels when she relates the fact that her mother "had promised to send for me forever, but it never happened" (17). What Browne does bring to the surface though, is the fact that Princess's fear and lack of confidence chiefly occurs as a result of one main reality: her grandmother's negative vocal insertions and attitude towards her mother and her mother's act of migration. Her grandmother is introduced as meaning everything to Princess and she therefore internalizes her grandmother's characterization of the foreign space and the situation of her mother's presence there, as being the only possible truth. Her grandmother's words against the foreign space (and therefore against her mother) become almost prophetic, based on Princess's experiences. She uses these words to affirm all she feels, based on the situations she encounters. Each section of the narrative which displays Princess's emotional instability is preceded by a memory that is evoked about something her grandmother has said or done in offering an opinion about the migrant space and the departure of Princess's mother. It is her grandmother's traditional assertions about the foreign space that results in

tainting Princess's perspective and creates an extremist type of outlook of the diaspora for the teenager. The notions her grandmother puts forward are fraught with the kind of gender essentialism that presents what Crawford terms a "maternalist ideology" encouraged by Eurocentric, colonialist beliefs of motherhood. These beliefs perpetuate the idea that mothers who "leave their children behind" (328) are not fit to be mothers and have somehow deprived their children of fundamental primary social and personal needs, which no other human being is able to provide. Yet, apart from the damning expressions about America and subtly about her mother, which were expressed by her grandmother during Princess's upbringing in Jamaica, Princess feels quite at home with her grandmother and feels she has all she needs at home in Jamaica with her. Her grandmother is the only real mother figure Princess knows prior to her move to the United States. When she struggles through where she desires to live, she describes not wanting to go to America to attain any of the things everyone associated with America, she says plainly: "I didn't feel I had lost out on anything, really. I had Granny" (17). This is one of the most powerful characteristics of Browne's narratives – her ability to examine in a very precise and direct manner, the way Princess' emotions and cognition gradually evolve throughout the chapter book. What Browne also demonstrates however is the ambiguous, complex relationship between the grandmother and the child's mother. The grandmother's negative statements help the reader to realise that a part of the confusion the child experiences occurs because of the subtle and explosive statements her grandmother has made in the past about the child's mother. Again, this "mother-grandmother" relationship issue is also evident in McKenzie's collection of short stories *Satellite City and other stories* (1993) where McKenzie allows the reader to recognize that a large part of the child's negative impressions of her mother, which she received predominantly through her grandmother, might be inaccurate or exaggerated.

It is through this close exploration of the female sensibility that we detect the shift away from old ways of participating in the diaspora to new ways of living in what has grown into a postdiaspora space and experience. Browne subverts the notion that motherhood needs to be chained to a space of domesticity at

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all points throughout the mother-daughter relationship and demonstrates how the Caribbean mother has from the very beginning of her journey, mapped out a way to be with her child at a time when she feels the situation is now a healthy one within which to raise her. Despite the alienation and isolation (so deeply connected to diaspora living) experienced by Princess's mother, she pushes on nevertheless. She is a nurse's aide, though her entire family at home believes she is a nurse, and she has life a lot harder than her family members at home realise. Princess is home one evening when her mother's husband has a mild heart attack. She calls the ambulance and accompanies him on the drive to the hospital in which her mother works. She searches for her frantically, asking the nurses to locate her. It is at this point that she is informed that her mother is not in fact a nurse, but a nurse's aide. Her mother arrives just at the point that Princess receives this shocking information. When the outbursts die down, Princess and her mother stand together in an awkward silence. "She was looking at me. She knew. Was she going to just try to get through it, pretend I hadn't heard?" (120). Princess awaits an apology from her mother, but her mother is in no hurry to offer one. It is one of the strengths Browne highlights about Princess's mother - she accepts Princess's struggle to acclimatize, but she also accepts her own reality as an immigrant in a foreign space that regardless of its negativities, is also providing her with the opportunity to become better and attain more, for herself and her family. This stretches beyond the feeling of despair associated with the diasporic condition and adds an entirely new dimension that does not merely demonstrate the will to survive but also the will to grow and develop emotionally and financially. This new dimension is therefore deeply connected to an outlook of home as being based on what is inside and within her consciousness, rather than that which is solely characterized by the physical space which she inhabits. Even when she gets things wrong with Princess at the start (painting her room in a colour she despises, observing Princess's reaction to finding out that she is now married to an Indian man, not being able to prevent Princess from missing conditions "back home"), she still continues to pursue a bond with her daughter, introducing her daughter to this new mode of existence which will allow her to fuse together the pleasant experiences of both the foreign and the local space, rather than needing to choose one over the other. As a mother, she accepts

that she has made wrong decisions, but her motives all surround a positive focus – the betterment of herself for the betterment of her child.

The climactic section of the text occurs when Princess explodes during a moment of concern that her grandmother is ill and might not make it. “I don’t know where the money coming from, but I have to go to Granny. Suppose she die! Can’t you see, I have to go! I am the one to go!” And as if to explain fully, I added, “She is more my mother than you, any day. Granny is my real mother, not you!” (144) Browne allows the reader to be pulled into this exchange to reveal the deep struggle the child experiences as she tries to come to terms with how she has been taught to view her mother, how she actually views her mother based on all her mother says and does, and the decisions she needs to make to adjust her perspective based on all she has witnessed for herself. It is a significant moment because it illustrates the deeply entrenched ways in which female children (just as in Kincaid’s short story “Girl”) wrestle with a scripted characterization of who they ought to be and who their mothers ought to be as adult versions of themselves. This scripted characterization occurs in contrast to who they see themselves as being, and how they perceive their mothers, as these mothers strive to provide for their families regardless of the narrowed pathways constricting their ability by Eurocentric, capitalist systems framing perceptions of their identities as Caribbean female immigrants within the diaspora.

Rather than an idyllic representation of all Caribbean mothers who migrate, Caribbean female-authors have clearly demonstrated the variation which exists in the way individuals choose to participate in the migrant space. To label all immigrant mothers from the Caribbean as women who have abandoned their children is horrifically false and misrepresents a large population of women who have only entered the diaspora to secure the future of their children. As Crawford affirms, “[m]igration has been a strategy for Caribbean people in countering the unemployment, poverty and limited opportunities that result from the structural inefficiencies of their dependent capitalist economies” (328).

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Migration is therefore a response of Caribbean mothers that forms a major part of their efforts to raise the standard of living they are prepared to make accessible for their families and children.

Browne’s stories therefore promote a rethinking of the female self and the collective experience of females from childhood through to adulthood, through the direct use of the female child and her journey in a postdiasporic space. The newness of the diasporic condition aligns itself easily with the newness the child brings to the space as a member of a new generation with a mindset that is transformative and able to reshape how we read and respond to the situation of migration and the experiences of diaspora. She shows, through the careful details she provides of the main female character in *Island Princess in Brooklyn*, how “lived experience tends to supersede ideology” (Forbes 2005, 27). As David Chariandy argues in his discussion of migration and diaspora in contemporary Caribbean literature, “secondary migrations...might consolidate or shift the ‘old’ diasporic identities and/or introduce a new array of diasporic identities into the mix” (250). What needs to be monitored is the insistence of a traditional way of being associated with old diasporic realities and the way this is consciously or unconsciously imposed on the child’s reality as she enters a new zone of time. The story “Louise Jane and the Street of Fine Old Houses” in Browne’s collection *Every Little Thing Will be Alright* introduces both this kind of conflict and the subtle hint that by reconstructing these mental processes, a new generation of individuals might be able to more meaningfully participate in the postdiasporic space. Essentially then, Browne seems to be encouraging a rethinking of ways in which the self might be able to exist confidently through a *modus operandi* that moves beyond colonial perspectives of what it means to be Caribbean, to be black, to be from the working-class, and ultimately, to be female.

When Louisa Jane comes home from school to find her grandmother closing all the windows, she recognizes immediately that something is wrong and assumes that her parents had not sent money from England. This is a small insertion about the migrant space placed in a story that focuses on the way modernization

continues to destroy the lives of those in the homeland who are vulnerable and seen as marginal. The connection is immediately made however with the migrant space and the negative realities being experienced in the homeland. When her friend suggests that instead of becoming troubled by the government's plan to destroy her grandparent's house in order to erect new town buildings, she should "go to [her] Mummy and Daddy in England" because "lots of people go there" (65), Louisa immediately declares that she has no desire to migrate. Like Princess, in *Island Princess in Brooklyn*, Louisa feels indebted to her grandmother who has raised and nurtured her. The grandmother's decision to remain in Jamaica seems to indicate to Louisa that England is an undesirable place. "It's cold and it rains all the time and the houses are closed up, not open like ours" (65). The reader realizes that these descriptions are likely to have been offered by Louisa's grandmother. Once again, the conflict of an old, traditional way of viewing the migrant space and experience comes into conflict with the possibility of a new perspective on the diaspora. Louisa admits that "Mummy sends for us all the time but Granny does not want to go" (65). Browne does not turn this story into one about the migrant space but positions both the foreign and local realities alongside each other in a way that encourages an interrogation of the fixed position or posture of the grandmother who though having all good intentions for her granddaughter, also forgets to "tell[her] to get ready for school" and forgets to make her porridge (63). Browne subtly hints at the fact that although the grandmother verbally encourages the child to go and live with her mother, the kind of relationship she has shared with the granddaughter and the ways in which she has influenced her granddaughter's thoughts have complicated the situation further for both herself and her grandchild. It is not a narrative that points out a wrong or right way of viewing the migrant space, but it is one that prompts readers to question the fixed, rigid and often linear perceptions that are held about diasporic realities.

By the end of the story, Louisa's parents make the decision to remain in Jamaica, much to everyone's surprise. It is not the ending the reader expected. What becomes the focus, however, is not simply that there will be no migration,

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but that the option exists as to whether to remain in the foreign or local space. This is a new reality and Browne introduces it subtly. It demonstrates that our way of seeing ourselves in both spaces, as Caribbean people, is no longer bound to traditional notions of needing to migrate, but of choosing to migrate. Those who once existed in the diaspora and have acquired knowledge and experience in that space, can also return home, taking with them all they have acquired about themselves when living in that migrant space. Postdiaspora enables them once again to do this. The focus is not on return but rather on a kind of acculturation process which allows everyone (except the grandmother) to accept and merge experiences for the benefit of all, rather than separate and devalue.

This process of rethinking and reconstructing self-identity and the collective experience of the Caribbean female in the migrant space is also evident in *Island Princess in Brooklyn*, where towards the end of the chapter book, Princess realizes that the statements she has made about her mother have deeply affected her. When her mother pours out her heart to her, detailing all she has sacrificed because of her love for her daughter and making it clear that those on the outside, in the homeland, were not always allowed to know things because of how negative they often were, Princess starts to reconstruct the shape of her memories. Suddenly, the first-person narrative voice explains: “I saw my mother perhaps for the first time as a real person...eyes like mine, eyes that now held me in their grip” (171). This is a momentous moment in the text as through Browne’s creative writing style, the reader gains entrance into the delicate nature of a moment where mother and daughter meet each other in a moment of truth, unmasked and without concern for the scripted codes governing their identities and responses to each other. Princess makes this evident when she admits: “It was then that I stopped watching the movie of my life. I stopped listening to the voices of Granny and Sister that I played over and over in my mind” (172). When these things are released, Princess freely expresses exactly how she feels to her mother and explains quite openly that sometimes she doesn’t “know what to do or how to feel” (173) but that she is acutely aware of her love for her mother and she desires to remain with her. By the end

of the novel, Browne has taken us through the journey of a mother-daughter relationship which becomes infused with love and understanding by the decision of a mother to place her child and her child's desires above the need to fulfill the dominant role of mother prescribed for her by her Caribbean society. When she does this, Princess realizes that her mother is willing to send her back to Jamaica because her mother believes being with her grandmother will make her happier than being with her. Princess responds with deep emotion to the possibility of being separated from her mother again and she pleads with her mother to allow her to stay with her. "Then I felt my mother's arms around me, a real tight, deep hug, much bigger than any hugs I had got since I had been here" (173).

Browne's representation of the female child protagonist is key to an understanding of how she positions the postdiasporic space as an important space for a new generation of Caribbean children. She presents the female child as constantly evolving and flexible, able to adapt to circumstances, people and experiences, based on their deep levels of self and communal awareness and their determination to participate in their societies (wherever these societies are located) in ways that ensure balance and purpose. Perhaps due to globalization, the children in Browne's stories are not in any way as pressured as their parents to see the migrant space as the main space for financial opportunities and socioeconomic growth, but they are acutely aware that they have options, which need not bind them to the physical space of the Caribbean. They embody a kind of fluidity and flexibility characterized by postdiasporic conditions and they demonstrate the value of embracing the complexities associated with their journey as black Caribbean females who embody an awareness of self and identity which remains unchained to distinct spaces and which can thrive, regardless of conflicts and oppressive realities, whether home or abroad.

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