

# From Periphery to Center: Challenging Stereotypes and Deconstructing Binaries in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*

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## Abstract

This research paper intends to critically examine counter-discursive strategies in contemporary postcolonial novel with special focus on the British colonial stereotypes about the colonized Other in general and the West Indies in particular as represented in Andrea Levy's masterpiece, *Small Island*. The study illustrates how Levy succeeds in challenging the Western Canon by questioning stereotypes, reversing European imperialist fixed binaries and deconstructing the Eurocentric myths of superiority, authority and civility. The study follows a descriptive and analytical method based on the critical analysis of Levy's *Small Island* within the theoretical framework of postcolonialism. It throws some light on such issues as identity crisis, discrimination, and racial prejudice, in order to expose the negative impact of colonial attitudes on the relationship between the West and the Rest. It further illustrates how these attitudes result in misunderstanding among different cultures, obstructing possibilities of dialogue and aggravating crisis in human relationships within the globalized world today. On the other hand, the study shows how Levy, as a postcolonial writer, reconstructs the world by rewriting canonical stories and 'writing back' to the Centre of the Empire to create a canonical counter-discourse, as a response to the classics of English literature. By challenging stereotypes about the non-Western Other and destabilizing the Eurocentric assumption of authority, Levy intends to project reconciliation and dialogue as the only alternatives for a peaceful co-existence with the Other in a multicultural world.

**Key terms:** colonialism, postcolonialism, stereotypes, challenging stereotypes, Eurocentricism, Other/othering, deconstructing colonial discourse, binary opposition.

## 1. Introduction

The historical phenomenon of colonization has been widely spread around the world and across time. It can be traced back to the periods of the ancient Greeks, the Romans, the Moors, and the Ottomans. The era from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century marked the European colonial period in

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which several European powers such as Britain and France established colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, ending with the national liberation movements of the 1960s. Since colonial times, Europeans have perceived most of the world as open to conquest, control, domination and subsequently exploitation. The colonized nations have been perceived as weak, vicious, savage and in need to be 'civilized'. Hence, the colonizers justified colonialism with unreasonable claims for appropriating and civilizing missions. They went further in promoting their sense of superiority and hegemony by developing all kinds of stereotypes about different colonized groups, describing them as dangerous, untrustworthy, having no history and culture. Colonial discourse, as a transmitter of colonial ideology, plays a great role in allowing stereotypes to be taken as facts as they are continually perpetuated throughout history.

Post-colonial literature has been a hot commodity for many scholars.<sup>1</sup> It refers to the body of writing that is, in some way, affected by colonialism, either written during the European colonial period, or in the aftermaths of it, and which somehow portrays the experiences of colonialism or post-colonialism (Ashcroft et al., *The Empire 2*). Of all the worthwhile research done on postcolonial literature, it is the novel and its studies that have had the greatest influence on the field. Although many scholars have studied postcolonial novel from different perspectives, the studies related to the role of the postcolonial novel in challenging stereotypes, specifically with reference to the novel under study, are rare. In other words, political, economic, and cultural domination under colonialism has repeatedly been studied by many scholars and theorists all around the world during the last Century. However, the psychological effects of colonialism and stereotypes have received less attention even though they really have shaped most of the people's perception in the present time. Racial, ethnic, or cultural stereotypes about Indians, Africans, Arabs, Muslims, Blacks, Jewish etc., have been invented a long time ago but still existing and circulating today all around the world.

Post-colonial novel has become a veritable weapon used to challenge the hegemonic boundaries and the determinants that create unequal power relations, based on binary oppositions such as 'Us' vs. 'them', 'First-world' vs. 'third-world', 'white' vs. 'black', 'colonizer' vs. 'colonized', etc. In challenging the way colonial discourse has represented colonial subjects,

post-colonial writers and theorists seek to reshape perceptions and thinking about formerly colonized people and countries.

It is worth noting that about three quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism (Ashcroft et al., *The Empire* 1). Thus, this study is very significant because it illustrates how colonialism has affected people's perception of themselves and the other. It exposes the reality of colonial stereotypes and explains how such stereotypes helped Europe to maintain its control over the natives of the colonized countries not just politically or economically, but also culturally.

This study is theoretically informed by several related literatures that form a compelling interdisciplinary intersection: colonialism, stereotypes, postcolonial theory, challenging stereotypes, deconstructing the colonial discourse, and binary opposition. The study follows an analytical method based on the critical analysis of Levy's *Small Island* within the theoretical framework of colonialism, Eurocentrism, orientalism, otherness/othering, deconstruction, cultural studies and other interdisciplinary fields. Since the study is entirely literature-based, the methods of data collection which have been used include observation, archival research, traditional library research, and online research.

## 2. Historical Background

Jamaica is the third largest island of the Greater Antilles<sup>2</sup>. The colonial history of Jamaica started when Christopher Columbus learned of Jamaica from the indigenous people on the island of Cuba during his second voyage to the Americas in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century (Gardner 2). Accordingly, Jamaica was colonized first by the Spanish Empire, and then was captured by the English as one of the English colonies in 1655. During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, slave trade grew with the establishment of the plantation system especially when Jamaica became a British colony (Gardner 152). The economy of Jamaica started to decline in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially after the abolition of slavery. Due to the economy's long lasting fall, many West Indians were forced to migrate outside the country<sup>3</sup>. However, the Jamaican immigrants just as many other immigrants, who settled in Britain after World War II, were not welcomed to interact with the white society of Britain. Discrimination and prejudice against them were widespread. These immigrants suffered bad housing and employment due to their skin color and descent. Britain's white population disapproved them and

considered them as heathens (Lange 12). Thus, the Jamaican migrants were met with disappointment when arriving Britain. Negative atmosphere of resentment and hostility was all they received from their 'Mother Country'. In fact, the ideology of white supremacy was the only thing left after the decline of Britain as a great power in the aftermath of World War II. Although many migrants were educated in their homeland to consider England as their 'Mother country', from the first moment of their arrival, they got disillusioned and realized the difference between reality and what they had been taught. They were viewed to be inferiors and looked down upon as servants or slaves. Furthermore, white Britons were afraid to communicate with Jamaican immigrants and treated them based on the stereotypes that had been adopted due to colonial ideology.

### 3. Andrea Levy: Hybrid and Diaspora Identity

Andrea Levy is a British novelist born in London on 17 March 1956 to Jamaican parents. She is of originally Afro-Jamaican descent who has a Jewish paternal grandfather and a Scottish maternal great-grandfather. Her father sailed from Jamaica to Britain in 1948 on the *Empire Windrush*<sup>4</sup>. Her mother joined her father in his one room in west London six months after the Windrush had docked. Levy's parents were shocked when they found that they were foreigners in their 'Mother Country,' England. Like many other migrants at that time, they suffered bad housing and were treated with hostility when looking for somewhere to live because of their skin color. This experience has given Levy a complex perspective on the country of her birth.

Levy's fiction focuses mainly on the experience of Jamaican immigrants. It involves topics related to Jamaican diaspora people in England and their everyday experience of being Black and British. She uses her writing to illustrate the ways Black British negotiate racial, cultural, and national identities. As she puts it herself, "Black British identity is what interests me. I write about what I understand. What I know" ("This is my England").

Levy has written five novels: *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994), *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996), *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), *Small Island* (2004), and *The Long Song* (2010). The first and second novels are about Jamaican children who grew up in London which may reflect her own experience. *Every Light in the House Burnin'* is about a young black Jamaican girl, Angela Jacob, who was born and brought up on a council

estate in London. *Never Far from Nowhere* revolves around two very different Jamaican sisters, Olive and Vivien, who were born and brought up in London in the 1960s and '70s. Both novels are narrated from the perspective of the main characters, Angela, Olive and Vivien, to describe their difficulties living in England as black British.

After the publication of her second novel in 1996, Levy visited Jamaica for the first time. That visit paved the way for her third novel *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999) in which she dramatizes her family's experience. She "explores the notion of home, and how it differs for the formerly colonized and their descendants" (Iweala). Levy's fourth novel *Small Island*, which has won five prizes<sup>5</sup>, was addressed as a masterpiece of the contemporary Caribbean experience in Britain by the time it appeared in 2004 (Murdoch 141). It portrays the post war era on two 'small islands' Jamaica and the UK. It is a novel which combines different perspectives into a comprehensive narrative. It is the story of cultural clashes and the formation of British society and identity. In general, *Small Island* depicts the varied experiences of colonized people and "provides an insight into the initial post-war contact between Jamaican migrants, descendants of enslaved Africans, and the white 'Mother Country'."<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. Levy's *Small Island*: a Postcolonial Reading

##### 4.1 Categorizing the Other: Stereotypes in *Small Island*

*Small Island* is a historical, political, and autobiographical novel. Levy had spent four years and a half writing this novel with excessive searching through archives, at the RAF and Imperial War Museums (Levy, "This is my England"). As a postcolonial novel, *Small Island* handles the weighty themes of Empire, exposes the legacies of colonialism and uncovers the illusion of Eurocentrism. In *Small Island*, Levy provides a historically accurate depiction of the experience of the *Windrush* generation, her parents' generation, who left their homeland in the years immediately following the World War II (Greer). She further alludes to the difficulties that have encountered the Jamaican servicemen who left Jamaica to serve in the RAF and highlights their significant role during World War II. Levy also shows how political conflicts contribute to the making of Britain's present-day multicultural society and asserts the necessity of treating people equally regardless of their race or color.

In fact, colonialism along with colonial discourse has construed colonized nations as racially, culturally and intellectually inferior Others. As a result, Jamaican immigrants were treated badly when arriving to Britain. They were considered by many white people as inferiors who practiced head hunting, cannibalism, infanticide, polygamy and 'black magic'. They were seen as "backward, uncivilised and inherently inferior to Europeans, eating strange foods and carrying unpleasant diseases. The common belief was that most black settlers were ignorant, illiterate and lacked proper education" (Lange 12). Harry Goulbourne explains in his book *Race Relations in Britain Since 1945* how Britain has become a multicultural society and asserts the role of colonialism in shaping and developing Britain's attitudes towards racial discrimination:

This context or background can be explicated by reference to two interrelated but independent historical developments which have been important aspects of British race relations for well over three centuries: the experiences of colonialism, and those experiences of people and institutions in the imperial centre. (30)

He further explains:

The principle and practice of 'divide and rule' which served the administrators of empire, held true not only in the colonies, but also at home in the metropolis, at least in one important sense: citizens came to believe that their state was engaged in civilising missions to barbaric and savage peoples in far off places, and that as part of the great white race they were superior to others. (41)

*Small Island* is set in 1948 and before in different geographic locations, i.e. Jamaica, England, USA, and India. The book is divided into past and present times and oscillating between the two. It presents a counter-history of the period before and after World War II. *Small Island* primarily tells the story of a Jamaican couple who left their homeland in 1948 in order to start a new life in England. Their story is intertwined with a white landlady with whom they live in London and whose husband has left to fight in World War II.<sup>7</sup>

*Small Island* also alludes to the condition of the society of Britain after World War II. It represents the immigration of so many colonized people, 'colored nations', who settled there and have become part of the multicultural society of the UK in the present time. It describes how colonized nations were perceived not according to their own behaviors but

according to the colonial stereotypes which were attributed to them throughout history. According to Iweala, it questions "the gaps in the understanding of racial issues that exist between so many groups of people — friends with different racial and cultural frames of reference, siblings, even parents and their children" (Iweala). Thus, Levy uses her main characters, Hortense, Gilbert, Queenie, and Bernard to emphasize the role of colonialism in establishing stereotypes that affect one's perception and lead to generalization, discrimination and prejudice. Although Gilbert and Hortense returned to England as civilians, they were treated very differently. In a series of misfortunes, they were judged by the white British on the basis of stereotypes. Accordingly, they suffered discrimination and prejudice in employment, housing and everyday practices as many West Indians, Asians or colonized non-western people in general.

#### 4.2 Stereotyping as the Mother of Preconception and Prejudice

Colonial/ imperial discourse plays a great role in forming and perpetuating racial, cultural or ethnic stereotypes to assert European superiority. Told from the perspective of European colonizers, colonial discourse usually constructs colonized people as the Other non-European, whereas colonizers are usually presented as generous, civilized, and benevolent. According to Sam Vaknin, stereotypes "form the core of racism" (99). He further explains that stereotypes:

split the world into the irredeemably bad – “the other”, blacks, Jews, Hispanics, women, gay – and the flawlessly good, “we”, the purveyors of the stereotype. While expressly unrealistic, the stereotype teaches “what not to be” and “how not to behave.” A by-product of this primitive rendition is segregation. (102)

Furthermore, such stereotypes have resulted from the colonizers' effort to maximize their self-esteem and ease their consciences in order to justify their bad actions towards the natives. As Aimé Césaire in *Discourse on Colonialism* points out “the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience, gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal” (41). According to the psychologist, Robert Feldman, people want to feel good about themselves and superior to others and therefore they stereotype. He further explains,

In an effort to maximize our sense of self-esteem, we may come to think that our own group (our *ingroup*) is better than groups to which we don't belong (our *outgroups*). Consequently, we inflate the

positive aspects of our ingroup—and, at the same time, devalue outgroups. Ultimately, we come to view members of outgroups as inferior to members of our ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). The end result is prejudice toward members of groups of which we are not a part. (542)

This is obvious in *Small Island* when Queenie is questioned by her neighbors and her reputation is put under threat as she agrees to lodge West Indians or 'colored people' in her house: “People were wondering if I was quite as respectable as they once thought.” (SI 98) In other words, the British white society considers a woman living alone in a house with the ‘colored’ to be unrespectable. The neighbors always warn Queenie, as she put it herself:

How can you think of being a woman alone in a house with coloureds? Blanche said. ... they had different ways from us and knew nothing of manners. They washed in oil and smelt foul of it. ... Morris blushed scarlet telling me of their animal desires. 'And that's both the men and the women, Mrs Bligh'. I was to watch out, keep my door locked.' You'll never understand, let alone believe, a word that any of those worthless people say to you,' he cautioned. (SI 97)

Similarly, when Bernard came back to London, he questioned Queenie with anger wondering why she brought black people to live in his house: “did they have to be coloured? Couldn't you have got decent lodgers for the house? Respectable people?” (SI 360) Mr. Todd, Queenie's next-door neighbor, also keeps blaming her of ruining the country by letting darkies or 'colored' live in her house. His concern was that “they would turn the area into a jungle” (SI 95). This typical attitude of the whites here is not different from their perception of the African natives, for example, in Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* in which Maxwell Foster-Keen fails to hide his dislike of Sa'eed: “You, Mr. Sa'eed, are the best example of the fact that our civilizing mission in Africa is of no avail. After all the efforts we've made to educate you, it's as if you'd come out of the jungle for the first time” (93-94).

The racial segregation is not only limited to housing but also very rampant in work place. Black men are not allowed to work along with white women, as they have been perceived to be more likely to commit violent crimes and have low moral standards (SI 258). Gilbert explains how a girl at the office looks at him with horror; he swore that “her hair was standing straight as stiff fingers” (SI 259). This may also explain the attitude of Mrs.



Smith when Gilbert raised his hat to her one morning while she was talking to Queenie:

She rushed into her house like he'd just expose himself. Out came Morris who stood on the doorstep to protect his honour. And Gilbert had only said hello. After that she never spoke to me again. (*SI* 98)

Racial discrimination culminates to the extent that when walking on the street, a black person has to step off the pavement into the road, if an English person wishes to pass and there is not sufficient room on the pavement for them both (*SI* 277). Still more, the conversation between the American CO and his Sergeant about Gilbert shows how stereotypes and racial prejudice are horribly sustained in the consciousness of the Western Whites: "‘He is coloured, Sir.’ ‘He's what?’ ‘He's coloured.’ ‘Ah, shit. Coloured you say.’ ‘Black, sir.’ ... ‘How coloured is he?’ ‘Enough, Sir.’ ... ‘These niggers are more trouble than they are worth’" (125-126). At last, the CO angrily instructs the sergeant to, "Tell him to wait or get him something to eat. They always want something to eat" (126).

In fact, colonization or colonialism has resulted in the wide spread of stereotypes as a means to serve their imperial whims. They stereotype the natives as primitive, uncivilized, unreliable, stupid, dirty, weak, inhuman or lazy as a strategy to assert their claim for superiority to rule and control the world (Tyson 419). In this regard, Dilip Hiro asserts that the colonizers invent stereotypes of colonized people in order to justify colonialism:

Ironically, in history, the white colonizers, aiming to wash themselves from any guilt they could feel; they have created, maintained and spread many stereotypes about black people and these stereotypical representations became engrained in the popular British beliefs and myths. (3, qtd. in Cinkova 25)

Thus, stereotyping fosters prejudice and leads to developing preconceptions and generalizing the view about the other. This is clear from Queenie's neighbors' preconception that all the 'colored' were 'cross-eyed and goofy before they come to Britain' (*SI* 93). They believe that the West Indians come to England "only for teeth and glasses" (*SI* 179). As stereotyping leads to prejudice, it fuels hatred, demonization, and then violence against the other. In the theater, the usherette tells Gilbert that, "other customers don't like to sit next to coloureds" (*SI* 153). His rejection of this prejudice leads to a riot between the Whites and the Blacks. However, Gilbert stood still contemplating when a white woman blames him of causing all the trouble:

"Man it was hatred raged in these men's eyes not anger! Tell me, if you build a bonfire from the driest tinder, is it the stray spark you blame when the flames start to lick" (*SI* 157). Again, in the teashop, the three GIs watch Gilbert sitting next to Queenie "like snipers clearing their aim at a sitting target" (*SI* 147). This shows the consequence of the racial stereotype and violence aimed at Gilbert, as he is an inferior and has no right to sit next to a white woman. This antagonistic attitude resulting from perpetuating stereotyping can be better explained by Feldman:

All stereotypes share the common feature of oversimplifying the world: We view individuals not in terms of their unique, personal characteristics, but also in terms of characteristics we attribute to all the members of a particular group. (540)

Furthermore, the cruel generalizations of colonial history are shown when Bernard accuses Gilbert of being the father of Queenie's "very brown-skinned baby" (*SI* 401). He further blames all the coloreds for the situation: "It's everything to do with you. You and your kind!" (*SI* 403) This case also emphasizes that stereotypes are "generalizations that are not derived from rational or otherwise "good" cognitive processes" (Schneider 20). This becomes clear through Gilbert's words:

Cha! Am I the only black man in this world? Why everyone look to me? I have been back in England for only seven months. Why no one think to use their fingers to count out that before they accuse? (*SI* 404)

#### 4.3 Stereotyping: Identity Crisis and Self-Alienation

In addition to discrimination, racism, and prejudice, stereotyping can lead to identity crisis and alienation which is clear in Hortense's case. As a high-class girl in Jamaica, Hortense is educated to believe that England is her 'Mother country'. According to the colonial education she had received there, Hortense starts to imitate "the ways, fashion, accent, tastes and codes of the 'Mother country'" (Talec 1) in order to be accepted as a civilized citizen. In England, however, she undergoes self-alienation and identity crisis when becoming aware that she neither reserves her Jamaican identity and nor succeeds in acquiring a British one. Hortense has undergoes a 'deculturalization process' (Fanon 36) and has adopted alien principles and standards thinking that she must be seen as an English to succeed in life. In describing the white English women working at school, Hortense admiration is clearly expressed:

Those white women whose superiority encircled them like an aureole, could quieten any raucous gathering by just placing a finger to a lip. Their formal elocution, their eminent intelligence, their imperial demeanour demanded and received obedience from all who beheld them. (SI 57)

She has adopted the principles of the white mythology due to colonial education and social influence. That is clear from her description of the black students she used to teach in Jamaica:

Sixty children fidgeting like vermin. ... sixty nappy-headed, runny-nosed, foul-smelling ragamuffins. Sixty black faces. Some staring on me, gaping as idiots do...their fickle minds would start wandering... at that school for scoundrels I had learnt to despise. (SI 56-58)

Therefore, Hortense has experienced self-denial, cultural alienation, and identity crisis due to stereotypes. In the beginning, Hortense believes that her real home is England in which she can accomplish her goals and succeeds in life. The stereotypes that have been invented and taught in colonial schools convince her that England is her 'Mother Country,' the ideal place in which she deserves to live. However, when she reached England, she got disillusioned with the reality of England and the English.

#### 4.4 Stereotyping: An Epitome of Othering

Lois Tyson indicates that colonizers "saw themselves as the embodiment of what a human being should be, the proper 'self'; native peoples were considered 'other,' different, and therefore inferior to the point of being less than human" (420). Consequently, such differences become a basis for 'Othering' in which the 'Other' is seen as less human and more primitive or savage. In *Small Island*, many racial slurs are used throughout the novel to illustrate how stereotypes have been proliferated to identify colonized nations. The West Indians along with Asians were identified as 'colored.' This label was entitled to anyone who was not White. Gilbert, as a Jamaican Royal Air Force (RAF) volunteer, explains how colony men were expected to be uncultured, stupid, or animals who cannot even speak; "They expect us colony men to be uncultured. Some, let us face it, do not expect that we can talk at all" (SI 138). Gilbert recalls how he sometimes heard children call out after him: "It speaks, Mummy, it speaks" (SI 138), while others yelled up at his friend "Oi, darkie, show us yer tail" (SI 117). He also recalls how in a Yorkshire village, an elderly woman approaches James, one

of the West Indian RAF men, with her husband and asks him, "Would you mind saying something? Only my husband here says it's not English you're speaking." When James replied, her husband was astonished and she said, "There, I told you. They speak it just like us, only funnier" (SI 115). Hortense describes how Miss Newman believes that colored girls are less civilized and closer to nature (SI 56). Gilbert, as a black Jamaican, was expected by the Flight Sergeant to be a stupid darkie who cannot drive (SI 120). He indicates that the sergeant believes "anything primitive about his West Indian charge, it was worth the try" (SI 122).

Through Queenie's first encounter as a child with a black man, Levy illustrates how colonial stereotypes have dominated the whole perception of the white British and created misconceptions and hence prejudgments about the Other. She asserts the fact that colonized nations were stereotyped by the European colonizers to be cannibals, savages, or infanticides since the beginning of colonization. Queenie recalls that she was very afraid of being eaten by the black African man: "He could have swallowed me up, this big nigger man" (SI 5). Similarly, Bernard used to describe the state of his friend after telling him about the death of Maxi as "dumb as a coolie" (SI 338). Such stereotypical representations are exposed in the novel to illustrate how stereotypes have become deeply rooted in the popular British beliefs and myths. Bernard's attitude towards Indians concerning the riot which has occurred in Calcutta in 1946 illustrates this point much further. The presumed ignorance and barbarism of the colonized are used as a tool to justify colonialism. Bernard recalls,

Thousands were killed in Calcutta. Men, Women, Children, even suckling babies, it didn't matter who. They called it a riot. Those of us who'd been there in the thick of battle with these bloodthirsty little men knew it was more than that ... Made me smile to think of that ragged bunch of illiterates wanting to run their own country. The British out of India? Only British troops could keep those coolies under control. (SI 308)

## 5. Counter-Discursive Strategies in Levy's *Small Island*:

### 5.1 Challenging Stereotypes as a Form of 'Writing Back':

The colonizers or colonialists in general have not just developed stereotypes, but also asserted, perpetuated, and spread them through their dominant culture, education, and literature. However, challenging the

stereotypes is one of the various forms of counter-discourse, canonical counter-discourse or “writing back” to the Western canon. There are many voices which worked to create a counter-discourse/counter narrative through postcolonial literary texts. They attempt to challenge the Eurocentric hegemonic canonical discourse which adopts and propagates negative stereotypes of non-Western cultures and societies. Thus, challenging stereotypes represents an act of ‘challenging the center’ and refers to an act of liberation from Western colonial power. This act of liberation carried out by post-colonial writers is a counter-discourse that attempts to ‘write back’ to or ‘re-write’ the canonical stories of the classics of English literature with the aim to challenge the colonial authority, truth, and authenticity by deconstructing the colonial discourse, exposing its ‘hidden’ ideology, and giving voice to the marginalized Other. Hence, ‘writing back to stereotypes’ can help in eliminating and subverting stereotypes of colonial texts. Similarly, Alexandra Lewis states that ‘writing back’ involves a process to rewrite and “reinvent a *presence* that colonialist discourse had theorized as *absence*” (101). Thus, like Tayeb Salih, Levy in *Small Island* questions “the official stories and stereotypes that the Centre disseminates about the margin, or the colonizer about the colonized,” to use the words of Salwa Ghaly (21).

In fact, by challenging stereotypes, *Small Island* is considered a re-visionary novel, which has a clear cultural-political thrust. According to Widdowson, re-visionary novels aim to “restore a voice, a history and an identity to those hitherto exploited, marginalized and silenced by dominant interests and ideologies” (506). Thus, the marginal displaces the colonially centered within the fictional space. Similarly, Benita Parry believes that such texts assert “the role of the native as historical subject and combatant, possessor of another knowledge and producer of alternative traditions” (34). When the readers are faced with the character of Hortense and Gilbert, they find the antithesis of the uncivilized African/Oriental/Caribbean image depicted in many Western colonial literary texts. In *Small Island*, Levy addresses an intended audience not only of white but primarily Caribbean readers. Similarly, Achebe Chinua addresses the African audience aiming to “teach that their past was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them” (148, qtd. in Muharram 74). Not only does Levy write back to a particular English canonical text, as Lewis would say, but she also parodies “the whole of the discursive field [Orientalism] within which such texts continue to operate” (102).

## 5.2 Deconstructing the Myth of Britain as ‘Mother Country’

In Jamaica, Gilbert and Hortense were brought up and educated in colonial schools to believe that England was their ‘Mother country.’ Their relatives fought for Britain in World War II believing that they were fighting to end slavery and discrimination. However, Hortense was rejected to work at Kingston’s prestigious Church of England School, where “light-skinned girls in pristine uniforms gathered to drink from the fountain of an English curriculum” (SI 71). She is rejected by the headmaster simply because her “breeding was not legitimate enough for him to consider me worthy of standing in their elegant classrooms before high-class girls” (SI 71). Qualifications and professional efficiency are no criteria for job application. What matters more is “skin color and origin” (SI 375- 376). In the same way, Gilbert, as a Jamaican volunteer in the RAF, has been promised to be trained as a wireless operator/air gunner or flight engineer. However, when reaching England, he is reassigned to be trained as a truck driver for the Royal Air Force during World War II due to his skin colour (SI 123). In 1948, his suffering was intensified when he could not find a job in London though being well-qualified. Describing his frustration, Gilbert states, "In five, no, in six places, the job I had gone for vanish with one look upon my face" (SI 258). At last, Gilbert and Hortense have realized that they have no chance but to work beneath their qualifications.

In *Small Island*, laying bare the myth of the Mother Country and Western superiority affects the Western or imperial binary system in general. Both Gilbert and Hortense discover the bitter reality of their Mother Country. All the things they have been taught about England are turned to be fake. England's high standards and disciplines are best described by Gilbert:

Let me ask you to imagine this. Living far from you is a beloved relative 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 enthrall grown men as well as children. Her photographs are cherished, pinned in your own family album to be admired over and over. Your best, everything you have that is worthy is sent to Mother as gifts. And on her birthday you sing-song and party. (SI 116)

Then he describes the Mother Country's reality, stating:

Then one day you hear 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 you at Mother's needy side. This surely is adventure. After all you have heard, can you imagine, can you believe, soon, soon you will meet Mother? The filthy tramp that eventually greets you is she. Ragged, old, and dusty as the long dead. Mother has a blackened eye, bad breath and one lone tooth that waves in her head when she speaks. Can this be that fabled relation you heard so much of? This twisted- crooked weary woman. This stinking cantankerous hag. She offers you no comfort after your journey. No smile, no welcome. Yet she looks down at you through lordly eyes and says, 'who the bloody hell are you?' (SI 116)

Accordingly, the myth of the 'Mother Country' is vanished. In fact, uncovering the illusion of Eurocentrism is one of the main aspects through which the deconstruction of colonial stereotypes is achieved in this novel. All the good traits which have been attached to that Mother, England, are invented to suit the English colonizer's needs. Colonized people are taught by colonial education to revere England and to believe in the superiority of the English. In *Small Island*, however, England is no more the respected or the admired lovely 'Mother'. Hortense and Gilbert have to re-evaluate what colonial education has implanted in them. When Gilbert was a member of the British Royal Air Force, he criticized the way the English cook their food and longed to the food of his homeland. He wonders:

How the English built empires when their armies marched on nothing but mush should be one of the wonders of the world. I thought it would be combat that would make me regret having volunteered , not boiled-up potatoes, boiled up vegetables – gray and limp on the plate like they had been eaten once before. Why the English come to cook everything by this method? (SI 106)

### 5.3 Challenging Racial Stereotypes in *Small Island*

As the term race has been defined to indicate "a group characterized by closeness of common descent and usually also by some shared physical distinctiveness such as colour of skin" (MacEwen 10), the term 'racial stereotypes' can include both cultural and ethnic stereotypes. In the

Eurocentric sense, racial stereotypes refer to people who have color, culture, language, history, or ancestry different from the Europeans. *Small Island* reflects the stereotypes which have been created by the European colonizers to different nations they colonized including the Asians, the Africans or the West Indians. Such stereotypes have influenced the perception of many people including the Europeans themselves. The racial superiority of the English which has been maintained by colonialism and its ideologies drives them to assume illiteracy, violence, irrationality and backwardness on the part of the people they have colonized. Therefore, the binaries of Western culture are politically motivated and culturally determined, as they are not based on science but upon belief. Colonial discourse in literature, media or history has played a vital role in perpetuating and legitimizing Western ideologies favoring the 'white colonizer'. Accordingly, there is usually an unequal binary opposition in the perceived dichotomy between the colonizer and the colonized, or the 'West' and the 'Rest', throughout history.

In *Small Island*, Levy constantly clarifies that the fixed binary system in which colonial discourse inscribes the inferiority of the colonized people is continually disturbed. The way she projects her characters challenges the fixity of Western binary system. In its review, *The Daily Telegraph* states that, "Levy undercuts any assumption that race alone defines them, and is keen to highlight those symmetries and parallels in their life experiences" ("A New England."). Moreover, Marianne Brace in *The Independent* comments, "What makes Levy's writing so appealing is her even-handedness. All her characters can be weak, hopeless, brave, good, bad – whatever their colour" (Brace).

As a culturally hybrid writer, Levy stands objective and unbiased in her assessment of reality and rather seeks reconciliation in challenging racial stereotypes. She admits in *The Independent*, "None of my books is just about race" (Brace). Levy strives for being accepted among the British as an English but at the same time feels proud of her Jamaican heritage. In this regard, she explains:

Saying that I'm English doesn't mean I want to be assimilated; to take on the majority white culture to the exclusion of all other. (I cannot live without rice and peas. I now dance like a lunatic when Jamaica wins anything. And I will always make a noise when moved by emotion.) I will not take up a flag and wave it to intimidate. And



being English will not stop me from fighting to live in a country free from racism and social divisiveness. ("This is my England")

Accordingly, the stories of Levy's Jamaican and English characters are "explored not in opposition to each other but rather as two parts of a historical moment, with Levy turning a critical and compassionate eye on both" (Slater). Despite the fact that Queenie and Hortense are from different backgrounds, both of them get married with men they do not love in order to have a better life "as Hortense married Gilbert to escape from Jamaica, Queenie married her dull husband Bernard to escape the rigours of life on a Midlands farm" (Heyns). In addition, all the four characters have lost their hopes in life. With reference to *Small Island* and the construction of multicultural Britain, Jane Ciabattari posts in the *Critical Mass*:

That Levy succeeds in making Queenie and Bernard almost as compelling as Hortense and Gilbert ensures that her story of Jamaican-British contact is not one-sided, and demonstrates her equal compassion for the denizens of two very different small islands. (Ciabattari)

Moreover, by highlighting the similarity between the Jamaican colored couple and the white British couple in their loveless marital relationships, Levy attempts to bridge any gap between the two culturally and biologically different human races living in two 'small islands' and hence challenging the Eurocentric emphasis on the otherness, exoticism and difference of the non-western nations/people. In other words, Levy challenges the superiority of the West by humanizing her characters and underlining the fact that all are equal. Even Bernard, the most racist character in the novel, Levy does not represent him as wicked. She, however, depicts him in a way that enables the reader to understand the circumstances under which he became such a bigot.

Levy's portrayal of characters never becomes biased to black or white. Her characters are presented as normal people who share the same history and suffer from being victims of colonialism. At the end of the novel, Levy clarifies this point through Gilbert's speech when talking to Bernard:

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. Am 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 gonna fight me till the end. (SI 435)

Both the white British and black Jamaicans feel self-alienated despite being in their homeland. When Gilbert returns to Jamaica at the end of the war, he recognizes how small it is. He finds it difficult to readjust to home and recalls:

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 163)

Just like Gilbert, Bernard feels alienated when he reached his home after World War II. He is shocked by the changes that have befallen Britain, wondering:

England had shrunk. It was smaller than the place I left. [...] I had to stare out at the sea just to catch a breath. And behind every face I saw were trapped the rememberings of war. (SI 350)

Moreover, Levy challenges some stereotypes related to Africans or colonized people in general by using her characters' different perspectives. In the prologue of *Small Island* which is written from the perspective of the English narrator, some stereotypes are challenged. Queenie, who remembers going to the British Empire Exhibition as a child, recalls:

'I want to go,' I said, because there was nothing interesting to look at. But then suddenly there was a man. An African man. A black man who looked to be carved from melting chocolate. I clung to Emily but she shooed me off. He was right next to me, close enough so I could see him breathing. A monkey man sweating a smell of mothballs. Blacker than when you smudge your face with a sooty cork. The droplets of sweat on his forehead glistened and shone like jewels. (SI 5)

In these lines, Queenie describes her first encounter with a black man. It is clear that her perception and impression is completely negative. She immediately perceives him as a stereotype thinking that he must be dangerous because he looks different and calls him a 'monkey man'. She explains:

His lips were brown, not pink like they should be, and they bulged with air like bicycle tyres. His hair was woolly as a black shorn sheep. His nose, squashed flat, had two nostrils big as train tunnels. And he was looking down at me. (SI 5)

Queenie does not just prejudge the black man to be violent or hostile but also confesses that he may have eaten her alive. She considers:

This man was still looking down at me. I could feel the blood rising in my face, turning me crimson, as he smiled a perfect set of pure blinding white teeth. The inside of his mouth was pink and his face was coming closer and closer to mine. He could have swallowed me up, this big nigger man. (SI 5)

However, her negative perception is challenged once the black man speaks. She accepts to shake his hand then finally admits that the African man's hand "was warm and slightly sweaty like anyone else's" (SI 5).

Another example of challenging stereotypes by deconstructing the imperial binary opposition of the civilized vs. savage is Gilbert gentle and lovely way when calming Queenie despite Bernard's bad words and disdain. Hortense explains:

Gilbert insisted Mrs Bligh came from her knees. He lifted her, still sniveling, from the floor, supporting her with a careful arm round her waist. And he placed her down on the settee beside me ... Gilbert tried to squeeze himself down on the chair between Mrs Bligh and myself but there was no room. So it was he that took up the kneeling position. (SI 433)

Bernard bursts with anger when seeing Gilbert's hand placed on his wife's arm, shouting, "Get your filthy black hands off my wife!" Then he adds, "How dare you, you savage?" (SI 434). However, Gilbert's tender way in dealing with Queenie has challenged such a stereotype. This attitude also puts the colonial discourse in the reverse order showing Bernard as a savage with a barbarous conduct. Hortense then realized that "Gilbert Joseph, my husband, was a man of class, a man of character, a man of intelligence. Noble in a way that would someday make him a legend" (SI 435). Levy here presents each of the Jamaican characters to be possessed of far greater agency and insight than mere dirty black niggers with animal desire. In typical Conradian/Forsterian fashion, irrationality and foolishness are assigned to many of the "native" Africans/Indians. However, Levy here slams into this

relationship and suggests that unreasonableness and idiocy, in *Small Island*, originate in Britain, not Jamaica.

#### 5.4 The Deconstruction of Imperial Narrative: Reversing Binaries

As previously mentioned, the imperial embedded ideologies that have internalized all the bad human traits on non-Westerners are “a development of that tendency of Western thought in general to see the world in terms of binary oppositions that establish a relation of dominance” (Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies* 19). The racial or cultural superiority of the English colonizer is also challenged via Hortense's constant and contemptuous question wondering about how different the way the English live in reality. In fact, Hortense has noticed England's reality since her arrival at Queenie's house. Observing the room where Gilbert lives, Hortense bursts with anger:

This place is disgusting. I caan believe you bring me all this way to live like this. You make me come here to live like an animal? (SI 26)

Gilbert also describes Hortense's disappointment and wondering, “Is this the way the English live?’ How many times she ask me that question?” (SI 18)

In fact, England does teach Hortense many things. One is that the English are not as hygienic or clean as she expected them to be. When Hortense goes shopping with Queenie, she is surprised by the way the English shopkeeper handles the bread. All the good habits which she has learnt concerning the English have come to be fables. Thus, the myth of ‘England’s supremacy is perished. Hortense recalls:

'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.' She thinks me a fool that does not know what is bread? But my mind could not believe what my eye had seen. That English people would buy their bread in this way. This man was patting on his red head and wiping his hand down his filthy white coat. (SI 274- 275)

In another occasion, Gilbert clarifies to Hortense the fact that 'not everything the English do is good' which is too difficult for Hortense to understand at that moment. He recalls:

Unwrapping and placing the fish and chips on the plate I tell her,' You know what the English do?' ... 'They eat this food straight from the newspaper. No plate. Nothing.' I knew this high-class woman would

not be able to keep her face solemn in the presence of such barbarity. Scandalised, she could not stop herself staring on me in disbelief,' Yes, from the newspaper! ... ' Not everything,' I tell her,' not everything the English do is good'. (SI 271)

In fact, Levy uses caustic depiction in portraying the consequences of racial stereotype of the coloured. Then, she inverts stereotypes where white people are denuded of their supposed superiority, which is a step on the road to subvert racial stereotype completely. In this respect, the Western binary labeling the colonized as savage/ uncivilized/ uneducated/ violent or dangerous is entirely deconstructed. The binary logic of imperialism is overlapped and reversed through Hortense's character. She is neat, determined, ambitious, self-confident, arrogant and decent. Throughout the novel, Hortense sense of superiority and royalty never fades. When she applies for a job at the English school, she walks into a cupboard thinking that it is the door to leave by. However, she criticizes the way those English women keep their cupboards instead of being embarrassed. She says, "I should have told them that their cupboard was a disgrace" (SI 382). Besides, Hortense frequently criticizes Queenie and despises her for her disgusting house and lack of fashion sense. In her second encounter with Queenie, Hortense is shocked by Queenie's curiosity and considers her impolite. She argues:

But this was my home, it was for me to tell her when to sit, when to come in, when to warm her hands. I could surely teach this woman something, was my thought. Manners! (SI 189)

Even when Queenie tries to be nice by telling Hortense that she does not mind being seen in the street with her, Hortense believes that since she is a teacher and Queenie is a landlady, she should be the one who is supposed to feel ashamed not Queenie: Hortense wonders:

Now, why should this woman worry to be seen in the street with me? After all, I was a teacher and she was only a woman whose living was obtained from the letting of rooms. If anyone should be shy it should be I. (SI 191)

As Hortense considers herself superior to Queenie, she does not understand the reason behind Queenie's constant explanations when they go shopping. Hortense is a high-class woman whereas Queenie is a daughter of a butcher. In describing Queenie, Hortense wonders, "I was confused. What class of white woman was she?" (SI 191)

When Hortense goes shopping with Queenie, she believes that Queenie humiliates her by explaining the names of the shops to her. In fact, Queenie presumes that Hortense is unaccustomed with such shops in Jamaica. However, Hortense is aware of such shops and knows well everything before Queenie explains it (*SI 275*).

She also challenges this imperial way of thinking by criticizing the way the English treat their materials, asking:

'Is this where you buy your materials?' For all the cloth seemed to be spread about the floor. There was little room to tread. Bolts and bolts of cloth thrown this way and that all about the place. Some of it dirty. Some of it ragged and frying. And two old women looked to be crawling on their hands and knees through this mess of cloth while the assistant just daydream behind a counter. (*SI 275*)

Hortense compares the way the English sell cloth with the Jamaicans' way:

How the English treat their good materials like this? In Jamaica, I told Mrs Bligh, all the cloth is displayed neatly in rows for you to peruse the design, the colour. When you have chosen you point to the bolt that the assistant will then take up for measuring. She understood what I was telling her but still she look surprise on me, saying,' Oh, do you have drapers where you come from? (*SI 275*)

Again, Hortense sarcastically wonders, "How can an Englishwoman expect me to wash myself in the same place where I must clean up the vegetables? It was disgusting to me" (*SI 275*). Also, when Hortense was lodging with the Andersons, a white family, she was surprised by their ill-bred behavior. She considers herself better than them and arrogantly comments, "For none was so mysterious to me than how, in God's name, a woman such as I found herself residing in the household of people like the Andersons" (*SI 72*). Furthermore, Hortense is always depicted as a high-class woman with self-pride. Gilbert's description of Hortense when she walked out of the door of Mrs. Bligh's basement flat asserts how proud Hortense is. :

As she moved past me to ascend the stairs to return to our room, her nose lifted so far in the air it was a wonder her neck did not break. Now this was the story that my mind conjured. Queenie had in some way insulted my fiercely proud wife. Her hat a little old-fashioned? Her English not so good? Who knows? But a slight none the less for

which Hortense took grave offence. In retaliation Hortense had – with a knife, perhaps, or hatchet – killed her. (SI 401)

Similarly, Gilbert's sense of pride is obvious when he admits that he cannot stand seeing his wife on her knees. Asking Hortense not to wash the floor on her knees, Gilbert says, "I did not bring you to England to scrub a floor on your knees. No wife of mine will be on her knees in this country. You hear me?" (SI 263)

In fact, the sense of pride with which the Jamaican characters (i.e. Hortense and Gilbert) are endowed by the author as opposed to the shameful and disgraceful attitude of the white couple helps in shaking the fixity of the Eurocentric sense of privilege and reversing the order of superior-inferior binary system.

In the novel, the description of the physical appearance of the British white people helps in deconstructing the myth of white beauty and challenging the stereotype of black ugliness. Levy successfully associates the image of the coloured Jamaican girls with elegance, education and perfect appearance. She inverts stereotypes where white people appear inferior, exotic and uncivilized. Hortense describing herself and other Jamaican girls "like butterflies, we new girls, dazzled in our white gloves, our pastel frocks, our pretty hats. Girls from good homes from across the island. Girls who possessed the required knowledge of long division, quadratic equations. Girls who could parse a sentence, subject, object, nominative. ... Girls who could recite the capital cities of the world" (SI 276). On the other hand, Levy pictures the shock of the Jamaican Hortense by the dowdy woolen coat Queenie is wearing. Hortense is astounded that this dreary dismal coat is Queenie's best outside coat. She is deeply astonished when she reaches the bustling street where every English woman is attired in a dowdy house coat.

On the other hand, Queenie positively portrays the black man "to be carved from melting chocolate" (SI 5), in contrast with the disgusting image of her father when having a bath: "I had to bring the hot water that rolled black grime down his skin like mud washing off a wall" (SI 196). Again, Hortense's description of the white lady whom she saw at the street indicates ugliness:

Never in my days had I seen such a white woman. The hair curled upon her head put me in mind of confection – white and frothy as foam. Her complexion so light, beside it paper would look solid. Eyebrows, eyelashes, even her lips appeared to have no colour

passing through them. So pale was she her blood must be milk. (*SI* 276)

In the same context, Hortense depicts her white English teachers as coloured "They were all white women but their complexions ranged through varying shades of pink." Moreover, the principle, Miss Morgan, "had a smile that was unfamiliar to her face that it had an opposite effect – rather like the leer of a gargoyle" (*SI* 52). Here, the white women are revealed as exotic, foreign, and strange in their appearance.

In another scene, the image of the white people is denuded of perfect appearance as Queenie depicts her mother Lillie as a woman who "had hands could clasp like a vice, arms as strong as bear's and hips that widened every year with old men in the village agree they were childbearing" (*SI* 23,195-196). Here, she denudes the image of white women of softness and slenderness.

In addition, white people in some parts of the story are represented as lacking in education whereas the Jamaicans are shown as educated, professional, practical and more cultivated though being of a non-white origin. Queenie appears less educated in comparison with Hortense who is a teacher. Queenie lacks manners and needs to attend elocution and deportment lessons. Besides, Queenie is forced to quit going to school and work in the farm as a skivvy which reveals her parents as illiterate and backward in a society that feigns being civilized. Another example is the Indian boy who speaks good English that surprises Bernard (*SI* 316). On the other hand, Gilbert recalls how his fellow in the RAF, a college-educated Lenval, wonders "how so many white people come to speak so bad – low class and coarse as cane cutters" (*SI* 117). Hence, 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 barbarity and immorality of the colonizer is symbolized through the British characters. Queenie betrayed her husband and abandoned her baby. On the other hand, Bernard betrayed his wife with a young Indian whore, who "was nothing but a girl. Surely no more than fifteen. No younger. Fourteen or even twelve" (*SI* 340). He confesses that he "felt like a beast" (*SI* 341). Bernard unintentionally asserts that English men are used to do such things in India, when he describes the girl as "she hardly spoke any English. Just a few words learned by rote from other men who'd passed through" (*SI* 339). His violent act contradicts his words when accusing Gilbert of being



the father of the black child: "It's everything to do with you. You and your kind!" (SI 403) Thus, his actions contradict his words and that asserts the reversing of the binary opposition humane vs. savage again. Therefore, Levy makes it clear that savagery, wildness and violence are qualities attributed to the white.

In fact, Andrea Levy manages to disparage the status and superiority of the colonizer when she depicts the image of Queenie's father who fears joining the army and tries to evade and dodge this obligation. Again, through the character of Bernard, Levy has exposed the myth of superpower and unparalleled soldiering skills attributed to the army of the white colonizers. Bernard admits that he was happy and found a relief being not accepted for flying duty (SI 284). Bernard's cowardliness and lack of valor are so obvious when he and his friend were once scared in the war:

My finger was on the Sten's trigger – trembling again. I wondered if I looked as scared as Maxi. He was as bloodless as corpse. I could feel the urine warming my pants before seeping into the ground. I was a coward, I know, but I didn't want to die. Shot flinching on the ground, quivering like a girl. Could Queenie be proud of that?" (SI 297)

Levy here deals the self-importance of Bernard, as a representative of the Empire, a savage blow by displacing white soldiers and government to the margins of the text' giving priority to the valour and enthusiasm of the Jamaican and oriental Japanese soldiers. By this, she challenges stereotypes and deconstructs the colonial binary order of the center-margin dichotomy in which the white colonizer no more dominates the Other.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

In short, both English (colonizers) and Jamaican (colonized) characters in Levy's *Small Island* are portrayed in a way that reflects the fundamental flaws of racial stereotypes. The way Levy presents her characters challenges the colonial stereotypes and colonial hierarchies. However, her main purpose behind challenging stereotypes is reconciliation by putting more emphasis on equality between the British and Jamaican characters. In fact, we agree with Levy's attitude that adopting a counter-colonial discourse through 'writing back' should not be misunderstood as necessarily resulting in an endless cycle of stereotypical defence and attack (Lewis 93). Levy uses a more accommodating approach and refrains from answering perceived stereotypes

or racism with racism. To do so, she objectively and impartially attempts to humanize both the British and the Jamaicans on equal grounds. On the other hand, she strives to reverse the order of the Western fixed binary oppositions and proves that the foundations of the western stereotypical representations of the 'Other' are false and baseless. Like Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, Levy's *Small Island* 'transvaluates' many of the traditional valences of European civilization through a complete explosion of binaries, to use the words of Makdisi (805). By this, she paves the way for establishing a common ground for a possible dialogue between the Self and the 'Other' based on equality, mutual respect and hence peaceful co-existence. Therefore, we can conclude that 'writing back' should be primarily concerned with 'voicing' in order to establish "an ongoing dialogue" that aims to facilitate what Leila Ghandi would call a "democratic colloquium between the antagonistic inheritors of the colonial aftermath" (x).

<sup>1</sup> 'Post-colonialism' (covering the terms 'postcolonial studies', 'postcolonial theory' and 'postcolonial literature') is an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to the study of European colonialism and its impact on the society, culture, history and politics of the formerly colonized regions such as the African continent, the Caribbean, the Middle East, South-Asia and the Pacific (Cuddon 550).

<sup>2</sup> This refers to an island in the West Indies that encompasses the nations of Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. To read a brief history of Jamaica from the late 15th to the end of the 20th century, see Veront Satchell. "Jamaica" *World History Archives: The Retrospective History of Jamaica*, <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/43/index-ha.html>

<sup>3</sup> The British Nationality Act of 1948, giving British citizenship to all people living in Commonwealth countries, and full rights of entry and settlement due to labor shortage in Europe. This labor shortage had promoted the West Indians' immigration and lifelong residence in Britain (Lange 11).

<sup>4</sup> *Empire Windrush* was a passenger liner and cruise ship launched in Germany in 1930. She was acquired by the United Kingdom as a prize of war at the end of the war and renamed Empire Windrush. In British service, she continued to be used mainly as a troopship until March 1954, when the vessel caught fire and sank in the Mediterranean Sea with the loss of four crew. Empire Windrush is best remembered today for bringing one of the first large groups of post-war West Indian immigrants to the United Kingdom, carrying 492 passengers and one stowaway on a voyage from Jamaica to London in 1948.

<sup>5</sup> The 2004 Orange Prize for Fiction, the 2004 Whitbread Novel Award, the 2004 Whitbread Book of the Year, and the 2005 Commonwealth Writers Prize, the 2005 Orange Prize 'Best of the Best' award. It was adapted into a major BBC TV drama in 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Andrea Levy's *Small Island* setting, analysis and the slave trade and post-war migration can be seen in *Small Island Read* at [http://www.bristolreads.com/small\\_island\\_read/](http://www.bristolreads.com/small_island_read/)

<sup>7</sup> *Small Island* is not only told from the perspective of the Jamaican migrants who struggle to find jobs and lodging, but also from the standpoint of Londoners who have been not familiar with black faces yet. The narrative of the novel is divided into four smaller narratives. Each one of the main four characters narrates his/her story individually. Gilbert Joseph is a former Jamaican Royal Air Force recruit who has returned to Britain on the Empire Windrush on 28 May 1948; Hortense Joseph is a Jamaican teacher who follows her husband, Gilbert, to England. Queenie Bligh is a British white landlady, and Bernard Bligh is her husband. Each narrative enjoys a different perspective which provides an understanding of how people think differently and how stereotypes come as a result of ignorance and lack of information.

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