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Cosmopolitanism and its Discontents: Postcolonialism and the Immigrant Experience in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*

Abstract

Andrea Levy's *Small Island* captures the immigrant's experience in cosmopolitan London. In this novel, she showcases the fact that contrary to its claims to be accommodating to this diversity, the values upheld make no room for difference as they are strictly Eurocentric. The characters who through their colonial experience and education have been misled to believe that they are part of the British Empire are presented here faced with the shock of discovery that once in England, they are ascribed the second class position. This paper intends to interrogate the claim to cosmopolitanism. This is done through an engagement with postcolonial critique which conceptualizes the power relations between the colonizers and the colonized. The main argument of this discussion is that although the London of Andrea Levy's *Small Island* accommodates individuals from a variety of racial, national, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, they are never given the chance to experience any form of social integration.

cosmopolitanism, postcolonialism, Andrea Levy

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Introduction

The phenomenon of migration has created some of the most diversified societies in the world. Many of the former imperial powers by virtue of their economic boom and socio-political stability have seen thousands of immigrants from their former colonies flock into their boundaries. These are especially from countries with weaker economies, since the tendency is for people to seek for greener pastures. England is one country which has received a variety of migrants and these especially from its former colonies. The width, breadth and diversity of the British Empire mirror the number and variety of the immigrant population within its borders. Migration to Britain became particularly vibrant in the post-1945 period and has largely contributed to Britain becoming one of the most cosmopolitan nations in the world.

The fact that this migration was mostly from Britain's erstwhile colonies implies that it is in a sense, a continuation of the colonial narrative. Graham Huggan in Post-coloniality holds that "the mass relocation, either voluntary or forced of people from their own homelands to new regions — probably still the most common understanding of the increasingly multivalent term 'diaspora' — has been a central feature in the historical processes of colonization" (2010: 66). He goes ahead to cite the three major movements that make up these processes of colonization and it is the third that is of interest to this paper:

> Finally and more recently, there are those (both white and non-white) diasporas of *casualization* which, loosely bracketed under the Jamaican poet Louise Bennett's sarcastic term 'reverse colonization' are formed by groups of people who have moved, usually by choice but often under duress, from economically exploited and/or marginalized regions to metropolitan centres either in direct response to labour demands or, more generally in search of a better life. (Huggan 2010: 66)

The migrants this study is interested in are those who have moved to England from its former West Indian colonies with high hopes of a better life in the fictional world of Andrea Levy's *Small Island*. This movement is considered part of the colonial process because these migrants from the British colonies have chosen England as destination as a direct consequence of the colonial encounter. The varieties of individuals who migrate to England have therefore given it the face of a cosmopolitan nation.

The purpose of this paper is to question the notion of cosmopolitanism through a reading of Levy's *Small Island*. The main argument is that cosmopolitanism is a myth because while the immigrants are granted entry into England, this is as far as it goes. Thereafter they are refused social integration and exist on the fringes of the society. Thus the so-called cosmopolitan society of *Small Island* fails to uphold the ideals of justice, good neighbourliness and fellow-feeling. On the contrary, what is evident is an assemblage of people radically divided by origin, ethnicity and culture; one characterized by blatant discrimination and inequality.

Through Levy's engagement with the question of belonging in the diaspora, her novel falls within the subgenre of Cosmopolitan fiction. She investigates the principles and politics of intricate and manifold belonging. Katherine Stanton in her book *Cosmopolitan Fictions* has defined cosmopolitan fictions as works that signal "their interest in states of feeling, modes of belonging, and practices of citizenship in an increasingly pluralized cosmos" (2013: 2). Given that these are the main preoccupations of Levy's *Small Island*, my consideration of it as a cosmopolitan fiction is justified. Going further in her analysis of the notion, Stanton has added that "meant as an interpretive les as well as a descriptive term, 'cosmopolitan fiction' can help us glean new insights into literary and cultural works […] that best thematize migration, exile, and the diaspora" (2013: 2). All of these fully describe Levy's novel. Besides, the language use in the text is peculiar. This is especially as one observes the switch between British English and Caribbean Creole. This renders the notion of national borders fluid and opens up one of the settings — London — to a multiplicity of cultural identities.

Conceptual Definitions

Before pursuing the discussion, it seems only appropriate to provide a definition of the key terms which are 'cosmopolitanism' and 'postcolonialism'. It serves as a basis upon which the arguments of the paper are built. Cosmopolitanism springs from the root 'cosmos' which refers to the whole universe. This is suggestive of a broad variety of cultural and national influences. A cosmopolitan atmosphere refers to "a place where people from many different countries live" (*Macmillan English Dictionary*). Besides this literal meaning, cosmopolitanism goes beyond the idea of different people living together to connote a harmonious way of living characterized by hospitality. This is well expressed by Robert Spencer (2011) who holds that "cosmopolitanism is variously used to designate the Kantian ideal of hospitality and perpetual peace (Bohman and Lutz 1997); a democratic society that transcends the nation state (Archibugi and Held 1995; Falk 1995); an extended definition of citizenship (Smith 2001)" (1/2). The OED defines cosmopolitanism as "a sense of belonging to all parts of the world" while for his part, Walter Mignolo holds that "cosmopolitanism is a set of projects towards conviviality" (qtd in Spencer 2011: 4). Spencer therefore concludes that:

> Cosmopolitanism is both a disposition — one characterized by self-awareness, by penetrating sensitivity to the world beyond one's immediate milieu, and by an enlarged sense of moral and political responsibility to individuals and groups outside one's local or national community […]. (Spencer 2011: 41)

So, cosmopolitanism does not only involve a form of transcultural literacy but more especially tolerance of difference. It presupposes a society based on the recognition and acceptance of difference. It is one wherein individuals can feel at home even though away from

home. Ulf Hannerz (2010) has intimated that "cosmopolitanism is based on an orientation, a willingness to engage with the other […] an intellectual and aesthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences", adding that "this could be described as a kind of xenophilia, or penchant for diversity" (qtd in Vertoved 2010: 75). This idea is further pursued by Craig Calhoun who defines cosmopolitanism as "focusing on the world as a whole rather than on a particular locality or group within it. It means being at home with diversity" (2008: 428).

The above definitions underline a common factor which is the fact that cosmopolitanism does not simply denote the 'physical' presence of different peoples, cultures, beliefs in a given space but must include certain norms governing the harmonious coexistence of these differences, and promoting a kind of unity in diversity. In line with this, Gustavo Lins Ribeiro states that:

> Cosmopolitanism presupposes a positive attitude towards difference, a desire to construct broad allegiances and peaceful global communities of citizens who should be able to communicate across cultural and social boundaries forming a Universalist solidarity. (Ribeiro 2001: 19)

Therefore, when this study sets out to deconstruct the idea of cosmopolitanism in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, it is in effect not arguing that the British society portrayed in the text is not divergent1. Rather, it seeks to maintain that it is a society which does not favour this diversity, one in which the immigrant population although physically in England do not belong to the society; for as Ulrich Beck as postulated: "to belong or not to belong, that is the cosmopolitan question" (qtd in Calhoun 2008: 443).

Postcolonialism is the next concept warranting a definition in this discussion. Although it remains one of the more popular terms in contemporary academia, it is almost a truism that the more it is applied, the more difficult it becomes to define it. One area however in its definition where there is a general consensus, is the fact that the 'post' in the term is not a marker of temporality. Other than this, postcolonialism becomes more and more fluid as it develops a variety of meaning in the hands of each academic. The term thus refers not to an epoch but to a stance or a reaction to colonialism and its myriad excesses. Since the colonial entreprise was an exercise in oppression, the term postcolonial has become an umbrella term for the treatment of diverse forms of oppression. Rumina Sethi in *The Politics of Postcolonialism* declares that:

> In an age replete with innumerable variants of 'post-ist' politics, postcolonialism means so many things to so many people that its full implications necessarily lie outside our grasp. Applied indiscriminately to subjects that would never normally have been perceived collectively, its original focus on colonial politics has now extended from issues of minority-ism under European rule to the hegemony of the US in turning the world global, and from the marginality of women and blacks to the exile of those of us settled outside our nations. (Sethi 2011: 1)

While the term may appear appealing in addressing other issues of discrimination and oppression outside the colonial narrative, in this study, I retain its original relationship to colonial politics. Although *Small Island* is set both in the colonies and England, I argue that the immigrant experience therein is a direct continuum of this colonial politics. This is not

[1] John McLeod has noted that by the end of the Second World War, the urban and human geography of London has been irreversibly altered as a consequence of patterns of migration from countries with a history of colonialism, so that today a number of London's neighbourhoods are known primarily in terms of 'overseas' populations they have nurtured. It is estimated that 300 hundred different languages are readily spoken within the boundaries of the British capital (McLeod 2004: 4).

only because these immigrants are from the colonial outposts and are thus colonial subjects, although this is an important denominator; but most especially because the same forces are at play here in the metropole as in the colonial states. Many critics have seen the need to include the immigrant question under the rubric of postcolonialism and with good reasons. Ato Quayson in *Postcolonialism and Postmodernism* defines postcolonialism as follows:

> A working definition for postcolonialism is that it involves a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects, both at the local level of ex-colonial societies, as well as at the level of more general global developments thought to be the after-effects of empire. (Quayson 2005: 94)

It is in considering the immigrant experience as an effect of colonialism that my engagement with postcolonialism is justified. Ali Behdad corroborates this when he intimates that:

> Geographical and cultural displacements have radically informed (post) colonial consciousness. Although people have always moved either voluntarily or by force, European colonialism entailed a massive dislocation of people in the form of the slave trade and later indentured labor [sic]. […] More significantly, these displacing practices of colonialism have given rise to a new set of geographical and cultural movements among ex-colonies and the West since decolonization. (Behdad 2005: 396)

He goes on to specify that "Caribbean intellectuals like George Lamming and C. L. R. James viewed the new set of geographical and cultural movements between the ex-colonies and the west as the inevitable consequences of European expansion" (Behdad 2005: 398). While Rumina Sethi underlines that "in an attempt to 'world' postcolonialism further, Homi Bhabha emphasized border crossing by including 'transnational histories of migrants, the colonized or political refugees'"(Sethi 2011: 2). This paper therefore engages with the stories of migrants not because it is central of itself but because firstly, these are migrants whose movements have been occasioned by the colonial encounter and secondly but more importantly even here in the metropolis, the same power politics are at work, together with the age-old colonial binary opposites like master/slave. Equally we find the long held colonialist representation and stereotyping of the colonized fully at work. Thus the immigrant experience in *Small Island* falls squarely in line with the concerns of postcolonialism. The brutal inequalities in the much acclaimed cosmopolitan Britain all point to the continuation of the colonial story. Thus John McLeod notes that:

> Several postcolonial writers bear witness to the racism, violence and torment they and others experienced during the decade, and offer a bleak, sombre view of the city that demythologizes the colonial myth of London as the heart of a welcoming site of opportunity and fulfillment for those arriving from the colonies. (McLeod 2007: 27)

It is this disturbing experience of the immigrants or their postcolonial condition that serves as a basis to interrogate cosmopolitanism in *Small Island.*

Dreams of a Nurturing Mother Country

One of the hallmarks of British colonialism was the institution of a colonial system of education wherein the colonized were taught amongst other things, that England was the ba-

stion of human civilization. England in the textbooks of Empire was a warm and welcoming land of freedom. Besides, the fact of presenting England as the Mother Country created an illusion in the minds of the colonized that they were part of England. This was furthered by the notion of the British Empire which created the symbol of an entity where to be part of one region in the empire meant one could as well be part of any region. All of these coupled with England's position of prestige and power, made it the favoured destination. England became an obsession for the colonized subject. This obsession is nowhere better expressed than in the song composed by calypso singer Lord Kitchener for the docking of the *Empire Windrush*[2] in June 1948. The song goes thus:

> London is the place for me
> London, this lovely city
> You can go to France or America
> India, Asia or Australia
> But you must come back to London city
>
> Well believe me, I am speaking broad-mindedly
> I am glad to know my mother country
> I've been travelling to countries years ago
> But this is the place I wanted to know
> London, that's the place for me
>
> To live in London you're really comfortable
> Because the English people are very much sociable
> They take you here and they take you there
> And they make you feel like a millionaire
> So London, that's the place for me
>
> (qtd in Dawson 2007: 2)

It is important to reproduce the entire song here so as to get a feel of the obsession with England. It is noteworthy that Lord Kitchener was making his first trip to England when he composed this song, yet he already had ideas as to what awaited him in the mother country. What he expresses is nothing short of a conviction that he will be warmly welcomed in England and made to feel like a king. Lord Kitchener's optimism is a reflection of the general optimism of the West Indians schooled under the British colonial system. Ashley Dawson in *Mongrel Nation* thus opines that "'London is the place for Me' which Lord Kitchener composed during the voyage across the Atlantic, is the fantasy of a colonial subject who imagines himself returning to the welcoming bosom of his mother country" (2007: 2). This situation is found in *Small Island* where Hortense one of the main characters expresses her expectations of England:

> […] England became my destiny. A dining-table in a dining room set with four chairs. A starched table cloth embroidered with bows. Armchairs in the sitting room placed around a small wood fire. The house is modest- nothing fancy, no show — the kitchen small but with everything I need to prepare meals. We eat rice and peas on Sunday with chicken and corn, but in my English kitchen, roast meat with two vegetables and even fish and chips bubble on the stove. My husband fixes the window and look on my neighbours in the adjacent and opposite

[2] This is the first ship that transported West Indians in their numbers to England in 1948. It is worth mentioning that Andrea Levy's father was on board this ship alongside notable Trinidadian author Samuel Selvon.

> 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 the colours of the rainbow. (Levy 2004: 83)

Hortense (like Lord Kitchener) above builds an image of England from the storybooks of her colonial curriculum which is characterized by warmth, gaiety, politeness and refinement. The England of her textbooks is a cosmopolitan society *par excellence* where good grace, fellow-feeling and good neighbourliness are the norms. Hortense's illusion has been created by her education in Jamaica which deluded her into thinking of herself as a Briton by virtue of her being a subject of the British Empire. This explains why when Jamaican men were being drafted into the British army to fight against Hitler in the Second World War, her friend explains to her that they had to join in the war effort because if Hitler won, he would reinstitute slavery. The fair-skinned Hortense had concluded to herself that "No one would ever think to enchain someone such as I. All the world knows what that rousing anthem declares: 'Britons never, never, never shall be slaves"' (Levy 59). This clearly underlines her misbelief in thinking that she is Briton.

This obsession is also shared by her friend Celia who dreams of a life in England: "[…] when I am older, Hortense, I will be leaving Jamaica and I will be going to live in England". This is when her voice became high-class and her nose point into the air — well, as far as her round flat nose could — and she swayed as she brought the picture to her mind's eye. '"Hortense, in England I will have a big house with a bell at the front door and I will ring the bell'. […]. 'I will ring the bell in this house when I am in England. That is what will happen to me when I am older"'. (Levy 9) So both Celia and Hortense are certain that they will have to migrate to England. In their colonialist educated imagination, England is their Mother Country and holds the ultimate key to their future. Prominent British/Indian writer Salman Rushdie has underscored this point in *Imaginary Homelands* where he states that "In common with many Bombay-raised middle-class children of my generation, I grew up with an intimate knowledge of, and even sense of friendship with a certain kind of England: a dream England…" (Rushdie 2006: 433). It is with this 'dream England' drawn from textbooks that these colonials are familiar and to which they are lured.

This explains the overwhelming pride in families whose sons were called upon to serve with the English army during the war. When Michael Roberts, Hortense's cousin, does this, his mother explains with pride: 'he has gone to England with the purpose of joining the Royal Air Force […]. They need men like my son. Men of courage and good breeding. There is to be a war over there. The Mother country is calling men like my son to be heroes whose families will be proud of them' (Levy 49). That a mother would be ready to even lose her son to a war that does not directly concern Jamaica, bespeaks this obsession. It emphasizes the level at which England has been placed by her colonies, but most especially points to the fact that these Jamaicans indeed see themselves as an integral part of the British Empire. Thus when a British seeks to know why Gilbert would choose to leave the warmth of his country for England, Gilbert's surprising answer is "to fight for my country, sir".(Levy 115). Much later he has difficulties explaining his nationality to some Americans because of this strong need to show that he is part of the British Empire. The following discussion ensues between them:

"You're British" you say?
"British, yes" I answered.
"But not English?"
"No, I am from Jamaica but England is my Mother Country".
(Levy 131)

This is sufficiently illuminating as it fully expresses the Jamaican strongly held belief in their belonging to the Mother Country. This also brings out the question of multiple belongings which is a defining feature of cosmopolitan fiction. The relationship these Jamaicans imagine between themselves and England is well conveyed by Gilbert when he explains thus:

> Let me ask you to imagine this. Living far from you is a beloved relation whom you have never met. Yet this relation is so dear a kin she is known as mother. Your own mummy talks of Mother all the time. 'oh, mother is a beautiful woman — refined, mannerly and cultured'. Your daddy tells you, 'Mother thinks of you as her children. Like the Lord above, she takes care of you from afar'. There are many valorous stories told of her, which enthrall grown men as well as children. Her photographs are cherished, pinned in your own family album to be admired over and over. Your finest, your best, everything you have that is worthy is sent to Mother as a gifts. And on her birthday you sing-song and party.
>
> Then one day you hear mother calling — she is troubled, she need your help. Your mummy, your daddy say go. Leave home, leave familiar, leave love. Travel seas with waves that swell about you as substantial as concrete buildings. Shiver, tire, hunger — for no sacrifice is too much to see you at Mother's needy side. (Levy 116)

This from the Jamaican perspective is in essence the relationship between Jamaica and England. The Jamaicans are totally convinced of their belonging to the British Empire thus they can only expect to be welcomed and embraced by the arms of the Mother Country. This coupled with Britain's economic prosperity pushes them to migrate there. It is therefore against this backdrop that it is said of Gilbert that:

> Returning to England was more than an ambition for Gilbert Joseph. It was a mission, a calling, and even a duty. This man was so restless he could not stay still. Always in motion he was agitated, impatient — like a petulant boy waiting his turn at cricket. He told me opportunity ripened in England as abundant as fruit on Jamaican trees and he was going to be the man to pluck it. (Levy 81)

It is armed with this belief — this conviction that Gilbert, like thousands of Caribbeans and eventually Hortense migrate to the Mother Country of which they consider themselves to be part. Given the fact that these Caribbeans joined the war to fight for Britain, and considering England's claim to cosmopolitanism, it remains to judge how cosmopolitan it is in the postcolonial context. Are the norms of cosmopolitanism upheld when it comes to its former colonies? Seeking an answer to this preoccupation will constitute the next part of my paper.

Orphans in the Mother Country or A Failed Cosmopolitanism

Like mentioned in the foregone discussion, the Jamaicans migrate to England with the logic of their colonial education which prepared them for a warm reception. Theirs is an illusion of a mother taking her children into the warmth of her embrace; it is the belief in a cosmo-

politan state which is accommodating to a variety of peoples, ethnicities, nationalities and religions. However *Small Island* discredits this claim by underscoring the limits of Britain's cosmopolitanism.

Reading through the text, what we come across is rather a replay of the colonial relationship whereby the colonizers still hold negative views of the colonized, where these colonized once in England are not integrated into the society. Levy questions England's claim to cosmopolitanism very early in the novel during the British Empire Exhibition. Queenie after attending this exhibition states "I thought I'd been to Africa", adding that "I went to Africa when it came to Wembley" (Levy 1). The idea of Africa coming to England lays the stage for the presentation of migrants from the ex-colonies to England. Queenie thinks she went to Africa because she visited the African section of the exhibition. This exhibition therefore serves as a preview to the mass migration from the colonies. The attitude of the British towards the Africans is a projection of what kind of reception awaits the immigrants. Africa is presented as 'the jungle' (Levy 4). While Graham comments of the Africans that "they're not civilized. They only understand drums" (Levy 5). This attitude towards the African clearly shows an intolerance or better still a lack of understanding of difference which will characterize the relationship between the British and the immigrants.

The immigrants quickly come to realize what rift exists between their dreams of a nurturing Mother Country and the reality of how xenophobic England truly is. We witness this sharp contrast when Gilbert arrives England bubbling with hope:

> But still breezy from the sailing on the *Windrush* these were the first weeks for we Jamaicans. And every one of us was fat as a Bible with the faith that we would get a nice place to live in England — a bath, a kitchen, a little patch of garden. These two damp cramped rooms that the friend of Winston's brother had let us use were temporary. One night, maybe two. More private than the shelter. Better than the hostel. Two months I was there! Two months, and this intimate hospitality had begun to violate my hope. (Levy 177)

The rejection he gets from landlords is proof that by virtue of his skin colour and origin, he is most unwelcome in England. Far from his dream of getting a cozy place to live in, he hardly even gets a place at all. He adds "so how many gates I swing open? How many houses I knock on? Let me count the doors that opened slow and shut quick without even me breath managing to get inside". (Levy 177) This sets him wondering if the scenario would have been different had he still been in his RAF uniform. The landlords bring up a litany of excuses why they could not take him in: other lodgers wouldn't like it if a coloured is taken in, husband, wife, women in the house, neighbours and even children, he is told, would be outraged if a coloured man came among them. This is indicative of the failure of Britain's cosmopolitanism. By rejecting Gilbert based on his colour, it means, there is a limit to the acceptance of diversity that makes up a cosmopolitan society.

When Hortense arrives England, she is outraged and devastated by the kind of accommodation she has to live in with Gilbert. Her dreams of an English mansion start falling to pieces instantly. She bemoans over and over "Just this? I had to sit on the bed. My legs gave way. There was no bounce in me as I fell. 'Just this? This is where you are living? Just this?'" (Levy: 17). Hortense the newcomer cannot comprehend why Gilbert would 'choose' to live in such a condition in the England of her dreams. By focusing here on the newest immigrant, Levy forcefully brings to light the notion of illusion versus reality. This draws the line betwe-

en what the immigrants expected at departure and what they encounter at arrival, underlining the idea of a failed cosmopolitanism. Hortense goes further to probe: "is this the way the English live? How many times she ask me that question? I lose count. 'This is the way the English live?' That question became a mournful lament, sighed on each and every thing she see [sic]. 'Is this the way the English live?'". (Levy 18) What she does not yet realize is that to be in England — to be granted entry into England does not imply acceptance or belonging; it is in this that lies the failure of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan thinking accepts people from different backgrounds, and this is what is absent in the England of *Small Island*. Thus the cosmopolitanism in the text fails because England is a radically racist society. Thus it fails to accept, accommodate or integrate individuals like Gilbert, especially because they are black. This is even more disturbing for individuals like Gilbert who had put their lives on the line by fighting for Britain during the war. It only accentuates the failure of Britain's cosmopolitanism.

When Queenie accepts Gilbert and other blacks as tenants in her house, it causes an uproar among her neighbours who find this unacceptable. Mr Todd decries the fact that due to Queenie's action, their street was losing its respectability and tries to discourage her and eventually falls out with her. Queenie reports thus:

> Gilbert moving in had put an end to all that. Darkies! I'd taken in darkies next door to him. But not just me. There were others living around the square. A few more up the road a bit. His concern, he said, was that they would turn the area into a jungle. (Levy 95)

This observation is far from what one would expect from an acclaimed cosmopolitan society. Words like 'darkies' and 'jungle' rather portray a racist, stereotyped mindset, a direct antithesis to cosmopolitanism. What we find here is the interlocking of the cosmopolitan question and postcolonialism whereby long-held representations of blacks step in to taint England's claim to cosmopolitanism. Other neighbours equally show their wariness at Queenie's coloured tenants. She recounts as follows:

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

This disparaging language and rejection comes against the likes of Gilbert who had risked their lives in fighting alongside these Britons for their country[3]. It is partly why Queenie takes him in as she broods "memories around here might be very short but mine wasn't. I'd known Gilbert during the war. He was in the RAF. A boy in blue fighting for this country just like Bernard and the blushing Morris. No one else would take him in" (Levy 97). So, although the Britons could accept that coloureds fight alongside them against the enemy, once they war ended, they saw monsters that were unfit for human society. Such a situation seriously questions the whole notion of cosmopolitanism in the postcolonial context. Thus John McLeod (2004) has submitted that:

[3] Dawson has noted that on board the Windrush were some passengers who had already been to Britain, helping in to defend the Motherland from the Nazi onslaught during the Second World War and many of these migrants from the Caribbean felt that they were coming to collect the reward for their faithfulness as British Subjects (Dawson 2007).

> Brixton's diasporic peoples, like many other new Londoners from countries with a history of colonialism, would be subjected to a series of attitudes which frequently objectified and demonized them, often in terms of race, while questioning their rights of citizenship and tenure in one of the world's most historically cosmopolitan cities. The perpetual identification of these peoples and their families as 'strangers' rather than as citizens of London bears witness to the profoundly polycultural character of the city in the post war years and a number of reactionary responses at the levels of state and street which refused the newcomers legitimacy and rights of tenure. (Levy 2)

By refusing these immigrants legitimacy, these Londoners are in effect refusing the celebrated cosmopolitanism of their city. We can already glimpse from these attitudes that blackness constitutes the limits of cosmopolitanism in *Small Island*.

Queenie's neighbours are so distraught by her taking in black tenants that Blanche and her husband decide to move out with Blanche telling Queenie that her husband had just returned from the war and the country no longer feels like his own. She complains bitterly that their "house had been in her family for generations" but they prefer selling it and moving into a semi-detached house in Bromley than to live besides coloureds. Then Mr Todd returns to recount to her an "unfortunate incident" whereby his sister who was walking along a pavement was forced to walk into the road because two black women had not stepped aside for her to pass. He therefore emphasizes that "as they [the blacks] are guests in this country, it should be them that step off the pavement when an English person approaches" (Levy 99). Such acute inequality along racial lines interrogates the cosmopolitanism of the English society.

This stands in stark antagonism to the expectations of the immigrants. In the case of Hortense, she had imagined a society replete with warmth, hospitality, politeness and refinement, but the reality is the direct opposite. Thus McLeod observes that "the reality of London, of course, would often be very different from its expectations especially as regards walking on the streets or securing residence". (Levy 40) This explains why Queenie later advises Hortense to "step off the pavement into the road if an English person wishes to pass and there is not sufficient room on the pavement for us both" (Levy 277). Once in England, these immigrants come face-to-face with the reality of their circumstances, where they are actually outsiders within. This has prompted McLeod to conclude that "Caribbeans were within, but not a part of, London's economic and social fabric" (Levy 2).

Besides the street and residence, these immigrants have a hard time finding jobs in England. Like briefly mentioned before, the British were ready to welcome the Caribbean to help with the war effort, but once this was over, these same Caribbeans suddenly became an unwelcome nuisance to the British. Gilbert narrates his ordeal in searching for a job as follows:

> See me now. I am dressed no longer in my RAF uniform of blue but still, from the left, from the right, this West Indian man is looking just as fine in his best civilian suit. In my hand I have a letter of introduction from the forces of labour exchange concerning a job as store man. I take it to the office of a potential employer. (Levy 257)

Gilbert is confident that with his background as RAF and with his letter of introduction, he will get the job. However reality shocks him when he is rather given a list of excuses and insults in lieu of a job. The first man he presents his letter to tells him women were working in the factory he was applying to work for and it would be inappropriate if in the course of his

duties, he found himself accidentally talking to a white woman. The next person tells him he cannot employ him because his partner does not like coloured people. Gilbert reports that

> in five, no six places, the job I had gone for vanish with one look upon my face. Another I wait, letter in my hand, while everyone in the office go about their business as if I am not there. I can feel them watching me close as a pickpocket with his prey but cannot catch even a peeping twinkle of an eye. Until a man come in agitated "what're you doing here?" he say to me. "We don't want you. There's no job for you here. I'm going to get in touch with that labour exchange, tell them not to send any more of you people. We can't use your sort. Go on, get out". (Levy 258)

At yet another office, Gilbert recounts how the girl there seems so horrified to see him that "I swear her hair standing straight as stiff fingers — that with no hesitation I walk right back out again" (Levy 259). When he finally gets a job as a postman driver for the post office, he is happy but it ushers him into another set of problems: co-workers unwilling to work with him, insults and even assault. This is most unseemly for a cosmopolitan society. Gustavo Lins Ribeiro has intimated that the opposing concepts of cosmopolitanism indicate "xenophobia, fixity, parochialism, restricted sovereignty and allegiance to a motherland or a nation-state" (2001: 20). These are ironically the terms that best apply to the English society of *Small Island*. However it is noteworthy that its cosmopolitanism stops at the colour line. It is particularly the blackness that the British have an aversion for; it is what seriously calls to question its avowed cosmopolitanism. The novel presents an empty and meaningless cosmopolitanism, one that exists in name only, on the surface alone. So, Gilbert considers his return to England as "glory in indignity and humiliation" (Levy 268). He goes on to cite a good number of abuses meted on fellow West Indians in England: Eugene who was arrested for helping an old white English woman who tripped and fell and accused of attacking an old lady; Curtis a devout Christian who was asked not to return to his church because his skin was too dark to worship there. All of this and more have left Louis believing that "bloodyforeigner to be all one word. For like bosom pals, he only ever heard those words spoken together" (Levy 269). This xenophobic tendency stands in stark contrast to the cosmopolitan ideal. Finally faced with the reality of their situation, Gilbert considers themselves as "pitiful West Indian dreamers" (Levy 269). With the benefit of his experience he is able to caution Hortense "'Not everything', I tell her, 'not everything the English do is good'" (Levy 271). He knows what awaits her as he has learnt from bitter experience not to expect any form of warmth or welcome from the Mother Country. So he thinks of her, "And Hortense. Her face was still set haughty. But how long before her chin is cast down? For Fresh from a ship, England had not yet deceived her. But soon it will" (Levy 209). And this is soon enough.

When shortly after her arrival, Queenie takes her out for shopping, they are met by some young men who shout "Golliwog, golliwog, oi sambo, darkie" at her. However, what sends home the message is the experience she has when she tries to get a teaching job in England. With the confidence of the newcomer, she believes that her "two letters of recommendation each contained words that would open up the doors of any school to me" (Levy 371), only to be told "well I'm afraid you can't teach here" (Levy 375). "The letters don't matter she told me. You can't teach in this country. You're not qualified to teach here in England". (Levy 376) And this in Gilbert's words is Hortense's "sharp slap from the Mother Country's hand". (Levy 397) Embittered and in tears, she says "I dreamed of coming to London" (Levy 384).

Hortense, like Gilbert and the host of other immigrant West Indians come to realize that they were orphans in the Mother Country, that by virtue of their colour and ethnic origin, they could never step out from the subaltern position ascribed them. It further highlights the superficiality of Britain's cosmopolitanism, legitimating McLeod's assertion that:

> One of the most prominent metanarratives subsequently created about the 1950s depicts the decade as a journey from idealism to disillusionment where […] a mythic, illusory London is entirely destroyed by the 'different elements' which constitute the city's uninviting reality. (Levy 40)

It is this journey to disillusionment that serves as a basis for the questioning of Britain's cosmopolitanism as portrayed in *Small Island*. The several abuses which the immigrants are subjected to, the gross inequalities and lack of fellow-feeling all show the limits of this cosmopolitanism. The ultimate negation of Britain's cosmopolitanism in the text comes to light through Bernard, Queenie's husband. He returns from the war long after it ended and is horrified to find coloureds lodged in his house. When Queenie tries to bring him to reason by calling to mind that these coloureds also fought in the war, his response, is illuminating:

> The recipe for a quiet life is each to their own. The war was fought so people might live amongst their own kind. Quite simple. Everyone had a place. England for the English and the West Indies for these coloured people […]. Everyone was trying to get home after the war to be with kith and kin. Except these blasted coloured colonials. I've nothing against them in their place. But their place isn't here[4]. (Levy 389)

This is the crucial definition of what cosmopolitanism is not. Therefore, despite its claim to cosmopolitanism, England is peopled by the likes of Bernard, who could accept the coloureds during the war but once it was over they expected them to leave. It is this mindset, this rejection of the colonized based on the colour of their skin that ensures that the so-called cosmopolitanism of England fails. They are unwelcome in England after the war and this prompts Gilbert to continue with his ruminations on what they met in England when they rushed to her aid in her time of need: "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?'" (Levy 116). And Gilbert asks the telling question "but for me I had just one question — let me ask the Mother Country just this one simple question: how come England did not know me?" (Levy 117). The immigrants have come to fully realize that although they may have been part of the British Empire, they are not British and can never find a home there. It is in this vein that Laura Chrisman in analyzing Achebe's *Home* and *Exile* underlines that:

> For Achebe, London now fulfills a neo-imperial function that is inseparable from its historical role as imperial throne. Third-world peoples who relocate to it are faced with different slaveries: ideological and economic. (Chrisman 2003: 160)

In subjecting these immigrants to 'different slaveries', England falls short of its cosmopolitan ethics. Thus Achebe holds that:

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[4] Mau et al have underlined that people with cosmopolitan attitude and values are characterized by their recognition of others because of their value and integrity as human beings, quite independently of their national affiliations. They share an open and tolerant world view that is not bound by national categories (qtd in Vertoved 2010: 5).

> Oppressed multitudes from the provinces rush to the imperial seat because that is where they know all salvation comes from. But as other imperial subjects in other times and in other places have discovered; for the slave there is nothing at the centre but worse slavery. (qtd in Chrisman 2003: 161)

This is not what one expects from a cosmopolitan nation. For these immigrants, it is a case of broken dreams and dashed hopes. The exhilaration felt at the thought of moving to the mother country quickly dissipates, giving way to despair and disillusionment.

Conclusion

The apparent cosmopolitanism in *Small Island* falls to pieces under close scrutiny. This is so because the disillusionment of the postcolonial immigrants stems from the refusal to recognize them as fellow citizens of the world. Instead of the cosmopolitan values to be upheld, what we rather see is a reenactment of the colonial relationship where the colonized are pushed to the periphery of society and refused the basic rights. It is particularly glaring in the text because these colonials had assisted Britain in the war effort. If for nothing else, this could lead to their acceptance and integration into the British society as a form of appreciation for the sacrifice. Unfortunately the blackness of their skins stands as a barrier to any form of healthy interaction between them and the British. With this, no true cosmopolitanism can be built. The characters in the text express unhidden scorn and condensation towards the immigrants. Ascribed the subaltern status, these immigrants are not given the chance to evolve in the mainstream society. Rather they live out a pitiable existence from the fringes of the society and denied access to the many opportunities in the metropolis. Andrea Levy has intelligently shown how limited the cosmopolitanism of England is where it refuses the right to live to a set of people as a result of their racial, ethnic and cultural background. The postcolonial past of the immigrants is forever present with them, acting as a hindrance to their integration into the society. In reaction to Ulrich Beck's declaration "to belong or not to belong, that is the cosmopolitan question!" it can be rightly said that the cosmopolitanism presented in *Small Island* is a failure because it fails to create a sense of belonging in the West Indian immigrants. Thus the vexed questions of race, ethnicity and culture still need to be addressed before any cosmopolitanism worthy of its name can be envisaged.

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Streszczenie

Small Island (pol. *Wysepka*), autorstwa Andrei Levy, przedstawia losy imigrantów w kosmopolitycznym Londynie. Jednym z głównych problemów powieści jest ukazanie rozdźwięku między deklarowaną otwartością i tolerancją a rzeczywistością, w której na stosunek do inności rzutują silnie zakorzenione eurocentryczne schematy myślenia. Niniejszy artykuł, posługując się narzędziami krytyki postkolonialnej, konceptualizującej problem relacji między kolonizatorami i kolonizowanymi, analizuje na przykładzie ukazanego w powieści Londynu, skomplikowane problemy kulturowe, narodowe, rasowe byłego imperium kolonialnego.

kosmopolitanizm, postkolonializm, Andrea Levy