

The Representation of Black British Everyday Life in Andrea Levy's 'Fruit of the Lemon' and Diana Evans' 'Ordinary People'

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The Representation of Black British Everyday Life in Andrea Levy's
Fruit of the Lemon and Diana Evans's *Ordinary People*

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INTRODUCTION

Black British literature gained popularity after the first World War, and its beginnings are often associated with Samuel Selvon and George Lamming, who are seen as pioneer figures (Ledent n.p.). They are part of what is known as first-generation writers. Second-generation writers wrote about "*memories of migration*, rather than direct experience of it or of originary homelands" (Weedon 46). In a post-war literary landscape that was largely dominated by male writers, black and Asian women writers have used fiction in order to achieve (literary) agency (Rastogi 77). First-generation immigrant women writers such as Attia Hosain, Beryl Gilroy and Buchi Emecheta paved the way for the following generation (Rastogi 78). This second generation achieved a level of success much higher than their predecessors, and became known and recognised worldwide (Ibid). Among those are Zadie Smith, Andrea Levy and Monica Ali, and Rastogi also includes Bernardine Evaristo, Helen Oyeyemi and Diana Evans among others in this generation she calls "Generation Next" (Ibid). This thesis will focus on two of these contemporary black British female writers, Andrea Levy and Diana Evans. Analysing two novels which were published almost two decades apart, Levy's *Fruit of Lemon* (1999) and Evans's *Ordinary People* (2018), it will observe the evolution of the representation of black British everyday life.

I. Andrea Levy

Andrea Levy (1956-2019) was born in London and was the daughter of Jamaican migrants (Innes n.p.; Marshall n.p.): her father came on the Empire Windrush in 1948, and was joined by her mother six months later (Knepper 2). Levy's background was quite varied, as she had Jamaican, Scottish and Jewish origins (Knepper 2). She grew up in North London (Knepper 3), and studied textile design, to later become a costume assistant at the Royal Opera House and the BBC (Marshall n.p.; Marquis 58). Levy came from a working class background (Rowell 260), and started writing in her thirties, when she took an evening writing class which made her realise she had a great story to tell (Levy and Morrison 326-327; Rowell 259). She subsequently became more interested in her background and family history as well as in her place in English society (Rowell 259). She also wanted to write about the recent death of her

father (Rowell 260). As she decided to write about black British experience, she tried to research previous fiction written by black British authors but could only find very little material, which prompted her to attempt to fill the missing gap herself (Ibid). She stated that "[f]or me, writing has always been a journey of discovery about my past and family [...] All my books look at what it is to be black and British, trying to make the invisible visible, and to put back into history the people who got left out – people like my dad" (Innes n.p.). Andrea Levy is thus part of the second generation of migrant writers. Levy published six books: *Every Light in the House Burning* (1994), *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996), *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), *Small Island* (2004), *The Long Song* (2010), and *Six Stories and an Essay* (2014), which have received various prizes (*British Council*). While her novels were all critically acclaimed, it is *Small Island* that brought her to the forefront due to its huge success.

This thesis will focus in particular on her third novel *Fruit of the Lemon*. I will briefly summarise the plot, which in my opinion is necessary in order to understand the subsequent analysis. The book follows protagonist Faith Jackson, an English-born middle class young woman living in North London, whose parents are originally from Jamaica. Faith knows very little about her origins and seems oblivious to her racial difference. However, a string of events leads her to realise her alterity and results in an identity crisis. Her parents try to help her resolve this by sending her to Jamaica to spend some time with their family, where she learns more about her background and her family history.

The novel contains many autobiographical elements: Faith comes from a similar background to Levy, she has a similar family story, and a similar job (Faith works at the BBC in the costume department). Levy has stated that "everything [she has] written is a journey [...], [her] own journey of understanding who [she is], because when you grow up British, away from the Caribbean, you have no sense of who you are" (Rowell 264). *Fruit of the Lemon* features a first-person narration focalised from Faith's point of view.

Machado Sáez argues that although the period the events takes place in is not explicitly stated, contextual clues allow to situate the novel somewhere in the eighties (Machado Sáez 1). Among others, references made to movies that came out in the seventies (such as *Shaft* (1971) or *Superfly* (1972)), as well as mentions of Margaret Thatcher and of Lady Di, anchor the story in that decade (Machado Sáez 1).

II. Diana Evans

Diana Evans was born in 1972 in London to a British father and a Nigerian mother (Holland 556). She graduated with an MA in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia and is a former dancer (*Diana Evans* n.p.). She worked as a journalist and critic, writing for instance for *Time Magazine*, *Marie Claire*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Times*, *The New York Review of Books* and *Harper's Bazaar* (Ibid). She was also a musical journalist (Evans and Samspon n.p.). She started out writing poetry, and then moved onto short stories (Evaristo 31-33). The death of her twin sister was her impetus to start writing, and made her realise she had an important story to tell (Evans and Allardice n.p.). Evans has written three novels: *26a* (2005), *The Wonder* (2009), and *Ordinary People* (2018) ("Diana Evans" n.p.), which have all received various literary prizes (*Diana Evans* n.p.). She has stated that she wrote *Ordinary People* out of a desire to represent "the ordinary everyday existences of the Black-British middle class, which were almost completely invisible in our national literary culture" (Evans 30), and she insists on the importance of representation for young people (One on One). Another gap that she wanted to fill was that of a woman's perspective, which she felt was lacking in her main influence for the novel, John Updike's *Couples*, as it does not contain fully-fledged female characters and lacks a sense of empathy towards them (Evans and Allardice n.p.). Evans has shared her desire to write not about race but about universal experiences (Evaristo 33). She has also spoken against "a burden of responsibility to cover racial issues" that is put on black writers (Pérez-Fernández 291). Although Rastogi places her in the same generation as Levy, Holland positions her as part of a third-generation of black British writers (Holland 556). I will side with Holland on this issue: as Evans was born 16 years after Levy, it would be peculiar to place them in the same generation.

I will focus on her latest novel *Ordinary People*, which has not been discussed as extensively as her previous ones. *Ordinary People* retraces the story of two middle class multiracial couples, Michael and Melissa and Damian and Stephanie, and the relationship problems they face. It is set in contemporary South London and its suburbs. Melissa is a journalist who is now freelancing; her and Michael have two children. The novel ends with Michael and Melissa finally breaking up.

Like *Fruit of the Lemon*, this novel does also contain a few autobiographical elements: Diana Evans lives in South London, and like Melissa, was a journalist, and had a newborn and a five-year-old when she wrote the novel (Evans and Allardice, n.p.). Moreover, like Melissa, her mother is Nigerian and her father English.

The novel unfolds over the span of about a year, and although once again there are no explicit indications of the time frame it takes place in, it is easy to deduce as it contains many cultural references and points to important events, the most notable being Barack Obama's election and Michael Jackson's death. The novel starts with Barack Obama's first election in 2008 and ends with a New Year's party celebrating the year 2010.

Whereas *Fruit of the Lemon* focuses on a second-generation migrant protagonist in her early twenties, *Ordinary People* focuses on three second-generation migrants (and even third-generation, as it does briefly comment on the protagonists' children), who are in their late thirties, and takes place some thirty years later (they were thus young teenagers in the eighties, when *Fruit of the Lemon* takes place). As opposed to the first-person narration of the former, the latter contains an omniscient third person narrator who focuses mainly on the three main characters: Melissa, her fiancé Michael, and Michael's friend Damian.

III. Overview

The goal of this thesis is to analyse both novels' representation of race, especially in an everyday setting. Both novels are realist for the most part (as will be discussed briefly, *Ordinary People* features some supernatural elements) and display everyday situations. As both books are set in different time frames, I will argue that it is interesting to observe the evolution of this representation of race and racial discrimination through the years.

In order to analyse the novels, I have chosen to conduct a close reading of them, as well as character analysis, using relevant theories when needed, rather than basing entire reasoning on a single concept or theory. This allows me to use specific concepts at the appropriate moments.

The first chapter will lay down a few key moments in black British history, as well as provide a more complete definition of black British literature, in order to better understand the context in which those novels are inscribed.

The second chapter will focus on Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* and on its main character Faith. It will explore her initial, incomplete sense of identity, as she has been denied stories from her parents' past and culture, and show her denial of racial discrimination up until a key moment of realisation. This will lead to a journey to Jamaica to retrieve her cultural roots and a discussion of the role and importance of memory. The last part of the chapter will explore the notion of home, and Faith's newfound sense of identity.

The third and final chapter will contain an analysis of Evans's *Ordinary People*, and show the ways in which its discussion of race differs from the first novel. It will first look at the way race is represented, as well as the representation of racial discrimination. It will then explore the novel's focus on multiculturalism and end on the (racial) violence present in the novel. Although the analysis will mostly focus on the main characters, some parts will also include a discussion about older and younger generations.

CHAPTER 1: BEING BLACK AND BRITISH

In this first chapter I will briefly go over some of the main events regarding the history of the black presence in Britain, in order to offer some context for the subsequent analysis of the two novels. I will also introduce the category of black British literature.

1.1 Being black in Britain before the twenty-first century

It is tempting for many people to see the docking of the Empire Windrush as the defining moment which marked the arrival of black people in Britain (Levy n.p.). In his widely known *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (2004), Mark Stein retraces parts of black British history. The SS Empire Windrush arrived in England in 1948, transporting passengers who were mainly of West Indian origins and looking for job opportunities, which Britain was offering as it was in dire need of labour force after World War II (Stein 4). The official reports at the time spoke of 492 migrants who were on board (Knepper 3), but recent records show there were actually 1,027 passengers, who would later be known as the Windrush generation. The passengers were predominantly Jamaicans, but also people from other Caribbean countries or elsewhere (Rodgers and Ahmed, n.p.). The arrival of the boat did hold significance in that it marked "the start of large-scale postwar migration" (Stein 4), and is seen as symbolic of "the rise of multicultural, multiracial Britain" (Marquis 39).

However, Ron Ramdin writes that, contrary to popular belief, this event did not mark the beginning of the black presence in Britain, as there were black people there during the Roman occupation of the island, maybe even predating that according to some sources (Ramdin 3). They were still there through the centuries, and were for instance servants and performers at the King's court (Ramdin 5-6). At the end of the sixteenth century, Elizabeth I, worried about the growing number of blacks in England, tried to have them deported, but her efforts were not successful, as the slave trade saw an increasing number of black people entering the country (Ramdin 14). By the end of the eighteenth century, there were about 10,000 black people on the island; many of them had become well-integrated into the working-class, and another large portion formed 'the Black Poor' (Ramdin 24-25).

Moreover, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, slaves were brought to England from the Caribbean, as the English colonized the islands to profit from their resources (Ozun and Kuzgun 304). The islands took their independence in the 1960s, but their economic difficulties contributed to the subsequent wave of immigration to Britain (Ibid). British writer Caryl Phillips, who came to England as an infant with his parents, speaks of their (and his) experience growing up and living in Britain (as well as the experience of previous generations) in *A New World Order* (2001). He states that eighteenth-century England was, in fact, a multi-racial country: not only was it a result of the slave trade, but it was also in fashion for the wealthy to have black servants (Phillips 265). However, the abolition of the slave trade in 1834¹ saw a decrease in the black presence of Britain in the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century (Ibid).

Nonetheless, the SS Empire Windrush did mark the beginning of an important number of migration from the Caribbean to Britain: around 250,000 people migrated from 1948 to 1962 (Phillips 268). Legislation in 1962 and then 1968 rendered such immigration more difficult and almost impossible (Ibid). Because of the British colonial education they received, they thought of themselves as British (Ozun and Kuzgun 306). However, Caryl Phillips recalls his parents' experience, and states that upon arrival in the 'mother country', the migrants quickly found out that their skin colour would make it difficult to be accepted as British (Phillips 241). Moreover, they faced discrimination in housing, as the accommodation they were provided was typically subpar, overcrowded and unsanitary, as well as in employment, even though their jobs in the health and transportation service played a big role in stabilising the economy (Phillips 241-242). Years later their children's generation had to deal with the same problems and discrimination, but unlike their parents, who could entertain a dream of going home, this generation was home in England (Phillips 242). The main problem faced by this second generation² was the question of identity (Phillips 275). They considered themselves British, as "[they] spoke with the same accent as the other kids, [they] watched the same television programmes, [they] went to the same schools, [they] did the same exams. Surely [they] were British" (Phillips 275-276). Nonetheless, they were subjected

¹ While there was a Parliament Act in 1807 to end "the legal transportation of Africans across the Atlantic", the institution of slavery was officially abolished in 1834 (Muñoz-Valdivieso 161).

² Paul Gilroy criticizes what he calls "the absurd figure of the 'second generation immigrant', and asks a very relevant question: "for how many generations are we to remain immigrants", struggling to be accepted as British? (Gilroy [2005] 71). Although I have made the decision to use the term "second generation migrant" in this work for convenience's sake – as it is used by many critics to refer to the children of those who migrated to Britain – I think it is important to mention that this phrase may indeed not be totally appropriate, as it contributes to the othering of those it refers to.

to the same discrimination their parents were, and in the same areas of life (Phillips 276). The main difference was that they felt more involved in British society and therefore thought it was their duty to change it (Ibid). The second generation claimed their British identity and refused to be marginalized (Ibid). This led to many disturbances in the seventies and early eighties, especially in London, Liverpool and Bristol, which is significant as these cities were the main slaving ports in Britain during the eighteenth century (Ibid). At the time, the news reports depicted the black youth as the problem while failing to mention that they were protesting against the very real discriminations they were facing, which also included police harassment and institutionalized racism (Ibid).

Phillips recalls Enoch Powell's racist speeches that denied West Indians and Asians access to British identity, and the support he received from a large part of the British population (Phillips 273-274). A few years later, Margaret Thatcher used the same rhetoric in an attempt to define British identity racially (Phillips 277). Nonetheless, it was she "who eventually took the first real step in moving Britain away from a primarily racially constructed definition of British nationality and belonging" (Phillips 278). Indeed, as Thatcher wanted to modernise the country, her idea of Britishness and patriotism evolved according to economic preoccupations (Ibid). Economically profitable black and Asian workers were now considered British, as she wished to define 'Britishness' based on cultural rather than racial criteria (Ibid). However, the only migrants who were accepted were those who did not partake in any activity specific to their cultural backgrounds: no real diversity was actually encouraged, as anyone diverging from the cultural English norms was still rejected (Ibid).

Phillips goes on to mention race riots, notably the 1919 Liverpool riots and the 1958 Notting Hill riots, which, the media reported, started due to black men's familiarity with white women (Phillips 243-244). In 2002, The Guardian claimed that although senior officers tried to deny the racial nature of the Notting Hill riots, it was confirmed that they were started by armed 'Teddy Boys', whose aim was to "Keep Britain White" (Travis n.p.). The newspaper also deems this a crucial, historical moment, that forced the Britain to recognise the existence of a racial problem in the country (Ibid). In a 2001 article remembering "10 key moments in UK race relations", BBC News mentions the 1981 Brixton riots as a symptom of the black youth's anger at their treatment by the police, which led to the creation of The Police Complaints Authority (*BBC News* 2001 n.p.). The article also touches on the creation, five years earlier, of the Race Relations Act, which "makes racial discrimination unlawful in

employment, training, housing, education and the provision of goods, facilities and services" (Ibid). This did not, unfortunately, prevent similar protests from occurring again in later years, and even in this past decade.

The murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 also had a huge impact in Britain. Lawrence, an eighteen-year-old black man, was "stabbed to death in an unprovoked attack by a gang of white youth "as he was at a bus stop (*BBC News* 2018 n.p.). Two men were found guilty of his murder in 2012 but the other perpetrators are still free, and very little progress has been made ever since (Ibid). The Met's handling of the case was criticised, as they left suspects free in the days following the murder (Dodd and Grierson n.p.). The lead detective in the case was also let off the case despite bringing two of the perpetrators to justice (Ibid). In August 2020, the Met made the decision to close the case (Ibid), and Stephen's father said he will try to overturn this decision in order to bring justice to his son (Ibid).

The reason for these recurring cases of discrimination was race, which highlights another issue, that is a tendency to equate British identity with race. Andrea Katherine Medovarski writes that Britain has historically defined itself as "unitary, singular, and white" (23), even though this notion of national homogeneity has not only always been contested by the Scottish, the Welsh and the Irish, but has also been "challenged by rival local and regional allegiances, and cross-cut by class, gender, and generation" (Hall in Medovarski 23). In her essay "This is my England", Andrea Levy recalls a peculiar meeting with a New Zealander, who told her she did not look like an English person. When asked what an English person should look like, he then pointed to himself, a white, non-English man (n.p.). The anecdote is quite telling in the way Britishness is perceived, even abroad: race is one of, if not the, determining factor. Just like Phillips, Levy "was educated to be English", as she did all the things other white, English children did (Levy n.p.). She asserts her belonging in the country of her birth: "being English is my birthright. England is my home" (Levy n.p.). Unlike Phillips however, she was born in England. And, although Phillips celebrates the fact that Caribbean migrants not only contributed to the rebuilding of Britain, but also made it expand its definition of national identity (Phillips 281-282), almost two decades later, Diana Evans still has to insist on the fact that Black people are in fact British: "Blackness is not other, it's a part of Britishness" ("One on One").

This leads to another important point, as Diana Evans is not of West Indian origin, which brings into question what exactly the term 'black' encompasses. Michelle M. Wright states that Black people in the diaspora are generally all grouped together into the homogeneous group "Black", completely disregarding the fact that they have different "historical, cultural, national, ethnic, religious, and ancestral origins and influences" (2). Recently, there have been attempts to link all of those together by providing "a common historical moment or a shared cultural trope" (Ibid). This endeavour is however made impossible for the simple fact that this shared moment does not exist, and can only link a small number of black communities together (Wright 3). Stuart Hall writes that the term "black" came into use "as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalisation in Britain" (Hall in Stein 12-13). This however poses the risk, once again, of presenting a singular hegemonic black experience; it is thus important to underline the heterogeneity and difference of the identities of the black British population (Stein 13). Wright asserts that the racial category of 'blackness' only appeared "with the forced removal of West Africans to the Western Hemisphere", which means that "From the start, Black identity has been produced in contradiction" (Wright 1).³

1.2 Being Black in twenty-first century Britain

More recently, in 2008, there was a rise in youth killings in London, as thirty teenagers were killed (Wood 97). The phenomenon attracted wide press coverage of what was positioned as the "threat of 'knife crime' and 'teen gangs'", two terms which "carry heavily racialised overtones – the 1980s image of Black 'muggers' and 'street robbers' now morphed into one of Black teenage street gangs armed with knives" (Wood 98). Half of the victims were killed by other teenagers, and the rate of stabbings was up (Wood 99). Moreover, "[t]he large majority of victims were Black or Asian, as were their attackers" (Wood 100). However, only three of the murders were found to be in relation to gangs (Ibid). The article also highlights the fact that "Greater London has the highest rate of child poverty compared to other regions in England and Wales", and that poverty and social inequalities make it more likely for individuals to get involved in violence (Wood 99,101). 2018 saw a similar rise in knife

³ Wright points out that "there is no biological basis for racial categories (there is no such thing as a "black", "white", or "Asian" gene, and the amount of genetic disparity between persons of different races is the same as that between persons in the same racial category)" (1).

crime; Jessica Morgan offered some possible causes for this in an article, including the suppression of most youth services and a lower number of policemen (n.p.).

In August 2011, protests broke out in Tottenham after Mark Duggan was shot by the police (*BBC News* 2015 n.p.). They quickly escalated into violence and looting, which spread throughout the country (Ibid). In 2016, a Professor who researched the riots said that the

rioters were drawn from the poorest communities, had a sense of being constantly harassed by the police, felt that their opportunities were limited and shrinking, and that the dearth of services and chances around them was the result of deliberate political choices, made by rich people who behaved with impunity. (Newburn in Williams and Fishwick n.p.)

He went on to say that those conditions had only worsened in the last five years, and that this could be attributed to the lack of governmental response to the riots (Ibid). Jawhar Ahmed Dhouib points out that the situation is still not solved in today's Britain, as he brings up for instance the higher numbers of stop-and-search⁴ and arrest of black people (124).

A few years later, in 2017, what was called the "Windrush Scandal" came to light. Outrage sparked when the fact that "hundreds of Commonwealth citizens, many of whom were from the 'Windrush' generation, had been wrongly detained, deported and denied legal rights" surfaced (*The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants* n.p.). This came about with the 'Hostile Environment' law whose goal was to deter undocumented migrants from living in Britain, by making several entities (such as the NHS, landlords, banks, employers, etc.) carry out immigration control (Ibid). This caused a problem for many migrants of the Windrush generation who arrived in Britain "as children on their parents' passports" (Ibid). As many legal documents had been destroyed by the Home Office, they found themselves incapable of providing the documentation necessary to prove that they were indeed British citizens (Ibid). Moreover, "the Home Office demanded at least one official document from every year they had lived here. Attempting to find documents from decades ago created a huge, and in many cases, impossible burden" (Ibid). They were therefore labelled as illegal migrants, losing benefits and access "to housing, healthcare, bank accounts and driving licenses", while some were detained and even deported back to countries they had left as children (Ibid). To this

⁴ The British Transport Police's official website defines stop-and-search as the following: "An officer can stop and search you if they have a genuine suspicion in their mind that items that could be used to commit crime or are evidence of an offence (such as stolen property or weapons) will be found on you" (*British Transport Police* n.p.). In a 2019 article, *The Guardian* stated that black and Asian people, as well as minority background are "likely to be targeted [...] despite not having committed crimes" (PA Media n.p.).

day, the Government has only given compensation to a few, and has not yet apologised for its unjust treatment of those British citizens (Ibid). Moreover, although McKee states that they have withdrawn the targets for deportation, the 'Hostile Environment' law is still effective to this day (1). He adds that some migrants still do not seek care with the NHS out of fear of being turned to the immigration authorities, to which the NHS continues to provide patient data (Ibid).

This leads us to the present day. During the 2020 covid-19 pandemic, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) has found that "Black people are more than four times more likely to die from Covid-19 than white people", a disparity that would be partly due to "socio-economic disadvantage", although "a remaining part of the difference has not been explained" (Booth and Barr n.p.).

Finally, it is impossible to write about race relations without mentioning the events that have taken place since May 2020. On May 25, in the US, George Floyd was arrested by the Minneapolis police after allegedly attempting to pay with counterfeit money (Barker and Furber n.p.). Floyd was said to have resisted arrest, and a video taken by bystanders circulated on social media, showing police officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on his neck for almost 9 minutes – despite Floyd's plea that he could not breathe – which led to his death (Robles and Burch n.p.) This event sparked protests all across the United States, which in some cases also led to looting (Aratani n.p.). Many petitions circulated on the internet, demanding the arrest of the officers, or demanding justice for other black victims. Chauvin was arrested on May 29 and charged, as well as the three other officers present on the scene, who all have been arrested on "charges ranging from second-degree murder to aiding and abetting murder" (Xiong n.p.). Those protests led to others, all around the globe, including in Britain (Taylor n.p.). Floyd's death resonated with the British population and the racial injustices that were also happening there (Lee n.p.). Statistics have shown that police in England and Wales "were three times more likely to arrest a black person than a white person and five times more likely to use force in 2018-19", and that "Black people were also more than nine times as likely to be stopped and searched" and "more than twice as likely to die in police custody" (Ibid). Floyd's death also put the Black Lives Matter movement – which targets racial inequalities and violence on the black community – in the spotlight (*Black Lives Matter*).

In my opinion, it is more than ever relevant to talk about racial discrimination, and these events give an unfortunate context to this work.

1.3 Black British Literature

I will now briefly focus on black British literature. In the seventh edition of the Oxford Companion to English Literature, Bénédicte Ledent writes about Black British Literature. She starts by noting the controversial nature of the term, as it is perceived as "reductive and divisive", mainly because it reads as a marginalisation of this black literature against what would be 'white British literature', which in contrast is very much an unusual label (Ledent n.p.). The term came more widely of use in the seventies, but originally pointed to a literature produced in Britain by authors who had Asian, African or Caribbean origins, and referred to their shared experience as migrants (Ibid). The term has however evolved, and now encompasses writers of African and Caribbean origins (Ibid). This is the acceptation that I will use in this thesis. The label is still quite ambiguous, as it also refers to some authors of the same origins who are ethnically white (Ledent n.p.). This resonates with what Stein writes of the heterogeneity of the term (although he still keeps Asian writers under the label), as Black British Literature consists of "texts by male and female writers [...] who belong to different generations and social classes; and who are (or where) located in different geographical regions of Britain" (Stein xiv). Moreover, Ledent adds that this label does not refer only to literature written by and after the Windrush Generation, as there already were writers belonging to this tradition in the eighteenth-century, the most well-known being Olaudah Equiano (Ledent n.p.). Many genres can be found in this literary category, ranging from fiction, poetry, drama, essay writing and journalism (Ibid). The many literary prizes awarded to black British writers testifies to the rise of interest in these writings in the past decades, as does the growing number of academic writing on black British literature (Ibid). Some features specific to Black British Literature include "a keen interest in history, often combined with a special concern for 'otherness', not only racial, but also sexual and sometimes religious" (Ibid). This interest in history can be manifested through writing about slavery, or "[exploring] former times by establishing a link between Britain and the ancestral homeland" (Ibid). Stein writes that Black British Literature "not only deals with the situation of those who came from former colonies and their descendants, but also with the society

which they discovered and continue to shape – and with those societies left behind" (Stein xii). He adds that, while being anchored in Britain, this literature nonetheless deals with perspectives that are not to be found in all British literature, showing the point of view of someone who understands both insider and outsider positions (Stein xii). These themes thus help the writers navigate "their own complex cultural background and [...] their identity" (Ledent n.p.). It often takes the form of a fragmented narrative that mirrors the liminal, ambiguous position of the black writer in Britain (Ibid).

Stein points to the particular situation of those who either migrated to Britain as children, or who were born there (the so-called second-generation migrants), as he insists that British culture had a greater impact on them, as they grew up in Britain and were influenced by it (Stein 7). As such, their parents' homelands are not as present to them. They are only available through a third party: through their parents' stories and memories (Stein 7). Stein thus calls these origins 'mediated' (Stein 20).

A definition of black British literature was offered in 1987 by David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe. For them, black British Literature "refers to that created and published in Britain, largely for a British audience, by black writers either born in Britain or who have spent a majority of their lives in Britain (Dabydeen and Wilson-Tagoe in Stein 8). They do however question the meaning of the term "black", what it encompasses, and what distinguishes it from its white counterpart (Stein 8). Stein adds that "the redefinition of Britishness and the modification of the image of Britain is accomplished by using, if not hijacking, the novel as a machine of cultural representation and reproduction" (Stein 42). He argues that the novel of transformation, and black British literature for that matter, "not only portrays change in British society and culture, but, significantly, is also partly responsible for bringing about change" (Stein 42-43).

Based on the above definitions, Andrea Levy and Diana Evans's work is thus part of this canon of black British literature.

CHAPTER 2: MEMORY AND THE (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN ANDREA LEVY'S *FRUIT OF THE LEMON*

2.1 Identity as a "second-generation migrant"

Faith Jackson is what is commonly called a second-generation migrant: born and raised in England, she considers it her home and sees herself as English. As stated in the previous chapter, first and second-generation migrants have a different relationship to Britain. The experience of migration and of rejection marked Faith's parents, so they raised their children to ensure that they would not be subjected to the same treatment as they were. This, however, will be of great consequence for Faith's sense of identity. Ole Laursen writes that migrants were keen to leave the "histories of slavery and colonial subordination" behind in their effort to build a new life and reinvent themselves in this new country (53,59). Moreover, he argues that "[they] have repressed their history in Jamaica because it is too traumatic to be told" (Laursen 59); the reasons for this trauma will be developed later in this chapter.

Şebnem Toplu writes that Levy represents the Windrush generation in Faith's parents, Wade and Mildred Jackson (2): Mildred is a nurse and Wade owns a painting business. They both view Jamaica as their home and true place of belonging, and came to England in search of a better life (Toplu 2). The Jacksons went through many hardships while trying to build a life in this new country, like many other migrants (Toplu 2). The accommodation they occupied was subpar: they started out living with Wade's brother, who "lived in one room in a large dark house. In all the other rooms lived white women with blonde hair, who were [...] 'ladies of the night'", with whom they "had to share the kitchen and bathroom" (7-8). Wade "worked long hours", and the family had to be housed in council flats (9). Mildred's shock upon arriving in England is conveyed by her repeatedly saying "I never thought English people lived like that" (8-9). They were also subject to racist insults: "Everyone called them 'Wog' and 'Darkie'. Everyone told them they were from the jungle" (390). Moreover, the novel shows the difficulty for migrants to work in the same field they did back in their home country: Mildred, who was a nurse, eventually gets the same job in England, but Wade, was an accountant and ends up with his own painting and decorating company. This can however be construed as positive change, as despite the challenges and discrimination posed by English society, he has managed to build a business out of nothing.

On the other hand, Wade and Mildred are also box collectors ("My parents' hobby was collecting empty boxes. [...] Brown cardboard boxes mostly" [13]), always ready to move, which, Toplu argues, serves as an "explicit metaphor of the parents' immigrant selves", and also illustrates the paradoxical idea that, while they are ready to go back home to Jamaica, they "expect their children to settle down in England" (2). There is thus a big divide in the family, as the parents are Jamaican and their children British (Stein 69). Nonetheless, even though they were born and raised British, second-generation migrants are not accepted as such because of their skin colour (Toplu 4). The boxes also show "that their time in England was but a temporary – if extended – stay" (Ibid). Although they live in London, Wade and Mildred "feel they still 'belong' in the land of their birth" (Stein 95). They also keep their disillusionment from their children, which once again deprives them of some necessary context (Toplu 2). Growing up, Faith does not understand the meaning of this hoarding of boxes, and dismisses it as "a parental quirk" (Stein 69).

Laursen argues that this generation of children born and raised in Britain does not possess the necessary tools to understand "how modern racism is rooted in the traumatic histories of slavery and colonialism" because they have been deprived of stories of the past (Laursen 58). As a matter of fact, Weihsin Gui argues that, at the beginning of the novel, Faith is "oblivious to any racial discrimination because her [...] parents [...] raised her to assimilate into mainstream British society" (82). A symptom of the parents' reluctance to talk of the past is the lack of an oral tradition in the family, as stated by Faith at the beginning of the novel. Any story Faith has of her family is one that she had to piece together using the few bits of information she managed to collect from her mother through the years. As Faith's family consists only of her nuclear family – her parents and her brother – the former are the only people in her life capable of providing her with some kind of a cultural background. Not only do Faith's parents conceal their experiences of discrimination, they also keep Jamaica to themselves, providing very few stories of their birthplace, in the hopes "that their children will adjust as 'true' British to their motherland" (Toplu 3). But Faith's parents' attempt to migrate and then assimilate into British society and culture fails not only for themselves, but also for their daughter, and as a result Faith finds herself unable "to confront and resist racism" (Gui 82). Ozun and Kuzgun state that Faith "suffers from her unknown personal history and she cannot define her cultural self" (306-307).

Moreover, when her parents inform Faith about their plans to go back to Jamaica, her surprise and anger show how little Faith identifies with Jamaica, because of her lack of knowledge about her parents' (an her) origins (Perfect 34-35). Her first reaction upon hearing them say that they are thinking of moving back home is to think they are going back to their previous flat. When she learns that they are, in fact, considering going to Jamaica, she asks them why, and as they start answering, Faith thinks "Id stopped listening. Because what I meant by why, the question I wanted answering was, why Jamaica? Why is Jamaica home?" (49). This emphasises how little connection she feels to her parents' birthplace. Moreover, her "denial of her family's connection to any place outside of England also indicates her complicity in a national narrative that only understands belonging in singular terms" (Medovarski 88). As Faith sees herself as English, she assumes the same of her parents: they must feel at home in England too, and she does not understand their attachment to Jamaica. She can only see herself and her family as either English or Jamaican, but is incapable of reconciling the two.

Faith's parents' silence about their past mirrors the dominant discourses at play in Britain, which "[leave] certain traumatic histories such as slavery, colonialism, and post-war migration outside mainstream British history" (Laursen 53). Elena Machado Sáez argues that school history lessons are of no help, as they perpetuate colonial views of slavery, in which slaves are stripped of any agency or humanity and "[reinscribe] the system's violence by equating the slaves with livestock" (2-3). Therefore, Faith has no source that can help her navigate her identity in a society that is often quite hostile towards her. She is also ignorant of the reasons for her parents' migration, and any questions she may have about their history are dismissed (Machado Sáez 3). This secrecy about their past is also a way to protect the family, as Faith's mother Mildred warns her daughter against repeating any of the (few) family stories to friends, which "[highlights] the Jackson family's vulnerability within British society" (Ibid). According to Lawrence Scott, migrant parents wish for their children to assimilate in the host society, and believe that the silencing of their past is the way to do so (viii). As Caryl Phillips states, the first-generation migrants "often held their tongues in order that they might protect their children" (276). This results in a lack of self-awareness in Faith, as she "rejects the negative terms of racial identity and otherness to the extent she is also disassociated from all ethnic and cultural markers, and cannot read social interactions through any of these lenses" (Machado Sáez 4). When Faith's father Wade visits her at the new house she shares with three white housemates, he asks her if "any of them your own kind?", and Faith does not initially

understand what he means, asking "What? From college?" (29). When Wade specifies that he meant "coloured" (the use of this word instead of "black" also suggests discomfort), he is also visibly uncomfortable, suggesting that he also finds it challenging to "publicly [acknowledge] such markers" (Machado Sáez 4). Faith's reaction is one of denial, as she refuses to continue the conversation, internally wishing he stopped talking about it ("I didn't ask him to explain. I didn't ask him to finish what he was saying. I didn't want him to" [29]), which is a testament to "how strongly Faith represses any sense of racial identity" (Machado Sáez 4). Machado Sáez argues that "the public systems of erasure are so ingrained within Faith that she now erases her self and silences avenues for alternative modes of self-consciousness and racial awareness" (Ibid). Moreover, according to Jeannette Baxter, in refusing to acknowledge her racial identity, Faith is complicit "in the suppression of her own black identity from her contemporary experience" (83).

Tosha Sampson-Choma underlines a similar example. It occurs when Faith's brother Carl also visits her unannounced, although this time her friends are present. Her reaction to seeing him in this environment is quite telling, and shows that she "maintains the dominant culture's perspective on Black male identity" (Sampson-Choma 89). Indeed, she looks at him through the same lens as her white friends, seeing him as "a stranger" who is "out of context" (58), as if she was noticing his appearance for the first time, including the colour of his skin, which "[leaves] her feeling menaced" (Stein 70). She heavily racialises him, highlighting his difference in contrast to her white friends, as she describes him as "large and dark", "a big man – with a brown complexion", "a black man with a round head of afro hair" (59). She feels that Carl "does not belong in her world" (Sampson-Choma 89). Sampson-Choma underlines the irony of this, as Faith, who is also the only black person amongst white people, thinks that her brother stands out but she does not (Ibid). In addition, in her review of the novel, Donna Seaman remarks that "Faith is always nearly the only person of colour in sight" (32). Indeed, Faith lives and works with white people, and does not have any contact with black people outside of her family. This means that aside from them, "her world is entirely white" (Wright 208). As she recalls her years at art school, Faith says that she was, once again, the only black person there: "I was the only black girl on the course" (21). This shows a certain degree of self-awareness on her part, and her reluctance to acknowledge it out loud demonstrate a state of denial. When Carl introduces Faith to his girlfriend Ruth, he states that his sister "lives in a house full of white people. She doesn't really like black people" (166), and Faith finds herself unable to object to this statement. As they leave, Ruth tells Faith that "perhaps you need to

spend some more time among your own people" (166). Her parents appear to be of the same opinion, as they try to set Faith up with Wade's Jamaican co-worker Noel, but Faith is clearly not fond of the idea and feels embarrassed by her parents' pushy behaviour, who want to see Faith settle down before they leave for Jamaica.

The fact that Faith works at the BBC also has its importance. Stein argues that the BBC, as a national institution, represents "Britain as a whole", which is quite significant as the BBC is also portrayed "as a sphere where racism is played out" (Stein 67). Indeed, although the BBC may be seen as "the quintessential home of British costume drama", this type of drama has long been guilty of "erasing black British experience", notably by focusing on stories promoting the greatness of the British Empire (Baxter 83). Moreover, those shows do not provide the colonised's perspective, instead "[offering] contemporary audiences a vision of national identity as rooted in an imperial past and of a Britishness implicitly equated with whiteness" (Ibid). Another aspect to be noted is the absence of black actors from these shows (Baxter 84). Indeed, while discussing Faith's job with Noel, Mildred remarks that they have a black actor on a TV show (although she also avoids the word "black", instead using "coloured"), which highlights this as a rare occurrence. However, Faith is oblivious to the role she plays in those TV representations (Baxter 84). She is in charge of labelling and organising the clothes "that will dress the actors of world history [...] and in so doing, Faith is not only complicit in the preservation of a heritage industry that offers escape routes from the present into mythologized constructions of the past, but she is also complicit in the production of palatable historical narratives that deny her" (Ibid). Then, Medovarski underlines the fact that Faith's supervisor Henry makes some remarks that echo the history of slavery: when he meets Faith on her first day, he asks her "Are you for me?", which is "a question that evokes connotations of ownership – not just of Faith's labour but of her entire person" (90). Moreover, Medovarski writes that Faith "is immediately cast as both invisible and hypervisible", as Henry forgets her presence, and then "controls the way she is allowed to occupy space by only allowing her to sit in one specific chair" (90). Moreover, Henry's first reaction upon seeing Faith for the first time is to "momentarily [open] his eyes wide in surprise" (36). Although the novel does not specify what causes the surprise, and Faith does not comment on it, it seems probable, based on other similar reactions that occur throughout the novel, that it is because Faith is black. As stated before, few black people seemed to work at the BBC, which could also contribute to this sort of response.

Later on, while on a visit to her friend Simon's house, Faith meets his mother, who asks her questions about her family, and makes her realise how little she knows, as she is unable to answer any. In contrast, Simon's house is filled with antiques, "passed down from generation to generation" (140), which, aside from symbolising his family's wealth, also "provides a material route through which the family can confirm its already well-established genealogy and pass on to succeeding generations the privileges that accompany property ownership" (Medovarski 95). Simon's house is also full of family portraits. Moreover, his room contains a painting he made of the royal's family tree, which shows that "the discourses of the domestic, the familial, and the national become explicitly intertwined" (Medovarski 95). Medovarski argues that his reproduction of the royal family tree allows him "to interpolate himself and his ancestors into the national family" (96). This shows a sharp contrast with Faith's situation: not only does she not know anything about her ancestry, she knows very little about her extended family; the small family tree represented on the first page of the book is quite different to the more extensive one in Simon's room (Medovarski 96). Unlike Simon, Faith is unable to connect her personal history to the nation (Ibid). Marion, another one of Faith's friend, has a family which also shows a contrast with Faith's family: Marion and her family have indeed "all lived in the same streets for generations" (Medovarski 88). Faith envies Marion because she knows her extended family: "I envied Marion that she had a gran and grandad and aunts and uncles and sisters and cousins" (106), which shows that she longs to know more about her history and her family.

2.2 Navigating racism in the London of the 1980s

Faith's identity is precarious from the beginning of the novel. In the course of the first part of the narrative, she experiences a series of situations – which are mostly instances of racism and prejudice– that result in her seriously questioning her worldview, and cause her to suffer an identity crisis, showing her that the way she navigates her identity in British society is untenable.

Racism starts at school, with derogatory remarks aimed at Faith: boys bully her by saying that her "mom and dad came on a banana boat" (1). As Machado points out, they explicitly reference her race, calling her a "darkie", whereas Faith's description of them avoids any direct racial description, pointing to "the boys with unruly hair, short trousers and

dimpled knees that went bright red in the cold" (Machado Sáez 2). Faith is incapable of articulating an adequate response, and cries instead; her friends, however, completely reject the idea that her parents came on a banana boat in an effort to defend her. The image of the banana boat is decontextualised and used by those boys as an insult, which insists on Faith's racial difference to deny her a right to belong (Machado Sáez 2). When Mildred tells Faith that they did, in fact, come on a banana boat, instead of countering the racist taunts, it seems to reinforce them: Faith thinks that "the little white boys were right"; this time she refers to their complexion, which seems to suggest that she "[connects] the authority of the boys to their racial identity" (Ibid). Machado Sáez argues that despite being told that the boat was in fact "a proper boat with cabins and everything" (2), Faith still pictures her parents sleeping on the floor amongst the bananas, thus revealing that the little boys' "racist logic is ingrained in Faith's imaginary as well" (Machado Sáez 2). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that this image is one that Faith has before her mother clarifies things: as she asks Faith "What, you think we sit among the bananas?", Faith confirms that "[she] didn't tell her but, yes, that was exactly what [she] thought" (2). However, the story makes Faith think of "slave ships from [her] history lessons", suggesting that she has, indeed, not subverted the racist discourse (2).

On the other hand, Faith does not learn about the history of West Indian migration in her history classes (Laursen 59), and the lessons about slavery fail to critique this episode of history adequately, instead presenting it "as something 'convenient' and 'innocuous', [...] as something that 'worked'" (Perfect 34). The children "had to write essays telling the facts", and "drew diagrams of how the triangular trade in slaves worked, like [they] drew diagrams of sheep farming in Australia" (2). Faith "hated those lessons", as "although there were no small boys laughing and pointing, [she] felt them. 'Your mum and dad came on a slave ship', they would say. 'They are slaves'" (2). Faith is thus capable of applying the racist remarks to new situations, without the boys having to utter a word; it thus seems that she has indeed, on some level, internalised the insults. The episode also points to the fact that she has a certain understanding of her collective history, as she connects slavery to her family.

Racist incidents do not stop at school, and are scattered throughout the first part of the novel. Faith gets her first job offer at her degree show, making her "one of the lucky ones" (32), but her tutor dismisses her achievement by stating that the job offer is "to do with [Faith] being black and everyone else on the course being white" (32). In doing so, the tutor "reduces race to a market(able) category"(Machado Sáez 5), and decides that Faith was chosen not

because of her talent but because her "work has an ethnicity which shines through" (32). This ethnicity is not only vaguely defined but also erroneously, as the tutor clearly has no idea about Faith's Jamaican background, stating that her work has "a sort of African or South American feel which is obviously part of you" (32). Faith nevertheless recognises the most probable explanation for the job opportunity: "Or perhaps it was that I was just better than everyone else" (32). Once again, Faith is shown to be the only black person in a white environment. This may suggest that, in an effort to deny her racial difference, she tries to fit into the accepted, white English culture by affiliated herself with white people.

As Claudia Marquis points out, Faith is surrounded by racism, even when it is not directly aimed at her (Marquis 42). While her friend Marion's family treats her "as one of their own", they still display racist behaviour and remarks (Marquis 42). On one occasion, as Faith visits them, Trina, Marion's little sister, has gotten into a fight at school, and casually uses the words "wog" and "coon" to describe her opponent in front of Faith, clearly thinking nothing of it as she follows those words by casually asking "Faith, do you see anyone famous when you're at work?" (94). Marion's father uses exactly the same language in front of Faith:

She went and clocked some darkie. And this coon's mum and dad come up the school wanting to see Trina. They said she'd been bullying their daughter. Now their daughter is a great big, six foot bloody gorilla and Trina, as you know, is only little. [...] But then they starts shouting in my face that I don't know how to bring up my kids properly. I though that's bloody rich comin' from a coon (96).

Marion's grandma also takes part in the flow of racial slurs, adding that "You know how to bring up your kids – you don't need not bloody help from no nig-nog" (96). And although Marion, following this tirade, "looked briefly at [Faith], smiled and shrugged a little", she does not challenge her family's vocabulary, and neither does Faith (97). In fact, Faith does not comment on the incident, simply reporting the words, without offering any reaction in the narrative. This shows how unwilling she is to acknowledge racism, and that she has detached herself so completely she might not even really make a connection to herself, and therefore does not see that the insults also concern her.

Later on, Faith goes with her friends, as well as Marion and her father, to see two of their friends perform at a pub. The last act of the night is a black poet, and "seeing him makes Faith aware of her own black cultural identity" (Laursen 60):

Suddenly, as I looked up at this black poet I became aware that the poet and me were the only black people in the room. I looked around again – it was now a room of white people. I became nervous waiting for the poet to start. I was thinking, 'Please be good, please.' The poet became my dad, my brother, he was the unknown black faces in our photo album, he was the old man on the bus who called me sister, the man in the bank with the strong Trinidadian accent who could not make himself understood. He was every black man – ever. (104-105)

When Marion's father makes another racist remark, loudly shouting 'Good' when the poet announces his last poem, Faith recognises that those comments also concern her. Marion does condemn her father's behaviour, admitting that "he can be a bit like that. A bit... racist", and that his comments affect Faith and are also aimed at her– "I said to him, how do you think it makes Faith feel – I mean, he's so insensitive. He just said, as usual, 'Oh, Faith's different'. And I said, 'No she isn't. Faith is my best friend and she is black'" (105-106). Nonetheless, she tries to justify his behaviour by stating that "it's a cultural thing", invoking her working-class background, something that she regularly does: "Whenever Marion talked about her white working-class origins [...] everything they said, everything they did was a cultural thing", despite Marion admitting "not that being a cultural thing makes it alright" (106). Although Faith likes Marion's family, she always feels a bit uncomfortable around them because of their prejudice, as "when they looked at me [...] [she] always wondered who they saw" (106). Marion's long rationalisation of her family's racism gets to Faith: "My heart was thumping very loudly in time with the dustbins in the band", and she snaps at her, telling her "I don't need a lecture today" (106). Marion nevertheless continues, invoking feminism, and as Faith also remembers a previous speech she gave her "in her strident Marxist phase", saying that "as a feminist we were all sisters – black and white" (107), Faith angrily asks her to shut up and walks away, "realising that racism cuts across gender and class" (Laursen 61). Moreover, Gui argues that Marion's explanation of racism as a cultural thing only serves to show Faith that the British culture she has thought she was a part of "ultimately demeans and excludes someone like her" (83). Faith starts to realise her difference: she identifies to a black person's experience, refuses to hear Marion's excuses and recognises (although not verbally) racism, and the fact that it also concerns her. This also shows that her belonging is hindered by her skin colour.

Faith encounters racism in her work place as well. When she first meets her colleague Lorraine, the former states out of the blue to Faith: "My boyfriend's coloured. [...] I live with him and his family. They're ever so nice. Although some people are prejudice [*sic*], aren't they?" (41). Faith's reaction is, once again, to be silent. Ironically, Lorraine seems to be one of

those prejudiced people she mentioned. A story Faith reports has Lorraine talking about her father-in-law in racist terms: "I mean his dad's lovely, really, but he's got this temper and when he shouts I can't understand a word he's saying. It just sounds like a load of bwuba bwuba. [...] And he looks frightening, this big black... sorry, Faith ... coloured man. I don't mean to be horrible but..." (75). Lorraine uses racist stereotypes in portraying her boyfriend's dad, and does not seem to be aware of it; nonetheless, she corrects herself by saying 'coloured' instead of 'black' (but does not see anything wrong with the rest of what she has said) – which does not erase the racist nature of her story. Once again, Faith does not react to Lorraine's prejudice. It seems to be a common occurrence for Lorraine to make such comments, as it fits into the telling of a typical day at work for Faith.

Furthermore, Faith faces discrimination when she attempts to get a promotion. When she shares her desire to apply for a job as dresser – as she feels her current job is below her qualifications – her colleague Lorraine encourages her to apply, but casually remarks that "they don't have black dressers" (79). She then seems surprised that Faith had not noticed it, and proceeds to explain to her that she "overheard [a couple of the managers] saying that they didn't think the actors would like a coloured person putting their clothes on them" (79). Lorraine goes on to say that their boss Henry remarked that this would not be a problem if the actor was coloured, as "some of them are now on television" (79). As Faith's "hands began to shake" (79), Lorraine asks her repeatedly if she's upset. Once again, Faith is not able to verbally answer the question, only shrugging in response, displaying an inability to voice her anger (Machado Sáez 6). This silence shows that she is not used to recognising discrimination, and as a result is incapable of formulating an answer to it. Machado Sáez argues that Faith's co-workers "make [her] aware of the racist rules of the workplace only to 'put her in her place' and marginalize her" (6). Although Lorraine supports her decision to apply "because everybody likes [her]", Faith "remains shocked into silence" (Machado Sáez 6). The conversation unsettles her, as she is used to avoiding any kind of discourse about race, and is now forced to see that it does "shape and limit her experience, regardless of whether she is willing to acknowledge [it]" (Ibid). Moreover, her reluctance in recognising racial markers "makes her vulnerable because she cannot accurately read the power dynamics of such situations in order to navigate her way through or around them" (Machado Sáez 6). Finally, the absence of black dressers shows how far BBC's institutionalised racism goes, as it also applies to jobs that are behind the scenes (Baxter 84). Mildred's reaction to Faith reporting Lorraine's words that there are no black dressers is one of distress, as "a look

momentarily appeared in her eyes that was close to sadness. A look that pleaded, 'you can hate me but please love my children'" (82), which confirms the sacrifices the parents have made to make sure their children are accepted as English, and also marks a sort of revelation on Faith's part, as she is the one who interprets her mother's expression in this way.

Faith quickly realises that the interview for the job seems more like an ambush than an actual interview. After the second interviewer asks her if she does not think she is overqualified, she answers that she "[sees] it as a progression", to which he responds: "So you wouldn't see this as a long-term commitment to dressing?" (122). Faith notices that he had "a slight smirk on his lips. His expression looked as if he'd cornered me, as if this was not an interview but some sort of sport. He looked as if he might say, 'Aha gotcha!'" (123). It seems that the interview is a sham, and that they are trying to find any excuse not to hire Faith, most likely because of her skin colour. The interviewers then go on to tell her that she walks too slowly according to her work evaluations, and then deny any racial prejudice when Faith asks them about it. Not only do they vehemently deny any accusation of racism, they "are more interested in where Faith heard the 'rumour' that there are no black dressers than in Faith's concerns" (Medovarski 91). They also suggest that Faith "may be getting a little sensitive because of all the things that have been said", to try and derail the conversation away from race (125-126). The fact that Henry "found [her] interview funny" also shows he is oblivious to (or unconcerned about) the racism taking place in their work environment (127). Interestingly, this is the first time in the novel Faith openly and vocally acknowledges her skin colour and the fact that it may lead to discrimination.

In the end, Faith does however get the job. Baxter argues that, while her promotion can "[gesture] to a certain upward mobility", it is still inscribed "in wider discourses of racial in/equality and reverse discrimination in 1980s Britain" (81). The novel does not make clear whether Faith is given the job based on merit or as a part of quotas linked to positive discrimination, although Baxter suggests the latter is indicated in the text (Baxter 84-85). Ruth does not let Faith believe that she got the job out of merit. She asks Faith "but why did you get the job?", to which Faith answers "Because I'm good?" (163). Ruth does not accept this response: "'No', she said forcefully. 'It's just to shut you up. Its tokenism. It's what they do. How many other black people are working there? None, I bet. So they just employ you and then they can say, yes, we have a black person. And they carry on discriminating just the same'" (163). She also urges Faith to take action against her employers, to which Faith

responds with surprise, and she does not talk about reporting them again in the novel. This brings into question Faith's first job offer: as she rationalises and thinks she got the job because of her talent, her tendency to overlook prejudice, even in this particular case when the interviewers' bigotry was blatant, makes one wonder whether this was also the case with her previous job. Lorraine's reaction to Faith's promotion is positive, but she makes a strange remark, saying that "I knew he wasn't prejudiced. He loves animals", which is quite a peculiar connection to make: it seems to equate black people to animal, which is not only a dehumanising suggestion, but is also one that is part of a long history of such behaviour towards black people (157). In the influential *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986), psychiatrist Frantz Fanon exposes the racist assumption that "The Negro is an animal" (Fanon 113).

After being promoted, Faith has to wait for weeks: as she is too inexperienced to work in production, she is put on hold, and has to wait around in case an emergency occurs. While she is on standby, she has to stop herself from thinking that this is due to her skin colour, and does not even, in fact, dare to think that thought all the way through: "I had to stop myself from thinking that the reason I was not in the studio dressing rooms [...] was because..."; "I had to stop myself from thinking that because – " (172). When she finally gets her first dressing job, it is not to be dressing actors but dolls for a children's show (Baxter 85). The fact that she is expected to dress puppets only makes "the unspoken assumption that she should not be allowed to dress the white actors" more real (Medovarski 91). As the show is for children, it also infantilises Faith, which again leads to racist theory. Fanon writes about the assumption that "The Negro is just a child" (27). He adds, that "A white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child", a behaviour he has observed in hundreds of white men of all walks of life (Fanon 31). The discrimination Faith faces thus all refer back to racist attitudes which are widespread.

Then, Faith also experiences racism and an attack on her sense of identity when she goes to her housemate Simon's house in the country for the weekend. Simon describes the village as "quintessentially English", and it reminds Faith of "a model village that used to be in [their] park in London" (133-134). Like Marion's, "Simon's family home seems deeply rooted in the national landscape and culture", which is also transcribed by the numerous family portraits, inherited furniture and the royal family's family tree (Gui 83). Faith's attitude upon arriving in the country shows that she is already more aware of racism, as she is scared of what the reaction of Simon's mother will be upon meeting her: "And suddenly I became

mouth-dryingly apprehensive. Scared. Scared his mother would look at my face, gasp for air whilst grabbing her pearl necklace, then hit the gravel in a faint" (137). And although Simon's family is very welcoming, other inhabitants are not so friendly: when on a walk with Simon and his mother, Faith gets left behind for a bit, and other walkers act distant towards her. Simon's mother says greeting people while on a walk is a sort of tradition, and passersby do return the greeting; when Faith is alone, however, no one acknowledges her. Wright remarks that, as Faith becomes stuck in the mud during the walk, Simon and his mother are both "(metaphorically and literally) breezily unaware of her difficulties in keeping up with them" (Wright 205). When they get to the local pub later on, she also feels all eyes on her and that the place quietens down as she walks in. Although it seems very likely that people do in fact stare at her as she enters, it is also significant that she herself now understands that her skin colour impacts how people react. When she meets one of Simon's mother's friend, Andrew Bunyan, he asks her where she is from and refuses to take "London" for an answer, instead specifying: "I meant more what country are you from?" (150). Faith does not say she is English, as she knows "that was not what he wanted to hear", and explains that her "parents are from Jamaica", to which Bunyan responds "As soon as you walked in I thought I bet she's from Jamaica", disregarding Faith's subsequent correction that "just [her] parents are" (150). Marquis positions this as an instance of contemporary English racism, as Bunyan refuses to hear that Faith is English, and positions her "as an outsider and migrant" (43). Bunyan then tells Faith about his time in Jamaica, where he met a man who shared his last name, which he apparently finds hilarious, especially given the fact that the man was "black... black! [...] Darker than you, my dear, if you'll pardon me saying" (151). When asked her opinion about this strange coincidence, Faith declares to Bunyan that it is probable that these two share a name because "your family probably owned his family once" (151). The latter vehemently rejects this idea, insisting that "[he has] no family connections in that part of the world at all" (152). This illustrates that, when Faith is finally made to talk about Jamaica she "is immediately met with denial; the suddenly embarrassed Bunyan prefers simply to silence her suggestion as to the historical connection rather than consider it" (Perfect 35). This mirrors something Levy said in an interview about the amnesia surrounding slavery in England: "[slavery] is an incredibly important event that happened [...] and there's enormous amnesia about it in this country. [...] This is very important to who we are as a nation, and it's very important to understand it" (Ley and Fischer 134).

Faith is therefore implicitly shown that she is not welcomed in this "quintessentially English" village, and she is "aware that, to the staring eyes of the villagers, she has no place in the local tradition", the "normative, white British identity" (Gui 83). The fact that this rejection is not stated outright makes it more difficult to face for Faith. Moreover, Stein argues that Faith, while being attracted to the countryside, is always forbidden entrance (Stein 78). Faith recalls that while on road trips with Carl, they sometimes "used to stop, to get out of the van with the aim of running through a field or paddling in a river. But [they] were always greeted with fences and gates and barbed wire. And [they] never knew how to actually get onto 'that green and pleasant land'" (61). Faith is only able to go into the country when she is with Simon, who is white and upper-middle-class (Medovarski 93). Deirdre Osborne writes that

there is no more durable example of an ethnicity-defined zone of exclusion for black and Asian citizens than the rural and urban divide. The British countryside (England, Scotland and Wales) remains the province of whiteness, the rural idyll functions as a nostalgic idea of Britain prior to post-war migration, and is a situation reflected in the paucity of black and Asian work that is set in the countryside, where there has been no wholesale elimination of the racism that minority ethnic people can encounter there. (7)

The last straw for Faith, amidst all these more or less veiled attacks on her and her identity, is when she and Simon witness a racist attack on a bookshop that sells "gay and lesbian and black and 'Third World' fiction" (Laursen 61). The police's reaction to the aggression intensifies Faith's shock, as they dismiss it by saying that "They say they're National Front but they're not, they're just a bunch of thugs" (179). The policeman then goes on to blame the bookshop for their own recklessness. The police also choose to blame "thugs" for the attack, thus targeting a few people, rather than tackling a more institutional form of racism (Medovarski 100). On the other hand, Faith sympathises with the victim and sees her as an individual, referring to her by her name (Machado Sáez 7): "My head was hurting like it had come out in sympathy with Yemi. That was the woman's name, which I learnt from the ambulanceman shouting" (180). This empathy is not expressed by anyone else, as the subsequent retelling of the event by Simon not only erases Yemi's identity but also the racial undertones of the assault (Machado Sáez 7). The attack, which follows Faith's trip to Simon's house, is a reminder that racism is not only common in the countryside, but is also very much present in the city (Medovarski 99). This incident shows the continuity between more subtle, verbal forms of racism and extremely violent ones: all of the instances of racism Faith has faced so far "exist on a continuum – they are not isolated, unrelated incidents" (Ibid). The

violence is not only directed at the bookshop worker, but also at the shop itself, "[revealing] a much larger scope of racist hate" (Machado Sáez 7), as "a half-full bag of shit was splatted on the table—while the other half of its contents slid down the bookcase of gay and lesbian books. And the black and Third World fiction was spray-painted with 'Wog'" (177). The attack can also be read as an "attempt at censorship", as the bookshop proposes literature that offers "alternative perspectives that make visible the racism, sexism, and homophobia on which all nations are based" (Medovarski 99). This censorship is not unlike Bunyan's attitude, as he completely dismisses narratives that differ from the main, accepted one, ignoring the violence at the heart of the construction of England which is commonly erased from national discourses (Medovarski 99-100). Faith finds herself unable to deal with this racism that takes the form of violence or to ignore it as she did with previous, milder forms of racism (Machado Sáez 7). As Faith calls the police, her hand gets stuck to the paint sprayed on the phone, and in her effort to remove her hand, she leaves a bit of her skin behind. Not only does the forcefulness with which she rips her skin show that Faith really tries to distance herself from the black woman, it also gestures as to how "the extreme danger and horror of this social violence is so vividly present for Faith that it becomes inscribed into her own body" (Machado Sáez 7). It is also inscribed through her skin, which is significant as it is a signifier of her race. In addition, this event "forces Faith to connect the verbal erasure of her racial identity to social violence, but this event is so traumatic that it ultimately leads to her nervous breakdown" (Machado Sáez 6).

When she and Simon go back home, Simon tells the story to their friends. Faith interrupts him twice to specify that the woman attacked "was black like me" (182). This is an important turn in the novel, as it is the first time Faith openly refers to her race. Her friends' refusal to recognise that the woman was black only pushes Faith further into a state of shock (Perfect 35). The way they talk about the episode erases the racial nature of the attack, which Perfect calls "an act of wilful amnesia" that "finally pushes Faith to collapse into despair, confusion and self-loathing" (35). Faith also acknowledges that

the story sounded different when Simon retold it. It gained more menace with hindsight. It was now a fact that three men walked into a bookshop in daylight and hit someone over the head with a blunt instrument because they didn't like them. It was real. Not something skipped over in the local paper or tutted about at the dinner table. (181-182)

This last sentence suggests that she is used to dismissing similar racist incidents, because they probably seem more distant: the shock and violence of this particular event force Faith to finally acknowledge not only the accident but also the reasons behind it, which also concern her. Faith's presence is forgotten as their friends comfort Simon and ignore not only Faith's presence but also the trauma she has suffered in witnessing someone like her being a victim of racist violence (Machado Sáez 7). This leads her to see the world through colour, seeing "three white hands and one black stretch forward" (Machado Sáez 8). Simon is depicted as a hero, and the racist motives of the attackers are dismissed and forgotten, even though the National Front initials are painted all over the bookshop, along with racial and sexual slurs (Wright 210). Her friends portray the same type of behaviour as the policeman, with Mick echoing the sentiment that "they're just a bunch of thugs", to which Faith's reaction is to think, "He said it as if just a bunch of thugs couldn't hurt you" (183). Moreover, when he asks Simon "Why were you chasing them? What were you going to do if you caught up with them?", her friends "all laughed", whereas Faith remembers that "Carl once came home with bruises on his eyes, his face, his arms. The bruises took weeks to heal and turned bits of his skin blue. He never told anyone what happened" (183-184). In the meantime, her friends start to laugh at the affair, which results in Faith finally reacting: "I tipped my cup of tea slowly over the table. 'Will you all just shut up. Just fucking shut up. It's not funny!'" (184). The connection she makes to herself, and her brother, makes her realise that this attack is inscribed into a larger frame of racial discrimination.

As she realises that her friends are incapable or unwilling to understand, Faith decides to go home to her parents, "to be with [her] own people"; she knows that "they would understand how [she] felt – black on the outside and cowardly custard-yellow on the inside" (185). She resolves to believe what Ruth had told her: "what it all comes down to in the end is black against white. It was simple. It was so simple" (185). Faith thus goes from one extreme to another, going from completely denying the importance (and, to an extent, the existence) of race to wanting to live solely through it. But this simplistic view is almost instantly proven false. When she gets home, Ruth's family is visiting, and it turns out that they are white. Considering that Ruth portrays a very strong black identity, and told Faith it came down to black against white, this confuses Faith and proves to her that this way of thinking is not viable either. This shows Faith "how the histories of Britain and its colonies are intertwined, and the impossibility of constructing essential white or black family histories", and it is really the last straw for her, as her understanding of the world collapses. Laursen writes that as Faith

"was hoping to return to the comfort of a collective black history through her parents, such a perception of an essential 'black' collective cultural identity is also untenable. Indeed, it is only through an understanding of the hybrid nature of Jamaica that Faith can come to terms with her own place in that history" (62). However, Faith does not immediately come to that conclusion; instead of opting for a more balanced, less radical view of the world, she finds herself completely lost and unable to reconcile the two extremes.

All these experiences of rejection and racism combined make Faith "[lose] a comprehensive sense of herself" and result in her crisis: she is either too black, not black enough (to Ruth), not white enough (to her friends), not independent enough (to her brother) (Stein 71). These repeated attacks on her identity make her wish to "erase herself from her reality by disappearing into her room" (Machado Sáez 8). Machado Sáez argues that "Faith aspires to universal identity, she just wants to live, but such a move is implicitly self-destructive because this universal is 'not-black' and Faith endeavors to erase herself in order to fit into the privileged invisibility of whiteness" (Ibid). Lacking an alternative source of identification, Faith retreats into her bedroom where she stays for days, in the dark, refusing to talk to her housemates or to go to work, because "they didn't want [her] at the television centre. And [she] wanted to be wanted" (188). Faith's breakdown manifests in her desire to not wanting to be black anymore, she isolates herself in her room, covers the mirrors ("*Voilà! I was no longer black*" [187]). Faith's "ego is split [...] in this moment of crisis, being black and living unencumbered appear to Faith as mutually exclusive entirely" (Stein 70). This split is illustrated through a change of narrator: Faith refers to herself in the third person – describing herself as a "black girl lying in bed" – and sees herself through the eyes of others, as an outsider (Stein 70). Faith stays in her room for an unspecified amount of time, until her parents suggest she take a trip to Jamaica. Faith's reaction to the proposition shows how cut off she is from her origins: she asks them if she could go to Spain instead, as Jamaica is too far away (Perfect 36). Her mother tells her that "everybody should know where they come from", and Machado Sáez argues that Mildred has understood that "Faith's lack of context is a gap that can only be filled by the acquisition of a cultural and historical foundation within the geographic space of the Caribbean, through her extended family" (8).

2.3 Retrieving lost origins

Stein highlights the importance of the theme of return (whether it be a physical return or a more spiritual one) in post-colonial literature (57). It is especially prominent among black British writers of Caribbean origins (Nyman 37). Return should be seen to "signify agency" and "is an act of participating in the weaving of collective memory [...] rather than merely a comfort-seeking activity" (Stein 57). It is certainly a central theme in *Fruit of the Lemon*, as is the notion of memory. Historian Tzvetan Todorov insists on the importance of remembering and writes in *Les abus de la mémoire* that "Nul ne doit empêcher le recouvrement de la mémoire [...] Lorsque les événements vécus par l'individu ou par le groupe sont de nature exceptionnelle ou tragique, ce droit devient un devoir: celui de se souvenir, celui de témoigner" (Todorov 16). This adds to what was said above about Britain's collective amnesia about its role in slavery and the importance of remembering, and Faith's process of recuperation of these memories.

Stein argues that Faith leaves England on a search for her identity and her Englishness, which are interconnected notions (67). She goes to "her ancestral home", Jamaica, and "'returns' to a place from which she has not come" (Toplu 6-7). Wright describes Faith's journey as one of "reverse colonization"; a journey where she is made aware of her "status as Other, physically retreats by reenacting the colonization process, and moves from Britain to Jamaica to retrieve and recuperate her colonial roots" (Wright 214). I would argue that the use of the word "reverse", however, points to a different kind of colonisation, like the one described in Louise Bennett's poem "Colonization in Reverse". In this poem, the reverse colonisation refers to Jamaicans coming to England – like Faith's parents – (and "colonising" it), as opposed to the English coloniser coming to Jamaica; it is in this sense a true reversal, whereas Faith also goes from England to Jamaica. She does however reverse her parents' "colonization".

When she arrives in Jamaica, Faith feels lost and describes her unease as "culture shock" (197). If her being black became a problem for her back in England, at the same time it does not make her feel like she belongs in Jamaica (Laursen 63). Nyman argues that in many diasporic narratives, "the idea of the fixedness of home is criticized in a variety of ways, including the protagonists' travel and their constant sense of unbelonging in spaces where national (and racial) purity/uniformity is preferred (Nyman 81). Faith does not belong in

England because she is black; however, as I will show, her blackness does not secure her belonging in Jamaica either.

As she lands in Jamaica, Faith is surprised to see the airport "packed with black faces", and has difficulties understanding Jamaican English. As she is looking for her relatives, she is worried that they will not recognise each other, and thinks that any Jamaican family "could have claimed" her, showing how little she knows about her relatives and how little connection she feels to them (Stein 71). However, as soon as she meets her aunt and notices her resemblance to her mother, "a connection is forged and part 2 [of the novel] opens with a sort of birth of Faith's Jamaican self" (Stein 71).

Although Faith is of Jamaican origin, the island is unknown to her, and she is ignorant of many of its customs, practices, and even vocabulary (Stein 76). This puts her in the same position as many readers, and allows for an explanation of those elements that would otherwise most likely not be understood by the reader (Stein 77). In order for the reader to understand those unfamiliar elements, the novel uses what Stein calls "a type of linguistic and cultural 'glossing' toward Jamaican English. The Jamaican staple fried festival, for example, is dubbed 'festival bread', sorrel becomes 'sorrel juice'" (Ibid). While this provides the reader with a better understanding of those terms, it is also possible that this technique is not just a literary device designed to make the reading easier for those who are not Jamaican. Faith, being unfamiliar with those terms as well, could simply mistakenly give them the wrong name – especially as we deal with a first-person narration. Faith has prejudice about Jamaica and the way the people live; she sees it as a place with "things that bite, sting and kill you", is taken aback by how similar her aunt's house is to her family's (instead of the mud hut she had imagined), and is generally surprised by how many things remind her of her British home. While she is transiting in America before getting her plane to Jamaica, she describes the people waiting for the plane as "shabby-looking black people" who "looked too poor to fly" (194). Her view of Jamaica is similar to the one held by white Britons (Stein 78). She also seems to have assimilated ways of thinking that link race to nation, as she is surprised to see a "completely white" stewardess speaking in a Jamaican accent: "blonde hair, grey eyes – no stray African genes in her. 'Your seatbelt – could you fasten it?' she instructed as I stared at her for far too long" (197). Just as she lands in Jamaica, a man tricks her into giving him money, and she is completely lost and unable to find her way. When she gets to her aunt Coral's house, she is frightened by the dog, thinking "Rabies! I'd read about it – the Third

World is full of it" (211). Faith thus displays a behaviour that is full of prejudice against her parents' homeland.

Faith does not immediately blend in in this new country, notably because of her dressing style and her accent (Stein 74). However, after a few days in Jamaica, she switches her clothes to more Jamaican-like ones, which gestures to her transforming sense of identity (Toplu 10). Faith discovers that she can in fact blend in in this new place through her looks (Scott ix). When going to a wedding, she is ecstatic to find out she goes unnoticed – so much that she starts to think about going to Jamaica regularly, and even about living there:

No one noticed me. I smiled at anyone who looked in my direction. But no one did. I was blending in. I was just one of the crowd. I was just another guest. It was wonderful [...] And no one watched me [...] And I thought... I will visit Jamaica regularly. I thought... I could even live here. Who, on this Caribbean island, would care how slowly I walked? [...] In Jamaica I could be anything. (344-345)

This sentiment is short-lived, however, as she attracts attention by wearing trousers to church.

Faith experiences a similar situation while she is retrieving her bag from the airport earlier in the narrative. As she is waiting around with other Jamaicans, her reaction is similar to theirs and she starts referring to the group as "we":

They left me with a small group of people huddling round double glass doors, shifting from foot to foot in the heat as *we* all fanned ourselves with the bits of paper. More people joined *us* and *we* began mumbling and rolling our eyes. [...] I began to complain. 'Excuse me. Excuse me, *we* have all been here a very long time' [...] Several people in my crowd said, 'Um-uhmmm' to that. (261-263; my emphasis)

However, this feeling is once again temporary, as the custom officer's attitude makes her feel like a foreigner: "And I had never in my life felt so English" (264). Other small details show that Faith is not from Jamaica. During the wedding ceremony, she is terrified of the really strong wind, whereas no one else seems to notice: "Only I ducked. Only I gasped. [...] only I noticed it" (350). The event is presented in a humorous way, as the other guests only make remarks such as "Oh, there is a little bit of breeze today" (351). The difference between her and Coral's (as well as Vincent's) reaction to a dog hitting their car also showcases a big cultural contrast: as Faith is adamant in making sure the dog is unhurt, her relatives are more concerned with the damage done to the car. Although her skin colour is not the reason she stands out, as it was the case in England, Faith still does not completely fit in (Stein 75). As Medovarski puts it, Faith "experiences Jamaica as simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar; she feels perpetually unsettled" and does not feel fully at home there (Medovarski 104-105). In

fact, her experience seems to be the opposite of the one she has in England: whereas she fits in culturally in England, her skin colour prevents her from completely blending in. The contrary occurs in Jamaica, as the reason she stands out is her ignorance of certain aspects of the culture.

In Jamaica, Faith's sense of belonging relies on acceptance from her Jamaican relatives, and she mostly gains it by learning through them about her family history (Laursen 63). Indeed, Jamaica provides Faith with the family history and oral tradition she was lacking back in England (Laursen 63). Laursen highlights the importance of an oral tradition as "essential to the creation of cultural identity and the passing on of memories in West Indian societies" (64). Through her aunt mainly, who acts as a sort of "family archivist", Faith will finally discover her own and her family's past (Marquis 44). By uncovering this alternative, lesser known side of history, Levy gives space and a voice to characters who have historically been denied one: West Indian migrants (Scott viii). I would argue that the fact that a majority of the stories told are of women also contributes to provide their points of view, as they were historically kept silent as well. Perfect points out that the novel "emphasizes that the complexities of imperial history – and, in turn, the contemporary, postcolonial moment – cannot be understood except through engaging with a polyphony of contrapuntal voices" (Perfect 40). Marquis argues that this second part of the novel features a shift in narrators: while the first part had Faith as the only narrator, the second part includes stories told to her by family members and Faith becomes more of a listener (44). This multiplicity of narrators presents "a multi-vocal approach to history" (Ibid). Machado Sáez agrees with the fact that Faith's voice is interrupted, as "other first person narratives [...] both contest her narrative authority and contradict each other, emphasizing no single truth or origin" (Machado Sáez 9). However, I would like to argue that the shift is not really one of narrators, as the narrator does not change throughout the novel. In my opinion, Faith remains the only narrator, but acts as a sort of medium for the story-tellers. Their story is retold by Faith, and interjected by the person who is telling her the story. She fills in the blanks whenever she feels it is needed; for example, when Vincent has trouble expressing himself: "and of course because she was not feeding the baby, Hester's... you know... Hester's... you know, Faith...", it is directly followed by Faith explaining it in the narration: "Hester's breasts dried of milk before they should" (309).

This narrative mode "[seeks] to expose the totalizing versions of the past, in order to initiate a form of witnessing that insists on history as alive, open and in process" (Baxter 81). Moreover, Fiona Tolan argues that, in Levy's later novel *The Long Song*, the book's multiplicity of points of view serves to disrupt the single history of colonialism proposed by Europeans, which lacks nuance (103). The same can be argued in *Fruit of the Lemon*: the many different points of view give a variety of perspectives on a subject that is too often forgotten by the English. Coral's narrative voice also makes it easier for Faith to navigate Jamaica (Toplu 9). Indeed, a knowledge of the past is necessary to make sense of the present, and "it is impossible to make a new beginning without the past recollection because then the beginning has nothing to hold on to" (Connerton in Toplu 9). The fact that Faith mediates the stories she is told by Jamaicans may point to a kind of cultural superiority on her part, as she is an English woman. It may also, however, show her interest and involvement in the stories heard, and in her history.

The stories told are not, however, completely reliable, as they "are inflected by her interlocutors' biases, their relationships to the subject, and by [Faith's] own codes of understanding" (Stein 76). The unreliable narration can be exemplified with Coral, who seems to exaggerate some of her qualities and some of her sisters' flaws: "That mother of yours was a pest to me. She was so lazy [...] I was about to say that that was what Mum said about her, but Coral carried on" (216). Indeed, at the beginning of the novel, when Faith narrates the version she has reconstructed of her parents' life, she says that "Mum had to look after chickens on the farm while her sisters, evidently, lazed around all day looking in the mirror" (4). Coral also says that "she worked very, very hard at school and was liked by all her teachers and was the most popular girl in the class. When she left the headmistress 'had tears in her eyes – she wanted me to come and work in the school. I was her favourite'" (223). She then sings her own praises talking about nursing school, as "she worked very, very hard and was liked by all the staff and was the most popular girl in her group", a sentence she repeats almost exactly when talking about her children : "And Pauline and Vincent [...] did very, very well at school and were loved by everyone" (223-228). Coral also has trouble remembering certain details, for example when trying to situate Great Aunt Myrtle: "I think Great Aunt Myrtle was me grandmother's sister although she might have been her cousin. No... wait... well, we called her Auntie Myrtle" (247), or just people's names in general ("I can't remember his name either" [251]). This is also the case for Violet, a friend of Coral and Mildred's who tells Wade's story to Faith: "'Your daddy was the son of people who were friends with my

daddy. No, wait. Now I think, I think your daddy's daddy was the son of my daddy's cousin's uncle or was it his aunt? No, I think it was his uncle. But no. Wait, wait..." (327). Coral is sometimes unsure of where she heard stories from ("But I can't remember who told me now" [303]; "As I understand it and I am not sure how I know this, Faith, so don't bother asking me"[310-311]). Vincent has the same problem : "As God is my witness, Faith, that is true. But I can't remember who told me now – I may have read it or Mummy may have said but...." (303). Moreover, when Vincent tells Faith Cecelia's story (Coral's grandmother), he adds elements that Coral would have omitted and that are therefore merely speculations on his part: "She was illegitimate, that is what I think, although Mummy would never say herself" ; "but when my mummy tells that story there is no baby, no curtain – nothing is strapped to a back" (304). One point about memory that is underlined by Todorov and can fit perfectly here is the fact that memory is selective, and that "la restitution intégrale du passé est une chose bien sûr impossible" (Todorov 14). Apart from obvious biases, then, some elements are simply forgotten by the tellers, which is not surprising as the stories told are not only quite old, but are sometimes stories that have been passed on to the teller.

Finally, one of the last chapters has Vincent tell Faith her own story, which was told to her family in Jamaica by Faith's parents, and thus shines a different perspective on the events in the first part of the novel, as they are retold through Wade and Mildred's point of view. This is quite humorous because it shows that they were quite aware of many things Faith thought she had successfully kept from them ("When I lost the job I tried to hide it from my parents because evidently, I think of them as some fool people who just got off a boat" [388]). Faith's parents understood the difference between their experience and Faith's:

Nobody wanted them to live in their house, or even in their street. They laughed at their food, at their clothes, at the way they spoke. But they knew they were Jamaican. They knew where they came from and they knew where they wanted to go. They just got on with it. They learnt to get along with people. They learnt to smile and laugh and all the while just quietly make the life they wanted. [...] But me, I was born in England and I knew nothing else. (390-391)

The main element that differs from Faith's earlier narrative is that her parents claim she was never interested in her heritage: "Evidently, I had never in my life shown even the slightest interest in my parents' life before they came to England" (391). The emphasis on "even the slightest" does come across as an exaggeration. This could also simply point to a misunderstanding between two distinct generations, and more general miscommunications

between two generations who have been socialised in different ways, the parents in a Jamaican fashion, and the daughter in a more English way.

One of the family members Faith meets and hears the story of is Constance, one of Mildred's cousins, who can be seen as Faith's "narrative double", as she has undergone an identity crisis as well (Machado Sáez 9). Faith meets Constance at a family wedding, and is immediately taken aback by how similar she looks to Mildred: "my mother with white skin" (354). Constance is the daughter of Matilda, who is also light-skinned, and who taught her child to behave like the English, before ultimately sending her to England during the war (Machado Sáez 10). Fanon states that "every colonized people [...] finds itself face to face with the [...] culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards" (Fanon 18). He also insists on the importance of mastering the language of this mother country (Fanon 20)⁵. When Constance gets back to Jamaica, she realises that her light skin, which was previously admired, is no longer looked up to (Machado Sáez 10). Constance thus tries to embrace speaking like a Jamaican again, and, much like Faith, goes on a quest to find her origins (Machado Sáez 10). She attempts to find her grandmother to rebury her in the family estate, and even travels to Sierra Leone in an effort to retrieve lost African origins, but is rejected because of her fair skin. Her identity crisis leads her to change her name to Afria and dress in an 'African' style. Her job is in tourism, "which provides Constance with a new cultural identity", as it is "often figured as the quintessential site of globalization" (Machado Sáez 10). Nonetheless, she lives alone, in an isolated place. Constance mirrors Faith's experience, while also serving to nuance it, so that the novel does not become an "utopic reading of Faith's recovery of roots" (Machado Sáez 10). Constance's stance is one of mimicry, which changes as she grows older: she first identifies with the English, and then tries to portray a more African identity (Stein 77). She has, however, not managed to "establish her own ideals and is also not able to convincingly portray toward others those ideals which she follows as her own" (Stein 77). The name "Constance" (which is French for constancy) then is quite an ironical one, as it refers to a quality that the character lacks.

⁵ Although Fanon specifies that the observations he makes are only based on the Antilles, some of them can, in my opinion, be applied in this context as well, especially since Jamaica and Martinique are both part of the Caribbean.

On the other hand, although writing that "the novel is propelled by Faith's quest for self-knowledge", Stein then argues that, as she does not actively look for this family history and seems to just receive it from relatives, she is thus "a fairly passive 'agent' in the story" (68). Perfect, however, states that Faith "*seeks out* stories from family members and family friends" (36; my emphasis), and reproduces them, mentioning who told it to her on the chapter heading : "Eunice's story told to me by Coral" etc. (36). I will also argue that Faith's role is much more than that of a passive agent. Firstly, the way the stories are transcribed is worth noting: the stories are told by Faith in a first person narration, interspersed with comments and sentences by the teller of the story. Faith does not share any reactions, but it does appear that she interacts with the speaker, asking them questions that are missing from the narrative. For instance, Coral starts off her mother's story by seemingly responding to Faith's questions: "'Now Faith, what you want to know about your grandmother? Well, her name was Grace and she was a good mother to us all', Auntie Coral told me. 'What, you want to know more?'" (267). While this may seem like Coral is simply asking rhetorical questions as an excuse to tell family anecdotes, she does interrupt her story by saying: "Different fathers! What put that idea in your head, Faith? What has your mummy been telling you?" (267). The question asked by Faith (whether her grandmother and her sister had different fathers) is absent from the narrative, but the answer makes it clear that a question was asked. Similar interruptions are present throughout the other stories, showing that Faith is not, in fact, merely a passive agent who just listens to stories, but that she asks to hear them, and interacts with them, asking questions and precisions.

In contrast to Faith's relative absence from these tales, her reaction upon visiting old family places is one of great excitement. When Coral takes her to the house she and her sisters grew up in, Faith suddenly becomes extremely enthusiastic. Coral only tells her they are at her childhood home once they are on the land, and Faith reacts very strongly: "'Here?!' I shouted at Coral. 'This is where you grew up? This is where Mum grew up ...?'" (299). She associates the land to the family stories she has been told: "This was the land bought with Panama Canal wages. Where women with cotters on their heads sold cocoa pods for chocolate. [...] This was a house that had three steps up to a veranda" (299). Faith proceeds to inspect the property from top to bottom:

I put my ear to the trunk of a lemon tree [...] I opened the doors of the chicken coops and peered behind the corrugated fence [...] I ran to another spot, 'What room was this, Coral?' [...] 'Can we see the grave again?' I asked. I had not looked properly. All I had seen was the disturbed rounded earth. I had not knelt

and pressed my ear to the ground. I had not laid flowers. I had not told them I was their granddaughter from England. I had not left my respect. (300)

Coral is surprised by Faith's behaviour: "Stop that, child. What are you doing? Have you gone mad?" (300). This scene shows how interested in her history and heritage Faith is, and how having a larger family and knowing about it is important to her. She makes up for the gap in her family history that she had to navigate through when she was younger, and now tries to take it all in in order to compensate for it.

Throughout this second section, the visual representation of the family tree progresses as it becomes more intricate and complete with each story told, although there remain certain gaps illustrated by question mark in lieu of a name. The family tree is represented on specific pages of the novel, the first one right before page 1, the last one right after the last page, and the others can be found on pages 222, 248, 282, 302, 328. All of those except the first and last one appear on the second page of a chapter retracing a family member's story. The original tree, composed only of the nuclear family, is missing "intergenerational relationships (sisters/aunties; brothers/uncles; nephews/nieces/cousins), let alone trans-generational relationships (grandparents, great-grandparents, great, great-grandparents)", and "rooted firmly on a present fostered on forgetting" (Baxter 82). Stories of exile and migration, linked to a slave and colonial ancestry, are nowhere to be found; "memories, stories and experiences have been systematically excluded from the family tree" (Baxter 82). The visual representation of Faith's family tree marks the opening of the novel, and "serves as the text's first official verbal/visual account of history" (Baxter 82). The finalised family tree, on the other hand, presents a family history spanning eight generations (Stein 68). The much more complete, finalised tree also features on the last page of the novel. Although the tree does not include dates of birth and death, it does sometimes mention the status (slave or free), origins or ethnicities (Medovarski 106). The novel ends on the now much larger, reconstructed family tree, which, while still being incomplete, is significantly more comprehensive than the one reproduced in the beginning (Perfect 36). The tree is nonetheless marked by a certain "uncertainty surrounding issues of inheritance and origin" (Baxter 86). Faith does not find out a specific, singular connection solely to Jamaica, but rather discovers that she has connections all around the world, her family tree including "a series of migrations and settlements between England, Ireland, Scotland, Cuba, Panama, Martinique, Costa Rica, Canada, and the United States", and not just Jamaican origins (Medovarski 106). These multiple origins point to the diversity and richness of Faith's family history, whose origins across the globe "[attest] to the

hybrid and transnational nature of Jamaican identity" (Laursen 63). While these stories "highlight difference within a seemingly coherent black experience in Jamaica", they nevertheless enable Faith to form "a connection with her shared, collective Jamaican identity", without forsaking her English cultural identity (Laursen 63). Faith discovers her "hybrid identity", and now has "access to two or more ethnic identities" (Toplu 10).

Todorov writes that culture is closely linked to memory: "La culture, au sens que les ethnologues donnent à ce mot, est essentiellement une affaire de mémoire: c'est la connaissance d'un certain nombre de codes du comportement, et la capacité de s'en servir" (21). He adds that "un être déculturé est celui qui n'a jamais acquis la culture de ses ancêtres, ou qui l'a oubliée et perdue" (Todorov 21). Faith, in the first part of the novel, would thus be such a "decultured being". Todorov also underlines the importance of belonging to a cultural group:

Il faut d'abord noter que la représentation du passé est constitutive non seulement de l'identité individuelle – la personne présente est faite de ses propres images d'elle-même –, mais aussi de l'identité collective. Or, qu'on le veuille ou non, la plupart des êtres humains ont besoin de ressentir leur appartenance à un groupe: c'est qu'ils trouvent là le moyen le plus immédiat d'obtenir la reconnaissance de leur existence, indispensable à tout un chacun. (51-52)

This thus points out what Faith was missing: a collective sense of (black) identity based on her family history. By gaining this history, she therefore gains recognition.

While learning about her family history, Faith also becomes aware of the racial discrimination her predecessors faced, as they "are invariably denied work out of fear of racial contamination, [...] they are socially shunned and racially abused in the street, and [...] some are simply beaten, or worked to death, because of the colour of their skin" (Baxter 86). This racism is also consistently present within the family, notably in the form of colourism (Baxter 86-78). Faith's parents are victims of it, with Mildred deemed too black by Wade's parents (Baxter 87). Racism is thus not only an outside force, but it is also "deeply embedded within formations of black identity and experience, manifesting itself, in the discriminators, in forms of physical and psychological abuse [...] and residing, in the discriminated, in feelings of humiliation, resentment and self-loathing" (Baxter 87). Such traumatic experiences explain why Faith's parents chose to silence their past and their "familial histories that so brutally treated and, ultimately, denied them" (Baxter 87). Marquis mentions the impact of colonialism, which "exceeds the moment of [its] historical occurrence, acquiring the disturbed, belated chronology of trauma" (34). This trauma may cause symptoms such as

"forms of repression, silencing" (Ibid).⁶ The novel shares many other instances of colourism, coming both from black and white people. Some of the characters who display this tendency are Coral's mother-in-law ("You see his mother thought he could do better. I was too dark" [225]), Coral's aunt who was her mother's favourite because she "had fair skin, her nose was straight and her lips were thin" (267), and Coral's father ("He didn't like being told what to do by people who were, evidently, darker than him" [290]; "William did not like his daughters to mix with anyone who was darker than they were" [292]). Coral's response and explanation to these incidents is to rationalise them: "You must understand, Faith, that was how it was in those days" (225); "That's how it was" (292).

On the other hand, it is also interesting to note that, while Faith's trip lasted two weeks, the novel only relates the many activities she has done in the few last chapters; the other chapters, while sometimes relating some specific things she has done – such as going to a wedding or visiting her mother's old house – mostly focus on the retelling of old family stories. While Faith has learnt a lot about her ancestry, she still knows little about her more direct family: she only has little information about Vincent and Pauline, Coral's children, and does not even know anything about Pauline's family, which is exemplified in the family tree by the entries: 'Pauline's husband', and then three 'son' for their children.

As a primary conclusion, I will join Perfect in saying that, while her trip does not make Faith claim Jamaica as her home, it provides her with an understanding of her family's past (Perfect 36). Her trip helps her acquire "a sense of a wider history, which was kept from her because it was too traumatic to pass on", and makes her rethink her parents' arrival in Britain as the beginning of her family history (Laursen 63). The more Faith learns about her history, the closer she gets "to understanding her own, individual history as it exists in an intricate, and often, difficult, relation to a rich ancestral collective" (Baxter 87). Her new knowledge allows her to situate herself more precisely and with more self-confidence.

Finally, I will now briefly touch on the concept of memory. The notion of memory is closely linked to the diaspora. The diaspora involves many generations, as it "can be inherited since its memory can be passed on" (Stein 63). There is thus, theoretically, no end to the diaspora as its memories can live on forever (Ibid). The diaspora, in this case, does not refer

⁶ Although I will not expand on the notion of trauma (which would necessitate a very in-depth analysis), it is interesting to mention it here.

to individual experiences and memories, but rather to "a communal memory and awareness of dispersal which marks the condition of diaspora, and is one of the decisive features of communal identification" (Ibid). Stein then argues that "the condition of diaspora can not only be *realized* in and through memory, but memory also *delimits* the diaspora condition" (Ibid). Diaspora is not, however, experienced in the same way for every generation, as "there is a difference between one's own memories, the experiences of one's own generation, and those inherited from the preceding generations" (Stein 64). The current experience of diaspora in Britain is one which "is concerned to struggle for different ways to be British" (Clifford in Stein 65). Diaspora is also "multilocalized and transcends the nation space" (Stein 65). In learning about her past, Faith could thus add this inherited experience of diaspora to the lived one she herself experienced firsthand in England, and realise that her identity is not defined by place, and that there is not one singular way to be English.

2.4 The notion of home

Finally, I would like to discuss an notion which is an important part of the diaspora and of Faith's journey – the concept of home. Stein uses Paul Gilroy's notion of the distinction between "the location of residence and the location of belonging", which is quite self-explanatory (Gilroy in Stein 69). This difference is visible in Faith's parents, as the notion of house and of home are distinct for them, whereas house and home are one and the same to Faith (Stein 69). Once again, the experiences of parents and children differ. Faith's feeling of not belonging does not come from being displaced or living abroad, but rather from being denied belonging in her home: "the numerous rejections experienced by Faith mark her home as not-home" (Ibid). But Faith will discover that "she can choose to locate herself in London and to belong there" (Ibid). Medovarski insists that the concept of home is a very complex notion for immigrant families, one that is "constantly shifting and in need of persistent renegotiation, based on one's context and surroundings and the familial or social communities in which one is situated [...] The novel suggests that such attempts made by the children of immigrants to settle in the UK on different terms will simultaneously unsettle dominant and bounded understandings of nationhood" (Medovarski 110). In a way we can hope that Faith's more solid sense of self will see itself reflected in the nation.

Nyman argues that the diaspora allows "to question the fixedness of identities and conceptions of home and nation, and to show that home is not necessarily a stable issue or a merely positive and empowering site" (Nyman 24). Notions such as home and belonging, for example, have become much more complex and problematised in this time of globalisation (Ibid). The notion of being home versus not being home is explained in this way: 'being home' "refers to the place where one lives within the familiar, safe, protected boundaries", whereas 'not being home' "is a matter of realising that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself" (Martin and Mohanty in Nyman 34). This definition applies perfectly to Faith: she realises that her sense of belonging hinged on her suppressing part of her identity and history to fit in the national narrative, causing her sense of safety to collapse entirely. Faith's parents, and then Faith herself, come to the conclusion that she is in need of a wider cultural context. Homesickness thus refers not to missing a physical, spatial sense of home but rather "is a longing to come home to the magic of stories, cultural memories, and myths" (Nyman 25). This definition of home is helpful in questioning traditional views of it, and in "emphasizing the role of community as a major site of belonging and identity" (Nyman 24-25). Contemporary migrant⁷ writers "explore the connection between identity and a place-based definition of home but eventually refuse to finalise such a closure" (George in Nyman 25). Home is not Jamaica either for Faith, but she takes her experience there back to England; although she considers England her home, it is now also understood through a familial and cultural history. Faith's identity crisis can thus be attributed to her being rejected by the place she called home, and is (at least partially) resolved by her acquisition of a cultural identity: "by meeting her extended family in Jamaica, Faith gains entrance into a broader community, which connects her Afro-Caribbean background to her Black British subjectivity" (Machado Sáez 9). She gains a more nuanced sense of identity, which rejects the binaries she previously lived by and which were untenable.

2.5 Towards a more complete sense of cultural identity

The novel ends with part 3, titled 'England'. It is only composed of one chapter consisting of two pages, including the final one on which the representation of the finalised family tree is found, bringing things full circle as it echoes the first part, also titled 'England', which begins

⁷Although it was specified before, Levy is not a migrant per-se but a second-generation migrant; however, I believe this literary feature applies relevantly to *Fruit of the Lemon*.

with the family tree as well. This circular structure could be construed as negative in the sense that, as it mirrors the first part, it could imply a return to things as they were before. However, as she arrives back "home" to England, it appears that Faith has managed to let go of the dominant discourse through the discovery of her family history (Marquis 45). She reclaims her history and feels pride in it: "I was coming home. I was coming home to tell everyone. My mum and dad came to England on a banana boat" (Marquis 45). This creates another narrative symmetry, referencing the taunts of the little boys present on the first page, and this reclamation of her history contrasts with her previous reluctance to acknowledge it (Perfect 37). Faith is no longer ashamed of her family background, as she reclaims it and denies any other interpretations of it, such as the playground insults about her family (Marquis 45). Marquis argues that "when she reclaims the jibes and insults about her migrant history, she acknowledges the ways in which slavery, exile, diasporic formation, and migration have shaped both the Caribbean and black British experience" (46). Faith does not only bring back a new sense of awareness, but also many material things, which are nonetheless for the most part also endowed with meaning. Not only does she pack shirts meant for tourists and a gift from Coral, she also takes home a stone picked up at Fort Charles, and "a bag of red coffee berries that she intends to roast when she gets to London", just like her grandfather used to do (Machado Sáez 10). This "mix of commodities, authenticity, imagination-history, and a tradition of consumption come together to form an incomplete and yet sufficient foundation from which Faith will rebuild herself" (Machado Sáez 10-11). While she now has a connection to Jamaica when she previously had none, England remains the place she feels most at home; nonetheless, her trip has allowed her to strengthen her identity through the discovery of her ancestry (Machado Sáez 11). One of the takeaways of the novel is that identity is not a fixed notion, but rather "is a process and is constantly *in process*" (Pready 27), and is therefore "never complete" (Marquis 44). It is also "shown to be fluid, flexible, and hybrid, rather than a mere product of the nation-state" (Nyman 39). Faith manages to connect "British public memory to her own private history" (Marquis 45). She "finds an alternative sense of historical belonging that rivals the national history of Britain", and acquires a form of double-consciousness (Marquis 45-46). There is a "need to understand that home is a construct and that a place-related understanding of home is to be replaced with an acceptance of diasporic identity" (Nyman 56), which is what Faith appears to have achieved, or to be on the way to achieving, although she still refers to England as her home. Faith's newfound awareness and reclamation of her family history "makes her better able to deal with the kinds of attack that she had previously so feared" (Perfect 36). The ending seems to imply Faith will assert her

identity in a more self-assured manner, which is something she did not do previously. I would argue that her name could then be seen in two ways. It can be construed in an ironic manner, as it may convey her parents' faith that their daughter would fit in England (which was not quite the case at the beginning). However, the ending may give a more positive meaning to her name, as it shows faith in the idea that her experience will be different from her parents, thanks to her growth throughout the narrative.

Nonetheless, Wright argues that despite the hope conveyed by Faith's newfound, extended knowledge of herself and her origins, the novel's ending is ambiguous (210). Faith's return to England is celebrated by the fireworks of Guy Fawkes' night, mirroring her parents' arrival decades earlier (Ibid). Like them, she feels that the fireworks are celebrating her (Ibid). However this is not the case, and "the slow realization that England is unmindful of her return", as well as the duality of the fireworks' description—"at once dazzling but violent, brilliant but ephemeral"—cast a bit of a shadow on an otherwise mainly positive ending (Ibid). Baxter echoes this sentiment by highlighting the fact that the ending is not a utopian one, as it does not necessarily point to "a future without prejudice and discrimination"; despite this, Faith is now better equipped to deal with it should it come about (87). Faith knows that the fireworks do not represent "England needing [her]" as she would have liked to think (396). Nonetheless, her realisation that the fireworks are not celebrating her return could also show her understanding of England, and demonstrate how well she knows the country: "At first I thought it may be a welcome home for me [...] I knew I couldn't be right and I wasn't. [...] No. I knew this was England, November the fifth. It was Guy Fawkes' night and I was coming home" (396). By gaining a larger perspective into her family history, Faith does not have to rely solely on her parents' story, and instead feels more assured to navigate England knowing that her history links her to the country before her parents' migration (Stein 74). Faith "has not found lost origins but has affiliated herself in new ways" (Stein 93).

On a final note, Todorov writes that, while uncovering the past is essential, it is also vital not to let it determine the present (23). He distinguishes between two uses of memory: "l'usage littéral" and "l'usage exemplaire". While the former makes the present dependant on the past, the latter allows us to use the past in the present, "de se servir des leçons, des injustices subies pour combattre celles qui ont cours aujourd'hui" (Todorov 31). This would be the ideal response for Faith to have, and the novel seems to hint at such an understanding of the past; using her newly acquired knowledge of herself and her shared past to navigate

contemporary England. Stein argues that "Faith [...] [comes] to construct [a cultural identity]. That is, [she has] learned to position [herself] in narratives of the past without being overdetermined by these narratives of the past" (94). This knowledge of the past is essential to confront contemporary issues that stem from similar problems:

Nous devons pourtant maintenir vivante la mémoire du passé : non pour demander réparation pour l'offense subie, mais pour être alertés sur des situations nouvelles et pourtant analogues. Le racisme, la xénophobie, l'exclusion qui frappent les autres aujourd'hui ne sont pas identiques à ceux d'il y a cinquante, ceux [*sic*] ou deux cents ans; nous ne devons pas moins, au nom de ce passé, précisément, agir sur le présent" (Todorov 59).

This sentiment is echoed by Perfect: "*Fruit of the Lemon* goes far beyond diagnosing racism as being deeply ingrained in contemporary British society; it highlights the importance of recognizing the complexities of imperial history in combating racism and prejudice in the contemporary postcolonial moment" (36). Moreover, it "warns against refusals to acknowledge and embrace the past, stressing the importance of historicizing one's society, one's ancestry and oneself in the fight against racism, prejudice and ignorance" (Perfect 34). If the ending of *Fruit of the Lemon* does not explicitly show Faith taking a stance to defend herself, it certainly conveys that she has integrated her ancestors' past into her own experiences, and understands the present through those, without being overdetermined by them, which is the first step in building a stronger identity and sense of belonging in England. The second step would be to assert this belonging by openly challenging those who question it, something she has not really done before. The first part of the novel however shows that Faith becomes more and more assured in challenging racism (first by questioning her bosses' prejudice, then by reminding Mr Bunyan of the role of the English in the history of slavery, and finally by recognising the racial motives of the bookshop attack). Now that her sense of herself is much more stable and strong, we could imagine that she will now contest narratives that deny and erase her identity and her experience.

Fruit of the Lemon thus retraces Faith's journey, and works on the resolution of her ambivalence by inscribing her experience into a wider familial and cultural background. While Faith's parents state that they are able to live in England despite the discrimination they face because of the knowledge of where they come from, this will not necessarily be the case for Faith. Instead, as she is English, her knowledge of her origins will most probably come in handy to challenge those who question her belonging and to anchor herself more in her home country. The final words spoken by Faith ("I was coming to tell everyone" [397]) seem to

point to the fact that she will now refuse to be silenced, and will perhaps challenge the remarks she receives, something she failed to do before. *Fruit of the Lemon* also tackles deeper societal issues, mainly racism, and shows its impact and evolution through the years, and how prevalent and pervasive it is within English society – but also within Jamaican society. From the beginning of the novel, Faith displays a (subconscious) knowledge of her difference and of discrimination, but adopts an attitude of denial, refusing to directly and openly acknowledge such treatment. Scott writes that "Levy argues that one of the most difficult challenges for the black person is to make themselves uncomfortable, to live as uncomfortable, in challenging people about racism" (Scott ix). The question that remains pending, then, is whether Faith will be up to the task.

CHAPTER 3 : THE REPRESENTATION OF RACE AND CULTURE IN DIANA EVANS'S *ORDINARY PEOPLE*

Ordinary People presents everyday lives of second-generation migrants as well. But, instead of a single female protagonist, it features one main female character as well as two male characters. As stated before, Evans' wish was to showcase and put forward her view and experience of London, which involves black people and black culture:

it's specifically about a middle-class blackness which we just don't see [...] if you look at representations of blackness in the media and in our films and our literature, [...] it's really hard to see depictions of just ordinary black lives, and I think that it's [...] so important for young people to see themselves reflected around them in a way that is positive, [...] just normal. We've been robbed of a sense of ordinariness (One on One).

This chapter will look at the different ways in which race, and more specifically racial discrimination are represented in the novel. Although those themes are omnipresent throughout the story, I wish to highlight the fact that they act more as a background reality and do not constitute the main theme of the novel. In this respect, it differs from *Fruit of the Lemon*.

3.1 Representations of race

In writing this novel, Evans has stated that she has tried "to normalize and humanize black experience" (Diana Evans - *Ordinary People*). While she admits that it is impossible to write about black experience without mentioning race, she insists that she does not want this concept to overtake the story and the characters (Evans and Allardice n.p.). In this effort to normalize blackness, Evans has also stated that she tries to make the word 'black' itself ordinary, and therefore avoids using it in the novel to refer to her characters or their skin colour (Evans and Samspon n.p.).

Sara Upstone describes Evans's first two novels as taking place "in a London devoid of racism" (101). I would argue that the same cannot be said for *Ordinary People*. Although the characters do not witness any direct remarks or insults linked to their skin colour, whether directed at them or not –as Faith does in *Fruit of the Lemon* –, there are still clear mentions

and instances of racism; it would thus seem excessive to claim that there is absolutely *no* racism present in the novel. Rather, issues linked to race are very subtly brought up. Upstone also describes Evans's writing in *The Wonder* as one that "celebrates the black body", by avoiding mentions of race in physical descriptions (102). This is quite a significant technique as the black body has historically "been the limiting factor in racist representations of blackness" (Upstone 94). She quotes Gilroy's statement that the idea of a "beautiful black body" subverts racist ideas and denies the role of body in the construction of racial difference, managing to situate the question of race more in the background by focusing on "the questions of style and beauty" (Gilroy in Upstone 95). The bodies in *The Wonder* are "beautiful and black", and the novel's physical descriptions do not mention race and contain few explicit references to complexion (Upstone 102). In *Ordinary People*, while avoiding race when describing characters, Evans does refer to it indirectly by describing the many nuances and shades of different skin colours: Stephanie has "clear pale skin", Damian "light-brown skin" (44). Michael looks at Melissa's "brown body" and "strong brown arms" (75); as he embraces her, he is "the darker brown against her caramel" (291). Michael and his lover, Rachel are described as "his brown against her cream" (191). Melissa calls Michael "My sweet brown" (79). Her mother Alice has a "chocolate-coloured hand" (322). Melissa's former editor is described as "a dark, heavy woman" (284). Strangers they come across briefly are described in similar terms: Michael sees "a dark-skinned man" (189), a woman with a "porcelain cleavage" (162); on holiday the beach is "full of salmon-coloured Brits" (245). Despite these descriptions based on colour, the novel still contains direct references to race, especially in the word 'black': "a thin black woman" (84); "lack of black people" (126); "black folks" (233). Those are however fewer in the story, and do not describe the main characters. This also allows for a nuance in skin colours, as the term "black" is often used as a monolith to refer to people who, in reality, do not all have the same exact skin tone.

Ria's perception of race is different due to her young age: she does not see race but sees people as colours, as she still possesses a certain "racial innocence" linked to her age (Evans and Samspon n.p; my translation). This is explicitly stated in the novel: "To Ria, though, it was all irrelevant. People were not black or white. They were brown, beige or pink" (110), which also mirrors the author's intent in her descriptions of race. This is not the case with Faith, who becomes aware at a young age of her racial difference due to boys taunting her. One of the reasons for this difference could be that Ria goes to a very multicultural

school, and is thus surrounded by children of many different backgrounds and skin colours, whereas Faith went to a school that was predominantly white in which she stood out.

Another way of hinting at the characters' race is achieved by naming their ethnicity or their parents' nationality. Stephanie's mother is "half Italian" (33), Damian's dad is "from Trinidad" (40), Melissa's mother is Nigerian, Michael is Jamaican (and has "a distant trace of India in his ancestry" [3]), and Melissa's friend Hazel is half French and half Ghanaian. Background characters are also described in this way, such as a driver who "was a bald, plump Ghanaian" (151), and a childminder who is Jamaican.

Moreover, the image of hair is also used as a subtle way to refer to race. Cooper refers to hair in several diasporic novels, including Evans' *26a*, as being "metonymic of [the female characters'] bodies, their identities and their differences" (Cooper 53). She adds that black people's hair serves as an unifying element for black people living outside of Africa (Cooper 53), specifically because "black people's hair has been historically *devalued* as the most visible stigmata of blackness, second only to skin" (Mercer in Cooper 53). For this reason, hair is closely tied to identity (Cooper 53).

In this regard, Weitz states that "hairstyles serve as important cultural artifacts, because they are simultaneously public (visible to everyone), personal (biologically linked to the body), and highly malleable to suit cultural and personal preferences" (Weitz in Versey 810). Hair is seen as very important for many women, regardless of their race (Versey 811). Wright states that "African American women's hair has always been read as a dangerous excess that must either be hidden or else made to imitate true ('white') femininity" (Wright 149). As a result, and as opposed to black men, "Black women were encouraged and coerced, by white and sometimes Black communities, either to straighten their hair or to hide it" (Wright 149). Black women were historically demeaned and deemed unprofessional, among other things, because of their hair (Ramsey in Rowe 27), while straight hair was (and still is) seen as more acceptable (Rowe 30). Rowe also alludes to what she calls the "longstanding 'straight hair is self-hate' versus 'natural hair is self love' dichotomy that many in both scholarly and public discourse use to frame Black women's hair practices" (Rowe 33). Evans's position is ambiguous, as she states that "it is almost this way of hiding our natural selves and there's something really tragic about it, but also very celebratory and decorative" (Evans and Allardice n.p.). While these observations stand for the US, a 2020 article on women-focused

website Refinery29 highlighted many instances of discrimination in the UK, at school or the workplace towards women with 'natural' black hair; those instances included being expelled from school or being denied a job (Morgan 2020 n.p.). The article also stated that there were no protections in place to safeguard against specific hair discriminations, although those instances could be protected under the equality act (Richardson in Morgan 2020 n.p.). Hairstylists warn of what is called "traction alopecia: hair loss from the tension exerted by styles like braids, extensions (with the hair braided underneath) and wigs" (Martin n.p.). The topic is contentious: while wigs and weaves allow many different hairstyles and even protect the hair when done properly, detractors "are quick to accuse extension wearers of submitting to the pressures of a Eurocentric society and its beauty standards" (Ibid).

Ordinary People, while mentioning hair on several occasions, does not mention any kind of discrimination that could be associated with it. Hair holds a merely descriptive place; it is a subtle way of incorporating race – and, to repeat what was said above, to celebrate black bodies. The very first pages of the novel mention hair through the guests at a party – "women with varying degrees of fake hair, their curls, their tresses, their long straight manes"–, and through Melissa whose "afro was arranged in a sequence of diagonal cornrows at the front with the rest left free though tamed with palmful of S-Curl gel" (3). Seen through Damian's eyes, Melissa's "fro was a halo" (55); this image can be seen as subverting negative ideas associated with black people's hair, as halos are usually associated with saints or angels, and therefore convey a positive image. Female characters especially are endowed with descriptions of their hair, for example with Melissa's friend Hazel "half-French, half-Ghanaian curls" (137), and Melissa's former boss: "her weave was damp from the heat, wisps of it clinging to her temples" (284), which is in accordance with the above mentioned fact that a greater emphasis is put on women's hair. The novel hints at the natural hair versus straight hair 'debate' through Melissa's family, and shows a younger generation's perspective, as seventeen-year-old Lauren finds herself justifying her hair choices to her aunts: "'What are you doing to your hair, Lauren, are you relaxing it?' Carol said. She sported deadlocks and believed in the Nubian approach to the contested afro follicle. 'I'm straight-combing it.' 'You should just be natural. Just be you, be free.'" (172). Lauren's hair "had once belonged to someone else, someone Indian, she revealed, which was why it had been expensive" (172). And although Lauren and her brother defend her choice by responding to Melissa and her sister's critiques ("'You're hot-combing someone else's hair', Melissa said. 'It's *my* hair.' 'It's on her head,' Warren confirmed, 'so it's her hair.'" [173]), the narrator seems critical of Lauren's

hair choices: "Lauren had smoke lifting off her head. She was trying her best to supersede herself [...] She was a fantasy of herself, permanently materialising" (172). Although this can be interpreted as Lauren following white standards of beauty, she also "applied bronzing cream, to darken her too-light beige-nation complexion" (172), which seems to negate this reading. However, this can also be seen as her trying to navigate her mixed identity by trying to connect to both sides of her heritage. Finally, the ending features Melissa with "a new hair, a new her", which echoes what was written above about the importance of hair to women's identity.

Another central theme that can be related to race is food, as it is representative of culture (Githire 85). Taste brings people together: "Bourdieu stresses taste's intuitive ability to connect those who belong to similar backgrounds, solely by differentiating them from all others" (Githire 857). Nonetheless, tastes evolve, and are influenced by people's surrounding, especially in this time of globalisation, where "culinary borrowings form the basis of food cultures across the world as assimilated foods become naturalized and normalized in the course of time" (Githire 857). Moreover, "immigrant foods in former colonial centers reflect a reality that has been in place in western metropolises for centuries" (Githire 859). Cooper writes about the importance of food in several diasporic novels (including Evans's *26a*) (Cooper 53), in which the writers she studies "constantly refer to African food, but as a lack, an ignorance, a tension, which disturbs their everyday British reality" (Cooper 53). It can be argued that this is the case in *Ordinary People*, as it shows Melissa trying to make traditional Nigerian food as a way of making her children connect to their heritage:

Melissa did sometimes attempt to make eba and stew – Ria always enjoyed eating it at her mother's, and Alice was eager for all of her granddchildren to eat Nigerian food – but it never tasted as good when she made it herself. She could never get the consistency of the eba right and the stew was not as tasty, and it was such a long drawn-out process, getting the yam and shaving off the bark and boiling it and mixing it with the gari and mashing them together in a pestle and mortar, and for what? For a sub-par, second-generation travesty. So the occasions when Melissa did make it had become just that, occasions. She preferred to take the children to her mother's so that they could have the real thing. (110)

While this passage shows Melissa's desire to connect with her (food) heritage and to make her children aware of it, it also seems metaphorical of Melissa's status as a 'second-generation migrant' and as a mixed-race woman. The eba she makes is "a sub-par, second-generation travesty", while her Nigerian mother makes "the real thing" (110). This can also hint at the gradual loss of cultural practices by subsequent generations.

The novel presents another attempt by Melissa at making traditional Nigerian food, after a child was murdered near their home: "It was probably going to be another failure, but she'd had the urge to make eba [...] It seemed like a comforting thing to do, a way of being somewhere else. She wanted to escape from these dark British streets, their haggard, down-trodden faces, their meanness and menace and the stifling air" (227). This seems to point to Melissa being aware, on a probably more subconscious level, of racial discrimination, as she tries to dissociate from Britain and connect to her Nigerian roots by way of food. As it turns out, "the eba calmed them, it soothed them", even though Melissa is not quite satisfied with it: "'The eba's still not right' she said. 'It's too grainy'" (234). And although Ria says she likes it, she "did not yet understand the nuances of eba consistency" (234). Again, this shows that Ria, as part of a "third-generation", does not have the same understanding of and connection to her heritage. Moreover, Ria and her friends are shown to be eating quite traditionally English, 'everyday' food: "They would go into the other hall to eat crisps, custard creams, Haribos, Chupa Chups" (108), in a context where a lot of food from many different cultures are available. More than a disinterest in other cultures, this may show her attachment to English culture and (food) traditions. Finally, when discussing moving out of London, Michael jokingly asks Melissa "Do they sell gari in Sussex? Plantain?" (234), which shows the importance of the availability of food reminiscent of their cultural origins, as well as the role London plays as a multicultural capital.

The importance of music is also inherent in the novel. Upstone points to how Evans's *26a* shows the characters' blackness "most particularly in cultural reference points to Hip Hop and black popular music" (102). Music also has a prominent role in *Ordinary People*; as stated by Evans, "you can't write a portrait of black life without a strong musical presence" (Evans and Allardice n.p.).

Evans became interested in using music for its ability to tell a story; music "became like a prop, a guide" (One on One). In fact, the novel even has a soundtrack available on Spotify, which Evans says has made people think of the novel as a musical one (Ibid). This soundtrack is an integral part of the novel, which is interspersed with references to many singers and songs, many of them black, the most prominent of all being John Legend's debut album *Get Lifted*.

The importance of music in representing black identities is developed by Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* (1993). He points out how vital music was to slaves, as it served as a form of communication to make up for the inaccessibility of other ways to communicate (Gilroy 74). He adds that:

the transnational structures which brought the black Atlantic world into being have themselves developed and now articulate its myriad forms into a system of global communications constituted by flows. This fundamental dislocation of black culture is especially important in the recent history of black musics which, produced out of the racial slavery which made modern western civilisation possible, now dominate its popular cultures. (Gilroy 80)

Nowadays, "black music has become a truly global phenomenon" (Gilroy 96). As for the way those forms of music came to Britain, Gilroy writes this:

Appearing in Britain through a circulatory system that gave a central place to the musics which had both informed and recorded black struggles in other places, they were rearticulated in distinctively European conditions. [...] Dislocated from their original conditions of existence, the sound tracks of this African-American cultural broadcast fed a new metaphysics of blackness elaborated and enacted in Europe and elsewhere within the underground, alternative, public spaces constituted around an expressive culture that was dominated by music. (Gilroy 83)

The continuous presence of (mostly black) music throughout the novel thus points to the importance this medium has (and continues to) hold historically for black people.

Evans said that "That album, John Legend, is quite instrumental, it becomes the accompaniment to Michael's romantic history and psychology" (One on One). For example, Michael listens to music on his iPod during his commute: "There were a handful of artists on his Most Played list, including Shuggie Otis, Nas, Dolly Parton and Jill Scott, but the Most Played album was John Legend's 2004 debut *Get Lifted*, which was a journey of a different kind" (69). The album "followed, as Michael interpreted it, the odyssey of a man changing from a womanising, nightclubbing, phone-number-collecting, good-time cheat into a responsible, mature and committed life partner" (69). The novel then goes into detail about the storyline of each song, and the evolution of the singer. The song "Ordinary People", which lends its title to the novel, represents the story rather well: "And he spent one song in an agony of uncertainty called Ordinary People, where his love was undeniable but constantly running into hardship and there were arguments everyday and no one knew which way to go" (69-70). This describes rather accurately the relationship between Michael and Melissa, the recurrent arguments, and the indecisiveness they both face regarding their future together.

Through listening to the album, Michael reminisces about his past relationships, in particular with a girl named Gillian, connecting stages of the relationship with songs on the album.

Listening to the album prompts Michael to think about the current status of his and Melissa's relationship:

There were days when Michael really questioned his sustainability in this relationship, when he wondered whether he had come full circle to *Used To Love U*, and Melissa was now a different kind of woman, the kind John was singing about, superior, demanding, judgemental [...] He felt, with a new, emergent spite, that yes, Melissa *was* this type of girl now, unkind, materialistic, a Puffy-wanter, a Jay-Z chaser, that yes, they *had* come full circle, and all he had to do now was just try to stop loving her. (81-82)

After a failed date with Melissa, Michael decides to initiate things with Rachel. As he comes to this decision, "He was backtracking up along the John Legend tracklist. He was regressing to a post-teenage, pre-Melissa state" (162). Finally, during the final fight that breaks up their relationship, John Legend's songs come to Michael once again. Michael's personal journey is thus deeply inscribed into a musical background, which mirrors the emotions Michael is feeling.

Another important event marked by music is Michael and Melissa's date at a Jill Scott concert. This date is made in an effort to rekindle their relationship. Jill Scott "was their early music" (153), the music they listened to in the early stages of their relationship. During the concert, Jill announces to the crowd that she has gotten a divorce, after her husband cheated on her. The symbolism of this is not lost on Michael and Melissa: "It was a message for the world but it seemed to come directly for them. [...] The music that had married them was now telling them to divorce" (154-155). This incident seems like a sign, and foreshadows the ending of the novel, as well as Michael's affair, which has not yet happened at this point in the novel.

Finally, the novel is interspersed by references to famous musical artists, the most prominent of those being Michael Jackson. His death is also the event that finally makes Damian realize and come to terms with his father's death: "The air was without Michael [...] And it was only now, finally, with all of this exploding before him, that Damian finally understood and recognised what it meant that his father was dead. [...] He was dead. He was

memories and dust. He would never see him again" (279). This realization gives him the incentive to throw away an old manuscript he had written that was left taking the dust, and finally get into writing something new. Music, moreover, was one of the few things he shared with his father: "Aside from the books, music was the second education his father had put to him" (280). This is interesting because his father was quite militant, and very well versed in black theories and literature; his attachment to music then comes to no surprise. Finally, Holland argues that Michael Jackson, "at the height of his fame, represents the pinnacle of cross-cultural success" (Holland 564). This is in accordance with Gilroy's observation that black music is not only a global phenomenon, but it also dominates Western culture.

Music is thus deeply intertwined in the story and in the characters' lives, and follows crucial moments of their lives. Moreover, critics on *Ordinary People's* cover describe the writing style as "lyrical": Naomi Alderman calls Evans "a lyrical and glorious writer", and Christie Watson writes that the novel is "a lyrical and beautiful story". This, coupled with the omnipresence of music through the novel and the characters' psychology, point to the importance of music in black culture.

Lastly, the characters' vocabulary or mannerisms are also linked to their cultural origins. Michael and Damian are portrayed as saying typically Caribbean expressions: "Michael had said cha man" (126); "Chill out, man" (24). Stephanie reproaches Damian for his way of speaking: "'Let her be, man.' 'Can you stop saying 'man' all the time around the kids?' [...] 'I shouldn't have to change the way I speak.' 'But you *do*. You *do* have to change'" (241). Stephanie, who is white and English, scolds Damian for a way of speaking that is anchored in him and typical of people of the same origins. This mirrors Constance and her family's attitude towards language displayed in *Fruit of the Lemon*, and their insistence on speaking 'proper' English. Moreover, this way of speaking is referenced in *Fruit of the Lemon*: "a woman like me who had grown up around the Jamaican accent with its 'nah man's and 'cha' and sucking of teeth" (195). In *Ordinary People*, the kissing of teeth is also shown as a typically Jamaican habit: "[Melissa] kissed her teeth to the highest octave she could manage, which was quite high. Her teeth-kissing had advanced over the years. She had adopted some of [Michael's] Jamaicanness" (299).

3.2 Multiculturalism

The story is peppered with references of the multiculturalism of London. In an essay about the novel, Evans shares an excerpt which "depicts London in all its multicultural glory, the colour and the humour of it, its gorgeous aromatic foodstuffs and imported fabrics. And while so doing it points to the matter-of-factness of this diversity, the ordinary lives lived within it that do not consider themselves exotic in any way, but simply as who they are" (Evans 30). This excerpt is taken from chapter 6, which is aptly titled "Multiculturalism":

In case the people of Bell Green had not noticed, or not duly appreciated, the variety of nationalities and cultures living in their vicinity (the Africans and Caribbeans, the Eastern Europeans, the Indians, the Iranians, the Turks, the Nigerians, the Jamaicans, the Chinese, the Greeks and so on), Ria's school held an annual cultural evening in December to celebrate the rich and expansive meeting of all these disparate lands. There were folk songs and dances performed by children wearing their national dress. There were poetry readings in high-pitched voices exploring the positivity and mellifluousness of diversity. There were comedy sketches and gospel singers, recorder recitals and carnival choreographies, a fashion show in which adults and children alike paraded up and down the makeshift wooden catwalk in the cramped assembly hall flaunting their far-flung fabrics, their wrappers, their saris, their headwraps and their dashikis. In the adjacent hall was an array of international food donated by the parents, an aromatic meeting of fufu with samosas, of moi moi and egusi stew with tabbouleh and baklava – and while you were there you could also get your hair braided or your palms hennaed or your face painted at one of the stalls, or take part in a spot of Tamil calligraphy, or Polish Wycinanki. (107)

Although this extract is quite long, it shows the many different aspects that make up this multicultural night. This conveys a very staged and forced celebration, and contributes to making the different cultures seem exotic and unusual, rather than making it a normal part of the landscape. Moreover, the event also seems to present somewhat stereotypical aspects of said cultures, aspects that the participants may not partake in regularly, if at all.

Although nothing is really said of Ria's friends, their names mirror the multiculturalism of the school and neighbourhood : "[Ria's] school friends would also be up late, Shanita, Shaquira, Emily" (108). Ria, however, does not seem so excited by the multicultural aspect of the night or in the different cultures celebrated at the event; instead, she sees the night as an opportunity to stay up late and eat candy. Moreover, she is not interested in wearing clothes reminiscent of her parents' cultural background:

Ria had a wrapper and matching top that Melissa had made for her to wear to a Nigerian wedding last year. But she wasn't going to wear it because she wasn't in the fashion show and the audience didn't have to dress cultural, they could wear whatever they wanted. She was going to wear her new grey Primark jeans, the Moshi Monster top her grandmother on Michael's side had bought for her, her black and pink trainers, and her white puffa. (109)

This conveys Ria's apparent lack of interest not only in her own culture, but also in the others present around her. Moreover, the clothes bought to her by her Jamaican grandmother do not have a cultural meaning or link to Jamaica. It also suggests that Ria finds "dressing cultural" to be a chore, therefore implying a lack of interest in such cultural practices.

As stated above, this celebration of multiculturalism comes across as a bit forced, and as some sort of spectacle. The tone of the narrator suggests such a reading, pointing to the fact that this celebration of difference and of one's origins is not one necessarily displayed on a daily basis, but rather put on for show:

Meanwhile, the peoples of the Mediterranean *dug out* their historical skirts, and those of the Indian subcontinent assembled little tunics and saris so that they could watch their cubs twirl around on stage, celebrating all together the wonderful exuberance of the beige nation, *which was something that just did not really occur to them on a day-to-day basis*. (109; my emphasis)

The use of the term 'dug out' also implies that these cultural clothes are buried and forgotten somewhere, and that they are thus rarely (or never) worn. However, Evans's above quotation makes another reading possible, suggesting that people are so used to this culture that they simply see it as a feature of their everyday lives, and not something special that needs to be celebrated daily. While the neighbourhood may be multicultural, this multiculturalism is not necessarily noticed by its inhabitants, which could be construed in a positive way (as it has become so normalized) or in a negative one (cultural practices are getting lost). In my opinion, the sarcastic tone of the narrator, however, points more towards the former reading. Ria is then said to have "changed into her uncultural clothes" (117), which also seems to be said quite sarcastically. England is, after all, part of Ria's cultural heritage, as she was not only born and raised there, but is partly English through her grandfather.

Unlike Faith in *Fruit of the Lemon*, the characters in *Ordinary People* seem quite aware of their cultural heritage, and willing to pass it on to their children. This is especially evident in Melissa, which could suggest the difference between Caribbean and African cultural practices. Melissa's family is the most present in the novel: she frequently mentions her mother, and her sisters, nieces and nephews and her father are also present in the narrative. Melissa refers in several instances to her mother's Nigerian beliefs or customs: "in

the end she had no other choice but to go against her mother's staunch Nigerian conviction of never disturbing a baby's sleep" (90); "now the lecture on the imperative of the male presence in the parenting household delivered with traditional Nigerian outrage" (227); "[Alice] was adamant that they should eat with their right hands, that any sign of left-handedness in a child should be destroyed as soon as it became apparent"⁸ (321); "a night thing, her mother used to call them, beings who walk in the night hours, not quite human, who watch us" (65). The belief in a "night thing" is however normalised in the novel: Melissa believes in it and uses her mother's recipes and tips to get rid of it (such as leaving an onion on a windowsill or putting plantain under a pillow) without questions. Michael, however, does not share this belief: "When she'd mentioned the night thing to him he'd been dismissive, saying ghosts didn't exist, even though she'd tried to explain to him that it wasn't a ghost as such, it was an energy, a pressure, a dark touch in the air" (193). This, again, might convey a cultural difference, between people of Caribbean and of African origins.

Melissa calls Alice her family's "homeland connection" (170). She most likely immigrated from Nigeria, as she is described as "a shrunken woman in a foreign land" (319), which makes her a first-generation migrant. Michael and Melissa have both spent time in their mother countries ("they discussed [...] their mothers' countries and the times they'd spent there" [77]), and actually met in Jamaica. Melissa does reference the country, and how at home she felt there, but no mention of time spent in Nigeria occurs in the novel. The only clue would be "the ebony mask from Lekki Market in Lagos" (6), which belongs to Michael and Melissa and suggests she might have bought it there herself, although it could also have been given to her by her mother or other Nigerian relatives. Although she is attached to Nigerian traditions, Melissa does not seem to be particularly attached to the country itself, and refers to Jamaica more than to Nigeria. Cuder-Domínguez writes of characters (in *26a* and Evaristo's *Lara*) for whom "exposure to another postcolonial society" (in *26a*, the West Indies as opposed to the character's mother country Nigeria) and to black people who are not Nigerian may have been helpful in formulating an inclusive sense of identity which reconciles being both black and British (284). Melissa's attachment to Jamaica may show such a process.

⁸ left-handedness is stigmatised in many African countries, including Nigeria: "the left hand is still demonized as unlucky, evil, clumsy [...] [it] is associated with disrespect and bad manners in arguably many (if not all) Nigerian cultures" (Alhassan 65).

Moreover, Melissa also seems to want to make her children aware of their heritage. As mentioned above, she makes traditional Nigerian food, which may also be prompted by her mother's wishes. Melissa and Michael both want to travel with the children to their mother countries: "Melissa and Michael also planned to take their children 'home' one day, to both Nigeria and Jamaica, but these were expensive, complicated trips [...] so they were going to wait until Blake was a least old enough to know where he was and what it meant when they were there so that they could get their money's worth of heritage awareness" (109-110). The end of this sentence reflects the same sarcasm noted above about multiculturalism: cultural heritage seems only important when it is convenient (in this case in a financial respect). The irony is even heightened when Melissa and Michael decide to go on a trip abroad: Melissa longs to go to Jamaica, ("She was thinking of Jamaica, how much she'd loved it there" [237]), she wants to go "somewhere where there's no English people" (237). Instead, "they went to the Costa del Sol. Mass-market Spain. A two-hour flight on easyJet. Crawling with Brits [...] Almost everybody spoke English, and the paellas were less than Spanish" (238). Despite their desire to escape the English, they find themselves in a place full of English people, which may point to the fact that they are also very much English, and share habits with them. Nonetheless, Melissa's reference to the English points to a racialised definition of Englishness: she wants to escape white English people. In this way, she separates herself from them, but also falls into a dangerous trap of equating Englishness with whiteness: this definition suggests she does not belong to the category of 'English'.

On the other hand, Michael's family is not really present in the story: his parents are only alluded to, and no details are given about them, although it is easily deducible that they are Jamaican, as is Michael. The novel does not specify whether they are first or second generation migrants, but it shows that they live in England; a brief mention is made of Michael's father and mother, but it does not give anything away as far as their living situation or background.

Finally, while very little is said of Damian's mother ("His mother had left and gone to Canada when Damian was five and had never returned, and he practically forgot her" [41]), we do get a good look at his father's background. The book introduces him in this way:

Laurence Hope was a political activist and writer who had come to England from Trinidad as a teen and made a career of his outrage. He was one among the crusaders, who had witnessed personally the landlords who would not give them rooms and the police who would not let them go and the thugs who

would not let them be, and retaliated. He had rioted, organised and campaigned. He wrote articles about the pernicious violations of racism, gave speeches in dim community halls about the need for action and the importance of black unity 'Without unity we're lost', he would say to Damian, over breakfast or while watching the evening news or on a Saturday night in the smoky living room in the company of fellow crusaders. [...] He carried on working and thinking until this outrage became the only world he had left, and he shrunk with it, became thin and alone. 'We're still not free,' he would tell Damian. 'They think they're free, but they're not. There's still lots of work to be done.' (40)

This points to Todorov's statements about groups of people who were wronged in the past and continue exploiting the status of victim:

Si l'on parvient à établir de façon convaincante que tel groupe a été victime d'injustice dans le passé, cela lui ouvre dans le présent une ligne de crédit inépuisable [...] Au lieu d'avoir à lutter pour obtenir un privilège, on le reçoit d'office par sa seule appartenance au groupe jadis défavorisé [...] Les Noirs américains fournissent un exemple éloquent de cette conduite. Victimes incontestables de l'esclavage et de ses séquelles, comme de la discrimination raciale, désireux de sortir de cette position, ils ne souhaitent en revanche nullement abandonner le rôle de victime qui leur assure un privilège moral et politique durable. (55-56)

While Laurence seems to recognise present racial struggles, he is overdetermined by them, and seems incapable of positioning himself in a status that is not one of victim. Nonetheless, he acknowledges that racial discrimination is still very much present.

Damian's father's type of parenting is the complete opposite of Faith's parents, who kept their struggles to themselves. Laurence's actions are not shown as completely positive, however, as it seems he becomes a slave to his ideas. Ironically, Damian's reaction is one of rejection, and this in a way mirrors Faith's attitude at the beginning of *Fruit of the Lemon* of refusing to acknowledge her difference and the discrimination she faces:

Damian would be haunted, worried by this work that still had to be done [...], when all he wanted to do some days was just come home from school and watch *Neighbours* and not think about how and why there were no black people in *Neighbours*, and eat shepherd's pie, or lasagne, or something that people ate in happy homes where there was someone around who cooked. (40-41)

He seems to long for a traditional white English family, referencing a typically English dish, and wanting to forget about his racial difference. Nonetheless, Damian *is* aware of his blackness and of the discrimination black people face, as shown for example in the discussions he has with Michael about race, something Faith suppresses at the beginning of the narrative.

However, Damian, like Faith, is quite ignorant of his father's life before he came to England: "Damian discovered things about his childhood in Trinidad which he hardly ever talked about, as if it were not significant, as if it were only England that had made him who he was, as if he did not exist before he became angry" (42). This mirrors what was said about Faith, who used to think of her family history as beginning with her parents' arrival to England, which is a limiting belief for her sense of self. It seems that Damian has not superseded this idea. Damian's last name "Hope" is significant in this context, as he feels like he has to live up to his father's expectations (or hopes) to continue his fight. The fact that he started out as a housing officer, "drafting tenancy agreements and writing evictions letters and coordinating claims for housing benefits" (43) could be read in two ways. It could be construed as him making a positive difference, or hint back at the discrimination migrants faced when they first arrived in England in the second part of the twentieth-century. The novel does not point to any of these interpretations.

Damian's upbringing has other negative effects on him. He acts distant with Stephanie since the death of his father, and does not consider therapy to be an option: "His father would never have done such a thing. He would see it as self-pitying and white. Did the slaves have access to therapy? Were they treated for post-traumatic stress disorder? No, Laurence would opine. They got on with it and mustered strength and sang song and drew on their *spirits*, and they had a whole lot more to complain about than one measly little family bereavement. They were being bereaved every day, every hour, every minute, en masse, their throats cut, their sweethearts raped, their brothers whipped, their father lynched. Who are you to complain?" (131). This shows that Laurence does in fact let the past rule the present by dismissing present issues in the name of the past, which is something Todorov warns against in *Les abus de la mémoire* (23). He also writes that "commémorer les victimes du passé est gratifiant, s'occuper de celles d'aujourd'hui dérange" (53).

The complexity of heritage and identity is illustrated by a conversation between Melissa and Ria:

'Mummy', she said one afternoon on the walk home from school. That day she had been painting the Jamaican flag. I've got three countries in my blood – Nigeria, Jamaica and England.'
 'Yes, that's right,' Melissa said.
 'I'm half English, a quarter Jamaican and a quarter Nigerian.'
 'No, you're a quarter Nigerian, a quarter English and half Jamaican.'
 'Why?'
 'Because I'm half Nigerian and half English, and Daddy's completely Jamaican.'

'But I want to be completely Jamaican too,' Ria said. 'I want to be all of them.'
 'You can't be all of them and only one of them at the same time. You can either be just one thing or a mixture of things. Anyway, you're British as well.'
 'So I'm four things?'
 'No. British is your nationality. This is where you're born and bred.'
 [...]
 'What did you say about bread?'
 'Not bread that you eat. Bred means growing up.'
 'Oh. OK.' Then she skipped off ahead [...]. (110-111)

Ria shows a desire to be part of the same cultures as her parents, and seems eager to know more about it. Her reaction after the discussion to just skip off ahead could mean one of two things: that she has had the answers she wanted for now and does not need to know more for now, or that she has already become disinterested in the subject. Ria and Melissa are both shown to deal with the subject in a casual way; Melissa encourages her daughter to ask questions about her heritage and answers them, which contrasts with Faith's relationship with her parents (although we are dealing with different generations in this case). The issue is not problematised and does not appear to cause any persisting confusion for Ria. However, her desire to be at once completely Jamaican, English and Nigerian shows a bit of confusion due to her status as a mixed-race children, and how difficult it is to find a stable sense of identity. It is not specified whether Melissa (and Michael) talk to their children about these things, although, as mentioned above, their desire to visit Nigeria and Jamaica suggests that they want them to know about their cultural heritage. The mention of what Ria has been doing at school (drawing the Jamaican flag) suggests that school offers more insight into the multiculturalism of the country, which would contrast with Faith's school years, during which the programme completely ignored the existence of non-white British citizens.

3.3 Racism and violence

This section will first look at the instances of racism in the novel, before tackling the less prominent issue of violence.

Ordinary People is filled with subtle references to race, racism and important events linked to black people, including slavery, as well as references to famous black people. As mentioned above, the novel starts with a party celebrating Barack Obama's election as the first black US President. The guests

had stayed up on Tuesday night watching blue eat red, and the Obama daughters walking on to the stage in their small, well-tailored dresses and their excited shoes had reminded many of them of the four little girls bombed forty-five years before in the church in Alabama by the Ku Klux Klan.[...] it was impossible to look at this new advancement of history without also seeing the older, more terrible one, and thus the celebration was at the same time a mighty lament. (2-3)

The election of Obama was a historical event, which held significance for black people outside the US as well; "the election of Obama was a huge moment for me personally but it was a huge moment for the world as well" (One on One). This is shown in Michael and Melissa's house, where "[t]he Obamas were on the fridge" (21).

Another reference to an important event in black British history is a reference to the murder of Stephen Lawrence. As Michael is thinking that his white lover Rachel cannot understand him, he thinks that she cannot understand "the never-ending sorrow for Stephen, for all the Stephens and the murdered ancestors of Stephen" (191). This shows that Michael can apply past racist events to the present and he uses lessons of the past to apply to the present day.

References to slavery are made through Michael's body: "across the small of his back, were lines of a similar paler tone against the dark background, as though perhaps, in a former life, he had been whipped" (25); "his whip marks" (157). As Evans has stated, "we wear our history all the time, in everything we do" (One on One). These passages exemplify it and show Melissa's awareness of this fact. This echoes Gilroy, who writes that "the history of slavery is somehow assigned to blacks. It becomes our special property rather than a part of the ethical and intellectual heritage of the West as a whole" (Gilroy 49). This also parallels what was said in the previous chapter, about white English people negating any involvement in the history of slavery, therefore putting it all on black people. It could also point to Michael's ancestry, and to the fact that his ancestors may have been slaves. Another reference to slavery is made during Melissa and Hazel's shopping trip: "And Selfridges was a beast of a department store, a glittering homage to materialism, the shop assistants were like *overseers*, standing around with their open pots of cream and eau de toilettes" (135; my emphasis).

While they are on their trip to Spain, the holiday rep displays some prejudice: "and before anyone could ask anything else (the black people were always so demanding, she

found), she went on her way" (243). This prejudice is not conveyed to the characters, however, as it is only the rep's thoughts. This allows to show prejudice that the characters are not aware of; it is thus possible that they are subjected to more prejudice than they are aware of, and may be oblivious to some of it. This contrasts the otherwise absence of obvious racial prejudice, which may be missing because the narration is focused on the main characters. Then, as they are playing a game consisting of making up a story, Michael references racism from the police. The story comes to a missing child, and Michael adds to the story: "'Meanwhile Johannes' parents were really worried.' 'Indeed!' Michael said, 'For they hadn't seen their son in six months, and they didn't believe the police's institutionally racist theory that he must have run away from home'" (271). This statement is not commented upon by the narrator or the other characters. This could either mean that they are totally aware of the issue and even used to it, due to its frequency; or that they simply choose to ignore it, out of discomfort or simply because the situation is not one favourable to such discussions.

Another issue that is very briefly commented on in the novel is that of inclusivity in the beauty sphere. On her shopping trip with Hazel, Melissa goes to MAC to buy powder; in MAC, "they had understanding browns, many shades of it, placing them above those brands who allowed only a few dark tones to be flawless" (142). The lack of diverse shades in makeup, especially for dark-skinned women, was really brought to the forefront in 2017, when singer Rihanna launched her makeup brand *Fenty Beauty* (Winker n.p.). The brand's initial launch included forty shades of foundation, including shades for dark skin, which were often forgotten before; the brand's success pushed other brands to be more inclusive in their shade ranges (Winker n.p.). While this conveys racial discrimination, those events also show an improvement and an impetus to ameliorate things in this particular area.

As Michael and Damian go to a bar, "they were alarmed at the lack of black people in there, they were nowhere to be seen, [...] so Michael had said cha man, let's go to the Satay. [...] It was one of the few places in Brixton that had triumphed against the bleaching conquest of gentrification" (126). The term 'bleaching' really points to the fact that gentrification is mostly linked to white people. Moreover, Michael and Melissa's move from North to South London (which is a less predominantly white area)⁹ is also partially motivated by the fact that it is more financially accessible to them.

⁹ The 2011 census led by the ONS has found that Southwark had the highest black African population, Croydon the highest black Caribbean population and Lambeth the highest black population.

Ordinary People also shows the black characters' need and desire to be around other black people. This is shown explicitly in Michael, but also, in a less overt way, in Melissa. When going to a Christmas party held by his office, Michael is left "wondering as usual whether he would be the only black person in the room. It was hard to believe, the ice caps melting, the crater expanding, Obama, the recession, the fact of the twenty-first century in general, that he was still asking himself this question" (163). Michael is also uncomfortable being around the trustees: "Michael never knew what to say to these people. They were virtually another species even as they shared his citizenship, and he always felt overly conspicuous yet circumferential in their multitudinous presence. Usually he skirted around the edges of these events, feeling too tall and too dark in the middle" (163). Fanon writes that "The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question..." (Fanon 17). Michael, although he is British and was not a direct victim of colonialism, still seems to have inherited this behaviour. Marquis quotes Marianne Hirsch, who states that trauma can be passed on to the next generations through their parents' memories (Hirsch in Marquis 34). This entails, however, that Michael knows a lot about his family history, which is not specified in the novel. However, it is also worth noting that among these trustees are "aristocrats, lords, a lady and a baroness", which means that Michael's discomfort could also partially come from this class difference (163).

Later on, as Melissa is suggesting leaving London, Michael vehemently protests: "Michael was having images in his head of the children playing on an empty beach in foul weather, with lots of white people in the distance [...] 'I'm not leaving Londinium,' he said adamantly. 'I need to be around brown people'" (232). To Melissa,

Michael's reliance on brownness was a prison, hers as well as his. It cut him off from other possibilities, from certain unknown skies and distant blue grasses.[...] Colour was in his way of all the other colours. it had given him a script for life, or forced it upon him, and he was compelled to follow it. If the script was taken away, who would he be?. (232)

This also echoes the way Laurence thought, and his life could be seen as a cautionary tale for Michael, although this is Melissa's interpretation of Michael's thoughts. Fanon writes that "as long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others" (Fanon 109). This can also explain why

Melissa feels at home in Jamaica. Nonetheless, England is still predominantly white— even if London is one of the most diverse places in Britain.

Michael and Melissa do not see eye to eye on this issue:

[the children] need brownness too, you know [...] 'But they *are* their brownness. It's inside them. It's part of them. God, why are we even talking about this? It's so basic. [...] I want my kids to see black folks around them, not just feel their blackness inside.' These words, blackness, black people, whiteness, they were crude, contagious. The children would be infected by them, dragged also into this prison, this malady, this towering preoccupation, robbed also of a love for canyons, for particular lights. 'The less they see it around them,' he said, 'the less they'll feel it inside.' 'No, the more they'll feel it.' 'Yes, but in a bad way'.(232-233)

Melissa does not understand Michael, which she admits is due to her difficult childhood: "I had other things to worry about when I was a kid" (233). She has a complicated relationship with her father ("it was a thing from childhood, a father who was cruel" [93]), and although "Long gone were the days of Cornelius's fearsome dictatorship, when he had ruled over the house with a strict disciplinarian regime and large amounts of alcohol"(170), Melissa still feels uneasy visiting her father.

Despite Melissa's inability to understand Michael's need to be around black people, it seems that she has a similar desire as well, on some level. When she tells Michael she needs to go on a holiday, "She was thinking of Jamaica, how much she'd loved it there. She had felt so at home, the warm air, the bright colours, the black country, the lack of inner questioning" (237). Ironically, as stated before, the destination they choose, Costa del Sol, is full of English people. Once again, as she is there, she is "yearning again for somewhere more like Jamaica" (243). This seems to mirror Faith's behaviour, which is one of denial. Damian also misses London and its multicultural feel, which is not so present in the countryside ("he belonged there in a way that he would never, could never, belong in Dorking. He was outside, displaced" (46). He also reminisces about his childhood and the lack of representation there was on TV for black people (although specifically about the show *Neighbours* which is an Australian TV series).

Melissa's experience of race is inevitably different as she is mixed race: when reminiscing about her relationship with Michael, she remembers that

[y]et despite such rightness, not everything about them was right. Sometimes she felt that he wanted her to be more Nubian, that she was too English for him, had too much of white. He wanted her badly to understand the anger that charged out of him at random moments, at the police, for instance, at passport control, at anyone or anything that seemed to pose a barrier because he was black and male. (95)

Not much more is explicitly said about Melissa's status as a mixed race woman.

That being said, the difficulty they have to understand each other seems to relate more to a gender difference, rather than a racial one. Indeed, Michael finds his relationship with Rachel difficult because she does not understand his experience as a black man, as opposed to his relationship with Melissa:

It was minimal, physically, the difference between them, his brown against her cream. The real difference was in her life, in her history. She could never know him completely because she had not lived as he had lived. [...] He found himself explaining things to her and not liking that he had to explain, whereas with Melissa, or with Gillian, all the others before, they already knew those things and he didn't have to tell them anything. Even if they had not felt it themselves, they knew it, because they were of the same texture, or a variation of that texture. (191)

Another important theme the novel touches on is the issue of knife crime, and gang-related violence. This is alluded to at several moments in the story. During the party celebrating Obama's win, "beneath it all was a faint air of anticlimax, a contrast between the glory of the moment and the problems of reality, for there were boys outside who might have been Obamas somewhere else but here were shooting each other, and girls who might also have been Michelles" (4). As stated a few lines above, "the world was different now but just the same" (4).

Violence is what prompted Stephanie and Damian to move out of the city, as she witnesses a scene of extreme violence. The subject is brought up at dinner with Michael and Melissa, as Stephanie responds to Damian's statement that he would like to move back to London: "'Really? Why? It's so rough,' said Stephanie. 'How many teenage stabbings or shootings or whatever have there been so far this year? Forty or something? [...]' 'Twenty-eight,' said Michael. 'Twenty-eight. Well, that's enough, isn't it?' 'Those are the ones reported anyway'" (60). She adds: "But there is a problem with gangs here. That's a fact, isn't it?" (60). Melanie, like Stephanie, is aware of the omnipresent violence in the city, and is worried for her children:

the sirens ripped crazily through the air. They were a constant presence, their endless wail of trouble. Like Stephanie, Melissa did not want Ria and Blake to grow up with this sound, to develop the hardness

that enabled you to become insensitive to it [...] Would Ria remember the sirens? Would she remember the day they walked home from school and the road opposite the church was blocked off by white ribbons? [...] There had been a shooting, right there at the top of Paradise Row, at 3.35 p.m., as children were walking home from school. (113-114)

The most significant instance of this violence is shown through the death of a thirteen-year-old boy, Justin, who sang at Ria's school multicultural night. Justin likes to emulate and follow his older brother Ethan, who is part of a crew that had a disagreement with some people from Catford. As Justin goes out looking for his brother, who "had been dragged into a car and taken away, and they were going to fix him, really fix him" (222), he is found by the Catford people, and stabbed to death by a fourteen-year-old girl as a way of initiation. The fact that this happened on Paradise Row makes the event all the more tragic, if not ironic. Melissa actually witnessed part of it, as she saw Ethan being taken away. Flowers are put out in memory of Justin, and "there were other flowers, for other children who had gone too soon" (228). When Melissa informs Michael of the murder, his response shows how common these events have become: "Another one?" (229). The accident also makes Melissa want to move out: "We need to move way from here [...] it's not safe. I want the kids to live somewhere safe" [...] I don't want them to get killed by a stray bullet one day just walking to the shops to buy toothpaste (231). Although once again race is not mentioned when describing the young gang members, Michael's words hint to them being black: "You know what the worse thing is? [...] I don't understand my people any more. The things they do, how their minds work to make them do those things. I don't know my community" (235). The way the episode of the murder is told, as well as Michael's response to the growing criminality, serve to humanise the victims. This is also intensified by the fact that the event is told through the victim's and his mother's point of view. Instead of focusing on the perpetrators, it shows the tragic nature of an occurrence that has become all too common.

As Lucy Hannah explains in an interview with Evans, the affair is handled "casually", in the sense that it is shown as something ordinary that happens quite often, "it's very much part of the landscape of where Michael and Melissa are living" (One on One). Evans explains that she wanted the novel to be an accurate representation of London, and knife crime was very much a part of it as she was writing the novel, as the statistics were constantly going up, just as they were in 2019 at the time the interview took place (Ibid). The problem was so present Evans felt a responsibility to write about it, as it would have been a part of her

characters' lives, and "to show the killings beyond the statistics [...] we don't hear much about the insides of those lives who are witnessing these killings" (Ibid). The incident takes a very small part of the novel as she did not want it to be "a central theme in the story" (Ibid). Evans has said that the hope conveyed by Obama's election was contrasted by the violence omnipresent in the streets of London: "the 'sense of hope and empowerment' after Obama's win came up against 'this complete despair, and sorrow at what was happening around us on the streets'" (Evans and Allardice n.p.).

3.4 The role of gender

The main female protagonist Melissa also suffers from a sort of breakdown, but it is presented very differently and has distinct causes than Faith's. The ending of the novel marks a shift as it veers into the supernatural. The intrusion of the supernatural in an otherwise realist novel can be used to convey identity issues (Cuder-Domínguez 280). I will apply a similar reading to *Ordinary People*, and argue that supernatural elements are symbolic of Melissa's doubts and identity issues.

Jane Bryce analyses novels by female authors with Nigerian roots (including Evans's 26a), and the evolution of female representation in Nigerian literature:

I suggest that the forms of feminine identity evident in earlier women's writing, constrained by nationalist priorities that privileged masculinity, have given way to a challenging reconfiguration of national realities in which the feminine is neither essentialized and mythologized nor marginalized, but unapologetically central to the realist representation of a recognizable social world. This constitutes a shifting of the ground of identity-construction in Nigerian fiction away from the fully-constituted masculine self, to a notion of selfhood as split or multiple. (Bryce 49-50)

She also argues that biracial children (who represent "the merging of two cultural identities" [60]) "can be seen as 'half and half children', alternately split and doubled" (Bryce 60).

As written above, Evans wished to represent women's perspective in the novel, as she felt it was lacking in her influences (Evans and Allardice n.p.). She also wanted to write about motherhood (as well as fatherhood) and about the way in which parenthood is experienced differently for men and women, and how easy it is to fall back into traditional roles associated with motherhood ("Rencontre avec Diana Evans"). Evans thus wanted to represent "a character struggling against that, and to depict this embattled kind of female psychology in

order to really explore the theme of motherhood in a very honest way [...] and also to make women feel understood, really, and heard" (Ibid). Motherhood is one of the main themes in the novel: "it's about a woman's fight to keep a hold of her identity in the midst of motherhood and relationship [...] it's about how children can threaten ones identity and sense of individuality" (One on One). She wrote it from a female and male perspective to offer different points of view (One on One). She adds that "long-term relationships can often pose some kind of threat onto the individual [...] this is something that all the characters struggle against, apart from Stephanie [...] [they] are really grappling with this idea of wanting to be who they think they are and worrying that they're becoming this other person that they don't want to be" ("Rencontre avec Diana Evans").

Melissa's breakdown happens at the end of the novel but is foreshadowed from the beginning. Melissa experiences peculiar things happening; they take the form of strange or supernatural elements, such as a weird feeling she has about the house and its previous owners. As the story unfolds, the house becomes more and more menacing and her daughter Ria's behaviour and health alarms her. All of these elements seem to follow the state of Michael and Melissa's relationship: many of the events Melissa interprets as bad omens follow the beginning of Michael's affair. As they return from their holiday, the house appears to have deteriorated further, and Ria's strange behaviour starts again. This follows Melissa's brief affair with Damian in Spain. This culminates into a fight between Michael and Melissa, which seems to mark the end of the relationship, as Melissa admits to sleeping with Damian. The whole scene is surrounded by a storm and objects falling, and ends with Melissa accidentally making Ria fall down the stairs, which makes her come to her senses. As everything bad that happens is linked by Melissa to the house, it seems to be symbolic of Melissa's sense of being stuck in an unhappy situation.

These events point to a more allegorical reading, showing the succession of events as leading up to Melissa's breakdown and crisis of identity. This does not appear to have any relation to race (as opposed to Faith's breakdown), but rather to Melissa's relationship with Michael and role as a wife and mother. Melissa feels unfulfilled and frustrated, as her life has gone in a direction she is not completely happy with. She has given up her previous job to stay home with Blake, and she "occasionally [...] regretted her decision to change her life and go freelance" (91). She is unsure of herself and is having a sort of identity crisis: "For there was a niggling paradox inside Melissa that meant that she was still not sure exactly which

kind of person she was" (92). This is also stated after she has given birth to Blake: "Melissa cried on the wide steps of the hospital, because she understood that this was the life she would live now, this man, this boy, this girl, it was no more subject to fundamental change" (20). During a discussion with Damian, she admits that she feels scared now, which she did not used to be, as she felt she had a sort of guardian angel: "That thing that belonged only to me, that no one could ever take away. It's not there anymore. [...] I've been thinking maybe Blake's taken it. Maybe that's what happens with sons, they take their mothers' souls away" (216). Although she then dismisses her words by saying she is drunk, it does show that she feels as she has lost a sense of unified identity, perhaps through motherhood.

Upstone writes that "26a clearly divorces the characters' mental health problems from their racial identities" (51). I will argue that this seems to be the case here as well, as Melissa's identity problems do not seem linked to race, despite the fact that she seems to sometimes problematise her being black in England. While it may have played a part, the ending implies that the issue was her relationship: she has separated from Michael, moved out of the house, gotten a new job, which seem to have (partly) resolved (or helped with) her breakdown. Moreover, her breakdown can be linked to a Western feminist tradition. Cooper argues that in this tradition, "madness is the consequence of the silencing of women" (53). Melissa has suffered from sexism, and an abusive father as a child. Sexism is still present in many areas of her life, including in her previous job. A sentence towards the end of the novel shows that Melissa feels silenced: "inside she was thinking, *I know who it is*, but she didn't say this out loud because [Michael] would look at her again in that erasing way and then *she would disappear even more*" (289; original emphasis; my emphasis). When talking about her Nigerian beliefs, Michael is also described as being "dismissive" (193), and refuses to listen to Melissa's explanations.

Evans also points to the fact that Melissa constantly feels like her belonging is interrogated, she feels alienated (Evans and Samspon n.p.). She says that Melissa's childhood was marked by misogyny and patriarchy but adds that it is "as though she was not black enough" (Ibid.). This also points to a reading involving race. The role of race, or of a comforting cultural heritage, is emphasised at the end, when Melissa goes to her mother's after her fight with Michael: "There she was, a shrunken woman in a foreign land, yet home to her children when they most needed it [...] This is where you come when you are lost [...] You go to the first place, the first country, to her net curtains and her singular food" (319).

Alice is used as a sort of symbol for Nigeria, and for the safety it brings to her mixed race daughter. Nyman's explanation of homesickness can be applied here as well, as it is, as a reminder, "a longing to come home to the magic of stories, cultural memories, and myths" (25), which seems to be what Alice offers to her children. While the main reasons for the breakdown, and the ones that are more explicitly shown in the text, point to a reading disregarding the role of race, it does not seem to be as clear-cut. Melissa's status as a mixed race woman also plays a role, it seems, in her breakdown. Nonetheless, as stated above, the breakdown seems mostly resolved towards the end, as she makes changes in her relationships. I will thus maintain the argument that this was the main reason for Melissa's breakdown.

A lot more could be said about the ending and the supernatural element, and different readings are possible; I have chosen to take this particular route as it fits most into the discussion and theme of the thesis. The Crystal Palace is also a recurring element in the novel, and Melissa's breakdown is mirrored by the image of the palace burning down. The palace burning down seems to serve as a metaphor for the dying relationship: "The palace was no longer standing. It had burnt to the ground in 1936, after a long and steady decline" (27). The novel shows the "long and steady decline" of Michael and Melissa's relationship, which ends with Melissa's breakdown and the image of the fire.

Ordinary People presents the reader with a story that is relatable to many, and uses themes that are universal, such as motherhood, failing relationships, and mid-life crisis. References to race abound, but are brought up subtly throughout the novel. Although characters are rarely described in explicit racial terms, they are referred to by physical characteristics such as skin colour or hair, and these are often shown in a positive light. The characters face very little, if any, racial discrimination, but are nonetheless confronted to violence linked to race. The novel insists on gender difference, as it appears that male and female characters experience blackness in a different manner. Finally, the omniscient narrator occupies quite a prominent place in the novel, through the use for instance of sarcasm.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, my analysis has shown that *Fruit of the Lemon* and *Ordinary People* give two very different representations of everyday black British life. Unlike *Fruit of the Lemon*, *Ordinary People*'s story is not motivated by race and the identity issues linked to it, but race is still deeply embedded into the story. This conclusion will regroup the main differences – as well as similarities – found in the two novels analysed in this thesis.

As a reminder, it is essential to underline that both novels were published two decades apart, by authors of different generations and of different origins. These differences alone can already explain to some extent the distinct modes of representation of race in both books. Some of these differences could also be linked to specific literary choices made by the writers.

The characters in both novels do not all have the same origins: Faith is fully Jamaican, as is Michael. Damian's situation is ambiguous as his mother's ethnicity (and identity) is unknown; his father, however, is Trinidadian. Melissa, however, is mixed-race, with a Nigerian mother and an English father, and is thus the only character in both books with (direct) African origins.

Unlike Faith, the protagonists of *Ordinary People* seem to have grown up aware of their racial identity. Damian's childhood shows a sharp contrast to Faith's, as his father repeatedly talked to him about the discrimination black people faced. This resulted in Damian feeling a burden of 'continuing the fight', while also rejecting this responsibility as a child, wanting to be like every other (presumably white) 'normal' English child. However, it appears that he, like Faith, is unaware of his father's life before coming to England, and it is therefore safe to assume he knows very little about his family's background and wider history. Not much is said about Michael's parents, and it is not specified whether Melissa is aware of her family's history. Nonetheless, she knows of cultural Nigerian traditions thanks to her mother, and she seems adamant in making her children aware of them as well. All of the characters in *Ordinary People* seem conscious of the history of racism and of the hardships black people have faced, notably in England. They also appear to have grown up and lived alongside people of the same race, unlike Faith who was always surrounded almost exclusively by white people. Despite this more extensive knowledge about the past, their awareness of their racial

difference, and their proximity to more black people, Michael, Melissa and Damian still seem to have an ambiguous sense of belonging in England. They do, still as adults, realise when they are the only black people in the room, and feel the need to be around more black people (although Melissa does not say so, it still appears that she feels the same way, albeit perhaps in a less intense manner). Nonetheless, it is important to note that not much is said of these characters' childhood, and most of the novel focuses on their lives as adults in their thirties. The fact that they still sometimes feel like their belonging is questioned, even though they clearly are more aware of their culture and race than Faith is at the beginning of *Fruit of the Lemon*, suggests that Faith's triumphant return will not be as clear-cut as it may be implied. The ending shows that Faith has grown, and learnt more about her and her family's past and culture, and she feels confident she her belonging will be more assured. *Ordinary People* could suggest that she will probably still experience moments of unbelonging; however, unlike Melissa, Michael, and Damian, Faith's knowledge of her family history is very extensive, and she appears to have forged a close link to her family in Jamaica, something none of the protagonists of *Ordinary People* are shown to possess.

Both novels feature a travel abroad, and these trips have, in a way, similar motivations. Faith feels alienated in England, unwelcome: her journey abroad is a result of this feeling of unbelonging, although the destination is her parents' idea. Her 'holiday' in Jamaica serves to help her come to terms with her identity and give her a more secure sense of belonging. Michael and Melissa also go on holiday in a desire to escape England. They do not, however, travel to one of their mother countries. While the reasons for this could be practical (Spain is, after all, closer and cheaper than Jamaica or Nigeria), they have already been back to their mother countries before. Both books show the journey as a turning point for the characters (and especially for Melissa in the case of *Ordinary People*).

One of the key differences between the two novels lies in the way they each deal with the experience of racism. While Faith witnesses a lot of prejudice, hears many racist insults and is subjected to discrimination because of her skin colour (which she however refuses to acknowledge), no such experience is depicted for the characters of *Ordinary People*. No incidents occur for the duration of the novel, nor are there any mentioned in recollection of their childhood or younger years. There are no mentions of any awareness or witnessing of racism by any of their children either (nonetheless, the third person narration could suggest that the children are in denial, like Faith at the beginning of the story). Discrimination towards

black people can be seen more subtly, for example in the acknowledgment of gentrification as a white process, and in a more direct way in the murder of Justin. The violence shown by the murder of the boy mirrors that of the attack of the bookshop in *Fruit of the Lemon*, as Michael and Melissa recognise themselves in the attack, thinking it could happen to their own children, just like Faith had identified to the bookshop worker.

Although both books show a different side of London (Faith's London is predominantly white, and while this may have been the case for Michael, Melissa and Damian growing up, there were still black people present in their lives – even if it is only each other–, they agree on the fact that the countryside is in fact mostly made up of a white population, which is still true two decades after *Fruit of the Lemon* takes place. Although Faith (and Carl) are shown to want to get into the countryside but are made to understand they do not belong, that is not the case for Michael and Damian, who do not wish to live in the country as the former thinks that he would not belong, and the latter, who is already living in the countryside, feels a much stronger sense of belonging in the city..

Both novels also show different attitudes from the characters' parents: Faith and Damian's parents are in sharp contrast with each other, and the novels problematise each of their behaviour, suggesting neither of the extremes (Faith's parents complete erasure of their culture for Faith, and Damian's father excessive, incessant talks of racism) show a viable way of navigating race.

The one character whose experience of race differs dramatically from the rest of the main characters in both novels is Melissa. Her case is quite particular: it seems that her life was marked by sexism more than by racism. Just like Faith was initially, however, she seems to be a bit in denial about racism, or her racial difference: she felt like she belonged the most in Jamaica (despite her Nigerian and English origins), and sometimes feels alienated in England, wishing to escape the English people. She does not, however, understand Michael's need to be around black people. She is also shown to be aware of other black people and feels some sort of distant connection to them. Faith and Melissa share another common point, as they both suffer a sort of breakdown. While Faith's is caused by her realising she is denied belonging in her country of birth, it seems Melissa's has other causes. Melissa seems to lose a sense of self in her relationship and her role as a mother, but previous examples indicate that there might be more to it, and her identity as a mixed race woman may have played a (albeit

smaller) role. Nonetheless, I argue that both women are brought down by the silencing of their experiences by the people around them. While Michael does not pay attention to Melissa's warnings and complaints about the house and about their daughter's health, Faith's experience of racism is denied throughout the novel at her job interview, as well as by Andrew Bunyan, and by her white flatmates, to only name a few. Moreover, Melissa's difference differs the most from the other main characters (Faith, Michael, and Damian). The reason for Melissa's distinct experiences may also be because she has Nigerian origins and not Caribbean ones, or it could also be attributed to her being mixed race.

The books also contain distinct main themes. While *Fruit of the Lemon* heavily focuses on memory and on the importance of remembering and knowing one's origins and family history, *Ordinary People*'s central theme is parenthood (and especially motherhood) and romantic relationships.

The evolution of different generations show a hopeful conclusion. It seems as though each generation is getting closer to a more complete sense of belonging. The protagonists of *Ordinary People*, while showing signs of ambivalence about their belonging in England, nonetheless are more secure than Faith was at the beginning of the novel. Melissa and Michael's daughter Ria shows hopes for the newer generations: she shows interest in her cultural background by asking questions and partaking in cultural traditions (such as eating traditional food), and she lives in a society that is becoming more and more multicultural: figures from national census made by the ONS show that the percentage of the population considered ethnically white has diminished from 94.1% in 1991 to 86% in 2011 (Weedon 43). It does however feature what appears to be dilutions of cultural practices. Moreover, the rise of black British literature, and especially of novels showing the ordinariness of black life, constitute a non-negligible source of identifications for the black British population. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon calls for the necessity of media made specifically for black children, so that they can identify to it (Fanon 148). With diversity on the rise on TV and in Hollywood (although there is still a long way to go) (Ramos n.p.), which would provide children with representation, it seems more likely to see more multicultural, truer to life representations on the big (and smaller) screen, providing notably the black population with more representation. This seems an accurate moment to remind of Stein's quote that black British literature "not only portrays change in British society and culture, but, significantly, is also partly responsible for bringing about change" (42-43). While this reading may be a bit

too optimistic, it does provide a ray of hope, especially since both authors' avowed impetus to write is to represent a dimension that was missing.

The prominent theme of motherhood brings about one of the very important subject of this conclusion, and of race analysis as a whole. Although this thesis has focused on analysing the role of race, it has also briefly brought up issues of gender and class. Race as a factor of discrimination should not be studied alone, as it is influenced by other factors such as class, race, sexuality, etc. Dave Gunning writes about the way in which class and gender are not completely separate from one another: "this process perhaps finds better expression in the insight of the authors of *Policing the Crisis* that 'race is the modality in which class is lived', and Paul Gilroy's supplementary suggestion that 'gender is the modality in which race is lived'" (Gunning 16). Therefore, "these systems of oppression cannot usefully be thought of as separate from each other, or as doubled, but rather as intertwined to a degree that one may serve as the manifest expression of an attack latently motivated by another" (Gunning 16). Identity responds to the same logic, as for instance "being English is by no means an unproblematic identity, and is subject to all kinds of gradation depending on class, gender and other factors" (Gunning 22). Matthew Taunton writes that Levy's novel *Never Far from Nowhere* insists on the importance of class for the characters, which is almost as prominent a factor of discrimination as is race (Taunton 27). Fanon also writes about the intersections between race and class: "but that does not prevent the idea of race from mingling with that of class: The first is concrete and particular, the second is universal and abstract" (Fanon 133). Finally, I will add to that Medoravski's remark that, for both first and second-generation migrants, "marginalizations are often intensified along the axis of gender" (Medovarski 166), and Wright's comments that theorisations of the black subject are incomplete if they fail to mention gender (Wright 125).

Gender is an especially prominent theme in both novels, particularly in *Ordinary People*. References to sexism and rigid gender roles can be found throughout the novel through Melissa's character. *Fruit of the Lemon* also hints at the different treatment Faith's brother Carl receives from their parents, and his different experience of racial discrimination. The role gender plays, and its interaction with race, in both novels, would be an interesting theme to pursue; unfortunately, the length of this thesis has not allowed for an extensive analysis of this topic.

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