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# A Hostile Environment: The Conflicted Cosmopolitics of Andrea Levy's *Small Island*

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**Abstract:** The critical consensus around Andrea Levy's award-winning Windrush-era novel *Small Island* (2004) is that it depicts, as Mike Phillips encapsulates in his *Guardian* review, "some of the most un-pleasant racist aspects of the period, without displaying any sense of polemical intent." This article works against the notion that Levy's writing is unpolemical—in other words, primarily conciliatory or diplomatic. By drawing attention to the neglected anti-national polemics of *Small Island*, the article examines the way in which the novel offers a particularly condemning view of the national mythos surrounding post-war Commonwealth migration from the colonies and the seemingly progressive enactment of nationalization projects, such as universal social welfare in 1948. *Small Island*'s critical view of the nation, one that has become newly legible in the aftermath of Teresa May's hostile environment policy and the 2018 Windrush scandal, remains, however, in tension with its quadripartite narrative structure. Levy's attempt to compose a structural form of cosmopolitanism that admirably crosses the boundaries of race, gender, and cultural circumstance becomes the site of its distinctly conflicted cosmopolitics: the novel on a structural level advances a conciliatory, cosmopolitan discourse that clashes with its more pessimistic anti-national commentary. Recognizing the tension in *Small Island* between aesthetic form and national critique enables a reading of Levy's prose that registers the uneven yet bleaker and more subversive ways in which she represents the enduring coloniality of post-war Britain.

**Keywords**: Andrea Levy, *Small Island*, Windrush scandal, hostile environment, cosmopolitanism, welfare state

> The shameful present, in which refugees are turned away, asylum seekers are left destitute on the streets, migrants are indefinitely detained and members of the so-called "Windrush generation" are deported, is often compared to an imagined past, as activists and outraged politicians indignantly ask: What has this country *become*? The problem is, this is the kind of place it has long been.
>
> Maya Goodfellow, *Hostile Environment: How Immigrants Became Scapegoats* 46

> [T]he starting point of writing books has always been about wanting to make the unseen visible, wanting to show the experience of [my] parents' generation and the children that came after, having to live in this country, quite a hostile environment, and how [they] cope with that.
>
> Andrea Levy, "'Pivoting the Centre': The Fiction of Andrea Levy" 57

**I. Introduction**

In his short essay "The World of Wrestling" (1957), Roland Barthes ruminates on how wrestling is primarily an expression of morality—the show of wrestlers is to enact a concept, "that of justice" (21). "[T]he spectator does not wish for the actual suffering," Barthes contends; "he only enjoys the perfection of an iconography" (20). The intelligibility of the spectacle derives from its edifying performance and becomes, for Barthes, an example of how myths are created: they are at once consumable, seemingly organic, uncomplicated, and euphoric. When a grandiose black-and-white model of the *SS Empire Windrush* effortlessly emerged from the wings of the London Stadium during Danny Boyle's 2012 Olympic Opening Ceremony, it offered audiences an analogous experience to that of Barthes' wrestling spectators. Boyle distilled the mythologizing and moralizing power of sport into a dramatization of enduring myths of the nation. The ceremony enacted a jubilant version of a British past that transformed histories of revolution and dissent

into a pageantry of the nation's sportsmanship. The floor of the London Stadium became the pastoral grounds through which a national culture of inclusion, defiance, and "cosmopolitan[ism]" would be born (Bryant 337). With the bombastic representation of the Industrial Revolution at its core, Boyle's ceremony heralded a progressive story of *Pax Britannica* in which civil rights and labor movements, the welfare state, and migration from the former colonies defined the "greatness" of a nation through its "modern and egalitarian achievements" (Kallioniemi 201). However, unseen in the spectacle and collapsed into the singular representation of the *Windrush*—the ship that has become in popular discourse metonymic for post-war Commonwealth migration—was a national culture bolstered by the wretched history of Empire. The procession of migrants walking in front of the ship appeared to champion a moment, excised from historical reality, when Empire's black citizens were welcomed into the industrious pastures of the Motherland. The inclusion of the *Windrush* flaunted the mythos of a nation that was, as Sarah Lyall from *The New York Times* revealingly put it, "secure in its post-empire identity." Barthes' well-known analysis of the process of myth-making via wrestling's moral performance offers a poignant analogue to Boyle's athletic national spectacle. Similar to wrestling, the ceremony portrayed "an ideal understanding of things": "the euphoria of men raised for a while above the constitutive ambiguity of everyday situations and placed before the panoramic view of a univocal Nature, in which signs at last correspond to causes, without obstacle, without evasion, without contradiction" (Barthes 25). The black bodies gathered at the foot of the *Windrush* represented a fraudulent moral argument about Britain's past and engagement with colonial migrants. Within the narrative of the Opening Ceremony, the *Windrush* became perfect iconography for a discourse of post-war national uplift that was devoid of contradiction and detached from the unpalatable histories of subjection, hostility, and enslavement that forged the very circumstances of the ship.

The seemingly progressive work of the Opening Ceremony perpetuated an enduring conservative ideology that embraces the Commonwealth as a means to memorialize a benevolent view of the British Empire and its disintegration. As Maya Goodfellow explains in her incisive

study *Hostile Environment: How Immigrants Became Scapegoats* (2019), "[t]hrough this organisational vehicle [the Commonwealth] . . . [politicians] claimed that the Empire was naturally evolving into a multiracial collection of countries. In this telling of history, colonial independence could be cast not as radical change driven by anti-colonial movements but as a planned transformation that signalled the UK's benevolence and adaptability" (55). Goodfellow rightfully translates the 1948 British Nationality Act as a similarly discrepant legislative moment that enacted what looked like liberal policy but that in reality sought to encourage migration from countries of the "Old Commonwealth," otherwise known as the "white dominions": Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, and Southern Rhodesia. The Act was granted Royal Assent one month after the *Windrush* docked and gave automatic citizenship rights to all subjects of the British Empire and its colonies. The British Nationality Act has been crucially entangled with the misleadingly progressive mythology that has come to define the docking of the *Empire Windrush* where nearly five hundred Caribbean migrants would disembark at Tilbury as a response to labour shortages in the post-war British economy. A well-meaning yet intense commemorative culture has enveloped the cultural imaginary of the *Windrush* (particularly after the fiftieth anniversary of its docking in June of 1998), which has cast the ship as a nationalist marker that inaugurated so-called mass migration from the colonies and the ascent of a diverse and multiracial Britain. The nationalization of the ship has managed to simplify its story and disallow the integration of divergent historical realities. The *Windrush*, for instance, was not the first ship to bring British subjects from the Caribbean to England in the post-war period (the *Ormonde* and the *Almanzora* arrived in 1947); its passengers were not all from the Caribbean (sixty-six Polish migrants are known to have been on the ship); and despite the 21 June 1948 headline in the *Evening Standard* that read "Welcome Home," the Caribbean migrants aboard faced immense hardship and hostility when they arrived (qtd. in Fryer 372).

When, as Home Secretary, Teresa May announced in 2013 a new flagship immigration bill that would scrutinize the status of migrants often through outsourced security firms such as G4S, Serco, and Clearel and

across a range of governmental departments including justice, transport, health, and pensions, the sanitized politics that constituted the imaginary of the *Windrush* began to unravel. As May unforgettably put it, the purpose of the bill was to "create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants" (qtd. in Kirkup and Winnett). Because the bill put the impetus on those who were perceived to be migrants to prove their status—via new legislative powers granted to landlords, doctors, and immigration services—a culture of intimidation and "institutional cruelty" developed against those deemed to be the nation's Others (Gentleman 300).[1] Habib Rahman, from the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, presciently remarked at the time that "these measures will divide society, creating a two-tier Britain, a return to the days of 'no dogs, no blacks, no Irish'" (qtd. in Travis). May's "hostile environment" policy indeed exacerbated an already tense anti-migrant climate that had been fomented through decades of anti-immigration policies.[2] With catchphrases such as "Deport first, Appeal later" and vans loitering in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods with signage reading "Go Home or Face Arrest," the "hostile environment" would effectively create an unthinking bureaucracy whose central aim was to meet deportation targets. As Rahman predicted, the policy created illicit divisions in the enactment of immigration law, most notably in what became known as the Windrush scandal, wherein pension-age British citizens (the children of those first generation migrants) who had arrived in the 1950s and 1960s from the Caribbean were detained, denied their rights, "illegalized" and/or deported.[3] If the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* previously signified a cultural imaginary of a nation parading its beatific, cosmopolitan, post-Empire credentials, then what does the Windrush scandal tell us about twenty-first-century Britain and its desired Elysian narrative of tolerance, justice, and fair play?

Published during the Cool Britannia era of the Blair years, Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) revisits the historical moment of the *Windrush* from the purview of the twenty-first century. Geographically located in England, Jamaica, the United States, British Burma, and pre-partition India, the novel coordinates a sweeping panorama of its time through four protagonists who are brought together by two marriages

of expedience: Hortense and Gilbert, a Jamaican couple, are wedded to facilitate their migration to England, while Queenie and Bernard, an English couple, unite for Queenie to escape her non-metropolitan background. By assembling these divergent first-person voices, Levy manages to offer a semblance of narratological equity in ways that imply an egalitarian engagement with the range of perspectives that shape her depiction of post-war Britain. Her demotic, cross-cultural, and seemingly conciliatory approach to historical representation has, one could argue, contributed to the wide appeal and mainstream success of the novel. *Small Island* has garnered a litany of major literary prizes, including the Orange Prize for Fiction, the Whitbread Novel Award, the Whitbread Book of the Year Award, the Commonwealth Writers' Prize: Best Book, and the Orange Prize "Best of the Best" award. In 2007 it was adopted for the largest mass reading initiative in Britain (funded by the Arts Council and Heritage Lottery), adapted into a two-part BBC One television drama in 2009, and reimagined for the stage in a sold-out 2019 run at the Royal National's Olivier Theatre—its largest auditorium. In his 2004 *Guardian* review of the book, Mike Phillips suggests that readers were sufficiently conditioned for Levy's ambitious novel when it was first released in the early years of the twenty-first century: since the fiftieth anniversary of the *Windrush*, the ship has provoked "a growing conversation about the effects of Caribbean migration on British identity." "Levy's authorial platform," Phillips contends, "is balanced squarely in the middle of this conversation."

Phillips goes on to identify a reading of the novel that judiciously captures much of what is unsaid in the subsequent popular and critical consensus. *Small Island*, he revealingly claims, "records some of the most un-pleasant racist aspects of the period, without displaying any sense of polemical intent." For Phillips, this rhetorical balancing act is made possible because of Levy's adherence to historical fact. Her "faithful account" of the moment, Phillips argues, enables Levy to avoid an adversarial narrative by being "both dispassionate and compassionate." In response to what Phillips initially glosses as Levy's diplomatic and conciliatory style, I want to develop the contention that *Small Island* is much more polemical, and by extension more conflicted, than critics

(and indeed Phillips) have thus far considered. In the aftermath of May's "hostile environment" policy and the ongoing catastrophe of the Windrush scandal, I submit that it is impossible not to recognize the polemics of Levy's prose. This is not to suggest that the critical literature examining *Small Island* previously overlooked how the text critiques or represents the "racist aspects" of the post-war period but rather to mark the ways in which the specifically radical, anti-national, and demythologizing nature of Levy's writing has become newly legible.

The diplomacy that Phillips appraises in Levy's writing can be formally located in the first-person quadripartite architecture of the text. Examined from a structural and hermeneutical standpoint, *Small Island* composes an admirable discourse of cosmopolitanism that transgresses boundaries and enacts what appears to be a conciliatory modality of engaging with the past. However, the optimistic cosmopolitics composed at the level of form conflicts with the novel's bleak anti-nationalist content. Reading Levy's novel in a Windrush scandal environment intensifies this conflict as the anti-national strain in the text becomes even more discernible. The tension between the form and the content of the novel additionally contributes to the troubling way in which Levy's writing has been occasionally deployed. *Small Island* works hard to demythologize problematic national myths of Britain's so-called post-Empire identity, yet the novel has become entangled in national projects (such as *Small Island Read*) that participate in the very acts of memorialization and myth-making that Levy's imaginative work resists. In what follows, I trace Levy's incisive critique of seemingly progressive national myths through the novel's specific examination of the development of the welfare state and its involvement with eugenics, colonial governance, and migration from the colonies. By interrogating the conjunction of the state's "welcoming" of Commonwealth migrants and enactment of nationalization projects, such as universal social welfare in 1948 (a historical conjuncture that was also central to Boyle's Opening Ceremony), Levy demystifies post-war Britain by depicting its hostility as symptomatic of the nation's enduring coloniality. If, as Sandra Courtman has argued (before the Windrush scandal), *Small Island* is "emblematic of the struggles of the *Windrush* generation" (96), then the novel is far

shrewder and, perhaps, more condemning in its rendering of the post-war moment than has been previously acknowledged.

**II: Critique of the Nation: The Historicity and Hostility of 1948**

Numerous critics have carefully detailed how Levy's reimagining of the Windrush moment and the year 1948 confronts the way in which popular perceptions of the ship have amputated an extended history of black and Commonwealth migration to Britain and, indeed, characterised the moment as principally male-dominated.[4] As *Small Island*'s narrative vacillates between its two central time periods, "Before" and "1948," it situates the biographies of each of the characters in a world that predates 1948. For instance, Gilbert and Michael (Hortense's second cousin and the novel's silent fifth protagonist) travel to England from Jamaica not as colonial migrants but rather as members of the Armed Forces during the Second World War. Gilbert would return to England in 1948 on the *Windrush*, but the name of the ship is mentioned in passing only twice while the depiction of the vessel is entirely omitted. Instead, it is Hortense's subsequent transatlantic journey that is granted a more precise depiction as she travels on "a ship as big as a world" (Levy, *Small Island* 11). Although Hortense is not travelling on the *Windrush*, her distinctly gendered and racialized moment of arrival—she is mistaken as a nanny at the docks—equally elides a thoroughly detailed account of the worldly vessel. Unlike the recent theatrical adaptation of *Small Island*, which features Jon Driscoll's dramatic projection of the waves of the Caribbean Sea and black-and-white footage of migrants stepping off the *Windrush* in the backdrop, Levy's novel disturbs the euphoric conjuring and perfect iconography of the ship by avoiding its representation altogether.

While the way in which Levy challenges the originary mythology of the Windrush is crucial to any analysis attentive to the historicity of the novel (and any attendant critique of the nation), there has yet to be any sustained analysis of how *Small Island* concomitantly interrogates the emergence of the welfare state and the liberal politics of nationalization that shaped the contemporaneous "hostile environment" experienced by the nation's racialized citizens.[5] In the first moments of Gilbert's return

to England, the novel avoids portraying the optimism of arrival and instead shifts perspectives to unveil the impending animus of post-war Britain. As "most of the boys were looking upwards" (Levy, *Small Island* 212), Gilbert's eye line turns another direction: "So I was looking down, unlike them big-eyed newcomer boys. I just arrive back in England and there on the pavement before me I spy a brooch. What a piece of good fortune, what a little bit of luck" (213). The fortuitous ornamental pin is "radiant iridescent green" (213), a lustrous color that intimates a sign of wealth and legal tender that appears attainable and alluringly accessible. However, the shimmering green disintegrates as Gilbert realizes that it was the backs of flies gleaming in the light that produced his vision of this jewel: "My eyes no longer believed what they saw. For after the host of flies flew they left me with just the small piece of brown dog's shit they had all gathered on. Was this a sign? Maybe. For one of the big-eyed newcomer boys walk straight along and step right in the muck" (213). The appearance of good fortune at the heart of the Empire is not merely an illusory trick but a symbolically laden deflection that exposes the decrepit state of the nation. For Commonwealth migrants such as Gilbert, the reception into the country captures the way in which they are welcomed into the underclasses of society. The animal excreta serves as prophecy for Gilbert who understands how the gleaming jewels of the Motherland mask that which awaits him and his fellow travelers: the waste of the metropolis.

The ridiculed hope of prosperity and security odiously represented on the streets of London demonstrates a historicized depiction of 1948, one that inextricably interweaves migration from the colonies with the socioeconomic circumstances of welfare reform and late-1940s nationalization projects. 1948 remains a crucial year in the novel not only because of the docking of the *Windrush* and the enactment of the British Nationality Act, but also because of the establishment of the National Health Service, the nationalization of the railways and electricity supply, and the passing of the National Assistance Act. Through an attention to the politics of nationalization, Levy entangles the history of Commonwealth migration with the emergence of the welfare state in what would become known in the following decades leading

up to Margaret Thatcher's electoral victory in 1979 as Britain's post-war consensus. Queenie's neighbor Mr. Todd verbalizes the vexed relationship between black migration and the welfare state when he inaccurately theorizes the impetus for migration after the war. "For the teeth and the glasses," he asserts: "That was the reason so many coloured people were coming to this country. . . . That National Health Service, it's pulling them in. . . . Giving things away at our expense will keep them coming" (Levy, *Small Island* 111). By critiquing the juridical rights of Commonwealth migrants and their access to state-funded public services through accusations of health tourism, Mr. Todd becomes emblematic of both the toxic relationship between nationalism, imperial fervor, and xenophobia and an imperious form of nationalized subsistence. While Queenie struggles to maintain her large house without Bernard (who has not returned home for two years after the end of the war), Mr. Todd freely offers his assistance—"He boarded up the hole in the roof. Got rid of the pigeons. Plastered the ceiling. Replaced the windowpanes. Helped . . . clear the rubble out of the garden" (113). He would soon withhold his services, however, as "Gilbert moving in had put an end to all that" (113). Mr. Todd's inability to connect the ways in which migration from the Commonwealth serves the national interest during post-war reconstruction expresses itself in the most nescient fashion. His deluded desire for "[o]ur own kind sticking together, just like during the war" (113) concretizes the obtuse ignorance that informed the effective racialization of welfare. Gilbert's encounter with the "iridescent" fecal matter on the pavement becomes then a poignant emblem of a two-tiered system of social services. Mr. Todd's ethno-nationalist socialism—symbolically exemplified by the illusory backs of flies eating dog shit—represents one version of Levy's vilification of the purportedly benign imperial ideologies that advance a politics of nationalization and anti-fascism (given the context of the war) but that in reality are marred by a crude racism (blissfully ignorant of the history of Empire) that attempts to restrict access to public services for colonial migrants who gave their lives to fight for King and country.

Throughout *Small Island*, 1948 marks an undoubtedly hostile environment for Britain's racialized citizens who experience everyday and

institutional forms of racism that specifically limit admittance to the nation's resources in terms of welfare, labor, and housing. The polemic content of Levy's depiction of post-war Britain wryly exposes itself through the mundane way in which government organizations (the army, post office, education) enact a discriminatory order that enshrines the hierarchies of Empire within the so-called Motherland. Examining the *longue durée* of Britain's welfare state since the abolition of slavery, Robbie Shilliam compellingly highlights how the discourse of national welfare in Britain functioned at home and abroad as "political domination in service of empire's integrity" (77). As Shilliam uncovers, notions of welfare were "actually bound up in imperial determinants that racialized those deserving and undeserving of social security and welfare" (57). The influential British economist and social reformer William Beveridge (1879–1963), who foundationally contributed to the post-war welfare state through his 1942 report *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, for instance, articulated the universalization of social insurance in much of his writing as a mechanism to protect the "Anglo-Saxon" family. English mothers, he asserted, "have vital work to do in ensuring the adequate continuance of the British race and of British ideals in the world" (Beveridge 53). As Shilliam suggests, Beveridge's so-called progressive views on welfare upheld the eugenicist logic that has long informed the development of social insurance in Britain.[6] Beveridge's well-known eugenicist views would also infiltrate the liberalization of welfare in ways that illuminate how progressive national policies furtively worked against the politics of decolonization. As Denise Noble reminds us, these welfare policies, which included the "racialization of women's labor" within the mythic "Anglo-Saxon" family unit, were "essential component[s] in British national and colonial governance" (58).[7] It is perhaps no coincidence that Boyle's Olympic Opening Ceremony would brandish its tolerant version of the nation by spotlighting 1948 and combining the iconography of the *Windrush* and the National Health Service. As the ceremony unwittingly illustrated, the symbolic entanglement of Commonwealth migration and nationalized welfare offers a seemingly self-evident veneer of inclusivity that masks the coloniality of Britain's "benevolent" national identity. Thus, nationalized

social welfare, glossed by Mr. Todd as care for "teeth" and "glasses," stands as a crucial cipher from which to place Levy's trenchant critique of the progressive post-war nation.

The imperious structure of welfare continued in the post-war period through the ways racialized migrants from the colonies were deemed, in Shilliam's phrasing, "undeserving of social security and welfare"; they thus "disproportionately occup[ied] the worst jobs and receive[d] the worst provisions of public goods" (82). The discrimination they faced in nearly every aspect of civic life became known as the "colour bar," an "unofficial institution of British colonialism" that "conventionalized [a] series of racist practices . . . which regulated and barred the participation and mobility of colonial subjects within . . . civilian and military institutions" (Hesse 106). Gilbert's post-fecal experiences in London exemplify how Levy specifically condemns the insidious legacies of discrimination that constitute the structures of civic life for her migrant characters, not only in terms of welfare but crucially labor as well. Perhaps the novel's most pervasive example of such structural obstacles is Gilbert's endless employment as a driver. "I could drive from the age of ten," Gilbert prophetically explains (Levy, *Small Island* 144). By delivering baked goods for his mother's and aunt's cake-baking business in Jamaica, Gilbert financially contributes to his fees for private school while developing his ambition to study law. As he enlists for the war, Gilbert seeks social mobility. With his "exemplary grades in all exams," he is told by recruitment officers in Kingston that he "would be trained as a wireless operator/air-gunner or flight engineer," "a valuable member of a squadron, second only to a pilot in respect and responsibility" (145). "With a service record like that," Gilbert tells us, "those military men had assured me, once the war was won, Civvy Street would welcome me for further study" (145). The official assurance of opportunity and mobility do not, however, translate into reality as Gilbert realizes that both his military and civilian posts would be the same—that of a driver: "You see, there is a list, written by the hand of the Almighty in a celestial book, which details the rich and wonderful accomplishments his subjects might achieve here on earth: father of philosophy, composer of the finest music, ace pilot of the skies, paramour to lucky women. Now I knew: beside the

name Gilbert Joseph was written just one word—driver" (146). This mocking depiction of Gilbert's employment opportunities elucidates the divine entrenchment of an inflexible division of labor. The metaphor of an ethereal Almighty standing for Empire suggests a system of control that maintains its subjects in a form of virtuous supremacy that is impossible to challenge. Gilbert's awareness of this distinctly unequal system of management—he is denied the loftier roles of philosopher, musician, pilot, or Casanova—confirms the system of social immobility that he painfully experiences in both Jamaica and England. In each aspect of his life he remains "a frustrated prisoner, behind a wheel" (144).

Levy entrenches her critique of the "colour bar" by drawing attention to how Commonwealth migrants are relegated to the maintenance of nationalized industries through their labor while being seen as a threat to the survival of those very sectors. Submitting his application for a rehabilitation course in law after the war, Gilbert discovers an impenetrable bureaucracy where it becomes clear that the profession is off limits to him—"so many heads shook I began to think all at the Colonial Office had a nervous tic" (198). He attempts to find work using "a letter of introduction from the forces labour exchange" (311), but "with one look upon [his] . . . face" the jobs he applied for "vanish" (313). Gilbert eventually finds a position delivering mail for the postal service. The discrimination he encounters forces him to take alternate routes. Shifted abruptly to a King's Cross run without assistance, Gilbert asks a group of workers if they might assist him in deciphering which parcels are for the Post Office and which are for the railway. The workers respond with taunts and jeers: "Look, a darkie's stealing from the railways" (316). They continue in the escalating encounter, exclaiming, "There's decent Englishmen that should be doing your job" (318). Crudely verbalizing the gestural prejudice at the Colonial Office, the workers (who are aptly placed at the railway station the year the railways were nationalized) suggest that Gilbert threatens the emergence of a socialized national economy, the benefits of which should only be accessible to those of "English stock." The admittance to civic life and into the much-needed labor force in the immediate post-war years clearly excludes the racialized citizens of the Commonwealth. Levy's inclusion of both the quiet

and raucous racism of 1948 elucidates a larger commentary on the state of the nation that castigates the emergence of a national discourse priding itself on its civility and post-war triumph over fascism. As Levy demonstrates, in the post-war period the conditions of warfare continue in the everyday lives of Britain's black citizens. As the workers finally direct Gilbert toward the correct parcels, he leaves the encounter "aching," "with a gunfire of cuss words popping and pinging around [him]" (318).

Levy extends her patient rendering of England's virulently explicit yet equally mundane "colour bar" by exposing the insidious nature of its diplomatic and bureaucratic expression, particularly in terms of housing and employment. In search of a room, Gilbert experiences discrimination masquerading as genteel hospitality: "So how many gates I swing open? How many houses I knock on? Let me count the doors that opened slow and shut quick without even me breath managing to get inside" (215). The description of an inaccessible housing market—"polite as nobility they inform me the room has gone" (215)—is explicated in the substance of the narrative but also, and more importantly, through the figuration of a language contorting to express this specific form of prejudice. Gilbert's focus on, for instance, the speed of the doors opening and closing conveys the callous agility of the "colour bar." From a dilatory welcome into a potential home to an abrupt parting, Gilbert concisely demonstrates how this performance of hospitality combines timid suspicion, racism, and outright hostility. Hortense experiences a similarly illuminating predicament with doors. At the offices of the education authority in London, she arrives with two letters of recommendation, teaching experience, and the completion of her formal education as a teacher. Hortense is greeted by three women, one of whom was "gleaming with so much joy" that she "could do nothing but return the welcome" with a "beaming smile" (452). Despite their ostentatious exchange, Hortense is told that she is unequivocally "not qualified to teach here in England" (454). Attempting to inquire how to update her qualifications, she confronts the impenetrable idiom of an elusive bureaucratic system that denies her even the possibility of employment: "Really, miss, I have just explained everything to you. You do speak English? Have you not understood me? It's quite simple. There is no

point you asking me anything else" (454–55). The simplicity in this explanation lies in its complete lack of information. No explanation has been given to Hortense, and thus the discrimination she experiences contains no verbal or formal expression. Confounded by this baffling bureaucratic encounter, Hortense subsequently turns to a door to exit the room only to walk unknowingly into a dark cupboard with "a ladder, mop and a broom" (455). In a building that administrates employment at a state level, it is telling that the door that leads to custodial supplies should remain freely open to her.

Since language fails to enunciate the administrative racism that informs the "colour bar," Levy instead conveys the frustrating obstructions for her migrant characters through the doorways of houses and governmental institutions. The polemics of her distinctive mode of representation occurs through the dangerous way in which discrimination becomes architectural. It is a system of oppression engineered into the structure of an entire social, political, and economic order. The unutterable constitution of the "colour bar" effectively devastates resistance and the ability to obtain due process. *Small Island*'s damning portrayal of post-war Britain thus lies in how it exposes civic hostility at the humdrum level of administration—the precise form of bureaucratic antagonism that would define the catastrophe of the Windrush scandal. What may appear to be the lack of "polemical intent" in the novel bears witness to Levy's exacting depiction of the enduring history of Britain's "hostile environment," one which exposes not only the foundations of the scandal but also the fraught nature of the nation's liberal identity.

## III: Conciliation and the Hermeneutical Cosmopolitanism of *Small Island*

If Levy's polemics lie in her representation of the pervasive, insidious, and structural nature of racial discrimination in the immediate post-war period, then the novel's own structural framework signifies in more poignant and political ways. As the previous section suggests, through the discursive construction of 1948, *Small Island* offers an oppositional and anti-national account of the endemic racial and colonial hierarchies that shape the emergence of the universalization of welfare and national

assistance. However, this oppositionality is implanted amongst four distinct perspectives that forge the polyvocal design of the text. Through the separate narrators, readers experience divergent accounts that not only historicize the relationship between each story but also offer a form of narratological symmetry.[8] We first encounter Hortense, for instance, "fresh off the boat" through her disorienting experience of arrival in 1948 London (Levy, *Small Island* 31). Bernard's introduction similarly registers a bewildering landing as he is "thrown" into the violent commotion of war on the Indian front (345). Pushed into the rampaging confusion of a trench to avoid an attack from two Japanese fighter planes, Bernard is transformed into a new arrivant as a fellow soldier mockingly inquires, "Just off the boat?" (347). The narrative structure of the novel proposes a comparative exercise through which radically contrasting perspectives and subject positions are consonantly assembled. Hortense, in this instance, aligns with Bernard, who believes without a trace of irony that the "war was fought so people might live amongst their own kind" (469). His eugenicist conception of Britain—a place to be with "kith and kin" (469)—is granted narratological space from which to disclose a reactionary and benighted view of the country and its Empire. While they may appear to be separated in insurmountable ways, Hortense and Bernard become unlikely mirrors of each other, with their antipodal experiences echoing throughout the novel's quadripartite structure: as Hortense laments the distance to the bathroom in Queenie's lodging house and the impending impossibility to "keep out the cold" with just her nightdress on (119), Bernard craves the cold in India—"I missed shivering" and that "shocking dash from bed into clothes" (356). By entangling their opposing yet doubled experiences, Levy creates subtle sensorial connections between Hortense and Bernard that are indicative of how the novel begins to temper its polemic commentary. Through its structural framework, *Small Island* creates a commendable cosmopolitical aesthetic—or as Emily Johansen argues, a "cosmopolitanized history" (395)—that aspires to cut across the boundaries of race, gender, and cultural circumstance. However, as I suggest, Levy's structural cosmopolitanism does not extend to but rather remains in tension with the novel's more oppositional, anti-national content.

*Small Island*'s conflicted critique stems from an aesthetic architecture that appears to mime what Paul Ricoeur once termed a "hermeneutics of suspicion." Examining the work of Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud, Ricoeur identified a theory of interpretation and modality of writing that sought to expose the "illusions of consciousness" (356). The interpretative framework offered by Ricoeur suggests, as Rita Felski has lucidly argued, a form of "negative" critique with an "adversarial force" that "grapple[s] with the oversights, omissions, contradictions, insufficiencies, or evasions in the object one is analysing." The adversarial criticism of Ricoeur's "school of suspicion" has nourished forms of cosmopolitan criticism that align with what appear to be the structural and narratological aims of Levy's *Small Island*. For example, in Paul Gilroy's *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (2004), cosmopolitanism as a demotic, affiliative, and anti-national consciousness becomes an expression of a negative, even oppositional, hermeneutical exercise. Turning to literature, Gilroy shows how Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721) becomes a key site to exhibit this civic and ethical method. The eighteenth-century epistolary novel, told from the perspective of Persian travelers Usbek and Rica who meditate on life, culture, religion, and politics as they travel from one metropolis (Isfahan) to another (Paris), shapes a primarily "subversive" (Gilroy 78) narrative where the presence of "strangers" and their "strangeness" become "functional and educative" (79). Usbek and Rica defamiliarize French culture and customs through their outsider status and narratologically "reintroduce France to itself" (78). As Gilroy argues, the "cosmopolitan position from which Montesquieu wrote" (78) conjures creative acts of cultural estrangement in order to propose "that we must learn to practice a systematic form of disloyalty to our own local civilization if we seek to either understand it or to interact equitably with others formed elsewhere" (79). The "negative" hermeneutical purpose of Gilroy's oppositional, anti-national cosmopolitanism is to cultivate forms of cultural alienation as a means to expose the mystification of national allegiances while enabling the possibility of more planetary affiliations to take hold.

The seemingly analogous structural cosmopolitanism of *Small Island* relies on the ostensible estrangement between the four diverse narrators

and indeed between the reader and the text. However, unlike Gilroy's understanding of Montesquieu's method, Levy's cosmopolitan aesthetics transforms that initial estrangement into intimate familiarity. The hermeneutical cosmopolitanism compelled within the narratological design of the novel does not retain an "adversarial force" in the tradition of Ricoeur's "school of suspicion" or Gilroy's disloyal cosmopolitanism but rather develops a "reconciliatory" impulse that turns moments of estrangement and alienation into overwrought connection (Pirker 177). The shift from estrangement to familiarity presents itself most acutely through the novel's doppelgänger motif, in which racial difference collapses the strangeness of characters into a familiar commonality. Michael provides a potent example of the novel's use of doppelgängers as he is consistently (mis)recognized throughout the story. As *Small Island*'s narratological hinge, he brings together the two couples through an unlikely plot device that permanently entangles their lives. Both Hortense and Queenie fall in love with Michael, and while he fathers Queenie's son, Hortense becomes the child's adoptive mother. Neither Hortense nor Queenie are aware of this connection. While Michael has no voice in the text (he is narrated exclusively through other characters), he is omnipresent in both women's lives. When Queenie first encounters Michael as her lodger during the war, she is transported to the 1924 Wembley Empire Exhibition where, as a child, she encounters for the first time an "African man" who was part of the exhibition (Levy, *Small Island* 6). Greeting Michael at her doorway, she notes, "I was lost in Africa again at the Empire Exhibition" (291). Mistaking Gilbert for Michael, Arthur (Bernard's father) manages to lure Gilbert to Queenie during the war. Meeting Gilbert for the first time, Queenie explains, "[Arthur] thinks you're someone else" (170). Indeed, she notes, "You look like him—a little bit" (171). After Michael leaves Jamaica to join the Royal Air Force, Hortense believes she sees him riding a bike on the street. As she runs with "euphoria" after him (81), she realizes her mistake for it is Gilbert, her future husband, that she sees: "It was him. It was the man I thought was Michael. But it was not Michael. It was a stranger" (82).

The familiar strangeness of Michael renders him an uncanny figuration for nearly all the black men in the novel. He activates not a modality of cultural estrangement (*à la* Gilroy's reading of Montesquieu) but a simulacrum of black virility and masculinity. Michael functions as a means to refamiliarize rather than defamiliarize the relationships between the characters and the reader.

The familiarizing quality of the doppelgänger, which also finds expression in Arthur's "love of the parallel" (Levy, *Small Island* 168) as he shadows Gilbert through the fields of Lincolnshire, is reflected throughout the novel's structure in the form of corollary characters, scenes, and encounters. While the polyphonic, "overlapping and nonsynchronous" composition of the text appears, as some critics have described, to "disorien[t] the reader who is taken back and forth in time and place" (Andermahr 562), its seemingly alienating effects end up nourishing a narrative of enlightenment, connection, and familiarity. Tracing even a few photographs can, for instance, expose how "parallelism and shadowing," as Bruce Woodcock puts it (51), forge the distinctive structural cosmopolitanism of the novel. The photographs are of Michael's family—his father, mother, and Hortense. Queenie sees the images for the first time when she discovers that Michael has left behind his wallet in the "Before" section of the novel: "There were photographs in its tattered inside. One of an old negro man standing formally in front of a house. Looking to all the world like a chimpanzee in clothes, this lord of the manor stood behind a seated black woman with white hair. . . . Another was of a little darkie girl with fuzzy-wuzzy hair tied in ribbons as big as bandages" (Levy, *Small Island* 302–03). Queenie's passionate romance with Michael prefigures this description, which discursively unmasks the vexed erotics of her hospitality. The ocular glossing of unfamiliar black bodies reveals Queenie's fetishization of blackness and the imperious optics that would inform the hostile environment experienced by the novel's migrants. As Queenie admits her affair with Michael to Bernard (after Hortense has aided in the delivery of her child), she recollects her last night with Michael and that wallet he came to retrieve—"[t]he one with the photograph of the old coloured

gentleman and his seated wife. And that little girl" (493). The evolution of Queenie's description of the photographs captures the conciliatory modality of cosmopolitanism in the text. Hortense's uncanny presence is crucial. The sentence fragment through which she is circumscribed in the second description suggests a cognitive pause in the narrative for Queenie, who discerns a heightened connection with "that little girl." As the timeline of the photographs' appearance in the story reveals, Hortense was not unfamiliar to Queenie when she arrived on her doorstep in 1948; she had already seen an image of her as a child. The progression of Queenie's characterization of the photographs additionally marks her developing sense of cross-racial understanding and sympathy as she humanizes her subsequent description of the images. The narrative familiarity registered through the young Hortense, particularly after the two women become closely entangled through the delivery of the baby, identifies the educative and ethical method of encountering otherness that Levy develops in her writing—an otherness that is never entirely strange or alienating.

The structural cosmopolitanism of *Small Island* advances, then, a hermeneutics of conciliation that deploys tactics such as doppelgängers, parallels, and homologous scenes for readers to discover. These connections are not obscured but rather amplified through the narrative structure of the text, which weaves together the voices of each character in such a way as to flaunt the relationships between what appear to be disparate and disconnected lives. The structure of the text entices readers to blur the boundaries between each story—in other words, to interpretively enact the border-bending ethos of cosmopolitical affectivity—through hints and clues that connect each narrativized life. This aesthetic articulation of an edifying hermeneutical method, what David James has termed the novel's "collaborative realism" (62), shapes a narrative discourse that is primed for national mythologization. The novel's mainstream popularity is perhaps no coincidence. The instrumentalization of *Small Island* through state-sponsored funding bodies such as the Arts Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund via *Small Island Read 2007*—what the website describes as "the biggest mass-reading initiative that has ever taken place in Britain"—gestures toward the (at times

questionable) cultural work Levy's text has been compelled to perform. As the website for *Small Island Read* explains:

> 2007 marks the 200th anniversary of the passing of the Slave Trade Abolition Bill and *Small Island Read 2007* was part of a wider national initiative commemorating the ending of the trade and exploring slavery's continuing influence upon multicultural Britain. The novel *Small Island* was chosen not only because it is an entertaining and enjoyable read but also because it provides an insight into the initial post-war contact between Jamaican migrants, descendants of enslaved Africans, and the white "Mother Country."

Through the articulated aims of the initiative, the novel is transformed into a site of national memorialization. Rachel Carroll has importantly drawn attention to the insidious nature of this gesture whereby "*Small Island* is somehow required to stand for slavery and its history without directly addressing it, and to speak for contemporary Britain without explicitly representing it" (68). Combining the commemoration of the abolition of slavery—which lauds "the British state as a liberating force" rather than "an agent of oppression" (69)—with an understanding of post-war migration from the colonies as a signifier for "multicultural Britain" effectively assembles a distorted narrative of national uplift akin to Boyle's euphoric Opening Ceremony. This is the stuff of mythology. The amalgamation of abolition with post-war migration and "entertaining" reading creates, to return to Barthes' words, the "perfection of a [national] iconography." *Small Island Read* set up its initiative through "an ideal understanding of things" that offered a moralizing and utilitarian conception of Levy's novel. While I am not arguing, as Carroll does, that Levy's egalitarian inclusion of "white British voices" renders the text "amenable" to such a project (69), I do want to suggest that the conciliatory nature of the novel's hermeneutic construction, which entangles the lives of the characters in overwrought ways, invites a more expansive range of ideological responses that belie the more uncomfortable elements of the text. The composition of the novel's drama, distilled through its quadripartite structure and use of parallels, at best

demonstrates the way in which the structures of Empire create inherent intimacies and similarities amongst all its subjects. At worst, the novel's insistence on the deep connectivity between the characters moves away from depicting genuine difference and toward the recuperation of a post-imperial national family that was always already connected. If the subversive form of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* lies in how Usbek and Rica "reintroduce[d] France to itself" through their outer-national estranging perspectives, then the question becomes, in what ways does the connective narratological structure of Levy's novel reintroduce Britain to itself?

**IV: Conflicting Cosmopolitics and the Ending**

I have been arguing that the oppositional anti-nationalism of *Small Island* at the level of content sits discordantly with the structural composition of its conciliatory cosmopolitanism. Levy, much like Gilroy, interrogates how it might be possible to "interact equitably" (Gilroy 79) and develop a "healthier orientation toward the unsettling experience of exposure to otherness" (77). While Gilroy turns to the edifying interactivity of engaging with radical difference, Levy examines the educative possibilities of discovering commonality. Both concepts of cosmopolitanism advocate for the cultivation of anti-racist and anti-imperial positionalities. The tension between conciliation and opposition—similarity and difference—in the novel constructs an incongruous political and aesthetic dynamic that the many adaptations and readings of the text have struggled to come to terms with. What idea of Britain does *Small Island* ultimately propose? The austere circumstance of baby Michael's adoption becomes a key juncture of cosmopolitical conflict in the text—one that, in the end, underscores the novel's scathing portrayal of a hostile Britain. It is through the breakdown of conciliation in the novel's conclusion that Levy expresses her most polemic and damning points.

While the circulation of baby Michael in the text imitates the narratological structure of *Small Island*, the material circumstances of his adoption works against this cosmopolitical aesthetic. As each of the characters comes into physical contact with the child—Queenie embraces Michael after his birth (Levy, *Small Island* 483), Bernard lets him "suc[k] on his finger" (509), Hortense holds him while waiting

for Queenie's tea (518), and Gilbert meanwhile gives him "his finger to chew" (518)—readers are urged to imagine the different implications each relationship provokes. What would it mean for Bernard, the most explicitly racist narrator, to adopt the baby as he unexpectedly suggests? How would Queenie come to terms with the complexities of raising a mixed-race child, born out of wedlock, with Bernard? By placing baby Michael with Hortense and Gilbert, Levy takes these questions out of the realm of the structural and speculative and instead demonstrates how his adoption, to borrow John McLeod's words, "functions to sustain colonial and race relations" (61). While Queenie's difficult decision to give up her child can be read generously as a form of "benevolent realism," as Sarah Brophy has shown (16), Queenie's inability to imagine her life with the child indicates how Levy clinches her searing critique of the nation. As the burden of childrearing is placed on Hortense and Gilbert, Levy reiterates how post-war welfare perpetuates racialized forms of redistribution. By echoing Beveridge's articulation of the universalization of welfare, Queenie inhabits a eugenicist understanding of the post-war "Anglo-Saxon" family in which her role is to maintain "the adequate continuance of the British race." As Queenie makes explicit: "I just want him to be with people who'll understand. . . . His own kind" (Levy, *Small Island* 522). If baby Michael is meant to "stand for the future and a new generation," as Eva Ulrike Pirker argues, then his treatment ominously foretells the impending hostilities for Britain's black citizens (155). The adoption of the child challenges the conciliatory cosmopolitanism compelled by the novel's structural aesthetics, which works hard to dismantle the logic of insurmountable racial difference. The child is the embodiment of the overwrought connections made in the text that persistently assert the existence of a universal condition. The establishment of cross-cultural and cross-racial connections are effectively undone by the novel's conclusion, which demonstrates that the intimacy of familiarity is a function of "kith and kin."

Gilbert agrees to take baby Michael in order to remove him from the "hostile environment" created by Bernard and "all his kind" (Levy, *Small Island* 527). "What sort of life," Gilbert laments, "would that little man have?" (527). The administration of social welfare plays out along

racial lines as Hortense and Gilbert not only agree to care for the child (a gesture which includes a hidden three hundred pounds for the family given through private means) but are finally able to access affordable housing not through state assistance but through the Jamaican *pardner* system of distributing communal savings. The polemics of Levy's depiction of 1948 rests with the representation of the child who symbolizes a new generation of black Britons juridically constituted by the principle of *jus soli*. Levy's novel suggests that even for those black Britons born in the country, their legal life and access to the nation's resources remains circumscribed by a morbid legacy of racial discrimination—a legacy that continues with twenty-first-century legislation such as the "hostile environment" policy. Baby Michael is not only denied support from and access to the nation's resources but more specifically figured as a risk to its social and cultural health. As Hazel Carby powerfully reminds us, during the Second World War, "[b]oth black male and white female bodies were designated vectors of diseases, carriers of a threat which could literally and metaphorically infect the nation" (75). "If white women became the bearers of half-caste children," Carby continues, "the postwar era of peace and stability hoped for by so many would be irrevocably disrupted" (75). When Queenie laments that she does not "have the guts" to keep her child (Levy, *Small Island* 521), she enunciates this specific discourse of racialized and biological national health wherein her body's intestinal fortitude becomes compromised by the child. The "polemical intent" of Levy's writing is expressed most forcefully in this moment as baby Michael becomes representative of an insidious and racialized strain of anti-welfarism that configures the nation in eugenic terms. The structural cosmopolitanism and egalitarian ethos of the novel is mocked by this ending, which somberly depicts—and even predicts—the continuation of the blighted circumstances now associated with the so-called Windrush generation and their children.

How then can we characterize the way in which Levy reintroduces Britain to itself? The text offers a deeply conflicted commentary: two stories that bring together on the one hand a conciliatory, inclusive, even cosmopolitan view of the nation and on the other hand a grimly nationalist and virulently discriminatory one. Levy's decision to end the

novel with Churchill's words "Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few" (Levy, *Small Island* 531) entrenches her complicated, even discordant, representation of the nation. The use of Churchill's wartime speech, which memorialized the 1940 Battle of Britain and paraded the heroism of the Royal Air Force against Germany's Nazi regime, seems to reproduce the "sentimental and grandiloquent" national politics associated with nearly any citation of Churchill (Valluvan 114). The critical consensus surrounding Levy's deployment of Churchill suggests that his words "re-signif[y]" the context of his speech to "includ[e] not only the unacknowledged contribution of Black service men and women in World War II, but indeed the whole pioneering generation of Windrush migrants who filled much-needed jobs in the period of post-war reconstruction" (Andermahr 559–60). Levy herself explains the conciliatory import of her use of Churchill: "I just thought, I wonder if Churchill were alive, could I persuade him to say that this could be apt as well for the immigrant population?" ("Andrea Levy Interviewed" 337). *Small Island*'s textual memorial to a re-signified Churchill represents perhaps its greatest conflict, one that has only amplified in a contemporary context through which the nation intensifies how it legislates hostility toward migrants. Is it possible for readers to gloss these words from Churchill in a novel about post-war Commonwealth migration without also recollecting his admiration for the slogan "Keep England White," or his support for the Boer War, or his contribution to the 1943 Bengal famine? In other words, does the inclusion of Churchill disclose the novel's desire to incorporate its black migrants within a grandiloquent nationalist story, or does it mockingly demonstrate a defacement of Churchill's words by highlighting the futility of such an act? The frolic mythology, as Barthes might put it, established between good and evil in Churchill's speech conjures a long national history of exclusionary discourses. Given *Small Island*'s investment in depicting the hostility of the nation toward its racialized migrants and citizens, Levy's use of Churchill potentially reads as a form of literary graffiti that vandalizes the understanding of Britishness through a culture of racially divisive commemoration. On the other hand, the turn to Churchill equally suggests the novel's difficulty in imagining

a world outside the jingoistic boundaries of the nation. Levy's writing thus lays bare a more expansive inquiry on the aftermath of Empire. As the text longs for the radical crossing of boundaries, it concomitantly highlights the impossibilities of certain crossroads; while it searingly challenges the idea of a so-called post-Empire British nation, it also appeals to the desire for inclusive forms of patriotism. The analysis of *Small Island*'s conflicted ideological positionality offered here attests to the sophisticated craft of a writer who grappled with the task of national demystification and decolonization alongside the unfashionable longing for cosmopolitan affectivity. Levy's deft and polemic yet uneven engagement with the nation registers a complicated postcolonial aesthetic that surely distinguishes the enduring importance of her farsighted work.

## Notes

1 The notion of a "burden of proof" did not however begin with the "hostile environment" policy. As Section 3(8) of the 1971 Immigration Act states: "When any question arises under this Act whether or not a person is a British citizen, or is entitled to any exemption under this Act, it shall lie on the person asserting it to prove that he is" ("Immigration Act 1971").

2 Examples of Britain's long history of anti-immigration legislation include: the Aliens Act (1905), the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act (1914), the Aliens Restrictions (Amendment) Act (1919), the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962; 1968), the Immigration Act (1971), the British Nationality Act (1981), and the more recent, Immigration Act (2014). For a detailed account of the impact of these policies, see Goodfellow's *Hostile Environment*, which carefully delineates how anti-immigrant sensibilities have been constructed precisely through such legislative measures.

3 The bureaucratic difficulties experienced by the victims of the Windrush scandal stem from the various ways they attempted to but could not prove their legal right to remain. In her ground-breaking reporting of the affair, Gentleman concisely articulates the Kafkaesque position Windrush scandal victims found themselves in. As she explains in *The Windrush Betrayal*,

> [o]ne of the key problems for people in this cohort was that if you were a British citizen the Home Office would not keep a file on you, because this system was only there for keeping records of immigrants. As Windrush-generation people were effectively moved from being seen as citizens to being classified as migrants, they were forced to make applications to regularise their status; these applications could

> have been helped by accessing their Home Office files, only most of them discovered they had no Home Office files because the Home Office had never viewed them as migrants who needed files. It was head-spinningly confusing. (148–49)

4 See in particular Andermahr, Carroll, Casagranda, Courtman, Muñoz-Valdivieso, and Pirker.

5 Taunton's analysis of Levy's representation of council estates in her second novel, *Never Far from Nowhere*, offers an important contribution to the neglected focus on issues of class and its intersection with national politics within Levy scholarship. By reading how the council estate transforms from "an embodiment of the egalitarian ambitions of the British welfare state" (Taunton 24) into a marker of hostility and disparity (particularly in the context of the rise of monetarist policies), Taunton demonstrates Levy's long-standing exploration of the politics of welfare in her writing.

6 For a useful overview of the connections between eugenics and welfarism in Beveridge's thinking, see Fuller's "Recovering Biology's Potential as a Science of Social Progress." Placing the legacy of Beveridge into the contemporary moment, Fuller asks: "Can a welfare state today be countenanced without dealing explicitly with the biological side of social life to which eugenics drew such vivid attention?" (498). As COVID-19 further exacerbates the inequalities of social life (particularly amongst racialized communities), this question becomes all the more pertinent as newspaper headlines "[c]all for a New Beveridge Report" (Savage) in a rhetorical move that, yet again, mythologizes the progressive qualities of the report.

7 Noble, for example, draws our attention to *The Report of the West India Royal Commission* (1945), also known as the *Moyne Report* (1945), which demonstrated how social welfare (understood in distinctly racialized and gendered terms) was used for appeasement purposes in the quiet maintenance of Empire within Britain's Caribbean colonies.

8 While the narrative voices of Hortense, Gilbert, Queenie, and Bernard become crucially enmeshed throughout *Small Island*, their distribution is not equal. Bernard's voice, in particular, remains one of the most marginal as his narrative only begins two thirds of the way into the novel.

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