

Univerzita Karlova  
Pedagogická fakulta  
Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

The portrayal of the Windrush generation in Andrea Levy's *Small Island* and  
Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*

Vyobrazení Windrush generace v díle *Malý Ostrov* od Andrey Levy a  
*Osamělí Londýňané* od Samuela Selvona

Bc. Simona Hemžalová

Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Tereza Topolovská, Ph.D.

Studijní program: Učitelství pro střední školy

Studijní obor: N AJJ (7504T213)

Odevzdáním této diplomové práce na téma Vyobrazení Windrush generace v díle *Malý Ostrov* od Andrey Levy a *Osamělí Londýňané* od Samuela Selvona potvrzují, že jsem ji vypracovala pod vedením vedoucí práce samostatně za použití v práci uvedených pramenů a literatury. Dále potvrzují, že tato práce nebyla využita k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

V Praze dne 12. 7. 2021

### **Poděkování**

Ráda bych touto cestou poděkovala PhDr. Tereze Topolovské, Ph.D., nejenom za pomoc při výběru tématu, ale převážně také za odborné a cenné rady, vstřícnost, trpělivost a ochotu při vedení této diplomové práce, bez kterých by nikdy nebyla vznikla.

## **ABSTRAKT**

Cílem diplomové práce je porovnat způsob vyobrazení tzv. Windrush generace, představující první vlnu přistěhovalců z původních britských kolonií do Británie, v dílech *Malý Ostrov* (2004) od Andrey Levy a *Osamělí Londýňané* (1956) od Samuela Selvona. Teoretická část práce čtenáři poskytuje socio-historický a kulturní přehled kolem původu vzrůstající imigrace v Británii po druhé světové válce, která dle vybraných sekundárních zdrojů rovněž přispěla k rozmachu rasismu a diskriminaci, zejména vůči obyvatelům karibského původu. Práce dále představuje základní koncepty postkoloniální a anglofonní karibské literatury a sleduje osobní zkušenosti s imigrací a charakteristické rysy psaní vybraných autorů. Ty jsou zásadní pro pochopení jejich tvorby a následnou interpretaci zkušenosti imigrantů zachycené v obou románech. Praktická část práce se opírá o poznatky prezentované v teoretické části práce a zaměřuje se na srovnání těchto románů z hlediska jejich ztvárnění tzv. Windrush generace, konkrétněji s ohledem na formu a obsah. Zároveň práce sleduje, jakým způsobem jejich literární znázornění zkušenosti imigrantů odpovídá realitě popsané ve vybrané odborné literatuře. Kromě toho si práce klade za cíl prozkoumat, zdali je mezi romány nějaký výraznější posun či rozdíl ve vyobrazení zkušenosti imigrantů a pokud ano, je-li možné vysledovat příčiny změny ve vnímání či ztvárnění této zkušenosti.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

imigrace, rasová diskriminace, poválečná Británie, postkoloniální literatura, Windrush generace, Samuel Selvon, Andrea Levy

## **ABSTRACT**

The diploma thesis is concerned with the portrayal of the Windrush generation, the first wave of immigrants coming to Britain from its former colonies, in Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) and Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956). The theoretical part of the thesis outlines the socio-historical and cultural overview of the rising immigration to Britain after the Second World War, which according to the selected secondary sources contributed to the increase of racism and discrimination, namely against people of Caribbean origin. The thesis further presents principal concepts of postcolonial and Anglophone Caribbean literature and examines both authors' personal experience with immigration as well as the idiosyncratic features of their writing. These are essential for understanding the literary works of the selected authors and the subsequent interpretation of their literary depiction of the immigrant experience. The practical part of the thesis relies on the theoretical part and focuses on the comparison of the two novels, their presentation and view of the so-called Windrush generation with specific attention paid to their form and content. Simultaneously, the work examines how the literary depictions of the immigrant experience correspond to the theory presented. Moreover, the thesis attempts to explore whether there is a significant shift in the portrayal of the Windrush generation and if so, whether the cause of this shift in perception can be determined.

## **KEYWORDS**

immigration, racial discrimination, post-war Britain, postcolonial literature, Windrush generation, Samuel Selvon, Andrea Levy

## Obsah

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Theoretical part</b> .....	<b>10</b>
2.1	Historical overview: Britain during and after the Second World War .....	10
2.1.1	Racial segregation during the Second World War .....	10
2.1.2	Post-war Britain.....	11
2.2	The Windrush generation.....	13
2.2.1	Perception of the Mother Country: London is the place for me.....	14
2.2.2	British political response to Windrush .....	15
2.3	West Indian experience in post-war Britain .....	16
2.4	Selected concepts of postcolonial thinking and theory.....	18
2.5	Postcolonial literature within the context of contemporary British fiction.....	20
2.6	Anglophone Caribbean literature.....	21
2.6.1	Windrush narratives.....	23
2.6.2	<i>The Lonely Londoners</i> within the context of Samuel Selvon's works .....	25
2.6.3	<i>Small Island</i> within the context of Andrea Levy's works .....	27
<b>3</b>	<b>Practical Part</b> .....	<b>31</b>
3.1	Form and language.....	32
3.1.1	Language .....	33
3.1.2	Narration.....	38
3.1.3	Humour.....	42
3.2	Geographical and historical setting.....	46
3.2.1	Geographical setting.....	47
3.2.2	Historical setting.....	51
3.3	Characters .....	59
3.4	Plot.....	66
<b>4</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Works Cited</b> .....	<b>74</b>

## 1 Introduction

The recent events related to the Windrush scandal, which first emerged in 2017, unearthed presence of racial prejudice of the British society against the Commonwealth citizens, most of whom emigrated to England from the former British colonies during the post-war times (“Windrush Scandal Explained”). After almost 70 years, the British government wanted all undocumented immigrants deported back to their motherlands, afflicting mainly those of the Windrush generation who came to Britain on their family members’ passports in 1948 (ibid.). These people faced the uncomfortable situations of proving their British citizenship despite living in the country for many years – some people ended up deported while others found themselves on the brink of deportation. Even though Britain is widely considered a multi-racial and multicultural country, the relics of the colonial past still seem to haunt the nation, as demonstrated by government policies known as the “hostile environment”, first proposed in 2012 (“The Hostile Environment Explained”). The Windrush scandal may be then seen as a culmination of “a long, guilty history of colonial occupation and exploitation” (Gentleman 12). The issues concerning the colonial heritage and racial tensions in post-war Britain are still relevant and reaching well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I found this issue highly pertinent, and therefore decided to look at the historical development of the situation and its representation in fiction. Over the past two decades, the importance of historical fiction has grown and, in fact, underwent significant postcolonial revisions (Keen 167).

The first spark of motivation to write this thesis arose when reading *Small Island* (2004) by Andrea Levy. I was stricken by the diverse perspectives she provided the reader with. One could perceive the story from both perspectives of the white British majority and the Caribbean minority. Levy’s use of humour, inviting insight into the characters’ minds, as well as the meticulous description of the overall situation ensured my continuous attention and I simply could not put the book away as I was completely absorbed in the story. As Levy was a second-generation black British author, I found it necessary to compare her depiction of the Windrush generation with authors who recorded their first-hand experience. *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) by Samuel Selvon, who himself travelled on the *SS Empire Windrush*, fit this description perfectly. While reading Selvon’s novel, I was particularly

shocked by the degree of hostility the immigrants were exposed to. Selvon's narrative confronted the readers with the realistic depiction of immigrant life in post-war Britain filled with feelings of exile, loneliness, and alienation. Through various West Indian male characters sharing their raw experience in London and employment of a dialect throughout the whole novel, he paints a rather authentic picture of the Windrush generation.

I first came across these works and their authors in the lectures on Postcolonial and Contemporary British and American Literature. The works by Andrea Levy were compulsory reading and the characteristic features of postcolonial thinking and theory, including the Anglophone Caribbean literature, were outlined and further discussed in greater detail. These lectures proved crucial in providing the students with the necessary knowledge for a better comprehension of postcolonial works in general. Looking back at my first readings of *The Long Song* (2010) and *Small Island*, both by Andrea Levy, they were rather plot-driven. Instead of understanding the works in their entirety, I obliviously indulged only in the action-related parts of the story and therefore managed to ignore some of the vital points of the books. Now that I have attended the two courses, it made me realise how important these literary contributions are and how ignorant my previous readings were. There is more to those postcolonial works than just the story itself. Among other things, they offer new perspectives, topics, and languages. As a consequence, one ends up pondering a number of questions, such as why these authors felt the need to write about the problems of immigration, how they incorporate humour in novels which would otherwise offer an account of the grim reality of colonialism and postcolonialism, or how their writing style accentuates the meaning of their works.

In order to understand and contextualise the historical interpretation of their writings, the theoretical part opens with the account of historical overview of the Windrush experience which is in accordance with the authors of non-fiction publications dealing with the topic, such as David Olusoga's *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (2016), Amelia Gentleman's *Windrush Betrayal: Exposing the Hostile Environment* (2019), Robert Winder's *Bloody Foreigners: The Story of Immigration to Britain* (2010) and Ron Ramdin's *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (2017). All of them encapsulate the historical and social background of the Windrush situation, including the selected events of

the Second World War, British reaction to the beginning of global immigration, and the struggles of the newcomers from the Caribbean in post-war Britain. To elucidate the literary context of the Windrush generation, the following major sources will be used: *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (2013) by Bill Ashcroft et al. to present the basic concepts of postcolonial thinking and theory; Nick Bentley's *Contemporary British Fiction* (2008) and Malcolm Bradbury's *The Atlas of Literature* (2003) to provide necessary literary context of postcolonial and Anglophone Caribbean literature, highlight their characteristic features and introduce other authors who, just like Samuel Selvon, communicated their own migrant experience.

The practical part shall be then in accordance with the objective of this thesis, focusing on the portrayal of the Windrush experience in the novels. It will also compare the novels' depiction of the Windrush story with the findings featured in the theoretical part of the thesis in order to evaluate to what extent the literary illustrations correspond to real historical data. The aim of the practical part is to consider how *The Lonely Londoners* and *Small Island* depict the historical situation in terms of form, language, setting, characters, and plot, i.e. the constitutive elements of fiction (Klarer). It will focus on aspects such as creolisation and the use of a vernacular, the employment of humour and its function in the two literary works, and how both the geographical as well as the historical settings shape the characters' behaviour and their perception of Britain. It will also explore the representation of male and female characters and how they cope with the feelings of alienation and loneliness in the new environment. The last chapter shall look at how Andrea Levy and Samuel Selvon describe the Windrush experience in the plot of *The Lonely Londoners* and *Small Island*.

The aim of the thesis is to study the ways in which both Andrea Levy and Samuel Selvon portray the Windrush generation in their novels. The work will look at what perspectives they apply to explore the phenomenon and what aspects the books share or differ in. The comparison of the two novels shall focus on differences and similarities in the portrayal of the Windrush experience and their possible causes. The thesis will try to determine whether these could be ascribed to Selvon and Levy being representatives of first- and second-generation writers respectively, thus having first- and second-hand experience. Or, if the dissimilarities present may be a consequence of the authors' writing styles, or some

other factors involved in the creation of the novels. Furthermore, the work will examine whether there is a noticeable shift of perspectives or a change in the depiction of the immigrant experience within the course of almost fifty years that separate the novels, but also within the context of writing of two different authors. Simultaneously, should the variations and possible dissimilarities be present, the thesis will explore whether they imply a shift in perception of the historical experience and if so, the thesis will strive to uncover the nature of this shift.

## **2 Theoretical part**

### **2.1 Historical overview: Britain during and after the Second World War**

To better understand the backdrop of the Windrush story in both *Small Island* and *The Lonely Londoners*, it is essential to explain what immigrants experienced during and after World War II in England. This chapter aims to elucidate what prompted the British administration to invite members of the colonised countries to the Mother Country after the Second World War and it analyses factors and motivations behind Britain's developing hostility towards the non-white immigrants.

#### **2.1.1 Racial segregation during the Second World War**

The story of both *The Lonely Londoners* and *Small Island* occurs after World War II but the novels to some extent touch on the war itself and the racial segregation happening therein. The Second World War was central to the rise of racism within the British society and it can be considered a significant part of the Windrush story since the consequences of the war precipitated the Caribbean immigration. To better comprehend why Selvon and Levy decided to portray the discrimination in their works, it is important to explain the historical background of racism and its prevalence in the British society during that time. This subchapter will be based on the work *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (2016) by a historian David Olusoga, Amelia Gentleman's *Windrush Betrayal: Exposing the Hostile Environment* (2019) and Emily Charles' article for Imperial War Museums "‘They Treated Us Royally’? The Experiences of Black Americans in Britain during the Second World War".

During the Second World War, thousands of West Indians volunteered to help England, and many joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) as a large number of pilots died in the Battle of Britain and replacement pilots were desperately needed (Gentleman 53). Besides the aid from the Caribbean, America as an ally also sent over its army which included African-Americans and other minorities as well. Unfortunately, racial segregation remained even on the British soil and put Britain into an uncomfortable position. The British government did not wish to adopt the same treatment towards the minorities but also wanted to maintain good relations with the American ally (Charles). As a compromise, the cabinet

proposed that “it was desirable that the people of this country should avoid becoming too friendly with coloured troops” (Charles). However, most of the British people welcomed the black soldiers and did not really pay attention to the segregation. Often, they actually enjoyed the company of the minorities as they were more agreeable, better behaved and complained less than the white Americans. Despite the exceptions, racial prejudice was still significant in the interactions between the British populace and the soldiers of colour, but the main source of the discrimination were the rules set by the US administrators, which for instance prohibited the non-white troops from entering certain public places (Charles).

However, the biggest issue for the American GIs was not the “lack of racial segregation in pubs and cafes” (Olusoga 460), but the idea of allowing inter-racial relationships between the men of colour and British women. This indignation was met with some understanding on the British side as many were outraged to observe mixed-race couples and a lot of such encounters elicited violence (Olusoga 461). As a result, British authorities attempted to limit the interactions between the black soldiers and white women, which only accentuated their support of the American enforcement of racial segregation. Despite the regulations, some of the women decided to get married to their black lovers, which caused various complications after the war, as in some parts of the USA inter-racial marriages were banned. Naturally, there were also thousands of mixed-race children conceived during these years and both the babies and their mothers faced ostracism by the public with many of the children being left abandoned (Olusoga 464–467).

Once the war ended and the troops were disbanded, the West Indians returned to the Caribbean, where the economic situation was far from ideal. It was declining due to natural disasters that damaged and plundered the islands. Such circumstances resulted in a rise of unemployment which became the leading impetus for immigrants to move to Britain in the 1940s (Gentleman 70).

### **2.1.2 Post-war Britain**

The psychological toll of World War II on the British nation was even higher than it was thirty years earlier after the First World War (Wasson 305). The country was heavily indebted, its economy in shatters, and vast parts of London were destroyed, since it suffered “the heaviest and most continuous attacks” (“The Bombing of Britain 1940-1945

Exhibition”) during the Second World War, namely in the course of the aerial bombardment known as The Blitz.<sup>1</sup> Almost a third of the capital was razed by bombs during the war, including schools as well as factories, so a prompt reconstruction of London was indispensable (Wasson 305). The manpower and building materials were in short supply and external assistance was required (“London – Reconstruction after World War II”) but there was no shortage of willing workers from the Caribbean, who came under their own initiative (Winder 340), which allowed the beginning of the post-war restoration.

The immense changes brought about by the war resonated through the whole British Empire and eventually caused it to dissolve over the course of the decade following the war, which gave birth to several new independent countries (Whittle 149). It had become too economically demanding to maintain the colonies and in the wake of the restructuring of the European and global powers, it had also become less politically feasible to defend the sovereignty of Great Britain (“The End of the British Empire After the Second World War”). What was left of the British Empire after India’s independence and the Suez Crisis of 1956 was the United Kingdom, its overseas territories, and the Commonwealth of Nations (Darwin).

As Malcolm Bradbury states, despite the country being devastated as a consequence of the war, the 1950s also represented a period of fresh and unique artistic contributions in various spheres such as literature, drama, music, fashion, design, and many more. This new shift in culture was largely visible in the lives the British were leading, for instance, the considerable increase of interest in jazz clubs, and the emergence of numerous revolts or demonstrations. Anger as an ambience of the capital city can be traced not just in literature but also in the culture and a way of life of that time, which was mostly manifested by street protests (237).

---

<sup>1</sup> The term originated from the German “blitzkrieg” meaning “lightning war” (“The Blitz Around Britain”). The German Air force continued regular attacks from 7 September 1940 until 11 May 1941, targeting chiefly the industrial centres, ports, London, and other parts of Britain. The number of casualties was a petrifying 43,500 (“The Blitz Around Britain”).

## 2.2 The Windrush generation

The name of the generation is derived from the *SS Empire Windrush*, a carrier which landed at Tilbury Docks on 22 June 1948 with 492 migrants, most of whom were ex-servicemen, and launched the process of continual transformation of the nation, including the creation of multi-racial Britain and the questioning of the national identity (Mead 137, 164). As it has been said before, Britain was recovering from the Second World War and was in dire need of labourers who would help reconstruct the country and its parts destroyed by the war. The West Indies' economy was struggling as much as Britain's, but the Mother Country held a certain promise of better future. Therefore, the West Indians did not hesitate and boarded the *Empire Windrush* not only to help England, but they also went with the expectation of improving their living conditions (Winder 343).

Windrush represented, as Robert Winder puts it in the *Bloody Foreigners: The Story of Immigration to Britain* (2010), an “inevitable first step in what would later become known as ‘colonisation in reverse’” (345) and became the primary symbol of the Commonwealth journeys to Britain. All the people from the Caribbean who voluntarily crossed the ocean in 1948 over to Britain with the vision of helping the nation and with the hope of more promising life became collectively known as the Windrush generation (Gentleman, *Windrush Betrayal* 12). This generation also included non-white writers active during the decades after World War II who drew from their own experience in the new environment. The Windrush journey “has become core to narratives of British history” (Kushner 166).

Needless to say, *Empire Windrush* was not the first ship to bring non-white immigrants over to Britain. One year before this well-known cruise, another ship called *Ormonde* arrived with 108 people without catching any media attention (Winder 348). In fact, the coloured population had been residing in Britain before the Windrush generation settled in the country. The black presence in England can be traced back as early as Roman times, however, it became discernible only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Winston 347). John Solomos adds that small black communities in Liverpool, London, Cardiff, and Bristol had already been established by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (44). However, before the migration commenced by the *Empire Windrush*, Britain mainly functioned as a stopover “rather than [a] permanent settlement” (Winston 347). The Windrush generation was

different because the non-white newcomers made a conscious decision to settle in the urban areas of England with the prospect of building a new future and life there (ibid.). Their landing was central to British history, it was the first impulse that launched global immigration to Britain as well as the beginning of redefinition of what it means to be British (Kushner 164).

### **2.2.1 Perception of the Mother Country: London is the place for me<sup>2</sup>**

[...] To live in London you are really comfortable  
Because the English people are very much sociable  
They take you here and they take you there  
And they make you feel like a millionaire  
London that's the place for me [...] (Kitchener 1:07–1:24).

As Peter Fryer points out in his *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (2018), “[d]isappointment and disillusionment of many kinds were the everyday experience of the 1950s settlers” (380). It is indisputable that the newcomers held completely idealistic expectations of Britain. Many residents of the colonies were under the impression and even believed in the universal saying that the streets of London are paved with gold (Winder 346). Such convictions originated in the colonial education system, in which Britain was venerated as their “Mother Country” (Fryer 380). Caribbean education is still a reflection of the British system which considers Formal British English as the norm for all institutions. As a result, the marginalised native languages of the Caribbean are used primarily in everyday communication, while “The Queen’s English” is preferred for formal interactions (Blair; Williams xix). What was taught in schools strengthened the West Indians’ beliefs in their British citizenships and many regarded themselves as rightful Englishmen. On that account, the majority naturally felt the need to know everything about the country and, in some cases, even dreamed about living and settling in Britain (Fryer 380).

---

<sup>2</sup> “London is a place for me” is a song by the calypso king Aldwyn Roberts known as Lord Kitchener who sang it for the first time when the passengers of the *Empire Windrush* freshly disembarked in Britain and were interviewed by the journalists (Olusoga, “The Unwanted: The Secret Windrush Files”). One can sense the naivety of the immigrants within the lines “To live in London you are really comfortable [b]ecause the English people are very much sociable“ and “they make you feel like a millionaire”.

The non-white members of the RAF who came from the colonies had the opportunity to fully experience whether the stories about the Mother Country were true. Despite going through the horrors of the Second World War and seeing the devastation as well as poverty of the war years, they still perceived Britain as an immense source of employment opportunities, the lack of which was the main problem in the Caribbean. Having the right for citizenship and the experience from the RAF service, there was no hesitation on the part of the former pilots, and they merely stayed long enough back in their homeland to gather necessary resources and set out back over the ocean to Britain (Winder 344).

### 2.2.2 British political response to Windrush

What contributed to the departure of the *Empire Windrush* was the British National Act of 1948 which assured the right of British subjects to move freely and legally settle in Britain as Commonwealth citizens<sup>3</sup> (Olusoga, “The Unwanted: The Secret Windrush Files”). However, “[n]o one imagined that black and brown people from Asia, Africa and the West Indies would use their rights under this act to come and settle in Britain” (Gentleman, “The Unwanted: The Secret Windrush Files review”). The British National Act of 1948 was originally meant for the white people of the colonies to return to their former homes and help rebuild the decimated nation. For the British government, the Windrush situation represented a dire predicament which must have been dealt with immediately. Despite the case being labelled as the “‘coloured’ problem” (Whittle 150), the British authorities wished to resolve it without any implications of racism present in their decisions (Gentleman, “The Unwanted: The Secret Windrush Files review”).

As Ian Spencer puts it in *British Immigration Policy Since 1939: The Making of Multi-Racial Britain* (1997), the public presentation of the government’s opinion on the migration differed from the personal prejudice they held against the people of colour. This instance can be illustrated by the then Prime Minister Clement Attlee who described the immigrants as “honest workers [who] can [...] make a genuine contribution to our labour difficulties at the present time” (53), however, it was also Clement Attlee who suggested to divert the ship full of West Indians to East Africa, where the passengers were to pick peanuts (Olusoga, *Black and British* 475). Creech Jones, the then Colonial Secretary, also claimed that “[t]hese people

---

<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the British people were free to settle in the colonies (Olusoga, *Black and British*, 477).

have British passports and they must be allowed to land”, but according to him, “[t]hey won’t last one winter in England” (Winder 349). He simply could not hold back his private opinions. As reported by John Solomos, what naturally emerged in the 1950s were acrimonious debates either in the government departments or in public spaces about the impact immigration would have on Britain, especially in terms of “‘racial character of the British people’ and the national identity” (54). These debates challenged the understanding of Britishness “that excluded or included people on the ground of race” (54).

In spite of the efforts of the British government to cover the traces of open hostility and indignation, the immigrants on board of the *Empire Windrush* were still aware of the situation in Britain as the following feelings of the passengers demonstrate: “As we got closer to England there was great apprehension on the boat because we knew the authorities did not want us to land. [...] We heard there was consternation in Parliament and that newspapers [...] were saying we should be turned back” (Lunn 168). What they did not anticipate was the unwelcoming environment created by the British, later supported by slogans such as “Keep England White” (Gentleman, “The Unwanted: The Secret Windrush Files review”). According to Robert Winder, had some of the Windrush passengers known what awaits them in Britain, “they would have jumped over the rails and swum home” (346).

### **2.3 West Indian experience in post-war Britain**

The previous outline of the historical aspects behind the rise of racial prejudice and the situation after World War II showed that the hostility of the British had been present prior to docking of the *Empire Windrush* and continued to manifest even after the coloured immigrants tried to settle in the new environment. It is important to look at the experience of the Windrush generation when confronted with the practices of the British system and white Brits in order to build a theoretical foundation for the subsequent comparison of the immigrant experience depicted in *The Lonely Londoners* and *Small Island* with the historical findings presented in non-fiction sources.

Even though the Britons and people of colour hardly ever met, racial prejudice on the British side was prevalent. The white majority often frowned upon the black communities who were viewed as “uncivilized, backward people, inherently inferior to Europeans, living in primitive mud huts ‘in the bush’, wearing few clothes, eating strange foods, and suffering

from unpleasant diseases” (Fryer 380). Some even believed that they practised cannibalism, polygamy, or magic. They were seen as illiterate, uneducated, and as those who speak outlandish languages. People were also convinced that black men “had stronger sexual urges than white men [...] and could give greater satisfaction to their sexual partners” (Fryer 380). Besides the remaining fragments of imperialism and colonialism in the form of racial prejudice and “assumption that it was right to exploit Africans and Asians because they were inferior” (Whittle 150), another issue with the Windrush situation was the “fear of economic competition” (Ramdin 254).

In her article “The Unwanted: The Secret Windrush Files review – who could feel proud of Britain after this?” for *The Guardian* (2019), Amelia Gentleman points out that despite the fact that Britain was in desperate need of an immense number of extra workers, “officials turned out to be more welcoming to ex-SS soldiers from Germany than British subjects from the Caribbean”. British people seemed not to be troubled by the past deeds of the newcomers or their nationality, what they recognized and fixated on instead was solely the colour of their skin.

Labour and housing markets were the two central problems the West Indians had to resolve. When speaking of employment, a stereotype was created about the immigrants, lying in the presumption that they were “unskilled manual workers” (Fryer 380). However, the reality was usually different as, in most cases, the non-whites had to resort to jobs of lower status than they were used to back at home. In fact, most of those positions comprised of jobs which the white majority did not wish to do, such as “sweeping the streets, general labouring, [or] night-shift work” (Fryer 380). Two camps seemed to emerge in relation to acceptance of a non-white at a workplace. While the first supported employment of the black population and actually saw their true potential, the other held the opposing view, thinking that they were only living off welfare benefits. In fact, most of the “West Indians were conscious of this ambivalence among their white co-workers” (Ramdin 250), but it was still demanding to maintain a job and endure the workdays in the hostile environment.

As Ron Ramdin demonstrates in *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (2017), the living conditions were not any better than the working ones in terms of quality. Since the Migrant Services were unable to guarantee accommodation for all the migrants,

many had to rely on others in the non-white community. For instance, those coming to London “initially tended to spend one night at least with a friend or relative” (243). Newcomers generally drew on the help of those more experienced who had managed to settle down earlier and whose places, consequently, became “hostels” (243). Due to the shortage of housing in London, the original vast settlement of the West Indians, many of the immigrants were pushed to live in the decayed and degraded parts of the capital city. Majority of the new settlers had to put up with deteriorating places, for instance, in the form of “[n]ineteenth century basements” which were “clumsy and ugly” (245) and with the increasement in rent prices, most of those accommodations became overcrowded with dark-skinned citizens. As a result, a lot of the West Indians were longing for home and struggled to come to terms with the suffocating living conditions (246).

Finding a place which would be a good value for money was troublesome for many non-white residents since their public image was usually tainted with associations such as “intruder[s]” (Ramdin 247). What also negatively contributed to the already biased opinions on immigrants was the form in which vacant rooms were advertised. According to Ramdin, they were labelled either as “coloured welcome” or “anti-coloured” (248). While the former was relatively rare and the newcomers were quite suspicious of it, the latter prevailed and made the dark-skinned population even more cognisant of the racial prejudice preventing them from obtaining better accommodation (247).

Needless to say, West Indians did not face racism only in the aforementioned areas of housing or a workplace, but also in common social situations. For example, “George Powe, who settled in Nottingham, found himself excluded from three different pubs which essentially operated a colour bar” (Panayi 238). Unfortunately, other institutions and organisations such as restaurants or churches adopted similar attitude towards the non-white population (Panayi 238).

## **2.4 Selected concepts of postcolonial thinking and theory**

In *Understanding Postcolonialism* (2009) Jane Hiddleston defines postcolonialism as “the multiple political, economic, cultural and philosophical responses to colonialism from its inauguration to the present day” (1). Postcolonialism is also a movement which

challenges or reacts to colonialism<sup>4</sup> and “commemorates [...] the triumph over it” (Young 60). Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) was instrumental in founding the field of postcolonial studies. The major concern of Orientalism is to scrutinise the way in which Orient is “constructed in European thinking” (Ashcroft 185). Said observed Western tendencies to reconstruct or dominate over the Orient, to ascribe certain characteristics to it and present it in this way in writing. In other words, Orientalism is an instance of discourse, governed by the power which the West has over the East and which forces the Europeans to perceive the Orient in a certain way without being conscious of it. Therefore, the Orient is by no means a natural construct, but a social one established by making stereotypes commonplace (ibid.).

In connection to Orientalism, binarism as another significant concept of postcolonial theory must be mentioned. The fundamental idea behind binarism, especially in case of the Western tradition, is to generally perceive and structure the world into binary oppositions, meaning that there are two counterparts which are related, for instance, “centre/margin, coloniser/colonised, metropolis/empire, civilised/primitive” (Ashcroft 26). The danger of the binary oppositions resides in the underlying tendency for one of the pair to dominate and the impudence of the Western world to exploit this domination. One of the more obvious examples of binarism is “the concept of race” (Ashcroft 27), clearly marking “white” as more superior than the general “non-white”, who is also referred to as the “other”. “Otherness” is ascribed to the colonised subject to distinguish it from the colonising culture, creating the notion of “savage” and the “concept of the civilized to oppose it” (Ashcroft 43). In this sense, a geographical distinction, which was driven by political and economic power, defined Europe as “centre”, while everything outside the centre, including the former colonies, as “periphery” or “margins”. In other words, the metropolitan centres considered themselves as more developed and civilised and so believed to have the right to occupy and exploit the margins. Therefore, the centre-periphery model functioned as means used to justify the attitude of the centre towards the colonies (ibid.).

What must be considered in connection to binarism is also the fact that the margins were discursively created and similarly to the Orient, it is not something that naturally

---

<sup>4</sup> Colonialism represents an invasion, domination and subjugation of another country, including its people, economics, production and the government (Hiddleston 2).

emerged. Therefore, one should concentrate on the power relations between the colonisers and the colonised, preferably try to disrupt the binaries, and perhaps question how the marginalised spaces were formed (Ashcroft 44).

## **2.5 Postcolonial literature within the context of contemporary British fiction**

Decolonisation and the end of the Empire, together with the slowly developing “multicultural nature of contemporary Britain” (Bentley, *Contemporary British Fiction* 26), functioned as a rich base for new topics in fiction. Perhaps one of the most positive outcomes of the Empire lies in English literature and language being disseminated across the world. This led to the emergence of new writers in the 1950s up to 70s from “South-East Asia, Africa and the Caribbean” (Bentley, *Contemporary British Fiction* 65) whose works questioned the traditional British literature. Various authors, including Samuel Selvon, V. S. Naipaul, or Buchi Emecheta, explored the ways in which their colonial or postcolonial experience can be articulated in fiction. The newly created multicultural context and the contribution of new writers enriched contemporary British literature by means of numerous unique “styles and subject matter” (ibid.).

Postcolonial literature as presented in Nick Bentley’s *Contemporary British Fiction* (2008) has been preoccupied with Edward Said’s idea that discourse together with literature were responsible for establishing “‘positional superiority’ of the West” (18) over the Orient and other countries under the colonial rule. According to Bentley, another concern of postcolonial writers would be the approach to portraying ethnic minorities in British fiction and their need to rectify it, predominantly by means of language. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin note that “postcolonial writing define[s] itself by seizing the language of the centre and replac[es] it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized space” (37). This is in accordance with one of the objectives of postcolonial fiction which is to employ a dialect and disrupt the traditional English syntax. Some sources introduce the term “Englishes” (Mazon 704), representing a new alternative of the English language as well as “a plurality of voices” (ibid.). In other words, the principal objective of postcolonial authors is to isolate their text from English and to distinguish their writing from the literature the general population is accustomed to (Bentley, *Contemporary British Fiction* 19–20).

In *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000* (2002) Dominic Head states that it is especially the post-war period and the postcolonial era, in which “the question of identity and national affiliation becomes complex and indeterminate” (156). Literature seems to be an excellent tool for scrutinising these issues emerging in multicultural Britain. Perhaps the most discussed concept connected with identity is Britishness and more precisely what it means to be British. Higgins, Smith and Storey in their *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Culture* (2010) comment on the formation of the British identity and point out that it is not “coherent and fixed” (13) as often understood, but a dynamic process which involves invention as well as reinvention. As Britain has always been a heterogeneous nation, Britishness has never been completely unified – the disparity stems from the notion of “ethnicity, region, religion, social class, gender and generation” (23). Therefore, national identity encapsulates factors such as “who we think we are”, “where we think we come from” as well as “where are we going”, it is not established by being born in a specific place (13).

## **2.6 Anglophone Caribbean literature**

This chapter shall derive typical aspects of Anglophone Caribbean literature from Malcolm Bradbury’s work *The Atlas of Literature* (2003) and further characterise them so as to establish a foundation for the later analysis of the novels by Andrea Levy and Samuel Selvon, representatives of Anglophone Caribbean literature.

According to Malcolm Bradbury, Anglophone Caribbean literature might be to some extent considered as a form of exile literature, even though the reasons for emigration were originally economical. Many of the representatives of Anglophone Caribbean literature are considered diaspora authors, in other words, those who no longer live in the Caribbean but usually write about their roots, history and cultural heritage (280). It is also important to point out that despite the emancipation from slavery dating back to 1834 on Anglophone islands, the West Indian literature clearly emerged at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (280).

Possibly the most prevailing aspect of Anglophone Caribbean literature is a strong sense of place. Slavery, which is considered one of the focal historical experiences of the Caribbean, was never forgotten and therefore manifests in literature, though not all literary works depict the atrocities of enslavement but rather the significance of its emancipation. It

was a big step for the West Indians as they were finally free to own a house, pick a life partner or simply eat food of their choice – rights and activities ordinary for most people. It comes then as no surprise that many Caribbean writers devoted their works to describing details of the newly discovered everyday life (Bradbury 282). Since many were pulled away from their homelands and transported around the world during slavery, home was recognised as something special and valuable (282). This sense of place was strengthened by including descriptions of not only physical things, represented by homes and houses, but also sensual experiences, in other words, the local colour of Anglophone Caribbean literature. It illuminates the stories by descriptions of sensations such as heady perfumes, the light, the colour, the dramatic sunsets which suddenly come before the darkness, the contrasts, the brightness, the birds, and the sounds (ibid.).

The notion of place can be sometimes juxtaposed with the feeling of exile which might accompany characters of the Caribbean writers. Exile symbolises a perpetual feeling that one is never at home, meaning that there is no “place of ‘home’” regardless of the individual’s current place of residence (Ashcroft 109). The concept can, to some extent, represent an exile from the person’s own culture, language, or traditions, therefore suggesting “in-between[ness]” (ibid.). The feeling of exile seems to be largely evident in literary works produced by the Windrush generation, those who voluntarily emigrated from the West Indies. This is most likely due to the fact that despite expecting to find a better life in Britain, this goal later proved to be as unachievable as back at home in the Caribbean (Bradbury 281).

Apart from the notion of exile and home, another essential characteristic of Anglophone Caribbean literature is the employment of humour. Given the historical experience of slavery and colonial times, humour has always been blended with a bit of bitterness or sadness (Bradbury 283). In *Humour in the Caribbean Literary Canon* (2012) Vásquez elaborates on the use of humour in the Caribbean writings and specifies that it makes the abominable digestible, uncovers and challenges the “important issues such as sexuality and class”, and functions as a creative device (2). Furthermore, the incorporation of humour may be perceived and applied as a form of coping mechanism – Fryer mentions in *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (2018) that characters who are “at

first sickened by such hypocrisy, found in their sense of humour a reliable strategy for coping with it” (381).

History of colonial past is understandably still present in many of the postcolonial narratives. In “The Lives of Others: Happenings, Histories and Literary Healing” (2011) Donnell states that, like literature, history tells stories only with the difference that it promotes and confirms the supremacy of the more powerful (422). One may be even familiar with the saying “history is written by the victors”. As Nick Bentley claims, the original understanding of history as a trustworthy source of information about the past has been replaced by political influence with intention to “maintain prevailing power frameworks” (68). In other words, it is the power that governs history, not the accuracy of past events.

In the case of the West Indies, marked by the influence of the British Empire and colonisation, there has been an enormous amount of forgotten and untold personal histories (Donnell 422). Derek Walcott nicely describes the relationship between “History” and the overlooked marginalized population: “I met History once but he ain’t recognize me” (ibid.). According to Donnell, the objective of many West Indian authors should be to accentuate the ignored reality and history, make the invisible visible again, and to “rehumanize” those whose lives had been affected by the colonial rule (423). Writing about the past may provide a chance for others to observe the new different perspectives and try to acknowledge or understand them.

### **2.6.1 Windrush narratives**

As stated in the subchapter on post-war Britain, the 1950s brought a wave of new artistic development, including literary contributions. In *The Atlas of Literature* (2003) Malcolm Bradbury points out that many English writers reflected their war experience and described London during those times through various perspectives (237). Other writers joining the literary scene focused on portraying persecuted individuals living in poverty in London, or people from the rural areas moving to London, hoping they would find better living conditions (ibid.). Nonetheless, a significant difference in the depiction of the British capital city started to emerge with the arrival of colonial subjects to the Mother Country. Suddenly, the previous perceptions of London were confronted with new, entirely divergent viewpoints (239). In fact, many of the writers who challenged the London descriptions

provided by white Brits travelled on the *Empire Windrush* in the hope of starting a new, more prosperous life (ibid.).

George Lamming, V. S. Naipaul, and Samuel Selvon were the main representatives of the generation that travelled across the ocean from the West Indies to England and made their literary contributions to the British literature at that time. George Lamming, born in Barbados, described his life experiences in the novels *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), in which his life in a span of ten years is depicted, and *The Emigrants* (1954), which describes an experience of those who decided to leave their homeland in the 1950s and move to Britain, just like him. According to Timothy Weiss, the use of autobiographical features in Lamming's novels provided new "definitions of self and community" for other postcolonial writers of his and later generations (168). Through mixing of first and third-narration, modernist narrative perspectives and descriptions of darkness and anxiety, Lamming reflects the misfortunes and obstacles experienced by the immigrants. Such circumstances pushed the newcomers to create a new sense of self and identity so as to assimilate into the society. Despite the hostility they might have felt against England, they were still a part of it, whether they liked it or not (ibid.).

Both V. S. Naipaul and Samuel Selvon came from Trinidad, the home of calypso and the largest and most culturally prosperous island of the West Indies. V.S. Naipaul addressed certain important aspects typical for Anglophone Caribbean literature in his works *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) and *The Mimic Men* (1947). For example, in *A House for Mr Biswas*, the main character's greatest wish was to own a house, which illustrates a strong sense of place, an aspect crucial for Anglophone Caribbean literature (Bradbury 282). In *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul also touches upon the concept of mimicry, which appears in Selvon's and Levy's works. Mimicry, as Homi Bhabha describes it, is "the process by which the colonised subject is reproduced as 'almost the same, but not quite'" (Ashcroft 155). A 'mimic man' is then someone who imitates the behaviour, language, culture and who tries to act like the coloniser, therefore acquiring the same power, but suppressing their own cultural identity (ibid.). Furthermore, the novels *The Mimic Men* and *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) also reveal Naipaul's own migrant experience (Walkowitz 231). Samuel Selvon and his literary contribution will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter.

Although the writers left their Caribbean homes in hope for better lives in another country and frequently reflected their own experience, in most cases they had no other choice but to return to their native lands, either metaphorically or literally. The same had to be done for them to determine their writing identities. They were not received as “English writers per se” but as “West Indian writers in England” (Weiss 163–164). Nevertheless, their literary input started a wave of other multicultural voices, including the subsequent generation of writers born in Britain, who began to address issues they considered pertinent and necessary to be discussed (Wambu).

### **2.6.2 *The Lonely Londoners* within the context of Samuel Selvon’s works**

Samuel Selvon was an East Indian born in Trinidad to a half-Scottish mother in 1923. He moved to Britain in 1948 on the *Empire Windrush* and left for Canada in 1978. When still in Trinidad, he found employment in *Trinidad Guardian* where he worked as a reporter and an editor (“Samuel Selvon”). Although he was brought up in an already multicultural space marked by colonial history, it was the time he spent in Britain which became vital for his literary development. In fact, the crucial aspect which led to reaching the peak of his career as a writer was the personal experience he gained in London (Nasta, “*The Lonely Londoners: A New Way of Reading*”).

In the early period of Selvon’s literary creation, he composed one of his first works: *A Brighter Sun* (1952), *An Island Is a World* (1955), *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *Ways of Sunlight* (1957), and *Turn Again Tiger* (1958). These stories capture the life in the Caribbean as well as the novelty of his experience in Britain and characters representing people of his native origin who were also searching for their identities (Wyke 28). *A Brighter Sun* is even said to have been composed on his journey on the *Empire Windrush* to the United Kingdom and it covers the relationship between the Indians and Creoles back in Trinidad (“Samuel Selvon”).

His third novel, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), reflects Selvon’s early experience of assimilation in Britain “with a group of black “immigrants [...] among whom [he] lived for a few years” (Nasta, “*The Lonely Londoners: A New Way of Reading*”), and it is, in fact, considered as one of the first novels to capture the Caribbean immigration to Britain (Habiba). *The Lonely Londoners* is concerned with the Windrush generation and their efforts

to find a place and identity in the newly created multicultural Britain. Together with *Moses Ascending* (1975) and *Moses Migrating* (1983), the London novel forms a trilogy about Moses who paints his story from the very beginning in the British capital city back to the native Trinidad. In *The Lonely Londoners* Moses shares his Windrush experience in post-war London, where he does not feel at home and dreams about returning to his homeland. Following with *Moses Ascending*, he struggles to truly ascend in the society as he tries to become a landlord and acquire a house in Britain. Finishing with *Moses Migrating*, Moses manages to move back to Trinidad, but he contemplates travelling back to Britain as he feels to belong there more than in the Caribbean (Nasta, “The Moses trilogy”).

The distinctive feature of *The Lonely Londoners*, which made the work significant, was not only the accurate depiction of the immigrant life, but also of London as a multicultural and black city, accompanied by Selvon’s specific use of language (Nasta, “*The Lonely Londoners: A New Way of Reading*”). Selvon started writing the novel in standard English but later realised that it did not capture the characters in their entirety and complexity as he originally intended:

The people I wanted to describe were entertaining people indeed, but I could not really move. At that stage, I had written the narrative in English and most of the dialogues in dialect. Then I started both narrative and dialogue in dialect and the novel just shot along. It was not difficult to understand because I modified the dialect, keeping the lilt and the rhythm, but somewhat transformed, bringing the lyrical passages closer to standard English (Wyke 4).

In other words, the dialogue passages were written with a dialect, while the narrative was in standard English. These two were merged and resulted in a style decidedly specific for Selvon. In the article by Sam Jordison “How the Lonely Londoners extends the novel’s language” (2018), Selvon seemed to find his newly created and innovative style as “artificial and fabricated”. He also believed he was one of “the first Caribbean writers to explore and employ dialect in a full-length novel where it was used in both narrative and dialogue” (Jordison) in the 1950s, which makes his literary contribution rather revolutionary. Jordison also emphasizes that through the incorporation of his “fictionalized Creole” (Birat 825) Selvon showed that “he owns colonial language and bends it to his will, [...] presents English

back to us, new and repurposed” and still manages to make it comprehensible even for the non-Caribbean or non-Creole readers.

What most likely influenced Selvon’s choice of language was the Trinidadian calypso which is “well-known for its wit, melodrama, licentiousness and sharp political satire” (Nasta, Introduction). The origin of calypso<sup>5</sup> as a musical form, goes back to “songs, rhythms, and dance traditions present in Trinidad during the time of African enslavement” (Birat 826). As a means of communication, calypso can be found to be used in “news, gossip, scandal” as well as in “social and political commentary” and can convey messages about everyday aspects of life such as “sex, violence, love” [...] jobs, [or] world issues” (Birat 826).

Generally, Selvon’s novels could be then described as full of “comedy, irony and tragicomedy, often with an undertow of sadness” (Savory 235). He wanted to voice the West Indian migrant everyday life as well as the feeling of exile and make his experience accessible to a wider range of readers, among which were the following generations of writers who were influenced by Selvon’s works, most notably Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen, Zadie Smith, or Andrea Levy (Nasta, “*The Lonely Londoners: A New Way of Reading*”).

### **2.6.3 *Small Island* within the context of Andrea Levy’s works**

Born to Jamaican parents in 1956 in London, Andrea Levy provided contemporary British fiction with a new perspective on black life in Britain. Despite being surrounded by the works of African-American writers such as Toni Morrison or Alice Walker, Levy felt a strong need for books about black people in Britain, stories she would be able to identify with, and noticed that those were entirely missing in fiction (Levy, *Small Island* 537). Inspired by her parents’ immigrant experience, she decided to recount it and make their story visible, which prompted the creation of *Small Island* (2004). In an interview included at the end of the novel *Small Island*, Levy specifies that “writing has always been a journey of discovery about [her] past and [her] family” (Levy, *Small Island* 539).

---

<sup>5</sup> Calypso is a type of an Afro-Caribbean music which has its roots in slavery, during which it functioned as a means of communication for the slaves, who were forbidden to talk to each other in their own languages (Phillips 13).

Being a child of Windrush parents, Levy found it necessary to articulate the hostility of the British environment she and her parents encountered. That is why her novels preceding *Small Island – Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), *Every Light in the House Burnin’* (1994) and *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996) – revolve around the lives of second-generation immigrants in London, represented by characters who lack knowledge about their Caribbean heritage, and their struggle to fit in racist Britain. *Small Island* marked a new direction for Levy’s works, “moving back in time to locate and explore a foundational story of belonging from a Black British perspective” (Lowe).

*Small Island* draws on the raw experience of Levy’s parents as well as on four-and-a-half years of meticulous research (Hickman). Her father, Winston Levy, came to England in 1948 on the *Empire Windrush* and her mother followed six months after. Once landed, Winston immediately found employment, but Levy’s mother, a qualified teacher, was not allowed to teach in Britain and had to be re-trained (Levy, “Back to My Own Country”). To settle in smoothly, Levy’s mother wanted to suppress their Caribbean heritage and avoid bringing any unsolicited attention to her family in the presence of a darker immigrant. Jamaican class-system was based on skin colour and since the Levy family was of fairer complexion, in the Caribbean context, they were considered a higher class (Levy, “Back to My Own Country”). It had, however, no effect in Britain since the white population did not differentiate black people in the same way. When growing up, Levy was oblivious to racism just like her mother who refused to acknowledge she was exposed to it as well (Hickman). Nevertheless, it is important to note that her books are not only about racism. They touch on other issues such as class, identity, gender, or exploration of the personal and cultural heritage.

In her interview with Blake Morrison, Levy specifies that the key step for *Small Island* was to make her parents speak about their experience.<sup>6</sup> Hearing the stories, she could draw on the information and create characters with similar personality traits. For instance, Hortense does not fully encapsulate Levy’s mother, but there are aspects they share.

---

<sup>6</sup> Levy’s parents were reluctant to share their stories. As first-generation immigrants, they simply wanted to assimilate and fit in the society. They were not familiar with the “English ways” like Levy, a born British-Caribbean, who had to sometimes “parent them” and who instead of fitting in tried to directly confront the problem (Levy; Morrison).

Similarly, Queenie was inspired by Levy's mother-in-law (331). Therefore, she managed to incorporate both black and white experiences. In fact, she enjoyed playing with the two viewpoints as she claims: "I like that point of contact between black and white. The fission. For me, that's where the energy is. Immigration is a dynamic process. The people who come are as changed by it as the people they come to" (Hickman). Blake Morrison also addressed Levy's use of humour which is typical for her works. In Levy's words, the combination of humour with the tragic elements should reflect "the human condition" (332). She considers humour to be part of everyday life, regardless of the situation. The aim is to make her novels as realistic as possible, combining both funny and tragic aspects instead of having to decide between them. Furthermore, Levy claims that her books "have a focus, which gives more than just a story—gives you an insight into understanding how people think and feel in another culture or another country" (333) which is also the reason why she inclined towards first-person narration.

Levy shared more information about her writing process during the interview with Blake Morrison. The act of storytelling was not something she was exposed to for as long as she could remember since her mother refused to talk about her childhood, nor was she a passionate reader as she only started reading around the age of twenty-three. What in fact inspired her style of writing and storytelling were British soap operas like *Coronation Street*. She herself states that "when I write books, I write them in scenes. I see it running through my head as little episodes. I am truly a creature of the television and film age" (335). Her main objective is to investigate her cultural heritage and integrate this heritage into the "mainstream of British thought" (326).

Surprisingly, Levy's primary thoughts about the success of *Small Island* amongst the British were rather sceptical. She did not expect people to have such a strong, favourable reaction to a story she initially thought uninteresting. She described these feelings in a video on her successful novel:

It was such an enormous shock to me that so many people read it and so many people said to me how much they enjoyed it and how much they didn't know about the story which they felt they knew a lot about. And I thought, "Yeah, that's kind of why I write

books because a lot of the story of the Caribbean are stories that people think they know, but they don't" (Levy, "In honour of its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary" 0:49–1:12).

Andrea Levy had read Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* before writing *Small Island* and it seemed to have a "great impact" on her (Levy; Morrison 336). However, Levy mentions that she had to be aware of what she read in order not to be swayed by the work when composing her own. Although the writer might have a feeling that the story has already been told, according to Levy it is necessary to "shut yourself off from influence" (Levy; Morrison 336) so that, as a new generation, she could "reassess what's going on and from [her] standpoint" (ibid.).

Just like Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, Levy's *Small Island* deals with the Windrush experience. However, it confronts the male-centred perspective by the inclusion of female point of view. Through the character Hortense she challenges the fact that women were most likely perceived as "a secondary or belated part of this diaspora" (Lowe). What also seems to differentiate Levy from Selvon is the focus of her works. She concentrated on families and children, mainly daughters of the immigrants, who, just like her, were not aware of the hostile environment at first and did not recognise the differences between them and the other white children as they considered themselves fully British (Innes).

### 3 Practical Part

The theoretical part of the thesis has outlined the socio-historical background of the Windrush generation and their experience while assimilating in Britain, the basic principles of postcolonial theory and literature as well as aspects typical for Anglophone Caribbean literature in order to create a theoretical foundation for the subsequent analysis of the two novels. The practical part of the thesis will now focus on the comparison and analysis of the two novels *The Lonely Londoners*<sup>7</sup> by Samuel Selvon and *Small Island*<sup>8</sup> by Andrea Levy, the objective of which is to point out similarities and differences between the two, uncover the possible causes of these differences, and determine whether the findings in the theoretical part are in accordance with the literary representation of the Windrush generation. It will also try to examine whether there is a shift or a development present in the portrayal of the Windrush experience and if so, to then determine the nature of this shift.

*The Lonely Londoners* is an episodic novel about a group of first-generation Caribbean immigrants, recording their struggles and attempts to find employment, a place to live, and their identities in post-war London in the 1950s. The story represents a raw and harsh experience of the West Indians who are filled with feelings of alienation, loneliness, and sadness as their previous high anticipation of better lives is met with the discriminatory British treatment. Through personal stories, the narrator of the book manages to map out how the city of London shapes and affects the characters who hail from various parts of the West Indies, eventually forming a West Indian community in the capital city. They seem to come to terms with the bitter reality of English life by means of sharing their everyday experiences with each other and by using humour to assuage the sour feelings caused by the hostile environment.

*Small Island* is a character-driven story which examines the social dynamics during and after the Second World War in Britain and explores the arrival of the Windrush generation from Jamaican and British perspectives. As the story revolves around the lives and experiences of four characters of different origins and sexes, the novel juxtaposes the black and white as well as the male and female viewpoints on matters such as racial

---

<sup>7</sup> The following page references are expressed with an abbreviation *LL* in parentheses in the text.

<sup>8</sup> The following page references are expressed with an abbreviation *SI* in parentheses in the text.

discrimination, prejudice towards the immigrants, formation of the character's identities, and the psychological impact of the historical circumstances on the individuals. The characters' storylines are full of tragic as well as comic encounters and the novel shows how both sides of the Windrush story grapple to cope with the changing situations in their lives.

Taking these outlined aspects and themes into consideration and connecting them with concepts mentioned earlier in the theoretical part, the practical part of the thesis will be further divided into four subchapters. These will be form and language, geographical and historical setting, characters, and plot. The chapters dedicated to the aspects of form and language shall discuss the use of Creole and a vernacular in the novels, narration, as well as various perspectives applied in the novels. While the geographical setting will focus on the contrast between London and the Caribbean and how this contrast is depicted in the selected literary works, the historical setting shall examine the socio-historical circumstances which influenced the Windrush experience and see whether these correspond to historical data presented in the theoretical part of the thesis. Regarding the characters, the practical part will analyse the impact the socio-historical context had on the formation of their identity, the feeling of alienation and loneliness. It will also look at the representation of male and female characters and other postcolonial aspects such as Orientalism or otherness. The Plot subchapter shall function as a summary which will consider all features of the preceding sections and look at how these contributed to the way the overall Windrush experience is presented. This analysis shall attempt to decide whether there is a significant shift in the interpretation of the Windrush generation in the two novels.

### **3.1 Form and language**

As Andrea Levy and Samuel Selvon are diaspora as well as postcolonial authors, the use of a creolised language or a vernacular is noticeable in their fiction. The objective of this chapter is to look at the ways in which both Levy and Selvon use language, humour<sup>9</sup>, and narration to express the Windrush experience. The analysis should contribute to finding out whether there are any differences in the use of perspectives and how the choice of language and the use of humour shape the reader's perception of the Windrush story.

---

<sup>9</sup> See chapter 2.6 of the theoretical part.

### 3.1.1 Language

As specified in the theoretical part of the thesis, postcolonial writers operate with language to create their own “Englishes”, namely by means of mixing English with some of the features of their own mother tongues. This process of combining languages to produce new ones is called creolisation (Cambridge Dictionary). Since the inclusion of creolised English is observable in both *The Lonely Londoners* and *Small Island*, this subchapter will focus on the ways Andrea Levy and Samuel Selvon refashion the language in their novels, perhaps to achieve a more accurate expression of the historical experience.

Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* is considered a revolutionary literary piece since he was one of the first authors to employ Caribbean creole in both the narrative as well as dialogue throughout the whole novel.<sup>10</sup> His literary language comprises of a creolized Caribbean English, which is influenced by the Trinidadian culture, namely calypso<sup>11</sup> that provides a rather rhythmical and musical dynamic to the narration. However, the dialect Selvon used in his novel does not equate to any real West Indian location, meaning it is not completely authentic, as it is a combination of different language variations used across the Caribbean (Bentley, “Form and Language” 79). Selvon’s language is rather a mixture of a West Indian dialect with standard English since the primary objective was to make the novel accessible to both Caribbean and English people. It was meant to make the white population aware of the Windrush experience from the perspective of someone who was directly involved in the West Indian migration, and simultaneously to offer a form of relative reading comfort for the non-white community.

The most striking difference between standard English and Selvon’s English appears to be in the approach to verbs. For instance, the auxiliary verb “to be” is omitted in “You think I going to stay in Trinidad when the war over?” (*LL* 83), or the third person singular morpheme -s is ignored in “When Moses sit down and pay his fare he take out a white handkerchief and blow his nose” (*LL* 1). These features may compliment the combination of past and present tenses, which seems typical for Selvon’s English. In “When he was a little fellar, he hear some people ...” (*LL* 83) Selvon contrasts the past simple tense “he was” with

---

<sup>10</sup> See chapter 2.6.2 of the theoretical part.

<sup>11</sup> See chapter 2.6.2 of the theoretical part.

the present “he hear”. This distinction may to some extent indicate the use of historical present tense and the narrator’s attempt to “treat past events as if they occurred at the time of the utterance” (Wyke 37). The resulting language of this combination may also symbolise liberation from the “language of the centre” (Bentley, “Form and Language” 78) and an effort to represent genuine conversations within the West Indian community.

The use of a dialect throughout the whole novel brings about the impression that the narrator telling the immigrants’ stories is, in fact, one of them. He knows the characters as well as the setting and is by no means an external observer (Klanicová 34). The inclusion of creolised English within the narration also disrupts the general “hierarchy of discourses” (Bentley, “Form and Language” 76). It challenges the authority of the narrator who would ordinarily use standard English and the dialect would be left to the characters. Selvon merges the two levels, the narrator and the characters, thus emphasising the collective identity of the characters, including also the narrator therein (ibid.).

To get closer to actual verbal exchanges between the West Indian people, Selvon also included slang expressions from his Caribbean English. Therefore, the language used in *The Lonely Londoners* is marked by words such as “fellar” (LL 22) meaning fellow, “the Gate” (LL 77) suggesting Notting Hill, or “spades” (LL 3) and “the Water” (LL 3), referring to blacks in England and to Bayswater respectively. For the male characters, white English girls are “cats” (LL 77), “chicks” (LL 100), “number” (LL 101), and even “white pussy” (LL 79). Just like the names of places in London are re-created to make the surroundings more familiar, the characters also invent names for themselves – Big City, Five Past Twelve, or Sir Galahad. According to Grmelová, this is “a traditional calypso strategy” (74) which helps to deepen and strengthen the collective bond between the characters.

By including the slightly modified West Indian dialect in the novel, Selvon attempts to make *The Lonely Londoners* more authentic and capture what might be considered as a real-life exchange between Caribbean men at that time period. Owing to the employment of creolised Caribbean English, he manages to reach a broader audience of readers and distance the novel from mainstream British fiction (Klanicová 35).

In *Small Island*, Andrea Levy also manipulates the language to shape her characters’ stories. The rather descriptive narrative appears to resemble standard English, but different

varieties of standard English are applied for each character. By doing so, Levy emphasises the “evolution of West Indian language in London” (James 54) and manages to illustrate the cultural clash through changing of the registers. This is mostly visible in Gilbert and his code-switching based on the person he is interacting with, meaning that he would opt for Creole when speaking to his Jamaican cousin Elwood – “‘We lose everyt’ing,’ I tell him, ‘What you wan’ me to have faith in?’” (SI 206) – and use standard English when communicating with a white British person – “Madam, I will neither go to the back nor will I leave. My friends and I intend to enjoy the film from this spot” (SI 185).

Hortense’s story is narrated in West Indian Standard and her own speech functions as a projection of her identity as a woman of fairer skin, therefore of a higher-class. Her utmost wish is to sound as British as possible, which is noticeable in her efforts to imitate the way the English people speak: “I thought I must try saying sugar with those vowels that make the word go on forever. Very English. Sugaaaar” (SI 15). Similarly, she practises her pronunciation by listening to and repeating after the BBC radio channel – “To speak English properly as the high-class, I resolved to listen to the language at its finest” (SI 449). However, although Hortense aspires to achieve perfection in her English pronunciation and grammar, her speech is not understood and is therefore ridiculed. Her choice of vocabulary and syntax does not correspond to the commonly used language, thus consisting of certain “flaws” (James 53) as in “I have not seen Gilbert, ... but this is perchance where he is aboding?” (SI 13), making her a rather comical character.

By trying to sound more British than the British, Hortense, just like Harris in *The Lonely Londoners* who also imitates the Englishman-like manner, represents an embodiment of the concept of ‘mimicry’.<sup>12</sup> Despite trying to assimilate and act like the English, their Caribbean roots are not completely suppressed. In Harris’ case, he sometimes alters his speech when he is serious or in the company of his West Indian friends but most of the time “when Harris start[s] to spout English for you, you realise that you don’t really know the language” (LL 103), meaning that Harris is trying to establish a British identity and present himself as a respectable individual worthy of belonging to the new society, yet he cannot free his speech of his Caribbean roots. As for Hortense, her Jamaican dialect is quite noticeable in exchanges

---

<sup>12</sup> See chapter 2.6.1 of the theoretical part.

with Gilbert but most prominently emerges towards the end of the novel, when she is given the black baby to bring up and calls him “Me sprigadee” (*SI* 529), indicating the child’s language will become a blend of British English as well as Jamaican patois since Gilbert and Hortense, the Caribbean couple, are to raise the child in Britain. The choice of the expression marks Hortense’s acceptance of her Jamaican identity. She considered herself, like the other Caribbean immigrants, to be a British subject, presuming she will be treated as such upon her arrival to the Mother Country. Realizing that this will not be so, Hortense fully embraces her Jamaican roots, language included, as manifested through the term of affection her Jamaican grandmother once used for her. Hortense merges her Jamaican past with English future embodied in the baby.

The inability to break off from the individual’s own cultural heritage is also exemplified through the character of Miss Jewel, Hortense’s grandmother. Due to her prestigious upbringing, Hortense was predominantly taught how to “speak properly as the King of England does” (*SI* 43) and therefore scorns her grandmother’s “rough country way” (*SI* 43) of speaking. As a result, Hortense attempts to teach Miss Jewel the “King’s English” by making her recite a section of William Wordsworth’s poem ‘I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud’:

I wander’d lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o’er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host of golden daffodils (*SI* 43).

Despite the successful endeavours to correct her pronunciation, Miss Jewel still recreates the poem into her own version, not being able to break off from her cultural heritage and national identity: “Ah walk under a cloud and den me float over de ill. An’ me see Miss Hortense a look pon de daffodil dem” (*SI* 44). This notion not only has a humorous effect but also shows how creolisation works in practise – Miss Jewel combines not only the languages but also the cultural aspects together. She emancipates herself from the British influence, the “centre”, and makes the poem her own.

In both novels, the British people seem not to understand the English used by the immigrants. This aspect could be in accordance with the concept of “otherness” and

binarism.<sup>13</sup> marking the British English as the “centre” and any English variant as the “periphery”. In *The Lonely Londoners*, the failure to comprehend the West Indian dialect is illustrated in an interaction between the character Galahad and his date – ““What did you say? You know it will take me some time to understand everything you say. The way you West Indians speak!’ ‘What wrong with it?’ Galahad ask. ‘Is English we speaking’” (LL 82). As can be observed, the British considered the language of the Caribbean people incomprehensible, thinking them primitive and uneducated.<sup>14</sup> They thought of them as lesser than the British, often simplifying their English as if talking to a child, degrading them because of that. *Small Island* demonstrates the misunderstandings between the white and non-white characters not only by Hortense’s absurd use of language discussed earlier, but also by a communication or rather a psychological noise. Its occurrence can be found in Bernard’s reaction to the speech given by Gilbert about racial prejudice:

‘You think it makes you better than me. You think it give you the right to lord it over a black man. [...] 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.’ [...] 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. 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? [...] ‘I’m sorry ...but I just can’t understand a single word that you’re saying’ (SI 525–6).

The problem in this exchange does not seem to be language, but rather a resistance to accept the reality the words described. Even though Gilbert tries to reach and reconcile with Bernard by means of sharing their war experience, Bernard is not capable of understanding the message of the speech as he is trapped in the past of the imperialistic thinking and cannot acknowledge the fact that Britain is gradually becoming a multicultural nation. Through his inability, possibly even refusal, to comprehend the speech, Bernard deprives Gilbert of his voice as well as humanity.

---

<sup>13</sup> See chapter 2.4 of the theoretical part.

<sup>14</sup> See chapter 2.3 of the theoretical part.

Due to the structure of the Caribbean education, many West Indians expected the British to speak “The Queen’s English” as they had always been taught at school.<sup>15</sup> However, the majority of the Caribbean newcomers in *Small Island* were shocked to find out that most of the British they encountered did not use the “proper” English, which is indicated by “[a] college-educated Lenval [who] wanted to know how so many white people come to speak so bad – low class and coarse as cane cutters” (*SI* 140). Similarly, Gilbert is astonished to hear Bernard “cuss language [he] never realize white men knew” (*SI* 486) when Bernard wrongly accuses Gilbert to be the child of Queenie’s black baby. This observation suggests the disillusionment created about Britain and its people. By emphasising the differences in perception of the languages, Levy confronts the educational system both in Britain and the West Indies and shows that some of the Jamaicans appear to be more educated than the British working-class people they encountered (Krčková 18), thus challenging the notion of Orientalism.

In conclusion, both authors manipulate the language but each in a specific way. While Selvon creates his own creolised version of English and incorporates calypso strategies to underline the collective narrative of the text, Levy plays around with different varieties of standard English. She aims to capture how the characters perceived each other’s languages and how the differences in its use shaped their identities. Although there is a contrast in how the writers operate with the language, they seem to share a common objective – to capture the Windrush experience as authentically as possible through employment of language that Caribbean people possibly used at that time.

### **3.1.2 Narration**

The choice of narrative technique in *The Lonely Londoners* and *Small Island* influences and shapes the perception of the Windrush stories. Since each of the authors applies a distinct narrative strategy, they manage to present the personal hardships and disillusionment of the characters from numerous perspectives, thus providing the reader with new personal histories.

---

<sup>15</sup> See chapter 2.2.1 of the theoretical part.

Samuel Selvon, of the Windrush generation himself, opted for an episodic, rather fragmentary storytelling through which he introduced the reader to various characters from the colonies who were trying to settle in London. By doing so, the novel does not feature any division into chapters or parts, it is a continuous flow of information which shifts between the characters' story arcs. The reader is not provided with any insight into the characters' minds, except for the main protagonist Moses. As *The Lonely Londoners* was written during the 1950s, the influence of other Windrush representative writers is visible in the novel. The autobiographical features of George Lamming's fiction,<sup>16</sup> especially those included in the novel *The Emigrants* (1954), seem to have had a great impact on Samuel Selvon when working on his 1956 novel.

*The Lonely Londoners* starts with a description of the gloomy city of London which is provided by an anonymous third-person narrator that introduces the main character Moses Aloetta, who is to meet up with Henry Oliver, later known as Sir Galahad, and help him assimilate in the capital city. However, the narration gradually turns from the pure description of actions – “When Moses sit down and pay his fare he take out a white handkerchief and blow his nose.” (LL 1) – towards Moses and his consciousness – “He had was to get up from a nice warm bed and dress and come out in this nasty weather to go and meet a fellar that he didn't even know. That was the hurtful part of it – is not as if this fellar is his brother or cousin or even friend; he don't know the man from Adam” (LL 1). The readers get a chance to identify with Moses as they follow his thoughts, opinions, and feelings. What Selvon achieves by this shift in narration is also a character who functions as a camera, through whose eyes the reader perceives the story, making Moses the mediator of the narration. By including more characters and their stories in the novel, *The Lonely Londoners* encapsulates personal histories of the minor voices<sup>17</sup> and supplies its audience with new perspectives on London of that time. These characters create a collective narration which rejects the “centrality of Englishness” (Bentley, “Form and Language” 73) by sharing personal stories of marginalised voices as well as their cultural values.

---

<sup>16</sup> See chapter 2.6.1 of the theoretical part.

<sup>17</sup> See chapter 2.6 of the theoretical part.

As Selvon was inspired by other Windrush authors, who were also innovative in their creation during the 1950s, he played around with narrative techniques and styles. What he managed to incorporate in his writing quite smoothly was the modernist stream of consciousness. While the rest of the novel follows a relatively similar pattern of description and dialogue exchanges, starting on page 92 the narration slightly alters with the arrival of summer. With no punctuation involved, the section represents one sentence which spans over ten pages and depicts the characters' adventures in summery London. This narrative technique underlines the rhythm of the novel and quickens the storytelling, perhaps to capture the oral tradition of calypso as well as the true duration of the summer period in England: "in the winter you would never think the grass would ever come green again but if you don't keep your eyes open it look like one day the trees naked and the next day they have clothes on" (LL 93). Furthermore, the summer passage links Moses and Galahad's narrative as both the characters seem to be dependent on each other and their relationship central to the coping with the feelings of exile and alienation, despite having diverse attitudes towards life in England – "oh lord Galahad say when the sweetness of summer get in him he say he would never leave the old Brit'n as long as he live and Moses sigh a long sigh like a man who live life and see nothing at all in it and who frighten as the years go by wondering what it is all about" (LL 101–2). Having the immediate Windrush experience, Selvon might have also opted for the stream of consciousness as a form of expression of his own thoughts and feelings. In other words, the modernist technique could represent his struggle to communicate the experience and give it a logical, coherent structure.

On the other hand, Andrea Levy applied a "polyphonic narrative mode" (Lowe) in her *Small Island*. Since she wanted to make her parents' personal stories heard and play with the black and white perspectives,<sup>18</sup> she could not build the novel on only one or two voices. In the end, she opted for four characters, two of Jamaican and two of British origin, to show the contrast in their experience of post-war Britain. To provide the readers with an insight into the characters minds and to demonstrate how various people perceive the changing circumstances around them differently,<sup>19</sup> she relies on a first-person narration.

---

<sup>18</sup> See chapter 2.6.3 of the theoretical part.

<sup>19</sup> See chapter 2.6.3 of the theoretical part.

As a second-generation born in England without no immediate experience like Selvon, Levy gave her novel a certain structure since she based the story on other people's knowledge and painstaking research.<sup>20</sup> *Small Island* is not fragmentary like *The Lonely Londoners*, nor does it include modernist narrative techniques such as stream of consciousness. The novel is divided into sections, namely "1948" and "Before". While in the "Before" section each character is given a space to share their back story individually, in the "1948" passage their voices intertwine and the reader is provided with different perspectives on the same situations. These encounters sometimes happen to be humorous as could be observed in Hortense and Gilbert's case. Upon Hortense's arrival in England, the reader is exposed to a slapstick between the two, which ends up with Gilbert throwing the contents of his chamber pot into the sink where he was preparing the afternoon tea for them both. Needless to say, Queenie and Bernard, the white couple, have their portion of comical interactions as well.

Although the characters cannot hear each other's stories, they somehow cooperate to build up the whole narrative – where one voice finishes, the other picks up. The use of multiple narratives and the back-and-forth movement throughout the novel corresponds to the techniques used in TV drama, which was the primary source of inspiration for Andrea Levy as she had grown up on soap operas like *Coronation Street*.<sup>21</sup>

The perspectives of the characters in *Small Island* also seem to be completely different. Gilbert, who has a long experience of racial discrimination and alienation, due to his time spent in the RAF during the war, tries to protect Hortense from the harsh British treatment by teaching her about the cultural differences and accompanies her to places. However, Hortense does not feel like she needs the help, she stands her ground and with unrealistic expectations tries to assimilate into the society while ignoring the prejudice around her. Her pompous attitude is later humbled by a rejection from the British school where she interviewed. Despite the diverging outlooks on life in Britain, both characters' experience feelings of degradation and disappointment and they often describe it as a contrast with their original anticipation of what life in Britain would be like.

---

<sup>20</sup> See chapter 2.6.3 of the theoretical part.

<sup>21</sup> See chapter 2.6.3 of the theoretical part.

Queenie and Bernard's viewpoints on the Windrush situation vary as well. Their stance on the newly created immigrant communities is described in the novel through one of Bernard's dreams. The couple are back in their old bedroom when Bernard sees the door opening and a smiling Japanese man emerges. Bernard wants to shoot the man, but as the man is smiling, he "start[s] to think, Oh well, maybe he's not so bad. Until [Bernard] see[s] his sword flash" (SI 439). He knows that they are both in danger, but Queenie just casually sits up in bed and says "'Hello.' [...] As if she'd known him all her life" (SI 439). Even though it seems that Bernard may change his radical imperialistic way of thinking at first, the probability of that change decreases as the dream unfolds. On the other hand, Queenie's reaction demonstrates a friendly approach to the man of a different ethnicity, just like she has treated the coloured newcomers all along. This comparison suggests Levy's attempt to include varying perceptions of the Windrush situation not only between the Caribbean and the British but also among each group.

Although Levy was inspired by works of other Windrush writers, she depicts the experience in a slightly different way than Selvon in his *The Lonely Londoners*. Both authors include numerous voices in the narrative, but the resulting effect they can have on the reading of the novels seems to diverge. Selvon depicts the Windrush experience as a "collective narration of minority representation" (Bentley, "Form and Language" 71) by using one perspective through which he introduces various stories. Levy, on the other hand, provides more perspectives by juxtaposing the white and black viewpoints and therefore shows how immigration influences not only the black but also the white population. She emphasises that there is not only one dominant version of history and that it is necessary to place the stories alongside each other to form an unbiased opinion (Levy; Morrison 334). The reason behind her inclusion of varying perspectives could be ascribed to her hindsight and meticulous research done on the topic as she had the opportunity to listen to both sides of the story and therefore treated the experience accordingly.

### **3.1.3 Humour**

Both Samuel Selvon and Andrea Levy incorporate humour in their literary works. In fact, the employment of humour is a prominent aspect typical for Anglophone Caribbean literature, the representatives of which are the two postcolonial authors. Humour can serve

various functions in fiction, be it a coping mechanism, a way of satirising certain topics, or easing difficult situations. What the Caribbean novels share are comic characters and the depiction of the harsh British treatment of the immigrants in a rather amusing way. Thus, the use of humour functions as a means of coping with the cruel reality. The aim of this subchapter is to look at how humour is integrated in the story of *The Lonely Londoners* and *Small Island* and how it influences the perception of the Windrush experience.

In *The Lonely Londoners*, the outlined instances of application of humour can be exemplified by focusing on the characters and their stories. Probably one of the most comical characters is the loud, vigorous, older Jamaican woman Tanty Bessy, who is always the centre of attention. Unaware of the situation in Britain at first, she does not conceal her Jamaican roots, when, for instance, asked by the reporter to pose for a family picture. She calls the family together “as if she calling out in a backyard in Jamaica” (11) and as others do not want her to “make bigger scene” (11), they submissively join her. But before taking the picture, they wait because Tanty needs to put on “a straw hat with a wide brim” (ibid.). Upon leaving, the reporter cannot help but utter, “I hope you don’t find our weather too cold for you” (12). Another instance during which Tanty proved to be a comical character was during Harris’ party where she chases him around to dance with her. With the words “[t]hese English girls don’t know how to dance calypso, man” (110), Tanty takes Harris and “swing him on the floor, pushing up she fat self against him” (ibid.). Tanty represents an important figure of the novel that directly tackles the prejudices of the white populace created about the West Indian people by means of her behaviour and creation of entertaining situations. Her attitude constitutes a resistance of “losing her Caribbean self in exile” (Okawa 19).

In fact, most of the characters that Moses depicts in *The Lonely Londoners* are to some extent comical – overly positive Galahad, who wears minimal clothing in winter but feels cold during summer; philanderer Captain, who has a sexual relation with a transvestite he mistook for a woman, and who moves his wife into another West Indian’s house without giving him any prior notice; fair-skinned gullible Lewis, who based on other people’s opinions starts beating his wife for he believes she is cheating on him when, in fact, she is innocent; and a dreamer, Big City, whose speech is constantly corrected by Moses and who contradicts himself by saying one thing but doing the opposite.

Because these characters are constantly alleviating the demeaning and uncomfortable situations they find themselves in, humour here functions as a coping strategy to process the bitter reality. A great example of such application of humour may be observed in Galahad and his pigeon story. As he finds himself in a desperate situation – without a job and agonised by hunger during winter – he decides to hunt down a pigeon in Kensington Gardens. Unfortunately, he is caught in the act by an old woman who threatens to call the police on this “cruel” man and a “monster” (LL 118). The comedy is further underlined by Moses’ reaction to Galahad’s experience: “Boy, you take a big chance [...] You think this is Trinidad? Them pigeons there to beautify the park, not to eat. The people over here will kill you if you touch a fly” (LL 120), yet he helps him cook and eat the bird. What Selvon presents as comical uncovers a much more serious message – the British population would “prefer to see [a] man starve” (LL 117) than to let him eat a pigeon or help to improve the living conditions of the black community so that they would not have to resolve to such actions. By making their experience amusing, the West Indians manage to laugh the cruelty off and at the same time implicitly point out how bizarre the British treatment is.

Selvon even underlines the use of humour as a coping mechanism through Moses at the end of the novel as he explains: “As if the boys laughing, but they only laughing because they afraid to cry, they only laughing because to think so much about everything would be a big calamity” (LL 139). Furthermore, Moses and his ridiculing of other characters may be interpreted as a strategy to repress or hide his own misery, which seems to prevail on his side of the West Indian community. This aspect makes Selvon’s portrayal of the Windrush experience rather tragicomic.

*Small Island* illustrates the use of humour in a very similar way. Equally comical character to Tanty Bessy might be Hortense Joseph. As mentioned earlier, Levy ridicules the way Hortense uses language to achieve the impeccable English, but it is also her eccentric behaviour, especially in interaction with her husband Gilbert, which gives the comical impression. Just like Tanty, Hortense challenges the white prejudice and besides other things represents the fresh newcomers who are gradually stricken by the rough reality. Filled with confidence, she applies for a teaching position in a British school, yet is rejected, humiliated, and derided by the white women teachers who interviewed her. Upon leaving the room, she

mistakenly walks into a cupboard instead of a door. As she paints her experience to Gilbert, he sympathises with her failure and offers comfort by means of humour: “You must tell [those women] that was an interesting cupboard” (SI 461), upon which Hortense joins in with other jokes and eventually puts the situation behind her. As in *The Lonely Londoners*, the characters use humour to digest the degrading and mortifying experiences.

Much like Selvon, Levy uses humour as a tool to emphasise how absurd some of the situations the black characters deal with are. She communicates this through Kenneth, one of the tenants in Queenie’s house, who describes his conversation with Bernard: “‘You have to leave,’ he tell me. ‘Why?’ I say. ‘The house on fire?’ [...] His mouth open a little but nothing come through. [...] Suddenly, him start screaming he is selling the house. ‘Now,’ I ask him, ‘you selling the house this minute?’” (SI 443). Similarly, when Queenie teaches Hortense the manners in England and tells her that she, “as the visitor to this country, should step off the pavement into the road if an English person wishes to pass and there is not sufficient room [...] for both” (SI 335), Hortense only retorts: “And if there is a puddle should I lie down in it?” (ibid.). These situations do not appear to be as anguished as the ones described by Selvon because the characters’ reactions to the inequitable circumstance are visibly disapproving, emphasising Levy’s confidence to confront the discrimination as a second-generation writer.

Moreover, Selvon uses calypso and its satirical edge, wordplay, and banter in his Trinidadian vernacular to convey humour and “verbal teasing” between the characters (Okawa 19). *The Lonely Londoners* also infuses the language in poignant situations with what could be labelled as dark humour that illuminates the characters’ hardships and invites empathy on the side of the readers. Levy does not apply calypso in *Small Island* to convey humour but weaves irony or satire throughout the novel as a humorous device to emphasise the humanity in people<sup>22</sup> who are not just the victims of a tragedy but real people with whom the readers may also sympathise.

By incorporating more perspectives, Levy ridicules not only the black individuals by placing them in uncomfortable circumstances, but also the whites, sometimes mutually. To

---

<sup>22</sup> See chapter 2.6.3 of the theoretical part.

exemplify, the Jamaicans make fun of Mr Ryder, an American and a founder of the school where Hortense works, who is bald and is told to cheat on his wife Stella, thus producing similarly bald babies. Another instance is Bernard, who diagnoses himself with syphilis, but it turns out that his symptoms suggest a simple flu. If it had been syphilis, he would have been long dead as he has not treated it for two years. Moreover, Queenie despises Bernard and can bear his presence only through the use of humour or hyperbole. When he tells her about his time in prison, she “just wanted to laugh. Shout loud and congratulate him on failing to be dull for once in his life” (*SI* 512). Levy manages to make light of them both, the Jamaican as well as the British equally, not distinguishing between them based on the colour of their skin. By doing so she challenges the white majority’s position as the “centre” and as being more “powerful” than the West Indians,<sup>23</sup> highlighting their weaknesses and vulnerabilities as human beings. This shows that the Windrush situation did not affect only the immigrants but also the white Brits.

As demonstrated in this chapter, both Selvon and Levy use humour in a very similar way. It helps to bring out the bizarreness behind the mistreatment of the immigrants and simultaneously highlights the disillusionment of the West Indians, who expected to be treated like the white Brits. The most striking difference between the novels seems to lie in the application of humour to the characters. While Selvon applies humour mostly within the Caribbean community, Levy also ridicules the white majority. By making fun of the British as well as Caribbean characters’ behaviour and weaknesses she did not only emphasise their equality and vulnerability, but also managed to reflect their humanity.<sup>24</sup>

### **3.2 Geographical and historical setting**

The subsequent chapter will juxtapose the two novels in terms of geographical and historical setting. The geographical setting will focus on the comparison of the life in London and the Caribbean and on the question as to what extent the authors devote space in their novels to the depiction of Britain, the West Indies, or both. In terms of the historical setting, the attention will be turned towards the changing situation in Britain during and after the Second World War, which was discussed in the theoretical part of the thesis. This chapter

---

<sup>23</sup> See chapter 2.4 of the theoretical part.

<sup>24</sup> See chapter 2.6.3 of the theoretical part.

will consider the disillusionment of the Windrush generation about the Mother Country,<sup>25</sup> the depiction of the Second World War,<sup>26</sup> and the experience of the immigrants when assimilating into the British society.<sup>27</sup>

The objective of this chapter is to explore how the two diaspora authors capture the Windrush experience with regard to the setting. It will consider how the characters perceive London and how they compare the capital city with their home in the Caribbean. This comparison should be underlined by the strong sense of place and local colour, concepts typical for Anglophone Caribbean literature.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, this chapter should examine the role of the Second World War and whether the authors consider it a significant part of the immigrant story. Lastly, it will observe how the authors depict the historical situation and whether the literary portrayal of the Windrush generation is in accordance with historical data presented in the theoretical part of the thesis.

### **3.2.1 Geographical setting**

As diaspora authors, Samuel Selvon and Andrea Levy write not only about life in Britain but also about their roots in the Caribbean. In fact, they often provide a comparison of London and West Indian places. This subchapter will look at how the two authors depict the geographical setting and how the surroundings affect the characters of *The Lonely Londoners* and *Small Island*.

Most of the characters in both novels believe that London is the place for them,<sup>29</sup> that they “would get a nice place to live in England – a bath, a kitchen, [and] a little patch of garden” (SI 241). This suggests the necessity to create their own place in England, the need for their own home where they would be able to put down roots and start a new life.<sup>30</sup> However, the reality proves to be different and even the appearance of the city itself does not meet their prior expectations. London happens to be more “grey”, “cold”, and “cheerless” (SI 225) compared to the bright Caribbean. As most of the story of the novels takes place during winter in post-war Britain, the characters address the changing climate

---

<sup>25</sup> See chapter 2.2.1 of the theoretical part.

<sup>26</sup> See chapter 2.1.1 of the theoretical part.

<sup>27</sup> See chapter 2.3 of the theoretical part.

<sup>28</sup> See chapter 2.6 of the theoretical part.

<sup>29</sup> See chapter 2.2.1 of the theoretical part.

<sup>30</sup> See chapter 2.6 of the theoretical part.

for which they were not completely prepared either – the sky is no longer always blue and the West Indian newcomers soon “forget what it like to see blue skies like back home where blue sky so common people don’t even look up” (LL 93). There is “[n]o heat from [the sun], it is just there in the sky like a force-ripe orange” (LL 23). What they were also not accustomed to was the fact that there is less daylight throughout the winter. Consequently, the gloomy and wintry weather leaves the characters with feelings of “melancholy” (LL 23), which makes them reminisce about the warmth of their Caribbean home, colourful and lively all year round.

What reminds the immigrants from the West Indies of the Caribbean is summer in London. This season is predominantly depicted in *The Lonely Londoners* as a time when “the sun shine for true and the sky blue and a warm wind blowing” and “in the town big times fete like stupidity” (LL 93). In *Small Island*, the connection to the Caribbean is demonstrated through a blanket that Hortense receives from an old woman before she leaves for London and which she later places on Gilbert’s bed. The blanket is of bright Caribbean colours (SI 226) and it is, according to Queenie, so bright that “[y]ou need dark glasses for [it]” (SI 228). The Caribbean colours summon the vivacity of Jamaica, transplanting a little piece of the island there and makes the dreary new home feel more like the old one. Moreover, shortly after her arrival in England, Hortense is flabbergasted to find out that there is no birdsong accompanying the dusky morning. In fact, bird as a part of the local colour of the Caribbean<sup>31</sup> is painted mainly by Michael Roberts, Queenie’s sweetheart and a relative of Hortense’s. The hummingbird he describes to Queenie is “blue, green, purple, red – every colour you can see in its tiny feathered body” (SI 299). The picture of the “national bird” of Jamaica (SI 299) stays in Queenie’s mind but she later questions her ability to transmit this acquired knowledge to her mixed-race son since she has “never [...] seen a hummingbird [...] [n]ot even in a book” (SI 521), which suggests the differences between the Londoners and West Indians and the inability to fully comprehend or even communicate each other’s cultural values.

Although the characters are trying to settle down in the new environment and smoothly blend into the British society, they sometimes fail to suppress their West Indian identity from

---

<sup>31</sup> See chapter 2.6 of the theoretical part.

affecting their behaviour. The inability to conceal the Caribbean influence, however, makes the readers more aware of the disparate customs in the two countries. When Tanty and Hortense go buy bread in the local grocery store, they observe that English people do not wrap it into a bag, but the two characters react to the same situation differently. While Tanty points out that “[w]here [she] come[s] from [...] they don’t give you bread like that” (*LL* 67), Hortense stays silent, waiting for the man to wrap the bread, until Queenie takes it for her. She is shocked to learn that this is the way “English people would buy their bread” (*SI* 331) and thinks, “Cha, why he no lick the bread first before giving it to me to eat?” (*ibid.*). Through Tanty and Hortense, the authors present what could be called “a colonisation in reverse”.<sup>32</sup> The characters try to modify the customs in England (much like English people did when they arrived in the colonies) and make the world around them more familiar, closer to the “small islands”, like Trinidad or Jamaica, where they originally came from (Nasta; Howes).

The primary distinction between the two novels lies in the attention they pay to specific places. While Selvon describes immigration and subsequent assimilation solely against the backdrop of London, Levy jumps between London, Jamaica, and India, but ultimately devotes most space of *Small Island* to the depiction of the Caribbean and British pre-war lives in the “Before” sections. This contrast is most likely present due to Selvon’s aspiration to share his first-hand experience in London and Levy’s intention to present the Windrush generation as a historical milestone based on other people’s stories, detailed research, and her second-hand experience. There is also a significant difference in how Levy and Selvon portray London and its influence on the characters.

Selvon illustrates London as a newly arising multicultural city as more and more people were arriving from the colonies in search of a better life after the Second World War. For Selvon’s “lonely Londoners”, the capital city is a place which divides people into “little worlds, and you stay in the world you belong to and you don’t know anything about what happening in the other ones except what you read in the papers” (*LL* 60). The city represents the hustle and bustle, the dynamism and the changes that come with the newly arrived migrants from the colonies: “Before Jamaicans start to invade Brit’n, it was a hell of a thing

---

<sup>32</sup> See chapter 2.2 of the theoretical part.

to pick up a piece of saltfish anywhere, or to get thing like pepper sauce or dasheen or even garlic” (LL 63), which no longer seems to be a problem because “[s]hop[s] all about start to take in stocks of foodstuffs what West Indians like” (LL 63).

Furthermore, London appears to affect Selvon’s characters in a slightly different way as he accentuates the discrepancy between the newcomers and the already acclimated. Moses, an experienced Londoner, finds the capital city “powerfully lonely” (LL 29), sooty and hazy. He is even disappointed by the landmarks and places everybody glorified “back home” (LL 73) – when he got the chance to see them, it felt “like nothing” (ibid.). On the other hand, Galahad, a newcomer, seems to perceive London as a fresh new start or a second chance at life. He arrives in England with almost nothing – no suitcase, no clothes, barely any money, and acts as if he was still back in Trinidad. However, he is soon exposed to the hostile environment and the dull climate of England. Despite the downsides of the immigrant life in Britain, Galahad still sees London as full of opportunities, full of life, and prefers to observe the places around him rather than to pay attention to the woman he is on a date with. As soon as he receives his first payment, he spends it on garments, which makes him “feel like a king living in London [...] with money in your pocket, not a worry in the world” (LL 74–5). This notion of a changing environment with the arrival of immigrants is also in accordance with Levy’s opinion on immigration being a dynamic process that affects and alters both her Jamaican as well as the British characters, which she perhaps drew on and later incorporated in her *Small Island* as well.<sup>33</sup>

Since Andrea Levy does not provide much space for the description of post-war London in her “1948” section, the readers only get a tiny glimpse of what the capital city looked like back then. Unlike Selvon who presents London purely as a multicultural place, Levy also demonstrates the impact the Second World War had on the city, primarily by means of focusing on the derelict buildings. The state of Bligh’s house is, in fact, the first aspect Hortense notices when she arrives at the place. Although it seems that this house with “pillars at the doorway” could have been “home to a doctor or a lawyer or perhaps a friend of a friend of the King”, it was “shabby”, with “cardboard and strips of white tape” placed where mosaic stained glass was originally fitted (SI 12). Even for Bernard, the owner of the

---

<sup>33</sup> See chapter 2.6.3 of the theoretical part.

house who returns from the war, it is “[h]ard to believe this had been [his] home for most of [his] life” (SI 427). He looks around and finds that “[n]othing was familiar” (SI 427-8), the “[b]uildings [were] decaying and run down. Rotting sashes. Cracked plaster. Obscene gaps where houses once stood” (SI 428). It was difficult for him as an ex-RAF soldier to observe how “England had shrunk. It was smaller than the place [he]’d left” (SI 424). Bernard, who is scarred by his war experience, struggles to adapt to the war-torn society, which was gradually becoming multicultural. Similarly to the Windrush generation, his expectations of what Britain and his future life would look like once he returns, were also shattered. By concentrating on the destroyed houses Levy accentuates how World War II significantly affected the condition of Britain. However, it is not just the dilapidated state Bernard’s house is in that shocks him, but also the fact that Queenie transformed his place into a multicultural space by renting rooms to people of colour which he is against. With Bernard’s return and repossession of his house, Queenie realises that she cannot maintain her position as a landlady. The developing circumstances after the Second World War show that lives were changing not only for the immigrants moving to Britain and seeking work, but also for the British, which makes the war a crucial part of the Windrush story.

*Small Island* does not offer as much commentary on the capital city as *The Lonely Londoners* since Levy mostly concentrates on the injustice and inequality the Windrush generation experienced in interaction with other people within the British society, which shall be discussed in the following subchapter.

### **3.2.2 Historical setting**

As indicated in the preceding subchapter, *Small Island* introduces the historical setting in more detail than *The Lonely Londoners*. Apart from capturing the early immigration allowed by the British Nationality Act of 1948 and the British reaction to it,<sup>34</sup> Levy turns the attention to the root of racial segregation and discrimination brought about by the US administration during the Second World War, which seems to be secondary in *The Lonely Londoners*. The objective of this subchapter is to look at the importance of World War II and the impact it had on the development of racism and racial segregation in Britain. Furthermore, this part of the thesis will consider the question of racism and how the two

---

<sup>34</sup> See chapter 2.2.2 of the theoretical part.

authors tackle it in their novels. Lastly, the subchapter will observe to what extent the historical findings presented in the theoretical part correspond to the literary representations of the Windrush generation provided by Andrea Levy and Samuel Selvon.

Because Selvon did not include much commentary on the Second World War as he rather captured his own experience assimilating in post-war London, it is primarily through the character Gilbert Joseph in *Small Island* that the readers learn about the war experience of a non-white RAF airman in America and England. Gilbert and other military men are first exposed to racial segregation when they are sent to Virginia in America. Despite the initial hospitality of the Americans who treat the British subjects as “superior” black people, they soon learn that according to the Americans the only solution to “the nigger problem [...] is segregation” (*SI* 132). This observation suggests that the root of racism seems to lie in the racial segregation created within the American army as presented in the theoretical part of the thesis. However, racism is gradually settling in even among the British population as can be observed during Gilbert’s journey to England, when the RAF soldiers are being constantly disdained by Corporal Baxter who refers to them as “colony troops” and adds comments such as, “You can kiss the idea of a banana goodbye” or “No white women there will consort with the likes of you” (*SI* 133).

Racial segregation and racist behaviour seem to be becoming more prevalent in Britain with the growing presence of the American GIs. While the Americans are rather straightforward about the enmity towards the people of colour, the British rather insinuate their stance towards the West Indian soldiers, even within the RAF. Assigned as a driver, Gilbert is to fetch British shock absorbers to an adjacent American base. However, when he arrives, the officers talk behind his back in a racist manner and Gilbert experiences what it feels like to be in the African-American’s shoes – “If a coloured man finds himself on an American army base surrounded entirely by white people, then, man!, he is in the wrong place” (*SI* 153). Nevertheless, the fact that the British commanding officer deliberately sent Gilbert, a black airman, to the American base, where he knew Gilbert would be treated with

contempt, demonstrates the covert slow spread of racism in Britain and the fact that any attempt to become friendly with the men of colour should be avoided.<sup>35</sup>

This is further exemplified in the scene during which Queenie, Gilbert and Arthur, Bernard's father, decide to visit a local cinema. When Gilbert is asked to go and sit in the very back row, just like all the other black soldiers, both Queenie and Gilbert are appalled, and a quarrel breaks out. Gilbert argues that "there is no segregation in this country. [He] will sit wherever [he] like[s] in this picture house. And those coloured men at the back should have been allowed to sit wherever they so please. This is England, not Alabama" (*SI* 185). In the end they are all forced to leave the cinema and later they get involved in a race riot, which comes to a halt after Arthur is shot dead by the American Military Police. Gilbert proclaims that "Arthur Bligh had become another casualty of war – but come, tell me, someone . . . which war?" (*SI* 193) – suggesting the pointlessness of creating a racial war within a world war, during which they should fight alongside and not each other. Simultaneously, this proves that the American administrators are trying to divide the society into the white majority and black minority, and possibly restrict or even prohibit them from participating in public activities such as visiting the cinema.<sup>36</sup>

As the theoretical part of the thesis explained, these attempts at segregation were indeed present in England during World War II as well as the ambivalence in behaviour towards the black soldiers. When Gilbert and his friends visit one of the British villages, the people, upon learning they are British subjects, welcome them with a warm embrace and words. However, despite the initial hearty acceptance, there is still visible prejudice against the black airmen within the English populace.<sup>37</sup> It manifests itself when the crowd asks them to say something in English, for they think "it's not English [they're] speaking" (*SI* 138), and when Gilbert says that he left Jamaica to "fight for [his] country" (*ibid.*), a white citizen retorts: "Humph. Your country?" (*SI* 138), not considering Gilbert, a Jamaican man, to be a part of the British nation.

---

<sup>35</sup> See chapter 2.1.1 of the theoretical part.

<sup>36</sup> See chapter 2.1.1 of the theoretical part.

<sup>37</sup> See chapter 2.1.1 of the theoretical part.

Owing to the general preconception that blacks have “animal desires” (*SI* 116) for women and can provide their sexual partners with greater satisfaction than the white men,<sup>38</sup> inter-racial relationships were recognised, particularly among the American GIs, as a public outrage. This is exemplified in *Small Island* when Gilbert goes out for a cup of tea with Queenie and sits not so far from three American GIs. He experiences the “cocky hatred that was charging across the room to yell in the face of a coloured man whose audacity was to sit with a white woman” (*SI* 177). Gilbert is aware of the “impotent rage in their eyes” (*SI* 179) and believes he cannot flee from the three servicemen without being harmed, but in the end manages to escape intact. Through this particular scene Levy points out that the reaction of the American soldiers seems to be rather exaggerated or even ridiculous, given that they themselves may have ancestors of black origin – “One of them had tight black curly hair – man, this white boy should never dig too deep in his past: who knows what strangeness could be uncovered?” (*SI* 178). Should their cultural heritage prove to be true, it would make their reaction to the inter-racial encounters rather paradoxical. Levy’s attempt to highlight the unknown and possibly ethnic lineage of the American soldiers could be to some extent due to her own experience and realisation that although she considered herself British, i.e. white, she still had identifiable Caribbean roots (Levy, “Back to My Own Country”).

The belief about non-white men having stronger sexual urges does not disappear even after the war. Queenie is cautioned by her friend’s husband who claims to have seen their sexual practices and Gilbert is rejected from a job because “all hell would break loose if the men found [him] talking to their women” (*SI* 312). The notion that coloured males can offer better sexual satisfaction is proven to be true through the passionate affair between Queenie and Michael, the result of which was a mixed-race child. The reason for the improvement of the experience could be ascribed to Queenie’s affection towards Michael, the exoticism he represented, or both. Therefore, these two aspects corroborate the information provided in the theoretical part of the thesis.

Levy also describes the worsening situation in Jamaica caused by the natural disasters and the optimistic expectations of its inhabitants to find better job opportunities in the

---

<sup>38</sup> See chapter 2.3 of the theoretical part.

Mother Country.<sup>39</sup> The notion of a Mother Country appears in *Small Island* especially when Gilbert starts noticing the prejudice and racism accumulating in Britain. Gilbert personifies the Mother Country and introduces it through a mother–child metaphor where the “Mother is a beautiful woman – refined, mannerly and cultured” (*SI* 139), and the colonies represent “her children” (*ibid.*) who cherish, support, and extoll the Mother. However, the time when she was thriving, prosperous and authoritative is long gone when they finally meet her. At that point, Levy portrays Britain primarily through ravaged buildings, which is significantly different from what the West Indians were expecting and further adds to their sense of disillusionment.<sup>40</sup> Britain’s destroyed houses and cities represent greater need for reconstruction of the country as such, which along with the disenchantment also offers a spark of hope for the nation’s rebirth (Krčková 28).

Even though the majority of the West Indians, including Gilbert, were led to learn as much as possible about the Mother Country<sup>41</sup>, the greatest source of astonishment for them was the fact that the Mother Country did not know them (*SI* 141). Whenever the West Indian characters asked about the Caribbean, people would assume it is in Africa (*SI* 142). Similarly, *The Lonely Londoners* demonstrate how British people believe that all immigrants of colour come only from Jamaica, when in fact they also hail from other islands like Trinidad or Barbados. This implies that the perception of the West Indies corresponds to the notion of “centre” versus “margins”<sup>42</sup> – the central country (Britain), does not need to learn about its margins (colonies) because they are secondary to them. On that account, Selvon and Levy attempt to challenge the wrongly established impressions about the Caribbean population and they both expose the British treatment of the non-white newcomers during the years after the Second World War.

People create most of the stereotypes based on what they learn from the media. It can function as a tool to secure supremacy of the white majority over the minorities and to

---

<sup>39</sup> See chapter 2.1.1 of the theoretical part.

<sup>40</sup> It was not only the illusion of England as a country, but also of what the English are like. There was a general presumption in the colonies that the streets of London are paved with gold and many believed in the courtesy of the British people.

<sup>41</sup> See chapter 2.2.1 of the theoretical part.

<sup>42</sup> See chapter 2.4 of the theoretical part.

portray their stories accordingly.<sup>43</sup> The media is “always talking about fellars coming up here to work and creating problem” (LL 129) and “whatever the newspaper and the radio say in this country, that is the people Bible” (LL 2). Those who do not have access to media form their opinions based on their encounters with the non-white immigrants, or they simply adopt somebody else’s sentiment. The coloured inhabitants are aware that one example of unacceptable behaviour gives the British “wrong impression for all the rest” (LL 34). They realise that there is a possibility that anything the Brits would interpret as misdemeanour could only strengthen the universal belief that the blacks are uncivilised (LL 116). However, when in contact with the West Indians, the white majority would usually incline towards what Selvon labels as “British diplomacy” (LL 20) – while Americans are upfront about their hatred towards the black minorities, the British reject them indirectly by means of mitigating devices such as “‘thank you sir,’ and ‘how do you do’” (LL 20–1).

The question of racism seems to be more explicitly discussed in *The Lonely Londoners*. As Moses teaches Galahad about the post-war life in Britain, he explains that one of the reasons they are not welcomed and accepted by the white majority is simply because of their skin colour. This is exemplified by “Pole[s] [... who] have no more right in this country than [the West Indians]” (LL 21), yet it is only the non-white community that is treated unjustly and with intolerance. They feel wronged as “British subjects” because it is them “who bleed [and bled] to make this country prosperous” (ibid.) and yet they cannot find a job due to the colour of their skin. It was mostly the coloured workers who did the menial, unwanted jobs and who were afflicted by the colour bar even in places ran by the white immigrants.<sup>44</sup>

Later, based on a meeting with a small child, who calls him a “black man”, and the reaction of the passers-by, Galahad realises it is truly the colour of his skin that differentiates him from the rest of the British. He is even invited to speak about the colour problem “at the Orator’s Corner” where “fellars saying all kind of thing against the government and the country” or “making big discussion on the colour problem [...] and the police not doing them anything” (LL 88). The heated debates<sup>45</sup> resonate with anger as an ambiance of the city

---

<sup>43</sup> See chapters 2.4 and 2.6 of the theoretical part.

<sup>44</sup> See chapter 2.3 of the theoretical part.

<sup>45</sup> See chapter 2.2.2 of the theoretical part.

of London in the 1950s.<sup>46</sup> The involvement of public discourse is observable only in *The Lonely Londoners*, which accentuates the political atmosphere regarding the Windrush situation at that time. Levy does not even touch upon the fact that the Parliament held discussions about the immigration or that Britain did not do “anything drastic like stop [the immigrants] from coming to the Mother Country” (*LL* 2). Therefore, each writer included aspects which they considered relevant to their objectives at the time when they produced their novels – while Levy focused more on the historical background of the Windrush story as a second-generation writer who wanted to articulate and record her parents’ experience, Selvon involved politics and the question of racism that is in accordance with anger as an ambiance of London, presenting the Windrush situation in the 1950s as he experienced it.

What the two novels share is the depiction of racial discrimination in the areas of housing and employment in Britain. The major motive for the injustice appears to be the concern of the English that the West Indians would “get job in front of them” (*LL* 20) or tarnish the previously “respectable” neighbourhoods (*SI* 112). Nevertheless, racism did not only affect the search for housing and jobs. It was evident also in public places and everyday situations as illustrated by Eugene in *Small Island* who was accused of “attacking an old lady”, when in fact he was trying to save her from falling down, or Curtis, a Christian who is banished from a local church “for his skin was too dark to worship there” (*SI* 326). This is again in accordance with the findings presented in the theoretical part of the thesis. The imperialistic conviction that it is acceptable to exploit and abuse the minorities<sup>47</sup> is also prevalent in the novels and will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Both Selvon and Levy describe the hardships the characters face on their journeys to obtain respectable jobs, which in most cases did not correspond to their acquired qualifications. Although the West Indians aspire to move up the socioeconomic ladder, they usually end up with blue-collar jobs the white majority find suitable for them – “They send you for a storekeeper work and they want to put you in the yard to lift heavy iron. They think that is all we good for, and this time they keeping all the soft clerical jobs” (*LL* 35). In fact, most of the characters accept the jobs they are offered, regardless of the type, rather than

---

<sup>46</sup> See chapter 2.1.2 of the theoretical part.

<sup>47</sup> See chapter 2.3 of the theoretical part.

being supported by the “State” (*LL* 22), thus setting a bad example for the West Indian community. The jobs they are usually offered consist of hard-manual labour in places where they would be invisible, such as driving or working solely night shifts.

Even when they are ultimately given a job, the relationships in the workplace are filled with prejudice, hatred, and racism.<sup>48</sup> When Gilbert finally finds a job as a driver for a Post Office, he drives around with a co-worker who gives him directions for “[h]e believed [Gilbert], a foreigner, did not know or could ever learn the route” (*SI* 314), considering him as the “other”, the “uneducated and uncivilized”. One day, when his partner falls ill, the substitute does not want to cooperate with him, and the other men bully Gilbert with comments such as “Did I hear someone speak?” or “Look, darkie’s stealing from the railways” (*SI* 315), impeding Gilbert’s working conditions.

Regarding the housing situation, as stated in the theoretical part, most of the newcomers relied on the already settled and more experienced. This is illustrated through Moses and Galahad as well as Gilbert and Hortense. In fact, Moses and Gilbert’s experience seems to be rather similar. They were both among the first immigrants to settle in Britain, therefore, they function as “guides” who accompany the newcomers and teach them about the Mother Country. Even their original living conditions in Britain were very much alike – they lived in a room crammed with number of other foreigners. These rooms sometimes also functioned as a sanctuary for those freshly arrived. It was problematic for the coloured communities to find a place to stay, especially when there were more people to accommodate. Through the already mentioned “British diplomacy”, the landlords and landladies usually turned the West Indians down. Sometimes the advertisements for rooms openly included notices such as “Keep the Water White”<sup>49</sup> (*LL* 77). Still, there were people like Queenie, who would take in the immigrants for they “were willing to pay good money to stay in those dingy rooms” (*SI* 436). The white majority knew the West Indians struggled to find a place and therefore exploited their dire predicament with the requirement of higher rents.

---

<sup>48</sup> See chapter 2.3 of the theoretical part.

<sup>49</sup> See chapter 2.2.2 of the theoretical part.

After exploring the selected aspects of the historical settings, it can be said that they correspond to the historical facts outlined in the theoretical part. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Windrush experience as presented by Selvon and Levy can be regarded as a reliable source of historical evidence. However, considering the depiction of the Windrush generation with regard to the historical setting, there are certain differences in the novels. Selvon does not include much of a historical overview and as he records his experience predominantly after World War II, it seems that he does not consider war to be a significant part of the Windrush story. Levy, on the other hand, provides space for the depiction of the past and highlights the influence of the war on the characters as well as the developing circumstances in England, thus presenting war as a crucial part of the Windrush story. Through juxtaposing the present and the past, Levy also emphasises the disillusionment created about Britain.

### **3.3 Characters**

The aim of this chapter is to examine characters' behaviour and feelings, their identity formation, endurance of the hostility from the side of the English, and how the two books treat the representation of male and female characters. Moreover, it will consider the depiction of the concepts such as Orientalism, otherness, and a strong sense of place, which are representative for postcolonial and Anglophone Caribbean literatures. This chapter should help determine whether the Windrush story can be considered solely a male experience, the role of female characters in the novels, and how Andrea Levy and Samuel Selvon portray the Windrush generation with regard to the postcolonial theory.

The feelings of loneliness, nostalgia, and exile are most evident in the character of Moses. Despite being overwhelmed by these emotions, he tries to repress them in order to focus on the present. When he reminisces with Galahad about Trinidad over the cooked pigeon, Moses feels guilty about having a good time as he realises that he is ignorant of the reality – he and Galahad are eating a pigeon because they are hungry and have no money for food, which emphasises his more pessimistic perception of London. Moses represents “mister London” (*LL* 20), a knowledgeable and experienced man living in London, however, he did not move forward at all even after living so many years in the Mother Country. He observes that there is the same lack of prospects in London as there is back in Trinidad,

which deepens the feeling of exile.<sup>50</sup> Moses may also feel lonely because he is the only character in the novel that does not share the enthusiasm and eagerness his West Indian friends do. Despite their belief that London can provide them with more and principally better opportunities, they sometimes, just like Moses, cannot help but feel nostalgic and miss their warm, bright home in the Caribbean. What seems to help Moses, and other characters, to accept the harsh immigrant life are the connections they have within the West Indian community through conversations “about things back home” (*LL* 126). The roots they share represent the strength of their community and it is in fact through these close bonds that they create their own place, which may remind them of “home”. It helps them to feel less alone in the city which “does [not] really accept [them]” (*ibid.*) and from which they cannot escape because all their relatives reside on the other side of the ocean.

Loneliness, alienation, and exile can be detected in the characters of *Small Island* as well. Similarly to Moses, Gilbert contemplates his decision to stay in London through imaginative conversations with his cousin Elwood, who is a proud Jamaican and who tried to discourage Gilbert from moving to England. Furthermore, Gilbert appears to be rejected by almost everyone in the novel except for Queenie and Arthur, who take him in as a tenant and develop a relatively close friendship with him. Even his wife Hortense does not acknowledge him until the very end of the book because his behaviour and speech are always full of levity. The feelings of alienation are emphasised even more when he discovers that England did not know him – the Mother Country was scrutinising him as if asking, “Who the bloody hell are you?” (*SI* 139). He feels like he does not belong to the Mother Country but simultaneously cannot imagine a better future in the Caribbean, indicating a strong feeling of exile.

As for the other characters of *Small Island*, Queenie is alienated by her neighbours because she is the only landlady within the street to take in coloured tenants. To some extent, she is even held responsible for people moving out of the street because “these darkies bring down a neighbourhood” (*SI* 117). However, despite her initial defiance against the racial prejudice, she eventually succumbs to it as she finds herself incapable of raising her mixed-

---

<sup>50</sup> See chapter 2.6 of the theoretical part.

race child as a white mother,<sup>51</sup> showing that even though she overlooks the race of her tenants, she is still influenced by it. Queenie also subverts the perception of social power when she goes down on her knees and begs the Jamaican couple to take in her child of colour. Moreover, as already discussed in the subchapter on geographical setting, Bernard who is stricken by his war experience also does not feel at home when he returns to England and notices the changes brought about by the war.

What appears to be paramount to the feeling of alienation is skin colour, which is also closely connected to the formation of the characters' identities and the question of Britishness. In Selvon's novel there are two instances in the form of characters of Bart and Galahad who help to illuminate this issue. "Bart have light skin. That is to say, he neither here nor there, though he more here than there" (*LL* 46), which implies that he neither belongs to England nor the Caribbean. He does not identify with either world, though he would clearly prefer to be regarded British as he demonstrates: "I here with these boys, but I not one of them, look at the colour of my skin" (*LL* 48). However, it is the disdain manifested by the "British diplomacy" which gradually breaks his conviction. Eventually, Bart is forced to "boil down and come like one of the boys" (*LL* 48), meaning that he is compelled to embrace his Caribbean identity.

Galahad treats the colour problem in a slightly different manner. As already mentioned, he realises that the skin colour is what separates and alienates him from the white majority. Galahad divorces himself from the "Colour" (*LL* 77), which he refers to as if it was a person or something completely disembodied and isolated. He tries to detach the "Colour" from his personality, his sense of self, and wishes for the English to wise up to the distinction and alter their behaviour towards the West Indian community. According to Galahad, it is the "Colour" that prevents the immigrants from fully assimilating into the white society and from becoming British.

Just like Bart, Hortense with her "golden skin [with which she] would have a golden future" (*SI* 527) illustrates the concept of "in-betweenness".<sup>52</sup> She represents the naïve, ambitious newcomer who believes to have the potential to contribute to the British society

---

<sup>51</sup> See chapter 2.1.1 of the theoretical part.

<sup>52</sup> See chapter 2.6 of the theoretical part.

but is gradually degraded – first by the English and later by her husband Gilbert who demeans her with derogatory comments on her skills. The humiliating, downgrading experience she has to deal with shakes, as well as shapes, her identity. Hortense understands that she can no longer offer her abilities and qualification as formerly planned. Similarly to Bart, she is pushed to recognise the way she is perceived by the white community, and consequently narrow down the possibility of her enriching the society, and accept her Caribbean roots.

Alienation and racism make the characters feel like the “other”,<sup>53</sup> they are aware of not belonging into the British society despite their being British subjects. The core of alienation, “otherness”, or unwelcoming behaviour of the British towards the West Indian immigrants most likely lies in the predicament that Britain considers itself as a powerful, more civilised and educated nation than the “savages” who are moving from the primitive “small islands” and who represent margins or periphery.

Bernard, as a proud subject of the British Empire, represents the embodiment of Orientalism.<sup>54</sup> His convictions about the people of colour seem to be identical to those of his close neighbour Mr Todd, whose “concern [...] was that [the immigrants] would turn the area into a jungle” (*SI* 113) and that “[t]he government should never have let them in” because they will “have a devil of a time getting rid of them now” (*SI* 117). Once Bernard leaves Britain to serve under the RAF in Burma, his perception of the Orient is in accordance with the stereotypes created about India: “These people stank. Body odour was masked by sweet, sickly, spicy scents” (*SI* 341). He paints it as a poor underdeveloped country and feels that he wields power over the indigenous population as the British are perceived as more civilised, educated, and as missionaries who helped develop the nations. Although Bernard demonstrates the notion of Orientalism, it is also through him that Levy challenges this concept. He is sometimes portrayed as weaker than the inhabitants of the Orient, is often “laughed at by coolies” (*SI* 389) and treated in the same way as them. On one occasion when Bernard ruthlessly rapes an underage prostitute, perhaps to prove to himself that he is not a

---

<sup>53</sup> See chapter 2.4 of the theoretical part.

<sup>54</sup> See chapter 2.4 of the theoretical part.

coward, he repents the deed as he realises that what he has done to the young girl, whom he considers as the “other”, reminds him of the savagery behaviour of the uncivilised.

Though unconsciously, Queenie also expresses characteristics of Orientalism. Despite her good intentions to help the immigrants, Queenie still manages to be racist and filled with prejudice towards them. In her interaction with Hortense, she does not realise how much they have in common due to British colonialist history and feels the obligation to educate her. She operates with the inherent conviction that Hortense, as the “other”, must be less knowledgeable and less civilised. However, it is Hortense who could teach Queenie for she is more educated and more sophisticated. Moreover, Queenie succumbs to her intuition and asks Kenneth, one of the tenants Gilbert “vouched for” (*SI* 116), to leave her house because he reminded her of the “[a]nimal, like Morris warned” (*SI* 117). The four varying perspectives allow Levy to incorporate more into the story and that is how she confronts the portrayal of the white Brits as the majority and the Caribbean as the minority. She shows that sometimes the roles can be reversed.

The difference between the characters of the novels lies in the resistance to the British hostility they are exposed to. While the individuals in *The Lonely Londoners*, who represent the Windrush generation, are relatively submissive and do not fight back, Levy’s characters are more indignant and reluctant to tolerate the antagonism. Thus, Levy manages to embody her attitude towards the Windrush situation as a second-generation black British author into her characters.<sup>55</sup> She is not afraid of projecting her confidence into her Jamaican characters when confronting problems, namely Gilbert who fights not only verbally but also physically with Bernard when he rejects the immigrants’ presence in his house despite them being paying tenants. Similarly, Hortense shows resentment when she is not given the teaching position she interviewed for: “I will come back again when I am qualified to teach in this country” (*SI* 455). In *The Lonely Londoners*, Captain simply leaves without arguing when he is told to do a different job than he was originally promised.

As far as the representation of male and female characters is concerned, there are prominent differences between *The Lonely Londoners* and *Small Island*. As already stated

---

<sup>55</sup> See chapter 2.6.3 of the theoretical part.

in the theoretical part of the thesis, Selvon inclined towards the male-centred perspective and so the majority of his characters are men, which confirms the original hypothesis that the first wave of the West Indian migration mostly consisted of men.<sup>56</sup> The only prominent female character in *The Lonely Londoners* is the previously discussed Tanty Bessy, who most likely serves as Selvon's remembrance of strong Caribbean women. However, even she is marginalised because unlike the male immigrants, she is anxious about travelling outside the area where she resides. Generally, women in *The Lonely Londoners* are diminished, depersonalised, and voiceless. Most of them do domestic jobs and are isolated from the major events of the novel. Some are even deprived of a name, they are simply addressed as "white girls" (LL 59), "white pussy" (LL 79), or "frauline" (LL 71). Perhaps Selvon's characters "depersonalize the female – as they themselves have been depersonalized" (Grmelová 76). Women are frequently objectified and subjugated by men who interact with them primarily with intention to engage in sexual activity which they later boast about. However, it is through these relations that the Caribbean men are trying to get closer to the white population, thus affecting their identity formation as well. Furthermore, the inter-racial relationships could be interpreted as a strategy for the West Indians to obtain not only a higher social status, but also a victory over the colonising culture.

Levy challenges Selvon's meager depiction of women, giving voices to Hortense and Queenie, two central characters of the Windrush experience in *Small Island*. Through Hortense she objects to the idea that women's participation in migration is perceived as secondary.<sup>57</sup> Hortense also functions as a character that ridicules male sexuality which is especially evident during her wedding night with Gilbert: "If a body in its beauty is the work of God, then this hideous predicament between his legs was without doubt the work of the devil" (SI 104). She does not trust Gilbert to stay innocent during the time he will be waiting for her arrival to Britain because "[t]here may be women who will turn [his] head in England" (SI 104). Later, she even falsely accuses him of impregnating Queenie, just like Bernard. Queenie, as another female lead in *Small Island*, offers lodgings to the coloured community despite the general racial prejudice prevailing in the British society. Through

---

<sup>56</sup> See chapter 2.2 of the theoretical part.

<sup>57</sup> See chapter 2.6.3 of the theoretical part.

this role she also symbolizes the notion of a “Mother Country”<sup>58</sup> since her real name is Victoria (after the Queen Victoria). As a “Mother” she welcomes the colonial “children” and provides them with comfort, understanding and a place to live (Krčková 23). This way Queenie does not only revolt against the biased society but also against her husband Bernard who does not want to accept the Caribbean lodgers.

As already discussed in the chapter on geographical setting, the strong sense of a place is another aspect perceptible in *The Lonely Londoners* and *Small Island*. Most of the non-white characters firmly believe to have a place waiting for them once they arrive in Britain. However, these dreams are shattered as they end up in tiny, crummy rooms, often shared with other newcomers. Despite the situation being quite the opposite of what they expected, they still consider it their home, a place of their own. This is demonstrated in *Small Island* through Gilbert and Hortense and their reaction to Bernard and Queenie’s attitude as landlords – “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” (*SI* 229). The same situation occurs when Bernard returns from home and decides to displace the tenants of colour, examining the state of their rooms and being too nosy, which the two Jamaican characters resent. However, Gilbert and Hortense ultimately find their own house in which they intend to raise Queenie’s mixed-race child, highlighting the immigrants’ intentions to settle down in London. Simultaneously, the house represents an optimistic future of assimilation in Britain, which is included in *Small Island* most likely due to Levy being a second-generation writer who considered immigration a dynamic process and saw their possible contribution to the society.

Even though there are characters like Big City in *The Lonely Londoners* that have faith in a more promising future with a place to live, Selvon ultimately does not satisfy the characters’ needs. In *Small Island* Levy, on the other hand, provides the Jamaican couple with a new house to reside in, thus indicating bright prospects for the assimilation of the new settlers and for the creation of the multi-racial and multicultural Britain.

---

<sup>58</sup> See chapter 3.2.2 of the practical part.

### 3.4 Plot

Taking all previously discussed aspects into consideration, this chapter shall elucidate how the Windrush experience is portrayed with regard to the plot of the two novels. It will examine how Andrea Levy and Samuel Selvon construct the story and how it affects the portrayal of the Windrush generation. It shall also look at whether there is a significant difference in the way of reading the Windrush story and the impression these stories leave behind when reading the two novels.

*The Lonely Londoners* does not comprise of a plot in the usual sense of the term. As already said, it is rather a collection of disparate individual experiences of the Windrush generation trying to adapt to the post-war life in London in the 1950s. Through multiple voices, the individual stories are presented as separate snapshots of immigrant lives, which eventually merge together in Moses' room where all the previously introduced characters gather "for a oldtalk" (LL 134). This structure of the novel points to their establishment of a Caribbean community within London that is sustained by male bonding over their shared past, roots and the unnerving experience of the present. It is through this community that the characters manage to survive in the unwelcoming environment. Thus, the Windrush experience is depicted as both an individual and collective one.

Although the readers follow several stories of various characters, none of them take priority over the other. The absence of a protagonist compliments the absence of a plot and gives an impression of a collection of personal stories. Since Selvon worked as a reporter, the application of third-person narration may also function as a way to provide commentary on the experience of the characters rather than their consciousness.

The novel successively presents the readers with unvirtuous but sympathetic characters who grapple with a harsh reality. As readers follow the characters' pasts and struggles in everyday survival, which are sometimes filled with a bit of humour, making the unpleasant experience at least more digestible, they observe how lonely, isolated, and disappointed the characters are. Selvon does not consider the prospects of the characters, nor does he include many hints in the story that would point to the security of the subsequent and successful integration within the British society. Furthermore, as majority of the characters are men, Selvon's novel depicts the Windrush experience as mainly a male

phenomenon. Most of the women characters are thus marginalised, if not objectified. The male representation in *The Lonely Londoners* may be more prevalent due to there being more male than female passengers on the *SS Empire Windrush*.<sup>59</sup> Also, the literary contribution of writers of the Windrush generation predominantly comprised of men writing about their experience, thus elevating male protagonists who overshadowed the female characters and their perspectives.

*Small Island*, on the other hand, provides the readers with a relatively complex plot due to the incorporation of four varying perspectives and alternations between narrators. The four protagonists, just like the “lonely Londoners”, share their personal histories, current experiences, as well as expectations for their futures. They switch between past and present, war and post-war time, London and Jamaica, or London and India. Nevertheless, their paths are eventually entwined, and the characters assemble at the climax of the novel to resolve the problem of a newly born mixed-race child. It is, in fact, the plot that connects the characters’ lives together, not the formation of a community.

As stated earlier, Levy’s novel is divided into two primary sections – “1948” and “Before”. More time is spent in the latter segment of the book since Levy depicts the experience as dependent on the individuals’ past, rather than the present. In the same way she blends in the story the circumstances occurring during the Second World War, which shape the situation in post-war Britain and result in racial discrimination. Therefore, unlike Selvon, she considers the past and historical experience of the war an important part of the Windrush story.

Although Levy describes the past of each individual in a separate section, the characters are still interconnected and often there are at least two characters that interact within the passage. The most important event of the novel is Queenie’s childbirth, during which all the main protagonists are finally assembled in one place – Bernard’s house. However, the essential moment that leads to this climax lies in the past, during the war period, when Queenie indulges in a passionate affair with Michael, a Jamaican RAF volunteer and Hortense’s cousin. Not only does the baby represent a promising future for

---

<sup>59</sup> See chapter 2.2 of the theoretical part.

the assimilation and integration of the multi-racial population in Britain, it also serves as a literary expression of Andrea Levy as a second-generation child who is going to grow up in a bicultural environment, both Jamaican and British. In other words, Andrea Levy “sees the future in the past” (Grmelová 84), presenting the Windrush stories as a milestone which affected the development of the British society and resulted in present-day multicultural England.

The authors’ portrayal of the Windrush experience seems to be rather tragicomic since they provide the readers with the descriptions of discriminatory British behaviour alongside mundane situations and employ comedy throughout the novels. However, in Levy’s novel the experience is also presented as optimistic as she gives the Jamaican couple their own house, thus suggesting a promising future for the next generation. Furthermore, she emphasises that there are still people who do not mind the cultural difference between the British and the Caribbean. This is exemplified primarily by Queenie but also by a woman who stops Gilbert to return his dropped glove and gives him a cough sweet to warm him up – a behaviour which Gilbert labels as an “act of kindness” in “this thankless place” (SI 328).

As a female writer herself, Levy incorporated the female perspective in *Small Island* and in fact made it quite dominant. Both main female characters represent strong British and Jamaican women who are not afraid to oppose men as well as society itself. She accentuates that the Windrush experience was not solely male, but women also played their significant roles in the migration and later integration into the British society. Through the involvement of both male and female, as well as British and Jamaican, perspectives, *Small Island* shows that the Windrush experience did not shape just the lives of the male black community but of the whole nation.

## 4 Conclusion

As Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) portray the same historical event, the immigrant experience of the so-called Windrush generation in post-war Britain, the aim of the thesis was to compare and contrast the authors' approach towards the literary interpretation of the Windrush story with regard to the time span between the publications of the two novels. It also considered both authors' idiosyncratic features of writing and their personal experience with the Windrush topic. The thesis explored how the two authors present the Windrush story to their readers, what perspectives and tools they use to illustrate the historical, social and cultural circumstances, and whether there is a noticeable development in the overall depiction of the Windrush experience. If a shift would be detected, the thesis was to uncover its nature. Furthermore, the work was also concerned with the question as to what extent the literary representations of Windrush generation correspond to historical data presented in the theoretical part.

To be able to comprehend the backdrop of the Windrush situation and the need to articulate the experience in fiction, the theoretical part of the thesis outlined the socio-historical facts from non-fiction sources dealing with the Windrush topic. The work briefly described the importance of World War II which introduced the racial segregation that caused the subsequent prevalence of racism in Britain. The historical background of the Windrush situation was found to be mostly described in *Small Island*. Levy depicted the rise of racism in the military as well as among the middle-class through discrimination and hostile treatment towards both the African-American and British soldiers. The white majority's disapproval of inter-racial relationships was proven to be also in accordance with the theoretical part through Gilbert and Queenie's friendship as well as Queenie's love affair with Jamaican airman Michael. On the other hand, Selvon provided a more detailed description of post-war London and the lives of the Windrush generation, including the comparison of the behaviour of the Americans and British towards the West Indians, which is based on the directness of their expression. Although he did not devote much space to the historical background of racial segregation, he communicated its presence in Britain through everyday experiences of his characters who are exposed to discrimination, even from the white immigrants. Still, both authors accurately captured the historical experience of the

Windrush generation in post-war Britain in terms of living and working conditions especially by means of juxtaposing the character's raw experiences with their initial expectations. Based on the comparison of the two novels, Levy and Selvon's literary portrayal of the Windrush generation can be, therefore, perceived as reliable representations of the historical event.

The theoretical part also dealt with the typical aspects of postcolonial and Anglophone Caribbean literature, including the Windrush narratives. These key aspects helped understand the authors' linguistic, stylistic, and thematic choices, elements which were also integral for the analysis in the practical part of the thesis. All these concepts were explored in order to create a theoretical foundation for the subsequent comparison of the two novels and the analysis of how the authors incorporate these features into their works to depict the Windrush experience. The strong sense of place underlined by the local colour proved to be central to the illustration of the Windrush experience as they emphasised the characters' feeling of exile. The concepts of Orientalism and "otherness" were explored so as to understand the characters' coping with the sense of alienation and the discrimination they were exposed to. These were most likely included due to Selvon and Levy (by proxy) coming from the former colonies – they have ample experience with otherness and being othered as they were marginalised, just like their characters, owing to the colour of their skin. Through these concepts they might have wanted to draw attention to the perception of people of colour and disrupt the binary oppositions based on race, which makes the "white" dominant over the "non-white".

The practical part of the thesis then analysed the two novels *The Lonely Londoners* and *Small Island*, considering four main aspects – form, geographical and historical setting, characters, and plot. Selvon and Levy operate with language by means of creolisation so as to capture the Windrush experience as authentically as possible. Because his principal objective was to record the raw West Indian immigrant experience in Britain, Selvon employs Caribbean Creole and calypso elements to make the overall Windrush experience more authentic. He merges various Caribbean dialects to capture the heterogenous West Indian community accumulating in Britain, and standard English to make the novel comprehensible for the non-Caribbean readers. Levy, on the other hand, alternates between

different varieties of English based on the characters and situations. She attempts to show how the English language is perceived by some of the West Indians and how it is modified to fit not only the character's personality but also the culture and the circumstances. The use of a vernacular or a collective narrative also suggests that the characters are to some extent excluded from the centre of the colonial power by refusing to get rid of the language of their motherland.

Regarding their narration strategies, while Selvon combines elements of modernism, realism, and oral tradition by which he also challenges the British literary canon of the 1950s, Levy concentrates mostly on capturing the Windrush experience using her parents' stories and meticulous research she has done on the topic. Each generation of writers grasps and deals with the topic of the Windrush generation slightly differently. They present the historical event from various perspectives, either as an account of a variety of experiences, interpreted as individual as well as collective through the formation of community, or as an insight into the minds and their processing of the circumstances. Levy showed it is necessary to juxtapose the stories, viewpoints, and experiences not only of the Windrush generation, but also of the British, who were part of the overall experience, to form a comprehensive opinion about the subject matter and to understand it.

In both novels, humour functions mostly as a tool to lighten the uncomfortable, if not unbearable, situations the Windrush generation was exposed to within the British society and to point out how bizarre the white majority's treatment and the situations often were. It makes the bitter aspects of the Windrush experience more digestible not only for the readers but mainly for the characters who use humour to cope with the hostile environment into which they try to assimilate. Levy also attempts to balance the comedy between the black and white characters by making fun of them both, emphasising the equity as well as vulnerability of the characters regardless of their skin colour.

As far as geographical and historical settings are concerned, Samuel Selvon presents London as a newly arising multicultural city which affects the characters of *The Lonely Londoners* either positively or negatively. Levy depicts the capital city as a war-torn place which reminds the Windrush generation of the importance of the past while simultaneously looking towards a better, war-less future. Just like in the geographical setting, in the

historical setting Selvon concentrates more on the post-war situation in Britain and paints the Windrush experience as something that commenced only after the Second World War. On the other hand, Levy highlights the relevance of the war as she spends more time describing the lives of both the Caribbean people and the British before and during wartime rather than after it and considers war a significant part of the Windrush story. Levy examines how war shaped the social circumstances in both Jamaica and Britain and affected the characters' lives as well as their perception of the Windrush situation by means of juxtaposing the past with the present and the characters' dreamt-of future.

The chapter on characters explored how post-war Britain shapes the identities of the Windrush generation and how the characters react to the hostile environment. While Selvon's characters are relatively compliant towards the hostility as they wish to blend in the British society without conflicts, Levy's Caribbean characters are more daring and not afraid to confront the British treatment, which reflects her approach towards the antipathy as a second-generation writer.

As for male and female representation, most of the characters in Selvon's novel are men since he presents the Windrush migration primarily as a male experience, which to some extent marginalises women's participation in it. The women in *The Lonely Londoners* are, therefore, usually voiceless, nameless, or subjugated. The reason behind this could be ascribed to the fact that most of the passengers on the *Empire Windrush* were men, many of which were ex-servicemen seeking work in England. Another reason could be the literary contribution which comprised of mostly male Caribbean representatives. The majority of their novels' protagonists were men, the stories themselves lacking in female leads and perspectives. Levy confronts Selvon's treatment of women and gives voices to female characters who are portrayed as more knowledgeable and as those who could contribute to the British society more than men. The women in *Small Island* are also given space to express their thoughts and opinions for they sometimes criticise or even ridicule male characters and their sexuality to accentuate the objectification and general treatment of women.

Andrea Levy and Samuel Selvon gave voices to the minorities through whose perspectives they described the Windrush story and emphasised the important position of

postcolonial writings within historical fiction. As mentioned earlier, both authors accurately illustrated the historical experience of the Windrush generation in areas of housing and work when compared with the findings of the non-fiction secondary sources in the theoretical part of the thesis. They highlighted similar aspects of the immigrant experience such as the degree of hostility against the West Indian immigrants which generate the feelings of exile and alienation, the employment of humour as a coping mechanism against the British treatment, or disillusionment and unrealistic expectations created about Britain which are eventually shattered when confronted with the reality.

The differences between the two authors mostly lie in the treatment of language, narrative techniques and perspectives applied, the geographical setting, representation of male and female characters, and the approach to the plot in the novels, all of which influenced the literary interpretation of the Windrush experience. However, the most prominent differences were observed in Levy's incorporation of both the British and the Caribbean viewpoints as well as strong female characters and their perspectives. *Small Island* confronts the male-centred narration of *The Lonely Londoners* and even more importantly, Levy is much more optimistic than Selvon in the ending and the possible resolution. This might be because of the authors' integration of their personal experience within the stories: Selvon being a man and a first-generation author, Levy being a woman and a second-generation writer. Still, there are more similarities overall which highlight that the portrayal of the Windrush generation in both the novels shares common objectives – to draw attention to the multiple interpretations of historical events, to make personal histories visible again and though these stories establish a forthright position within the British canon.

## 5 Works Cited

- Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. E-book, Routledge, 2013.
- . *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004.
- Bentley, Nick. *Contemporary British Fiction*. E-book, Edinburgh UP, 2008.
- . "Form and Language in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*". *ARIEL*, vol. 36, no. 3–4, July 2005, pp. 67–81, <https://tinyurl.com/3m3f397r>. Accessed June 2021.
- Birat, Kathie. "Making Sense of Memory in the Writings of the Caribbean Diaspora: Sam Selvon's London Calypso." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 55, no. 6, 27 Dec. 2019, pp. 824–835., <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2019.1683349>. Accessed 8 June 2021.
- Blair, J. Eleanor, and Kenneth A. Williams. *The Handbook on Caribbean Education*. E-book, Information Age Publishing, 2021.
- Bradbury, Malcolm. *Atlas literatury: literární toulky světem*. Translated by Vladimír Krivánek, Cesty, 2003.
- Cambridge Dictionary. "Creolization". *Cambridge Dictionary*, 2021, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/creolization>. Accessed 27 June 2021.
- Charles, Emily. "'They Treated Us Royally'? The Experiences of Black Americans in Britain during the Second World War." *Imperial War Museums*, <https://iwm.org.uk/history/they-treated-us-royally-the-experiences-of-black-americans-in-britain-during-the-second-world-war>. Accessed 9 June 2021.
- Darwin, Dr John. "Britain, the Commonwealth and the End of Empire." *BBC*, 3 Mar. 2011, [https://bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/endofempire\\_overview\\_01.shtml#seven](https://bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/endofempire_overview_01.shtml#seven). Accessed 9 June 2021.
- Donnell, Alison. "The Lives of Others: Happenings, Histories and Literary Healing". *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, edited by Michael A. Bucknor, and Alison Donnell, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://bookcentral.proquest.com/lib/natl-ebooks/detail.action?docID=716494>. Accessed 11 Mar. 2021.

- Fryer, Peter. *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. E-book, Pluto Press, 2018.
- Gentleman, Amelia. *Windrush Betrayal: Exposing the Hostile Environment*. E-book, Guardian Faber, 2019.
- . "The Unwanted: The Secret Windrush Files review – who could feel proud of Britain after this?". *The Guardian*, 24 June 2019, <https://theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/jun/24/the-unwanted-the-secret-windrush-files-review-who-could-feel-proud-of-britain-after-this>. Accessed 21 Feb. 2021.
- Grmelová, Anna. "From Loneliness to Encounter: London in the Windrush Generation Novels of Sam Selvon and Andrea Levy". *Litteraria Pragensia*, vol. 20, no. 40, 2010, pp. 70–84.
- Habila, Helon. "Out of the shadows". *The Guardian*, 17 Mar. 2007, <https://theguardian.com/books/2007/mar/17/society1>. Accessed 6 June 2021.
- Head, Dominic. *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000*. E-book, Cambridge UP, 2002.
- Hickman, Christie. "Andrea Levy: Under the skin of history". *The Independent*, 6 Feb. 2004, <https://independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/andrea-levy-under-the-skin-of-history-67727>. Accessed 6 June 2021.
- Hiddleston, Jane. *Understanding Postcolonialism*. Acumen, 2009.
- Higgins, Michael, et al. *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Culture*. Cambridge UP, 2010.
- Innes, Lyn. "Andrea Levy obituary". *The Guardian*, 15 Feb. 2019, <https://theguardian.com/books/2019/feb/15/andrea-levy-obituary>. Accessed 18 Mar. 2021.
- James, Cynthia. "You'll Soon Get Used to Our Language": Language, Parody and West Indian Identity in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*. *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2007, <https://doi.org/10.33596/ANTH.89>. Accessed 11 June 2021.

- Jordison, Sam. "How The Lonely Londoners Extends the Novel's Language". *The Guardian*, 16 Oct. 2018, <https://theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2018/oct/16/how-the-lonely-londoners-extends-the-novels-language>. Accessed 8 June 2021.
- Keen, Suzanne. "The Historical Turn in British Fiction". *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, edited by James F. English, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, pp. 167–182.
- Kitchener, Lord. "LORD KITCHENER – London Is the Place for Me". *YouTube*, uploaded by bashwar22, 16 Sept. 2009, <https://youtu.be/dGt21q1AjuI>. Accessed 21 Feb. 2021.
- Klanicová, Eliška. *Caribbeans in Britain as Reflected in Selvon's The Lonely Londoners*. Brno, 2010. Masaryk U, Faculty of Arts, Bachelor's thesis.
- Klarer, Mario. *An Introduction to Literary Studies*. Routledge, 1999.
- Krčková, Klára. *Diasporic Features in the Fiction of Andrea Levy*. Olomouc, 2013. Palacký U, Faculty of Arts, Bachelor's thesis.
- Kushner, Tony. *The Battle of Britishness: Migrant Journeys, 1685 to the Present*. Manchester UP, 2012.
- Levy, Andrea. *Small Island*. Tinder Press, 2017.
- . "In honour of its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Andrea Levy talked about her novel, SMALL ISLAND". *YouTube*, uploaded by Headline Books, 14 Oct. 2014, [https://youtube.com/watch?v=WyUR6gZyYLE&ab\\_channel=HeadlineBooks](https://youtube.com/watch?v=WyUR6gZyYLE&ab_channel=HeadlineBooks). Accessed 17 Mar. 2021.
- . "Back to My Own Country: an essay by Andrea Levy". *The British Library*, 2014, <https://bl.uk/windrush/articles/back-to-my-own-country-an-essay-by-andrea-levy>. Accessed 17 Mar. 2021.
- Levy, Andrea, and Blake Morrison. "Andrea Levy Interviewed by Blake Morrison." *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol. 20, no. 3, 18 Nov. 2009, pp. 325–338, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09574040903285859>. Accessed 6 June 2021.

- “London – Reconstruction after World War II”. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., <https://britannica.com/place/London/Reconstruction-after-World-War-II>. Accessed 25 Feb. 2021.
- Lowe, Hannah. “An Introduction to Andrea Levy's *Small Island*.” *The British Library*, 4 Oct. 2018, <https://bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-andrea-levys-small-island>. Accessed 8 June 2021.
- Lunn, Kenneth. “The British State and Immigration, 1945–51: New Light on the Empire Windrush.” *Immigrants & Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora*, vol. 8., no. 1-2, 1989, pp. 161–174, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619288.1989.9974713>. Accessed 21 Feb. 2021.
- Mazzon, Gabriella. “English and the development of postcolonial literature”. *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, Jan. 2012, pp. 703–738, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9781107007031.003>. Accessed 15 Mar. 2021.
- Mead, Matthew. “Empire Windrush: The cultural memory of an imaginary arrival”. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 45, no. 2, June 2009, pp. 137–149, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449850902819920>. Accessed 20 Feb. 2021.
- Nasta, Susheila. “The Moses trilogy: Sam Selvon discusses his London novels”. Wasafari, vol. 1, no. 2, 1985, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02690058508574079>. Accessed 17 Mar. 2021.
- . “*The Lonely Londoners*: A New Way of Reading and Writing the City”. *The British Library*, 4 Oct. 2018, <https://bl.uk/windrush/articles/the-lonely-londoners-a-new-way-of-reading-and-writing-the-city>. Accessed 17 Mar. 2021.
- . Introduction. *The Lonely Londoners*, by Samuel Selvon, Penguin Books, 2006, pp. v-xvii.
- Nasta, Susheila, and Hetta Howes. “The Loneliness of the Lonely Londoners”. *Solitudes: Past and Present*, 26 Oct. 2020, <https://solitudes.qmul.ac.uk/blog/the-loneliness-of-the-lonely-londoners/>. Accessed 13 June 2021.
- Panayi, Panikos. *An Immigration History of Britain: Multicultural Racism Since 1800*. E-book, Routledge, 2014.

- Okawa, Rachelle. "Humour in exile: The subversive effects of laughter in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia*". *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 49, no. 1, Feb. 2013, pp. 16–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2011.633012>. Accessed 10 June 2021.
- Olusoga, David. *Black and British: A Forgotten History*. E-book, Pan Macmillan, 2016.
- . "The Unwanted: The Secret Windrush Files BBC Documentary on Caribbean Blacks mistreatment". *YouTube*, uploaded by ignoredvoices, 26 June 2019, [https://youtu.be/f\\_rzJTNZSLM](https://youtu.be/f_rzJTNZSLM). Accessed 21 Feb. 2021.
- Phillips, Everard Mark. "Recognising the Language of Calypso as 'Symbolic Action' in Resolving Conflict in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago." *The London School of Economics and Political Science*, ProQuest LLC, 2014.
- Ramdin, Ron. *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain*. E-book, Verso, 2017.
- "Samuel Selvon." *The British Library*. <https://bl.uk/people/samuel-selvon>. Accessed 8 June 2021.
- Savory, Elaine. "Postcolonialism and Caribbean literature". *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, Jan. 2012, pp. 215–249, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9781107007017.009>. Accessed 11 Mar. 2021.
- Selvon, Samuel. *The Lonely Londoners*. Penguin Books, 2006.
- Solomos, John. *Race and Racism in Britain*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Spencer, Ian R. G.. *British Immigration Policy Since 1939: The Making of Multi-Racial Britain*, Taylor & Francis Group, 1997. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/natl-ebooks/detail.action?docID=166881>. Accessed 3 Mar. 2021.
- "The Blitz Around Britain". *Imperial War Museums*, <https://iwm.org.uk/history/the-blitz-around-britain>. Accessed 24 Feb. 2021.
- "The Bombing of Britain 1940-1945 Exhibition". *University of Exeter*, <https://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/collegeofhumanities/history/res>

[earchcentres/centreforthestudyofwarstateandsociety/bombing/THE\\_BOMBING\\_OF\\_BRITAIN.pdf](https://www.iph.gov.uk/researchcentres/centreforthestudyofwarstateandsociety/bombing/THE_BOMBING_OF_BRITAIN.pdf). Accessed 25 Feb. 2021.

“The End of the British Empire After the Second World War”. *Imperial War Museums*, <https://iwm.org.uk/history/the-end-of-the-british-empire-after-the-second-world-war>. Accessed 25 Feb. 2021.

“The Hostile Environment explained”. *Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants*, <https://www.jcwi.org.uk/the-hostile-environment-explained>. Accessed 20 Mar. 2021.

Vásquez, Sam. *Humor in the Caribbean Literary Canon*. E-book, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Wambu, Onyekachi. “History - British History in Depth: Black British Literature since Windrush.” *BBC*, 3 Mar. 2011, [https://bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/literature\\_01.shtml](https://bbc.co.uk/history/british/modern/literature_01.shtml). Accessed 20 Mar. 2021.

Walkowitz, Rebecca L. “The post-consensus novel: Minority culture, multiculturalism, and transnational comparison”. *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-century English Novel*, Cambridge UP, 2009, pp. 223–237.

Wasson, Ellis. *A History of Modern Britain: 1714 to the Present*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2016. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/natl-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4187340>. Accessed 28 Feb. 2021.

Weiss, Timothy. “The *Windrush* generation”. *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-century English Novel*. Cambridge UP, 2009, pp. 163–175.

Whittle, Matthew. *Post-War British Literature and the “End of Empire”*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Winder, Robert. *Bloody Foreigners: The Story of Immigration to Britain*. E-book, Abacus, 2010.

“Windrush scandal explained”. *Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants*, <https://jcwi.org.uk/windrush-scandal-explained>. Accessed 14 Feb. 2021.

Winston, James. "The Black Experience in Twentieth-Century Britain". *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Black Experience and the Empire*, edited by Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004, pp. 347–386.

Wyke, Clement H. *Sam Selvon's Dialectal Style and Fictional Strategy*. E-book, U of British Columbia P, 1991.

Young, Robert J. C. *Postcolonialism: A Historical Introduction*. E-book, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016.