GRADIVA

Volume 62 | Issue 10 | October 2023
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10200343

Structural Violence and The Socio-Economic Rights of British Afro-Caribbean Subjects in Andrea Levy's Two Novels

Thomas-Michael Emeka Chukwumezie

Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
Email: emeka.chukwumezie@unn.edu.ng ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3098-574X

Abstract

Caribbean literature has generated literary productions that border on history and identity. Many of these studies view Caribbean history both as traumatic and ignoble. This history is believed to predispose the Caribbean subjects to quest for identity or perpetual search for their root. However, sufficient critical attention has not been paid to the detrimental effects of structural violence that undermine the socio-economic rights of the descendants of the Afro-Caribbean immigrants in England, a fact which complicates their sense of self and reinvigorates their search for psychic wholeness. This study, therefore, focuses on the reality of structural violence and its effects on the identity of the British Afro-Caribbean subjects. Andrea Levy, a second-generation Afro-Caribbean British writer has continued in the tradition of the Caribbean art of commitment. She, therefore, through the characters of Faith, Gilbert and Hortense, among others, whose fight to assert their black British identity leads to some kind of complications, demonstrates how the British Afro-Caibbean subjects are shortchanged in the socio-economic sphere because of their race. These Afro-Caribbean immigrants in Britain and their descendants face frustrations as they encounter the reality of 'institutionalised' structural violence which denies them their socio-economic rights as British citizens. Their belief that they are an integral part of British cultural mainstream is therefore unrealisable, hence, they are left as second-class or marginalised citizens whose socio-economic rights are deliberately constricted.

Keywords: *Afro-Caribbean, Immigrants, Structural Violence, Socio-Economic Rights, Historical Experience.*

INTRODUCTION

The West Indian region's peculiar historical experiences serve as a source of inspiration for Caribbean literature. This literary tradition is, therefore, immersed in the representations of the experiences of slavery, colonialism, politics, and connection to Africa, gender roles, sex and sexuality, economic development and exploitation, and the quest for an individual and a collective identity that could be tagged the West Indian. (Erika J. Waters 1994).

Historically, the black people of the Caribbean, who the trans-Atlantic slave uprooted from different parts of sub-Saharan Africa and transplanted into the new world, suffer not just the negative and debilitating effects of enslavement but *rootlessness* and *unhomeliness* (Bhabha, 2004) in their new environment. Consequently, they lacked and still lack a common culture, language or religion because their European captors, through deliberate physical, spiritual and psychological violence, destroyed whatever cohesion and fraternity that could have developed among the black communities in the West Indies. The physical (geographical) and psychological (mental) separation from their cultural roots in Africa resulted in a feeling of alienation and loss of self. The Afro-Caribbean experience is, therefore, fraught with a

Volume 62 | Issue 10 | October 2023
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10200343

conscious effort to re-invent oneself or assert one's rights to self-definition. The discourse of the loss of identity and the need to define who the non-white West Indian is, is at the core of this body of literature that is classified as the Caribbean or West Indian Literature.

Beyond the horrendous experience of slavery, these ex-slaves and their descendants still experience stigmatisation many centuries after the abolition of slavery. The structural pattern of that emancipation, like slavery itself, never recognised their humanity as it economically emasculated them further. So, these ex-slaves lacked any meaningful socio-economic rights even at the end of slavery. The emancipation they had looked up to for their freedom denied them the basic rights as the citizens of their various countries. Hence, in desperation for self-definition with the hope to exercise their rights as humans, they were dispersed in various European countries by the munificent wave of migration. Therefore, many of the Afro-Caribbean people, who immigrated to England, through the process of psychic shut-down, desired a historical closure because they considered their past ignoble. They, therefore, through the process of silencing, consciously denied their descendants the knowledge of their history which they considered ignoble.

Consequently, this second generation of Afro-Caribbean immigrants, who had been nurtured to see themselves as Britons, suddenly discovered that their British citizenship is wobbly because of their skin colour. As they hit the larger society after their studies to pursue their career, they encounter a *glass ceiling* that inhibits their upward thrust within the country of their birth. Therefore, their erroneous belief, that England is a home to them falls like a pack of cards as they are thrown into identity crises or self-doubt.

This study, therefore, focuses its critical gaze on Andrea Levy's two novels- *Small Island* and *Fruit of the Lemon*-to establish that the socio-economic rights of British Afro-Caribbean people and their descendants are totally undermined irrespective of their 'full' British citizenship. And evidently, this study shows that the denial of their socio-economic rights was made possible through the institutionalised structural violence, which like a landmine shatters their essence. This discovery will, therefore, demonstrate why their nagging identity question is unabated irrespective of their huge investments in human capital development in Britain.

The British Afro-Caribbean Literature, the Reality of Invisibility and the Search for Self or Psychic Wholeness

Ayo Kehinde (2010) in his study of Caribbean literature posits that the Caribbean writers' search for cultural re-birth and re-invention is a conscious attempt to come to terms with their unwholesome past that is rooted in slavery and deprivation. Usually, the attempt to achieve psychic and spiritual wholeness often compels the black or non-white West Indian writer to embark on a real or imaginative pilgrimage to either Africa or the Indian sub-continent with a hope to achieve 'wholeness'. Such journeys are often a result of 'self-conceived romantic and pristine thought about Africa (Raji-Oyelade, 130).' This search for origin or root is precipitated by pesky identity crisis which is often a major driving force that facilitates and activates their creative imagination. This Kehinde's postulation, had previously been expressed by Karen King-Aribisala (1999), Paul Gilroy (1995), and Bill Ashcroft et al (1989), who also argue that the unique historical configurations of the West Indies and the resultant negative impact has had a debilitating and very corrosive impact on the collective psyche of the people of the West Indies, especially the non-white members of the community. The position propounded by Kehinde and many other critics, who have reviewed black West Indian literature, is that the

Volume 62 | Issue 10 | October 2023
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10200343

quest for identity and cultural wholeness influence the Afro-Caribbean writers' perception of life.

Therefore, the Caribbean literary engagements traditionally produce narratives with a strong personal presence which tends to display depths of character. These characters, therefore, have the capacity to spring surprises inexhaustibly like real human beings. Levy's works '…have these kinds of individuals with identity standards that determine their orientations towards the world and often preoccupied with self-verification. (Akwanya, 2013)'

Writing on this affinity between literature and identity (sense of self) discourse, Bennette and Royle (2004) argue that the major preoccupation of literature is the exploration and reflection of personal identity. They aver that literature provides a requisite space where questions about the nature of an individual's identity are 'most provocatively articulated' (128). There is no gainsaying the fact that identity has a lot to do with socialisation hence; Stolley (2005) maintains that 'socialisation is the process of learning cultural patterns, behaviours and [social] expectations' placed on the individual, (61). According to Matsumoto (2009) therefore, identity is 'a way an individual understands himself and is recognised by others (244).' Thus, when an individual is confused about his or her 'personality' and the social roles expected of him as a result of existing social constructs (structural violence), as in the case of black West Indians in Britain, an identity crisis sets in.

Writing on the quest for identity among these immigrants, Meena Alexander (2009) argues that the identity crisis often occurs as a result of a hostile or unwelcoming environment. This unwelcoming environment has a lot to do with structural violence which they have to contend with even as British citizens. Equally, Pready (2012) asserts that the central concerns of Levy's novels include: identity, racial identity, the role of family, work, education, identity formulation, among others. Pready's postulations about the thematic preoccupations of Levy's works of art focus on the negotiation of space, identity, and relationships in postcolonial Britain among the descendants of Afro- Caribbean subjects. This study will link this 'negotiation for space' to the harsh environment created by structural violence which serves as a catalyst to the undermining of the socio-economic rights of the British Afro-Caribbean people.

Faith's parents in Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* were among the 'Windrush' Afro-Caribbean immigrants in Britain. Their arrival in England clearly upset the British social system. These immigrants were not welcome to England as they were treated as *outsiders*. The first two major problems they faced were those of accommodation and employment. Faith's parents in *Fruit of the Lemon* had to live in the same house with prostitutes when they first arrived in England. Also, Gilbert and Hortense in Levy's *Small Island* face a similar fate as they live in a dilapidated building. Gilbert informs the audience that it was out of Queenie's magnanimity that he could secure such a 'hole' as a home. Gilbert and Hortense, though educated, but could not secure decent jobs that might support them as immigrants in England. They suffered discrimination everywhere they go to and as such, they could not fit into the British socio-economic system.

So, Faith's parents, like other first-generation Afro-Caribbean subjects in England, having settled in England after the initial trauma, fought through thick and thin to train their children in school. Their belief is that their children, who are born as British citizens, if equipped with adequate education, will not experience the rejection that they faced as British colonial subjects and citizens. These Windrush Caribbean immigrants in Britain consciously made effort to shield their children from their ignoble past. Hence, they silenced every part of

Volume 62 | Issue 10 | October 2023
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10200343

their past even when their children, prodded through social interaction, asked them about their history. This desire for historical closure informed the ignorance of history demonstrated by their children who erroneously believed England to be their home. Consequently, as these children venture into the British society, they are held back by structural violence which undermined their socio-economic rights as citizens of that country. These immigrants were systematically excluded from the British social and cultural schemes.

Structural Violence and the Afro-Caribbean Diasporic Experience in Britain

The horrendous experience of slavery was accompanied by both physical and structural violence. The slaves and their descendants were dehumanised during slavery and stigmatised thereafter. The stigma of slavery still follows them even many centuries after emancipation. As immigrants and British citizens in England, the Afro-Caribbean subjects are subtly restricted from joining British cultural mainstream basically because of their skin colour. Their all-round racial experience typifies the harsh reality of structural violence which impairs the wellbeing of the target group. According to Johan Galtung on his discourse of this form of violence, structural violence is the 'avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or…the impairment of human life, which lowers the actual degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible.' Structural violence, therefore, is a form of institutionalised denial which limits an individual from attaining his potentials within a given environment.

Paul Farmer et al 2006 in their discourse on structural violence aver that it is often embedded in longstanding 'ubiquitous social structures, normalised by stable institutions and regular experience.' To these scholars structural violence 'seem so ordinary in our ways of understanding the world, they appear almost invisible.' It is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realisations are below their potential realisations (Galtung, 5). The foregoing assertion portrays structural violence as such a non-physical violence that has been accepted or seen as part of the culture of that particular society. They, therefore, believe that structural violence appears invisible but clearly manifest as 'disparate access to resources, political power, education, healthcare, and legal standing,' (3) among others. The individuals who experience structural violence are always enveloped by the cloud of invisibility even as they are denied their basic rights as members of their society. What this means is that structural violence is a system of well-articulated injustice subtly meted out to a target group within their social environment. Farmer, therefore, submits that 'the idea of structural violence is linked very closely to social injustice and the social machinery of oppression.' (2)

Similarly, Patrick Sylvain (2007) maintains that 'structural violence must be understood in social, political, economic, psychological and cultural terms.' His view is that since structural violence is about social injustice and oppression, we must, therefore, systematically deconstruct the systematisation of this oppression both current and historical, in order to reveal their continuous links and havoc to humanity. Sylvain's stand is that 'since structural violence is contrary to accident, it must also be viewed in socio-personal terms as one pursues his interests while assaulting the interest or needs of others.' (6) Beyond slavery and colonialism, the historical experiences of the Afro-Caribbean immigrants especially in Britain manifest the debilitating effects of structural violence. This is so because these immigrants experience systematic restrictions both in the labour market and in other social interactions.

Volume 62 | Issue 10 | October 2023
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10200343

The views of the scholars above establish the fact that structural violence is man-made and is designed as a barrier against the target group. This form of violence is usually more devastating than physical violence in magnitude since its primary place of attack is the psyche of the victims who feel restrained or restricted without cause. It violently denies the victims of their humanity because it is institutionalised within the social systems that the victims operate.

How does it affect the Afro-Caribbean immigrants in England in Levy's selected novels? As has been highlighted earlier, these descendants of the ex-slaves as British citizens and immigrants are denied some of their basic rights because of their race or history which their skin colour externalises. The British cultural mainstream keeps them at bay and they are not accorded their full rights in every segment of the society. While at school or at work, they are treated as 'outsiders' who should be grateful for the little space the society allows them. Evidently, the potency of structural violence keeps them down as the social dregs in the country of their birth because of their racial history. In order words, this tends to keep them perpetually poor and stop them from enjoying an adequate standard of living or achieve their life goals or potentials. As immigrants or British citizens, they have limited choices in the area of their career irrespective of their training. Equally too, they are not free to interact with the whites or live in any location of their choice as the analysis will shortly attest. Like unwanted guests, they live in a world of invisibility even though they are accorded British citizenship.

Socio-Economic Rights and Afro-Caribbean Migrant Experience in England

The reality of structural violence experienced by Afro-Caribbean immigrants in England naturally denied them of their socio-economic rights as both humans and citizens of Britain and this eroded their sense of self. This denial tends to keep them poor since poverty in a relative sense includes: deprivation, social exclusion, social discrimination and indignity. According to Amartya Sen, 'poverty is a denial of capabilities and freedom to achieve what an individual is capable of. Amartya's view is in tandem with the articulation of poverty by (*ICESCR*) which maintains that, 'Poverty as a human right condition is characterised by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.' Poverty, therefore, is a negation of human rights if we recognise that these rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person.

Accordingly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights documents maintains that the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his civil and political rights. Hence, in ***Article 2*** it is clearly stated concerning socio-economic rights that:

2. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to guarantee that the rights enunciated in the present Covenant will be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The recommendation above places the responsibility of maintaining the Economic and Social Cultural (*ECOSOC)* rights of all citizens in the hands of the government. The government of all the covenanting countries which Britain is part of will without prejudice articulate laws that will protect the rights of all her citizenry. This responsibility is stated in article 3 of *ECOSOC* rights documents thus:

Volume 62 | Issue 10 | October 2023
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10200343

Article 3: The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the present Covenant.

The British government who fully endorsed the above *ECOSOC* rights appear not to be faithfully implementing the provisions of this treaty in relation to all her subjects. Notably, many British Afro-Caribbean subjects in fictionalising their experiences have consistently portrayed how they were denied these rights. The fictive British Afro-Caribbean subjects in the two novels selected are clearly, through State-approved systems, denied their *ECOSOC* rights. These denials were made possible through the potency of structural violence which restrains them from achieving their full potentials as British citizens. These characters suddenly notice their marginal British citizenship as they face an unfavourable socio-economic environment in the country of their birth.

The British Afro-Caribbean Subjects and the Reality of Structural Violence in Levy's *Small Island and Fruit of the Lemon*

Structural violence which is non-physical violence impairs both basic or fundamental human needs and life in general. It tends to reduce the degree an individual is able to meet his/her needs. It could be said to be a barrier or glass ceiling that limits the target group from achieving their dreams and goals within their social environment. According to Patrick Sylvain, as has cited earlier, this form of violence is viewed in socio-personal terms as a mechanism that advances the interest(s) of one or a group while assaulting the interest(s) or the needs of others. Structural violence could be said to be a deliberate policy put in place to facilitate and maintain social and economic inequality within the society. As evident in Levy's novels under study, the British mass culture maintains this form of violence against the subjects of her former colonies with the sole intention to keep them perpetually poor. These immigrants have arrived in England with the hope of enhancing their lot in life and securing a strong platform for their children. Their dream of England as an El Dorado was shattered as they suffered rejection in Britain.

Beginning with accommodation, most of these Afro-Caribbean immigrants could not find a suitable or decent accommodation because of their skin colour. Their hosts who consider them 'less' humans refused to let out houses to them. They, therefore, live in squalor or dilapidated houses. Hortense, who joins her husband Gilbert later in England from Jamaica, describes their house as a filthy hole. (*Small Island*, 28). She further laments their accommodation ordeal when she tells Gilbert that, 'This place is disgusting…' 'I caan believe you bring me here. You live like an animal…' (*SI*, 32) Gilbert who had suffered untold frustration before he could secure the abandoned small room quickly tells her that 'and lucky I know her – places hard to come by, especially for coloured boys' (*SI*, 29). Hortense as a newcomer is told by her husband that it is out of Mrs Queenie Bligh's (their landlady) magnanimity that he is able to get a space at all.

It will be noted that after the WWII, the Caribbean subjects were given an opportunity to come and live in England as British citizens. But as soon as they arrived in England, they experienced rejection everywhere. The Britons find their presence disgusting and refused to give out accommodation to them. This lack of decent accommodation destabilises them psychologically and otherwise. In fact, it questioned their humanity and perpetually assaulted their sense of self.

Volume 62 | Issue 10 | October 2023
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10200343

Beyond the deplorable condition of their accommodation, they also experienced extreme hostility within the neighbourhood of their abode. They were called derogatory names as, coon, darkie, among others, and were accused of being a curse to the community as Queenie's neighbour states here, 'but these darkies bring down a neighbourhood, Mrs Bligh. The government should never have let them in. We'll have a devil of a time getting rid of them… (*SI*, 117).' It often goes beyond decent accommodation to even having a free space to walk on while going about their daily activities. These immigrants were treated as not only strangers but as inferior beings that should not cohabit with the British white population. Mr Todd in the excerpt below narrates his sister's experience to Queenie whereby he tells her to advise those Afro-Caribbeans (her tenants) to step out of the way when a white person is approaching:

'My sister had a very unfortunate incident today…'Turns out she'd been walking along the pavement. It was raining and she'd got her umbrella up… She's walking along when two darkie women start coming towards her. Walking side by side. Anyway, they reach her and there's not enough pavement for all of them… 'that my sister was made to step off the pavement and walk into the road to get by them. These two had no intention of letting her pass undisturbed.' …His point…was that I should see to it that my coloured lodgers are quite clear that, as they are guests in this country, it should be them that step off the pavement when an English person approaches… But I just thought it might help relations around here if all our coloured brethren understood how to behave.' (*SI*, 118)

The Afro-Caribbean immigrants in England were treated as total strangers and as such they did not have access to social amenities and that negatively impacted on their wellbeing. Mr Todd's advice that Afro-Caribbean people should 'understand how to behave' points to the limited space the British society could allow them.

Also, in Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon*, Faith's parents, Mildred and Wade, as tenderfeet in England have to stay in Ladbroke Grove where they have to share an apartment with prostitutes because of their skin colour (*FTL*, 8). As if that is not bad enough, Faith's parents have to accommodate Donald, Faith's uncle, in the same room, a condition they could barely cope with. Donald out of frustration leaves England back to Jamaica (*FTL*, 287). This same 'segregation mentality' or superiority mentality has been fictionalised by Samuel Selvon in his *The Lonely Londoners* where the white community refuses to give out even empty apartments to blacks especially the Afro-Caribbean subjects. The white communities used the slogan 'keep the water white' to remind themselves of their social obligation not to accommodate the Afro-Caribbeans or black people in general. So, this outright rejection triggered off a sense of loss and homelessness among these immigrants. And this condition of estrangement, which is institutionalised directly, worked against their socio-economic rights as British citizens and the end result is that they suffer from alienation and identity crisis.

Furthermore, the British mass culture openly encouraged discrimination against the British Afro-Caribbean subjects. In Levy's *Small Island*, there is a distinct demarcation between where the whites and blacks (Afro-Caribbeans) can operate. Gilbert, who serves in British army, could not be allowed to sit alongside his white colleagues in the army because of his skin colour. But when he visits a cinema house with Queenie, who is his host, Queenie insists that she will sit together with her guest in the cinema hall. Queenie's insistence attracts derogatory remarks and name-calling from other white guests who see her as a swine. To appease their white audience, therefore, the usherette in the cinema tells Gilbert to go sit among the blacks at the gallery, 'You have to sit with them.'… 'You're coloured.'… 'Well, we do it here. It's the rules. All niggers-… 'All coloureds up the back rows.'… 'Because that's their

Volume 62 | Issue 10 | October 2023
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10200343

seats.'… 'Our other customers don't like to sit next to coloureds.'… 'They don't like to be all mixed up' (*SI,* 184-185). Queenie's continued insistence that Gilbert must sit beside her in the cinema led to the fracas that results in the death of her father-in-law, who is in their company.

In another instance, Gilbert had a scuffle with his office mate and after being humiliated by the whites that ganged up against him, Gilbert's white colleague who touched him in the process of the quarrel says, 'I'll have to wash my fucking hands now I've touched you,' he told me, pushing me from him. I stood pitiful as a whipped dog… (*SI,* 318). Gilbert standing pitifully as a whipped dog is an apt representation of the psychological damage this kind of treatment causes the Afro-Caribbean subjects in Britain. It leaves them defeated and helpless. Consequently, they doubt their very existence, a condition which predisposes them to an identity crisis and the resultant poverty.

So, after many humiliating experiences, Gilbert laments his fate as a RUF volunteer fighting in England, 'Cha, nah, man- is bareface cheek! We fighting the persecution of the Jew, yet even in my RAF blue, my coloured skin can permit anyone to treat me as less than a man' (*SI,* 186). The Afro-Caribbean subjects are not regarded as humans but as something less human who should not be accorded any right even though they are recognised as British citizens. They experience dehumanisation wherever they appear in England. Not even religion or any form of training or achievement could mitigate their experience.

Such treatment knows no boundary as the case of Curtis exemplifies in Levy's *Small Island*. Curtis, 'a devout Christian…was asked not to return to his local church for his skin was too dark to worship there (*SI*, 326).' His presence as a black man in their church is intolerable to them even to their 'white God'. Curtis, a devout Afro-Caribbean immigrant, is humiliated out of the church where he had been taught that all men are equal before God. As Curtis leaves the church, 'the shock rob him of his voice (*SI*, 326).' Curtis' fundamental rights as a citizen of that country is trampled upon by British racist culture which manifests as structural violence. Curtis is taught a hard lesson that all men are equal before God but 'some men are more equal before the British 'white God' than others'. Curtis' experience of shock and the loss of his voice is a metaphor of the invisibility the Afro-Caribbean subjects are subjected to in Britain. The loss of voice here equally denotes an inability to put up any form of resistance against their institutionalised subjugation. It simply shows their state of helpless as British citizens.

Similarly, such fate awaits Faith (a second-generation Afro-Caribbean in England) in Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* as she visits Simon's family. During this first visit to Simon's family, Faith is invited to go with the family for a dinner in a restaurant. When they enter the restaurant and sit down, the woman sitting next to her (Faith) 'begins to move along the bench seat' (*FTL*, 128) because Faith's colour could choke her to death. Other guests in the restaurant impulsively started moving on their seats while focusing on the 'stranger'- Faith. Faith is so much browbeaten by this experience that she is thrown into crisis throughout the visit. This crisis manifests in her abrasive confrontation of Mr Bunyan, who as Simon's family guest, unwittingly delves into the Caribbean past. Simon's mother, having perceived the burning conflict within Faith, quietly advises her to try and connect to her root- the Caribbean.

Faith's 'otherness' is further exposed when she secures a job at BBC. On resumption, she is directed to a particular seat she will be sitting on since her white colleagues may not willingly share seats with her (*FTL,* 132). She is made to feel that she is a stranger in Britain by the attitude of her colleagues in the office. The British social system resists their assimilation into the British mainstream and this predisposes the Afro-Caribbean subjects to self-doubt

Volume 62 | Issue 10 | October 2023
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10200343

which inhibits their upward thrust in the socio-economic sphere. Faith and her generation, like their parents' generation, are not wanted in England and this puts them at a great disadvantage in all life endeavours.

Undermining the Socio-economic Rights of the Afro-Caribbean Immigrants in Britain in Levy's Novels

Structural violence, subtly enshrined in British culture, manifests more in the area of economic advancement of the Afro-Caribbean immigrants. These individuals are marked unemployable because of their skin colour. Their qualifications or training were never considered when being considered for any job. This experience has been fictionalised by Samuel Selvon in his *The Lonely Londoners*. There, the Labour Exchange Office responsible for employment marks the files of the Afro-Caribbean subjects with the inscription *J-C***,** which means *Jamaica, Coloured*. The narrator, (Moses), in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* informs the readers that by that sign (J-C), every staff in this Department knows that the candidate is only qualified for menial jobs. And sometimes they are totally denied any job opportunity because some companies would not want to hire them. The Labour Exchange Office, therefore, discriminates against these Afro-Caribbean subjects basically because of their pigmentation. They are given jobs that do not require expertise in total disregard of their skill. This form of discrimination negatively affects their economic and social well-being and ensures that they remain the social dregs of their society.

The above experiences continued unabated as many Afro-Caribbean subjects answered the call by Mother Country after WWII to come to England. Their frustrations are fictionalised by Levy in her *Small Island* where she graphically represents the debilitating experiences of Gilbert and his wife, Hortense, as new immigrants in England. Gilbert, who enthusiastically sets out to secure a job, suffers rejection in all the offices where he tenders his application. He is openly told in some places that there is no job for him. Frustrated by these negative responses Gilbert states that, 'In five, no, six places, the job I had gone for vanish with one look upon my face' (*SI*, 313). He further recounts how his presence has become a kind of terror in some organisations where the Labour Office has recommended him for a job. Gilbert goes ahead to narrate one of his experiences of rejection in the course of trying to get a job thus, 'the girl at another office look on me with such horror- man, I swear her hair standing straight as stiff fingers- that with no hesitation I walk right back out again.' (*SI*, 313) In another office still, after being ignored by the staff for some time, the man-in-charge who is to interview him is so disgusted by his presence that he extends his anger to the Labour Exchange Officials in this excerpt:

Another, I wait, letter in my hand, while everyone in this office goes about their businesses as if I am not there. I can feel them watching me close as a pickpocket with his prey but cannot catch even a peeping twinkle of an eye. Until a man came in agitated. 'What're you doing here?' he says to me. 'We don't want you. There's no job for you here. I'm going to get in touch with that labour exchange, tell them not to send any more of you people. We can't use your sort. Go on, get out.' (*SI*, 313)

The reaction of this man above is typical of the harsh treatment the Afro-Caribbean subjects receive from British society. They see them as 'sub-humans' who should not be allowed to operate side by side their European counterparts irrespective of their qualifications. So, even as British citizens, they are not eligible to work in certain places or handle some jobs which may upset some group of persons.

Volume 62 | Issue 10 | October 2023
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10200343

The case of Hortense, Gilbert's wife, is that before coming to England, she qualified as a teacher in a school owned and managed by colonial authorities- (Europeans). Hortense finished as the best graduating student both in spoken and writing English in Jamaica and received a promise of a teaching job in England from her tutors. The College Head of the school gave her a support document, as a qualified teacher, that will help her secure a teaching job in Britain. Hortense's aspiration of teaching in England is shattered when her application to teach is turned down by the education authority. She is simply told by the staff of education authority that she is not qualified to teach in England in this excerpt:

Well, I'm afraid you can't teach here,'… 'The letters don't matter,' she told me. 'You can't teach in this country. You're not qualified to teach here in England… It's not up to me. It's the decision of the education authority. I can do nothing to change that.' (*SI*, 453-454)

The demoralising information Hortense receives at education authority blindfolds her so badly that she walks into a wardrobe supposing it to be exit door. The laughter of the three ladies at education office confounds her so much that when she comes outside, she walks past her husband without recognising him. Gilbert and his wife Hortense, as the microcosm of the Caribbean subjects in Britain, are systematically denied their rights to secure decent jobs that will move them away from the poverty zone. They are not given an opportunity to improve their lives through decent labour.

Equally, Faith, the protagonist in Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon,* is not spared from such discriminations that result in economic marginalisation targeted to keep them (British Afro-Caribbeans) down. Faith is born in England, finished high school and came top of her class. Her qualification secures her an instant job but she is sacked from that job unceremoniously by her boss without any provocation (*FTL*, 33). The action of her boss violates labour rights but Faith could not seek any redress because of her race. She, therefore, walks away and continues to search for employment elsewhere. But being a young enterprising person, Faith applies for a job in BBC and as she prepares to be interviewed, she is told by her 'white' friend that 'they do not employ black people in that establishment.' So, when Faith senses that she may not likely be employed in BBC having been told that she is overqualified by the panel of interviewers, she bluntly confronts them by telling them that she heard that they don't employ the blacks in their establishment (*FTL*, 108). Eventually, she is hired to work at BBC but she is 'restricted' to dressing only dolls used in children's programme in their station. Faith is dejected when she discovers that she is assigned to dress dolls because no white actor can bear a touch of her hand on his/her body. Faith is rejected everywhere because she is a black Briton and she feels racial forces holding her down everywhere in England, a country of her birth (*FTL*, 332). Even some members of staff at the BBC could not tolerate her presence. Mr Henry, in particular, is so irritated by her presence that he asks Faith to get up from the chair where she is sitting. When she attempts to sit on another chair, Henry tells her that his colleague may not like it (*FTL*, 35). She, therefore, laments her fate when she says, "they didn't want me at the television centre. And I wanted to be wanted. I wanted to be liked." (*FTL*, 161) So, Faith, like other members of her race, is shut out of economic system through racial discrimination or the application of structural violence.

Beyond the blatant denial of accommodation, these immigrants were often denied job opportunities as the analysis has shown. They were either outrightly denied a job or their qualifications were never considered as they are given only menial jobs that limit any meaningful advancement on the economic ladder. This job denial epitomises structural

Volume 62 | Issue 10 | October 2023
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10200343

violence because their consequent miserable economic condition denies them of other rights they should naturally have as humans for a better living condition.

Coming back to Gilbert, in Levy's *Small Island*, he gets a job to deliver mails to the post office after many attempts. This job keeps him away from other members of the staff but on a few occasions when he has close contact with them, they openly show their displeasure at his presence. Hortense' case sharply contrasts with that of her husband. She could not secure any job in England even though she is a qualified teacher. This shatters her dream of a good life in England and lowers her self-esteem.

Faith, like Gilbert mentioned above, is equally treated like an outcast in the office but because she has nowhere else to go, she endures the brutality of rejection which impacts negatively on her psyche. But the most devastating part of her rejection is when she discovers that she cannot dress real humans for performance at BBC just because of her pigmentation. The fire of self-doubt ignited by this discovery, with other incidents eventually, consumes whatever 'Britishness' Faith has 'acquired'. Some of the implications of such treatment are lack of job fulfilment and restricted career advancement. And the latter impacts negatively on Faith's economy and this amounts to an undermining of her socio-economic rights as a British citizen.

CONCLUSION

In all, in Levy's two novels studied, the Afro-Caribbean subjects in Britain are victims of structural violence which dehumanises them. Their marginalised British citizenship is highly pronounced in the labour market where they are not accorded the same rights as their 'white' counterparts. The British culture marks them as 'outsiders' and as such, they are subjected to debilitating racial discrimination which denies them their socio-economic and cultural rights.

Notably, this discrimination has been the experience of all generations of Afro-Caribbean subjects because of their slave ancestry. But the generation of Afro-Caribbean subjects, who were born in Britain, appears more hit because they erroneously had never suspected that there is any difference between them and their white British counterparts. So, when they are faced with this reality, they hardly could cope with it. And consequently, as their sense of self is eroded, they are perpetually delineated as second-class citizens who have limited socio-economic and cultural rights. What these experiences amount to is that the British Afro-Caribbean subjects are dehumanised beyond measure like their slave ancestors. They are denied their basic rights as British citizens. This denial leads to self-doubt and the consequent identity crisis. Like their progenitors, their identity problem naturally results in a desperate search for a home with mythical potency. This search for origin or home compels Faith to travel to Jamaica where she eventually connects with their racial history which served as a panacea to her crisis of identity.

The three characters studied are clear representations of the Afro-Caribbean subjects who are systemically through the instrumentality of structural violence are denied their socio-economic and cultural rights even as British citizens. The reality of this non-physical violence devastates them psychologically and also cripples them economically which results in cultural alienation.

Volume 62 | Issue 10 | October 2023
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10200343

Works Cited

1) Akwanya, A. Nicholas. 2004. *Verbal Structures: Studies in the Nature and Organizational Patterns of Literary Language*. Enugu: Acena Publishers.

2) Ashcroft, B. et al. 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literature*. London: Routledge.

3) Austine Akpuda. *The Black Presence in Caribbean Literature*. Enugu: Samdrew Production.

4) 126-136.

5) Benette, A. and Royle, N. 2004. *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (third edition) UK: Pearson Education Ltd.

6) Bhabha, Homi. 2004. *The Location Culture*. London: Routledge Classics.

7) Erika, J. W. 1994. *New Writing from the Caribbean: Selections from the Caribbean Writer*. New York: Macmillan.

8) Farmer, P. E. 1996. "On Suffering and Structural Violence: a View from Below." *PloS.Med* 3 (10): e449.DOI 10.1371/journal. pmed. 0030449. Retrieved on 23rd September 2015.

9) Farmer, P.E. et al 2006. "Structural Violence and Clinical Medicine" *PLoS Med* 3(10): e449. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.0030449. Retrieved on 23/9/2015.

10) Galtung Johan.1990. "Cultural Violence" *Cultural Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.27, No.3. (Aug. 1990). Pp. 291-305.

11) Gilroy, Paul. 1987. *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. London: Hutchinson.

12) Gilroy, Paul. 1995. *The black Atlantic, Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.

13) Kehinde, A. 2010. "Edward Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* and the Trope of Cultural Foetal

14) Searching." *Journal of New African Poetry* 4. Retrieved from www.africa research.org/Papers/NkhN3.pdf on March 6, 2016.

15) King-Aribisala, K. 1991. "African Homogeneity: the Affirmation of a United African

16) and Afro-West Indian identity." Ed. Ernest Emenyonu. *African literature and African historical experiences*. Ibadan: Heinemann. 35-51.

17) Levy, A. (1999) 2004. *Fruit of the Lemon.* London: Headline Book Publishing Group.

18) ……2004. *Small Island*. London: Headline Book Publishing Group.

19) Matsumoto, D. 2009. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

20) Ready, Joe. 2012. "The Familiar Made Strange: the Relationship between the Home and Identity in Andrea Levy's Fiction*." EnterText*. Special issue on Andrea Levy.9.14-30. http://www.brunel.ac.uk/arts/research/entertext/issues/entertext-9. Retrieved on 26th November 2013.

Volume 62 | Issue 10 | October 2023
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10200343

21) Raji-Oyelade, A. 2005. "The Troikan Essence in Edward K. Brathwaite's *The Arrivants*." Ed.

22) Austine Akpuda. *The Black Presence in Caribbean Literature*. Enugu: Samdrew Production. 126-136.

23) Selvon, Samuel. 1979. *The Lonely Londoners* Essex: Longman Group Limited.

24) Stolley, Kathy. 2005. *The Basics of Sociology*. Westport: Green Wood Press, 2005.

25) https://www.ohchr.org/en/universal-declaration-of-human-rights