

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI

FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

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**WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE NOVELS OF ANDREA LEVY**

**Bakalářská práce**

Olomouc 2024

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Studijní program: Anglická filologie

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma Woman Characters in the Novels of Andrea Levy vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla úplný seznam citované a použité literatury.

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Podpis .....

## **Poděkování**

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# 1 Introduction

“There are some words that once spoken will split the world in two. There would be the life before you breathed them and then the altered life after they'd been said.” This quote from the novel *Small Island* captures the power of truth, communication, and the consequences of our choices. It guides the characters throughout the story as they face critical moments and their decision to speak or stay silent determines their journey.

Andrea Levy in her novels *Small Island* and *Every Light in the House Burnin'* offers a complex analysis of social dynamics through the perspective of both immigrants and native Britons. The theme of immigrants coming to a new country full of prejudices and their assimilation into society is a recurrent theme in Levy's work. She tells the story drawing on her own life and experiences of her parents coming to England during the Windrush era.

*Small Island* follows the story of Jamaican immigrants Hortense and Gilbert coming to England during the Windrush era portraying their struggles to integrate into British society. As newcomers of different races, they have to face the harsh realities of prejudices, discrimination, and racism that prevail in British society. *Every Light in the House Burnin'* follows the life of the first generation of Jamaican immigrants' children. The narrative through Angela's lens shows family dynamics and their assimilation into British society facing hostility and racism. This novel is highly inspired by Andrea Levy's life showing different experiences from her childhood.

This thesis is focused on racism and feminism that are experienced by immigrants coming to England, and that is why this work will focus on these themes in two separate chapters. The remaining chapters will discuss the portrayal of woman characters in the selected novels and their impact on the overall storyline.

The first chapter will focus on the life of the author Andrea Levy. This chapter includes biographical facts about the author and her family. Part of this chapter is also her work and awards for her work. The second chapter will look at the historical background of feminism and its waves. It consists of the analysis of the first, second, third, and today's wave of feminism. The third chapter delves into the theme of racism and its historical background. It is primarily focused on the racism of immigrants as this perspective is relevant to this thesis. The Fourth chapter deals with the analysis of woman characters in

the novels specifically their development throughout the story. This chapter is divided into subchapters that focus on the story of Hortense, Queenie, and Angela separately. The next subchapter of character analysis is a chapter that focuses on their impact on the overall storyline.

The characters will be analyzed from the perspective of racism and feminism and what influence these trends have on their development. The analysis will focus not only on the characters but also on the environment in which they live or grow up.

## 2 Andrea Levy Biography

Andrea Levy was born in London, England to Jamaican immigrants and she was the youngest of four siblings. She grew up in a working-class society in North London and she was influenced by her upbringing and the experience of her parents. Her father, Winston Levy, was part of the Windrush generation coming to England between 1948 and 1971 due to the labor shortages and Britain's call for help in post-war reconstruction. Levy's mother joined Levy's father not long after his arrival. As Levy portrays the experiences of her parents in her novels, Levy's father had an idealized view of England. He thought that he would be viewed as a normal British citizen and that he would acclimatize smoothly. However, the opposite was true. He had to face prejudice and discrimination in the white society of Britain.

Even though born in England, as a second-generation immigrant in Britain Levy had to face prejudice and discrimination in what was still a very white society. She attended Highbury High School. As Pavlína Flajšarová mentioned in her book Levy "was educated to be English and her classmates, most of them of white Anglo-Saxon origin, would never have to grow up to question whether they were English or not"<sup>1</sup>. It was not until her work life that she had to face discrimination. After graduation, she started to study textile design at Middlesex Polytechnic. After her studies, Levy tried several jobs one of which was a costume assistant at the Royal Opera House. During this time, she met her future husband, Bill Mayblin, with whom she also established a graphic design company. It was not until her thirties that she started to write.

In her novels, there is the recurrent portrayal of struggles and triumphs achieved by Caribbean immigrants in post-war Britain. In her writings, Levy very often shows themes of identity, race, belonging, or feminism based on her own experiences. Typical for Levy's narratives is a changing of narrators and timeline. Her father's death was one of the reasons she wanted to start writing about the fate of Caribbean immigrants. Levy's career took off after the publication of her first novel *Every Light in the House Burnin'*. In this novel, Levy portrays her experience growing up in an immigrant family exploring the themes of belonging, family, and racism. However, it was her later works that brought her to light and that marked her as a voice of contemporary British literature. In her novel *Small Island* Levy portrays the experiences of her parents and the Windrush generation during and after

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<sup>1</sup> Pavlína Flajšarová, *Diaspora in the Fiction of Andrea Levy*, (Olomouc, Palacký University, 2014), 57.



World War II. Using long flashbacks, *Small Island* goes beyond London also showing life in Jamaica and India. As Duboin suggested Levy uses London as “a liminal space in which all the characters without distinction have to negotiate their place and reconsider their self-image whether in terms of race, gender, class or nationhood.”<sup>2</sup> This novel was critically acclaimed and won the Orange Prize for fiction and Whitbread Book of the Year. Her other novels include *The Long Song*, *Fruit of the Lemon*, or *Never Far from Nowhere*.

Her works were critically acclaimed and celebrated for bringing the light to the realities of the Windrush generation and their descendants. Immigrants often praised Levy’s work and how she captured the accuracy and authenticity of immigrant experiences. Even though they praised her works, sometimes they also criticized her for portraying hard realities which resulted in overshadowing the positive aspect of Caribbean communities. Her stories can be universal and allow people from different backgrounds to connect and sympathize with the struggles of her characters.

During her career, Levy stayed committed to giving voice to marginalized groups. She also tried to shed light on the contributions of Jamaican immigrants to British society that were often overlooked. Her work resonates not only for its historical significance but also for its timeless narratives about racism, identity, and belonging. Andrea Levy passed away in 2019 leaving her legacy behind.

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<sup>2</sup> Corinne Duboin. “Contested Identities: Migrant Stories and Liminal Selves in Andrea Levy’s ‘Small Island.’” *Obsidian* 12, no. 1 (2011): 15, accessed May 5, 2024, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44489338>.

### 3 Brief historical background of feminism

Feminism is a word that has resonated in society for centuries and it accompanies us in the endless struggle for gender equality. The term itself is derived from French “feminisme” and according to the Oxford English Dictionary it is “the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men.”<sup>3</sup> From the beginning to the present time feminism has evolved, adapted, and responded to different social, political, and cultural movements. Feminism emerged as a reaction to the inequality and discrimination that women felt in the patriarchal society.

The first wave of feminism started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was focused on fundamental rights such as the right to vote also known as suffragette and for improving women’s legal status. Women fought for the right to be involved in the political process and influence decision-making which was perceived as controversial and revolutionary. Another important aspect of this wave was the right to education for women. Feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Emily Davies argued that all women should have the same right to education as men and that educated women would contribute to the development of society. Mary Wollstonecraft, “founding mother”<sup>4</sup>, was one of the most important figures of feminism and as Arianne Chernock mentioned in her book *Men and the Making of Modern British Feminism* she “spoke up, quite loudly, for what had been until then a largely silent section of human race.”<sup>5</sup>

As women started to enter the labor market, they became more independent but still had to fight against discrimination and social norms that limited their rights and opportunities. It was these inequalities that led to organizing feminist movements. In the United Kingdom, the suffrage movement was led by two main groups. First was the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) which was led by Millicent Fawcett. This group advocated changes through peaceful and legal means. Their strategy was in rational argumentation, persuasion, and moralizing pressure on the political leadership. The second group was the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) which was led by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, and they advocated changes in more militant tactics. Christabel Pankhurst remarked: “It is unendurable to think of another

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<sup>3</sup> „Feminism, “Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, accessed January 28, 2024, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/feminism?q=feminism>

<sup>4</sup> Arianne Chernock, *Men and the Making of Modern British Feminism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 12

<sup>5</sup> Chernock, *Men and the Making of Modern British Feminism*, 12

generation of women wasting their lives for vote. We must not lose any more time. We must act.”<sup>6</sup> Suffragettes in this group adopted the motto “deeds, not words.”<sup>7</sup> Part of their strategy was hunger strikes, public demonstrations, vandalism, or even small bombings. Their efforts led to women’s suffrage in many countries and laid the foundation for future feminist movements that followed, marking the beginning of organized efforts to challenge gender-based discrimination and advocate for women’s rights.

The second wave which developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century emphasized a broader range of issues including reproductive rights, gender roles, and sexual violence. One of the main issues advocated in this wave was reproductive rights. Feminists emphasized that women should have control over their bodies, and they should decide about reproduction including the questions of contraception and abortion. In 1967, a law was passed that legalized abortion in the UK. Although abortion was legalized, women still had to meet several criteria to have an abortion. There was a significant shift in the questions of contraception as it became available to married women during the 1960s and to all women in 1974. This phase of feminism brought an emphasis on women’s freedom and autonomy and created a space for discussion of gender identity and sexual orientation. This era brought a greater awareness of gender stereotypes and a critique of patriarchal structures in society. Author of *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir, was one of the most important feminists of this wave and the author of the famous statement “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”<sup>8</sup> Women called for equal opportunity to choose their careers

and for equal wages. They fought against the discrimination women faced in the working sphere and advocated for changes in corporate policy to remove barriers to women’s career growth. In this wave, feminists also fought against domestic abuse, and they tried to bring awareness about this hidden form of gender violence and change conditions for victims of domestic violence and sexual harassment. The establishment of rape crisis centers and shelters for women fleeing domestic violence were key achievements of this period. However, the second wave was criticized for its focus on the experiences of white, middle-class women and often overlooking the challenges faced by

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<sup>6</sup> Kristin Olsen, *Chronology of Women’s History* (London, Greenwood Press, 1994), 196.

<sup>7</sup> “Start of the suffragette movement,” Parliament UK, accessed March 14, 2024, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/overview/startssuffragette/>

<sup>8</sup> Judith Butler, *Sex and Gender in Some de Beauvoir’s Second Sex* (New Heaven, Yale University Press, 1986), 35

women of different colors, lesbians, and women from lower social classes. This critique led to more intersectional approaches in the later waves of feminism.

The third wave emerging in the 1990s builds on the gains of the first and second wave but tries to address some of their shortcomings, particularly their focus on the experiences of white, middle-class women. As mentioned in a book by Genz and Brabon “The very invocation of ‘third wave feminism’ and the mobilisation of the adjective ‘third’ indicate a desire to establish a link with previous feminist waves and ensure a continuation of feminist principles and ideas.”<sup>9</sup> This phase emphasizes the importance of dealing with intersectionality, that is, the various factors such as race, class, sexual orientation, or position within the society that uniquely affect each woman’s life. This phase was marked by the rise of the internet, rapid globalization, and social and cultural shifts which led to a focus on recognizing and respecting the diversity of women’s identities.

The third wave called for a rethinking of the notion of universal female identity and the idea that gender oppression was the primary axis of inequality for all women. Reproduction rights remained an important issue with the third-wave feminists defending the successes of the second-wave against legislative and cultural attacks. However, they have also broadened the scope to issues such as the portrayal of women in the media, sexual autonomy, and the challenge to traditional notions of beauty. The term third-wave feminism is often connected with Rebecca Walker which she first introduced in the article where “she encouraged young women to join their (second-wave) mothers and embrace feminism<sup>10</sup>. Rebecca Walker while not British herself influenced by her ideas of feminism at the global level including in Great Britain. Among the third-wave pioneers was also Shannon Liss. “We are not postfeminist feminists. We are the third wave!”<sup>11</sup> Walker and Liss were radically against being referred to as post-feminism feminists.

The current era of feminism can be characterized as a fourth wave. Today, feminism is a vibrant and dynamic movement that is constantly evolving and adapting to changes in society especially its evolution in the digitalization and use of social media. Its importance lies in the fact that it helps to expose and address gender inequalities and contributes to the

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<sup>9</sup> Stéphanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* (Edinburgh, Edinburg University Press, 2018), 158

<sup>10</sup> Genz and Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*, 157

<sup>11</sup> Genz and Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*, 160

creation of a society in which women and men are valued based on their abilities and not gender stereotypes. This wave emphasizes that gender inequality is connected to other forms of discrimination and that feminist struggles are not monolithic, but the experiences of women are diverse. Digital space plays an important part in the fourth wave of feminism. Social media provides a platform for spreading feminist messages, creating campaigns, and organizing protests. “Such apps are perceived as opening up space for more democratic and diverse representations that do not fit the narrow parameters of beauty valorized by the popular mainstream media.”<sup>12</sup>

The fourth wave criticizes stereotypical and simplistic portrayals of women and calls for greater diversity and representation of women in all media, advertising, film, and television. It also highlights the importance of inclusive education and representation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. In 2014 new campaign HeForShe was launched, and its ambassador became a British actress, Emma Watson. This campaign aims for gender equality not only advocating women’s rights but also men’s rights. It aims to make men feel comfortable as being feminists. Criticism of the fourth wave is often directed at its over-reliance on digital technologies and social media and that there are types of cultures that can contribute to a toxic environment of online discussions. It extends the feminist struggle into new spheres and harnesses the power of digital communication to achieve a wider impact.

While many rights have been achieved, there are still many challenges that need to be addressed. Feminism remains an important movement that fights for an equal society for all its members. The journey of feminism is far from over and its evolution shows us the power of collective action and the desire for an equal society for everyone.

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<sup>12</sup> Sofia P. Caldeira, Sander De Ridder, and Sofie Van Bauwel. “Exploring the Politics of Gender Representation on Instagram: Self-Representations of Femininity.” *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 5, no. 1 (2018): 23–42. <https://doi.org/10.11116/digest.5.1.2>.

## 4 Historical Background of Racism

After World War II, Great Britain underwent significant demographical changes due to immigration from Britain's former colonies such as the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa. These changes were driven by many factors such as the need for labor to help rebuild Britain, Britain's colonial ties, and opportunities that the UK offered. However, instead of a warm welcome immigrants had to face prejudice and discrimination. As Hiro remarked "Negative attributes (such) as dirt, poverty, inferior social status, low intelligence, animal sexuality, primitiveness and violence."<sup>13</sup> Instead of a warm welcome immigrants had to face prejudice and discrimination. In 1948 SS Empire Windrush arrived in Britain carrying hundreds of Caribbean immigrants who should help to rebuild Great Britain. The term Windrush rooted in society describes a generation of immigrants and their antecedents who came to Britain after WWII between 1948 and 1971. Caribbean immigrants did not have the same rights as Britons even though they were British colonial citizens. They had to face discrimination in housing policies, they had limited access to education and different employment opportunities. White race was always considered to be superior to other races and the race that sets normative norms for humanity.

In the 1950s and 1960s due to economic uncertainty and housing shortages there were escalating racial tensions. In London, Nottingham, and Bristol there were common acts of violence such as riots and racial attacks towards ethnic minorities. As a result of these acts of violence British government set new legislation to promote equality. In 1965 British government passed the first of three race relations acts. This act prohibited discrimination in public places. As Solomos remarked the act was "fairly limited in scope the Act was important in confirming the government's concern about racial discrimination and its broad objective of using legislative action to achieve good race relations."<sup>14</sup> That is why over 70 percent of complaints were of the scope of this Act and it needed to be extended. In 1968 the extended version of the first act was passed. It prohibited discrimination in housing, employment, and public services. In 1976 the last Race Relations Act was passed, and it was extended to include forms of indirect discrimination. However, despite these legislative efforts, racism persisted in society and institutions. One of the main cases in the 1990s was the murder of Stephen Lawrence. Macpherson's report showed the existence of

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<sup>13</sup> Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British*, (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1973), 281.

<sup>14</sup> John Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, (London, Pelgrave Macmillan, 2003), 80.

institutional racism and prompted calls for greater reform. Despite progress in the fight against discrimination and racism, problems of systematic racism and social inequality persist.

## 5 Analysis of Character Development

### 5.1 Evolvement throughout the narrative

#### 5.1.1 Queenie Bligh

Queenie Bligh is a white British woman who is one of the central characters within the *Small Island*. Andrea Levy's portrayal of this character is an astounding story of a person changing against the backdrop of post-war Britain. Her evolution from a young and naive lady to someone with deep sympathy and courage points out not only individual growth but also shows changes in social and cultural norms of British society at that time. This character shows a potential for change in a society that is coming to terms with the aftermath of war, the collapse of the empire, and the emerging movement for racial equality.

Queenie's story begins in the prologue of the novel where she was introduced as a daughter of a farmer. She was raised in a farming family in North England. Every year there was an organized outing for butchers and their families and at this outing, she met a black people for the first time. It was also her first encounter with racism. Graham, Queenie's parent's employee, remarked "She can't understand what I'm saying, ... They're not civilized. They only understand drums."<sup>15</sup> He was referring to a Jamaican woman whom they met at an African exhibition making clothes. These were the prejudices that the immigrants had to face. Because of their skin color, they were perceived as less educated, as villains or primitives. Queenie grew up in a family and in a society that only judged colonial citizens and in society that thought it was the white race that defined norms of civility. However, by the reaction of the African man, who overheard mocking of Queenie by Graham, it was not the immigrants who were not civilized, it was exactly the opposite because it was the African man who showed how a civilized person would behave.

When Queenie was older she moved to London, where she was invited by her "Mother's posh sister"<sup>16</sup> Aunt Dorothy. This move shows her boldness and desire for independence and a break from traditional roles, and it is the first step on her journey to a different life. Queenie's behavior was not typical for women at this time. She wanted to escape her rural and conservative upbringing and create her path which can signal early

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<sup>15</sup> Andrea Levy, *Small Island* (London, Tinder Press, 2022), 5.

<sup>16</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 247.



feminist thoughts emerging in the society. She had more liberal views and her departure from her family and its values signals the start of Queenie's evolution.

After coming to London Aunt Dorothy hired for Queenie a teacher to help her improve Queenie's pronunciation. "She'll see you married to a prince."<sup>17</sup> This improvement should help Queenie in her courting and marrying to a higher class. Even though Aunt Dorothy came from the same social class as Queenie, she was aware of the class status of everyone she met, and she intended to help Queenie climb the social ladder. Segregation and classism have always been part of Queenie's life. Even though Queenie may want to climb the social ladder it would not be by marrying someone from a higher class but with her work and efforts.

Not long after Queenie arrived in London, she started working in her aunt's shop. She worked as a shop assistant. Her aunt dismisses a lot of men who come to the shop only to charm Queenie. However, only one aunt approved, who was "tall, skinny, not bad looking"<sup>18</sup> as Queenie described him. He started to come to the shop twice a day. "Has he asked you yet?"<sup>19</sup> Aunt Dorothy was determined to talk Queenie into courting this man. One day he asked Queenie out and introduced himself as Bernard Bligh. As a result of Aunt's efforts Queenie agreed to go out with Bernard and they started courting.

From the beginning Queenie's and Bernard's relationship was one-sided. Queenie was convinced by her aunt rather than her own will to start courting Bernard. "Is that all courting is?"<sup>20</sup> One day Queenie asked her aunt because she thought it would be dreamier, but she found it so boring. She did not find anything interesting in Bernard and she was annoyed by his flaws that she was noticing. "Bernard, I've enjoyed our little trips, but I don't think we should see each other anymore."<sup>21</sup> When Queenie tried to end their court, Bernard showed his emotions for the first time, and it was the first exciting thing that Queenie saw in him. Bernard liked her very much and he wanted another chance. After their walk, they went to Aunt's Dorothy shop where they found her on the floor and realized that she was dead. At the funeral, Queenie's mother told her that she was welcomed back home. "I've got some good news for you. I'm getting married, Mother, to Bernard Bligh."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 249.

<sup>18</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 251.

<sup>19</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 252.

<sup>20</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 255.

<sup>21</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 255.

<sup>22</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 258.

as a reaction to her mother's proposal to come back home Queenie decided to marry Bernard however not out of love but of fear and self-interest. The thought of coming back home to her family's principles and values frightened Queenie so much that she rather marry the man whom she did not love.

After Queenie and Bernard got married Queenie moved to Bernard's house in London. Their marriage was complicated and full of unmet expectations. Bernard portrays conservative views of British society whereas Queenie has more progressive views and consequently this shows signs of tension in their marriage even before Bernard's deployment. This tension can be seen in their sexual relationship which Queenie sees as a disgusting process and she realizes that the romantic aspect of the relationship is more important than she thought. Queenie was struggling with the expectations of society to fit into the typical housewife role. Their marriage can be seen as a compromise to these expectations that she conforms to despite her deeper desires for a more fulfilling partnership and life.

Bernard's deployment had a significant impact on Queenie's personal growth. From the beginning of the novel Queenie is not a prototypical portrait of a woman and Briton in general. She is open-minded and progressive and does not show signs of racism like other characters. When she moved to Bernard's house, she wanted to rent the rooms they did not use to people in need, but Bernard did not agree with her. During Bernard's absence, Queenie was forced to take care of herself and Bernard's father which led to her independence and renting the house to Jamaican immigrants. As Pavlína Flajšarová mentioned in her book "The Combination of Victoria and Queenie, as she is called, makes a clear allusion to Queen Victoria, the Empress of the British Empire, which also included India. Thus, symbolically, if Queenie is seen as a parallel figure to Victoria, the Queen; she rules over Bernard."<sup>23</sup> (165) By renting out the rooms to people of color she was making a statement challenging the social norms at that time and challenging the expected behavior of women at that time.

Queenie's first tenants were three officers who needed a place to stay while they were on leave. At this time Queenie met Michael for the first time. Their relationship is in contrast to different social statuses and backgrounds. Jamaican immigrant Michael represents the oppressed black population in Britain while Queenie represents the

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<sup>23</sup> Pavlína Flajšarová, *Diaspora in the Fiction of Andrea Levy*, (Olomouc, Palacký University, 2014), 165.

privileged white majority. Queenie and her marriage to Bernard show the constraints that women in this period had to face. However, her new relationship with Michael helped her to break free from these constraints to some extent and it helped her to fight against patriarchal structures that confine her. Since Queenie lives in a society that despises immigrants and people of different races in general, in the beginning, she has prejudices towards Michael. Her actions even though well-intentioned sometimes displayed the very stereotypes and social norms that she tried to challenge. For example, in the beginning of their relationship, Queenie was surprised by Michael's manners and this reflects how low expectations British society had towards immigrants. Consequently, Queenie's behavior can lead to the suggestion that even the most open-minded individuals can contribute to racism. However, with the development of their relationship, Queenie confronted her prejudices and started to see Michael as an individual who deserved respect and dignity.

The short relationship between Queenie and Michael lasted only a few days while he was staying in her house. However, it had a significant impact on her marriage with Bernard. Michael was very kind towards Arthur which she had not seen from Bernard because he never paid that much attention to his father or anything in general. During Bernard's absence, Queenie experienced kindness and compassion which she never felt with Bernard. One night Queenie and Michael had sex together and for the first time, she took pleasure in sex. This experience contrasts the experiences she had with Bernard during which she usually "worked out what she could make for dinner."<sup>24</sup> Through her experiences with Michael, Queenie realized that her marriage to Bernard lacked something and that she married him for stability rather than love. The romantic aspect that Queenie lacked in her marriage with Bernard may be the reason why she could not get pregnant.

When the narrative moves on to the post-war era Queenie rented room to Jamaican immigrants, Gilbert, and Hortense. Queenie and Gilbert met during the war when he trained in Britain. Their relationship was based on mutual respect and understanding foreshadowing potential solidarity between races. Hortense, Gilbert's wife, and Jamaican immigrant came to England to seek a better life. Not long after their arrival, Bernard returned home after two years of hiding in Brighton because of his unfaithfulness when coming back home from war. Through Queenie's and Bernard's post war relationship Levy examines the shifting and changes in perception of gender roles in post-war Britain. When

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<sup>24</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 301.

Bernard found out that Queenie rented his house to colored people, he was shocked. “Listen to me, Bernard. I had to get lodgers. I had no idea where you were. There was no one going to look after me. I had to bring people in.”<sup>25</sup> Not only did he have a problem with their lodgers he had also difficulty with accepting Queenie’s independence that she gained during his absence. Growing tension in their marriage displayed the conflict between pre-war and post-war expectations of women in society.

Moreover, after a few days, Queenie gave birth to a mixed-race child whose father was Michael. This event was pivotal in her personal growth. “Your baby is black.”<sup>26</sup> As a white woman in a society that oppressed and despised colored people, Queenie had to face the realities of racial injustice. The baby can be seen as a portrayal of the unpreparedness of British society for future race mixing.

You might think you can do it now,’ I told him, ‘While he’s a little baby saying nothing. But what about when he grows up? A big, strapping coloured lad. And people snigger at you in the street and ask you all sorts of awkward questions. Are you going to fight for him? All those neighbours . . . those proper decent neighbours out in the suburbs, are you going to tell them to mind their own business? Are you going to punch other dads ’cause their kids called him names? Are you going to be proud of him? Glad that he’s your son?’<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, Queenie decided to entrust her child to Hortense and Gilbert because she was aware of the systematic injustice that the child would have to face. This decision to give away her child to Gilbert and Hortense showed her deep trust and affection for the couple and it was also a prove of her evolution in understanding love, family importance, and community beyond race.

Queenie’s journey throughout the story displays her personal growth which is affected by her embrace of independence, her resistance to social and racial norms, and her struggle with expectations placed upon her as a woman. These aspects highlight her early feminist leanings and resistance to racism.

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<sup>25</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 436.

<sup>26</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 483.

<sup>27</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 531.

### 5.1.2 Hortense Roberts

Hortense Roberts is another central character in *Small Island*. As a Jamaican immigrant, she had to face racism and discrimination after she arrived in her Mother country. Through her character, Levy portrays an exploration of gender and race and how these aspects shape her personality.

After she arrived in England Hortense faces the harsh realities of the post-war situation. Her idea about coming to England was a little naive and right after she got off the boat, she encountered her first sign of racism when a woman approached her saying: “Have you seen Sugar? She’s one of you.”<sup>28</sup> The woman as well as other Britons assumed that all Jamaicans must know each other. Even the remark “she’s one of you” shows her prejudice toward people of different races. Levy portrays the Britons as an arrogant society that knows nothing of the world beyond its borders. This contrasts with Hortense who is well-educated and knows nearly everything about England. “It took me several attempts at saying the address to the driver of the taxi before his face lit with recognition”<sup>29</sup> When she tried to get to the house where Gilbert, her husband, lived, she had to face reality once again. The driver of the taxi she took did not understand her pronunciation. In Jamaica she won prizes in pronunciation competitions, however, she could not understand why he had a problem understanding her. She did not want to believe that her education would be that different from reality.

As Hortense arrived at the house where Gilbert lived, she was quite sceptical about the house and its looks describing it as “shabby”<sup>30</sup>, but she was aware of the fact that there has been a war, and she was not completely dissatisfied as she thinks: “Only the house of someone high class would have pillars.”<sup>31</sup> This also shows her naivety as she thought that Gilbert would be able to afford such a house after such a short time.

Her first encounter with Queenie is not exactly polite as Queenie remarks that her trunk “is the size of the Isle of Wight”<sup>32</sup> referring to Hortense’s skin color. Hortense is aware of this allusion to her skin, but she does not react. In addition to this Queenie left Hortense standing outside while waiting for Gilbert. When Hortense finally saw her husband, she was very angry because he was supposed to wait for Hortense at the docks.

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<sup>28</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 16.

<sup>30</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 12.

<sup>32</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 13.

Hortense cannot understand that for him same as for Hortense life in Britain is something new. Hortense and Gilbert do not understand each other that much. That can be caused by the fact that before their marriage they have known each other for only five days. This fact connects her to Queenie because both marriages were only the means how to create their path in life and the life they wanted.

When Gilbert shows Hortense his room where he lives all she said was “Just this? Just this? You bring me all this way for just this?”<sup>33</sup> This one room was not at all what Hortense imagined when coming to England. She thought that she would live in a big house in London but all she got was one dirty room. Even though when she arrived, she showed some kind of understatement that there has been a war she does not show it now. At this point, she is disappointed in her new country as well as she is disappointed in her husband. The next morning after her arrival she starts to unpack her things. “The yellow with red, the blue with the green commenced dancing in this dreary room. I took the far-from-home blanket and spread it on the bed.”<sup>34</sup> By unpacking this blanket which is full of colors, Hortense tries to bring more colors and joy to cold England. To England that is not cold only because of its weather but also because of the cold behavior of people that she met.

From the beginning of the novel, she feels superior to Gilbert. She grew up in a wealthy Jamaican family and she does not have that dark color of skin like her mother and the rest of the Jamaicans. As she describes it, it is “the color of warm honey”<sup>35</sup> The color of her skin was one of the things why she thought her life was predestined to be gold. Because of her skin, she thought that she had the right to have some privileges in her country and she felt superior to Jamaicans. This shows that racism is not only in countries where there is a clear distinction between the color of people’s skin, but it can be also in countries where everyone has nearly the same color. Moreover, Hortense thanks to her skin color identified as a British citizen more than Jamaican and she thought that she would have no problem adjusting to British life. But once she arrived in England, she had a hard clash with reality when she found out that the British did not see her as a native Briton at

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<sup>33</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 226.

<sup>35</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 37.

all. As Evelyn mentioned “migrants from the West Indies were unprepared to be treated as a members of separate sphere of Britishness.”<sup>36</sup>

The marriage of Hortense and Gilbert is full of misunderstandings. Even though they are trying to be nice and polite towards each other it usually leads to misunderstanding. One day when Gilbert was leaving for work, he asked Hortense if she could make him dinner. Surprisingly she did not have any objections which shows the potential for change in their relationship. This part of a man leaving for work and his wife staying at home cooking and cleaning is the portrayal of typical roles in society at that time. Women are supposed to stay at home and men are supposed to provide for the family. However, a new conflict is on its way when Gilbert comes home. When he came, he saw Hortense on her knees scrubbing the floor. “I cannot see you on your knees so soon. I did not bring you to England to scrub a floor on your knees. No wife of mine will be on her knees in this country.”<sup>37</sup> Gilbert shows that he has feelings for Hortense and that he wants to give her the life she imagined when coming to England. However, he is aware of the fact that British society has prejudices towards Jamaican immigrants and that he must work hard to at least afford his place. He does not want to see Hortense working hard because she does not know what is awaiting her.

After he came home Hortense was still cooking. When she served him a dinner he remarked “What is this?”<sup>38</sup> Gilbert wanted Hortense to cook him chips. However, Hortense only learned to cook in school and only in a theoretical way. She did not know how to cook chips, so she asked Queenie. Hortense cooked it exactly as Queenie instructed her, but the result was far from what chips are. Queenie also told her that English was like the chips served with an egg and Hortense was proud of herself as she knew exactly how to do it because she learned it at school. Hortense even learned how to properly eat a boiled egg and she was curious how Gilbert would eat it. The proper way was to slice off the top of the egg and not tap the egg. Gilbert starts to eat the egg and he will tap it. She even uses the word that Gilbert does not know which once again shows that Hortense thinks he is improper and foolish, and she feels superior to him. “I can take no more of this”<sup>39</sup> After

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<sup>36</sup> Kim Evelyn, “Claiming a Space in the Thought-I-Knew-You-Place: Migrant Domesticity, Diaspora, and Home in Andrea Levy’s ‘Small Island.’” *South Atlantic Review* 78, no. 3/4 (2013): 130, accessed May 8, 2024, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43739219>.

<sup>37</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 319.

<sup>38</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 322.

<sup>39</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 324.

they found out that the egg was rotted Gilbert burst out of the room. It may seem that he is frustrated with Hortense however, he is more frustrated with England and the poor conditions they have there.

The next day after Hortense's arrival she is offered to go shopping with Queenie. "I was dressed as a woman such as I should be when visiting the shops in England."<sup>40</sup> When Queenie came to pick up Hortense for shopping, Hortense was a little confused by Queenie's outfit. She wore a dreary coat, so Hortense assumed that Queenie changed her mind about the shopping. Hortense thought that woman could not go shopping wearing such an outfit. Hortense dressed in her usual attention and care, and she conveyed the British idea of the civilized citizen. However, Queenie's outfit showed that not all these British ideas of civilization that were presented in colonies were followed in Britain itself. Moreover, Queenie sees Hortense as someone to be humiliated which, according to Hortense, is quite presumptuous since she thought it would be exactly the opposite. At shops, Queenie started to explain to Hortense how things work in Europe assuming that Hortense did not know any modern things because she came from uncivilized Jamaica. However, Hortense experienced all the modern things in Jamaica, and she started to realize that England was far from what she expected. "This man was patting on his red head and wiping his hand down his filthy white coat. Cha, why he not lick the bread first before giving it to me to eat?"<sup>41</sup> Hortense is shocked that the baker touched her bread with her hands, and she realizes that it is not Jamaica that is uncivilized but, in some ways, it is Britain itself.

In Jamaica Hortense trained to be a teacher and after her training she became one. It was during the college period that she learned about British superiority, and she succumbed to this idea. As she saw herself as a native Briton, she idealized the idea of living and working in England and was determined to live there. "I then informed him that a teacher such as I was not someone to be treated in the same way as a person in low-class job."<sup>42</sup> She thought about herself so highly that when she went to apply for a job it never occurred to her that they might not accept her. Gilbert wanted to help her navigate the new life in Britain but Hortense, according to her, knew exactly what she was doing. She went to the office, and she was greeted in a kind manner that she thought everything would go

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<sup>40</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 329.

<sup>41</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 332.

<sup>42</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 450.



smoothly. She handed them her letters of recommendation. She said that she was there to apply for a job as a teacher. This was a surprise for a woman working there and she started to ask her question. Where does Hortense come from? Where was Hortense trained to be a teacher? To all her questions Hortense responded Jamaica and that was a problem. “Well, I’m afraid you can’t teach here.”<sup>43</sup> After Hortense heard this response her dream was crushed. She could not comprehend that she was not allowed to teach in Britain. She could not understand why her training in Jamaica was not enough to teach in England. She did train in Jamaica, but it was under the British educational system. Now in England, she is forced to go through the entire educational process again. This Hortense’s experience is one of the most crushing that happened in the whole novel. Even though she was crushed she did not forget about her good manners and acted politely when leaving. That cannot be said about the women in the office who burst out laughing. Hortense is disappointed not only with the British educational system but also with the society that is unable to accept immigrants.

Another change in Joseph’s relationship appears when Gilbert finds out that Hortense cannot teach in England. This crushing experience changed Hortense character significantly. “Hortense should have yelled in righteous pain does not whimper in my ear.”<sup>44</sup> For the first time, Hortense showed some kind of emotion to Gilbert. She lost her guard over her behavior and let her feelings run free. This also affected Gilbert who could not see his wife in such a state. “For then I might catch my hand around one of their scrawny white necks and squeeze. No one will watch us weep in this country.”<sup>45</sup> He was so angry about how they treated Hortense that he wanted to hurt them. Until this moment he always solved every problem with humor and irony but not this time. He was crushed to see Hortense this sad. Also, the remark “no one will watch us weep in this country” shows that no matter how they treated them they have their pride, and no one can take this from them. When they sat and talked about what Hortense do if she could not teach Gilbert said: “Don’t worry. I can look after you.”<sup>46</sup> This remark disturbed her. It was not that she did not believe Gilbert that he would do that, it was because she came to this country to build her own life without having to depend on anyone and she was not afraid of work.

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<sup>43</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 453.

<sup>44</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 459.

<sup>45</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 459.

<sup>46</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 464.

When the Josephs came home, they met Queenie's husband for the first time. He came back home after the war. With his coming back they had to face another wave of racism and prejudice that infiltrated the house, their safe place. Bernard Bligh was a prototypical Briton who embodies everything that British society despises. He does not behave politely to someone who is not the same race as he is and who is not the same class as he is. As Evelyn said, "Bernard's attitude toward national belonging merges with his view of domestic exclusivity, illustrating the ideological overlap between homes and nations as possessions with territorial borders."<sup>47</sup> When he found out that the Josephs lived in his house, he was furious. He called them darkies and wanted them to leave the house and that is when Queenie walked into the room. They started to fight and after a while, Queenie started to whimper. No one knew what was happening. She went into labor and wanted Hortense to help her. "We must call a doctor."<sup>48</sup> Hortense was scared to help and she wore her best dress that she had on the interview. The labor changes Hortense's behavior in the way that she loosens her obsession about maintaining good manners and decency due to which she often behaves unkindly towards Gilbert.

After the labor Josephs announced that they wanted to move out. They are invited by Queenie for a cup of tea because she is worried that they do not trust her anymore because of Bernard's desire to sell the house. Queenie tries to make conversation with Hortense and Gilbert and tells them that the baby's name is Michael. Hortense is surprised because she had a cousin named Michael. Hortense and Queenie never knew that they knew the same Michael. "Will you take him with you? Look after him for me. Will you take him and look after him?"<sup>49</sup> Suddenly Queenie asks Hortense if they would take Michael and raise him. She is aware of the fact that British society would not accept such thing as white women raising a black child. She is aware of the fact that the child would have to face prejudice and discrimination maybe even more if she would raise him. Josephs do not know what they should do. In the meantime, there is another conflict when Gilbert tries to comfort the distraught Queenie. Bernard is furious about Gilbert touching her wife.

"You know what your problem is, man? Your white skin. You think it makes you better than me. You think it give you the right to lord it over a black man. But you

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<sup>47</sup> Kim Evelyn, "Claiming a Space in the Thought-I-Knew-You-Place: Migrant Domesticity, Diaspora, and Home in Andrea Levy's 'Small Island.'" *South Atlantic Review* 78, no. 3/4 (2013): 144, accessed May 8, 2024, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43739219>.

<sup>48</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 475.

<sup>49</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 519.

know what it make you? You wan' know what your white skin make you, man? It make you white. That is all, man, White. No better, no worse than me – just white.”<sup>50</sup>

This statement that Gilbert makes about Bernard's racism makes Hortense realize that her husband is a “man of class, man of character, man of intelligence.”<sup>51</sup> In the end, she is glad that she has married such a man as Gilbert. This realization shows that her values changed and now she no longer craves good social status as it was at the beginning of her narrative. After the fight, Josephs decided to take Michael with them. This passage where the mother must give up her child because of race is showing the cruelty of society. Moreover, it is a parallel to Hortense's mother Alberta who also had to give up Hortense to give Hortense the opportunity for a better life. This is the time when she realizes what she has lost and longs for her mother.

The relationship of Josephs went through many challenges throughout the story. In the beginning, it was a couple that was formed only for the benefit and not for love. However, as the story progressed, so did their relationship. They end the story as a young loving couple, and they build up a strong marriage.

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<sup>50</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 525.

<sup>51</sup> Levy, *Small Island*, 526.

### 5.1.3 Angela Jacobs

Angela Jacobs is one of the main characters of Levy's first novel *Every Light in the House Burnin'*. She is a young black woman born in England to Jamaican immigrants portraying the struggles of the first-generation immigrants' children and immigrants in general. Through this character, Levy explores the theme of identity, racism, and family dynamics faced by Jamaican immigrants who came to England. This novel is highly based on Levy's parents and childhood experiences.

Angela Jacobs is the youngest child of Jamaican immigrants Winston and Beryl Jacobs, who came to England with the hope of a better life. The whole family of six lives in a small council home with a desire to buy a house one day. As a black child in a white neighborhood, she faces racism on a daily basis. Angela grew up in a family that is close but very distant at the same time. A lot of things in the family remain secret even though they share the small space where they live. The small flat where they live is the portrayal of the systematic barriers they had to face. As Jamaican immigrants, they did not have the same chances for decent housing as other Britons. The shortage of housing is a portrayal of racism because not many people rented houses or flats to immigrants and the available flats were often very small and in poor condition. This shapes Angela's perception of England and herself because she often feels like she does not belong to the society in her own country.

Growing up in a white neighborhood brings to the surface the harsh realities of racism faced by immigrants. Jacobs' children often played outside with other children from the neighborhood. They were playing all sorts of games for example rounders, run-outs, tin tan tommy, and more. One day when playing the game rounders conflict between the two "races" emerged. This game was similar to baseball where they had to hit the ball with a bat and run to the bases. Two teams were playing. The first team consisted of Angela, her brother John, Kathleen, and Peter. The second one consisted of Ronnie, who set the rules, Linda, Steven, and Brucie. It was Angela's turn to play. She hit the ball and ran to the third base. However, Ronnie, who set the rules decided that she is out of the game. After a brief exchange between John and Ronnie about his sister not being out it was John's turn to play. John hit the ball and ran to the fourth base. However, same as his sister he was out of the game. Ronnie could not bear the thought that someone who was not the same skin color as him could be better than him and he changed the rules to fit his needs. All the players of the game started to argue. It got to the point where the boys wanted to fight, and Angela

started to cry. “Better take her back to where you came from.”<sup>52</sup> Ronnie started to attack Angela and John verbally and other members followed. “Take her back to the jungle... Yeah, take her back to the jungle – all wogs come from the jungle.”<sup>53</sup> They were all friends but only until the moment when the Jacobs were better at something or different in their traditions. “You are not English – my dad said,”<sup>54</sup> The neighborhood children adopt the thoughts and views of their parents and English society. This recurrent statement towards immigrants “to go back where they came from” portrays the thoughts of society that are not loudly said but persist in British society and it is the general perception of immigrants.

Angela also faces racism in school and in church where she confronts with isolation and ignorance both from other pupils and teachers as well. Angela is not the only black pupil in Sunday school in church. There is also Ada who as well as Angela was isolated from the rest of the students. As Angela describes her “Ada has no friends at school and spent her playtimes with her sister, who was in the year below us.”<sup>55</sup> Ada was not accepted by other pupils in the school and even with Angela, they were not friends. Even though Ada’s family was the only one except the Jacobs who were black they did not talk to each other. It was caused by different family backgrounds. Ada had African ancestors whereas Angela had Caribbean ancestors. However, the perception of both Angela and Ada was the same. They were seen as someone who did not belong to this country because of their skin color.

One day during Sunday school Ada is confronted by others because of her color. “She is stupid and dirty.”<sup>56</sup> One of the pupils addressed Ada calling her stupid and dirty which was the prevailing opinion in society. They all taught that the immigrants are uncivilized and uneducated people who only occupy their country and take away their opportunities. Not only did he address Ada, but he also addressed Angela in the same way as well. The only one who tried to defend them was Angela’s friend Sonia. The teacher Miss Thompson did not know how to handle this situation so she asked the vicar for help. However, the vicar did not handle it well at all because once again he excluded Angela and Ada from other pupils. “Come on out to the front.”<sup>57</sup> Angela and Ada were called to the

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<sup>52</sup> Andrea Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin* (London, Tinder Press, 2017), 68.

<sup>53</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin* , 68.

<sup>54</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin* , 68.

<sup>55</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin* , 174.

<sup>56</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin* , 176.

<sup>57</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin* , 178.

front. They were isolated from other pupils and shown as examples of who differentiate from others.

Usually, when someone attacked Angela verbally and she said it to her parents they did not support her much. The usual answer was to “take no notice”<sup>58</sup> because they wanted to belong to the British society and they thought the best way was to take no notice, so they ignored any insults directed at them or their children. Moreover, Angela’s mother deepens the isolation they had to face saying “We’re not black and we’re not white.”<sup>59</sup> This had a significant impact on Angela as well as her siblings. A statement like this profoundly affects Angela’s self-perception and confidence because now she feels like she does not belong in either community. As Sonia mentioned when defending Angela “She’s not ever properly coloured”<sup>60</sup> emphasizes the distinction in Angela’s skin color. Her paleness differentiates her from native Britons as well as from immigrants therefore she feels alienated among her peers as well as in the immigrant community. The alienation is also shown when she goes to the hairdresser where she is in a community of black people with African ancestors. Once again, there is shown the adaptation of views from parents because now Angela as well as her mother distinguishes between black people who have African ancestors and between people who have Caribbean ancestors.

Angela was experiencing her parents’ effort to assimilate into British society. They tried so hard that they did not react to any racist comments, and they even lied about their food. “I don’t want that woman thinking that we had sausages on Sunday – you hear?... Don’t say sausages – say chicken.”<sup>61</sup> Angela was told many times to not tell what they had for dinner or lunch, or she was asked by her mother to tell something else. Her mother usually cooked Jamaican food at home, but she did not want to be different from others. On the other hand, when Winston’s, Angela’s father, sister came to visit, Beryl prepared sandwiches trying to show their proper Britishness.

The racism and discrimination that Angela and her whole family face are not only social but institutional as well. When Angela found out about the illness of her father, she immediately tried to get him the best possible care. She knows her parents and their approach how to dealing with different issues. Their approach was to accept what was

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<sup>58</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin’*, 70.

<sup>59</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin’*, 70.

<sup>60</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin’*, 177.

<sup>61</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin’*, 164.

given to them and live their life in silence hoping that “no one would know that they sneaked into this country.”<sup>62</sup> However, Angela did not accept the little they were given and was determined to ask for more. “I knew this society better than my parents.”<sup>63</sup> As she grew up in this country and was born there, she was convinced that it was her birthright to get the same possibilities as other Britons.

When Angela visited her father’s doctor, she wanted to know all possible options for how to help her father. “Why do you want a district nurse? Your father is quite lucid.”<sup>64</sup> However, she experienced the reluctance of healthcare providers to escalate care showing that the health of immigrants is seen as less worthy. “I’ll make a report and tell the doctor about the knee. He’ll come if he thinks he should.”<sup>65</sup> Angela’s father is often treated with less urgency and respect than the white patient would be treated. This is shown through nurses and doctors who ignore his pain and see it as an exaggeration. Another aspect of the treatment of Angela’s father is that healthcare providers do not treat Angela with respect. “When they begin to swell up like that, it’s not good – he won’t have long.”<sup>66</sup> The district nurse who came to check on Angela’s father said the harsh realities of his illness without any empathy. As she saw the behavior of doctor and nurse Angela became more assertive and advocated fiercely for her father’s care.

In terms of feminism, Angela is influenced primarily by the dynamics in her family. Her mother is the portrayal of independence and strength. Angela’s mother functioned as a housewife, taking care of her family, and as the breadwinner as well. Beryl combines her domestic responsibilities with work which was the common social expectation for women whereas men should “only” provide for their families. Her mother’s efforts are seen as part of her women’s duty and therefore are often overseen. This offers Angela a first-hand look at the resilience of women and the challenges they had to face. Her mother had to face discrimination at work when she wanted to work as a teacher. This is parallel to the novel *Small Island* because both characters Beryl and Hortense are not accepted because they trained in Jamaica. However, they have done their training under the British educational system. Angela went to the Highbury High School. The girls were encouraged by their headmistress saying that “when all your work is done girls, when you have made your

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<sup>62</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin’*, 107.

<sup>63</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin’*, 106.

<sup>64</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin’*, 112.

<sup>65</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin’*, 137.

<sup>66</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin’*, 136.

achievement – it's then you must fight on.<sup>67</sup> This statement suggests that the role of women in society is fickle, and once they achieve something it does not mean it stays forever. However, the encouragement should awaken the desire to want more and that every woman is strong enough to achieve what she desires.

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<sup>67</sup> Levy, *Every Light in the House Burnin '*, 221.



## 5.2 Impact of characters on the overall storyline

Hortense and Queenie have a significant impact on the narrative and themes of *Small Island*. Both provide different lenses through which Levy tried to explore themes of race, identity, and belonging. Their development provides a complex perspective on the situation in post-war Britain and the experiences of Jamaican immigrants.

Hortense, the Jamaican immigrant, shows the story from the perspective of an immigrant coming to England during the Windrush era. As a Jamaican immigrant, she had to face harsh realities of racism, discrimination, and prejudice. She portrays the struggles of many immigrants who tried to keep British conventions and fulfill their dreams. Throughout the story, Hortense undergoes a significant transformation when she tries to find her place in British society and fights with her own identity. Her determination to belong to British society shows the difficulties of navigating between two different worlds. Hortense despite the obstacles she has to face, is determined to keep her dignity and pursue her dreams showing the power of a strong will in the face of adversity. Hortense's idealism of England changes with her assimilation in the new country and portrays the experiences of the immigrants coming to England. She is also a portrayal of the strong sense of Jamaican identity which often leads to clashes with less formal social norms in England.

On the other hand, Queenie serves as a connection between the two worlds. She is a portrayal of the potential to overcome prejudices between different races. Her friendship with Jamaican immigrants challenges social expectations and prejudices. Queenie's character is marked by the rejection of social norms and by supporting immigrants she shows her openness to justice and equality. Queenie's character functions for Levy as a way to explore empathy, solidarity, and the possibility of change. Through this character, Levy portrays the optimistic vision for a more open-minded society. Queenie is the portrayal of independence that challenges the roles and expectations of women during this period and suggests potential change in society. By giving up her child she shows an awareness of social limitations and prejudice.

These two characters are connected to highlight the complexities of race, identity, and belonging in post-war Britain. Stories of Hortense and Queenie show the legacy of colonialism and the unceasing struggle for equality for all. Through these characters, Levy wants to make readers aware of the harsh realities of race relations and celebrate those who already confronted their prejudices.

Angela is not only one of the main characters of the story, but through her character, Levy creates a strong connection between Angela and the reader making the readers question their perception of themes such as racism, identity, and gender. Portrayal of Angela's thoughts and feelings provides the reader with a closer experience of immigrants and makes the readers sympathize with her. Angela's story highlights the experience of Jamaican immigrants coming to England and shows the struggles of cultural displacement and discrimination faced by immigrants her interactions with her friends, neighbors, and doctors show the systematic barriers that immigrants often had to face. This character also functions as a portrayal of Levy's critiques of all kinds of racism. Through Angela, Levy explores the complexities of identity and belonging and how these aspects are perceived in her family but also society. Additionally, Angela's development from a child to a young woman shows her growing awareness of feminism and how are women treated in society and she challenges these social norms. Each stage of her life shows different challenges that she must face, and her perspective not only shapes the narrative but also provides it with emotions and portrayal of cultural differences.

## Conclusion

Andrea Levy, a British writer of Jamaican descent, portrays in her works the immigrant experiences in post-war Britain. Throughout her novels, she explores the challenges that immigrants had to face emphasizing their fight with social prejudice and struggle for belonging into a white British society. Her works are highly based on her personal experience and on the experience of her parents who came to England during the Windrush. In her works, she presents the situations from two different perspectives, from the perspective of immigrants as well as from the perspective of Britons.

Racism and feminism are the main prisms through which this thesis analyzed the woman characters in the selected novels *Small Island* and *Every Light in the House Burnin'*. These characters offer insight into the challenges and transformations faced by women during the period of Windrush era. In the novel *Small Island*, the characters that have been analyzed are Hortense and Queenie. Each character was analyzed in a separate chapter showing the point of view of Jamaican immigrant and British citizens. Queenie represents the British perspective on immigrants coming to her country. Through her character, Levy explores the perception of immigrants and the potential for change in social norms. This chapter focuses on the evolution of Queenie from a young naïve lady to a woman with the courage to challenge social norms and a woman with deep empathy. Queen's development emphasized the feminist fight for independence and rejection of racial prejudices. The analysis has shown that even an individual growing up and living in a predominantly white society can break free from its prejudices and norms and can understand people from different backgrounds.

The next chapter was focused on the other character from *Small Island*, Hortense. Hortense explores life in Britain through the perspective of Jamaican immigrants coming to England during the Windrush era. Through this character, Levy portrays experiences of black woman coming to terms with the issues of racism and feminism and how these aspects shape her interactions with the outside world. This chapter explores the different kinds of racism faced by Jamaican immigrants and its effects on their personal and professional lives. Analysis of this character explores the struggle of belonging and alienation between her Jamaican origin and the British identity that she aspires to. The result of the analysis of this character is that it does not matter from which background one comes, but it is the personality that matters.

The last character that this thesis focuses on is Angela from the novel *Every Light in the House Burnin'*. Angela is the first generation of Jamaican children who grew up in England. This chapter explored the themes of identity, racism, and family dynamics and how these aspects influenced the lives of Jamaican immigrants. Angela as well as other characters in Levy's work faces all kinds of racism. This chapter explores how these experiences interwind with her family's struggle to assimilate into British society. Part of this chapter is also a portrayal of social and institutional discrimination that Angela and her family had to face and the worse conditions in the housing and health care systems. Through Angela's analysis, it is shown that it doesn't matter what race one is, but everyone should have the same rights. Each chapter is followed by a subchapter that is focused on the impact of the characters on the overall storyline.

Through her works, Levy sheds some light on the topic of British history that had not been talked about much before. As a voice for marginalized groups, she wanted to bring attention to the significant part of British history that had shaped her life. Through her experiences portrayed in her works, Levy explored the shifting and changes in the social norms in British society. She emphasized the importance of marginalized groups living in British society and different ethnic groups can identify with her works.

## Resumé

Cílem této bakalářské práce bylo analyzovat ženské postavy ve vybraných dílech *Small Island* a *Every Light in the House Burnin'* od britské spisovatelky Andrey Levyové. Levyová je dcerou imigrantů, kteří přišli do Velké Británie během tzv. Windrush éry, která proběhla mezi lety 1948 až 1971. Tato generace se stěhovala do Británie na výzvu britské vlády. Přistěhovalci s vidinou lepších pracovních příležitostí a životní úrovně migrovali z britských kolonií do Británie. Jednalo se především o muže, kteří dobrovolně sloužili pro Britskou armádu. Po několika měsících následovaly i jejich ženy a rodiny.

V první části bakalářské práce jsem se zaměřila na život autorky Andrey Levyové. Součástí této kapitoly bylo přiblížení jejího života a její rodiny, která přišla do Velké Británie s první vlnou přistěhovalců po druhé světové válce. Dále jsem se zaměřila na její práci a jak svoje životní zkušenosti s přistěhovalstvím odráží ve své tvorbě. Kapitola také obsahuje to, jak byla její díla vnímána a přijata kritiky a společností.

V další kapitole jsem se zaměřila na kulturně historický kontext feminizmu, který je pro tuto práci podstatný, jelikož analýza postav probíhá zejména z pohledu feminizmu a rasismu. Tato kapitola se zaměřuje na definici jednotlivých vln feminizmu a jejich vývoj. Další kapitola, která je pro tuto práci významná je kapitola zaměřující se na historický kontext rasismu. Zaměřuje se především na rasismus na území Británie, zkoumá jeho vývoj a zákony, které byly britskou vládou vydány pro jeho omezení.

Následující kapitoly už byly zaměřené na samotnou analýzu postav. Z románů Andrey Levyové jsem vybrala tři postavy, které jsem analyzovala z perspektivy feminizmu a především rasismu. Jednalo se o postavy Hortense a Queenie z románu *Small Island* a o postavu Angely z románu *Every Light in the house Burnin'*. Každé z těchto postav je věnována oddělená kapitola, která se zaměřuje na různé úhly pohledu. Kapitola, která analyzuje postavu Queenie se zaměřuje na pohled britské společnosti a její vnímání přistěhovalců migrujících do Velké Británie. Zabývala jsem se hlavně postojem Queenie k rasismu a jak se tato postava snaží změnit zakořeněné společenské normy. Queenie je jedna z mála postav, která se snaží své předsudky a vnímání lidí jiné barvy pleti změnit, ačkoli mnohokrát se ze zakořeněných předsudků Britské společnosti vymanit nedokáže. Tato postava se v průběhu děje proměňuje z mladé a naivní dívky v ženu, která se snaží bojovat s postojem britské společnosti vůči migrantům.

Postava Hortense nabízí pohled na situaci z druhé perspektivy, a to z perspektivy přistěhovalce snažícího se zapadnout do britské společnosti. Hortense zprostředkovává náhled na nepřesné zobrazování Velké Británie v britských koloniích. Hortense jako většina přistěhovalců migruje do Velké Británie s vidinou lepších životních standardů a školství. Sama sebe vnímá spíše jako Britku než jako Jamajčanku. Její uctívání Velké Británie je založeno na zkresleném pohledu, který je typický pro britské kolonie. Po jejím příjezdu si uvědomuje, že situace v Británii není taková, jak bylo prezentováno a že životní úroveň je mnohdy horší než na Jamajce. Analýza Hortense se zabývá zejména jejím přizpůsobením se anglické společnosti a jejím bojem s diskriminací a předsudky. Dalším bodem analýzy je její vývoj v průběhu příběhu a také jaký na ni má dopad vliv společnosti, která je charakterizována rasismem mířeným na přicházející přistěhovalce.

Angela je poslední postava, kterou tato práce analyzuje. Oproti Hortense se liší tím, že se v Británii už narodila. Angela slouží jako prostředek k analýze rodinných vztahů a jak tyto vztahy ovlivňují její vývoj. V této kapitole jsem se zaměřila především na diskriminaci imigrantů na úrovni společenské a institucionální. Angela bojuje s diskriminací jak ve škole, tak i například ve zdravotnictví. Ztělesňuje houževnatost imigrantů, kteří museli bojovat s nerovnocenným systémem.

Další částí této práce je i vliv těchto postav na celkový příběh románu.

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## **Annotation**

The bachelor thesis deals with the analysis of female characters in the novels *Small Island* and *Every Light in the House Burnin'* by British author Andrea Levy. The analysis focuses on the characters of Hortense, Queenie, and Angela. It explores the impact of race and ethnicity on their ability to fit into a society that despises them. The female protagonists are examined primarily through the lens of feminism and racism and how these aspects shape their professional and personal lives.

## **Anotace**

Bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou ženských postav v románech *Small Island* and *Every Light in the House Burnin'* od britské autorky Andrey Levyové. Analýza je zaměřena na postavy Hortense, Queenie a Angely. Zkoumá vliv rasy a etnického původu na jejich schopnosti začlenit se do společnosti, která jimi opovrhuje. Ženské hrdinky jsou zkoumány především z pohledu feminismu a rasismu a jak tyto aspekty formují jejich profesní i osobní život.

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