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The Experience of Hybridity in Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore* and Andrea Levy's *Small Island*

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Abstract

Traumatized by the civil war in his homeland during the postcolonial period, the African Solomon takes refuge in England where he encounters hatred, violence, and death instead of finding home. He is an immigrant whose hybridity does not allow him a survival from the standard of Englishness. In contrast to Solomon's unsuccessful hybridization, the Jamaican immigrants Hortense and Gilbert's multiculturalism encourages them to raise voice against intolerant racism in the post-imperial England, the "mother country", that attracted peoples of ex-colonies with its promise of a better life. By focusing on some key concepts of post-colonial literary theory, this paper proposes that Caryl Phillips and Andrea Levy differ in their treatments of hybridity although they are transnational Black writers.

Keywords: Hybridity, Migration, Englishness, Alienation, Black

1. Introduction

This paper examines two examples of the immigrant fiction produced by the two novelists of the Black-Atlantic. In *A Distant Shore*, Caryl Phillips narrates the story of African Solomon who leaves his country and takes refuge in England due to being traumatized by the civil war between various tribes that kill each other with the hope of establishing their own government during the postcolonial period. Rather than a home, Solomon encounters hatred, violence, and death in England. As an immigrant, which means "being stranger" (Walkowitz, 2006, p. 538)

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due to his racial difference, his hybridity does not empower him to survive the "ideal" of Englishness, the legacy of colonialism in the contemporary world. Similarly, in *Small Island,* Andrea Levy depicts Hortense and Gilbert's story, the Jamaican immigrants who come to the "mother country" with high expectations that they cannot fulfil in their homelands. Contrary to Solomon's failed hybridization, thanks to their multiculturalism, Hortense and Gilbert are able to confront the racism in England. An analysis of these two immigrant novels by their "thematic parallels" with the postcolonial literary tradition, such as "physical and emotional confrontations with the new land and its ancient and established meanings", "displacement", the "crisis of identity", the "celebration of the struggle towards independence in community and individual" (Ashcroft et al., 1989, pp. 26-30), the problem of defining "home", and the idea of "returning home" (Toplu, 2005) will shed light on how differently Caryl Phillips and Andrea Levy treat the Black experience of "hybridity" despite being transnational writers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Historical Background

The history of the colonized people in the former colonies were written by the British Empire, as Hall highlights (2001), as the colonizing master that set up colonies for various reasons and subordinated the "native" people of those lands because of their attributed lack of civilization, and therefore their "need [for being] rule[d]" (p. 29). The "colonial encounter" between the British and indigenous people, which led to the construction of the idea of the "other" and "otherness", was a matter of power relationships. Explaining the difference between races, the reason for their superiority or inferiority, the "White Anglo Saxon" was determined as superior to all "the black, brown, yellow" people (p. 30), and was given a right to dominate and represent the different one as the "other". The identity of "Britishness" (p. 29), which was built upon only race and ethnicity, became the label of difference of the British from their colonial others, which produced a gap between the two sides via antagonisms such as "them" and "us" or "savage" and "civilized" (pp. 34-37).

The "suppression" and the representation of colonialized people, which stemmed from the polarization between the "dominant" and "subordinate", can't be evaluated, as Szamosi points out (1995), apart from the ideology of "nationalism" and racism. In defining British "national identity", the culturally different "other" was represented through his/her dissimilarity in "sex", "race" or "class", and was estranged as a "threat" to the wholeness of the "self". It was

a xenophobic construct that led to and was nourished by the feelings of abhorrence, apprehension, and enmity (pp. 99-100). Therefore, the Empire's superior vision of itself restricted the notion of Englishness to a single "place of birth, culture, and racial identity . . . [and] this would hold a world where English people lived only in England" (Barley qtd. in Szamozi, 1995, p. 99). As Lahiri underlines (2001), this self-view of superiority projected by the discriminatory ideology of Britishness was still influential in the post-imperial London of the 1960s when large groups of ex-colonial subjects immigrated to the "mother country" with the hopes of financial improvement and better living conditions. Because of the rise in the number of "Commonwealth immigrants", the peoples rushing from Britain's ex-colonies were recognized as nothing, but "problems" (pp. 206-210).

2.2 Theoretical Background

The literary resistance against the "monocultural" historical archive of the British Empire which foregrounded the superiority of Englishness over other cultures was made by postcolonial writers. In their works representing the colonial experience, they rejected the superiority of Englishness over other cultures and developed a standpoint of "otherness" through a "pluralistic" and "multicultural" attitude (Szamosi, 1995, pp. 100-101). This required the employment of some "subversive strategies" (Ashcroft et al., 1989) to dismantle the binary oppositions of "the colonized and the colonizer", "the vocal and the silent", and "the centre and the periphery" (Slemon, 1995, pp. 106-107).

In a world of globalization, as Bhabha notes (1994), the "concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities . . . are in a profound process of redefinition" (p. 5). Today, like postcolonial literary representation, the notion of "immigrant fictions", as Walkowitz suggests (2006), refers to works of literature representing the "contemporary" multilingual experience that travel within various "literary systems" with the intention of being read in numerous "national traditions" as it exists in "multiple geographies". Immigrant literature aims at undermining the "nation-based" construction of a "literary culture" from a "transnational" perspective, and it includes, at its heart, a "resistance to . . . the 'ethnic bildungsroman', the novel of successful assimilation". Therefore, in a transnational literary work, the "experience of immigration" with its possible consequence of a "sense of estrangement" becomes a tool for reflecting the "impossibility of claims for pure cultural absolutism or an unproblematically static, rooted cultural identity" (pp. 528-532).

Coming from multinational backgrounds, "migrant writers" join a "literary system" whose products are dissimilar to the "nation-based" literary forms, for they focus on "the global space of ongoing travel and transcontinental connection" through their "transnational" point of view. In "the literature of immigration", migration is represented as a "social" and "political" process of identity formation. Thus, it is "an aesthetic program" designed for the depiction of "the movement of people and objects across geographies and cultures" as the factor making them "cosmopolitan, transnational, and hybrid". Moreover, immigration literature refuses the representation of an immigrant who fluctuates "between two worlds . . . distinct and coherent", yet it adopts an immigrant's portrayal that is "transplanted" and impacted by an ambivalent sense of belonging and community because of his/her "mobility" (Walkowitz, 2006, pp. 533-534).

3. Discussion

3.1 A Distant Shore: A Pessimistic Depiction of Hybridity

Caryl Phillips, who was born in St. Kitts, brought up in England "in white working-class areas of Leeds", and has "travelled" and inhabited different locations including the Caribbean and the US (Phillips and Sharpe, 1995, p. 154), is a migrant writer that defines himself as "the product of a diaspora" (Phillips and Sharpe, 1995, p. 157). As a representative of the Black-Atlantic, he is "determined to do something about overturning the insular view the British have of themselves as a nation" (Phillips and Sharpe, 1995, p. 156), which requires reflecting the "deep-seated xenophobia and the hostility" contemporary immigrants face in Britain at present (Phillips and Sharpe, 1995, p. 154). It is unavoidable for Phillips, who bears the stamp of "the triangular" Black experience of migration (Phillips and Sharpe, 1995, p. 156), to depict in his works the tales of "racism, slavery, European anti-Semitism, and violence against immigrants" (Walkowitz, 2006, p. 539). Despite his discontent about hostile racism, he rejects in his fictional representations "a distinctive literary culture" that focuses on "race or national origin" and celebrates racist assertions to express "a group's" identity (Walkowitz, 2006, p. 541). Instead of clinging to a national Black identity and due to being a transnational immigrant shaped by different cultures, he claims that "a simple return or recovery of the past" is impossible (Phillips and Sharpe, 1995, p. 157). As a result, he considers himself someone adopting an antiracist perspective who does not "feel loyalty to any race-but to the human race". Furthermore, he explains his interest in race as an issue of "interaction" (Desai et al., p. 87-88). Accordingly, for Phillips, "memory" exists not for "recovering the past, but

reworking it" (Phillips and Sharpe, 1995, p. 157). That's why memory leads him to represent the process of "the regional and international migrancy" through the ambivalent situation of the post-colonial individual rather than celebrating "cultural heritage" (Walkowitz, 2006, p. 541).

In his novel *A Distant Shore*, Caryl Phillips has a "pessimistic vision" of the condition of "cultural hybridity" unlike Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity as the source of "power" brought about by "having access to two or more ethnic identities" (Easthope qtd. in Buchanan, 2003, p. 175). Hybridity, as Buchanan points out, is a condition in which the individual is enabled the capability of subverting "the once-monolithic discourse of authority and imperial identity" by means of his or her "ambiguities" and inconsistencies (p. 175).[2] Contrary to the concept of hybridity as "the positive 'third stage' of non-hierarchical relations" (Buchanan, 2003, p. 177), Phillips's protagonist experience the "hybridization" stage "in the country of destination" (Walkowitz, 2006, p. 534) with lots of obstructions to get over (Buchanan, 2003). As an immigrant fleeing from his African country to build up a future in England, Solomon cannot achieve a profitable hybridization no matter to what extent he complies with the requirements of Englishness, which might encourage him to challenge the racial discrimination burdening him in the host country.

In addition to representing the condition of being an outsider impacted by immigration, Phillips depicts the marginalization of people in contemporary world through the intersection of race and gender in *A Distant Shore*. He points out to these factors that contribute to the ostracism in today's Britain and claims that the "situations" "that a woman might find herself in and that black people were definitely" are quite "parallel" and emerge as the operations of "the same" "power structure" (Phillips and Sharpe, 1995, p.159). As a reflection of his observation considering race and gender, he juxtaposes the condition of Solomon's "being a stranger in a nation" with the condition of Dorothy's, the English woman, "being a stranger in a village" through uniting them in their "sense of marginality and placelessness". The feeling of strangeness and lacking a sense of belonging to a place that Solomon and Dorothy have in common result from the "exclusion" of outsiders they confront in Stoneleigh, the English village they inhabit. What stimulates the antagonism toward both, despite Dorothy's

[2] "Bhabha . . . celebrates it as an 'interstitial passage in-between fixed identities' which 'entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy'. Buchanan, B. (2003). Caryl Phillips: Colonialism, Cultural Hybridity and Racial Difference. In R. J. Lane, R. Mengham & P. Tew (Eds.) *Contemporary British Fiction* (p. 175). Cambridge: Polity.

Englishness, is nativistic "values" of the imperial legacy which assumes "ethnical superiority" over other races in the contemporary world, as well (Buchanan, 2003, p. 182, Walkowitz, 2006, p. 542).

A Distant Shore illustrates the protagonists' overlapping stories retrospectively and opens with their crucial friendship. For Solomon and Dorothy, who pass through similar psychological processes of alienation and loneliness, friendship becomes necessary to be able to survive in a hostile environment. What drags them to each other is escaping from the past and taking shelter in Stoneleigh as immigrants, both literally and metaphorically. Dorothy, who gets divorced, feels inefficient, and is bored with her life as a music teacher after losing her parents and being forced to retire early because of the accusation of disturbing a colleague, Geoff, chooses Stoneleigh to forget her unhappy past and for a new beginning. She considers herself "abandoned" (Phillips, 2003, p. 278); a feeling triggered by her ineffective socialization, being left by her husband, and the unsatisfactory relationship with Sheila, her sister, which is worsened by years of lack of communication. She is lonely and suffers from some psychological problems she is unable to share with anyone but her dead parents whom she visits in their graves.

Likewise, for Solomon, who is traumatized by his whole family's massacre during the civil war in his own country, the only way of survival is immigration to England. To remain there legally, he has to "erase" everything that belonged to his past. Furthermore, he changes his name, Gabriel, and takes up a new identity, Solomon, to make himself forgotten in the memory of the English legal authorities who have accused him of assaulting an English girl. Solomon settles in Stoneleigh and becomes the night watchman of the developing area where he is "the only coloured person in the village" (Phillips, 2003, p. 45), thus is hated and sent "love letters", as he ironically names them, by "people who don't want him in this place" (Phillips 42). Being aware of what Buchanan (2003) explains as the "xenophobic form of Britishness", the remnant of colonial heritage directed towards "waves of unwanted immigrants" due to their involvement in the escalation of "high unemployment rate" (p. 181), "poor Solomon" chooses loneliness through doing his job and "sitting alone in his bungalow, with only his memories for company" (Phillips, 2003, p. 58). He deliberately alienates himself from the rest of the town, "a defence mechanism" protecting him "against the display of violent . . . energies once harnessed and indulged by colonialism" (Buchanan, 2003, p. 178).

In *A Distant Shore*, the existence of quite "one-sided friendships" or "ambiguous relationships" between "immigrants" and the English from a variety of classes (Buchanan, 2003, p. 178, 179) reflect Caryl Phillips's negative perspective of cultural hybridity that becomes a problematic stage through which an immigrant has to pass for a successful identity construction in the host country. Solomon's first attempt at getting in touch with Denise turns out to be a failure. Moreover, it has a negative influence on his later relationships with the other English like Dorothy, Mike, and Mr. and Mrs. Anderson whom he comes across during his migrancy culminating in his death. Hence, as an immigrant ostracized due to his lack of Englishness, Solomon's incapability of establishing connections becomes, as Buchanan (2003) states, "the tragic sign of the hopelessness of hybridity" (p. 186). Despite his insistence on doing "nothing wrong" (Phillips, 2003, p. 166) and his avowal of just transferring his traumatic past in exchange for consoling Denise in "silent tears" (p. 187) about the violence she is exposed to in her daily life, Solomon is charged with assault. In present-day England attracting immigrants from various parts of the world for several reasons, assault on the locals is one of the potential crimes attached to refugees. As Katherine, the lawyer, reminds him of the traditional racist attitude of the English, "It's just that people always assume that there's no smoke without fire. I know it's unfair, but that's how it is" (p. 166). Therefore, to be able to cope with his new life in Stoneleigh, Solomon tries to avoid communication as much as possible and remain a mystery for his friends Dorothy, Mike, and Mr. and Mrs. Anderson.

As well as their strangeness and loneliness in Stoneleigh, Dorothy's "non-racist view of the world", as Phillips points out, enables her and Solomon to build up a "vulnerable" and short-term friendship through which they approach each other with empathy and "love" (Phillips and Jaggi, 2004, p. 119, 121). Dorothy is different from the townsfolk whose culturally constructed ideology against the other reminds her also "the arguments" she "gets stuck into" with her parents:

> both of whom disliked coloureds. Dad told me that he regarded coloureds as a challenge to our English identity. He believed that the Welsh were full of sentimental stupidity, that the Scots were helplessly mean and mopish and they should keep to their own side of Hadrian's Wall, and that the Irish were violent, Catholic drunks. For him, being English was more important than being British, and being English meant no coloured. He would no more listen to me than would the teachers at school, who also hated coloureds. When people were around, they'd go on about them not really adapting well to our school system, but in private they were always 'cheeky little niggers'. (Phillips, 2003, pp. 42-43)

Like most of the English, who judge the non-English without taking his or her character into account, Dorothy's parents would view her friendship with Solomon as shameful since she confesses that "their minds are already made up" (p. 56). Nevertheless, even Dorothy's neutral point of view of immigrants does not constrain her from contrasting Solomon, "who doesn't talk to anybody . . . washes his car . . . hasn't done anything" (p. 43), and the rest of the immigrants in the region, who attack, steal, and beg for a living instead of working, hence labelling the Black immigrant "harmless" (p. 56). She finds the inhabitants' anger and "hatred" toward Solomon unjustifiable, thus feels "ashamed" due to the letters of threat they send to trouble him. As a result of their similar states of loneliness, alienation, and placelessness, the English woman empathizes with the Black immigrant's desire of forgetting his past. That is the same escapeway, she contemplates, she has undertaken by coming to Stoneleigh:

> Aside from this man, there is nobody else in sight . . . Just this lonely man who washes his car with a concentration that suggests that a difficult life is informing the circular motion of his right hand. His every movement would appear to be an attempt to erase a past that he no longer wishes to be reminded of. She looks at him and she understands. (p. 268)

The representation of the friendly relationship between the Black refugee and the English woman is a challenge *A Distant Shore* puts forward, as a transnational novel, against the idealized Englishness. It is a worldview that Phillips identifies with "the stubbornness of colonial pride" the English inherited, still cherish in the contemporary world by depending on an alleged vast "cultural gap" and exert as the "last defence against what they see as barbarism" of the citizens of previous colonies (Phillips qtd. in Buchanan, 2003, p. 180, 181). From the perspective of the White townspeople, Solomon does not have a right to reside in Stoneleigh since he doesn't comply with their standards of Englishness. After his violent murder by the racist groups of the town, Dorothy considers the place an uninhabitable environment which "without Solomon . . . suddenly seems like a strange and empty village" (Phillips, 2003, p. 55) as it is destroyed by "these" cruel people who do not "care about anybody apart from their stupid selves" (p. 59).

It is ironical that the subversion of Englishness which does not allow immigrants, namely the strangers, no matter how they are traumatized, is undertaken by Dorothy who is disturbed the barbarity of her White citizens. As a resistance against the murder of the Black refugee

and an act of condemning the English that involved in this cruelty, Dorothy pins one of the letters, with razor blades inside, on the notice board of the public bar and cleans "[Solomon's] precious car" by ignoring the hostile stares (p. 63). Nevertheless, her recollection of the Black man curiously after his death and not having the slightest "clue about his past or present" (p. 63) indicate the weak possibility of establishing healthy communication in today's transnational England between the locals and the immigrants, which is devoid of the discriminatory view of Englishness:

> I walked by the edge of the canal . . . thought of my friend lying face down in the water like a dead fish. It's hard to believe that there will be no more trips . . . or conversations with him in my house, or time spent with him in his house trying to work out who the strange man is in the photograph on the mantelpiece. I worry over who will look after his car, or tell his family. I don't even know if he has any family. The poor man may as well have been living on the dark side of the moon. (p. 59).

Besides indicating the condition of being unwanted as an immigrant, Solomon's lack of communication, whether it is on purpose or by force, with the members of the White English society foreshadows his unsuccessful hybridity, the stage he needs to pass to come to terms with his past and survive. Although Solomon can build better relationships with Mike or the Andersons to a certain extent, he doesn't "open up" to them during his experience of hybridity. He calls Mike, the lorry driver originally from Ireland who takes him to Stoneleigh, his "saviour" since Mike "saved" him "from the rain like a good Samaritan" (p. 293). Likewise, he considers the Andersons from Scotland his "benefactors" (p. 272) and "guardian angels" (p. 280), who give him shelter and food, offer the comforts of a real home like real parents, teach some jobs, and help with everything necessary for him to stay in England legally. However, due to the racist and violent attitude, which has "caused him to be fearful" (p. 273), and the prejudice he faces in England, which has made it his "natural instinct . . . to trust nobody" (p. 177), Solomon distances himself from his friends, prefers to convey his past only partially, and conceals his true opinion of being an immigrant in England:

> And so I told about the pain of leaving my country, and the uncomfortable journey to England, and the difficulties of travelling on the boat. I told that my greatest problem with England was that sometimes the weather was very cool, but now that I was in England I possess a great desire to learn. To be educated. I told that at home things are very, very bad. That the war has left people afraid, and they have nothing, and nobody wishes to remain there, but in England

> there is peace . . . I told her nothing of Felix, or Amma, or my uncle Joshua, or Bright . . . nothing of the temptation of the poor girl, who was one of the most abandoned of her species . . . nothing of Said, or prison, where I was never condemned to make recompense, for I was innocent of any crime . . . nothing of Katherine, who had helped me to overcome some of the fear that arose from my ignorance of the ways of English people . . . nothing of Gabriel. I told that my name was Solomon and I needed to acquire papers so that I could work and remain in England . . . that I had no other country. (pp. 277-278)

Despite his attempt at erasing the traumatic memory of his country hidden in renaming himself as Solomon, the Black man's past turns into a burden on his shoulders because of his leaving the struggle of liberation in his country where he "killed or captured the enemy", the members of the other tribe, as captain "Hawk" (p. 142). As a witness surviving the war he calls "slaughter", he cannot help but feels "ashamed" (p. 143) of his departure. That's why he suffers from being in-between, a condition caused by his sense of belonging to his past and country despite his yearning for their erasure by the replacement of a new life in England. What worsens his in-betweenness is his incapability of fighting against the idea of Englishness, which becomes a barrier between him and his new life, thus forces him into an adaptation through forbearance and hesitation in his relationships to the English.

Instead of gaining strength through hybridity, Solomon's in-betweenness leads to self-estrangement, for it is fuelled by the "rudeness" of the working-class people,[3] which troubles him with "great misery" (p. 286) when he tries to learn a trade. The words written on the wall of the Andersons' house during his stay and the threatening letters sent to his house by some racists are examples of hate speech that intensifies Solomon's feeling of displacement. As a result of the violence and hatred he encounters during the process of constructing his identity in the new land, Solomon cannot succeed in overcoming the trauma of leaving his country. Furthermore, he gets haunted by the past returning[4], as a foreshadowing to his death, in his

[3] Buchanan underlines Caryl Phillips's mistrust in the lower middle class and the working class who, with their "right-wing extremism", bare the "racist and violent" attitude of British culture in their relationship to immigrants. For Phillips, this was echoed in the 1962 Immigration Act, Powell's 1968 "rivers of blood" statement discouraging "immigrants from former colonies", and the atmosphere of "fascism" in the 1980s, as the result of "the industrial decline", "economic hardship" and "depression" when "immigrants became scapegoats for a broader cultural unease" and "fascism . . . appeal[ed] most directly to the lower middle class who fear[ed] a return to working-class status". See Buchanan, B. (2003). Caryl Phillips: Colonialism, Cultural Hybridity and Racial Difference. In R. J. Lane, R. Mengham & P. Tew (Eds.) *Contemporary British Fiction* (p. 182). Cambridge: Polity.

[4] Elsewhere, I discuss the two methods implemented by transatlantic Black writers to integrate the experience and trauma of slavery into historical archive. As research indicates, they retell this experience through a mixture

dreams where "his own mother and father [appear] before him with stern faces, warning him of unfortunate events that [are] sure to blight his life should he choose to remain among these people" (p. 279).

3.2 Small Island: Challenging Racism through Hybridity

Similar to Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore*, in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, the encounter between the "mother country" and her postcolonial members takes place as an experience of immigration stamped by the atmosphere of "traditional xenophobia", where colonial subjects of the Empire are responded by "intolerance" and denial (Lahiri, 2001, p. 210). A plurality of perspectives flowing in a discontinuous narration is used to represent this encounter between the English and the Black immigrants. In opposition to their expectations, the protagonists Gilbert and Hortense pass through a problematic experience of immigration which spans a period of first ignorance and then full realization of their multicultural identity. What differentiates their experience of immigration from Solomon's is their ability to establish "personality integration" (Wilfred et al., 1992, 182) through adopting a multicultural perspective. This is in alignment with Andrea Levy's point of view as a transnational English writer with Jamaican origin, who can renounce neither of her identities. She points out to the impropriety of relating Englishness to "ethnicity" since, she believes, there is no "racial purity". Contrary to being comprised of a single ethnic entity, Levy suggests that, in the formation of one's personal identity as a meaningful whole, all states of belonging are influential whether they are racial or cultural. Thus, claiming the superiority of one ethnicity over others is a dangerously "tacit" racism that rises over "social divisiveness" at the expense of people's "plural and inclusive" coexistence[5].

The protagonists of *Small Island* are among the inhabitants of former colonies who rush to London in the post-war period by listening to the "Mother Country['s] . . . calling" (Levy, 2004, p. 59) promising them better life standards than that of their countries. From Gilbert and Hortense's point of view, England is a land of opportunities that is equally open to and obtainable by anybody and where "everyone walked on a blanket of gold" (p. 90). As this

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of history, memory, and imagination to expose the injustice and a demand for recognition, which requires them to adopt either a counterfactual or hauntological point of view. See Şengenç, H. (2019). Trauma of Slavery and Witnessing in Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts.* In A. Atilla, D. Waterman, & C. A. Sanz Mingo (Eds.), Literature, Narrative and Trauma (pp. 189-199). Bornova, Izmir: Ege Üniversitesi Basımevi.

[5] See Levy, A. (2000, February 19). This is My England. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/feb/19/society1

metaphor suggests, England is a place of hope, happiness, and richness that embellishes immigrants' dreams. Gilbert has the same dream of living "in England" as the other Blacks who think "opportunity ripened [there] as abundant as fruit on Jamaican trees", so "he [is] going to be the man to pluck it." (p. 98). On the other hand, after the war, the "big-ideas-man" (p. 99) Gilbert considers Jamaica a place of confinement, "a small island" (p. 207), where there is a shortage of choices, jobs, money, education, and advancement.

Like many Jamaicans, Gilbert feels like living in a "prison" (p. 209) in his homeland from which he has to escape in order to realize his dreams. What Hortense has in common with Gilbert is a similar sense of stuckness. Since she cannot fulfil her dream of becoming a teacher for "light-skinned girls" (p. 86), an indication of being superior and respectful like the White women who educated her, there is no alternative other than leaving Jamaica. Therefore, she is easily persuaded by Gilbert and accepts his marriage proposal like a "business" agreement to take part in the dream:

> England became my destiny. A dining room set with four chairs. A starched tablecloth embroidered . . . The house is modest . . . the kitchen small but with everything I need to prepare meals . . . in my English kitchen . . . I sip hot tea by an open window and look on my neighbours in the adjacent and opposite dwelling. I walk to the shop where I am greeted with manners, 'Good day' politeness, 'A fine day today', and refinement, 'I trust you are well?' A red bus, a cold morning and daffodils blooming with all the colours of the rainbow. (pp. 100-101)

The idea of identification with the ruler, as Lahiri (2001) refers (p. 212), is a reflection of the "deculturation" project of the empire, as Hall (2001) underlines (p. 36), which is revealed in Gilbert and Hortense's drawing such a fine portrait of an "imaginary homeland."[6] The deculturation of the "native" people (Hall, 2001, p.37) was necessitated and justified by their "being less civilized and closer to nature" (Levy, 2004, p. 67), which gave the "mother country" the "responsibility to civilize" (Hall, 2001, p. 37) her colonial subjects by means of education. The "imperial task" of the colonising "centre" deepened the borders between the "self" and the "other", and it was maintained during the decolonization and post-war periods (Hall, 2001, pp. 37-39). Since they are the immigrants coming from England's former

[6] Hanif Kureishi notes that the middle-class members of Britain's colonial subjects have this desire of an "imaginary homeland" represented by England, as "They have wanted to elevate themselves out of the maelstrom and by gaining economic power and the opportunity and dignity it brings, they have made themselves safe-safer. They have taken advantage of England". See Kureishi, H. (1996). The Rainbow Sign. *My Beautiful Laundrette*. (94). London: Faber and Faber.

colonies, Gilbert and Hortense distinguish themselves as the true members of the "Mother Country" via an identification with the superior race. From the very childhood, it has been a must for them to learn the language, geography, history, and culture of the mother country which will enable them to break away from "chains" (Levy, 2004, p. 71) and become civilized like "flower[s] out of dirt" (p. 70). While they internalize the impositions of and feel a belonging to the empire, they suppress their racial identity as the outcome of deculturation. For example, Gilbert is proud of defending his country by joining voluntarily to the RAF and, wearing his airman's uniform that asserts his Britishness, feels powerful and admirable "like a god" (p. 125). Although he's Black, he sees himself superior to Black American soldiers in the army:

> we West Indians, being subjects of His Majesty King George VI, for the time being superior black skin. We were allowed to live with white soldiers, while the inferior American negro was not. We Jamaicans, knowing our island is one of the largest in the Caribbean, think ourselves sophisticated men of the world. Better than the small islanders whose universe only runs a few miles. (p. 131)

Gilbert believes in his loyal service for the "Mother Country", for it is an indicator of being British, thus a guarantee for his later profession, a very privileged one, as a "wireless operator/air gunner or flight engineer" (p. 147).

Hortense has great expectations due to some of her qualities she identifies as the sign of Britishness and civilization, too. She is educated to be a teacher, refined in both manner and appearance, talks proper English, and is affirmed to have a lighter skin colour, a reason to feel more fortunate than her Black friends, all of which promise her an easy acceptance by, and respect and future success in the "Mother Country". Her unawareness of the xenophobic confrontation between the colonial "guests" and the "host community" (Lahiri, 2001, p. 212) impacted by prejudice, discrimination, and the guests' remaining unrecognized as British prevents Hortense from understanding Queenie's, "only a woman whose living [is] obtained from letting of rooms", reference to being seen with "darkies" in the streets (Levy, 2004, p. 231).

As Hortense's impression of the darkness and coldness of the London morning that she contrasts with the warm sunny climate in Jamaica and the image in her mind of the "mother country" foreshadows, the undesirable strangers' "physical" (Lahiri, 2001, p. 200) conflict with the new land emerges sooner than expected. Their disappointment of acquiring lodgings

and occupation worsens when they have to face the authorities' rejection of them as unsuitable candidates for teaching at school and working in a factory. As Lahiri underlines, colonial subjects took "physically demanding" and "low status" jobs in England (p. 207). Correspondingly, not being able to find the job they deserve regarding their good qualifications discourages both Gilbert and Hortense like many of their fellow citizens, "small-island men" who happen to find themselves "with a broom in [their] hand" rather than "flying through the sky on metal wings" (Levy, 2004, p. 146).

It turns into an emotional conflict since Hortense and Gilbert are ignorant of the ostracism against the "other" in the mother country, yet they face it gradually as unwanted immigrants in the new land. Despite his competence as an "ex-serviceman" (Levy, 2004, p. 312), Gilbert is considered a menace against the ideals of the empire, a good enough reason for depriving him the possibility of a job even in a factory:

> His explanation was that there were women working in the factory. Not understanding his meaning I said that I did not mind. He smiled at this and then told me, 'You see, we have white women working here . . . what if you accidentally found talking to a white woman? . . . I'm afraid all hell would break loose if the men found you talking to their women. They simply wouldn't stand for that . . . You must see the problems it would cause?'. (p. 312)

The job interview Hortense experiences is another proof of the lack of knowledge and culturally constructed contempt against the "other". The only reference for immigrants' employment is racial background. She is rejected without even being looked at her educational qualifications and is humiliated by the traditional indifference:

> Where? . . . In Kingston, Jamaica . . . Where's that? . . . And where did you trained to be a teacher? . . . Is that in Jamaica? . . . Well, I'm afraid you can't teach here . . . in this country. You're not qualified to teach here in England. It doesn't matter that you were a teacher in Jamaica . . . you will not be able to teach here. (pp.453-454)

For Hortense, who is ashamed of her own "kind"[7], the ones "from home" (Levy, 2004, p. 463) whom Gilbert cherishes when he feels the burden of estrangement, due to considering them uneducated, uncivilized, and unfitting into England, the impossibility of obtaining her dream

[7]Kureishi (1996) points out to the tendency of being in "the company of one's own kind", which is contrary to the coexistence of peoples with different races living in an environment of "mutual respect and understanding". This brings forth a "failure of connection", for this tendency leads people to view the others outside their own community as having "less humanity", "the Enemy", or "the alien" (pp. 94-95).

job turns into "a sharp slap from the Mother Country's hand", which she wishes to be a "misunderstanding" (p. 453).

The difficulties immigrants face, the terrible conditions in which they try to survive, and the racial discrimination they endure in the army, at work, at the cinema or on the streets when they are stared at by the Whites and forced to show respect to them arouses in Hortense and Gilbert the feelings of "alienation and loneliness" (Lahiri, 2001, p. 211). Constantly suspected, refused, and excluded, Gilbert puts the blame on his black skin as the root of the problem, for he is "soon" convinced that "there [is] indeed something wrong with [him]." (Levy, 2004, p. 313). Although he gets a job as a postman driver, he witnesses the impossibility of unity between his own kind, the "coloured boys" (p. 29), and the people who monopolize the identity of Britishness. He is ignored, made fun of, and humiliated by his White colleagues at the post office, but he never takes up rudeness in order not to justify the Whites' racist presumptions regarding the Blacks:

> Politeness has always been my policy. It makes the good people of England revise what they think of you, if only for a second or two. They expect us colony men to be uncultured. Some, let us face it, do not expect that we can talk at all. 'It speaks, Mummy, it speaks,' has been called after me. Oh, yes, Mummy, it speaks and when it speaks it usually speaks with courtesy . . . I had been in England long enough to know that my complexion at a door can cause – what shall I say? – tension. When I was new to England all the doors looked the same to me. I make a mistake, I knock at the wrong one. Man, this woman come to the door brandishing a hot poker in my face yelling that she wanted no devil in her house. 'Since when was the devil in the RAF?' I asked her. Stand back I had learned that day – stand back, smile and watch out! (p. 165, 168).

Accordingly, it discourages him due to the fear of unemployment from defending himself against the racist insults in the Post Office despite being able to, for he knows that his challenge will be used by the White society to dismiss him depending on racially constructed representations of the "other":

> I could have whacked his nose until it cracked and bled . . . Smash my forehead into his mouth to dislodge a few teeth. And all before his friends had time to reach me . . . Come, let us face it, I could have just blown on him to push him to the ground. But if I was even to friendly tweak this man's cheek, or matey pat his back, I knew I would lose my job. Three white men looking on would have the story – the day the darkie, unprovoked, attacked this nice

> gentleman. Savages, they would say. And all would agree, we must never employ any more of these coons: they are trouble – more trouble than they are worth. What else could this Jamaican man do? I dropped my head. (p. 317)

The rejection, denial, and discrimination the Black immigrants coming from Britain's former colonies experience lead Gilbert to question and liken this condition to a morbid relationship; the one that is between a loyal dutiful child and an indifferent unappreciative mother for whom, just out of familial bondage, he fights in vain since he is unrecognized even in return for the great pains he takes:

> Living far from you is a beloved relation whom you have never met. Yet this relation is so dear a kin she is known as Mother. Your own mummy talks of Mother all the time. 'Oh, Mother is a beautiful woman – refined, mannerly and cultured.' Your daddy tells you, 'Mother thinks of you as her children . . . There are many valorous stories told of her . . . Her photographs are cherished, pinned in your own family album to be admired . . . everything you have that is worthy is sent to Mother as gifts . . . one day you hear Mother calling – she is troubled, she need your help . . . Leave home, leave familiar, leave love . . . Shiver, tire, hunger – for no sacrifice is too much . . . can you believe . . . you will meet Mother? The filthy tramp that eventually greets you is she . . . She offers you no comfort after your journey. No smile. No welcome. Yet she looks down at you through lordly eyes and says, 'Who the bloody hell are you?' (p. 139)

The refusal by the "Mother" which is accompanied by the feelings of loneliness and alienation" result in a sense of "displacement" (Lahiri, 2001, p. 211) in the Black protagonists. Besides Gilbert, Hortense loses her faith in everything attached to Britishness when she is turned down as a Jamaican teacher considered incapable of teaching in England. She sucks her teeth for the first time, a manner which is peculiar to Jamaicans and which she has despised and disowned before, for she finally confesses to "have found [. . .] this country . . . cold" (Levy, 2004, p. 466). In a similar moment of identity crisis, Gilbert seeks the "company of" the Blacks who offer the relief of their real home. His juxtaposition of the "Jamaican sun", which stands for easy communication in a friendly atmosphere and the chance to exist as he really is, with the English rain "striking as steel pins" (p. 325), which symbolizes their unfulfilled anticipations, indicates the immigrants' burden of living in a hostile country. They are awakened from the dream by the "Mother Country", a "thankless place", to which they feel no longer bound. Thus, seeing some Black people is the only consolation to the lonely immigrants. As Gilbert observes, no matter that they are unknown to

each other, each of the protagonists will be "so pleased to see a black face [and] run and hug the familiar stranger" (p.463).

For the members of Britain's former colonies immigrating to England, the ideal of Britishness results in a crisis of identity since it is closely linked with birthplace and racial background. Therefore, Hortense and Gilbert from the *periphery* are not recognized by the imperial *centre* even if they accomplish *civilization*. The problematic stage of defining *home* is followed by another problem, the thought of *returning home* that appears, for the colonial immigrants, as a solution to the conflict of not being viewed as enough British to be able to stay in *the Mother Country*. The immigrants' dilemma of whether to stay or to return is foreshadowed by Gilbert's recollection of his cousin Elwood's warning to stay and fight for his "own country's" (Levy, 2004, p. 129) independence rather than volunteering for an unwilling "Mother" that is obsessed with one's belonging to "pure English descent" and disavowal if his "colour" [does] not suit" (p. 131) her.

A possible solution to the protagonists' identity crisis comes through the reconciliation with their racial identity and clamping to the *company* of their *own*. Hortense, for instance, doesn't avoid being seen with Gilbert when she can't get the teaching job even though she previously accuses him of "darken[ing] up the place" (p. 450), that is posing prevention before her on the way to the job interview. The realization of a shared experience of immigration in the indifferent and hostile "Mother Country", where they suffer because of their racial background, provides an understanding toward each other and reminds the necessity of struggle for survival together instead of going back. This new perspective gives Hortense the power to "pay them no mind" (p. 463) by ignoring the Whites the same way she is ignored, and Gilbert to challenge the authority of the colonial empire by questioning Englishness:

> Gilbert sucked on his teeth to return this man's scorn. 'You know what your trouble 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 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 . . . Listen to me, man, we both just finish fighting a war . . . on the same side . . . for empire . . . But still, after all that we suffer together, you wan' tell me I am worthless and you are not. Am I to be the servant and you are the master for all time? No. Stop this, man. Stop it now. (p. 525)

4. Conclusions

In a nutshell, *A Distant Shore* and *Small Island* are two examples of immigrant literature that raise awareness to the issue of racism. As English novelists of the Black-Atlantic, Caryl Phillips and Andrea Levy share similar immigrant backgrounds, and they depict the story of *the other* by giving voice, in these novels, to the suppressed side of the former colonial encounter. The protagonists Solomon, Hortense, and Gilbert are free African and Jamaicans, yet they face racial discrimination since the imperial idea of Englishness is still a marker of superiority and a justification for exclusion in contemporary England during the encounter with immigrants. By means of the questioning of the power relationships between the *center* and *periphery*, and the representation of immigration via such postcolonial concepts as estrangement, displacement, identity crisis, and hybridity, *A Distant Shore* and *Small Island* break the silence of and target a literary liberation for the Black. Nevertheless, despite being transnational novelists believing in the importance of living in a pluralistic society where people with different national backgrounds all have a say, Caryl Phillips and Andrea Levy differ in their attitudes toward hybridity as a possible way of fighting back against racism. Solomon's hybridity does not have a life-sustaining quality to ensure him a survival in England. On the other hand, Hortense and Gilbert become independent individuals thanks to their inbetweenness. As they avow their multicultural identities, they are encouraged, unlike Solomon, to challenge the impositions of Englishness and overcome the identity crisis, which is a threshold to cross for their survival in England as unwelcome immigrants.

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