

The Double Consciousness of the Diaspora: Memory and Assimilation in Andrea Levy's Novels

Rashid Khan¹, Shafayat Hussain Bhat^{1*}, Mariya Hussain¹

¹Department of English, CT University, Ludhiana Punjab India

Corresponding author's email id: shafayat17765@ctuniversity.in

Article History:

Received: 12-12-2024

Revised: 25-01-2025

Accepted: 05-02-2025

Abstract:

Double-consciousness, as introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois in his book, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), is a concept in social philosophy which refers to a sense of 'twoness' apparently experienced by the blacks in America because of their racialized oppression in white-dominated society. Double-consciousness involves the conscious splitting of the inner self in an attempt to create a character that conforms to the standards of mainstream society. W.E.B. Du Bois explains it, stating that "this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of another." The present paper sets out to explore the manifestation of this concept in the works of Andrea Levy, focusing on the experiences of diasporic individuals. Analysing Levy's works, this study examines the significance of memory and home in defining identity amidst cultural displacement. By focusing on the fragmented identities of her characters, Levy exposes the enduring effects of colonial histories and systemic inequalities on their lives. Diaspora literature often highlights this conflict between cultural roots and modern realities, a duality that forms the core aspect of Levy's storytelling.

The objective of this research is to investigate how Levy's characters contend with their fractured identities while navigating the tension between historical influences and the challenges of assimilation. By highlighting how personal and collective histories intersect, this study contributes significantly to understanding of identity formation within diaspora studies. Through a qualitative methodology, the study undertakes an in-depth textual analysis of Levy's novels, situating them within an expansive scope of postcolonial and diaspora studies. The concept of double consciousness serves as a critical framework to analyse the internal struggle of Levy's characters as they negotiate their identities within a foreign society.

Keywords: Black British, Double Consciousness, Diasporic, Identity, Memory.

Introduction

The concept of double consciousness, first introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), is crucial to understanding the internal battle that marginalized people face when navigating several cultural identities. Du Bois (1994) defines this as "...sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity"(p. 3). This dualism has been extensively used to investigate the diasporic condition. Andrea Levy's works reflect this dynamic, as her characters struggle with the complexity of belonging to dual cultural spheres while encountering institutional racism and alienation in their host

country. Her works investigate how personal and collective memories of the past intersect with the urge to fit into a dominating culture. These stories show how memory can be both a source of identity and a source of conflict, shedding insight on the tension between heritage and social expectations.

Standing on Du Bois's definition of double consciousness, Cook (2014) gives his own definition as "the conscious splitting of the inner self in an attempt to create a character that would be accepted into mainstream society" (p. 1). He reveals that Du Bois's "this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of another" (Du Bois, 1994, p. 3) implies that "a stripping of one's identity has taken place" (Cook, 2014, p. 1). Black (2007) draws a parallel between Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1952) and Du Bois's double consciousness, claiming that Fanon's work demonstrates how double consciousness is also a condition of colonized people and strengthens the claim that African Americans are colonized within their own country. He distinguishes "unilateral double consciousness" (experienced by the oppressed) from "multilateral double consciousness" (experienced by both the oppressed and the oppressors) and proposes the latter as a solution to the problem of racial segregation. By this, he means that colonizers and white Americans need to embrace "the perspectives of the subjugated, marginalized, and silenced population," that is, become aware of what the "marginalized" think of them, to experience "white double consciousness." (p. 399). Black (2007) claims that if "the cultural exchanges were engaged equally by all parties, [...the] harm of unilateral double consciousness would be prevented [and] then, all parties would be both hosts and guests, sharing the challenges of measuring up to each other's cultures" (p. 400).

Stuart Hall's claim that identity is a process of 'becoming' rather than a fixed essence emphasizes the flexibility of diasporic identities. Hall (1996) claims that our sense of self is "formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us" (p. 598). This theme is embodied by Levy's characters, who are formed by both their cultural roots and postwar Britain's socioeconomic systems. The tension between recollection and assimilation in novels *Every Light in the House Burning* (1994), *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996), *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), and *Small Island* (2004), provides rich ground for exploring topics like alienation, belonging, and identity development. By exploring the concept of double consciousness, Levy's works present a complex portrayal of the diasporic experience, positioning them solidly within postcolonial and diaspora studies.

Double Consciousness in Diaspora Literature

Diaspora literature usually explores issues of double consciousness, delving into the psychological, cultural, and social conflicts that individuals experience while straddling two worlds. In the words of Lavie and Swedenberg (1996), Diaspora refers to "the doubled relationship or dual loyalty" that migrants, immigrants, exiles, and refugees have to geography, "their connections to the space they currently occupy and their continuing involvement with "back home" (p. 14). This dichotomy frequently manifests as a clash between an individual's cultural heritage and the dominant narratives of their new society. It resonates well in the contexts of migration, colonialism, and cultural hybridity, providing a prism through which to interpret the fractured identities of diasporic individuals. Du Bois (1994) defined double consciousness as the product of institutional oppression and cultural dislocation, which forces marginalized people to reconcile their own perceptions with how others

perceive them. He characterized it as "two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (p. 3). This conflict is obvious in Andrea Levy's works, where her characters navigate their Jamaican ancestry while trying to fit in with British society. *Never Far from Nowhere*, for example, looks at the generational and racial issues that Olive and Vivien, two sisters of Jamaican heritage, face. Their different skin tones and social goals demonstrate how colorism and systemic racism impact their experiences of double consciousness.

Gilroy's (1993) builds on Du Bois' theory by putting double consciousness within the transnational and transcultural dynamics of the African diaspora. He contends that diasporic identity is defined by routes rather than roots, highlighting the fluid and mixed nature of identity development in a globalized environment.

Double consciousness emerges from the unhappy symbiosis between three modes of thinking, being, and seeing. The first is racially particularistic, the second nationalistic in that it derives from the nation state in which the ex-slaves, but not-yet-citizens find themselves, rather than from their aspiration towards a nation state of their own. The third is diasporic or hemispheric, sometimes global and occasionally universalist. (p. 127)

This viewpoint is reflected in Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon*, in which the protagonist Faith embarks on a transforming journey to Jamaica to reconnect with her heritage. Faith's experience highlights the dichotomy of diasporic identity, as she grapples with the cultural contradictions of being both Jamaican and British. Her voyage exemplifies the crisis of representation experienced by diasporic people, who are frequently excluded from mainstream cultural narratives.

Bock's (2012) critique of *Never Far from Nowhere* emphasizes how race, class, and gender intertwine to shape Levy's characters' lives. Bock observes that Vivien and Olive's different approaches to identity creation reflect the difficulties encountered by Caribbean immigrants in Britain. Vivien, who is light-skinned and upwardly mobile, strives to integrate into British society, but Olive, who is dark-skinned, faces systematic racism and economic marginalization. This contrast exemplifies what Bock calls the "conflation of racism, sexism, and classism" that defines the lives of Caribbean women in the diaspora (p. 98). Olive and Vivien's experiences provide additional insight into the concept of colorism, a significant part of double consciousness. Olive, the 'dark-skinned' sibling, internalizes societal biases and strives to be accepted by her family and community. On the other hand, Vivien's 'high color' allows her to pass as white in certain situations, giving her social mobility while also isolating her from her origins. This dynamic reflects the psychological conflict described by Chaudhri (2014), who sees double consciousness as "strikingly similar to Freud's idea of the characteristics of the id, ego, and superego" (Chaudhri, 2014, p.1). The id expresses the characters' hidden desire for cultural belonging, whilst the ego serves as a bridge between their background and society demands of whiteness. In this view, Olive's rebellion and Vivien's integration symbolize contrasting approaches to navigating their shattered identities.

Andrea Levy's examination of double consciousness is consistent with the larger tradition of diaspora literature, which frequently depicts memory as a vital place for identity formation. Agnew (2005) notes:

The diasporic individual often has a double consciousness, a privileged knowledge and perspective that is consonant with postmodernity and globalization. The dual or paradoxical nature of diasporic consciousness is one that is caught between 'here' and 'there,' or between those who share roots, and is shaped through multilocality. (p. 14)

This paradox is obvious in Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon*, when Faith's trip to Jamaica serves as a moment of reflection and nostalgia. As Faith learns more about her family's history, she begins to reconcile the two sides of her identity, eventually finding strength in her cultural hybridity. The psychological toll of double consciousness is also apparent in *Small Island* (2004), as individuals like Hortense and Gilbert struggle to find their identities in postwar Britain. Hortense's memories of colonial education in Jamaica influence her hopes for social mobility, but Gilbert's wartime experiences underline the widespread racism experienced by Caribbean immigrants. Levy employs these narratives to challenge the illusion of British kindness, exposing the systematic disparities that continue in the aftermath of colonialism. As Rushdie (2002) notes:

The migrant, severed from his roots, often transplanted into a new language, always obliged to learn the ways of a new community, is forced to confront the great question of change and adaptation; but many migrants faced with the sheer existential difficulty of making such changes, and also, often, with the sheer alienness and defensive hostility of the peoples among whom they find themselves, retreat from such questions behind the walls of the old culture they have both brought along and left behind. The running man, rejected by those people who have built great walls to keep him out, leaps into a confining stockade of his own. (356)

The marginalized community develops a double consciousness which "describes a subjectivity both sundered and fused, an identity divided by forces originating both within and outside the self" (Winnat, 2004, p. 28). In other words, Blacks strive for the wholeness of their souls both from within (the black side), and outside of the self (the white side). Yet, the inside and outside of the self is always unstable and contradictory. Dayal (1996) argues that it allows for the emergence of different meanings of "belonging."

Double Consciousness in Andrea Levy's Novels

Andrea Levy's works, Levy's novels, including *Every Light in the House Burning* (1994), *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996), *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), and *Small Island* (2004), explore the complexity of diasporic identity as characters struggle with alienation and belonging, expressing the conflicting pressures of assimilating into a dominant culture and preserving cultural history. This conflict is consistent with W.E.B. Du Bois' (1903) concept of double consciousness, which depicts the "unreconciled strivings" of people caught between two cultural identities.

Memory has an important role in diasporic identity development, notably in Levy's works. It serves as a link between the past and the present, shedding light on how personal and collective memories contribute to the development of selfhood. Memory serves as both a refuge and a location of resistance to cultural erasure for diasporic people, whose identities are frequently shattered by migration and exile. Memory ties the individual past with collective heritage, making it an essential tool for navigating and negotiating diasporic experiences (Agnew, 2005, p. 1). Memory appears in

Andrea Levy's works not just as a recall of the past, but also as a dynamic and transformative force that creates identity, encourages resilience, and challenges hegemonic narratives.

Assimilation is portrayed as a complicated negotiation rather than a linear or clear process. Characters struggle to reconcile the desire to belong in British culture with the desire to preserve their history, frequently meeting structural roadblocks, racism, and internal turmoil. As Brah (1996) underlines in her idea of diaspora space, the act of assimilation is inextricably linked to histories of colonialism and displacement, highlighting how diasporic individuals are changed by the sociopolitical contexts of their surroundings. Levy's works frequently feature the dichotomy between cultural assimilation and historical preservation. Through her characters, Levy investigates how diasporic people traverse these dualities, frequently generating what Bhabha (1994) refers to as a "third space" of hybridity—an in-between zone where cultural differences are negotiated, and new identities are formed.

In *Every Light in the House Burning*, Levy's debut novel, the protagonist struggles with the cultural dissonance that comes with growing up as a second-generation Jamaican immigrant in Britain. The story depicts the family's working-class problems and the psychological toll of assimilation. For example, the protagonist's mother maintains traditional Jamaican traditions while seeking to fit into British culture. This dichotomy echoes Brah's (1996) remark that "diaspora space" is more than just a location of displacement, but also of cultural negotiation and resistance (p. 208-9). Angela Jacob draws attention to the story of her parent's experiences as being blacks and immigrant people from Jamaica to Britain. At the same time, she represents herself as the British born black daughter of Caribbean immigrant parents. The novel explores Angela's struggle for self-identity. Pready (2012) notes:

Levy turns to the Bildungsroman and renegotiates a traditional coming of age novel, with its psychological and moral shaping of the individual, alongside a kind of spatial initiation, which entails explorations of relations of relations among inside/outside spaces, relations to family, and (re)construction of self. (p. 16)

Levy (1994) in her novel also reveals Angela's family's negotiation and racial relationship with contemporary British society. All the time, white people reject and hate black people because of their race and immigrant status. Moreover, they always consider that black people belong to Africa. They claim that blacks are immigrants, they are not British. The narration can elucidate this issue. "You aren't English – my dad said," Steven joined in. "He said you come over with all the other coons. You wanna go back, coming over here. You wanna go back – go back to where you came from – blackie" (p. 57).

Angela Jacob's mother feels deep frustration regarding national belonging. She has been living for almost thirty-eight years in Britain, she taught British children, she followed the English government, she learned all English ways of life; yet she is not a British citizen. Angela says: "After thirty-eight years of living in Britain, teaching British children, paying British taxes, learning British ways, she wasn't British" (Levy, 1994, p. 8). Throughout the novel, Angela encounters various events and incidents as a British born black girl. The following event can elucidate this:

'Where are you from, Angela?'

‘I was born in this country,’ I said, as I always said to this familiar question.

‘Yes, but what about your parents – are they Jewish?’

‘No, they come from Jamaica.’

‘Both of them?’

‘Yes.’ (Levy, 1994, p. 186-187)

To comprehend her own identity, Angela needs to comprehend her father's past. Angela's father's denial of his past is a roadblock to her own identity because of this. "I have been working to change the way I speak and write, to incorporate in the manner of telling a sense of place, of not just who I am in the present but where I am coming from, the multiple voices within me. I have confronted silence, inarticulateness" (Hooks, 1989, p. 16). Essentially, the story dramatizes the necessity of seeing beyond the present and leaving the existing location to recapture a larger story about the larger family lineage. Lima (2005) asserts something similar when she says, "It seems as if a return to the past is required for her protagonists to be able to move on." (p. 57)

In *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996), Olive and Vivien Charles struggle to maintain their Jamaican identity in a mostly white British culture. Olive's experiences of racial prejudice, as well as her mother's emphasis on respectability politics, demonstrate the psychological cost of navigating double consciousness. According to Agnew, diasporic people frequently suffer a double consciousness in which they are caught between their homeland's cultural standards and those of their host community (p.14). Olive's experience exemplifies this paradox, as she fights assimilation pressures while attempting to assert her Jamaican identity. Rose, Olive and Vivien's mother, has got the "formation and crystallization of an attitude and a way of thinking and seeing that are essentially white" (Fanon, 2008, p. 114), it becomes difficult for her to reconcile that they are all black and at least has a home outside London; she has a place where she has come from. As Olive says:

My mother didn't believe in black people. Or should I say, she tried to believe that she was not black. Although she knew that she and my dad were not the only people who came over here from Jamaica in the fifties, she liked to think that because they were fair skinned, they were the only decent people who came. The only ones with "a bit of class." And she believed that the English would recognise this. (Levy, 1996, p. 7)

The foremost depiction of denial in Rose is that she looks Olive in the face and tells her that she (Olive) is not black. Olive says:

She used to talk to me about what she thought of the black people here, looking me straight in the face, telling me how they were like this and like that—nothing good of course. But she sat looking in my black face telling me. And I thought if anyone looking at us sitting at the table talking had to describe the scene, they'd say, "there are two black women talking." But my mother thought we weren't black. (Levy, 1996, p. 7)

Olive pushes back, stating:

"I'm black," I used to say, when I was old enough to but in.

“Don’t be silly, Olive, you’re not coloured.”

“No, Mum, I’m black.”

“No Olive, you’re not black, and that’s enough of this stupidity.”

“Well, I’m not white, I have to be something.”

“You’re not white and you’re not black—you’re you.” (Levy, 1996, p. 7)

Young Olive who has been in London all her life is not confused about the fact of her blackness, and she knows that there is no shying away from that fact. But Rose who has grown up in Jamaica has the exact opposite of Olive’s attitude. Vivien is portrayed as a character who has “this inner silence and timidity as a result of the inferiority complex, she has by the fact of her blackness” (Onunkwo and Chig, 2018, p. 722). Though she is light-skinned like her mother, unlike her mother, however, she is aware that she is black. Where denial comes in in her character is that she does not admit that being black in London is a problem. We are told by Olive that:

Vivien thinks she’s escaped, with all her exams and college and middle-class friends. She thinks she’ll be accepted in this country now. One of them. She’s pleased with herself—turned her back on everything she knows. My little sister thinks she’s better than me. She looks down her nose at me and thinks I’ve wasted my life. Nothing can shock me now. But Vivien, one day she’ll realize that in England, people like her are never far from nowhere. Never. (Levy, 1996, p. 273)

With this we see that Vivien’s is a case of “having two antagonistic identities” that are pulling at her (Black, 2007, p. 395). Her response to this psychological pull to is identify with the one that “looks on in amused contempt and pity” (DuBois, 1994, p. 3).

In *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), the protagonist, Faith Jackson, embarks on a transforming journey to Jamaica, where she learns about her family history through oral storytelling. Stein (2004) shows that Faith’s “location of belonging turns out to be location of ‘unbelonging’” and rejection. However, when Faith journeys from London to Jamaica, she collects stories that enable her to put into perspective her relationship to Britain and “conceive of alternate histories—and alternate futures as well” (p. 73). These narratives, which include stories of resistance to slavery and colonial persecution, allow Faith to link with her roots and establish a stronger sense of identity. Faith’s journey represents what Hall (1996) refers to as “the dialogic of identity,” in which personal narratives are inextricably tied to collective histories (p. 4). Faith’s absorption in her family’s oral histories helps her realize her place in a larger diasporic community. This communal experience, which encompasses stories of migration, resistance, and survival, gives Faith a sense of belonging that goes beyond national boundaries. According to Stuart Hall (1990), identity is constantly altered by cultural and historical processes rather than being based in a single origin. Faith’s path exemplifies this dynamic, as she comes to accept her Jamaican roots as an essential part of her identity.

Faith Jackson is torn between British and Jamaican culture, as soon as she realises she does not fully belong in Britain. Even though she was born and educated in Britain, she is constantly reminded of her Jamaican ancestry, starting already in primary school, where white boys keep repeating “your mum and dad came on a banana boat... Faith is a darkie” (Levy, 1999, p. 3). Shocked by this revelation,

she enquires about her family history. However, at home Faith learns hardly anything about it as her parents wish to leave their Jamaican heritage behind:

My mum and dad never talked about their lives before my brother Carl and I were born. They didn't sit us in front of the fire and tell long tales of life in Jamaica – of palm trees and yams and playing by rivers. There was no “oral tradition” in our family. Most of my childhood questions to them were answered with “That was a long time ago,” or “What you want to know about that for?” (Levy, 1999, p. 4)

Toplu (2005) believes that Faith “belongs neither to her ancestral homeland, Jamaica, nor to England, the legendary ‘Motherland’ of her ex-colonies. The hybridity created by these circumstances is resolved by Faith’s journey to Jamaica” (p. 1). Unable to find a sense of belonging in either place, she experiences an epiphany which makes her think she belongs to the African race, which becomes a stable point of reference for her. Faith tests her identity in her everyday contact with the British, who constantly ask her:

“And whereabouts are you from, Faith?” “London,” I said. The man laughed a little. I meant more what country are you from? I didn't bother to say I was born in England, that I was English, because I knew that was not what he wanted to hear. “My parents are Jamaican.” “Well, you see, I thought that” he began. “As soon as you walked in, I thought I bet she's from Jamaica.” “Just my parents are.” I added, but he went on. (Levy, 1999, p. 130)

The ignorance of the difference between the first and second generations of immigrants makes Faith’s quest for identity even more pressing. Vrabel (2006) maintains that because Faith is “trapped between two worldviews, [she] literally takes to her bed until an invitation to visit Jamaica opens a new world of possibilities for her.” (p. 53)

Faith Jackson's trip to Jamaica represents a watershed moment in her life. Initially, Faith rejects her Jamaican roots, seeing it as a barrier to her integration into British culture. Her trip to Jamaica, on the other hand, affects her understanding of identity as she reconnects with her family's history and learns about the legacies of colonization and resistance. This story is consistent with Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space," in which identity arises as a dynamic interaction of cultural factors. Faith's evolution is heavily influenced by the process of telling stories. Faith grows to appreciate her ancestry as she hears her relatives' stories of slavery, migration, and survival. This approach exemplifies what Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) refer to as "writing back to the empire"—a reclaiming of history and identity that contradicts colonial narratives. According to Agnew (2005), storytelling in diasporic contexts acts as both a form of resistance and an instrument for identity creation (p. 45). Faith's trip also demonstrates the psychological effects of assimilation. Her initial acceptance of British cultural norms and rejection of her background exemplify what Du Bois (1903) calls the "double aims" of individuals attempting to reconcile opposing identities. Levy draws on Faith's experience to criticize the pressures of cultural conformity and the erasure of minority identities in dominant nations.

Levy's works also underscore the role of memory in resisting cultural erasure. In *Fruit of the Lemon*, Levy's novel, Faith embarks on a profound journey to Jamaica in a quest to reclaim her roots, thereby illuminating the profound trauma of cultural dislocation and the necessity to reconcile her British upbringing with her Jamaican lineage. Here, memory is not a passive repository but an active

force propelling the characters to confront their pasts and sculpt their futures. Giles (2002) describes “memories are an active process by which meaning is created; they are not mere depositories of fact” (p. 23). Diasporic people frequently face dominant narratives that seek to denigrate or eradicate their cultural history.

Memory is crucial to the characters' sense of identity and belonging in *Small Island*, especially as they grapple with colonial and migration legacies. Gilbert Joseph's memories of Jamaica, as well as his experiences as a Royal Air Force soldier during World War II, play an important role in his identity construction. His memories of institutional racism in the RAF, as well as the rejection he received upon his return to Britain, highlight the pervasive impact of colonial hierarchies on diasporic identities:

‘You know what your trouble is, man?’ he said. ‘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. [...] we both just finish fighting a war - a bloody war - for the better world we wan' see. And on the same side - you and me. We both look on other men to see enemy. You and me, fighting for empire, fighting for peace. But still, after all that we suffer together, you wan' tell me I am worthless and you are not. Am I to be the servant and you are the master for all time? No. Stop this, man. Stop it now. We can work together, Mr Bligh. You no see? We must. Or else you just gonna fight me till the end? (Levy, 2004, p. 601)

Similarly, Hortense Roberts' desire for social mobility is inextricably linked to her recollections of colonial education in Jamaica. Hortense recalls being taught that British culture is superior, which contributed to her early dissatisfaction with postwar Britain's realities. Levy utilizes Hortense's memories to criticize colonial indoctrination, which established unreasonable expectations in colonial subjects. Agnew (2005) observes that memories are not static; they are altered and reshaped by the social, cultural, and political settings in which they are summoned (p. 5). Hortense's path illustrates this dynamic, with her early disenchantment giving way to a more nuanced understanding of her identity and role in British society. The novel also delves into the complexities of cultural hybridity through the characters' relationships. Hortense's connection with Queenie, a white British woman, shows the possibility of intercultural understanding in the “diaspora space.” However, this relationship is filled with difficulties, highlighting the ongoing impediments to real integration. According to Brah (1996), diaspora space is “inhabited not only by diasporic subjects but equally by those who are constructed as ‘indigenous’” (p. 209). Levy utilizes this interaction to question binary concepts of identity and belonging.

Levy's description of memory as resistance is consistent with the larger theoretical frameworks of diaspora studies. According to James Clifford (1994), diaspora is a “history of displacement” fueled by “myths/memories of the homeland” (p. 305). In Levy's writings, these recollections are more than just nostalgic; they serve as a critical lens through which individuals question their current circumstances. Keightley (2010) notes, “Remembering is an active reconciliation of past and present. The meaning of the past in relation to the present is what is at stake here; memories are important as they bring our changing sense of who we are and who we were, coherently into view of one another” (p. 58). For example, Gilbert's recollections of Jamaica in *Small Island* are paired with his encounters

with racism in Britain, emphasizing the stark difference between the empire's promises and its citizens' daily realities. This juxtaposition emphasizes the importance of memory in resisting colonial myths and claiming diasporic agency. On his arrival in Britain, Gilbert is shocked at the state of the country he has so long revered, and his account mischievously defamiliarizes the traditional representation of Britain as the noble Britannia:

The filthy tramp that eventually greets you is she. Ragged, old and dusty as the long dead. Mother has a blackened eye, bad breath and one lone tooth that waves in her head when she speaks. [...] 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 2004, 139)

While Levy's protagonists frequently feel alienated in their attempts to assimilate, her novels also include scenes of resistance and empowerment. By claiming their cultural heritage and questioning colonial tropes, Levy's characters reclaim their agency and redefine what it means to belong. Gilbert's decision to confront racist ideas and reclaim his dignity exemplifies diasporic resilience. These examples support Stuart Hall's (1990) claim that identity is not a static essence, but rather a "positioning" within the framework of history and society.

Conclusion

Andrea Levy's novels provide profound insights into the diasporic experience, offering a nuanced exploration of identity through the interconnected themes of memory, assimilation, and double consciousness. By portraying characters who grapple with the complexities of identity, heritage, and belonging, Levy contributes to the broader discourse on postcolonial and diaspora studies. Her characters represent what Du Bois (1903) refers to as the "double consciousness" of people navigating the contradictions between heritage and assimilation. Levy portrays integration as both a challenge and an opportunity, emphasizing the complexity of diasporic identity. Her works illuminate the psychological and cultural burdens of colonial histories, while also affirming the resilience and agency of diasporic individuals. Her works challenge mainstream narratives of identity and belonging, providing a striking critique of colonial legacies and ongoing conflicts in diasporic communities. By placing her characters in the "diaspora space," Levy not only highlights the challenges of assimilation, but also honors the resilience and agency of diasporic people.

Levy's characters exemplify the fragmented yet resilient identities of diasporic individuals, offering a lens through which to explore the ongoing negotiation of cultural identity. Through their struggles and triumphs, her protagonists reclaim their agency, challenge colonial narratives, and forge new understandings of selfhood within the diaspora space. Ultimately, Levy's exploration of these themes enriches our understanding of identity as a dynamic and multifaceted construct, shaped by personal experiences and collective histories. Her works affirm the enduring power of memory and storytelling in shaping diasporic identities, highlighting the resilience and creativity of individuals navigating the complexities of a globalized, postcolonial world.

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