

**THE POLEMICS OF INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY FORMATION  
IN ANDREA LEVY'S *SMALL ISLAND***



*Project submitted to St. Teresa's College ( Autonomous)  
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of  
BACHELOR OF ARTS in English Language and Literature*

*By*

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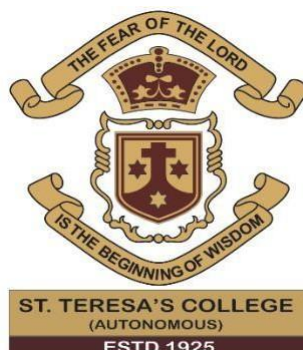
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**March 2023**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project entitled “The Polemics of Individual Identity Formation in Andrea Levy’s *Small Island*” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Jeena Ann Joseph, Assistant Professor, Department of English.

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## CERTIFICATE

I hereby declare that this project entitled “The Polemics of Individual Identity Formation in Andrea Levy’s *Small Island*” by Naomi Ann Netto is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

Dr. Jeena Ann Joseph

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Naomi Ann Netto

## CONTENTS

	Introduction	01
Chapter 1	Black Experience in Post-war Britain	08
Chapter 2	Through the Lens of the Occident	23
	Conclusion	36
	Works Consulted	40

## Introduction

The term 'Identity' can be defined as "The set of characteristics by which a person or thing is definitively recognisable or known" ("Identity"). Identity is undoubtedly one of the most complicated and paradoxical ideas investigated by social scientists because it is fundamental to each of us, but also ambiguous in its form and composition. It endures the persistent pressure of opposing forces: it is both singular and plural, actual and hypothetical, personal and societal, and defined by similarity and diversity. Perhaps identity's ambiguity results from the fact that it is constantly constructed and modified by the discourse of the individual and others around them, as opposed to existing in a static state. Identity is fundamentally both individualistic and pluralistic due to its dialectical nature (Persson). It is individualistic in the sense that it is unique to each person and is influenced by their family, upbringing, likes, dislikes, environment, etc. According to Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, it is pluralistic in the sense that "...the individual's identity is created through discourse and relationships with other individuals and groups" (qtd. in Persson). In the essay, "The Individual and the Collective: A Discussion of Identity and Individualism" it is stated by Stephanie Persson that:

For individuals near the borders of social categories, those attempting to straddle or cross over social boundaries through what may be considered "pluralistic" identities, an understanding of the permeable, flexible nature of these boundaries becomes extremely significant. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the dialectical nature of identity

means that the identity and collective actions of minority groups are heavily dependent on the view of themselves they see reflected in the majority culture. When people do not receive recognition, or when groups feel some element of their identity is under threat, this has a significant impact on their social and individual identities.

Identity formation, which is marked by continuity and internal unity, has to do with the intricate process by which people create a distinctive sense of who they are. Through the course of typical human growth, personal identity formation aims to construct a coherent sense of oneself. A self that is incoherent and characterised by discontinuity or a lack of inner coherence could be said to have developed abnormally (Herman). According to postcolonial theory, persons who have been freed from colonial rule, form a “postcolonial identity” based on interactions between various identities (on the grounds of gender, class, nationality, and ethnicity among others) that have been given diverse levels of social authority by colonial society (“Postcolonialism”). Hybridity is one of the factors most frequently linked to the effects of postcolonialism. The colonial impact that divides and fragments the identity, culture, and ideology of the colonised is represented by hybridity. Due to this effect, two cultures, the eastern and western cultures, become mixed. The western colonial civilization that changed the national identity and culture of the conquered lands is represented by hybridity (Sokar). Since characters serve as the foundation of a text and mould the plot, the issue of identity is prevalent in a variety of literary genres. Regardless of when a text was written, it is crucial for readers to examine a character's background and



analyse what makes them who they are and what makes them act the way they do, in order to gain a deeper comprehension of the content of the text (Hamilton).

Several nations acquired their independence during the second half of the 20th century, changing from colonies to independent nations, ushering in a new era. The issue of identity is raised in the modern world due to the rise in immigration, hybrid nations, and constitutions of states with various cultural diversities (Dizayi). It was in the late 1940s that England's cultural landscape started to evolve as a direct result of the second World War. There was an influx of immigrants from various commonwealth countries, especially those from the island nation of Jamaica. The chief reason why many Jamaicans immigrated to England during the post-war era was to find better opportunities for themselves and their families. The belief that was commonly held by Jamaicans residing in Jamaica during the country's colonial rule was that the Mother Country, England, was full of promise and wonder, a place where they could rebuild their lives after the war. Unfortunately for most if not all immigrants, this image of the Mother Country came crashing down as they were left disillusioned by the harsh state of affairs that ruled Britain. The natives of Britain were left hardened by the war and were not open to immigrants, especially those of colour, as the belief held at the time was that they were uncouth and set to take away precious jobs that they believed should be done by whites instead. This sense of unwelcome descended into blatant racism and prejudice which negatively affected the Jamaican immigrants. This in turn, affected their hybrid identities and created a sense of identity crisis among the immigrants. Literary theorists have given identity issues a great

deal of attention, while postcolonial novelists, particularly those from former British colonies, aimed to uncover and express the postcolonial era's identity crises.

Andrea Levy (1956-2019) was a world renowned English author, best known for her novels *Small Island* (2004) and *The Long Song* (2010). Levy was born in London to Jamaican parents, and grew up as a black Brit in a predominantly white England. This experience gave way to the author having a very nuanced perspective of the country she was born and brought up in. Levy remained in London for the rest of her life and gained a great deal of inspiration from the city, its past, as well as its inhabitants. It was Andrea Levy's fourth novel *Small Island*, published in the year 2004, which garnered the author widespread recognition for her writing style, as well as her choice of subject matter. The novel *Small Island* is perhaps her most recognisable work, which went on to win her the Whitbread Novel Award and the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2005.

Set in the year 1948 in post-war England, the novel revolves around the lives of four key characters and is narrated through their perspectives; Gilbert and Hortense Joseph are a Jamaican couple who immigrated to England in search of better life prospects, Bernard and Queenie Bligh, an English couple reunite years after the war, but after a series of events they soon realise that their lives will never be the same again. The characters of the novel, particularly Gilbert and Hortense, take inspiration from Levy's family life; her father, like Gilbert, left Jamaica for England in 1948, her mother, similar to Hortense, followed soon afterwards. Both couples had to make do with living in a single room instead of a whole house. Just like Levy's parents,

Hortense and Gilbert Joseph can both be considered to be a part of the 'Windrush Generation', this was the term used to describe immigrants who arrived in the UK between 1948 and 1971 from Caribbean countries. Instead of encountering the golden future they were hoping for, Levy's parents, like Hortense and Gilbert - and like so many other immigrants from the West Indies in the post-war era – were largely met with hostility and suspicion.

The author's choice for the novel's title might have been deliberate as the title, *Small Island*, can be interpreted as an irony. In the novel, the Jamaican protagonists are set to leave their home country of Jamaica in order to immigrate to England; the characters, especially Gilbert, feel stifled by their idyllic lives in Jamaica and yearn for something worthwhile and more meaningful. They feel that Jamaica lacks the opportunities they seek; Gilbert wishes to return to his former purposeful lifestyle as a RAF member in England, while Hortense wishes to teach more distinguished students and live a sophisticated lifestyle in the Mother Country. This feeling of insufficiency or inadequacy towards their homeland leads them to view Jamaica as a "small island", a place lacking in advancement and modernity. In the novel, Great Britain is perceived to be a land of opportunities and dreams by the immigrants from the commonwealth countries. These immigrants move to Britain with certain expectations, but are often met with a reality that is contradictory to their ideal beliefs. Most immigrants, especially those of colour, including the novel's protagonists, are faced with racism and discrimination and are pigeonholed into certain occupations and are often left out of opportunities that can lead to their economic and personal growth. The Jamaican couple both experience this on different levels, and are soon met

with the understanding that England too is a “small island”, both literally and metaphorically. This realisation is what exposes the inner workings of colonialism, as it is this mechanism that creates and projects an idealised image of the coloniser’s nation, as compared to the supposed substandard void that is the colonised nation.

This study attempts to analyse the influence of colonialism and the role it plays when it comes to the identity formation of colonised peoples, as well as it considers the ability that imperialism has to disillusion both colonised people and colonisers into believing certain stigmatised notions on nation and race. To help achieve the aim of this study, postcolonial criticism will be used as the theoretical framework. Chapter One of the project is concerned with the experiences of the Jamaican characters of the novel, it outlines their expectations of the Mother Country, as well as their struggles with assimilating into British society. The chapter examines the effects of racism and imperialism on the minority immigrant population’s identity formation. To elucidate this, the two eminent works *Orientalism* and *The Location of Culture* are used. In the seminal text *Orientalism* published in 1978, by Palestinian-American writer Edward Said, the author expounds the ability to reject and reinvent oneself as a postcolonial, anti-imperialist subject as the key to identity building. He details the politics of producing the ‘Other’ and how the process of ‘othering’ creates a skewed sense of superiority within the dominating race. Said also speaks of epistemic violence and how this form of violence violates individual identity production and knowledge. Another important topic that Said discusses is the process of ‘essentialism’ which explains the production of stereotypes. Homi K. Bhabha, an Indian-British

scholar and literary theorist, penned the essay “The Other Question”, which is part of his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). In this essay, the ideas of ‘ambivalence’ as a contradictory concept, as well as the idea of colonial discourse as an apparatus of power are introduced. In his essays, “Of Mimicry and Man” and “Signs Taken for Wonders” also part of the same book, Bhabha’s concept of ‘mimicry’ of the Occident by the Orient, as well as the concept of ‘hybridity’ are introduced respectively.

Chapter Two of the project shifts the focus onto the white population of post-war Britain. The chapter introduces the two white protagonists of the novel as well as their turbulent history and relationship during and after the war. The major differences between the two characters, Queenie and Bernard Bligh are highlighted, as well their differing attitudes towards the Jamaican couple, as well as people of colour in general. The ways in which the white population’s perspective is affected and influenced by generational racism and colonialism are examined here. The ideas of ‘essentialism’ and ‘colonial discourse as an apparatus of power’ are the key concepts by Said and Bhabha concentrated on among others in this chapter. The study will conclude with a brief overview of the two preceding chapters, and will elucidate the chosen novel, *Small Island*, as an apt text to substantiate the study’s attempt to analyse the influence of colonialism in the identity formation process of colonised people as well as their colonisers.

## Chapter 1

### Black Experience in Post-war Britain

“Black culture and people are not a monolith...”, these were the words stated by writer Chanell Noise (“Defining Black Experience”). Upon examining this quote, it is to be inferred that black culture - made up of black people along with their customs and traditions- is not a massive homogenous whole. It is safe to say that there is no single “black experience”, especially when one looks back to the history of the former British Empire and how it treated people of colour.

Jamaica, the Caribbean island nation, was formerly a colony of the British Empire from 1655 to 1962. The colonial rule that spanned over 300 years would inevitably impact and change the future of the island nation. Due to its production of sugar, which at the time was the main import into Britain, Jamaica was significant to its Mother country. The Caribbean colonies, which included Jamaica, Antigua, St. Kitts, Nevis, and Barbados, were the most strategically and economically important region of the empire. The British Isles, Western Africa, and the Americas were all connected by a larger Atlantic system of trade, migration, and exploitation that included all of these British-American possessions. Jamaica, like the other British possessions in the region, had a slave system. The majority of the population was made up of people who had been brought to the area as slaves from West Africa during the transatlantic slave trade. These people suffered under a cruel and oppressive government that profited from their labour. The majority of enslaved people were employed on plantations, such as the sugar estates in

Jamaica, where they were purchased and sold as property (“Slavery and Revolution”). Contemporaries regarded the treatment of the enslaved Africans in Jamaica as among the most cruel in the entire world. Many slaves were able to achieve freedom in the 18th century by a variety of methods, including enduring sexual servitude at the hands of white plantation owners who regarded their sex slaves as "mistresses." Some historians contend that the island's sugar and slave economies collapsed with the abolition of the slave trade in 1808 and of slavery itself in 1834. With the end of slavery in 1834 and full emancipation within four years, the British government was convinced to free the black people they had been holding as slaves when sugar production fell.

When World War One finally broke out in the 20th century, Jamaica formally swore allegiance to the Empire. The British government came under pressure to permit West Indians to volunteer and take part in combat operations. During the battle, the island's defence was the responsibility of the Jamaican Volunteer Defence Force, Jamaica Constabulary Force, and Jamaica Militia artillery. In order to gather money for 200 Jamaicans who wanted to serve abroad but couldn't afford the cost of travel, a War Contingent Committee was formed in 1915. For Jamaican volunteers, the Kingston Women's Fund Committee also planned fundraising events. The British West Indies Regiment included 10,280 Jamaicans, the majority of whom saw combat in Africa (Luscombe). In addition to providing military assistance, Jamaica donated gifts of its own produce to the war effort. In a telegram, the Governor declared on 1st September 1914: “The people of Jamaica unanimously desire to contribute to the Imperial Government in some way

towards the expenses of the war other than its own local defence” (qtd. in “War Effort”).

The novel *Small Island* by Andrea Levy is set in the year 1948, during the post-war era where scores of Jamaicans migrated from their homeland of Jamaica to the Mother country of Great Britain. The novel is narrated through the perspectives of four key characters, two of whom are the Jamaicans, Gilbert and Hortense Joseph. The narratives of these two characters begin with the pair moving into a rented room in a house on 21 Nevern Street in Earl’s Court, London, England. Through the use of a non-linear narrative and flashbacks, the personal histories of both characters are revealed.

Gilbert Joseph was a young Jamaican man who was out to seek adventure and a noble purpose in life. During the second World War, Gilbert was one among the many Jamaicans who volunteered to join the war effort. He became a part of the Royal Air Force (RAF) and just like many other young men, he dreamt of becoming a pilot for the English troops. Gilbert's deployment in England was his first introduction to life outside of Jamaica. Since his childhood, he had dreamt of having a purpose bigger than being limited to the future of being a truck driver for his mother and aunt’s bakery. Unfortunately, as fate would have it, Gilbert is met with the rude reality of racism and hardship in England. His appeal to train as a pilot for the Royal Air Force is denied on the basis of his race, and his choice for work options were restricted to being a driver and a coal shifter. Eventually after the war is over, Gilbert returns to Jamaica but is unsatisfied with being back home - for him a future in Jamaica is one that would be underwhelming as economic and personal growth is very limited. After experiencing life in Britain and briefly



life in America, Gilbert still strives to serve a greater purpose as he did during the war time, he believes this cannot be found in his home country, the small island of Jamaica. Despite the racism he experienced while working in England, he believes moving to London would provide him with an opportunity to build a new and better life for himself. His return to London is made possible after his path crosses with that of Hortense Roberts.

Hortense, one of the two female protagonists of the novel, was born out of wedlock to Lovell Roberts, a Jamaican bureaucrat, and Alberta, his maid. To preserve the family's reputation and dignity, Hortense was sent away and was raised by her father's cousins, Phillip and Martha Roberts. Under the care of the Roberts family, Hortense was brought up in a household that was deeply religious, morally upright, and aloof in the matters of familial affection. Her closest comrade growing up was her cousin Michael Roberts who she cared for deeply. Growing up in an upper class family gave Hortense the privilege of being able to attend school as well as a colonial teaching college where she became acquainted with many women, who like her, dreamed of teaching in well reputed schools in England. Her upbringing and privilege in life, along with her lack of healthy family bonds instilled in her a sense of self-righteousness. This attribute of her character along with her resolute nature is what led her to wreck her friendship with fellow college mate Celia Langley, by bribing her fiancé, who happened to be Gilbert Joseph, with funding for his much awaited return to England. By doing so, Hortense managed to convince Gilbert to marry her instead so that she could move to London with him, thus fulfilling her desires to leave behind her limiting life in Jamaica. After moving to England, Hortense was met with the harsh reality of life for coloured people

in the Mother Country. Her new life in London is limited to the four walls of the single room that she and Gilbert share on 21 Nevern Street. The condition of the room is rather dismal and it reflects the state in which many immigrants, especially those of colour, had to live in. Hortense's haughty and entitled nature comes out in full when she realises that her husband Gilbert can only provide her with so much. Her expectations of England and life in England are completely shattered - she was under the impression that she would live in a home equipped with the luxuries she was used to back home, she was also under the impression that her level of spoken English was excellent as she was deemed best in her class in college, however in England, many of the locals find it hard to decipher her accent-laden words. What completely disillusioned her was being denied a chance to apply to become a teacher in Britain, this was solely due to her race even though she possessed the required qualifications and recommendations.

Through reading the novel and through examining the history of Jamaican immigrants in Britain, it becomes clear that there is a certain binary present when it comes to explaining relations between the white and coloured populations. This distinction between the two has arisen as a consequence of the power dynamics of colonialism. Colonialism can be defined as "the control or governing influence of a nation over a dependent country, territory, or people" ("Colonialism"). According to Indian literary theorist and feminist critic Gayatri Spivak, one of the consequences of colonialism is the creation of the 'Other'; the term, which Spivak came up with, is used to talk about the discursive and other methods that colonisers employed to establish and maintain low-esteemed beliefs and presumptions about the colonised natives.

Therefore, the act of depicting and characterising the colonised natives as less than their European counterparts is known as "othering" (Raja). The other half of the binary is constituted by the 'Occident' a term which refers to the colonial power or the colonisers. In 1849, Henry David Thoreau wrote, "Behold the difference between the Oriental and the Occidental. The former has nothing to do in this world; the latter is full of activity. The one looks in the sun till his eyes are put out; the other follows him prone in his westward course" (qtd. in "Orientalism: Constructing the Orient/Occident Binary").

The Western world is thus viewed as the 'Occident', while the East is considered to be the 'Orient'. The politics behind the production of the Other can be better understood in Edward Said's seminal text *Orientalism*, published in the year 1978. In orientalism, an artificial binary opposition between the Western world and the Eastern world, particularly the Middle East and Asia, is constructed from a Eurocentric perspective. In order to defend imperialism and colonialism, this East-West dichotomy labels, reduces, and classifies the people of the Orient as the "Other", positioning the West as the superior force ("Orientalism: Constructing the Orient/Occident Binary").

According to Said, the usage of the Other or othering is done strategically and always in excess, alongside adopting depraved and anarchic terms. The reason for the existence of the Other is to instil a sense of superiority in the dominating class or race. Therefore, the identity of the Other and the identity of the hegemonized go hand in hand (NPTEL-NOC IITM).

In the novel, the Jamaican characters experience othering after they move to England, where most of the people at the time were prejudiced

against coloured immigrants. Almost all of the coloured characters in the novel experience othering on some level. During her first week in England, Hortense is given a tour of the neighbourhood she resides in by her landlady Queenie Bligh; the pair go to various shops, including the grocers', the fishmonger's stall, and the drapery. It is during this excursion that Hortense gets her first-hand account of how English people go about their daily lives and what most of them are like, it is also during this scene in Chapter 33 that Hortense first experiences othering in England. A young boy upon seeing Hortense yells out to his mother, "Look! She's black. Look, Mum, black woman" (Levy 334). The mother of the child is flustered and tells her son that Hortense isn't black, rather she is coloured. The words of the child reflect how deep rooted race bias can be and how it is present even in young children; his words label Hortense and reduce her to the colour of skin, thus objectifying her, that too publicly in the middle of the street. His mother does not chide him for publicly pointing out a stranger and that too the colour of their skin, rather she corrects him by using the term 'coloured', which does not diminish Hortense's objectification. This scene takes a turn for the worse after Hortense is further othered by more strangers in the street. She is verbally harassed and hollered at by a group of young men who call her "golliwog", "sambo", and "darkie", all of which are offensive and racist terms used against black people. 'Golliwog' in particular refers to a soft doll with a black face, frizzy hair and bright clothes, this term is now regarded as a racist caricature. Hortense herself didn't seem to be phased by the objectification or slurs as she was more enthralled by the peculiarities of English people; on the other hand, Queenie, a

white woman, seemed to be more disturbed by what Hortense was unfairly subjected to.

Another major instance of othering in the novel is in Chapter 17, when Gilbert accompanies Queenie and her father-in-law Arthur, to the theatre. During this scene, the trio go to watch *Gone with the Wind*, as they are being guided to their seats by the theatre's usher, Gilbert is barred from sitting with Queenie and Arthur and is asked to sit at the back of the theatre. Gilbert is confused by the situation and asks why he should sit at the back when there were sufficient seats at the row they had chosen. It is then that the usher shines her torch light on the seats at the back, revealing rows of black American GIs watching the film. The usher explains that all coloureds are to sit at the back of the theatre as otherwise it would cause inconvenience and discomfort for the white customers, in this case, white American GIs. Gilbert is furious and tells the usher that they were in England and not America, and that in England he can sit anywhere he pleases as there is no segregation or Jim Crow laws. The usher mistakes Jim Crow to be a person and states that, "Well, if he's coloured he'll have to sit at the back" (Levy 185). This lack of knowledge on race laws showcases the fact that white people often have the privilege of being ignorant on real world problems, as they are often in a comfortable position that does not leave them vulnerable to discrimination. "Segregation, madam, there is no segregation in this country. I will sit wherever I like in this picture house. And those coloured men at the back should have been allowed to sit wherever they so please. This is England, not Alabama" (Levy 185).

In colonialism, the body of the colonised subject is often contained or measured; the subject's knowledge is codified and transformed as well, in a

forceful or violent manner. This transformation can be termed as 'Epistemic Violence', a concept introduced into postcolonial studies by Gayatri Spivak. Epistemic violence can be defined as "violence that happens or operates on the level of knowledge". In this form of violence, the prior narrative of knowledge is violated and changes into a newer, distorted narrative of knowledge. This form of violence can be found with the entry of occidental colonial powers into orient countries. This often led to a devaluation of the orient country's past; the past of the nation is wiped out by the colonising power and is deemed as a "historical void" or a "pre-civilised limbo". This erasure of the colonised nation's past leads to the creation of a new perverted narrative that the nation's history, culture and progress only began with the arrival of the colonisers. This distortion of facts which is fed to upcoming generations, creates a skewed perspective and is an example of epistemic violence.

It is due to colonialism that the identity of the colonised subject is warped by Eurocentric norms that are propagated unto the colonised subject in order to subjugate them. This subjugation leads to the colonised subject developing negative feelings towards their own cultural and identity markers as they have internalised the idea that they are inferior as compared to those presented by the coloniser from the West. Therefore, epistemic violence threatens the identity production of colonised peoples as their natural or in-born attributes are seen as unacceptable and unpleasant. Epistemic violence can also lead to the production of stereotypes which are harmful and greatly limiting to those who these stereotypes are exacted against.

During the colonial era, many colonised peoples moved out of their home countries to their coloniser's nation due to various reasons like

disenfranchisement, lack of civil rights, excessive prejudice and bigotry. These migrations led to the meeting of two cultures; one of the colonisers, and the other of the colonised. This merging of cultures creates a new, unique identity - one that can be labelled as “hybrid”. According to Homi Bhabha in his essay “Signs Taken for Wonders”, from his book *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha states that: “Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power...” (112). Hybridity can also be defined in simple terms as an intermingling of Asian or African cultures with western culture. This state of being is especially evident in immigrants, and colonised peoples who are born and brought up during the colonial regime. In the case of the latter, the colonised person has a merged hybrid identity consisting of the coloniser – this could be through a colonial schooling system, and that of the colonised themselves – through local and oral traditions.

In imperialism, the coloniser employs othering in order to ensure their superiority over the colonised, this can psychologically affect the colonised people as they start to believe that their traditional cultural markers are intrinsically inferior. This often leads to the colonised people identifying more with their colonisers’ culture and practices, while disregarding their own. This is mostly evident in the generations of colonised people that have no direct relations to their country’s pre-colonial past.

In the novel, the protagonists Gilbert and Hortense Joseph, are prime examples of this phenomenon of identification with the colonisers. Both characters take great pride in moving out of Jamaica to the Mother Country of England; it’s even suggested in the novel that moving out of the country is a mark of achievement, while moving back home is considered as a step

backwards. From a young age, Jamaicans (like many other colonised people during the colonial era) were taught a great deal about England, this included its geography, history, political system, etc. In Chapter 12 of the novel, Gilbert states that one could ask him or any of the other West Indian RAF soldiers any question about where a particular product was manufactured in Britain, and they could reply correctly with ease. According to Gilbert, having knowledge of the various canals, railways, roadways, ports and docks of England or the dates when great laws were passed is the norm for any young Jamaican pupil. This shows that many colonised people at the time like Gilbert, simply accepted this way of education even though it served no real purpose for them, as they were born into the colonial regime. This leads to children and eventually adults, internalising the idea that England is their Mother Country, their saviour and redeemer, thus fulfilling the agenda of imperialism.

Characters like Hortense and her college classmate, Celia Langley are examples of how the coloured colonised people can idealise and look up to their white counterparts. While learning at the teaching college in Jamaica, Hortense takes demo classes for coloured students who prove to be too unruly for her, she wishes that she would be regarded with the same respect and superiority that white women are held with in the same profession. Her attitude and behaviour is very similar to that of a high-class white woman, this could possibly be attributed to the fact that she studied at institutions run by white administrations. However, Hortense learns the hard way that her attitude and outlook might slide in Jamaica, but will make life in England much harder for her. In Homi Bhabha's essay "Of Mimicry and Man", Bhabha introduces the concept of mimicry and defines it as: "...colonial mimicry is the desire for



a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (86). Mimicry is usually observed when people from colonised societies try to imitate the dress, language, or cultural attitudes of their colonisers. In the words of Amardeep Singh, “Presumably, while copying the master, one has to intentionally suppress one’s own cultural identity, though in some cases immigrants and colonial subjects are left so confused by their cultural encounter with a dominant foreign culture that there may not be a clear pre-existing identity to suppress” (“Mimicry and Hybridity in Plain English”). The latter part of the statement is applicable to most colonised peoples like Hortense and Gilbert, born generations after imperialism entered their nation; they have no recognition of a pre-colonial era and thus are a product of their imperial masters’ pedagogy. Thus, the way the characters, Gilbert and Hortense Joseph, Celia Langley, Hortense’s foster parents Mr. and Mrs. Roberts act are all examples of mimicry.

There is also a certain tension between colonised peoples, where one group identifies with their colonial masters, while the other wishes to distinguish themselves from the colonisers and rather embrace their own culture and autonomy. This dichotomy is presented in the novel through Gilbert and his cousin Elwood. Gilbert and Elwood grew up in Jamaica together and were quite close till Gilbert decided to join the RAF to help with the war effort. This decision by Gilbert was not taken well by his cousin who believed that Jamaicans should not be helping England fight the war, but rather they should be trying to rid themselves of their colonial masters. However, Gilbert wants to participate in the war, he states that, “But I was ready to fight this master race theory. For my father was a Jew and my brother

a black man. I told Elwood, ‘If this war is not won then you can be certain nothing here will ever change’” (Levy 131).

After the war, Gilbert briefly returns to Jamaica where Elwood gloats at him, after he learns that his cousin was unable to fulfil his dream of learning and practising law in England due to him being a black man. Elwood had told Gilbert numerous times that life in England is limited to English people and that they are liars. After their brief business venture of selling honey fails, Gilbert feels desolate by his life and the lack of direction it has after he moved back home. He yearns to go back to England as he believes that opportunity is ripe there, unlike Elwood, Gilbert feels cramped in Jamaica and wishes to have a more worthwhile and ambitious life. Elwood has an obstinate faith in Jamaica and urges Gilbert to instead stay home and fight for his own country’s freedom. On one hand, Elwood dreams of an independent Jamaica, while on the other, Gilbert wishes to be independent of Jamaica.

It is only after he returns back home from England that Gilbert comes to the realisation that Jamaica is a fairly small country which lacks the windows of opportunity he along with many other former Jamaican soldiers seek. Gilbert’s sentiment is expressed in the following line from Chapter 18 of the novel: “With alarm I became aware that the island of Jamaica was no universe: it ran only a few miles before it fell into the sea. In that moment, standing tall on Kingston harbour, I was shocked by the awful realisation that, man, we Jamaicans are all small islanders too” (Levy 196).

This feeling of confinement makes him, along with other men and women who like him dream of bigger prospects outside of home, feel isolated.

This feeling of isolation is brought on as he, a Jamaican man, cannot wholly identify with his homeland as he has been greatly influenced by the imperialism that has been inflicted upon his country, which causes him to partly identify with his colonial master's country and lifestyle. He, like many other immigrants, is caught in a limbo-like state between two cultures - that of the coloniser and of his own; this creates a divide within him as he cannot comfortably fit into either culture. This feeling of vacillation between cultures is a repercussion of having developed a hybrid identity. Gilbert feels like he has outgrown the bounds of his Jamaican life and culture, but at the same time he knows he would be considered insignificant and replaceable in Western society, due to him being a man of colour.

Although Gilbert wished to build a life in England, he acknowledges and misses the comforts of his home in Jamaica, such as the tropical weather, good flavourful food, and beautiful black women, which contrast starkly with the cold and blandness of England. Hortense comes to understand that the English are not what she imagined them to be, and that they too can act uncivilised, lack manners, dress shabbily, and have great variety in their physical appearance and dialect. This makes her realise that in many ways, the Jamaicans that she knew of were far more sophisticated in their dress and mannerisms. A comparison of the countries by Gilbert and Hortense throughout the novel, leads them to realise that though both their homeland and the mother country seem greatly different, they both share similarities too. The chief similarity between the two countries is the fact that they are both geographically and metaphorically "small islands"; Jamaica is small in the sense that it lacks the growth prospects that many of its inhabitants seek,

England is small in the sense that its people aren't the refined, well-bred beings that the system of colonialism tries to project them as, and also in the sense that the English can be fairly small-minded. Ultimately, Gilbert chooses life in England over Jamaica, as he values personal growth and wishes to once again experience the great sights he had looked upon in Britain despite the consequences it comes with, while Hortense accompanies him as a way of escaping her stifling teaching job in Jamaica.

## Chapter 2

### Through the Lens of the Occident

Eurocentrism can be described as, “a worldview, mindset, or rhetorical orientation that centres European, or White, ways of knowing as sole, central, or superior to all others” (Trembath). The unique aspect of the novel *Small Island* is its inclusion of both a black perspective from the Jamaican characters, as well as a eurocentric perspective from the white English characters.

This white perspective that makes up the other half of the novel is brought into being through the characters of Queenie and Bernard Bligh. Queenie Bligh (née Buxton) is one of the female protagonists of the novel. She grew up as the daughter of a butcher family in the English countryside and wasn't fully educated. Disturbed by the prospect of having to join the family business in the future, Queenie moves in with her aunt Dorothy in London to help her manage and run her candy store. It is in London that Queenie meets Bernard Bligh who takes an immediate interest in her. The two court each other for about four months before they decide to get married. The pair start their married life by moving into Bernard's childhood home, a tall house located in Earls Court on 21 Nevern Street in London, where they live with his father Arthur Bligh. It is during this time that Queenie first starts to feel dissatisfied by her marriage; she finds Bernard to be more concerned for his mentally ill father than her, and finds him to be a fairly mediocre man and a bland husband. She feels stifled by her mundane life as a housewife and is upset that her narrow-minded husband refuses to let her find work outside of the house. She feels regret for not cutting ties with him earlier on while they

were courting, she understands that Bernard is an irresolute and spineless person who has become dependent on their relationship and she therefore tries to make the best of her current situation. Queenie finds that the romantic component of marriage is more significant than she initially anticipated, even if she has attained the stable life her Aunt Dorothy had hoped for her. The basic lack of harmony in Queenie's and Bernard's marriage is seen in their inability to conceive a child. This causes a sense of despondency in the relationship as Queenie had hoped that bringing a child into the world and raising it would give her a new sense of purpose and would perhaps bring her and her husband closer together.

Bernard, who worked as a bank clerk and then a volunteer for the RAF, can be seen as one of the more hostile characters in the novel. He is a prime example of the racism and classism that characterised British society at the time. In this regard, he stands in stark contrast to his wife, the lone white character who makes an effort to fight the pervasive prejudice that surrounds her, albeit with limited success. Bernard encounters the hardships of war and the British army's hypocrisies while serving as an RAF soldier in India. However, Bernard's time in the army only serves to reinforce his racism and self-righteousness, not to make him more understanding and compassionate. During his deployment in India, Bernard quickly realises that he isn't cut out to be a soldier; he is not physically strong and he is older than most of the other soldiers. He is not given a glamorous pilot post when he enlists; rather, he is given a ground crew position. He wishes he might have returned to Queenie as a proud and dashing pilot, therefore he feels a little disappointed. He is aware that she would appreciate having a husband who is such a hero.

Bernard befriends a fellow soldier called Maxi who works as ground crew alongside him. The pair become good friends and reminisce about life back in England, they even create plans to start a rabbit farm in the countryside once they return home after the war. An accidental fire in the troops barracks leads to the deaths of many soldiers including Maxi, who were conducting a secret meeting. This becomes a great loss for Bernard who feels personally responsible for the incident as he was meant to keep watch of the barracks entrance. Due to his imprudence, Bernard is charged with abandoning his guard duty post as well as losing his rifle in the process, he has to spend two weeks in a local prison. He is the only white man in the prison and is forced to share a single cell with four Indian convicts. It is during this time that Bernard reflects on his marriage to Queenie and tries to write a letter to her; he fails to do so after many attempts and it is understood that his inability to express himself is a major fault in his marriage. His silence and aloof nature is viewed by Queenie as coldness, Bernard wishes to overcome this trait of his in order to do away with the poor communication he has with his wife.

Bernard is eventually released and demobilised by the lieutenant after which he spends a few days in Calcutta before his ship leaves for the UK. It is at the Calcutta marketplace that Bernard reunites with Pierpont, a fellow RAF soldier who is crude in nature. Pierpont invites Bernard to accompany him to a brothel but Bernard is disgusted by the idea, this prompts Pierpont to reveal to Bernard that Maxi used to frequent brothels too which leaves Bernard unsettled as he does not approve of such actions. After his encounter with Pierpont, Bernard is left disturbed by the revelations he has had since the fire in the barracks, in this vulnerable and perturbed state, Bernard decides to visit

the brothel Pierpont suggested. At the brothel, he meets a very young prostitute who speaks very limited English, Bernard feels awkward and ashamed of the situation he is in but still decides to have sex with the prostitute. It's when he's done that he realises that the prostitute is just a young girl who is left scared by his violent behaviour, this realisation makes Bernard feel extremely guilty and he imagines that Queenie would be horrified by his actions. It is then that Bernard recognises that the war has stripped him of his decency rather than transforming him into a hero.

During the journey home by ship, Bernard notices that he has developed a lump on his genitals; he first assumed that it was just a mosquito bite, but with the passing days it starts to grow in size and becomes so painful that it causes him to vomit. Bernard believes that he has contracted syphilis and now has to face the consequence of having had a sexual encounter with a prostitute. Bernard is left feeling contrite and indisposed after the discovery, he is too ashamed at the idea of returning home to Queenie as he feels he has let her down greatly. After reaching England, Bernard decides to stay in Brighton instead of contacting his wife and living with her in London. He believes that his years are numbered due to syphilis and wishes to live the remainder of his days in disguise. He finds work as a café waiter and then as an informal accountant. After falling severely ill one day, Bernard reluctantly contacts a doctor and just as reluctantly informs him about his self-diagnosed case of syphilis, the doctor informs him that he doesn't suffer from any venereal disease, and that if he did, he would already be dead. Bernard is greatly relieved by the news and decides that he must return home to Queenie in London.



While Bernard is away, Queenie decides to rent out the spare rooms of their house to outsiders, especially those who are unable to find lodging elsewhere due to their social status or race. It is during this time that Queenie meets the charismatic and witty Michael Roberts, a Jamaican RAF pilot who also happens to be the estranged cousin of Hortense. He, along with two other RAF officers find lodging at the house, to the disapproval of the white lodgers. During his stay at the house, Michael is friendly and charming towards Queenie and her father-in-law Arthur. His presence stirs excitement in Queenie's life which became stale and monotone after the onset of the war. She feels a clear attraction towards him and his persona and she is nervous, yet pleased by the fact that he seems equally as interested in her as she is in him. On the last day of his stay, the two sleep together and Queenie comes to the realisation that she has never felt as beautiful or as content with her own husband Bernard. Queenie does however feel slightly ashamed at the idea that she had conjugal relations with a black man in spite of being a married white woman, due to the stigma that she is surrounded by.

The pair do not see each other again until after the war is over, when Michael returns to the house on 21 Nevern Street in order to collect the wallet he had left behind during his last visit, as well as find temporary lodging at the house until he can leave for Toronto. The spark between the pair is re-ignited and the two spend three days in the house away from the world, in each other's company like newly-weds. It is during this time that Queenie conceives a child; this was something she and Bernard had long dreamed for, but they were unable to have any children which in turn affected their marital life.

At this point in the novel, it has been three years since the war came to an end, and Bernard has not returned from India, this leads Queenie to believe that her husband had died during the war. The assumed loss of her husband does not stop Queenie from continuing with her life, she becomes especially close to Arthur, her father-in-law who is mute and mentally ill. Arthur becomes her confidant and is far more understanding and kind towards Queenie than his son Bernard. He even takes care of Queenie after she gets injured in an air-raid. Arthur's accidental death causes a chasm in Queenie's life, her life becomes even more lonely and she often forgets that Arthur has passed away.

It is the introduction of the novel's Jamaican couple into Queenie's life that brings about a turning point in her life. Gilbert and Hortense live in the tiny room on the top most floor of the house on 21 Nevern Street. Their presence in the house is not appreciated by Bernard once he returns home to London. He especially dislikes Gilbert who he is suspicious of due to his friendly relationship with Queenie. It is revealed to Bernard, Hortense and Gilbert, that Queenie is pregnant after she goes into labour in the house. This comes as a shock to everyone as the pregnancy went undetected due to Queenie's clever disguising methods. Hortense acts as a midwife and helps deliver the baby who turns out to be a boy. Queenie is overjoyed and names the baby Michael after his father, but Bernard and the others are mortified by the baby's dark skin. Bernard immediately suspects that Gilbert is the father and physically assaults him, however he soon learns from Queenie the truth of what happened during the years he spent away from home. Initially wary of the new-born, Bernard slowly grows fond of the child after a few days.

However, Queenie comes to the decision that she and Bernard cannot raise a biracial baby due to the racism and stigma that pervade their society. She believes that things may not work out as smoothly in the future once the child has grown up; this leads her to make the difficult decision of giving her baby away. She entrusts Michael to Hortense and Gilbert who she views as a great fit for being foster parents. The Jamaican couple refused to take in the child initially as they felt it wouldn't be fair for the child to be separated from his mother, but realising the gravitas of the situation they agree to take in the baby and raise him like their own.

'Essentialism' can be defined as the misrepresentation of something by oversimplifying a summary of its essence, or as: "To misrepresent (a characteristic of something) by falsely portraying it as essential to the whole (that is, implying that it defines the whole's essence)" ("Essentialize"). It is through essentialism that something is made into a stereotype. The complexity, diversity, and heterogeneity of the process is taken away and a particular attribute is fixated upon. Thus, the process of arresting an attribute becomes a process of essentialism, where there is also a disregard for the other attributes that come into play in the identity formation process. The Orient can be seen as a very essentialised representation, as oftentimes the West stereotypes certain attributes of the East that they find unsavoury, they arrest these attributes and thus reduce the East into a misrepresentation.

In the novel, there are a few instances of essentialism; the first and major incident takes place in the prologue of the novel. The prologue is narrated from the perspective of Queenie's childhood self, where she recalls her first trip to the British Empire Exhibition with her family and their

domestic workers. While wandering through the various countries' exhibits, a young Queenie along with two of her family's domestic workers, Graham and Emily, visit the African pavilion where Queenie gets her first glimpse of a life-size model African village. While looking around the exhibit, the three come across a black woman who is part of the exhibit, weaving bright coloured cloth at a loom. Graham states that machines exist that can replicate the woman's work, he confidently tells Emily and Queenie that the woman can't understand what he's saying because he has assumed that she doesn't speak English. Graham goes on to explain that since the woman can't speak their language, she is uncivilised and that she can only understand drums. Right after this encounter, the three meet a black man, the first Queenie has ever come across. The man seemed to have taken an interest in young Queenie which caused Emily and Graham to tease and taunt her, telling her to kiss the man. To their surprise, the man responds to their jests by telling Queenie in perfect English that he would rather shake her hand instead. This comes as a rude shock to Graham who believed the stereotype that Africans were uncivilised and uneducated. Later when the group meet up with Queenie's parents, Queenie recounts her experience at the African exhibit to her father. Wilfred Buxton, Queenie's father, comforts her and tells her not to worry about having shaken hands with a black stranger; he informs her that the man was possibly a prince or a chief in Africa since he could understand and speak English. The following dialogue was said by Wilfred Buxton to his daughter in the prologue of the novel, "Evidently when they speak English you know that they have learned to be civilised – taught English by the white man, missionaries probably" (Levy 7).

These two encounters between the white and black characters showcase the prejudice that many white people enacted against people of colour, especially during the early 20th century. In both the encounters, it was assumed by the white characters that the black man and woman did not understand English, solely based on the fact that they were black and therefore, not civilised enough to know the language of the white man. This instils a sense of superiority in the white characters.

The British Empire Exhibition itself is a very problematic concept; the exhibition showcases all the countries that were under the control of the British empire, each individual exhibit displayed a different country including native people from the nation and featured what life in said country would be like. Instead of educating English people about the various countries around the world their own country had colonised, the exhibition fed a perverse sense of superiority and pride to many of the visitors as they believed they belonged to a domineering nation that had managed to hegemonize many other cultures that they viewed as inferior. This sentiment is substantiated by Wilfred Buxton telling his daughter the following line after the pair go up the scenic railway and look down at the British Empire Exhibition: “See here, Queenie. Look around. You’ve got the whole world at your feet, lass” (Levy 7). This statement can be interpreted as how the coloniser, in this case the English, view themselves as powerful beings who have the ability to demand and desire for anything they wish due to their assumed superiority.

Thus, it is through essentialism that stereotypes are created and propagated. In his essay, “The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial

Discourse”, theorist Homi K. Bhabha introduces the concept of ‘ambivalence’.

According to Bhabha, ambivalence can be defined as:

...it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed. (66)

Bhabha states that, the creation of the Other, which is seen as excessive, daemonic, degenerate and disordered, leads to two assumptions – one that the Other is disordered or degenerate by default, and two, that this quality of degeneracy and disorderedness must be repeated endlessly and anxiously. On one hand there is a fixation, the stereotype (which is believed to be the permanent condition of the Other), on the other hand, there is a need to repeat the stereotype in order to perpetuate it. This leads to the question that if a stereotype is fixed in nature, then why does it have to be repeated? This is a contradiction or an ambivalence. It can be understood that there is no certain way to prove that a stereotype is true, therefore, there is a need for the stereotype to be repeated in order for it to be propagated, in this case by the Occident. The consistent repetition of a stereotype influences discourse and in turn makes a point, one that the Occident tries to prove about the Orient. In his definition, Bhabha also states that the stereotype is located in “excess”, where it is removed from verifiability and does not have empirical evidence.

Therefore, as stated by Bhabha, the currency of the stereotype comes from a

state of ambivalence. Ambivalence, according to Bhabha, is productive in nature as it produces certain discursive knowledge, this knowledge can lead to the identity formation of the Other. The Orient is seen as both desired and derided by the Eurocentric gaze of the Occident; desired as it is exotic, essentialised and romantic, derided as it is ridiculed and challenged for its supposed inadequacies as compared to the Occident (NPTEL-NOC IITM).

Therefore, it can be said that colonial discourse is quite influential and according to Bhabha, it can be an apparatus of power. Epistemic power is the power that lies in the hands of those who control, produce and manipulate knowledge. In the system of colonialism, this power lies in the hands of the Occident or the colonisers from the West. According to Bhabha in his essay “The Other Question”, the chief function of colonial discourse is “...the creation of a space for a ‘subject peoples’ through the production of knowledge in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited” (70). This knowledge which is under surveillance can be considered to be a coded knowledge through which the Other is subjugated, not only physically but epistemically and discursively too. This surveillance creates pleasure for the coloniser as the colonial subject is contained under the surveillance system, this generates gratification which is voyeuristic and narcissistic of the coloniser. The colonised subject is thus reduced to an object. A sense of unpleasantness is generated as there is always a threat of the breach or subversion of surveillance by the colonised subject.

Bhabha states that the main objective of colonial discourse is “...to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of

administration and instruction” (77). The systems of administration and instruction would include churches, schools, and other institutions created by the colonisers for the colonised peoples in order to indoctrinate them into believing their supposed inferiority in comparison to their colonial masters. This legitimises the assumed superiority of the coloniser and ensures their control and domination. Colonial discourse sanctions the idea that colonialism is a redeeming mechanism which liberates the colonised people from their own degeneracy – here lies the assumed nobility of the coloniser who comes in with the colonial apparatus of education, reformation and emancipation (NPTEL-NOC IITM).

In order to preserve the mechanism of colonialism, the knowledge of the supremacy of the coloniser alongside the body of the coloniser must be protected. If the knowledge which acknowledges the coloniser’s supremacy is not guarded, then the entire machinery of colonialism will crash. This can happen when the colonised peoples start to question the imperial regime and authority they are subject to. Therefore, the institution of colonialism depends on the discursive differences between the coloniser and the colonised (NPTEL-NOC IITM).

According to Bhabha in the “The Other Question”, “colonial discourse produces the colonised as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (70-71). The fixated nature of the colonised, (who are perceived to have a fixed reality of depravity, degeneracy, disorder, inferiority, etc.), is what never changes in the colonial apparatus. The colonised are considered to be the Other, and at the same time, they are considered to be entirely knowable and visible. The colonised are entirely



knowable in the sense that they can never be anything more than what they are assumed to be. There seems to be no uncertainty or unknowability when it comes to the identity of the other.

This assumed sense of superiority that has been instilled in generations of the Occident gives them an allowance to turn a blind eye or be ignorant on issues and situations that do not involve them. In the novel, one of the most significant instances of this would be when the white characters are asked where Jamaica is located – with their lack of knowledge they mostly reply that it's somewhere in Africa. This question is one that is repeatedly asked in the novel by different Jamaican characters, the answers they receive from their white counterparts often suggests their blissful ignorance when it comes to the people who live outside of Britain, but are part of its empire. The following extract is a conversation between Queenie and Michael, taken from Chapter 28 of the novel: “‘Where are you from?’ ... ‘Should I ask you something easier?’ I [Queenie] asked. ‘Jamaica.’ [replied Michael] ‘In Africa?’ [replied Queenie] ... ‘Why every English person I meet think Jamaica is in Africa?’ [asked Michael] ‘Is it not?’ [replied Queenie] ‘No, it is not. It is an island in the Caribbean’” (Levy 298).

These white characters exemplify the fact that they do not have to look outside of their immediate surroundings; they have the privilege to overlook the lives and struggles of people who are exploited by their country as they occupy a comfortable spot in the social and racial hierarchy.

## Conclusion

*Small Island* by Andrea Levy remains a faithful testament to a time period in England's history that is usually undiscussed and mostly forgotten about in history books. The large-scale immigration of people from various commonwealth countries seized Britain during the post-war era, and had its natives caught in the crosshairs of the beginning of a new cultural era. It was during this time that the English landscape started to witness major changes in its make-up of a homogenous white population. An influx of immigrants meant that there would also be an influx of new cultures, this was not positively received at the time as most of the native population were set in their ways and did not take kindly to people and cultures they viewed as inferior. Since England was rebuilding itself after the great wars, there was also a fear that precious jobs would be taken away by the new immigrants. These fears culminated in the mind of traditional English society and were often acted on by means of racism, bigotry, social exclusion and in extreme cases, violence. This left immigrants feeling alienated and disillusioned in a foreign land that rebuked them for their very essence but required and used them during an extreme time of need.

The four protagonists of the novel act as the four pillars that hold up the story of a late 1940s England. Levy's inclusion of both black and white, male and female characters from varied backgrounds, brings in a wider balanced perspective which helps the reader easily imagine a bygone era of time. The struggles of the characters, both English and Jamaican, reflect the real-life situations faced by the people of the time, including Levy's own parents. This creates a sense of understanding amongst contemporary

audiences and gives them a glance at the workings of cultural assimilation as well as the creation of hybrid identities.

In the novel, the reader comes to understand that Gilbert and Hortense Joseph are a Jamaican immigrant couple who wish to make a respectable and prosperous life for themselves in England. Their shift from Jamaica, their home country, to England, the Mother country, is brought on by their commonly shared belief that England is a place of golden opportunities where they can grow and prosper economically, unlike Jamaica, their home they feel stifled by. The effects of the years of imperialism that plagued Jamaica and much of the Eastern world, are seen through how the characters view the nation that colonised them and their own nation which was colonised. England stands as a vision of modernity and class in the eye of the colonised Jamaicans; to them to be English is to be civilised and respectable. This creates a sense of wanting to belong and be accepted by the English colonists, which could only be possible through renouncing whatever isn't English, which usually includes one's own culture. In the novel, the Jamaican couple are seemingly English in the way they speak, think, dress and behave. They are the products of a generation born during the colonial era of Jamaica who have never witnessed their country's pre-colonial past and are thus heavily influenced by their colonisers' culture and practices. Thus, it can be said that colonialism has a way of skewing the way colonised peoples or formerly colonised peoples view their nation and their own culture.

Hortense and Gilbert can be seen as representative of the thousands of Jamaicans who came to England via the *Empire Windrush* in 1948. These immigrants, just like Hortense and Gilbert, possess an identity that is mixed or

hybrid as they identify as Jamaican by blood, but are English by practice. Even though these Jamaican immigrants followed fairly similar practices as their English counterparts, they weren't necessarily treated as equals and were oftentimes excluded from much of the opportunities that the whites were granted. This left the coloured immigrants in a limbo-like state as they felt they didn't belong to either community – they were non-white and immigrants, therefore they would not be completely accepted by the English in England, while they seemed “too colonised” or too similar to the whites to fit into their own community in their home country. This inability to fit comfortably into either side caused a sense of unease and disillusionment amongst the immigrants as there was a sense of lacking both stability and the idea of home. The white community's inability to fully accept outsiders, especially those who were subjugated by them, shows how deep-rooted colonialism can be. Colonists who put forth their colonial ideas possessed the power to rewrite the narratives of the nations they colonised. These manipulations of narratives were detrimental to the future of the colonised peoples as the belief of their supposed inferiority was being propagated.

Amongst the white characters of the novel, Bernard Bligh is perhaps the most hostile, he becomes a major opposing force in the lives of Gilbert, Hortense, and even his own wife Queenie. He can be read as a stand-in for the typical racist, narrow-minded colonist who believes he hails from a superior land. Therefore, it can be seen that Bernard too is affected by colonialism as he believes the notion that the English are superior to the Jamaicans and Indians he has encountered in his life. This belief held by him leaves him at odds with the Jamaican couple and his wife who is far more open-minded and

considerate than him. Queenie Bligh on the other hand, is proof that not all white people are plagued by the same ideologies; she showcases a more empathetic side of British society, a side more tolerant towards change and diversity. She can also be seen as a testament to the fact that the British society of the time had the ability to slowly overcome their racist ideologies and attitudes.

Although the London which Gilbert and Hortense are faced with is far from the gold-paved streets they had envisioned, their resolve and resilience helped them push through the barriers they were constantly confronted with. While the novel handles the heavy themes of war, love, prejudice, and imperialism, the content never comes across as too bleak or intense for Levy's sparkling sense of humour and wit provides a lightness to the story, which is generally uncommon in novels pertaining to the same themes. Overall, *Small Island* is a compelling novel, one that strives to uncover the layers of identity of each of its protagonists, whilst subtly illustrating the effects of colonialism on identity formation in both the colonising, as well as the colonised people.

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