

Cultural Adaptation and Negotiation: Interpreting the Select Novels of Andrea Levy

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Abstract

Levy as a devoted writer has recorded the rights of the Blacks at Britain. On the other hand, the writings of the Windrush generation in previous decades expressed the consciousness of the Caribbean. She has consistently showed her deep desire to see Britain through her own unique lens. Her need to demonstrate her Britishness through her fiction writing is therefore examined. She highlights the injustices Black people experience in the English nation in a few of her works, and she also falls sort of negotiating a suitable position for them within the transnational framework. In this case, an effort is made to draw attention to the shift in her description of Caribbean consciousness.

Keywords: Andrea Levy, Black British writer, Windrush generation, acculturation, Caribbean consciousness.

Andrea Levy's novels, which explore the tales of slavery across the Atlantic and the legacies of colonization, have garnered international recognition. As a Caribbean descendent, Andrea Levy was unable to go back three hundred years while writing her novel. In an interview with Charles Henry Rowell, she stated proudly that she was intended to give back the authority to the African population in the Caribbean, rather than merely portraying them as sufferers or as individuals who had to face terror (Levy 268). Levy thought that returning to their origins would reveal the untold strength of her ancestors who achieved emancipation

and continued to thrive generation after generation. Even though Levy studied a lot about history, she expressed her thanks to her ancestors in the same interview, saying, that her ancestors built rich and complex societies from scratch, despite very difficult circumstances. (Levy 268) Looking back in time, a progressive move was made in response to Britain's labor problem. The British Citizenship Act of 1948 granted legal rights and permitted immigration to England for individuals from the Caribbean as well as other British colonies. Consequently both groups of individuals having the freedom to enter, settle, and engage in employment in Britain (Solomons 56). "More than one generation came between the passing of the Citizenship Act in 1948... and the Immigration act of 1971," according to Stein, "wives and children of previously settled men started arriving" (5).

In addition to her books being well-known for their affinity with the Caribbean, her early writings show how interested she became in discovering Britain both as a place to write and as a time for writing—and how much she enjoyed investigating it. In the 1960s and 1970s, when the country was overtly hostile to Black people, Levy made a literary promise to negotiate a space for them. These two books, *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and *Fruit of the Lemon*, are selections from her body of work. She made use of the "interior monologue" (Childs and Fowler 121), which captures the concepts that pass through a character's head. Using a manner like this, Levy's book advises rejecting the prevailing epistemological viewpoint that muffles Black voices but not the location.

Levy aspired to lessen binary thinking and equalize rights more than she did by singing gloomy concepts and evoking the demeaning mindset of the immigrants of different generations in the foreign land. The majority of Levy's generation of Black writers who were born in Britain also established an emerging Black British voice. Ghanaian poet Kwame Dawes says that these writers' mission is to combat the idea that they are not at ease when they are in England (Dawes 261).

According to Shweta Sharma, many upcoming writers are releasing works with comparable concepts for altering the diasporic mindset, the perspective of rejecting the binaries has at last left a mark in the discussions of post-modernism and post-feminism (67). As Levy writes in *This is My England*, that there was a point that her mum had doubts about this emigration, on hearing stories of the treatment the first travellers had received. She saw firsthand horror that Caribbean immigrants felt about their mistreatment. Despite how history has portrayed the power structure, Levy had the courage to elevate the reconstructed black community in contemporary Britain, where they are there to pursue freedom and power on par with the rest of humanity. She said, “If Englishness doesn’t define me, then redefine Englishness,” in a Waterstone’s Magazine story (Levy 64). The notion of forging new identities emerged after postcolonialism and proved to be a more widespread phenomenon. The migrant’s sense of being rootless, of living between worlds, between a lost past and a non-integrated present, is perhaps the most appropriate image of this (post) modern condition, noted Chambers, pointing out a scenario of the Age (27). Levy’s perspective on Black people’s survival in a non-white land is based on her personal experiences as a second-generation immigrant.

Austin Clarke and other Levy contemporaries also published works with comparable views. These writers demonstrated commonalities in their approach by exploring the new road, away from the Windrush generation, who were the first-generation Caribbean writers of the 1950s and 1960s, despite the fact that writers and writings could not be taxonomized throughout the Age. An epigraph in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s book features a comment by writer Clarke that demonstrates the two authors’ similar methods. Nonetheless, Levy believed that by going back to her roots, she might become her true self, as she herself said in the Rowell interview: “That’s the selective memory we have, and the amnesia I’m talking about. People like me because I’m the bastard child of the Empire, and I want you to see it that way.

What took place? What took place? What took place? Although it's difficult labor, someone has to do it. It's something that a lot of people do" (280).

Concurrently, transformations in diasporic identity are occurring in line with global technological and ideological advancements. The notable point, as stated by Robin Cohen, is that more solid and accurate knowledge about the nature of the Caribbean social diaspora will be feasible only by collecting full past information and sociological data. Some critics have specifically examined and analyzed Caribbean immigration (152). Therefore, Levy took a unique way to expressing Caribbean consciousness by addressing a distinct idea. Just by straying from the writing styles of the Windrush generation—the first wave of Caribbean writers to publish literary works in the 1950s and 1960s, including Samuel Selvon whose style gained notoriety. Selvon, in particular, took pride in referring to himself as the Caribbean writer among the writers of the Windrush generation, as Ken McCoogan writes about Selvon that he always identified himself as a Caribbean expatriate... all his life, Selvon championed the development of a multi-cultural, pan-Caribbean consciousness" (73).

As a result, the first generation of Caribbean writers expressed the consciousness of the region through rejection or nostalgia. However, Levy concentrated on the struggles of the lower class and working-class immigrants by creating British-born characters in her early novels who are separated from the larger world outside with a sense of exile. In the framework of self-development issues, yet they are devoid of external context (Pready 17). In contrast, the writers who came before her focused more on the external environment than the inside self.

A Jamaican family's existence in London is shown in the 1994 the novel *Every Light in the House Burnin'*. The narrator claims that despite living in a strange land, Angela's family tries to fit in. Winston and Beryl went to Tilbury together in 1948. Despite the

difficulties the couple encountered upon arriving in their new nation, they have done a remarkable job of eradicating any negative stereotypes about them, especially with regard to parenthood. Because of their insightful representation, the idea of parenting which comprises promoting a child's physical, social, and emotional development is deeply embedded in Angela's parents.

But the parents were adamant that maintaining a tranquil and comfortable life would come from their refusal to make an investment in the culture in which they reside and from their pride in their history. Unquestionably belonging to the second generation, Angela takes on the role of cultural bridge. Born and reared in the same home as Winston and Beryl, Angela's upbringing provided her with the independence to advocate for the rights of all individuals, irrespective of their location or ethnicity. What is left, according to Susan Alice Fischer, is that her continuous struggle to find a place for herself. Her generation will be the next to carve out a niche for themselves in Britain once her father passes away (206).

Culture can be broadly defined as the beliefs, customs, and values of a particular civilization. Most people are aware that all civilizations grow socially rather than biologically. As a result, rather of being passed down through families, culture is an idea that people acquire through observation. The novel *Every Light in the House Burnin'* is a moving examination of cultural appropriation and negotiation, especially as it relates to the experience of Afro-Caribbean immigrants in Britain. In terms of cultural adaption, the novel illustrates the difficulties Caribbean immigrants had assimilating into British society in the context of the Immigrant Experience. After relocating from Jamaica to London, Angela's parents had to adjust to a strange and frequently hostile environment. In order to adapt, people must deal with racism, pick up new social conventions, and figure out how to preserve their cultural identity. To add more strength to the point, there is a noticeable distinction between the ways in which the younger and older generations adjust to their new environments when discussing generational

differences. Born and reared in the United Kingdom, Angela frequently finds herself torn between the traditional beliefs of her parents and the contemporary British society she is exposed to. The different levels of cultural adaption within immigrant families are shown by this generational gap.

And also, Angela's journey illustrates the struggle for identity and a sense of belonging in terms of identity and belonging. She struggles with issues related to her cultural background and what it means to be Jamaican and British as she gets older. As she attempts to reconcile the two aspects of her identity, this internal conflict is a crucial component of cultural adaptation.

Every Light in the House Burnin' essentially uses the experience of a single family to illustrate the difficulties of cultural adaptation and negotiation. The delicate depiction by Andrea Levy highlights the psychological and emotional costs of migration while also highlighting the fortitude and resiliency of people who successfully negotiate cultural divides.

The novel *Fruit of the Lemon* tells the tale of Faith Jackson, a young Jamaican black woman, as she struggles with her heritage, identity, and sense of belonging in late 20th-century Britain and overcomes prejudice and cultural alienation. The daughter of a Jamaican immigrant, Faith Jackson, resides in London. According to the original meaning of religion, a person must have unwavering aspiration regardless of their ethnicity or culture. She succeeded in earning her degree in textiles and fashion. Faith's parents have consistently helped her to restore her composure. They put out endless effort to discover a way to enable their daughter to reclaim her actual self.

They reasoned that by helping her understand the pride of her ancestors, she would be able to reclaim her spirit that memories and dreams of a lost homeland are beneficial for maintaining identity and ensuring survival (Weedon 27). Regarding "coloured" immigration,

Spencer (153) states that it would almost certainly lead to racial strife. Personas such as Faith Jackson, Angela, and her parents discussed their experiences of being different. Levy thus falls short in illuminating the astute observations on the disparities that Black people face. There is a need for uniqueness, according to Mbembe, when people experience intense exclusion(183). With the Afro-Caribbean diaspora in Britain serving as a backdrop, the novel tackles issues of identity, heritage, and the complexity of the immigrant experience.

First, Faith Jackson, a young black woman born in Britain to Jamaican parents, first experiences identification issues in the note on identification Crisis. Growing up in a largely white community, she struggles with self-acceptance and a sense of belonging. Her journey of adaptation includes balancing her Caribbean ancestry with her British upbringing, which is both difficult and life-changing.

Next, regarding Workplace Challenges, Faith describes how her experiences there have brought to light both covert and overt instances of prejudice. She must negotiate these racial tensions as she adjusts to professional life in Britain while retaining her feeling of value. Because it demonstrates how systematic racism affects both personal and professional identity, this aspect of cultural adaptation is vital. Through Faith's journey in *Fruit of the Lemon*, Andrea Levy expertly illustrates the complexities of cultural adaptation and negotiation. The novel emphasizes the value of knowing one's heritage and the transformational potential of accepting one's cultural origins. Levy highlights the benefits and difficulties of juggling several cultural identities via Faith's experience, ultimately highlighting the diversity of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora.

Levy emphasizes the systemic prejudice and injustices Black people in Britain experience in several of her writings. She promotes a better knowledge and appreciation of Black people's involvement in the history of the country by shedding light on their hardships,

resiliency, and contributions to British society. But she also has the difficulty of helping Black Britons find a legitimate place in a transnational context where identities are ambiguous and frequently disputed.

This paper attempts to highlight the change in Levy's depiction of Caribbean awareness. In contrast to previous literary manifestations that prioritized preserving a unique Caribbean identity, Levy's works exhibit a more cohesive strategy, fusing aspects of British and Caribbean culture. This change reflects a more expansive and inclusive view of British identity, recognizing the fluid and hybrid character of identity within a heterogeneous community. Finally, the literary works of Andrea Levy offer a thorough examination of Black British identity. Her creations honor Black people's tenacity and complex identities while also exposing the injustices they endure. Levy rewrites the story of Britishness by highlighting the fluid and dynamic character of cultural identity and highlighting the value of inclusivity and acknowledging a range of experiences and histories.

To conclude, Levy's deft storytelling style challenges readers' preconceived notions about what true knowledge is, where it may be found, and how to get it. Levy highlights the necessity to demand better treatment of all people through such systemic anti-Black racism. Additionally, by introducing a fresh viewpoint at the relevant historical period, as stated by Parama Sarkar, that strategy is to maintain the native cultures securely in their place (23). Levy helps readers understand the stain on British history that resulted from the people of other countries' failure to negotiate a position for them while in their foreign land.

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