

Whose Island Is Small? :
Racism and Identity of the Diaspora
In Andrea Levy's *Small Island*

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Sivuaine-graduussani käsittelee Andrea Levyn romaanin *Small Island* kahden jamaikalaisen syntyperää olevan päähenkilön sekä muutaman muun henkilön kohtaamaa rasismia ennen ja jälkeen toista maailmansotaa. Lisäksi tutkin miten kahden mustan päähenkilön identiteetit kehittyvät. Nämä jamaikalaiset edustavat sitä diaspora-ryhmää, jonka voidaan väittää syntyneen toisen maailmansodan jälkeen. Vuonna 1948 *The Empire Windrush*-laiva toi Isoon-Britanniaan ensimmäisen isomman maahanmuuttajaryhmän Karibialta. Tämän voidaan katsoa aloittaneen maahanmuuton isommassa mittakaavassa.

Teoriaosiossani esittelen kulttuurintutkimuksen lähtökohdat sekä päätutkijat. Lisäksi määrittelen, mitä tarkoitan rasismilla, diasporalla ja identiteetillä. Läheisesti tähän pohdintaan liittyy myös muukalaisviha, joka on romaanissakin esiintyvä teema.

Tämä historiallinen romaani jakautuu kahteen pääaikakauteen: aikaan ennen vuotta 1948 ja itse vuoteen 1948. Sivuainegraduni analyysiosion rakenne noudattaa tätä jakaumaa. Lisäksi analyysiosioon sisältyy kappale, jossa tutkin jamaikalaisen päähenkilöpariskunnan keskinäistä suhdetta ja kuinka se kehittyi. Viimeksi mainittu osio on tärkeä identiteetin kehityksen tulkinnassa. Analysoitavina ovat tapahtumat ennen tuota historiallisestikin merkittävää vuotta sekä mitä tapahtuu vuonna 1948, kun jamaikalaiset päähenkilöt saapuvat asettua asumaan pysyvästi Isoon-Britanniaan.

Ennen vuotta 1948 tarkastelen jamaikalaisen päähenkilöiden suhtautumista Isoon-Britanniaan. Kyseessä on pariskunta, joka tapaa ja avioituu pikaisesti päästäkseen lähtemään aloittamaan uuden elämän Isossa-Britanniassa. Miehellä on kokemuksia Isosta-Britanniasta ennen lähtöä, sillä hän palvelee toisen maailmansodan aikana Britannian kuninkaallisissa ilmavoimissa. Hänet komennetaan myös USA:han, jossa hänen kohtaamansa rasismi on erilaista kuin Isossa-Britanniassa. Nainen taas haaveilee Isosta-Britanniasta, jossa kaikki on täydellistä. Siksi hänen itsetuntonsa saakin ison kolauksen, kun emämaa osoittautuu rasistiseksi.

Osiossani, joka käsittelee tapahtumia vuonna 1948, keskityn siihen, kuinka romaanin diasporaa edustavat henkilöt kokevat rasismia. Heidän kohtaamansa rasismi on sekä verbaalista että fyysistä. Rasismi on romaanissa myös universaalia. Sitä esiintyy niin Jamaikalla, USA:ssa kuin Isossa-Britanniassakin. Kaikkien yhteiskuntaluokkien jäsenet vauvoista vaareihin syyllistyvät siihen. Sekä miehet että naiset syyllistyvät rasistisiin tekoihin, joiden seurauksista romaanin henkilöt joutuvat kärsimään. Esimerkkejä näistä ovat huonot asuinolosuhteet sekä työttömyys. Naiset ovat kuitenkin hyväksyvämpiä maahanmuuttajia kohtaan kuin miehet.

Avainsanat: rasismi, diaspora, identiteetti, siirtomaat, emämaa, Levy

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1. Introduction

Having been in London on the day of the terrorist attack in July 2005, I feel that Great Britain is still not fully free of racism. There seems to be a sense of ‘them and us’, insiders and outsiders, in Britain, even in the 21st century which could palpably be felt during the day and especially in the media aftermath. I could also feel during my one-year stay in Cumbria some years ago that I was not always that welcome everywhere even though my skin colour was the same as that of the dominant group (see Procter 2004: 2¹ and his discussion on dominant and subordinate groups). These are the main underlying reasons for my interest in racism (or racial discrimination which is the term preferred by some theorists), where it stems from and how it develops.

Authors representing other cultures than solely that of the British have recently been publishing their work in a greater extent in Britain. Straight after the terrorist attack, during my stay in England in the summer of 2005, I read Andrea Levy’s *Small Island*². Levy represents this transnational author group since her lineage is from Jamaica but she was born and raised in England. (For a definition of transnational interconnections see Stein 2004: 16³.) I feel that Levy has something valuable to add to the British culture, as she addresses the issue of racism in her novel in the 20th century, around the time of the Second World War. I must agree with Allardice (*The Guardian*, 21.1.2005⁴) when she aptly points out how Levy is now placing the theme of dual heritage in the limelight for a wide audience. Toplu (2005)⁵ argues

¹ Procter, James. *Stuart Hall*. London: Routledge, 2004.

² Levy, Andrea. *Small Island*. London: Headline Book Publishing, 2004

³ Stein, Mark. *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2004.

⁴ Allardice, Lisa. 2005. *The Guardian Profile: Andrea Levy*. [Internet] *The Guardian*. January 21, 2005. Available from <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,,1395260,00.html>>. [Accessed 9 November 2006]

⁵ Toplu, Sebnem. “Home(land) or ‘Motherland’: Translational Identities in Andrea Levy’s *Fruit of the Lemon*.” *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*. Volume 3, Issue 1. Spring 2005. There is no usable pagination in this essay. Therefore only the year of publication is given.

that “Britain is still struggling to come to terms with its imperial past and is trying to come to terms with the challenges presented by a post-imperial multi-racial society.” By this Toplu means that the question of real Britishness is a big issue both what comes to the past and the future. Also the challenges of a post-imperial multi-racial society are an issue in contemporary Britain which could also be sensed after the terrorist attack. Toplu (2005) also points out how “[w]ithin this highly complex social structure, the novel has proved to be a fruitful site for investigating hybridized cultural forms of Britishness.” Stein (2004: 42), too, is of the opinion that novel can be used as “a machine of cultural representation and reproduction” when talking about the redefinition of Britishness. Thus, I wish to examine the writing of a contemporary black British author whose roots are Caribbean.

The aim of this thesis is hence to explore how the two main black Jamaican immigrants, Hortense and Gilbert, as well as some other characters representing the Caribbean post-colonial diaspora, experience and deal with racism and/or xenophobia and how this is depicted in Levy’s *Small Island*. Since the novel may be categorized as a bildungsroman, a novel of development, emphasis will be placed on exploring how the characters of Hortense and Gilbert and their identities evolve. Their relationship throughout the novel as a newlywed couple also reflects this identity change and they, as a female and male, are somewhat compared and contrasted. Consequently the novel describes a major turning point in the history of Britain, hence the characters’ experiences and reactions to racism can be claimed to reflect this process of change, which is under scrutiny.

This thesis best locates in the field of cultural studies, in particular black British cultural studies. This scholarship will now be discussed as well as racism, diaspora and identity which already have been touched upon above.

2. Cultural Studies

Cultural studies as a theoretical orientation has no simple origins but according to Stuart Hall (2001: 1899⁶), one of the most influential cultural studies theorists, it is a “discursive formation”. Hall further claims that cultural studies has multiple discourses and as a result it is “a whole set of formations; it has its own different conjunctures and moments in the past”. In other words, within its history it has comprised various kinds of work. Hall (ibid.) argues cultural studies to be an open-ended project and summarises this: “it is a project that is always open to that which it doesn’t yet know, to that which it can’t yet name.” Thus this theoretical orientation has willingness to connect. In Hall’s view (2001: 1899), in cultural studies, “one registers the tension between a refusal to close the field, to police and, at the same time, a determination to stake out some positions within it and argue for them.” In other words, this can be viewed as a dialogic approach to theory (Hall 2001: 1909). Owusu (2000: 1⁷), again, defines cultural studies as a discursive ambit and notes how the impact of it has been significant in the fields of sociology, literature and political science.

In the course of the development of cultural studies, it became a Marxist theory. (For a discussion on the development of cultural studies, see Owusu 2000.) The underlying reasons for creating it, according to Hall (2001: 1900), are “questions that Marxism as a theoretical project put on the agenda”. Culture, ideology, language and the symbolic are according to Hall (2001: 1901) “the privileged objects of study”. The study of language and the symbolic in a novel fall within this definition and therefore it is justified to use this orientation as the main theory, as well as a reference point for “the relationships between power and exploitation” (Hall 2001: 1900-1901). A further justification for the use of this theoretical

⁶ Hall, Stuart. “Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies.” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton & Company, 2001, 1898-1910.

⁷ Owusu, Kwesi. “Introduction: Charting the Genealogy of Black British Cultural Studies.” *Black British Culture & Society: A Text Reader*. Ed. Kwesi Owusu. London: Routledge, 2000.

framework is how cultural studies, in Hall's view (2001: 1905), has put "on its own agenda the critical questions of race, the politics of race, the resistance to racism, the critical questions of cultural politics". This view is further strengthened by Owusu's (2000: 1) remark on how black British cultural studies "has engaged questions raised by the Black experience in postwar Britain, and indeed new configurations of racial politics from around the world."

Parker (1998b⁸) acknowledges the strengths of cultural studies which according to him are those of "remaking theories, discursive practices and pedagogies not only in English Studies and in History but also currently in disciplines such as Geography". Harris (2000: 396⁹), again, points out the strengths of cultural studies to be the production of an impressive body of scholarship which has studied e.g. mass culture, working-class culture and race and ethnicity in culture.

There are always some drawbacks to every theoretical framework. Consequently Parker poses some criticism of cultural studies. He (1998a: 8) argues how "the guardians of the canon [cultural studies] were not the only ones who were remiss" because they did not mention the works of mid-19th century black authors such as Equiano, Sancho or Harriet Jacobs. By these guardians he means the founding fathers of Cultural Studies who are Richard Hoggart, Edward Thompson and Raymond Williams. They started publishing their work in the mid-1950s and they were followed by Hall *et al.* in the mid-1960s. According to Parker (1998b) there are two silences in cultural studies. Firstly, before Hall and his contemporaries in the mid-1960s, there was a silence about colonialism and imperialism. Secondly, "there was a silence about literary texts in the making of the story." However, Owusu (2000: 2) has a contrasting view and he points out how historic disintegration of the empire and the arrival of a large number of migrant workers from the Caribbean and Asia were some of the concerns of

⁸ Parker, Kenneth. "Writing Dis-Location : Black Writers and Postcolonial Britain." *Social Identities*. 1998, Vol. 4, Issue 2, 177-200. The pagination is not consistent with the printer version and therefore not used at all.

⁹ Harris, Roxy. "Openings, Absences and Omissions: Aspects of the Treatment of 'Race', Culture and Ethnicity in British Cultural Studies." *Black British Culture & Society: A Text Reader*. Ed. Kwesi Owusu. London: Routledge, 2000, 395-404.

the founding fathers. Harris (2000: 397, 399) claims that British cultural studies has tended to focus on the effects of the subcultural youth of Britain's Caribbean-descended black working class population instead of considering this black population as "active and creative agents of their own history and culture".

Gilroy, a key name in black British cultural studies, also gets his share of Parker's criticism. Parker (1998b) refers to two of his most famous texts and claims how Gilroy "can write at length and with sophistication about forms such as film, photography and music." Parker notes how there is no mention of any literary texts in Gilroy's work except for a few pages devoted to Toni Morrison. I agree with this since I found Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*¹⁰ very interesting but I was as well disappointed with the lack of references to literary texts. However, some of the key ideas, e.g. on racism, are usable in this thesis.

Parker (1998b) argues that in the key texts of cultural studies, among others, the working class reading minds and habits have been ignored as well as topics such as slavery and resistance. Parker (1998b, 1998a: 8) gives a list of black authors who have not been discussed in cultural studies. Mary Prince is such an author. Cultural studies can hence be claimed to only take contemporary issues under scrutiny in its work. This statement is supported by Parker's (1998b) view on cultural studies and how "nothing much happens before the end of the Second World War" among Stuart Hall and other critics. Parker's (1998b) "criticism is that in the map they draw of the postwar British national culture [...] they make no reference to the contributions made by black writers". Parker (1998b) poses a satirical question when discussing critics such as Hall and Gilroy, "Are these critics ill-literate?", since there is no "evidence that they are either aware of, or value, the contribution of a by now considerable

¹⁰ Gilroy, Paul. *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. London: Hutchinson, 1987.

body of fiction, poetry and drama produced by immigrants and their descendants since the end of the Second World War.”

It is time to consider the term culture since this makes up an essential part, not just in the name of it, but also of the theoretical framework in question. According to Hall (2001: 1907) it is impossible “to get anything like an adequate theoretical account of culture’s relations and its effects” whether “it is conceived either in terms of texts and contexts, of intertextuality, or of the historical formations in which cultural practices are lodged”. Gilroy (1987: 17) in turn introduces “a more sophisticated theory of culture into the political analysis of ‘race’ and racism in Britain by claiming the term back from ethnicity” (original quotation marks). According to this point of view (ibid.), “[r]acial meanings are examined not as an autonomous branch of ideology, but as a salient feature in a general process whereby culture mediates the world of agents and the structures which are created by their social praxis.” According to this view, culture has a crucial meaning in the process. Procter (2004: 1), who has written an extensive compilation of Hall’s most influential work, claims that for Hall “culture is not something to simply appreciate, or study; it is also a critical site of social action and intervention, where power relations are both established and potentially unsettled.” Hall’s view on culture is somewhat similar with Gilroy’s (see above). It also sums up the object of study in this pro gradu thesis, i.e. how the two groups, migrant and British, interact in *Small Island*. Culture can in other words be considered as a process much in the same way as cultural studies.

Having established the grounds for cultural studies and culture, the most crucial terms will now be defined, related to the object of study in this pro gradu thesis. I will start by introducing how racism is perceived and what is meant by it.

2.1 Racism

According to Gilroy (1987: 23) racism originates in and is reproduced in certain forms of “the struggle between capital and labour – specifically in the modern period, the employment of migrant labour.” Gilroy (1987: 27) further argues racism to be a process which is not in his view a single event which bases on “psychological aberration” or “some ahistorical antipathy to black which is the cultural legacy of empire”. This legacy still haunts the consciousness of all white British “regardless of age, gender, income or circumstances.” Gilroy (1987: 229-30) points out how “[t]he right to be prejudiced is claimed as the heritage of the freeborn Briton”. British colonial past is the key factor here. The racism in *Small Island* can therefore be read as something inevitable and may be even justified.

Gilroy (1987: 38) gives examples of how “forms of economic coercion” are involved for instance in plantation slavery and migrant labour. These are examples of how “‘race’ can become a distinctive feature at the level of economic development” (original quotation marks). Race is in this view a political category. Parker (1998a: 6), again, uses the biological terms symbiosis and parasitism when discussing the relationships of the British and black immigrants. In Procter’s discussion colour has an essential role as a marker in the relationship. Hence it can be claimed that it also plays an important role when discussing racism and what it means.

The contemporary meaning for race for Gilroy (1987: 43) are “the discourses of patriotism, nationalism, xenophobia, Englishness, Britishness, militarism and gender difference” and these can be linked into an intricate system which defines the contemporary meaning of ‘race’ (original quotation marks). Rather heavy terms are included in Gilroy’s view on race, out of which xenophobia is one. Xenophobia is defined in *Collins Cobuild*

English Dictionary (1999: 1944¹¹) as “strong and unreasonable dislike or fear of people from other countries.” It is most probably this fear that leads people to racist actions and Gilroy (1987: 116) aptly points out how racism is not met by people “in general or in the abstract” but instead the effects of it are felt by them. Examples of these effects comprise for instance poor housing, unemployment, repatriation, violence and aggressive indifference. It is some of these, among others, that the black characters in *Small Island* face, too. Gilroy (ibid.) further argues that the people who are affected by racism do have the ability to think abstractly

about the character of oppression which determines their lives, but rather than the understanding of it, revealed in their expressive culture at last, is both too sophisticated and too practical to be diverted into the belief that ‘race’ is a simple cause rather than a complex effect of the underlying problems they face.

Rassool (1997: 187¹²) discusses the use of the term ‘blackness’ and how it “has historically provided a universalizing, homogenizing category in which the concept of ‘foreign Otherness’ has been encapsulated in both colonial and post-colonial discourse.” This term encompasses all the black people of different origins who have migrated to Britain. Blackness which is grounded in racist theories has in Rassool’s (ibid.) view “historically provided the category *against* which the concept of the British ‘nation’ has been defined in popular consciousness”. (original emphasis and quotation marks). According to this view blacks are racially and culturally an ‘outgroup’. Rassool (1997: 187) claims, however, that “this homogenized (dominant) view contrasts somewhat with the reality that the British ‘black experience’ comprises a complex tapestry of historical experiences grounded in different diasporas.” Toplu (2005) sums up the idea of racism by stating how it is a reality that forced most coloured people in Britain to go through a transformation of identity, the process of which is also reflected in *Small Island*.

¹¹ Sinclair, John et al. (eds.). *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary*. London: HarperCollins, 1999 (1995).

¹² Rassool, Naz. “Fractured or Flexible Identities? Life Histories of ‘Black’ Diasporic Women in Britain.” *Black British Feminism: A Reader*. Ed. Heidi Mirza. London: Routledge, 1998 (1997).

The reason for studying racism of post-colonial migrants in Britain in *Small Island* can further be justified by Gilroy's (1987: 207) statement that "[t]he recovery of historical knowledge is felt to be particularly important for blacks because the nature of their oppression is such that they have been denied any historical being." It is about time to discuss this oppression since literature of the black diaspora in England has also been neglected in the most influential theorists' writings. Parker (1998b) also points out how racism "is a consistent and continuing interest" among British migrants or their descendants who were born there as well as by those who are seeking to return to their parents' origin. The term diaspora collects some of the history of the black Britons and therefore it is discussed below.

2.2 Diaspora

According to Procter (2004: 131) Hall uses the term 'diaspora' "both literally (e.g. to refer to the specific composition of the Caribbean diaspora community" and "metaphorically (e.g. to refer to the radical impurity of black cinematic forms)." When used in either way, Procter argues Hall's (Procter, 2004: 131) use of the term to evoke a tension according to which the notion of nation and national identity are something "pure, self-contained and unified."

Gilroy (1987: 154) claims black Britain to define "itself crucially as part of a diaspora. Its unique cultures draw inspiration from those developed by black populations elsewhere." Black American and the Caribbean culture and politics have become sources for what it means to be black. This is then distinctively adapted to British experiences and meanings. That is to say, black culture is actively shaped: made and re-made. Much in the same way as cultural studies as a theoretical framework, black culture is in Gilroy's and Hall's view a process. Hall argues (1995: 6¹³ in Procter 2004: 131) the Caribbean to be the first, original

¹³ Hall, Stuart. "Negotiating Caribbean Identities." *New Left Review*, 1995, 209, 3-14.

and purest diaspora. Hall is referring to the same idea as Gilroy, i.e. the Caribbean as a diaspora community has originated in global migrations from elsewhere (cf. Toplu 2005). Rassool (1997: 189) also shares this view on the blacks' need to change, as well as on how the diaspora has developed. She (1997: 187-188) argues the different black British diasporas to originate in migration, both voluntary and involuntary, of groups of people from various parts of the world. Accordingly the people bring along their historical and cultural experiences. It is within these experiences that both cultural and individual subjectivities have been shaped. According to Rassool (1997: 189) “‘black’ identities are not fixed states of ‘being’; they are continually being shaped in their everyday interaction with the social world and thus they are flexible and engaged in a constant, reflexive, process of ‘becoming’.” (original quotation marks) Rassool’s statement could be stated to be self-explanatory since all groups of people, no matter which culture they inhabit, are constantly being shaped in their everyday interaction with the social world. Perhaps the blacks, like working class people, are only more consciously aware of this.

Toplu (2005) discusses diasporas as places of long-term “community formations” and also quotes Brah (1996: 193¹⁴) arguing the term diaspora to often invoke “the imagery of the traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of migration. But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings”. This view on diaspora clearly indicates that the nature of identity is dynamic since it is always in process and never represented as fixed or pre-given. This view will be elaborated on below.

¹⁴ Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: F Routledge, 1996.

2.3 Identity

Identity seems to be a closely linked concept when defining the Caribbean diaspora. Therefore, the post-war identity of the immigrants will now be discussed since it also makes up a crucial part of the main characters' view on the racism they face and because they also represent this diaspora. Parker (1998a: 6) felicitously argues how English, English Literature or English Studies have tended to locate writers in categories according to their birthplaces. This traditional mapping is somewhat simplified since the same kind of mapping has been done for ages, e.g. the Olympic Games is an example of this. (See also Stein 2004: xv and his discussion on how categorizing texts is problematic.) If following this line of thought, however, it is rather intricate, for instance when categorizing Levy's novels since she was born in England of Jamaican parents and also writes about Jamaican immigrants. This traditional mapping has consequently, as a result of the Second World War, become quite problematic. Parker (1998a: 7) argues, quite rightly, that "the dislodgement brought about in the wake of that war has been a major theme of the writing itself." One of the outcomes is that authors work around the theme of identity. Stein (2004: xii) discusses black British literature and points out how it "not only deals with the situation of those who came from former colonies and their descendants, but also with the society which they discovered and continue to shape and with those societies left behind." In my opinion the term 'black British literature' encompasses well the idea of what this literature is all about. In other words, it can be written by somebody who was born e.g. in Jamaica or India or by their offspring.

Stein (2004: xiii) further argues how much of this literature depicts and includes "subject formation under the influence of political, social, educational, familial, and other forces and thus resembles the *bildungsroman*." Stein uses the term 'novel of transformation' when referring to the *bildungsroman* as a genre. According to him (*ibid.*) these novels are the

dominant form in black British literature and they not only portray the protagonists' formation but also use textual agency and give out the transformative potential held by the protagonists.

Parker (1998a: 7) points out how identity is most often considered to be national, not just among those who “seek to root their lineage” on the British Isles but also among writers who are of former empire origin. Parker (ibid.) suggests that one of the features of post-war British cultures is

the erosion of old-fashioned lineages of community (notably those of class) under the impact of changes in working practices as well as social and marital relations, particularly as a consequence of the impact of the development of other and different forms of identity formation: gender; sexualities; region; proliferation of languages; religion – above all, ‘race’.

Social class is in other words an important part of identity. Having to adjust to a lower social class for instance in the form of employment and housing is clearly quite hard since that also means re-shaping one's self-image. As a result of the vast migration, travelling and dislocation of people from the former Caribbean, African and Indian colonies, “an enormously rich literary canon” has been produced (ibid.). Stein (2004: xiii) points out how Britain cannot any longer be “considered an autochthonous society of *True-Born Englishmen*” because the country has been influenced by processes of cultural transformation, “induced not only by immigration but also by having annexed foreign territory.” It is this process that the protagonists in *Small Island* are part of and witness.

Rassool (1997: 188) quite aptly points out how “‘black’ identities are not linear constructions but rather they reflect a tapestry of interwoven life experiences having their origins within different socio-historical epochs.” (original quotation marks) This view is also shared by Hall in an interview by Chen (2000: 414¹⁵), where he states how cultural identity is not fixed but always hybrid because it originates in very specific historical formations: “out of very specific histories and cultural repertoires of enunciation, that it can constitute a

¹⁵ Chen, Kuan-Hsing. “The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual: An Interview with Stuart Hall.” *Black British Culture & Society: A Text Reader*. Ed. Kwesi Owusu. London: Routledge, 2000, 405-415.

“positionality”, which we call, provisionally, identity.” Gilroy (2000: 439-440) states that the contemporary blacks in the West stand between two or more cultural assemblages. Thus “[s]triving to be both European and black requires some specific form of double consciousness.” The blacks are hence “locked symbiotically in an antagonistic relationship” which is marked by the colours black and white. Gilroy further argues that these colours “support a special rhetoric that has grown to be associated with a language of nationality and national belonging as well as the languages of race and ethnic identity.”

These ‘black’ identities in Britain originate in specific historical conditions among which, according to Rassool (1997: 188), is “the socio-cultural, political and geographical displacement effected by political exile, as well as the racism in which slavery, colonial and neo-colonial relations were legitimated”. She (1997: 189) further argues that these unequal power relations remain because they are historically rooted. This is rather similar to the discussion on how every Briton has the right to be racist. It is a national heritage. Having established the view on cultural change, including racism, diaspora and identity, I now move on to analyze these in *Small Island* and as Lima (2005: 58¹⁶) points out “Levy’s novels require that we think of identity as a “production”, as established by Hall (see above), instead of perceiving it as “an already accomplished fact”.

¹⁶ Lima, Maria Helena. “‘Pivoting the Centre’: The Fiction of Andrea Levy.” *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature*. Ed. Kadija Sesay. Herford: Hansib Publications, 2005, 56-85.

3. Andrea Levy and *Small Island*

As stated above, *Small Island* (*SI*) introduces many rather problematic themes related to black Jamaican immigrants around and after WWII, out of which racism, identity and diaspora have been discussed. Phillips puts it aptly (*The Guardian*, 14.2.2004¹⁷) when he states how Levy, in *SI*, “records some of the most un-pleasant racist aspects of the period, without displaying any sense of polemical intent, partly because her reliance on historical fact gives Levy a distance”. By using historical facts she can remain dispassionate and compassionate. These historical features, also according to Phillips, give a chance to describe the characters “in patient and illuminating detail.” Lima (2005: 56), again, discusses historical narratives, by quoting Burton (2003: 2-3¹⁸), according to whom, these narratives offer “a critical return [...] to the connections between metropole and colony, race and nation”. They explore the extent to which “empire was not just a phenomenon ‘out there’, but a fundamental and constitutive part of English culture and national identity at home”. Parker (1998a: 9), again, points out how writers from a variety of geographical locations have the experiences of colonialism, imperialism and liberation struggle in common. These themes are also reflected upon in *SI*.

SI is told in four voices. The main characters are two couples; Queenie and Bernard who are white and British and Hortense and Gilbert who are black and Jamaican. Since the historical facts are correct in the book, the characters feel real. Phillips (*The Guardian*, 14.2.2004) argues Levy’s grip on the language to be superb which I agree with. Each character, both Jamaican and British, has their own distinct way of speaking with a specific rhythm and content. This can be read in the novel by the way each character’s parts are written since there is a distinct way of writing each protagonist’s speech and thoughts. The

¹⁷ Phillips, Mike. 2004. *Roots Manoeuvre*. [Internet] The Guardian. Available from <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,1146440,00.html>>. [Accessed 9 November 2006]

¹⁸ Burton, Antoinette. “Introduction: On the Inadequacy and the Indispensability of the Nation.” *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*. Ed. Antoinette Burton. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003: 2-3.

rhythm can be ‘heard’ or sensed from the writing. The novel is in other words written in vernaculars, both of the former imperial possessions and British masters (cf. Parker, 1998a: 8). A further depth is given to Hortense and Gilbert by the fact that Levy has named the characters after her parents. According to Allardice (*The Guardian*, 21.1.2005) *SI* could be “the story of their arrival in the UK from the Caribbean.” There have been a Hortense and a Gilbert experiencing what the other members of the diaspora did. Fleming (2005: 16¹⁹) gives further similarities between the characters of Gilbert and Hortense and their namesakes by pointing out that Levy’s father served in the wartime RAF and her mother was a teacher in Jamaica. Gilbert also serves in the RAF and Hortense trains to become a teacher in Jamaica. However, the extent to which there are further similarities between these characters I do not know and therefore I treat these characters as solely fictional.

As was mentioned above, *SI* is a bildungsroman or a novel of development. Stein’s term novel of transformation, in my opinion, well encompasses how I perceive *SI*. According to Stein (2004: 22) this genre “describes and entails subject formation under the influence of social, educational, familial, and other forces.” The mode of black British novel of transformation has a dual function in Stein’s view with which I strongly agree. Firstly, it is about the development of its main characters and secondly about the transformation of British society as well as cultural institutions. Lima (2005: 63) argues *SI* to be a ‘double’ bildungsroman since there are two female protagonists rather than one. According to Lima, Levy is highlighting by this double positioning “the ways in which English society, by rigidly discriminating because of colour and class, limits the full development of all its children.” However, I wish to regard *SI* as a novel where the development of four protagonists is followed in arbitrary order since the main emphasis is not placed on the main female characters. The novel is in other words a multiple bildungsroman.

¹⁹ Fleming, Robert. “Clean Sweep.” *Black Issues Book Review*. July-August 2005, 16-18.

The novel is also divided into two main sections, i.e. to describe the time before 1948 and what actually happens in 1948. The reasons for this division are given below (see 3.2 1948). Before 1948 Bernard does not depict his story at all whereas his wife, Queenie, does tell about her childhood and what takes place after she has got married to Bernard. Hortense and Gilbert, again, depict their lives before and after and also the ideas they had about Britain prior to departure to the beloved mother country, as it was imagined by the immigrants, are given. The main emphasis is on these Jamaican-born characters. Firstly, their lives and ideas about England are given prior to 1948 (Ch. 3.1). Secondly, the permanent stay in England in 1948 is under scrutiny. The focus is especially on racism (Ch. 3.2). Finally, I introduce the reasons that lead into Hortense and Gilbert's marriage as well as briefly consider how their relationship as a newly-wed couple evolves. However, within the scope of thesis, it is not possible to include a thorough analysis on them as a couple and thus this leaves room for further study.

3.1 Before

I will begin the analysis of the characters by outlining what they were like before 1948 because the identity of these characters develops throughout the novel, not just in 1948, and as Rassool (1997: 188) points out people are not uni-dimensional: "the way in which they experience the world derive both directly and indirectly, consciously and unconsciously, from their socio-historical experiences." Stein (2004: 171) argues that the key function of black British novels of transformation is establishing a voice and including a narrative. Levy has managed to do so, both in the case of Hortense and Gilbert. They both have their voices and own narratives. The main emphasis, in this thesis, is placed on Hortense and Gilbert since it is these characters that represent the diaspora and meet the fiercest racism in *SI*. It is therefore

worth examining what the characters experience before the racist encounters in Britain in 1948 since it is these earlier incidents that affect the ways they react and respond. This is best reflected in the way they imagine the mother country and why they desire to leave Jamaica. Gilbert is also sent to the USA since he is serving in the RAF during the Second World War.

3.1.1 Hortense

Hortense as a character seems rather haughty at first before her character starts changing and gets more human traits. She also thinks she is perfect. She has been raised by her father's cousin Philip Roberts' family as a result of her lighter complexion and in that sense she also has had better chances of a bright future or "a chance of a golden life" because "If I was given to my father's cousins for upbringing, I could learn to read and write and perform all my times tables. And more. I could become a lady worthy of my father, wherever he might be." (*SI*, p. 38) Whereas if she had been brought up by her mother she would only have been offered "[b]are black feet skipping over stones" (*ibid*). In other words colour seals Hortense's fate from an early age. Philip Roberts is a man of power and also has a son, Michael, who is like a brother to Hortense since they grow up together. Colour plays an important role in the Caribbean as a determinant of how you will do in life. The lighter your skin the better odds you have. (For a discussion on the beauty of black females, see "Shades of Blackness: Young Black Female Constructions of Beauty" by Debbie Weekes²⁰.) Hortense compares her complexion to a college friend, Celia, in a rather naïve and prejudiced way:

Her [Celia's] skin was so dark. But mine was not of that hue – it was the colour of warm honey. No one would think to enchain someone such as I. All the world knows what that rousing anthem declares: 'Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.' (*SI*, p. 72)

²⁰ Weekes, Debbie. "Shades of Blackness: Young Black Female Constructions of Beauty." *Black British Feminism: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 1997, 113-126.

This also reflects the way she feels about Britain. She strongly feels herself to be part of the nation and does not grasp how she is black even if her skin is a bit lighter. Hortense also has a dreamlike image of Britain and considers herself a true Briton, the view of which changes later on. In other words Hortense thinks highly of herself because of her upbringing and her skin colour and as a result fails to understand how she is acting like a racist because she regards herself superior to her best friend.

Hortense values her British authority figures in the college where she trains to become a teacher.

I hungered to make those children regard me with as high an opinion as I had for the principal and tutors at my college. Those white women whose superiority encircled them like an aureole... Their formal elocution, their eminent intelligence, their imperial demeanour demanded and received obedience from all who beheld them. (*SI*, p. 69)

Levy has said in an interview how “[e]ach character needed a voice that reflected their lives, upbringings and beliefs. I wrote them in the first person so that the process for me became a little like acting. I would think myself into the character and then see the world through their eyes” (Fleming, 2005: 17). The way Hortense reasons, how she uses language, also tells how she is trying to be sophisticated and uses words to give this posh impact. Hortense would clearly like to be somebody as perfect as her white college tutors, to be highly respected, which is partly due to their imperial behaviour. However, she does not realize that the children probably do not respect her in the same manner because she is like them; she shares the same skin colour even though hers may have a little lighter hue. Hortense sees her teachers as angel-like creatures and this view of the British will change later on once in England.

The superiority of Hortense is highlighted throughout the start of the novel until 1948 when the tale twists. Yet another occasion where she thinks herself better when it comes to manners is when she invites Celia to visit the Andersons, the white family, whose house she is lodging in. Mrs Anderson (*SI*, pp. 87-8) is “the wife of the headmaster at the school – a

woman who not only had received her education at a boarding-school in Scotland but who was well known for having once been invited to take tea with a member of a royal household". Therefore Hortense thinks she and her family should have perfect table manners and this again shows how prejudiced she is. But instead she is "soon engulfed by the uncouth antics of this boorish family." According to Hortense the old woman in the family is sucking her chicken and Mrs Anderson tells about the birth of her twins "with embarrassing detail" and displays "the food she had just put in her mouth". When Hortense wants to know whether Celia also dislikes the family, Celia replies 'But I like this family very well.' There seems to be an inherent flaw in Hortense. She only sees the negative sides in every human being and she also shows racist qualities herself by criticizing the family she lives with. Her view of the British falters in the light of the behaviour of this family. Hortense is also always ready to criticize everybody she thinks uncouth since she has been brought up in an old-fashioned manner in a house where children were not allowed to even speak at table.

Hortense is rather small-minded and childish since her experiences are limited to home, and to college where she is one of the best and continues to exercise this pedantic way of seeing and thinking. She, in other words, does not have that much life experience and sees everything in a narrow-minded way. However, there are two big vicissitudes in her life that give her some life experience, before leaving for England, if not counting in the fact that she is not raised by her mother. The first one takes place while she still lives at home and works as an assistant at a private school. The school is run by Mr and Mrs Ryder. Michael becomes romantically involved with Mrs Ryder. There is a hurricane in the village and Hortense leaves Mrs Ryder, or Stella as Michael calls her, and Michael alone in the school house. It is eventually Hortense's fault that Michael gets sent away to England because she publicly announces how Mrs Ryder and Michael are alone in the school house while the husband of the former gets killed in the hurricane. This is a big scandal and "[g]ossip appeared in the

newspaper – a picture of Mrs Ryder’s grieving face with Michael caught in the flashlight’s glare” (*SI*, p. 59). Hortense loves Michael and therefore it is partially jealousy which makes her reveal the relationship.

The second setback also relates to Michael who has been packed off to England to serve in the RAF. While Hortense is in the college, the principal, Miss Morgan, announces that Michael is dead as given in the letter which Hortense gets from home.

‘The letter says nothing of him being dead,’ I said, but foreboding was trembling my hands.

‘God willing he is not dead. But prepare yourself and take comfort in the fact that many people, of whom I am one, believe that no matter what their colour, not matter what their creed, men who are fighting to protect the people of Great Britain from the threat of invasion by Germans are gallant heroes – be they alive or dead.’

[...] she smiled on me directly. And all at once this woman appeared devilish to me. So devilish I stood stupefied and gaping as my slackened mouth, like a terrified infant’s, quivered with the effort of trying not to weep. (*SI*, p. 80)

Miss Morgan, from Britain, seems to be a racist and not a sensitive person since she needs to point out at Hortense’s moment of grief how colour does not matter to her and whether the soldiers are dead or alive. This is the only time Hortense feels negatively about any of her tutors at college and questions their authority because Miss Morgan handles the situation in an indelicate way. This incident also highlights the idea of racism to be universal, i.e. not only is it to be met in Britain but it also exists in Jamaica. One of Miss Morgan’s eyes is half blue and half light brown and the other eye blue which add to the sensation of something supernatural addressing Hortense. Since she is extremely obedient, being in the presence of such a high authority makes the news of Michael missing even harder to bear.

3.1.2 Gilbert

Gilbert as a character seems much more amiable and social than Hortense. He also experiences Britain before 1948 while serving in the RAF during WWII and therefore he is

somewhat aware of what kind of a country it is before actually entering it for good. When he reaches the shores of Britain for the first time he questions the essence of this beloved mother country, 'Mother', and this is also when his identity starts hovering.

Let me ask you to imagine this. Living far from you is a beloved relation whom you have never met. Yet this relation is so dear a kin she is known as Mother. Your own mummy talks of Mother all the time. 'Oh, Mother is a beautiful woman – refined, mannerly and cultured. 'Your daddy tells you, 'Mother thinks of you as her children; like the Lord above she takes care of you from afar.' There are many valorous stories told of her, which enthral grown men as well as children. Her photographs are cherished, pinned in your own family album to be admired over and over. Your finest, your best, everything you have that is worthy is sent to Mother as gifts. And on her birthday sing-song and party.

Then one day you hear your Mother calling – she is troubled, she need your help. Your mummy, your daddy say go. Leave home, leave familiar, leave love. Travel seas with waves that swell about you as substantial as concrete buildings. Shiver, tire, hunger – for no sacrifice is too much to see at Mother's needy side. This surely is adventure. After all you have heard, you can imagine, can you believe, soon, soon you will meet Mother? (*SI*, p. 139)

It does not take long for Gilbert to realize the racist atmosphere there is in England. He has a dreamlike vision of what kind of a country Britain is and the way it is glorified makes the reality hit even harder. He describes this beloved Mother as a "filthy tramp", "[r]agged, old and dusty as the long dead". She also "has a blackened eye, bad breath and one lone tooth that waves in her head when she speaks." Britain is seen further seen by Gilbert as "This twisted-crooked weary woman. This stinking cantankerous hag." This Mother does not offer any comfort after the journey" and "[y]et she looks down at you through lordly eyes and says, 'Who the bloody hell are you?' (*SI*, p. 139). The last question tells about the way Gilbert manages to grasp the language of the British majority in a brilliant way and uses it ironically to create an even stronger image of his repulsion.

The reasons for Gilbert's strong reactions are justified by the Jamaican volunteers' first encounters with Britain. Not only is London in shambles because of the war but the weather in England is rainy, as it is common during summer time. Two reactions of this first meeting, however, describe the shock best and also illustrate the first signs of racism.

A college-educated Lenva wanted to know how so many white people come to speak so bad – low class and coarse as cane cutters. [...] And let me not forget James, perplexed as a newborn, standing with military bearing surrounded by English children – white urchin faces blackened with dirt, dried snot flaking on their mouths – who yelled up at him, ‘Oi, darkie, show us yer tail.’ (*SI*, p. 140)

The Caribbean have much better education than the native British and therefore it is hard for them to grasp why everybody speaks in an uncivilized way. The words of abuse used by the dirty children makes the statement of how it is right for every Briton to be prejudiced true, starting in childhood (see 2.1). Levy interestingly uses a combination of white and black when describing the youngsters. On the contrary it is these ‘urchins’ who look like monkeys rather than James who is dumbfounded by this racist incident.

Before leaving for England, Gilbert’s cousin Elwood tries to reason Gilbert not to go by arguing how the war is a white man’s war.

‘Man, this is a white man’s war. Why you wanna lose your life for a white man? For Jamaica, yes. To have your own country, yes. That is worth a fight. To see black skin in the governor’s house doing more than just serving at the table and sweeping the floor. A black man at Tate and Lyle doing more than just cutting cane. That is worth a fight. I join you then, man. But you think winning this war going to change anything for me and you?’ (*SI*, p. 129)

Elwood would approve of a war where the black man would be freed from his inferior position. His reasoning clearly reveals the racist juxtaposition which exists in Jamaica and which I pointed out earlier in the discussion on Hortense and her sentiments towards her authority figures at college (See 3.1.1). Lima (2005: 57) points out how in Levy’s novels the “characters become progressively more involved in deconstructing the official version of Englishness.” This can be read, according to Lima, in Gilbert’s response “But I was ready to fight this master race theory. For my father was a Jew and my brother is a black man. I told Elwood, ‘If this war is not won then you can be certain nothing here will ever change.’” (*SI*, p. 131)

Gilbert is struck by racism and xenophobia in good time before leaving.

Anthropoid – I looked to the dictionary to find the meaning of this word used by Hitler and his friends to describe Jews and coloured men. I got a punch in the head when the implication jumped from the page and struck me: ‘resembling a human but primitive, like an ape’. Two whacks I got. For I am a black man whose father was born a Jew. (*SI*, p. 129)

Gilbert clearly has two reasons for joining the RAF according to his reasoning above. Firstly, he is black and could have been raised a Jew like his father. Having seen this dictionary definition according to which he is a double ‘ape’, he has weighty reasons for leaving to the war.

When Gilbert has joined in the military he and his friends who he calls ‘the colony troops’ play a game in which one is supposed to know where a certain product is made in Britain. Gilbert goes on to explain how any West Indian RAF volunteer would know “where ships are built, cotton woven, steel forged, cars made, jam boiled, cups shaped, lace knotted, glass blown, tin mined, whisky distilled” (*SI*, p. 141). He also describes how he as a child already knew the canals, the railways, the roads, the ports of the docks and even the Parliamentary system. Gilbert has found that nobody knows where Jamaica is and describes stereotypical British people and their reactions when asked about Jamaica.

Now see this. An English soldier, a Tommy called Tommy Atkins. Skin as pale as soap, hair slicked with oil and shinier than his boots. See him sitting in a pub sipping a glass of warming rum and rolling a cigarette from a tin. Ask him, ‘Tommy, tell me nah, where is Jamaica?’

And hear him reply, ‘Well, dunno, Africa, ain’t it?’ (*SI*, pp. 141-2)

Gilbert compares himself and these typical Englishmen by stating how he could point at the Mother Country on a map, even “dizzy and dazed” (*SI*, p. 142). This description not only illustrates what kind of a sociolect Gilbert speaks but also how frustrated he must feel when nobody knows why he is in England in the first place and who he is.

One of the most racist encounters Gilbert witnesses and is part of, takes place while he is in the cinema with Queenie and her father-in-law who eventually is killed by the American Military Police as a result of the fight between the black and white US servicemen. The police

intervene in this racist scene and the innocent Arthur Bligh gets shot. Things start taking place when Gilbert refuses to go and sit at the back with the other blacks.

He has to go up the back,' the usherette said.
 'But there are seats here,' Queenie responded.
 'I just tell her that – she says it's the rules.'
 'Rules, what rules?' Queenie responded. [...]

It was then she took her torch to shine its searchlight beam up to the back rows of the picture house. For the briefest moment she ran her light along the faces sitting there.[...] As startling as exposing a horde of writhing cockroaches, that light, although searching for only a second, gave me an image that seared indelible into my mind's eye. It flashed across a line of black faces, illuminating the heedless and impassive features of a large group of black GIs enjoying the film.

'You have to sit with them.'
 'Madam,' I told her, 'I am not American. I am with the British RAF.'
 'You're coloured.'
 Queenie was back. 'What are you talking about?'
 'Coloured, he's coloured.' (SI, p. 184)

The reason for why “all niggers”, as the usherette accidentally calls them, have to sit at the back is because the American servicemen do not want to sit next to them. Gilbert thinks he has every right to sit wherever he pleases because they are in England, not in America. As a result of Gilbert's refusal, a row with hostile name-calling starts.

'Hey, nigger, I said sit where the lady tells ya.'
 I sat myself beside Queenie. The GI stood up – his silhouette rising like a mortal tempest before the screen.
 'Look, we don't want any trouble,' the now tearful usherette pleaded.
 'Nigger, do as you're told,' the GI shouted.
 'And you can shut up with your nigger,' Queenie said, 'I prefer them to you any day.'
 A woman's voice called. 'You tell'em, love – ruddy loud-mouth Yanks.' I did not have to look, I could feel the edgy stirring in the back of the picture house as someone shouted, 'Shut up, whitey. We ain't taking that no more.'
 The air trembled with the muttered grumblings from the rest of the audience while a white GI yelled, 'Stand up, nigger.' From the back came a harmony of voices shouting, 'Who you calling nigger? Who you calling nigger?'
 'Jigaboo suit you better?' another voice called from the front.
 'No, it ain't,' came the volley of reply. (SI, p. 186)

The name calling continues for a while until a riot breaks out, the whites fighting the blacks. When Arthur has got killed, Gilbert pointedly asks why he “had become another casualty of war – but come, tell me, someone ... which war?” (SI, p. 193) The answer to Gilbert's

question is probably that Arthur is the casualty of the racist war between the black and white. Ironically enough they are supposed to be on the same side fighting the German troops in the world war but as a result of such a minor thing as seating arrangements at the cinema, they end up fist-fighting each other. This incident clearly illustrates the attitudes towards the blacks both in the United States as in the United Kingdom. The usherette tries to blame the Americans for the racist seating arrangements but is guilty of hidden racism which pops up in her speech in the heat of the situation. Racism is constant which can be proven by this incident.

The Americans explicitly show their racism and the incident at the cinema is not the only occasion when Gilbert gets his share of it. He is faced with an absurd idea of the West Indian servicemen being better than the “American nigger” when serving in Virginia. There is no attempt to even hide the xenophobia but it is stated directly.

Now, from what I could understand, this American officer with the angular head was telling us that we West Indians, being subjects of His Majesty King George VI, had, for the time being, superior black skin. We were allowed to live with white soldiers, while the inferior American negro was not. I was perplexed. No, we were all perplexed. We Jamaicans, knowing our island is one of the largest in the Caribbean think ourselves sophisticated men of the world. Better than the ‘small islanders’ whose university only runs a few miles in either direction before it falls into the sea. But even the most feeble-minded small islanders could detect something odd about the situation. While being shown round the camp a smiling face would tell us, ‘You see, your American nigger don’t work. If his belly’s full he won’t work. When he’s hungry again then he’ll do just enough. Same kinda thing happens in the animal kingdom. But you boys being British are different.’ While being shown to our seats in the all-white picture show, handed bars of chocolate and cigarettes to share, men would say, ‘I am loyal to my flag but you would never catch no self-respecting white man going into battle with a nigger.’ At a dance in the mess being persuaded to boogie-woogie and jive – to let go, man, go! – into our black faces, up against our black skin they said, ‘We do not mix the negro and the white races here because it lowers the efficiency of our fighting units. Your American nigger ain’t really cut out to fight.’

Apparently our hosts had tried every solution to their nigger problem. ‘Only one that works in this country, and certainly in the military, is segregation.’ This was apparently how everyone liked it – black man as well as white. They had a name for it – no, not master-race theory: Jim Crow! (*SI*, pp. 131-2)

Segregation is openly admitted to exist and the blacks are being depicted as being inferior in the same way as in the “animal kingdom”. Absurdly enough, Gilbert has come to fight for the

right for being accepted as a man, not as an anthropoid and is told that the black do not share the same rights, even in America. The only reason for being treated differently when compared to the “American nigger”, which in itself is a racist naming, is that the Caribbean servicemen are subjects of Great Britain and the Americans are therefore trying to be approving hosts. They do not, in other words, have any rights as themselves but only as subjects.

Gilbert has originally thought that America is a paradise since the food the servicemen are given is so good, whereas in Britain everything has been boiled, “grey and limp on the plate like they had been eaten once before.” (*SI*, p. 126) It is this that he refers to in the quotation below. It seems to be quite a minor thing compared to the circumstances and racism in America. In Britain the black servicemen are treated kindly because of the uniform but in America, among the civilians, it does not matter.

I soon realised we were lucky the American military authorities did not let us off the camp in Virginia. We West Indians, thinking ourselves as good as any man, would have wandered unaware, greeting white people who would have swung us from the nearest tree for merely passing the time of day with them. And my brother Lester? How would they know he was a British coloured man with no uniform to distinguish him? By a badge perhaps worn on his coat? But in what shape? The word Paradise had long since stopped popping from my lips. We might be returning to that British boiling business but I was not the only boy who was pleased to be leaving America behind. (*SI*, p. 132)

Gilbert’s description of America’s racism reveals, yet again, that racism is constant and it does not only exist in Britain or Jamaica but can also be found in America and in a much more hostile way. As stated before, it is the effects of racism that are felt (Gilroy 1987: 116).

When on their way back to Britain, the servicemen get their share of racism from the British Corporal Baxter who has told them to be polite when they first arrived in America. Now he gives his lecture, some of which such as the smog, Gilbert finds interesting. Whereas some of it is tiring such as the fact that Britain is at war. However, Baxter makes use of the situation where the servicemen are captive on the ship and makes them feel like they are worth nothing.

Then suddenly, without warning, we West Indian RAF volunteers destined for England felt something like an explosion. I was not the only one on my feet ready to fight when I caught its blast. Not the only one with fists clenched willing to kill, when the rank and feisty fool-fool ras-clot Corporal Baxter, belittling us once more with his 'colony troops', told all us boys, 'And don't think you lot are going there to paint the town red. No white women there will consort with the likes of you.' (*SI*, p. 133)

Stein (2004: 57) points out how return is a common theme in post-colonial literature. According to him, it is either actual, physical returning or spiritual, notional and intellectual. Gilbert has clearly not been treated well in Britain or America and therefore thinks that returning home to Jamaica after the war is over will be nice and glorious as well. Stein (*ibid.*) calls this yearning for home "giving in to nostalgia". However, the reality is quite the opposite.

I had waited two years since the war's end for a ship that could carry me back to the island of Jamaica for a hero's return. Standing through victory parades in England, countless men had slapped my back, joyfully telling me that I could go home now. No more shivering with winter cold – my teeth would have no reason to chatter. [...]

But instead of being joyous at this demob I looked around me quizzical as a jilted lover. So, that was it. Now what? 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! (*SI*, p. 196)

This description of Jamaica reveals what the title of the novel might be hinting at: not only is Great Britain a small island but so is Jamaica, too. Jamaica is literally small, considering its size and Great Britain is small in the sense that the people inhabiting it are small-minded and racist. Britain is also small in size when contrasting it with Europe or North America. While in America Gilbert has referred to the other Caribbean islands as being "small" (see above) but with the experience of having been away, both in America and in the Mother Country, his way of seeing has changed. He is not the same man as before leaving because of his life experience which includes among other things racism and segregation. Gilbert's agitation in Jamaica is aggravated by the fact that all his siblings have fled the island and moved either to America or Canada. Stein (2004: 58) argues departures and returns to be a commonly found

pattern in a number of black British novels. It is this trait that marks the genre as diasporic, i.e. there is either one home or none. Gilbert is left alone with his cousin Elwood with whom he tries to set up business but their attempts fail. He finds himself in a dead-end with no home, from which his saviour is Hortense (see 3.3).

3.2 1948

There are two main reasons for why 1948 functions as a watershed in *Small Island*. Firstly, the year is revolutionary because the black British cultural identity starts forming as a result of more and more black migrant labourers entering Britain. This is also when Gilbert enters Britain on the SS Empire Windrush in June, followed later by Hortense. The SS Empire Windrush docked at Tilbury on 22 June 1948. Phillips (BBC, the Internet²¹) argues that if it had not been for WWII, “the Windrush and her passenger might not have made the voyage at all.” He also points out how “the image of the Caribbeans filing off its [Windrush’s] gangplank has come to symbolise many of the changes which have taken place”. He further claims that the debate about identity and citizenship, which is familiar today, started at this moment of stepping off the Windrush. Innes (2002: 180²²) argues that 1948 “brought a new generation of immigrants and settlers, as well as renewed violence against the established black community.” The Icons website²³ points out the number of passengers to have been 492 and how most of them were ex-servicemen and had been promised there would be jobs waiting. Only 202 of these passengers found work immediately which clearly reflects the hostile environment they were faced with in the beloved Mother Country which betrayed the

²¹ Phillips, Mike. Windrush – the Passengers. [Internet] BBC. Available from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/windrush_print.html>. [Accessed 22 January 2007]

²² Innes, Catherine. *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1970-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

²³ Icons ◦ a portrait of England. *The Story of the SS Empire Windrush*. [Internet] Available from <<http://www.icons.org.uk/theicons/collection/ss-windrush/biography/windrush-biography>>. [Accessed 9 November 2006]

majority of them in that sense. As Parker (1998a: 9) points out, the immigrants were coming 'home' as "they had been taught in schools and in their churches" since they had fought in the armies which had defeated Hitler. Despite these soldiers' record of fighting for Britain they became disliked and less and less welcome because of the influx of larger numbers of migrants (Stein, 2004: 4). However, the reality was somewhat different from their expectations as they soon came to experience. Stein (*ibid.*) points out how although the arrival of the SS Empire Windrush is crucial because it marks the start of postwar migration on a large-scale, there had been an inflow of immigrants already years before.

Secondly, 1948 marks the introduction of the Nationality Act. Innes (2002: 181) states how all the migrant labourers from former colonies "under the 1948 Nationality Act, passed in the year that the British Empire became the British Commonwealth, were British citizens, granted UK citizenship as citizens of Britain's colonies and former colonies." According to Carter *et al.* (2000: 23²⁴) this Act gave these former colonial subjects rights of entry and settlement that did not previously exist. The intention of this Act was to reorganize the empire as an economic and political force.

The concept of a 'United Kingdom and Colonies' citizenship – as opposed to a separate citizenship for each territory – enshrined in the Act was meant to curb colonial nationalism rather than to concede rights of entry and settlement into Britain. (Carter *et al.*, 2000: 23)

Carter *et al.* (2000: 32) argue that the 1948 Nationality Act boosted the conflict "between a formal definition of 'Britishness' which embraced black British subjects abroad and an increasingly racialized notion of belonging in which 'racial types' were constructed around colour."

According to Carter *et al.* (2000: 21) the role of the British state is often ignored or not seen as significant when discussing postwar racism. However, "on the contrary, the state took

²⁴ Carter, Bob, Harris, Clive and Shirley Joshi. "The 1951 – 1955 Conservative Government and the Racialization of Black Immigration." *Black British Culture & Society: A Text Reader*. Ed. Kwesi Owusu. London: Routledge, 2000, 21-36.

a major role in constructing black immigration as a 'problem' and in so doing reinforced a conception of Britishness grounded in colour and culture". Accordingly, the right of black people to enter and settle in Britain was prohibited by the government well before 1955, i.e. in the 1940s and 1950s. Given the circumstances around the time Hortense and Gilbert enter England, it can easily be understood why they are not accepted. It was the government which was partially denigrating the migrant workers.

This view is further supported by Carter *et al.* when they state how "the state went to great lengths to restrict and control on racist grounds black immigration to the United Kingdom despite a demand for labour". An ideological framework was developed by successive governments according to which blacks were seen as alien, threatening and unassimilable. The governments also drew up policies to control and discourage black immigration (Carter *et al.* 2000: 22). Firstly, the war and the history of the empire encouraged the British nation to xenophobia and racism and secondly the government was boosting these ideas. Stein (2004: 5) also shares this view of xenophobia. He points out how "Return to the Mother Country" was how the immigrants' moving was first seen both by themselves and the native Britons. This view soon changed, "as xenophobic responses were matched by the passing of increasingly restrictive immigration laws, to the point where immigration for black Commonwealth citizens has become nearly impossible." The circumstances Gilbert and Hortense step in are clearly hostile and it is time to study how they are treated, i.e. how this aggressive atmosphere is described in *SI*. Lima (2005: 59) also points out how Britain as 'mother' country has "left many of its children (by virtue of empire) orphaned, since it has rejected them as 'other', not English, when they arrive from their Caribbean islands".

3.2.1 Hortense

As noted above (see 3.1.1) Hortense's character starts changing once she enters Britain as does her dream-like idea of this beloved Mother country. In Britain she can no longer conceive of herself as perfect and she also witnesses a number of racist encounters which come to change her. While still in Jamaica Celia has trusted Hortense with her dream according to which she will have a big house in England when she is older with "a bell at the front door and I will ring the bell, ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling." (*SI*, p. 72) However, Hortense does not have this experience when standing at Queenie's door for the first time.

But when I pressed this doorbell I did not hear a ring. No ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling. I pressed it once more in case the bell was not operational. The house, I could see, was shabby. (*SI*, pp. 12-13)

This is foreboding of things yet to come which is also highlighted by the positioning in the novel. This excerpt is from one of the first chapters after the prologue. Hortense's feeling of things being "shabby" or rather out of place is also emphasized by the fact that her husband has not come to collect her from the harbour after a long journey from Jamaica but she has needed to find her own way to the house. Stein (2004: 45) writes about redressing the Mother Country. According to this idea, nothing works in Britain. The house is an example of this as well as of British institutions, such as the education authorities and the Post, which shall be described below, which can also be included because they clearly do not function the way they should.

Prior to standing by this derelict house she has tried to get some help at the dock after a long wait for Gilbert who has failed to meet her. There she also experiences racism in England for the first time when asking a man for guidance to Nevern Street. The man thinks he is funny and replies how he cannot take her "all the way on me trolley" (*SI*, p.16). This

working man does not understand Hortense even though she tries her best to sound sophisticated when inquiring about where to find a taxi.

I stared into his face and said, ‘Thank you, and could you be so kind as to point out for me the place where I might find one of these vehicles?’

The white man looked perplexed. ‘You what, love?’ he said, as if I had been speaking in tongues. (*SI*, p. 16)

Moses (January Magazine 2004²⁵) gives a sharp description of Hortense: “Snobbish, prim and more refined than most, Hortense is devastated when she realizes that England is not the utopia she imagined it would be.” She has not yet, however, come to realize what England is like but will find out later on, after having sought for employment (see below).

Her self-esteem is again tried when she tries to instruct the cab driver.

It took me several attempts at saying the address to the driver of the taxi vehicle before his face lift with recognition. ‘I need to be taken to number twenty-one Nevern Street in SW five. Twenty-one Nevern Street. N-e-v-e-r-n S-t-r-e-e-t.’ I put on my best accent. An accent that had taken me to the top of the class in Miss Stuart’s English pronunciation competition. My recitation of ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ had earned me a merit star and the honour of ringing the school bell for one week.

But still this taxi driver did not understand me. ‘No, sorry, dear. Have you got it written down or something?’ (*SI*, pp. 16-17)

The driver thinks Hortense is from somewhere uncivilized since he doubts whether there are knockers and door bells where she comes from. He also instructs Hortense how to ring the bell at the door with “the slow exaggeration I [Hortense] generally reserved for the teaching of small children” (*SI*, p. 17). There are misunderstandings on both sides as Hortense thinks how white men are meant to work because they are “fool”. This also shows Hortense’s prejudiced character and how she thinks herself perfect with a flawless pronunciation which has been highlighted at college. In a way, it is justified for Hortense to act in this manner because she has been taught in school how she has a perfect pronunciation and therefore she also has every right to believe so. This incident shows how xenophobia is mutual and also how Hortense knows a great deal more about British culture, for instance Keats, than the

²⁵ Moses, Nicole. *Colorific*. [Internet] January Magazine. 2004. Available from <<http://www.januarymagazine.com/fiction/smallisland.html>>. [Accessed 9 November 2006]

driver about the former colonies and their customs, in the same way as Gilbert and the colony troops (see above).

When Queenie opens the door and Hortense wonders whether Gilbert Joseph is living there, the misunderstandings begin. The ladies' accents are totally different and Queenie even pronounces Gilbert's name strangely enough to make Hortense doubt whether they are talking about the same man. Queenie inquires if Gilbert has not come to meet Hortense at the dock at which Hortense replies: 'I have not seen Gilbert,' [...] 'but this is perchance where he is aboding?' Hortense is overpolite whereas Queenie is not putting out her best behaviour and bluntly replies 'What?' at Hortense's question (*SI*, p. 13). This incident illustrates the differences of social class. Hortense is working class and Queenie has risen from working class to upper working class as a result of her marriage to Bernard who is a bank clerk.

There are further instances of failing communication between Queenie and Hortense. The former comes to see if things are alright with the latter which makes Hortense think Queenie is snooping around. But she politely lets Queenie enter and the following dialogue, which illustrates this cultural clash, takes place between them.

'Excuse me,' I said, 'but would you perchance have a basin that I might get a use of?'

'A what?'

'A basin,' I repeated.

'Sorry.'

'A basin to put at the sink.'

'A bee – to put what?'

'A basin.'

'I'm sorry but I don't understand what you're saying.'

I thought to say it again slower but then remembered an alternative that would work as well. 'A bucket,' I said.

'A what?' she started again.

It was useless. Was I not speaking English? I had nothing but the potty to point at instead. But she would surely misunderstand that. And who knows where the confusion could take us? So I hushed my mouth.

'Where did you get that thing?' she said, pointing at my blanket. 'It's so bright. You need dark glasses for that.' It obviously amused her. She began a giggle. 'Did you bring it over with you?' Moving past the blanket she went to warm her hands on the fire. She bent over closer to the flame. 'It's perishing today. I bet you wished you never left somewhere nice and hot?' When I made no reply she looked to me and mouthed the

words, 'Cold today,' as if I might have lost my hearing. ... 'You'll soon get used to our language.'

I told this Englishwoman, 'I can speak and understand the English language very well, thank you. [...]

I held my tongue. Forbearance prevented me informing her that what I do say she does not appear to comprehend.

'So how long have you and Gilbert been married, then?'

The barefaced cheek of the question sucked all the breath from me. Did she want to know all my business? I just look on her and wait. Soon this white Englishwoman must realise she is talking ill-mannered to me. But she say it again. This time in that slow way, as if I did not grasp her meaning the first time. (*SI*, pp. 228-9)

Hortense thinks that Queenie is impolite as she sits down without being asked to but she concludes that that is probably the way in England and lets her sit down. Queenie also suggests she could teach Hortense, whereas Hortense feels that she could teach Queenie manners.

Queenie does, in fact, teach Hortense. She takes Hortense shopping. On this spree, Hortense sees a woman whose "hair was black as ink, her complexion not much lighter than my own – the colour of honey." (*SI*, p. 330) Also Hortense finds dark-hued people extraordinary since all the Britons she has ever seen have always been light in complexion. Hortense is as well guilty of xenophobia and rude manners since she keeps staring at this dark lady and her son. The lady speaks "[i]mpeccable English, rounded and haughty" when inquiring about cheese (*SI*, p. 331) which makes Hortense dumbfounded. Queenie misunderstands Hortense's wondering gaping at the lady as that she does not know how to shop which shows Queenie's prejudiced or racist attitude towards Hortense. As a result, she starts explaining to Hortense: "In a grocery shop you can get milk, biscuits, sugar, cornflakes, eggs, that sort of thing. [...] So remember it is a grocery shop." (*ibid.*) When Hortense tries to purchase a tin of condensed milk, she needs to resort to pointing out since the clerk does not understand her.

But this man stared back at me as if I had not uttered the words. No light of comprehension sparkled in his eye. 'I beg your pardon?' he said.

Condensed milk, I said, five times, and still he looked on me bewildered. Why no one in this country understand my English? At college my diction was admired by all. I had to point at the wretched tin of condensed milk, which resided just behind his head.

‘Oh condensed milk,’ he told me, as if I had not been saying it all along.

Tired of this silly dance of miscomprehension, I did not bother to ask for the loaf of bread – I just point to the bread on the counter. The man enclose his big hand over the loaf, his freckled fingers across it. I stared on him. Was I to eat this bread now this man had touch it up? With his other hand he wiped his nose as he held out the bread for me to take. I did not take it, for I was waiting on him to place the bread into a bag to wrap it.

‘There you are,’ he said to me, pushing the loaf forward enough for me to see a thin black line of dirt arching under each fingernail. It was Mrs Bligh who came and took the bread from him. Her dirty hand having pinch up my loaf as well, she placed it into my shopping bag.

Then she tell me loud for all to hear, ‘This is bread.’ [...]

I whispered into the ear of Mrs Bligh, ‘He has not wrapped the bread.’

But she paid me no mind, so busy was she joining this shopkeeper in rolling their eyes to the heavens as I paid my money over. (*SI*, pp. 331-2)

Queenie does not even try to hide the way she is patronizing Hortense and openly joins in the racist mockery. She is, in other words, showing racist qualities even though she is trying to act nice to Hortense but actually manages to turn the helping into racism.

Not being understood is not the only racist encounter Hortense is faced with. She is also openly stared at and called names. One instance takes place when “a small blond child” points at Hortense.

‘Look! She’s black. Look, Mum, black woman.’ [...]

She nearly pushed the pram into a lamppost before leaning forward to admonish the pointing child. ‘Don’t point Georgey. She’s not black – she’s coloured.’

While from the other side of the road came shouting. Loud, uncouth and raucous. ‘Golliwog, golliwog.’ It was three young men. Holding up a wall they yelled through the funnel of their hands, ‘Oi, sambo.’ (*SI*, p. 334-5)

Hortense finds the boy also “an apparition” and is not taken aback by this child whereas she would like to see the young men’s faces because she would like to know what kind of “English person could call out so coarse”. The boys also call her “darkie”. The mother of the small boy uses a good strategy to back-pedal her son’s speech. She thinks it is more justified to call somebody ‘coloured’, i.e. to use euphemism, than to call somebody ‘black’. This illustrates the difference in attitude between the people in England. Some try to assimilate,

such as the lady with her son, whereas some openly show hostility towards the immigrants by calling them abusive names.

Queenie further shows some of her racist traits by being guilty of aggressive indifference (cf. Gilroy, 1987: 116) when she teaches Hortense to step off the pavement if a white person wishes to pass. This makes Hortense wonder: “Not believing what my ear was hearing I asked, ‘I, a woman, should step into the busy road?’ She nodded. So I enquired of her, ‘And if there is a puddle should I lie down in it?’ (SI, p. 335) In this incident Hortense shows her satirical character and she has somewhat also started to grasp how unwanted she is in England since she has slowly started to be on the defensive.

After having stayed in Britain for a while Hortense starts applying for teaching posts. There are, however, boundaries which are impossible to cross. Mirza (1997: 7²⁶) points out how “[i]n the British Government’s conscious drive to recruit cheap labour from the newly independent colonies in the early 1950s, it was simply assumed that migrant workers, like their own workers, are always male.” Women were according to this belief “invisible non-entities” and came either as “wives or children, dependents of the man” (Mirza, 1997: 7). This is not true in Hortense’s case since she strives to be an independent woman and even considers herself better than her husband. She thinks highly of herself and as a result gets the lesson of her lifetime.

My two letters of recommendation each contained words that would open up the doors of any school to me. [...]

Miss Morgan, the formidable principal at my college, declared me highly capable. And a highly capable expert I felt. This was the day I was going to present myself for a position as a teacher at the offices of the education authority and no pained-face, fool fool man was going to imperil my elation. (SI, pp. 448-9)

Hortense enters the Inquiries at the local school office. There she is treated with aggressive indifference.

²⁶ Mirza, Heidi Safia. “Introduction.” *Black British Feminism: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 1997, 1-28.

Three women sitting neatly at desks perused me as I came through the door. In a puppet dance all three quickly glanced to each other then returned to staring on me.

‘Good day,’ I said.

Two dropped their heads returning to their business as if I had not spoken, leaving just an older woman to ask, ‘Yes, do you want something?’ (*SI*, pp. 451-2)

The older woman smiles at Hortense which she misinterprets as a joyful smile and goes on to explain how she is a teacher.

But I was startled to find myself timorous in this woman’s friendly presence. My voice faltered into a tiny squeak. I took a moment to cough into my hand. Having composed myself I began again. ‘I am a teacher and I understand this is the place at which I should present myself for a position in that particular profession.’ Through this woman’s warm smile I detected a little confusion. Too well bred to say ‘What?’ she looked a quizzical eye on me, which shouted the word just as audibly. I repeated myself clearly but before I had completed the statement the woman asked of me sweetly, ‘Did you say you are a teacher?’ (*SI*, p. 452)

Hortense is not understood here either and the woman does not even try to hide her repulsive reaction which is shared by the other two women who refuse even to talk to Hortense. When Hortense hands in her excellent letters of recommendation, as she thinks, the woman does not even bother to look at them. Instead she wants to know where Hortense is from. Hortense tries to explain the letters but the woman does not care about Hortense’s teaching experience. Instead she is trying to find excuses to dismiss her.

She leaned back on her chair and instead of opening the letters she began playing with them – flicking the paper against her fingers. ‘And where did you train to be a teacher?’ she asked me.

Her comely smile belied the rudeness of her tone. And I could not help but note the rudeness of her tone. And I could not help but note that all gladness had left her eye and remained only at her mouth. ‘I trained at the teacher-training college in Constant Spring, under the tutelage of Miss Morgan.’

‘Is that in Jamaica?’

‘Yes.’

It was relief that tipped her head to one side while she let out a long breath. I eased myself believing everything was now cleared between us. Until, leaning all her ample charm forward, she told me, ‘Well, I’m afraid you can’t teach here,’ and passed the unopened letters back to me. (*SI*, p. 453)

Hortense thinks there has been a misunderstanding and tries to explain the letter further. In return she gets a humiliating response: “‘The letters don’t matter,’ she told me. ‘You can’t teach in this country. You’re not qualified to teach here in England.’” (*SI*, p. 454) The smile

Hortense has first understood as friendly is now “as stale as a gargoyle”. The woman refers to higher authorities and as a result shifts the responsibility. In that way she is not personally taking responsibility for her racist actions but instead it is the higher authorities who are to blame.

‘Miss, I’m afraid there really is no point your sitting there arguing with me.’ And she giggled. The untimely chortle made my mouth gape. ‘It’s not up to me. It’s the decision of the education authority. I can do nothing to change that. And, I’m afraid, neither can you. Now, I don’t mean to hurry you but I have an awful lot to do. So thank you for coming.’ (*SI*, p. 454)

Hortense remains polite till the end even though she is openly harassed. Her embarrassment is topped of when she walks into a cupboard instead of leaving the office through the door. The reactions of the three women in my opinion respond to the level of racism each woman holds.

All three were giggling when I emerged from the dark of the closet. One behind a hand, another with a sheet of paper lifted up so I might not see. The older woman was, of course, smiling but pity encircled the look, ‘It’s that door,’ she said, pointing her spiky finger at the other wooden opening. I thanked her, bade them all good day once more and passed through the correct exit, untroubled by the sound of their rising laughter. (*SI*, p. 455)

Hortense pretends everything to be all right in order not to not to let the women’s reactions to be justified. She tries to bluff that she does not care even though she is devastated and has faced one of the biggest setbacks in her life. This incident works as a turning point in Hortense’s life. It not only changes her beliefs about Britain and its people but it also makes Hortense respect her husband in a new way (see 3.3). It is also the first time her self-esteem experiences a true strike; she is not perfect and does not get a post which she thinks she has every right to.

Mirza argues migrant women to have only been able to claim their rights through marriage. According to Mirza (1997: 7) females “emerged in the official patriarchal, neo-imperialist discourse only as subjects for sexual and racist humiliation.” Mirza’s point of view can be shown to be true, at least in Hortense’s case. She indeed has been mortified worse than

ever in the school authorities' office. Toplu (2005) calls these two different types racial and gender discrimination, both of which Hortense is faced with.

Clearly, Hortense would like to have a good well-paid job so which she thinks is worth of her class. To prove that she belongs to a higher social class she listens to The BBC: "The Light Programme – *Woman's Hour*, *Mrs Dale's Diary*, *Music While You Work*, and of course the news." (SI, p. 449) She listens to these entertainment programmes and repeats after the model to be able to speak in the proper British way. All the people on these radio programmes speak with RP, with the exception of some labour MPs, and therefore she listens to them as she would like to have a similar accent. She thinks Cockney will not do and therefore "[e]very day my wireless was tuned to the most exemplary English in the known world." (SI, p. 449) Hortense's practice pays off since she is understood by the shopkeeper two times when she has requested an item in the grocery shop. Hortense is clearly trying to position herself in the society by embracing RP accent (see Stein, 2004: 173 and his discussion on voice, language and accent).

One of the underlying reasons for Hortense not getting a teaching post, besides racism, is the historical fact that the migrant workers tended to fill the jobs "in transport, health services, factories, and the postal service" (Innes, 2002: 180). So, there might have been a job for Hortense in health services had she been a nurse. Lima (2005: 59), again, points out how there were advertisements in West Indian newspapers by organizations like London Transport, the British Hotels and Restaurant Association and the NHS to recruit people to "jobs traditionally of low status and low pay".

Being denied a teaching post, Hortense has one of the worst disappointments and humiliating moments of her life. She is devastated and to top it all off, she also is being stared at and further harassed by Britons. She has told Gilbert how she needs to train again to become a teacher in Britain which makes Gilbert remember his old RAF friend, Charlie

Denton, who has got a post as a history teacher even though “this man once argue silly with me that Wellington had won the battle of Trafalgar Square” (*SI*, p. 458). This further strengthens the idea of how colour and racism are the reasons for not being hired, even though one has perfect subject knowledge and education. Hortense sits together with Gilbert on a park bench and Gilbert describes this moment of further mortification.

And still the goofy boy was staring on us. ‘Shoo,’ I told him. He poked out his tongue and wiggled his big ear at me, then ran away. But other eyes soon took his place. An old man was so beguiled by Hortense that, gaping on us, he leaned his stick into a drain and nearly trip over. A curly-haired woman crossed her eyes giddy with the effort of gawping. A fat man pointed, while another with a dog tutted and shook his head. Come, let me tell you, I wanted to tempt these busybodies closer. Beckon them step forward and take a better look. For then I might catch my hand around one of their scrawny white necks and squeeze. No one will watch us weep in this country.

‘What you all see?’ I shouted on them. ‘Go on, shoo.’ (*SI*, p. 459)

Gilbert’s depiction of the xenophobic, staring people comprises the whole range: from children to elderly, both females and males. This yet again proves how racism is constant and can be found among all ages, all social classes and both sexes.

Hortense is clearly having a rough time in England. Stein (2004: 44) points out how racist instances “ranging from stereotypes to verbal and physical abuse are common to most black British texts.” This is also the case in *SI*. Hortense is being harassed and called names, whereas Gilbert gets his share of physical abuse (see 3.2.2). Hortense is being stared at and even touched by children who find her fascinating because she is black. After she has been sight-seeing with Gilbert they go to have some tea and cakes with Gilbert when an alcoholic approaches them and says what a cold day it is. The reply Hortense makes tells how she feels about England: “I have found that this is a very cold country.” (*SI*, p. 466) The fairytale of a perfect Mother Country has vanished.

3.2.2 Gilbert

Gilbert has difficulties with finding accommodation when he returns to Britain on the SS *Empire Windrush*. He has no choice but to turn to Queenie who he got acquainted with while serving in the RAF during WW2. First, he thinks having met Queenie is good fortune and even regrets his marriage to Hortense. However, this view changes when some of Gilbert's friends move in as well and when the amount of rent is declared. Queenie shows her racist qualities also to Gilbert in this sense by overcharging.

Early days and Queenie was still that pretty blonde woman who friendly leaned across a table to share a rock bun with me. And though no longer dressed in uniform, I was still, even in my plain suit, one of the boys in blue. Happy to have me around her house, she made me tea. We, sipping the drink, would talk. [...] She needed my help – a woman on her own. She wore me out. Jumping steps and laughing like a girl as we moved furniture around the house so she might let the rooms. Let me tell you, every night in those early days I slipped to my knees to give thanks at my good fortune and cuss those hastily taken marriage vows. Meeting up with Queenie Bligh was the best luck this Jamaican man had ever had.

Then Winston and Kenneth moved in. The rent Queenie charged us made me clean my ear to ask again. Three pounds a week each for these rundown rooms? Winston and even Kenneth gaped dumbfounded as she assured us she had no choice but to charge that sort of money. Then with the first week's rent I delivered to her on Saturday morning she told me someone kept the door open too long. The next day she wanted me to know someone shut the door too loud. Something smelling up a room. Someone making too much noise. I must tell the boys not to leave on the light. Have I told the boys to keep their room clean?

'Cha, me thought you say she your friend. So why the woman act like bakkra?' Kenneth wanted to know. (*SI*, pp. 222-3)

Queenie starts complaining about everything: how to step on the first flight and how not to have anybody in the room. Gilbert, against his amiable and social character, starts avoiding her and even lies to her about the two look-alike brothers, Kenneth and Winston. The former is not trustworthy, whereas the latter is a good guy. It is Kenneth who has helped Gilbert heave Hortense's trunk up the stairs and Gilbert argues it to have been Winston. Finding housing at that time was extremely difficult for black immigrants which was supported by the government's acts to prohibit immigration (see 3.2). Levy has commented on this issue of

housing in an interview (Fleming, 2005: 16) by stating how “there were now the infamous signs that were out in the windows to deter black people and other undesirables that read: “No Blacks, No Irish, No dogs.” Also Phillips points out in the article “Windrush – the Passenger” (BBC, Internet) how there was first a clash between the Caribbeans and natives over accommodation. Innes (2002: 181) points out how the blacks commonly experienced hostility and discrimination in housing and employment.

Employment is another difficulty for Gilbert. He attends several job interviews, always thinking he will get the job. Levy has said in an interview how a black person could be told to the face how they would not be given a job since they are black (Fleming, 2005: 16). This is also true in Gilbert’s case. For instance, when he applies for a position as a storeman, he is only treated nicely because of his background as an RAF volunteer. The interviewer who Gilbert addresses as ‘Sir’ also appears to have been in the RAF. Gilbert has to follow a monologue about the man’s career in Falmouth for an hour which he tries to interrupt by reminding about the post he is applying for. The answer is ‘No, sorry.’ When Gilbert does not understand the man, he simply goes on to explain:

‘You see, we have white women working here. Now, in the course of your duties, what if you accidentally found yourself talking to a white woman?’ For a moment the man sounded so reasonable, so measured, I thought him to be talking sense.

‘I would be very courteous to her,’ I assured him.

But he shook his head. He wanted no answer from me. ‘I’m afraid all hell would break loose if the men found you talking to their women. They simply wouldn’t stand for that. As much as I’d like to I can’t give you the job. You must see the problems it would cause?’

Once my breath had returned enabling me to speak again, I asked him why he could not have told me this an hour before when I still had feeling in my backside. He tell me he wanted to be kind to an ex-serviceman. (*SI*, p. 312)

The reason this ‘Sir’ offers is clearly racist in nature. He even points out how he wanted to be nice and how it is the white women’s men who do not want their wives working with blacks. The man is blaming his racism on somebody else instead of taking responsibility for his actions. Lima (2005: 77) points out in her analysis of *SI* how if a black man was not wearing

the RAF's blue uniform, he would be dismissed as just a black man. The uniform has, in other words, been a ticket for being accepted as a normal human being during WW2 but not afterwards. This shows xenophobia to be a true phenomenon.

This seems to be the case in other job interviews as well. Another interviewer blames his partner for not liking "coloured people". The interview itself is absurd because the interviewer makes Gilbert pray before announcing the sentence, which makes the reader feel sympathy for Gilbert and accuse the interviewer of racism.

Another office I am invited into, the man ask me if I am a Christian. Let me tell you, after a few weeks back in this after-the-war England, God slipping from me like a freshly launched ship. But I say yes. The man start praying among the telephone and blotting-pad. He invite me to join him. I need the job so I lower my head. At the end of praising the Lord together he tell me he cannot employ me because his partner does not like coloured people. I nearly knock him into an early meeting with the Almighty when he call on God to bless me as I left. (*SI*, pp. 312-3)

This incident, laced with black humour, also depicts the state of desperation Gilbert is starting to be in. The only thing stopping him from punching the man is probably his good upbringing and manners.

Gilbert goes to several places to apply for employment. He has had the same experience as Hortense has later on, i.e. he is not taken seriously and is being accused of applying for posts which are according to the interviewers meant for the white British citizens. However, he has in fact been encouraged to leave Jamaica and apply for work in Britain. Thus far, he has probably applied for the wrong kind of places. Gilbert sums up his search for employment.

In five, no, in six places, the job I had gone for vanish with one look upon my face. Another, I wait, letter in my hand, while everyone in the office go about their business as if I am not there I can feel them watching me close as a pickpocket with his prey but cannot catch even a peeping twinkle of an eye. Until a man come in agitated. 'What're you doing here?' he say to me. 'We don't want you. There's no job for you here. I'm going to get in touch with that labour exchange, tell them not to send any more of you people. We can't use your sort. Go on, get out.' (*SI*, p. 313)

Gilbert is the target of xenophobia in the above incident and can sense the direct hostility. At least in this place, somebody has the courage to say direct to his face that he is not wanted. At

another office he is being looked at as if he was something frightening. The girl does not even try to hide her xenophobic response.

The girl at another office look on me with such horror – man I swear her hair standing straight as stiff fingers – that with no hesitation I walk right back out again. Was I to look upon that expression every day? Come, soon I would believe that there was something wrong with me. (*SI*, p. 313)

Ironically enough, when Gilbert eventually gets a job, he needs his driving license which he did not want to admit of having in the first place because of having driven more than enough in Jamaica to help his mother and aunt to deliver their bakery. The job he finds is in the field of transportation, in the Post Office. He finally finds a job in the right branch which was, according to Innes (2002: 180), meant for the migrant labour forces. Gilbert's reaction is depicted below.

Man, I was as jubilant as a boy on his birthday when my hands finally caressed the cold of a steering-wheel as a postman driver for the Post Office. Ah, that celestial book. I may not have been studying the law in this Mother Country but, let me tell you, for a Jamaican man a job as a driver was great luck – if only luck England-style. (*SI*, p. 313)

Gilbert has found out what kind of a country England is since it has let him down so many times. Therefore, he cannot appreciate the job to its full extent and is happy in “England-style”, carefully as there may be worse yet to come.

Gilbert is right to be skeptical about his luck. Difficulties start immediately Gilbert begins his new job. The foreman at the sorting office pretends he does not know Gilbert's surname and shows his race-prejudiced character by calling Gilbert by ‘Oi, you’ (*SI*, p. 313) instead of calling out Joseph which he has used the first time they have met which has been an “almost courteous encounter” (*SI*, p. 314). When Gilbert's usual partner for collecting from Victoria Station is ill, he is being coupled with a young man he immediately recognizes as trouble.

And at that moment I longed to be once more in Jamaica. I yearned for home as a drunk man for whisky. For only there could I be sure that someone looking on my face for the first time would regard it without reaction. No gapes, no gawps, no cussing, no looking quickly away as if seeing something unsavoury. Just a meeting as unremarkable as passing your mummy in the kitchen. [...] What a forlorn desire to seek indifference.

Seeing me, the young man approaching my van stopped dead. I greeted him with a smile. [...] He lifted his finger to point at me and only then did he shout, 'What the bloody hell is going on?'

Some jeers carried through the air from the other men looking on this comical situation. Oh, was it so funny – their friend has got the coon. I had got no time for this. 'Come on, man,' I tell him, 'we have to go.'

'I ain't going nowhere with you,' he say, before starting off back to the foreman.

The foreman took me off the run.

'Why?' I ask him. 'I have been doing this run for weeks with no trouble.'

'Because I said so. He don't wanna work with you.'

'But it is his job.'

'And I don't bloody blame him. I said you're trouble.'

'I am not the one giving the trouble.'

'One more word out of you coon, and you're out. You can pick up from King's Cross on your own. Or get your cards. You got it?' (*SI*, pp. 314-5)

When Gilbert tries to suggest that he is not responsible for the trouble, which he is right about, he is being told to either collect from King's Cross on his own or to resign. This is the first time Gilbert has ever been to King's Cross, and given the two options he has no choice. The foreman is not alleviating the situation but instead shows his racism by pointing out in front of everybody that the young man has every right to refuse to work with Gilbert. It is the right of every Briton to be racist, it seems.

Troubles continue at King's Cross because of the novelty of the situation. Gilbert does not know which are the post sacks. There he meets with a group of idle men who think bullying a "darkie" is a great sport. As long as Gilbert picks up the right sack, everything goes all right but when he grabs a different sack, he gets verbally aggressive and racist comments, such as: 'Look, a darkie's stealing from the railways' and 'Oh, my God, what's the coon doing, now?' Gilbert pleads for help and the men pretend that they do not understand him and tell Gilbert to speak English. Since he does not want to get in trouble, he tries to be polite and eventually a "cross-eye man" answers him.

'Could you please tell me what I am to take?' [...]

'I'll tell you, if you answer something for me,' His friends start chuckling again in anticipation of a nice piece of humiliation.

But I answer him civilly, 'What?'

'When are you going back to the jungle?' Oh, man, this is the best joke these four men had heard today. They all laugh at this. A coon. The jungle. What a lark. [...] I pick

up another sack. ‘Oi, darkie, you ain’t answered me. When are you going back to where you belong?’

And I said straight into this man’s one eye, ‘But I just get here, man, and I not fucked your wife yet.’

‘What did you say? What did he say?’ He turned to his pals but they had not heard. ‘Fucking wog. What did you just say?’

‘Nothing,’ I tell him. (*SI*, pp. 316-7)

This is a rare incident because Gilbert verbally attacks the racist name-calling because he has had his share. However, when the man attacks him physically, Gilbert decides not to take part in the fight because he would lose his job even though he could have fought the man in a number of ways because his hands are free. He is also smart enough to know that had there been a fight, the men would have explained it in their favour: “Three white men looking on would have the story – the day the darkie, unprovoked, attacked this nice gentleman.” (*SI*, p. 317) Stein (2004: 67) discusses Levy’s third novel *Fruit of the Lemon*²⁷ and points out how the protagonist works for the BBC, making her a pars pro toto figure. She, in other words, represents or stands for the entire British population even though she is of Jamaican origin. Levy has chosen a national institution where racism is played out. Stein (*ibid.*) argues that “[b]y synecdoche these institutions are related to Britain as whole.” This is also the case of the institution Gilbert works for as well as the institution Hortense tries to find a post within.

Gilbert has been in England for a while and his illusion of the Mother has clearly vanished. He has had a row with Hortense and is clearing his head by walking on the streets. He, feeling self-pity, reminisces how his cousin had asked him to stay in Jamaica. He describes the Mother Country as a lion whose “mouth may be open” [...], “but we [ex RAF-servicemen] had counted all its teeth. But, come, let us face it, only now were we ex-servicemen starting to feel its bite.” (*SI*, p. 326) Living in Britain is clearly quite torrid since there are racist encounters every day, both verbal and physical abuse. He is regretting having left to ‘be bitten by the lion’ when something unexpected happens.

²⁷ Levy, Andrea. *Fruit of the Lemon*. 1999. London: Headline Book Publishing, 1999.

Then I heard someone calling after me. I took no notice. A shriek of surprise: what coloured man in England would look to stare when they heard that? But It came again this time with words, 'Excuse me, excuse me.' And the clip clop of a woman's footfall along the pavement. I stopped and, turning slowly, I saw a tiny woman approach me. Out of breath, smiling, she looked up in my face. Not a young woman – forty, fifty, it was hard to tell in the streetlamp glow. But her smile was wholehearted. 'You dropped this, I think,' she said. It was a black glove. I was not sure it was mine but beguiled by the gesture I took it from her.

As I parted my lips to thank her no words came. Trying again I could only mouth the gratitude.

'Are you all right?' she asked me.

A tear was on my face. I could feel its damp, itchy path creeping down to my chin. I wiped it away. (*SI*, pp. 326-7)

The woman offers Gilbert even cough sweets and even touches him: "The place where her hand was on me was melting with the warmth of that gentle touch." Gilbert is truly touched by this unusual incident and it gives him the strength to carry on. He depicts how it is salvation to him.

For it was a salvation to me – not for the sugar but for the act of kindness. The human tenderness with which it was given to me. [...] A simple gesture, a friendly word, a touch, a sticky sweet rescued me as sure as if that Englishwoman had pulled me from drowning in the sea. (*SI*, p. 328)

This encounter also proves that not everybody is racist. The woman is a rare exception to the rule. It seems to be the females in *SI* who are more accepting of the black migrant workers than the males. The woman in the previous incident, as well as Queenie, are more open-minded and less xenophobic.

Bernard, Queenie's husband, shows the racist nature of Britons to be true once he returns home. This also proves how it is the men who attack the blacks both verbally and physically. He does not like the fact that there are tenants in the house in the first place and when he finds from the neighbour that the lodgers are "[a] prostitute and coloureds" he thinks Queenie ought to have got "decent lodgers" instead of these coloureds (*SI*, p. 436). As a matter of fact, when he sees Gilbert for the first time, he thinks that Gilbert's has "[e]yes popping out of his head like a golliwog's" (*SI*, p. 430) which shows what kinds of a racist he is. Bernard is determined to get these coloureds out of his house and starts raging outside Gilbert and Hortense's room.

Bernard openly shows his racist character by calling out racist names. The incident is depicted by Gilbert.

This skinny man start puffing up himself. Him have two fists made. I would kill the man with one blow if I were to punch him. I do him a favour – I push him away. But, man, him so skinny him fall over. [...] But I am not a rough man – I make sure he was all right. I stand over him. Wog, darkie, coon – all them words him start use in telling me he want me out. (*SI*, p. 444)

Since Bernard's raging does not have the wanted effect, i.e. to get Gilbert and Hortense out of the house, he goes to rummage about in their room which he thinks a disgrace because of the state it is in. Absurdly enough he shares the same opinion of the room with Hortense which he does not know. The room makes him to think: "The war was fought so people might live amongst their own kind. Quite simple. Everyone had a place. England for the English and the West Indies for those coloured people." (*SI*, p. 469) This could be thought of demonstrating the racist way of thinking. The reasoning is quite logical. However, Bernard does not take into account the fact that the immigrants have a legal right to be in England since they are British citizens. Bernard is caught sniffing around the room by Gilbert and Hortense who return home. There is some heated verbal abuse which leads into a physical struggle between the "darkie" and Bernard. This fight makes Queenie to go into labour.

3.2.4 Other Characters

The racist experiences Gilbert and Hortense share are also shared by other West Indian members of the diaspora. Gilbert shares a few of these racist humiliations. For instance he tells about his Jamaican friend Eugene who is being accused of attacking an old lady just because she is frightened by Eugene's skin colour.

This mild-mannered man was going about his business when an old woman trip on the kerb and fall down in front of him. He rush to her side, his hand out for her to hold. On his lips were soft words spoken. 'Let me help you up – come, are you hurt?' This nice old English lady took one look at him and scream. She yell so bad the police came

running. Eugene was taken away. The charge? Attacking an old lady. In the police cell Eugene sweat himself scrawny before this old woman clear up the matter. (*SI*, p. 326)

This incident does not encourage the black immigrants to behave in a friendly manner towards the majority of the British population. Yet another incident shows this to be true. Even the Christians despise blacks: “A devout Christian, Curtis was asked not to return to his local church for his skin was too dark to worship there. The shock rob him of his voice.” (ibid.) Gilbert’s friend, Louise, believes “bloodyforeigner” to be one word (ibid.) since he only has heard these words spoken together. This name calling as well as all these experiences show xenophobia to have been true in Britain in 1948.

Kenneth, the sinister twin, thinks he has been robbed when tax has been deducted from his pay. When Gilbert explains “how everyone pay tax”, this makes Kenneth wonder: “Everyone? White man too?” (*SI*, p. 442) Kenneth has every right to ask whether the black and white are treated in the same way since he, among other black immigrants, is not used to facing equality in England. The question quite well sums up the idea of how the immigrants feel about their beloved Mother Country: there is no justice for the black man.

3.3 Hortense vs. Gilbert

Prior to leaving for England, Hortense and Gilbert do not know each other well. Hortense pays for Gilbert’s journey in order to be able to join him as his wife later since as given below, unmarried women were not considered suitable for travelling. The couple gets rather hastily married and this makes Gilbert regret his marriage many times once Hortense has also arrived in England as well as when he has made up his mind about getting married and accepting the money.

When I walked away from her that day I went to sit under the refuge of the guango tree. Tree lizards still scuttled up the bark and the cicadas still hissed like cymbals. But the ground was now parched and dry – too hard for me to push my fingers down into the

earth. And it was there that I wept. I am not too proud to tell you I sobbed like a boy lost. I was beaten. There was no choice before me except one. If Hortense had money to buy me then, come, let us face it, my price was not too dear. (*SI*, pp. 210-11)

The decision Gilbert makes is rather dear and hard. He feels like he has sold his soul because he knows that Hortense “did not like me. My face distressed her, my jokes confused her, my tales of war bored her and talk of England made her yawn.” (*SI*, p. 210) However, Gilbert does like Hortense’s “golden complexion” which seems to be the second time in Hortense’s life her lighter skin colour saves her. First she was offered a better life in the same family with Michael and now Gilbert assents to her marriage proposal which is stated “[w]ith no persuasion, with no fancy words, with no declarations of love” (*SI*, p. 210). He knows that Hortense “was looking for escape and I was to be the back she would ride out on.” (*SI*, p. 210) At least the couple has one denominator in common: they need to get out of Jamaica and they wish to start a better life in England.

Their first encounter in England does not take place under favourable stars since Gilbert has slept in after an exhausting day at work which Hortense naturally does not know. There is a lot of misunderstanding in their marriage because they do not know each other well enough. When Hortense sees the room Gilbert is hiring, she utters: ““Just this?’ I had to sit on the bed. My legs gave way.” (*SI*, p. 21) Since Hortense has a vision of England and the house she would live in, it is no wonder she is disappointed. As a matter of fact Gilbert is partially responsible for this illusion because he has described the country like a fairytale when still living in Jamaica.

As he looked thoughtful at it [a discarded leaf] in his hand his voice – unexpectedly gentle, almost melodious – described how in England the trees lose their leaves before the winter months. Every leaf on every tree turns first red and then golden. With the wind or the passing of time these dazzling leaves fall from the trees covering the parks, the gardens, the pavements with a blanket of gold. (*SI*, p. 94)

What makes their relationship even more interesting and even more complicated is that Gilbert was seeing Hortense’s best friend Celia, or only friend, and asked her to leave to

England with him. Hortense, however, ruined this opportunity for her by reminding Celia that she had her sick mother to look after. Interestingly enough Gilbert's appearance reminds Hortense of Michael, the only romantic love she has ever experienced.

If Hortense has doubts about Gilbert, so does Gilbert about Hortense. He wonders on many occasions why he got married to her in the first place. When Hortense has been shown the room she is to live in, Gilbert has his doubts.

Soon the honourable man inside me was shaking my ribs and thumping my breast, wanting to know, 'Gilbert, what in God's name have you done? You no realise, man? Cha, you married to this woman!' (*SI*, p. 22)

The early path of the marriage is a nightmare for Gilbert since Hortense is bad at cooking and also her character seems to be rather haughty.

When Hortense has settled down in England and visits the education authorities, Gilbert insists on following her because he already knows how cruel the mother country can be to an immigrant. Hortense does not want him to join her because she thinks that he would be a disgrace to her because of his rough Jamaican manners.

But Gilbert was still sucking on his teeth. Every two bells the man said 'cha' and could not, no matter how I tried, stop himself exclaiming, 'Nah, man,' with every utterance. I worried that the refined and educated people at the education authority might look aghast at me if Gilbert Joseph were anywhere near. (*SI*, p. 450)

Gilbert is not the only one sucking his teeth. Hortense is also guilty of this habit that she herself finds uncivilized. Up until the moment of visiting the education office, Hortense has considered herself to be the more sophisticated one and has put no value on Gilbert.

Anyone hearing Gilbert Joseph speak would know without hesitation that this man was not English. No matter that he is dressed in his best suit, his hair greased, his fingernails clean, he talked (and walked) in a rough Jamaican way. (*SI*, p. 449)

Gilbert tries to warn Hortense of the possible response in the office but she will not listen. Despite being humiliated he decides to stay behind and wait for Hortense who thinks Gilbert is not worthy her companion because she is a respected teacher.

So I told him politely that perchance the education authority would want to show me the school at which I would be working. It might take some time and I did not want to disrupt his day further. The man look on me for a long while. Then, quietly, he said, 'Hortense, this is not the way England work.' I then informed him that a teacher such as I was not someone to be treated in the same way as a person in a low-class job. He just shake his head on me and say, 'You won't listen to me, will you? I wait for you.' (*SI*, p

Gilbert is the stronger one of the couple once they are both in England. With this I mean that Gilbert supports Hortense when she is denied a job as a teacher and also otherwise is a man of his word. He has been in England for a while when Hortense arrives and has already seen the drawbacks and knows what lies ahead of Hortense who holds a dream-like vision of the Mother Country when arriving. This is when their roles change. Hortense realizes she needs Gilbert for both company and financial support and Gilbert finds a new side to Hortense who has been humiliated and appreciates the consolation Gilbert offers.

When Hortense comes from the office, Gilbert comforts her and the couple bonds for the first time.

'What happen?' I asked her.

'Nothing,' she said.

So I tell her, 'Nothing is a smile, Hortense. You no cry over nothing.'

And the woman scream, 'Nothing,' at me again.

Man, let her burn. Come, this was probably the first time the woman's cheek ever felt a tear. She was insufferable! I walked away. Two paces. Then a hesitant third before I turned to look back on her. She was snivelling and trying with all her will not to wipe her nose on her good white glove.

[...]

But her breath rose in desperate gasps as she mumbling repeated over, 'They say I can't teach.'

Come, no pitiful cry from a child awoken rude from a dream could have melted a hard heart any surer.

I guided her to a seat in a little square, she followed me obedient.

[...]

Hortense's hat had slipped forlorn on her head, just a little, but enough to show this haughty Jamaican woman looking comical. I straightened it for her. She composed herself, dabbing her eye with the tip of her white-fingered glove. I got out my handkerchief so she might wipe her face. However, this item was not as clean as it might have been. For several days I had been meaning to wash it but... Hortense held it high between her finger and thumb to pass it back to me. [...] 'I walk into a cupboard.'

'Why you do that?' I asked her.

'I thought it was the door to leave by.'

'Oh dear,' I said.

‘But it was a cupboard and the women all laugh on me.’

My mind conjured the scene but instead of laughing hearty on the joke of this proud woman’s humiliation, my heart snapped in two. [...]

‘Ah. Now that was a broom cupboard. I have walked into many broom cupboards.’ Reddened and moistened with tears, her eyes gazed upon me. And I believe this was the first time they looked on me without scorn. [...]

‘This one had paper in also.’

‘Interesting cupboard,’ I told her. ‘You say it have broom and paper.’ And then it happen.

She smiled.

I felt sure Hortense had teeth that sharpened to a point like a row two nails. But they did not. They were small, dainty-white with a little gap in the front two. Come, could it be true that I had never before seen her smile? I thought carefully of what I should say next – for I feared a rogue word might chase away that astonishing vision. ‘How long you say you stay in this cupboard?’ I asked. And, oh boy, that smile take on a voice – she giggle. (*SI*, pp. 458-461)

The way Gilbert forgives all the bad words and undervaluation Hortense has graded him with shows what kind of a noble heart he has. Hortense also realizes, for the first time, that her husband has been trying to connect with her.

I feel that the relationship between Gilbert and Hortense describes the process of development they both go through. Stein (2004: 23) argues that the idea of the novel of transformation is to include a process in which the individual undergoes a process of character formation. The protagonists are taken out of their familial or educational institutions or possibly even society at large, which is true in both the protagonists’ cases in *SI*. They also go through a crisis before a return to the fold. Stein (*ibid.*) puts it: “the complex relationships between individual and community are scrutinized, hardship and evil are laid bare and (often) overcome, and the individual heads for or assumes a recognized position.” Since Hortense and Gilbert have made rather hasty wedding vows, they do not know each other properly before leaving for England. The process of getting to know each other is part of their process of development. Their characters form separately but also the relationship between them reflects this process. Stein (2004: 25) also argues how a number of “novels of transformation can also be charted as a quest for an outlook on life which accommodates the protagonists’ own identity, and which is shaped by a struggle with the parental generations, and one’s peers

and society at large.” In my opinion this idea is true of both Hortense and Gilbert. They are both trying to establish their identities and place in the English society and their relationships to parents as well as to each other and friends are meaningful when searching for this new identity.

Parker (1998b) discusses how female authors use the gendered dimension of racism in which “black men, victimised by their white counterparts, often hold views, and perpetrate actions that clearly demonstrate that colour is not the bar to oppressive masculinity.” This dimension of racism is not present *SI*, at least not in the relationship between Hortense and Gilbert. Gilbert could hence be claimed not to be a typical male since he does not act oppressively. Lima (2005: 60) points out how, in Caribbean novels, house stands for nation “the migrant is only superficially, and seemingly temporarily, allowed to occupy thanks to the ‘charity’ of the mother country.”

When Queenie gives birth to the baby, she ruins Hortense’s best dress. Whereas Bernard thinks Gilbert is the father of the child and also ruins his best suit by attacking him which leads into blood dripping on to Gilbert’s suit. When Gilbert tries to explain that the baby has nothing to do with him, Bernard, once again, shows his racism by stating: ‘It’s everything to do with you. You and your kind.’ (*SI*, p. 487) Gilbert feels sorry for Bernard and tries to help him up but he thrusts Gilbert’s hand away. This is one of the occasions Gilbert openly shows his hatred against Bernard and even calls him names, even though not out loud.

The man attack me, pour blood from my nose, accuse me of all sorts of things I had never got the chance to do with his wife. Come, let me tell you, all at once I was pleased this dogheart English bastard had too-too much to bear. (*SI*, p. 487)

According to Lima (2005: 65) it is a convention in post-colonial novels that if a child is born, it can be interpreted as a model for the new citizen or nation that is trying to bridge the two worlds. In this sense, Queenie’s baby is connecting the former colonial world with that of the mother country. There is, however, further depth to the child in the novel. The baby is

given the name Michael by Queenie, after his father, who happens to be Hortense's cousin she was raised up with. The novel has no references of Hortense and Gilbert fulfilling their marital obligations and hence it can be concluded that Hortense becomes a virgin mother by adopting the child born out of wedlock. When Queenie asks Hortense and Gilbert to adopt the baby, Bernard protests: 'That poor little half-caste child would be better off begging in a gutter!' (*SI*, p. 525) This makes Gilbert give a harangue in order to make Bernard realize what kind of a racist he is.

'You know what your trouble is, man?' he said. 'Your white skin. You think it makes you better than me. You think it give you the right to lord it over a black man. But you know what it make you? You wan' know what your white skin make you, man? It make you white. That is all, man. White. No better, no worse than me – just white.' Mr Bligh moved his eye to gaze on the ceiling. 'Listen to me, man, we both just finish fighting a war – a bloody war – for the better world we wan' see. And on the same side – you and me. We both look on other men to see enemy. You and me, fighting for empire, fighting for peace. But still, after all that we suffer together, you wan' tell me I am worthless and you are not. And I to be the servant and you are the master for all time? No. Stop this, man. Stop it now. We can work together, Mr Bligh. You no see? We must. Or else you just gonna fight me till the end?' (*SI*, p. 525)

Gilbert, after his rights have been denied by Bernard, tries to make peace. This valiant speech makes Hortense realize that her husband is "a man of class, a man of character, a man of intelligence. Noble in a way that would some day make him a legend." (*SI*, p. 526) Ironically enough, Bernard has not understood a word Gilbert has said and the war between the blacks and whites does not end in a truce. Eventually Gilbert decides to adopt the baby because he "can't just walk away. Leave that little coloured baby alone in this country, full of people like Mr Bligh. Him and all his kind. What sort of life would that little man have?" (*SI*, p. 527). Even though Bernard and Queenie harass Hortense and Gilbert, they still find it in their heart to take the little Michael and raise him as their own child. Without knowing, Hortense is as a matter of fact adopting a baby who is related to her. The baby's colour is also quite light since his mother is white which also fits in with Hortense's golden, lighter complexion, and since the baby's biological father looks somewhat similar to Gilbert, whom Hortense accidentally

has taken to be Michael upon their first meeting in Jamaica, the baby is a perfect match for Hortense and Gilbert.

Lima (2005: 79) poses the question: “How many babies like Queenie’s were given up to be raised by “proper” parents, and by that Levy means Black? England in the forties is indeed a [white] mother who does not know how to treat her offspring and rejects them.” Greer (The Guardian, 31.1.2004²⁸) points out how the two couples in *SI* “find that Empire has forged them a common destiny.” She continues: “Family is both theme and metaphor - the story of the Jamaican family in London, and the metaphor of Empire, the Big Family, which turns out to be betrayer and, in some cases, destroyer.”

²⁸ Greer, Bonnie. “The Empire’s Child.” [Internet] The Guardian. January 31, 2004. Available from <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,,1134242,00.html>>. [Accessed 2 June 2007]

4. Conclusion

The initial question I pose in the title of this thesis, “Whose Island Is Small?”, has no single answer. Firstly, the title is hinting at how racism is constant and can be found everywhere, on the three islands the black protagonists of *Small Island* spend time on, i.e. Jamaica, Britain and America. Secondly, it refers to the notion of it being a small world since Hortense and Gilbert end up adopting a baby who is the namesake of his father, Michael, who happens to be the boy Hortense was brought up together with.

As Phillips (*The Guardian*, 14.2.2004) states, *Small Island* is Andrea Levy’s big book.

Innes (2002: 181) argues quite rightly how

in the years when externally there seemed to be recognition of the right to equality and democracy as numerous ex-colonies acquired independence, internally, racism and discrimination seemed to be gaining ground and appeared to be given state sanction. There were the circumstances in which a new generation of British-born children of black and Asian citizens would grow up.

Rassool (1997: 190) sums up the process which Hortense and Gilbert go through quite aptly in

Finding a ‘home’ within the adoptive country then becomes a journey of learning to understand the past experiences in order to clarify the present – and from that position of knowledge to find a voice – and, more importantly, to define a future. (original quotation marks)

As Parker (1998b) points out black writers have made a remarkable contribution to the English literary canon since World War Two. Levy’ *Small Island* is part of this endowment since it has the historical facts right and sheds light on a topic which has not been generally known by the public. Racism, still a current topic in Great Britain, should be discussed openly and literature is an apt tool for this. Lima (2005: 71) points out how black British authors, like Levy, “[b]y exposing the fallacy of perpetual whiteness through their focus on peoples who juggle multiple ethnicities and histories [...] have begun to effect changes in the perception of English national identity.” She (ibid.) continues by stating how this is the time when with the

loss of the Empire there is an apparent loss of identity in England and what makes up English culture. This is the time “for novels like Levy’s to serve as catalysts for such soul-searching re-imagining and redefinition.”

Stein (2004: 53) sums up the idea of a novel of transformation and strongly agree that it also applies to *Small Island*.

...the black British novel of transformation is not only about the character formation of its protagonists, it is at once about the transformation and reformation of British cultures. These processes of transformation and reformation are not only represented *in* the texts; they are at once purveyed *by* them. The texts are, in other words, part of the processes they deal with. This can be accounted for by the performative functions of the novel of transformation, which involve the construction of new subject positions, the reimagination and redress of the images of Britain including the transgression of national boundaries, the depiction of racism, and, most importantly, the representation, exertion, and normalization of black British cultural power.

Stein’s conclusion also illustrates the way in which black British texts are a natural part of cultural studies, i.e. they are seen as a part of the process which makes up British culture. A part of this is the idea of Britain becoming multinational and how transnationality is an essential part. It follows that the best place to study the development of this process is the novel in which historical facts, such as racism, can be redressed and discussed.

To conclude, *Small Island* is a historical novel which is the first one to give an account of the history both from the point of view of the blacks and the whites. I quote Lima (2005: 75) who has it in a nutshell:

By juxtaposing the past and the present of two couples – one Jamaican, one English (=white) – Levy’s narrative unfolds to an elegant and careful construction of observed detail, truthful voices, and a meticulous layering of social observation recreating the 1940s social fabric, its conflicts, its racist attitudes and some of its victories.

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