

**People's Democratic Republic of Algeria**  
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University of Amar Thelidji- Laghouat  
Faculty of Letters and Languages  
Department of English



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**Diaspora, Space and Identity Production: The  
Predicament of Belonging in Andrea Levy's *Small Island***

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Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements Submitted to the  
Department of English for Master Degree in Literature and Civilization

**Presented by:**

**Ms. DECHACHE Ghazza**

**Supervised by**

**Mrs. GUELLIL Assia**

**Panel of Examiners:**

**Chairman (University of Laghouat)**

**Mrs. GUELLIL Assia**

**Supervisor (University of Laghouat)**

**Examiner (University of Laghouat)**

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## **Dedication:**

Praise be to ALLAH who has guided me to complete this project.

To my Father and my Mother, the source of light in my life. To all my siblings, thanks for being there whenever I needed you.

To the little angels of the family: Jad al Haqq, Amassi, and Touaba.

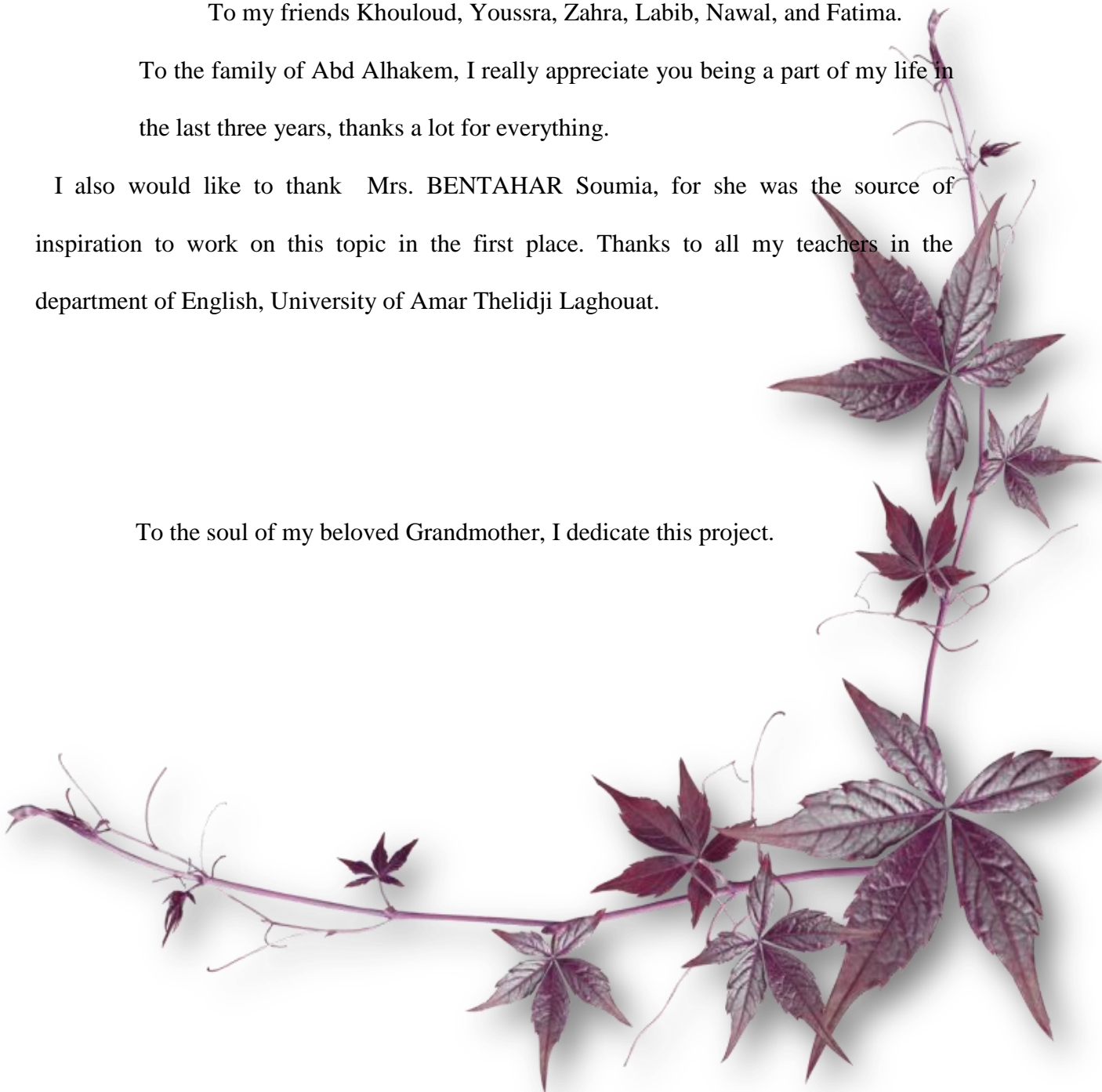
Special thanks to my soul mate and my sister Ikram

To my friends Khouloud, Youssra, Zahra, Labib, Nawal, and Fatima.

To the family of Abd Alhakem, I really appreciate you being a part of my life in the last three years, thanks a lot for everything.

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To the soul of my beloved Grandmother, I dedicate this project.



## ABSTRACT

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### Abstract

The vast territories that the British Empire once colonized resulted in a fiction that reflects specific groups of minorities within the British society known as Contemporary Black British Literature. It can be defined as the literature introduced in English by authors who originate from the former British colonies analogous African, Asian, and Caribbean regions. This research paper represents a closer examination of particular problematic issues that are dealt with in Contemporary Black British Literature, namely diaspora and cultural dislocation, space and identity production. It investigates the dilemmas of representation of Caribbean Diaspora living in the metropolitan city of London. This study examines the effects of changing places on the process of 'space and identity production'. Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004), portray hybrid characters who are seeking a sense of belonging. The struggle of Levy's characters to find their own spaces and identities in the post-war London is studied according to the theory of diasporic space and diasporic identity to illustrate the possibility of the existence of produced diasporic space where all these characters can express and celebrate their hybrid identities.

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# **General introduction**

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

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### General Introduction:

In the last decades, British fiction has been remarkably enriched by what is known as immigration of content. The vast territories that the British Empire once colonized, resulted in a fiction that reflects specific groups within the British metropolis called the Black British Literature. Black British Literature can be defined as the literature written in English by Caribbean, Asian, African, and other people coming from the British former colonies. The immigrants coming from these former colonies led to the emergence of a new composition within the British society; this new race is called the Black British. This latter term is mostly used to describe a group that represent all people of color who want to associate with the British society. However, this shift within the British society led to the emergence of a multicultural society that stimulates such change in the contemporary British novel.

Terms such as Black British literature and Postcolonial Literature are considered problematic due to the question of categorization. This latter helped in the arise of issues such as hybridity, belonging, exile, cultural dislocation, national identity, and other issues caused by the interactions between the British culture and postcolonial cultures.

Nevertheless, this sense of multicultural collection of societies involves the ‘center-periphery’ cultural relations. The cultural differences within the British society have involved a kind of spatial conflict. Colonized people are highly diverse in their traditions, and in their cultures which are both constructed and changing, so as beings transported into a very different geographical cultural area like the people of the Caribbean who found themselves introduced to an extremely different culture, their identities and cultures are eventually exposed to massive changes.

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Consequently, the fusion of these cultures helped in the creation of a hybrid identity. One of the postcolonial writers who tries to emphasize in her writings on the question of identity and culture of the colonized subjects is Andrea Levy in her novel *Small Island* that presents a period in history when men and women from the Caribbean were transported to Britain across national borders and cultures.

We are in an era in which millions of people are migrating to search for a new home, especially from the Second World War onwards, when people from the colonies moved to the center to fight for the British Empire, and to fulfill Britain's need for labor. People from the Caribbean eventually immigrated to London as volunteers in the British army and to have a better life. But the British wanted to keep Britain hegemonic and white. The West Indians with their hybrid identities found themselves in-between and rejected by the British as they belonged neither to their origin culture nor to the British one. Thus they had to reclaim for a space as a refuge.

Furthermore, the importance of this project lays in the fact that space and spatiality have become a central attention of scholars recently. This, Perhaps, is due to the growing interest in spaces and places and their effects on the lives of individuals. Many studies concerned with Caribbean diaspora did not fill the gap as being culturally dislocated and the process through which they could produce spaces to belong to the British metropolis.

Levy's novel *Small Island* (2004) presents characters that are culturally disturbed. Themes such as cultural dislocation are central in this novel. This research tackles issues of the West Indian immigrants who belong to the first generation, and analyzes their experiences of displacement through the characters portrayed in Levy's novel. Moreover, the fact that the writer could provide clear pictures of the conflicts existing between native and foreign cultures and by taking into account the fact that both protagonists: Hortense

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and Gilbert make shifts from the periphery to the center. They both moved from the former colony Jamaica to the British capital London.

The points mentioned above lead us to ask an essential question: how does cultural (dis/re) location affect space Production? This question triggered another one: how does the process of space production affect the characters' identities?

Trying to find answers to the previous questions, some hypotheses are laid. Andrea Levy's *Small Island* combine themes of cultural dislocation and relocation along with issues of identity formation. Analysis of Levy's novel focuses on the representation of multiple spaces such as Jamaica and the metropolitan city of London with respect to identity. Levy directs a remarkable attention to the cultural significance of space, and proves that spaces have huge influence on the people dwelling certain places. Levy's main characters, Hortense and Gilbert fills a diasporic space within the English society. They are neither inside nor outside this cultural space.

In Attempt to give adequate answers to the previous problematic questions, and verify the validity of the hypothesis mentioned above, an analytical method will be followed in order to highlight the impact of cultural dis/re location on space production, and the influence of this latter on the characters' identities.

This work will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter will introduce the theoretical background of this dissertation. In addition, it will attempt through the use of postcolonial theory, to conceptualize the issues of space with the focus on Caribbean Diaspora that went through a process of displacement. Moreover, this chapter will shed light on Brah Avtar's theory of diasporic space which introduces diasporic space as a space lived not only by the immigrants, but also by the native settlers.

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As for the second chapter, its aim is to introduce the historical context of the novel dealt with. It also represents the personal experience of Andrea Levy, as she is considered as one of the descendants of the pioneers who first consisted the Caribbean Diaspora. This chapter also represents optimistic expectations of the Caribbean immigrants about life in Britain through the characters in the novel; in the other hand, the opinion of the British on those West Indian immigrants.

Nevertheless, the third chapter will adopt an analytical study that aims at investigating the way the characters produce different spaces, in order to cope with the new places which they had to live in. Moreover, this chapter will highlight the impacts of the process of space production on the identity by having a close analysis of the characters in Levy's *Small Island*.

In order to conduct this research a number of books have been used as references and sources of information. To bring a close and clear idea in order to understand the postcolonial literature, for instance, *The Empire Writes Back* (2004), where the term postcolonial literature was first introduced and used by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, is of a great help in this research.

In tackling the issue of space, and theory of diasporic space in particular, the theory of Brah Avtar is of a great importance here. In her book *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996), Avtar gives a clear idea about the notion of space within diaspora.

# **Chapter one**

**An introduction to Postcolonial Theory  
and the Diasporic Experience**

### 1.1 Introduction:

This chapter provides the theoretical and the historical background of this study. It introduces the Postcolonial Theory as the main scope of this research. This chapter also introduces the Theory of Diasporic Space and Identity in relation to the Caribbean Diaspora in Britain. Questions of exile and diaspora, issues of belonging, and related notions of identity are central to works by postcolonial writers. For those of Caribbean region, the movements of global migrations from the period of WWII onwards and the so called historical event ‘The Windrush Generation’<sup>1</sup> had a significant role in the creation of the Caribbean diaspora in Britain.

### 1.2 An Introduction to Post-colonial Theory:

The dismantling structure of colonial control begins in the late 1950s and reaches its high point in the 1960s, resulted in the constitution of a remarkable historical moment. As country after country gained independence from the colonizing powers, a new era of decolonization has emerged under the term of Post-colonialism. One of the remarkable definitions of the term is taken from the famous book *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill A, Gareth G, and Helen T: “We use the term Post-colonial, however, to cover all the culture affected by the process from the moment of colonisation to the present day” (15).

This quotation shows the starting point of the postcolonial era as it was emerged from the moment of colonialism to the present day. Consequently, the literatures of regions such as African countries, India, and Caribbean countries are all post-colonial literatures as they were emerged from the experience of colonization. These countries were extremely

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<sup>1</sup> **Windrush Generation** : Those arriving in the UK between 1948 and 1971 from Caribbean countries have been labeled the Windrush Generation. This is a reference to the ship MV Empire Windrush, which arrived at Tilbury Docks, Essex, on 22 June 1948, bringing workers from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and other islands, as a response to post-war labor shortages in the UK. The ship carried 492 passengers - many of them children.

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affected by the cultures of the European empires such as the Dutch, the Portuguese, the French, and the British.

Furthermore, in the book '*An Introduction of Post-colonial Theory*' by Peter Childs and R.J. Patrick Williams, the Canadian critic Stephen Slemon gives another different definition of post-colonialism in relation to culture:

Definitions of the post-colonial of course vary widely, but for me the concept proves most useful not when it is used synonymously with a post-independence historical period in once colonized nations, but rather when it locates a specifically anti or post-colonial discursive purchase in culture (03).

In this quotation, Slemon claims that post-colonialism is more than a historical period. He argues that there is another meaning to post-colonial theory where the emphasis is on the processes of cultural productions which are considered as the particular concerns of the theory.

As a result, it is difficult to put post-colonial theory into one clear and a complete definition. However, as a literary theory, post-colonialism deals with the literature produced by the authors who take colonies and their people as their subject matter. The theory is often based around concepts of otherness, resistance, cultural identity, the question of belonging and diaspora.

### 1.3 A Short History of the Notion Diaspora:

Discussions on the nature of the term diaspora have always captured the interest of thinkers and theorists. Stéphane Dufoix is one of the devoted thinkers who was concerned with the study of the notion of diaspora. Dufoix summarizes his ideas in the book '*Diaspora Reimagined Spaces, Practices and Belonging*':

Etymology and first use should be able to tell us the truth (etymos means true in ancient Greek) about the birth and therefor the essence of the word. Unfortunately, such a perspective not only hinders the various evolutions in the uses of the term, it also presumes that a word is only born once. The instance of diaspora demonstrates the many lives a word can live: as a religious term, as an academic notion (08).

In this quotation, Dufoix claims that it is difficult to define the word diaspora as it could be considered in some times as a religious term, sometimes as an academic notion, and some others as a scientific concept. Yet, the term of diaspora takes its origins from the Greek word ‘diaspeiran’, ‘dia’ meaning over or through and ‘speiran’ meaning sow or scatter. As this etymology suggests, diaspora refers to a forcible movement of people from their homelands into new geographical areas.

The word diaspora was introduced for the first time according to Dufoix, in the third century BCE. Back then, the term was used to describe the divine punishment that would befall the Jews if they did not follow the commandments of God (08). In this situation, the use of diaspora was not only to describe the historical dispersal of the Jews throughout the world, but it was used also to describe a religious situation. The term diaspora continued to be used to refer to the Jews until the first century CE, when the New Testament refers to ‘diaspora’ as the members of the Christian Church as exiled from the City of God and dispersed across the Earth (08).

From the first decades of the twentieth century onwards, diaspora became to be referred to as an academic notion, and became used largely. Some scholars and socialists played an important role in this importation. Among them is The British anthropologist Maurice Freedman who attempted to use the term to demonstrate that Chinese and Indians constituted ‘Other Diasporas’. (09)

With the evolution process of this word, diaspora became used by various racial, religious, or ethnic groups to describe their connection to a geographical area that is different from the one they used to live in or the land of their origins. From the late 1960s within the African American community academic and non-academic publications started to multiply that used 'diaspora' to refer to Black people residing outside Africa.

### **1.4 Types of Diaspora:**

Literature emerging from the background of diaspora has led to two different types of writing. The first one is more autobiographical which refers to the narration of self. While the second one is considered more scholarly in which the author deals with studies on diaspora. Tololyan makes a distinction between these two types of writing by stating that there are two terms, named the emic diaspora and the etic diaspora.

#### **1.4.1 The Emic Diaspora:**

According to Tololyan, the emic diaspora refers to the diaspora in which the authors talk about themselves. He states that, "The self-study of diasporas produced representations and various forms of self-knowledge, some embodied in quotidian practices, some in public performances and others in oral and written archives and the thriving native-language press of groups such as the Armenians and the Chinese"(654). In this formulation, Tololyan argues that diasporas in the emic discourse generally keep making self-representations by referring to their selves using the English language.

#### **1.4.2 The Etic Diaspora:**

In the other hand, the matter that is significant in diaspora studies is according to Tololyan, the aspect of representation "Who represents-diasporas the community itself or scholars-...the diasporic social domain that exists when only emic study and self-representation is going on takes a different shape when it is constituted as the object of knowledge of diasporic studies"(654). In this formulation, Tololyan argues that the shift

from the emic diaspora to the etic diaspora depends on the way of representation. That is to say, when ‘diasporians become objects of knowledge and co-subjects’ (654), and they are represented and transformed into disciplinary objects, they are considered as study subjects in a disciplinary area.

### 1.5 Caribbean Diaspora in Britain and its Historical Roots:

Discussions on the questions of belonging and the issues of identity are always considered as the main concerns of many thinkers and philosophers all around the world. Stuart Hall as one of those thinkers and one of the founding figures of the cultural studies, he tackles issues such as identity and diaspora in his studies.

James Procter summarizes Hall’s ideas concerning diaspora in his book *‘Stuart Hall’*. According to Procter, Hall uses the term diaspora to refer to a range of global migrations like Black, Asian, Caribbean, Irish, African, etc; and travelling concepts such as routes, crossings, and borders (131). In this thought, Hall refers for example to the Caribbean as a specific composition of diasporic community.

Furthermore, according to Procter, Hall claims that the Caribbean is the first, the original, and the purest diaspora (131). With regards to Halls’ opinions, as diaspora community is born and raised out of global migrations ; yet, the Caribbean diaspora is pure and origin.

The history of the Caribbean Diaspora is built on the idea of migration. The book *‘Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain’* edited by Winston James and Clive Harris describes the historical and the social experience of the West Indies in the United Kingdom:

Large numbers of West Indies left their home territories for Britain during the 1950s and 1960s. They expected better employment and educational opportunities than existed in their homelands.

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The historical event Windrush refers to a long history of migrations to Britain, especially from the Caribbean regions. The period around the Second World War men and women from the Caribbean volunteered for all branches armed services. Many of the Caribbean people were lured by the offer of jobs in the ‘Mother Country’. At that time, there were no immigration restrictions for citizens from any part of the British Empire to the center since they had the right to immigrate according to Britain’s 1948 Nationality Act<sup>1</sup> gave UK citizenship to people living in its colonies including the Caribbeans. The arrival of hundreds of Caribbean passengers to London in 1948 was regarded as a landmark in the British post-war history, and many of them were promised of good opportunities of jobs.

After settling in the mother country, the second Windrush generation was born in Britain shaping the Caribbean diaspora there. Their sense of identity was also shaped by the first generation migrants’ history from their homeland. As a second-generation migrant, born in London, Andrea Levy has also witnessed the same crisis of identity and space. She summarizes her issues of identity in her article *This is My England* (2000), "Identity! Sometimes it makes my head hurt – sometimes my heart. So what am I? Where do I fit into Britain?"

As her father being one of the pioneers of the Caribbean diaspora, Levy here shows how the second generation of the Windrush event suffered from the issues of identity they used to face in England as their Diaspora home:

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<sup>1</sup> **Britain’s 1948 Nationality Act:** An Act to make provision for British nationality and for citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies and for purposes connected with the matters aforesaid.

My dad came to this country in 1948, on the Empire Windrush ship. He was one of the pioneers. One of the 492 people who looked around the old British Empire colony of Jamaica, so that there were no jobs, no prospects, and decided to chance his arm in the Mother Country.(....) My mum joined my dad in his one room in west London six months after the Windrush had docked. But they soon found that they were foreigners in England, and this shocked them.

### **1.6 Diasporic Space and Identity:**

Diasporic writings often become a response to the lost homes and to issues such as dislocation, discrimination, cultural change and identity. The diasporic community, initially try to adjust with the new culture and place into which they have moved.

#### **1.6.1 Brah Avtar and the Diasporic Space:**

The concept of diaspora proposes the idea of national borders. The two ideas are closely interrelated with the notion of location and dislocation. As one of the devoted thinkers who are concerned with the theory of diaspora, Brah Avtar published in 1996 her piece of writing ‘Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities’ in which she advanced the notion of ‘Diaspora Space’:

Diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, reclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition (31).

In this formulation, Avtar claims that the diaspora space is a space that is composed of differences and contradictions. Further, Avtar describes diasporic space in other words, as the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'them' are contested. 'My argument is that diaspora space as a conceptual category is 'inhabited', not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous (31).

The diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native (32). Avtar here claims that the diasporic space is an inhabited space not only by the black immigrants, but also by the British.

In addition, the similarities and differences across the difference axes of differentiation, class, racism, gender, sexuality, and so on, according to Avtar, articulate and disarticulate in the diaspora space. In the diaspora space called 'England', for example, African-Caribbean, Irish, Asian, Jewish, and other diasporas intersect among themselves as well as with the entity as Englishness<sup>1</sup>. Each of these formations has its own specificity.

### 6.2. Diaspora and Identity:

Questions related to issues of identity, belonging and return are further related to both the familial island home and that of their African ancestors to seek answers to questions pertaining to the nature of their complex identities. The notion of diaspora plays a useful role in explorations, and deconstructions of identity across national boundaries.

One of the key problems that a diasporic community faces is the predicament with regard to identity.

Identity is one of the most common themes in their literature, and in many cases the search for self-identities portrayed as confusing, painful and only occasionally rewarding.

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<sup>1</sup> **Englishness:** The quality of being English or of having characteristics regarded as typically English.

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As it is mentioned above, people from the Caribbean moved or were transported across national borders to the United Kingdom looking for good opportunities of jobs and better conditions of life. Furthermore, many of these families, especially the second generation who were born in Britain as Black British face issues of identity and belonging.

The question of diasporic identities has always been a field of study in research literature, especially in Diaspora studies and immigration. Identities of newcomers, the degree of attachment to both, country of origin and country of residence have concerned the academic and the social debates for a long time. In this realm, Daniel Naujoks claims in his essay *Diasporic Identities-Reflections on Transnational Belonging*:

Often analysts operate without a clear conceptualization of what identity is and how it can serve as an analytical category. Researchers, migrants, and the public discourse too readily speak along standard line of argumentation, referring to 'identity'. (02)

Thus, there is a rich body of research in literature dealing with the question of national and ethnic identity. Yet, the concept of identity remains a rather vague and not clearly defined term according to Naujoks, since the United Kingdom has a mixed population where various races, cultures, languages, religions intermingle.

Diaspora is thus often used to describe groups of displaced and exiled people who feel they possess a shared ethnicity, culture, (imagined) community and traditions but at the same time, have a relationship whether real or imagined, to a perceived homeland (06).

Diasporic people find it too difficult to situate themselves in the immigration country. They face alien lands and cherish fond memories of their homelands and are lost in nostalgia and sense of rootlessness. All those who shifted to foreign lands for temporary or permanent settlement felt, at one stage or the other, a sense of homelessness and alienation. This sense of rootlessness and alienation is caused by an awkward situation in which they are placed by their transplantation. Transplantation, thus looks back at location

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(homeland), passes through relocation (the alien land), and results in dislocation (a condition of mental and physical balance).

As one of the diasporic people who had to live in such conditions of life, is the famous black British novelist Andrea Levy. Since she is a descendant of Jamaican parents and was born in England, she had always to face certain issues concerning her identity and her state of belonging. Levy claims in her famous article *This is My England*:

I was educated to be English. Alongside me learning, watching, eating and playing- were white children. But those white children would never have to grow up to question whether they were English or not.

### 1.5 Conclusion:

This chapter introduces the foundation of this research. The theoretical background will help to guide this research in order to get the wanted results. Since this research deals with the theoretical study of this work and specifically the Theory of Diaspora, thoughts and ideologies concerning that are needed. In this vein, Stuart Hall's insights on diaspora, which is not only a historical event, but also it can be considered as social, economic, and a political movement as well.

The constitution of the theory of diaspora brought about the emergence of the diaspora spaces and identities. Brah Avtar argued that this diasporic space is inhabited by both, those who have migrated and their descendants, and those who are represented as indigenous. At last, Andrea Levy, as a diasporic Caribbean woman writer, argues that the sense of living in a diasporic space such as England continues to influence notions of identification and belonging to the region for Caribbean people.

## **Chapter Two**

Andrea Levy and her Diasporic Fiction

*Small Island*

### 2.1 Introduction:

This chapter attempts to describe Andrea Levy's experience as a diasporic novelist since she is a descendant of a Jamaican root, but was born in England and has been raised there. This chapter will also introduce Levy's fiction *Small Island* as a historical and a diasporic fiction in which the characters represent the Caribbean Diaspora in Britain. It will also attempt to describe the expectations of the West Indian immigrants when they decided to move on to live in the Mother Country and the disappointment they felt the moment they put their feet off the Empire Windrush ship in London, because of the judgments and the prejudices that the British have about them.

### 2.2 The Personal Experience of Andrea Levy:

Questions pertaining to issues of identity, belonging and return are further complicated. The displacement from the familial and the cultural home, the sense of loss and dislocation, are of significant importance for most of the contemporary diasporic Caribbean writers. As a Caribbean writer born and raised in Britain, Levy has always to look to both the familial island home and that of her African ancestors to seek answers to questions pertaining to the nature of her complex and multifaceted diasporic identity, Through her writings in which she addresses the nature of the return to the Caribbean, and the quest for home.

Andrea Levy builds up her writing on a personal experience. She was born in England to Jamaican immigrants. Her parents went to Britain as one of the passengers of the Empire Windrush and they could be both included in the so-called 'Windrush generation', and their memories and shared stories undoubtedly influenced Levy's prose greatly together with her own experience. However, Levy was born in the era of racial unrest in the United Kingdom. This condition influenced her throughout her lifetime, and she decided to share her experience with the public and started writing her first novel,

'*Every Light in the House Burning*', which was published in 1994. Two more novels followed; '*Never Far from Nowhere*' (1996), and '*Fruit of the Lemon*' (1999). In these novels, Levy dealt with the theme of Jamaican immigrants living in Britain from the point of view of the second generation; the children who were born already in Britain. In 2004, Levy published her fourth novel, *Small Island*, which focuses on the history of the West Indian minority in the United Kingdom and describes the Windrush generation's arrival into England.

### **2.3 An Introduction to Andrea Levy's '*Small Island*':**

Levy's *Small Island* is considered as one of the most notable novels of the Caribbean diaspora in Britain since it is concerned with the multiculturalism in Britain at the time according to what was written in the article titled *Review of Andrea Levy Small Island* 'Told from the perspective of two couples (speaking as four individuals) whose stories converge in London in 1948, *Small Island* is a consideration of the beginnings of Britain's multicultural society and the prejudices (in terms of race, class and gender) that permeate it'. Moreover, the novel focuses on the unrecognizability of the 'Mother Country' to West Indian migrants, their confrontation with their lived sense of hegemonic Britishness, Britain's rejection of black immigrants. Levy's work signifies upon these confrontations of national belonging and claiming a domestic space as a refuge and an act of resistance through the characters in her fiction.

*Small Island* presents a counter-history of the period before and after World War II (1939-1945), when men and women sailed from the Caribbean to the 'Mother Country' in 1948 in search of a better life. The novel's plot is structured around four main protagonists: Gilbert Joseph, a young Jamaican who joined the Royal Air Force in England, his wife Hortense, their white landlady Queenie Bligh, and her husband Bernard return from India where he served his country during the war.

Hortense, a qualified teacher, makes a marriage to Gilbert Joseph, pays for his passage to England on condition that he sends for her. She is not only hoping to meet her first love Michael Roberts, she also believes that living in Britain will give her a better chance to live her life. When she arrives in London in 1948, she is extremely disappointed by the one room in which they must live, and the problems they face because of their skin color. Queenie the white landlady becomes a close friend first with Gilbert then with Hortense after she arrives to England. After being assumed as missing in India after the war, Queenie's husband Bernard returns to England and finds Queenie pregnant of Michael's baby who is a black man.

### **2.3.1 Small Island:**

The title of Andrea Levy's novel can be understood in many ways. Jamaica and Britain are both real islands. However, according to Klàra Krçková, in her piece of writing *Diasporic Features in the Fiction of Andrea Levy*, small island can refer to a very different meaning in terms of the Caribbean Diaspora as they live in England, in which their island is imagined and exists only in their imagination where they play the role of the constituting elements of this imagined island:

In my opinion, there is one more metaphorical meaning to the title ; in terms of the Caribbean diaspora, in which its members had to live 'separated' from the major population, divided from the British people by an abstract barrier, this barrier might be also seen as an outline of a 'small island'. The community members would then be the constituting elements of this imagined 'island', lying within the rest of the British population. (28)

**2.3.2 Expectations of the immigrants about the life in Britain:**

Most of the West Indians who sailed on the British ship ‘The Empire Windrush’ in 1948, from the former British colony Jamaica to Britain, planned to start a new life there. Moreover, the West Indian immigrants hoped to find good jobs and a place to settle down with their families.

The Jamaican immigrants who had left their homeland as volunteers in the Second World War, just like Gilbert in the novel, and returned back to Jamaica, already viewed the island as a small one for them after they have seen the rest of the world. However, for Jamaicans, Britain had been always referred to as ‘The Mother Country’. The inhabitants of the former British colonies were encouraged to believe in their equality to British white population, with the idea that the mother country was waiting for them with great opportunities.

The passengers of the Empire Windrush were fascinated by England. Their first impression by the buildings, the streets, or even the roads shows how they liked Britain. Levy’s characters share the same trust in what they consider to be a safe place for them. Yet, they experienced a shock once they faced the cruel reality about life there. Gilbert’s family supposes that their son will study at university in Britain after the war ends. However, his application was refused at the Colonial Office and he was offered a much lower position instead, and he found himself working as a bread baker which makes him feel insulted and humiliated. He struggles to find a job for himself since the British employers refuse to hire a black man.

Unfortunately, Gilbert faces the same complications when he tries to find for himself and his wife Hortense a place to live in, as the owners of the houses in London refuse to rent him a place. As for many other black immigrants, Gilberts learns that unlike

the war time when his uniform granted him some prestige and some respect, after the war ended he is treated as an unwanted child of his Mother Country.

In addition, after six months Gilbert's wife Hortense comes to England to join him. However, she is disappointed since the moment she arrives in, as soon as Hortense tries to communicate with the locals, but she finds difficulties on the level of language and discourse, the taxi driver does not understand her pronunciation which confuses her and makes her feel humiliated when she tries to repeat for him the direction to Gilbert's place: "I put on my best accent. An accent that had taken me to the top of the class of Miss Stuart's English pronunciation competition. ...But still this taxi driver did not understand me" (17). Hortense used to be proud of her accent since back home in Jamaica, she used to be sure that her accent is perfect compared to the other students at school.

Hortense expected to be well welcomed when she arrives to England and she will be able to find a job as soon as she gets in there and work as a respected teacher as she used back in Jamaica. Hortense always had the idea that she is above the average of all West Indian people because of her skin color that was a little bit lighter and the roots of her family compared to the sons of her race. As a result to her great expectations Hortense feels so disappointed and extremely shocked.

### **2.3.3 The British and Their Opinion on the West Indian Immigrants:**

On the other side, Andrea Levy describes also the white English population status during the post-war era in her fictional work *Small Island*. At that time the White British society have just started recovering from the horrors of the Second World War since it costs them massive loss. In contrast to the West Indians expectations, the majority of the British inhabitants had no intention to welcome the black immigrants. According to what was stated in the piece of writing 'Who's Island is This? : Racism and Identity of the Diaspora In Andrea Levy's *Small Island* :

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Toplu (2005) argues that “Britain is still struggling to come to terms with its imperial past and is trying to come to terms with the challenges presented by a post-imperial multi-racial society.”. By this Toplu means that the question of real Britishness is a big issue both what comes to the past and the future.(4-5)

This means that the British population’ desires to keep the British society white and the pure Britishness are unquestionable. The British society considered this multiculturalism and the hybridized cultures within the British culture as a serious issue since the arrival of these ethnic groups of minorities.

This reject of the Blacks by the British inhabitants is well demonstrated by Levy in the novel, when the character Mr. Todd, Queenie Bligh’s neighbor who appears to extremely despises the black immigrants, blames Queenie for letting the ‘darkies’ as he calls them, to live in her house as lodgers, because for him, she was spoiling the area’s reputation by doing this.

Mr. Todd is a typical and a small example that presents the attitude of the British society towards the Blacks and their presence in the United Kingdom. Moreover, they think that the coming of the West Indians should be controlled by the government, and they should be separated from the rest of the society.

Although, the Black immigrants were officially British citizens, they were mostly considered to be of a lower status or even outside the British society. People always avoided any contact with them and they eventually kept being distant from the colored immigrants from the colonies.

### **2.4 Conclusion:**

This chapter introduced an overall idea on the novelist and her piece of writing as it presents a historical account on a specific period of time of the shared history between

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the two islands the British island and its previous colony the Jamaican island. The coming of the West Indian immigrants to the Mother country helped to shape the atmosphere there and represented the hegemonic British society with new small groups that are called the ethnic groups of minorities which helped to shape the Caribbean diaspora in Britain.

This chapter helps to provide the reader with an idea about the thoughts and the expectations the Caribbeans had about what they considered their Mother Country and even volunteered to fight for her since they considered themselves as they were her children, and her citizens. It also describes how the new black comers were treated across the ocean which made them live in a diaspora within the British society.

## **Chapter Three**

**Diaspic Features and the Impact of  
Diasporic Space on the Characters' Identities  
in Levy's Fiction *Small Island***

## Chapter Three Diaspic Features and the Impact of Diasporic Space on the Characters' Identities in Levy's Fiction *Small Island*

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### 3.1 Introduction:

This final chapter deals with the analytical frame of this research. It will attempt to analyze the novel as a diasporic fiction, more specifically; this chapter will discuss the language barrier as a diasporic feature in the novel. Also, it focuses on the influence of the dimensions of space as a crucial basis of constituting the characters' identity in the novel. Hortense Roberts and Gilbert Joseph are the characters who present the Jamaican minority in Levy's *Small Island*; while Bernard and Queenie Blight present the British society.

### 3.2 Language Barrier as a Diasporic Feature:

Language barrier<sup>1</sup> is considered as one of the significant features of diaspora. Although the West Indian immigrants are being distinguished from the British society for their Black skin color, but the typical dialect is also another barrier that varies the Caribbean Diaspora. And it is also widely common among the British population.

#### 3.2.1 Language Barrier for Hortense:

In *Small Island*, Hortense faces some issues concerning communication with the English driver who could not understand a word from her when she dictates for him the address of her husband Gilbert. Although Hortense put on her best accent and repeats the address for the taxi driver, but he still cannot understand her.

It took me several attempts at saying the address to the driver of the taxi vehicle before his face lit with recognition. 'I need to be taken number twenty-one Nevern Street in SW five. Twenty-one Nevern Street. N-e-v-e-r-n S-t-r-e-e-t.' I put on my best accent. An accent that had taken me to the top of the class in Miss Stuart's English pronunciation competition. My recitation of 'Ode to a Nightingale' had earned me a merit star and the honour of ringing the school bell for one week. But this taxi driver did not understand me. 'No, sorry, dear. Have you got it written down or something? On a piece of paper? Have you got it on a piece of paper?' I

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<sup>1</sup> Language Barrier : a difficulty for people communicating because they speak different languages.

### **Chapter Three Diaspic Features and the Impact of Diasporic Space on the Characters' Identities in Levy's Fiction *Small Island***

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showed him the letter from my husband, which was clearly marked with the address. 'Oh, Nevern Street - twenty-one. I've got you now (Levy 17).

Although Levy introduces Hortense as a very educated character, but Hortense faces difficult issues in terms of dialect. Hortense who had been always proud of her educational level and her pronunciation is humiliated in England; for instance when Mrs. Blight plays the role of a teacher to her and teaches her how to pronounce some basic English words "Mrs. Blight was a punctilious teacher. The shop with meat in the window she tell is a butcher. The one with pretty pink cakes is the baker. And each time she tell me she want me to repeat the word" (Levy 333).

From the point of view of the British, the black immigrants seemed like primitive creatures, not able to speak the language properly. In this light, the white people speak to the Jamaicans in simple English as if communicating with a child.

#### **3.3 Dimension of Space in the Novel and Its Influence on the Characters' Identities:**

Space is an important notion in Andrea Levy's narrative since it changes thoroughly during the time in the novel and it affects the characters in their actions. The dimensions of space also change through the narration process relatively to the narrator of each chapter. The novel tackles multiple geographic locations such as India, America, in addition to Jamaica, and London.

##### **3.3.1 The Post-war England (London):**

Dividing the spaces presented in the novel, London and its periphery is viewed by the Characters as a central point to which they all relate and in which they all meet and live. Levy depicts London as the shared space by both the British settlers and the new coming immigrants.

### **3.3.1.1 London for Bernard:**

For Bernard, London is the place where he lives with his wife Queenie, the place where they have a full life and a full history, London for them is their homeland. But, the face of the city Bernard once knew has extremely changed after the Second World War, which hardly reminded him of London before the war.

Bernard used to fight in India that is too far away from his home and his wife Queenie for the sake of his country. When Bernard returned back to England, he became badly affected by seeing the massive transformation which happened in his country because of the war. This damaged image of post-war England causes Bernard a severe shock, from his point of view, "England had shrunk. It was smaller than the place i'd left. Streets, shops, houses bore down like crowds, stifling even the feeble light that got through" (Levy 450).

Moreover, Bernard suddenly finds himself unable to recognize his own house, not only his country, 'I soon woke up at the corner of our street. Hard to believe this had been my home for most of my life. Nothing was familiar. Had it always looked so exhausted? So friable? Buildings decaying and run down. Rotting sashes. Cracked plaster. Obscene gaps where houses once stood' (Levy 455). The house that once was the home where he used to live with his family and his beloved wife Queenie. He suddenly lost his own house, and all what he has now is just a history and some memories that he once shared with his wife Queenie.

For Bernard, London is the homeland of the British population only. He finds it difficult for him to accept the coming of the immigrants to his country and sharing the space with them. When Bernard sees a black woman 'Hortense' in the street with his wife, and then he discovers that she lives in his house, he becomes shocked and disgusted. For him, he sacrifices his life in the war to protect his country, but now, and after he returns

### **Chapter Three Diasporic Features and the Impact of Diasporic Space on the Characters' Identities in Levy's Fiction *Small Island***

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back when the war is finally over, he finds strangers invading his territory. Bernard considers the immigrants from the West Indies unwanted strangers who should be kicked out and sent back to where they came from. Furthermore, Bernard refuses to accept the immigrants as his equals and as citizens who can share the land with the British society as Anne Murphy argues, 'The British characters in the novel see the West Indians as undifferentiated others defined entirely by their race'(15).

#### **3.3.1.2 London for Queenie:**

Queenie was born in Britain just like Bernard, they both grew up in the same atmosphere. But her opinion on the West Indians is the opposite of the rest of the British society. Opposed to her husband, Queenie is not concerned with the skin color of the newly coming immigrants and especially her lodgers, 'It's all right. I don't mind being seen in the street with you. You'll find I'm not like most. It doesn't worry me to be seen out with darkies' (Levy 213). Queenie who has experienced the terrors of war in England, and watched the destruction of the country during the war; she does not only accept to share the space with the coming immigrants, she even offers rooms in her own house to those immigrants to live.

#### **3.3.1.3 London for Hortense and Gilbert:**

Most of the new coming immigrants were young people who intended to settle down, start a family, find a job and a suitable place to live. For the immigrants, Hortense and Gilbert, space is valuable and very important. Since they were raised to look up to Britain as their 'Mother Country', they became strongly related to it. They thought themselves as being already British.

However, after they traveled to England when the Second World War was over, with the hope of finding their identity and a space to live in the United Kingdom, they become aware of the fact that they do not belong to the country. They are neither allowed

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nor able to become part of the British society as they hope. Since they were segregated from the locals they had only two options; whether to return back to Jamaica, or to settle down in the United Kingdom and adapt themselves to the life there.

Gilbert who volunteered in the British Army to fight for his Mother Country considers England as his own homeland. However, when the war was over, Gilbert lost the respect that he once gained from the British as soon as he took off the British uniform. Instead of a warm welcoming face from the 'Mother Country', she changes her look towards the West Indians and considers them as strangers. Gilbert then realizes this rough change in treatment and describes the 'Mother Country' as '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 the journey. No Smile. No welcome. Yet, she looks down at you through lordly eyes and says, 'Who the bloody hell are you?!' (Levy 139)

For Hortense everything that comes from Britain is an ideal. She was taught during her childhood back in Jamaica on the basics and the principles of being English. However, Hortense is determined to become a teacher in a prestigious school in England; she would do anything to fulfill this goal, she would even marry to Gilbert whom she did not know for the purpose of getting to Britain.

Although she was disappointed by the actual life in Britain after her arrival Hortense stubbornly holds to her aim, she considers herself above the English white woman Queenie who tries to help the blacks and treat them well. Hortense even criticizes Queenie when she tells her that she is not worry if people saw her walking in the streets with a darkie: 'Now, why should this woman worry to be seen in the street with me? After all, I was a teacher and she was only a woman whose living was obtained from the letting of rooms. If anyone should be shy it should be I' (Levy 231). Nevertheless, Hortense soon

## **Chapter Three Diasporic Features and the Impact of Diasporic Space on the Characters' Identities in Levy's Fiction *Small Island***

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has to face the rough reality after she was refused in a teaching position which strongly shakes her belief, pride, and self-confidence.

### **3.3.1.4 The Caribbean Island (Jamaica):**

Both Hortense and Gilbert in their chapters mention how they were instructed at school about the Mother Country; they had to memorize facts from geography and history, learning to name places such as rivers, cities, and mountains that they have never seen before. As a result, they grew up knowing the distant land which they never know better than they knew their own homeland and the geography of Jamaica.

Jamaica for both Gilbert and Hortense is only the place in which they were born and raised. Despite the crucial treatment and the rough reality they face in England; the idea of returning back to Jamaica was unquestionable for the West Indians. For them the condition of life in Jamaica is even worse than in Britain which was for them their life goal and the dream land opposed to the Caribbean Island Jamaica. The Jamaicans characters in *Small Island* always think of themselves as the sons of the Mother Country since back their childhood.

### **3.4 Conclusion:**

This chapter has presented the analytical background of this research as it provides the reader with an analytical reading of the novel as a diasporic novel. It introduces the language barrier as a distinguishing feature of the immigrants from the British society. Although it is not a material barrier, it clearly creates a distance between the immigrants and the locals in the United Kingdom who clearly appear unable to understand the Jamaican accent.

This chapter also introduces space as an important category in Andrea Levy's narrative since it affects the characters in their actions. As seen above, the spatial dimension varies according to the narrator of each chapter. Levy in her novel depicts how

### **Chapter Three Diasporic Features and the Impact of Diasporic Space on the Characters' Identities in Levy's Fiction *Small Island***

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each one the characters understood the concept of space, and searching for an identity based on the place that they consider as a home. But for the Jamaican characters Hortense and Gilbert, instead of finding a home across the national borders they were segregated and obliged to create their own community, a diaspora within the alien environment. Hortense and Gilbert struggle to find their position in the new environment. However, the only way for them to survive in Britain is to adapt the British culture and to incorporate with the British society.

# **General Conclusion**

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

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### General Conclusion:

Over the last decades, studies of space have captured the attention of academic scholars. Its significance is manifested in the influence of space and place on individuals. with the sprung of some specific movements such as mobility, and migration which is considered as one of the major phenomena of spatiality; narratives whenever they produce and write, discuss their experiences of displacement, dislocation and relocation.

This research has aimed at showing how the motive of diaspora has been examined through the novel of Andrea Levy *Small Island* from many aspects since it is an important phenomenon typical for the ethnic minorities which settled down in a foreign country. In the light of diasporic space theory, Andrea Levy's narrative techniques' employed in *Small Island* were illustrated from the aspect of space. The concept of space had a formative impact on Levy's fiction, since the dimensions of space have a crucial influence in constituting the characters' identity far from their homeland.

Moreover, the topic that carries a remarkable role in the constitution of a diaspora, is the dimension of space, Space is an important condition for a nation as well as individuals to construct and base their identity on a specific place where they can settle in and belong to. However, the characters of immigrants in *Small Island* such as Hortense and Gilbert lack this sense of having a home and belonging to a specific place. And instead of finding their space to settle in and build their identities, they were separated and forced to move to the suburbs of London. Consequently, they find themselves negotiating to gain the opportunity to create a home.

The first chapter is a descriptive chapter that introduces the theory discussed by Brah Avtar which was fundamental to understand the representation of space in the postcolonial novel and especially the diasporic fiction. The theory was presented to

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

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understand the influence of the spatial dimensions analogous Britain and Jamaica in the development of the main characters' identities.

On the other hand, the second chapter is both a descriptive and an analytical chapter which presents the work of Andrea Levy as a diasporic fiction on which Levy focuses on the topic of Caribbean diaspora in the United Kingdom. She presents the issue from two points of view; the immigrants as well as the British. Levy reconstructs the crucial event of the history of the West Indian minority, the arrival of the Empire Windrush, and provides a close insight into the characters' lives.

While the third chapter is mainly analytical which provides a close analysis to the characters' lives. This chapter helps the reader to understand Levy's fiction as a Diasporic fiction, as it introduces one of the significant features that supports the formation of diaspora. This feature is the language barrier. Thus it creates a gap between the characters as they are not able to communicate with each other and therefore the characters attempt to understand the other side fails.

This barrier is based mainly on prejudices and cultural misunderstandings as well as racial discrimination. Although the shared language might seem to be a connecting element for the West Indians and it is a sign that keeps them out of the British society, but they still do not use the language in the same way. For instance, in the case of Hortense, the ability to speak English is a matter of prestige, even back in Jamaica the spoken language divides the society into classes and even classifies the individuals into various backgrounds and different levels of education and intelligence.

# Appendix

## APPENDIX

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Appendix 1: Andrea Levy born on 7 March 1956

Andrea Levy is a child of the Windrush. She is the daughter of one of the pioneers who sailed from Jamaica to England on the Empire Windrush ship. Her father and later her mother came to Britain in 1948 in search of a better life. For the British born Levy, this meant that she grew up black in a very white England. This experience has given her an unusual perspective on the country of her birth – neither feeling totally part of the society nor a total outsider.

## APPENDIX

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### Appendix 2: Brah Avtar

Avtar Brah is Emerita Professor of Sociology at Birkbeck College, University of London.

In 1996, Avtar Brah published *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, in which she advanced the notion of ‘diaspora space’. ‘Diaspora space as a conceptual category is “inhabited” not only by those who have migrated and their descendants but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of diaspora space (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of “staying put”’ (Brah, 1996: 181).

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