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Redressing Racist Legacies in the Melancholic Nation: Anger and Silences in Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon*

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Abstract: "I am the bastard child of Empire and I will have my day," declares Faith, the narrator of Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), upon her return to England from Jamaica and after a catalogue of racial microaggressions that Levy carefully unfolds in the first part of the novel. Focusing largely on this portion of the novel, this article looks at how Faith's experiences of racialised trauma are a direct consequence of the melancholic state of the nation. It draws on Sara Ahmed's figure of the angry black woman, Audre Lorde's pioneering work on anger as a response to racism, and Anne Anlin Cheng's and Paul Gilroy's work to explore how the novel addresses racial and postcolonial melancholia. Paying close attention to the formal developments in Levy's work, particularly her use of ellipses and the defamiliarising effects of her openings and endings, I examine the novel's complex engagement with silences, anger, and racism. Like *Small Island* (2004) and her other novels, *Fruit of the Lemon* brings multiple and contesting collective and personal histories into direct collision from its very first sentence. The novel presents readers with "the suffering racial body" (Cheng 29) from the very beginning and, like Levy's other works, urges readers to keep on "looking at the historical, cultural and cross racial consequences of racial wounding and to situate these effects as crucial, formative elements of individual, national and cultural identities" (Cheng 94). By looking closely at the workings of racial politics in the novel and the ways in which various expressions of anger are silenced and/or articulated, I argue that Faith's situation is complicated

because the nation is melancholic in its relation to its colonial history and the raced other.

Keywords: Andrea Levy, *Fruit of the Lemon*, racism, melancholia

In June 2020, actress Wunmi Mosaku spoke to director Christiana Ebohon-Green for *The Guardian*'s recent black British culture special, a series of intergenerational conversations between black British artists in the era of Black Lives Matter. Mosaku notes: "I've had someone in costumes say to me, right at the beginning of my career: 'This outfit would work, if it wasn't for your stupid thighs.' *My* thighs! That can press 200lbs! I feel like I have a very typical west African physique, and that is part of my blackness!" (qtd. in Jones; emphasis in original). Mosaku's comments about everyday microaggressions and the exhausting work of "just trying to be the 'non-threatening black woman'" in the twenty-first century (qtd. in Jones) disturbingly echo the experiences of Faith, the narrator of Andrea Levy's third novel, *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999). Faith's employment as a wardrobe assistant in the costume department at the British Broadcasting Corporation, subsequent job interview for the position of dresser, and the conditions under which she briefly becomes "probably the first black dresser they've had" (Levy, *Fruit* 140) are far from celebratory in terms of breaking the glass ceiling. While she does not immediately possess Mosaku's language to celebrate and fortify her blackness against violence and objectification, Faith's journey, as Sara Ahmed usefully summarises in her reading of the novel, is "a story of becoming black as an act of resistance to being passed over, where becoming black means restoring family connections, of hearing family stories" (*Promise* 86). The first half of *Fruit of the Lemon* deals with the impact of everyday and structural racism on Faith before its second half explores her emerging black consciousness. Drawing on Ahmed's figure of the angry black woman, Audre Lorde's pioneering work on anger as a response to racism, and Anne Anlin Cheng's and Paul Gilroy's discussions of racial and postcolonial melancholia, this article explores *Fruit of*

the Lemon's careful unfolding and relentless cataloguing of racism and how various expressions of anger are silenced and/or articulated in the first half of the text. I begin by looking at Levy's use of ellipses and silences as effective methods of exploring Faith's experiences of racialized trauma as a direct consequence of the melancholic state of the nation. In the second part of the article, I examine Faith's articulations of anger and grief and discuss her becoming an "angry black woman" (Ahmed, *Promise* 67) after her friends and co-workers attempt to make her get over racial wounding.

Reflecting on Levy's "extraordinary prism," Rufus Norris, the National Theatre director of *Small Island*, recalls that, shortly before her death, Levy told him that she "need[ed] [him] to not patronise [her] characters by judging or feeling sorry for them" ("Remembering Andrea Levy" 26). The seriousness of Levy's words—this ethical and political task that she has bequeathed to readers and critics—guides my close reading of *Fruit of the Lemon*. I understand Levy's statement as a caution against reading her characters' identity struggles as personal journeys of self-formation and transformation that may risk diminishing their broader significance. I have written elsewhere about some of the issues in reading black British fiction through the lens of the Bildungsroman genre, an individualistic narrative of personal development or character formation (Veličković, "Melancholic Travellers"). Bernardine Evaristo makes a similar point when citing a *Poetry Review* of her novel *The Emperor's Babe* (2001) that suggests she "was trying to find some sense of identity by exploring the black history of Britain" (qtd. in Veličković, *The Idea of (Un)Belonging* 202–03). Evaristo emphasizes that the novel is not about her "trying to find [her]self as if it's a personal Odyssey" but that she is interested in writing about this history as part of "our entire heritage as a nation" (qtd. in Veličković, "Melancholic Travellers" 8). That is the broader significance of her work. As Michael Perfect notes in his analysis of *Fruit of the Lemon* and Levy's other novels, by addressing "the silences of nations as well as those of individuals" and "exploring the relationship between the existence of racism in a nation and that nation's erasure of particular historical narratives" (40), Levy asks "complex questions about the relationship between contemporary Britain and its imperial

history" (31). *Fruit of the Lemon* may appear to be Faith's story as she navigates the "the haunting negativity" (Cheng 14) that continues to mark "the very category of 'the racialized'" (25), but as I show through my close reading, the novel abounds with detailed episodes that immediately direct readers' attention to "the historical, cultural and cross racial consequences of racial wounding and . . . situate these effects as crucial, formative elements of individual, national and cultural identities" (Cheng 19–20). The novel carefully unfolds these historical legacies that determine Faith's position in the present.

The novel presents readers with "the suffering racial body" (Cheng 29) from the very beginning and reminds them of this suffering on almost every page. Before I analyse these episodes closely, it is important to reflect on the significance of the opening portions of Levy's works and their defamiliarising and unsettling effects as part of her wider aesthetics, which often alerts readers to the nation's wilful amnesia about the Empire in "an attempt to understand empire and its aftermath as a series of intertwined and interdependent histories" (Perfect 31). By exposing the residue of past histories of hurt and forms of racialization that make Faith's belonging, coming of age, and self-realization precarious in the present, the novel exposes the legacies that continue to produce both racial and national melancholia. Recent work by queer and postcolonial scholars has deployed melancholia—Sigmund Freud's term for an unproductive attachment to loss and a disabling state characterized by self-loathing and a "narcissistic identification" with the lost object (288)—as a diagnosis for the unresolved post-imperial condition of the nation. Melancholia has also been reappraised in the context of the harmful and cumulative effects of racialised experiences and possibilities of resistance and healing. Drawing on the work of German psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich—specifically, their examination of the inability of post-war German society to confront its Nazi past—Gilroy looks at Britain's "postimperial melancholia" (98): its melancholic attachment to past imperial greatness and its inability to work through the loss of Empire. Postimperial melancholia resurfaces in the present because the brutal legacy of imperialism remains largely unacknowledged and/or worked through, and so it continues to shape

the nation's ambivalent attitudes towards strangers and otherness in the present. Cheng and David L. Eng and Shinhee Han use the concept of melancholia to describe the complexities of everyday conflicts and the struggles racialized and minority groups face "with experiences of immigration, assimilation and racialization" (Eng and Han 344). Eng and Han explore the relationship between national and racial melancholia. In their discussion of racial melancholia as an ongoing relational process, Eng and Han write that this process is not simply about an individual drama for the racialized subject but always involves the complex and shifting social processes and causes of racialization within the national imaginary. Cheng also suggests that the dominant white culture is melancholic, in that its "relation to the raced other displays an entangled network of repulsion and sympathy, fear and desire, repudiation and identification" (12). However, Cheng suggests that, on a personal level, racial melancholia as "the ontological and psychical status of a social subject who has been made into an 'object', a 'loss', an 'invisibility', or a 'phantom'" (14) can become a more enabling process through which racialized individuals articulate strategies for healing and confront "the haunting negativity" that continues to mark "the very category of 'the racialized'" (25). Levy's novel explores both of these forms of melancholia, and it is within these frameworks that I contextualise and read the novel's engagement with structural and everyday racism and their effects on Faith and those around her.

Like *Small Island* (2004) and Levy's other novels, *Fruit of the Lemon* brings multiple and contesting collective and personal histories into direct collision from its very first sentence. This blending of histories is also evident in *Fruit of the Lemon*'s and *Small Island*'s structure—in their Prologues, in Parts 1 and 2 of *Fruit of the Lemon* that bring England and Jamaica closer, in the "Before" and "After" sections of *Small Island* and its non-linear, alternate narration. While *Small Island* has been hailed as marking a shift from Levy's earlier works and "a preoccupation [with] Black British identity" to an engagement "with the identity of the UK conceived internationally and transculturally for the benefit of all" (McLeod 49), I see Levy's work developing in metaphorical concentric circles around a common centre: each novel expands on, deepens, and

peels back yet another layer of the shared British-Caribbean history and dis/mantles the silences around it through her wonderfully complex and contradictory characters.[1] As she emphasizes in many interviews, her "books are about [her] trying to explore [her] British Caribbean ancestry, and to place that heritage where [she] think[s] it belongs—squarely in the mainstream of British history" (qtd. in Baxter and James 2). This engagement with British-Caribbean history seems to have been an ongoing project, and in that sense *Fruit of the Lemon* is much more than a Bildungsroman. That is, the journey of self-formation cannot come full circle while the nation keeps on refusing to also be transformed. Faith's visit to Jamaica enables her to heal from racial trauma and return to England with empowering knowledge about her heritage and family history; it is then that she utters the most powerful line in the novel: "I am the bastard child of Empire and I will have my day" (Levy, *Fruit* 327). Back home, however, the conditions are yet to change. In a similar way, Perfect reads the moments of non-resolution in *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996) and *Fruit of the Lemon* as warnings "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" (34). The unresolved endings, silences, and moments of tension in Levy's novels are therefore creative and productive; they draw attention to the novel's need to (re)create something that was not there as much as they alert readers to how the protagonists are marked by the remains and residues of histories of racism that persist in the present.

I. Opening Lines: Levy's Narratives and the Work of Mourning

Levy passed away on 14 February 2019. The news reached me the next morning as I was on the train going to teach *The Long Song* (2010) to first-year students and *Small Island* to final-year students that same afternoon. We were supposed to discuss the opening pages of both novels. For many students, it was their first encounter not only with Levy's work but also with the marginalized and erased histories that she brought to the forefront of the British national story during her career. A revealing teaching moment occurred when the predominantly white students in

the class were unable to recognize, describe, or speak about what takes place in the opening pages of *The Long Song* when Kitty takes over the narration from her son: "It was finished almost as soon as it began" (Levy 7). The rape of black women by white slave owners and other brutal chapters in British colonial history had likely never been taught or included in their curriculum before they came to university and, for many, their encounters with black British writing while at university had been conducted with what Heidi Safia Mirza usefully describes as "a tourist approach" (qtd. in Batty) at best. They did not have the language to discuss issues of race and slavery confidently, and this was a failure of whitewashed curriculum and history.

The opening pages of *The Long Song* are imbued with an ethical obligation and sense of responsibility attached to the re-memory, trauma, and gaping absences associated with transatlantic slavery. Levy presents several competing narratives from the beginning: the importance of recreating oral histories through the "lasting legacy of a printed book" (Levy, *The Long Song* 4); the need to honor and not patronize enslaved peoples through spectacles of racial suffering and dehumanization, evident in Thomas Kinsman's foreword in which he writes that his "mama began her life as *a person* for whom writing the letters ABC could have seen her put to lash, for she was born a slave" (2–3; emphasis added); and an invitation to participate in a transformational and ongoing engagement with the legacy of slavery that will enable the nation and its institutions to rethink its modern foundations built on exploitation, as Kinsman's mother reminds us—"all this particular distress so there might be sugar to sweeten the tea and blacken the teeth of the people in England" (8).

David James discusses how inventive Levy is both in terms of syntax and creating a sense of immediacy (53). I also focus on the immersive and defamiliarising openings of her novels as examples of her particular signature, her aesthetics, and her politics. The ways in which Levy exposes various legacies of empire through everyday encounters is one example of her writing style. The Prologue of *Small Island*, for instance, asks for a readjustment of the dominant discourse of empire-as-celebration and ways of seeing the world head-on. As Queenie and her family walk through the British Empire Exhibition encountering

the spectacle of "the whole Empire in little" (Levy, *Small Island* 3), illusions of past greatness literally melt away (the statue of "the Prince of Wales in yellow butter" [4] dissolves in the heat) and readers are immediately exposed to a catalogue of the complexities of racism that are the British Empire's legacy. Their mixed descriptions of the colonized at the exhibition, expressed with both repulsion and desire—"India was full of women brightly dressed in strange long colorful fabrics" (4) and "the dots meant they were ill" (5), while an African man is described as being "carved from melting chocolate" (6)—show the inherent fissures in colonial ideology and the idea of racial superiority. Readers are offered a corrective vision of what the Empire exhibitions are really about and their racist history. Imperial fantasies of greatness and superiority are exposed through the lack of knowledge and understanding this small island has about the people it colonized; in one scene, Queenie's teacher corrects her, mistakenly, "that Africa was a country" (3). Just as Queenie is born into and educated by a system that is silent about the intimacies that connect British history with that of the Caribbean and other parts of the world, so too is Faith, decades later. But while much was expected of *Small Island*, which was expected to "operate as a hinge between the past (slavery and its abolition, post-war immigration) and the present (contemporary multiculturalism)" (Carroll 68), *Fruit of the Lemon* failed to garner wider critical and cultural appeal, success, and impact, despite that fact that it presents "the histories that bind us together" (Levy, "Back To My Own Country" 19). The majority of critics viewed it mainly as Faith's story rather than a national story.

Fruit of the Lemon, like its successor *Small Island*, explores the legacy of the British Empire and how the nation's ignorance and amnesia around it continues to shape and affect different generations of black and white British and Jamaican characters. Maria Helena Lima observes that, "[a]fter reading *Small Island*, . . . readers will not be able to see 'home' and 'empire' as two separate spaces" (56). *Fruit of the Lemon* also brings England and Jamaica together via an expanding family tree. The Jackson genealogy, provided at the beginning of the novel, only looks like "a seedling of a family tree" (Stein 66) because the family's arrival and presence in England has been decontextualized. This is evident in

the novel's opening sentence, uttered by the bully boys at Faith's primary school: "Your mum and dad came on a banana boat" (Levy, *Fruit* 3). Not only does Levy immediately address the English's ignorance about the arrival of the Windrush generation, but she also exposes the nation's gaps in knowledge and history that stretch back much further in time. *Fruit of the Lemon* opens with a failure of the education system and Faith's memory of racist abuse on the playground that mirrors the power relations of wider society and prefigures "the sheer number of racist incidents" (Levy and Morrison 330) that Faith is subjected to throughout her education, working life, and navigation of everyday public and private spaces. In an interview with Levy, Blake Morrison finds the number of such incidents in the novel "striking" (Levy and Morrison 330), yet this relentless cataloguing emphasizes how Faith's heritage and belonging in her country of birth is regularly disputed. Faith is born into institutional racism, and the novel begins by depicting a site of racial wounding: the "bully boys . . . used to say . . . 'Faith is a darkie and her mum and dad came on a banana boat' . . . until I began to cry" (Levy, *Fruit* 3). Throughout the novel, Levy demands that readers imagine how Faith must be feeling and directs their attention to similar traumatic sites of "suffering injury to speaking out against that injury" (Cheng 3). She also explores Faith's inability to do so, signalled, as I will show, by the frequent use of ellipses.

Another example of casual and persistent racism in the opening pages of the novel is when the bully boys laugh at Faith in their "music and movement" class as they are played Harry Belafonte's famous rendition of "The Banana Boat Song (Day-O)." Levy uses the song, which likely originated among Jamaican workers who loaded shipping vessels with bananas at the docks and was popularised globally by the success of Belafonte's 1956 record *Calypso*, to open up the novel's wider thematic concerns—the complexity of the British-Caribbean connections that are rooted in the history of slavery, consequent gaps in personal and collective histories, and the illusion that Britain "can be disconnected from its imperial past" (Gilroy 2). If the origins of "The Banana Boat Song" have been decontextualized in Faith's school curriculum and the song is used in "music and movement" class (Levy, *Fruit* 3) only because of its

catchy tune, Levy immediately makes connections between her mother and father's arrival in England on the Jamaica Producers' banana boat in the 1940s and Britain's broader colonial history through references to her mother's colonial education that taught her about the effects of colonial education on Faith's mother, who was taught about snow and "the Mother Country" by a teacher from Scotland (6). Thus, Levy also contextualises the arrival of Faith's parents in Britain as a result of those histories and provides a counterpoint to the bully boys' ignorance and the depersonalised history lessons about the slaves "captured and transported from Africa to the New World" that Faith, unsurprisingly, hates (4). It is not Faith who "conflates the vessel her parents took to England from Jamaica in 1948 with a slave ship that probably transported her ancestors centuries earlier" (Stein 66) but the bullies who tell her that her parents "are slaves" (Levy, *Fruit* 4). The novel begins to set the historical record straight by providing accurate facts about Faith's parents' arrival as part of the Windrush generation as opposed to misconceptions about their coming on "a slave ship" (4) or "a banana boat" (3). The boys' conflation of the histories of slavery and post-war migration is an effective way to expose Britain's wilful ignorance about its role in establishing and perpetuating them. The Windrush generation remains excluded from the national story, and Levy exposes the workings of Britain's postcolonial melancholia—"the error of imagining that postcolonial people are only unwanted aliens without any substantive historical, political or cultural connections to the collective life of their fellow subjects" (Gilroy 98). She also explores the effects of this erasure on Faith, who matures in such a hostile environment.[2]

Additionally, the hard labour of the tallymen in "The Banana Boat Song" prefigures Faith's parents' struggles upon arriving in Britain. The dehumanizing effects of their de-skilling and the racism they encounter while trying to find suitable housing explain why they do not want to burden their children with these difficult stories of arrival. The reasons for their silence are emphasized in Faith's mother's statement that "these days are best forgotten" (Levy, *Fruit* 10). As Ahmed writes, "racism is a pain that is hard to bear" and those silences are a way of protecting "those we love from being hurt, or even . . . ourselves from hurt"

(*Promise* 82–83). While Faith does not know much about her Jamaican family, in the opening pages she presents detailed images of seen and unseen labour and the discrimination that her parents have suffered. Faith's mother, Mildred, comes to Britain with a nursing qualification but is offered work as "an orderly" (Levy, *Fruit* 9) and has to negotiate racialised and gendered labour hierarchies. Levy captures her deep unhappiness with domestic and menial labour: "[S]kivvy at home, skivvy at work" (9). Faith's father, Wade, has to start off with "just carrying things" (9) and works "from six in the morning until after nine at night" (10). When the family are made homeless when their landlord decides to sell their house and Mildred has to live with Faith and Faith's brother, Carl, in "a halfway house with other homeless families," Wade has to spend six months "in a hostel for men where he share[s] a room with nine others" (10) and is only able to see his family on weekends. Levy carefully lays bare these important details and asks readers to imagine the impact of these long-term struggles on Faith's parents as a way of capturing the hardworking spirit of the Windrush generation in the face of racism and prejudice.

The chapter ends with the accrual of material capital in the form of a house in Crouch End that Faith's parents are able to buy after ten years of hard work and frugal living in a tiny council flat. The house symbolizes the putting down of roots and Mildred and Wade's efforts to make a place for themselves on their own terms ("we finally arrive home" [11]) and imagine a better future for their children. But because their presence and place in British culture and society has been decontextualized and constantly questioned, Mildred and Wade—like the workers in "The Banana Boat Song" who "wan' go home" when daylight comes—dream of going back to Jamaica but are unable to afford it until they retire. Faith's rightful place in Britain is determined by the nation's unresolved postimperial condition and the effects of "corporeal and historico-racial schemas" that take different shapes in particular moments and situations and on particular bodies (Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 55). Recent reports recount the presence of anti-blackness in English schools and black children becoming "willing to suppress some of their cultural and racial identity to prevent what should be the golden era of their lives

from becoming a hellish travesty" (Stephen-Diver) as a result; this is precisely what happens to Faith and is the reason why Levy opens the novel by highlighting racism on the playground and in the education system.

Finally, Levy's inclusion of "The Banana Boat Song" raises readers' awareness of the complexity of a shared British-Caribbean history and counters any claims on the part of the nation to cultural and racial purity. Like Belafonte—who is of black and white, "Haitian, Jamaican and Martiniquan heritage" (McGill 47)—Faith is of mixed ancestry that is revealed to her as the family tree grows; she is also the child of "migrant" parents. I deliberately enclose the word "migrant" in quotation marks here to signal how it does not adequately describe the Windrush generation who arrived, as David Lammy usefully observes, "under the Nationality Act of 1948" as "British citizens." He notes that "they were British subjects not because they came to Britain, but because Britain came to them, took their ancestors across the Atlantic, colonised them, sold them into slavery, profited from their labour and made them British subjects." Continuing to describe them as migrants, as Gilroy shows, obfuscates the historical truth and thus presents "postcolonial people" only as "unwanted aliens without any substantive historical, political or cultural connections to the collective life of their fellow subjects" (98), as the recent Windrush scandal has amply demonstrated.[3] It is this "error of imagining" (98) that the novel seeks to expose and correct through a seemingly simple but effective and multi-layered image of arrival on a banana boat. It is interesting to note that "The Banana Boat Song" has commonly been described as an example of Jamaican calypso, which is inaccurate given that the genre was "born and bred in the crucible of Trinidad's inter-imperial histories of colonization, enslavement, occupation and migration" (Perry 3) and is "rooted in traditions developed by West African slaves brought to the Caribbean" (Ramm). These histories are a part of Faith's personal history as much as they are British and European history. Taking inspiration from calypso's different cultural sources and its combining of "joyful cadences with serious and often subtle social commentary" (Ramm), Levy draws on these layers of meanings in calypso to unravel competing official histories and oral traditions and celebrate hybridity. Before the novel can equip Faith with

a rich history that she is proud of—as her education and society fail to do—it takes readers through the daily microaggressions that occur because these histories of colonization and migration have been silenced.

II. Racial Melancholia and Microaggressions

Faith's identity is profoundly affected by the historical amnesia that pervades all social structures. Her situation in the novel is complicated further because the dominant culture is melancholic in its relation to its colonial history and the raced other. Since the nation's attachments to past imperial greatness have not been worked through, Gilroy argues, imperialism's residual elements continue to linger or transform into new forms of racism. Levy explores the workings of postimperial melancholia through a series of casual, everyday encounters. Faith is singled out for being "one of the lucky ones" by her tutor, who attributes her academic achievement to "an ethnicity which shines through" (Levy, *Fruit* 31). While she may not have full knowledge of how these remarks are a remnant of patronising colonial attitudes, Faith has a strong sense of how her blackness has been fetishized. She notes ironically: "I could only suppose that I had some sort of collective unconscious that was coming through my slave ancestry" (31). She is aware that she needs to protect herself against such ignorance as she refuses to be racialised by her tutor. Reflecting back on the fact that she got her first job at her degree show, Faith reclaims some agency by acknowledging the quality of her work when compared to that of her peers: "[P]erhaps it was that I was just better than everyone else" (31). The novel abounds with such ironic passages that portray the workings of racial and national melancholia.

Levy also explores the consequences of racial wounding and how, as Cheng describes in her discussion of oppressed subjectivities, "racialized people as complex psychical beings deal with the objecthood thrust upon them, which to a great extent constitutes how they negotiate sociality and nationality" (19). When she starts working for the BBC, Faith's blackness is an object of constant scrutiny. Her white colleague Lorraine mentions her own "coloured" boyfriend Derek and his "ever so nice" family (Levy, *Fruit* 38) as proof of her liberal attitudes but is unaware of the role her problematic allyship plays in perpetuating stereotypes of

reputable, non-threatening blackness. Shortly after this episode, Faith and her brother Carl make a trip to the countryside to see a second-hand car for sale. Levy powerfully captures the changing perceptions of blackness in public, private, and outdoor spaces. Faith and Carl are subjected to the visual economy of race and are seen as unexpected visitors. The small white woman who is selling the car expresses surprise upon opening the door to them. Levy uses an ellipsis to highlight this violence of whiteness and surveillance of black bodies. "I was expecting . . . [,]" she says before trailing off and eventually adding, "I'll just shut the door" (59). Carl is aware that they are seen as a threatening presence and tells Faith that the lady thinks they have "come to mug her" (59), a statement that echoes the media panic around mugging that was used to police young black men in the 1970s.[4] Faith responds differently, first by putting on her "'I've-got-a-degree' accent" (58) and later adding that she works in television (60). I am reluctant to read her response as an internalisation of stereotypes. Cheng cautions against "the reductive notion of 'internalization'" and explains how therein "lies a world of relations that is much about surviving grief as embodying it" (19–20). In the eyes of the white woman, Faith and Carl embody the threatening Other and Faith's reaction is a survival response to a traumatizing situation. In this passage, Levy explores how "racialised people deal with objecthood thrust upon them" (Cheng 20) in different ways.

This is not the first instance of racial wounding in the novel. Cheng observes that "racial melancholia has always existed for raced subjects both as a *sign* of rejecting and as a psychic *strategy* in response to that rejection" (20; emphasis in original). Recently, the racial harassment of Christian Cooper, an avid African-American birder, by Amy Cooper, a white woman, in Central Park in New York City and a widespread sharing of video footage of the incident has painfully reminded us of the workings of white privilege, ownership of spaces, and the precariousness of black lives in such spaces. Faith's response can be read as a psychic strategy against "the narrative of black bodies being harmed in nature and in the outdoors" (Lanham qtd. in Noor). In the next section, I discuss Faith's second visit to the countryside when she refuses to remain silent about these violations. The differential positioning of

young black British men and the limited actual and representational space that they are allowed to navigate is emphasized when the white car seller "looked at [Carl] startled, as if she didn't expect him to be able to speak" (Levy, *Fruit* 59). When Carl comes to Faith's house that she shares with three white housemates, she sees his presence in the doorway to their living room through "a *sign* of rejecting" and uses negative stereotypes to describe him as a big tall black man and a stranger who was "out of context" (Levy, *Fruit* 53). Looking at her brother also prompts Faith to observe how, when Carl was young, "everyone said he was like an angel," but when he got older, "they all thought he came to resemble the devil" (53).

This passage is reminiscent of the moment in Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012) when Nathan Bogle's journey from childhood to adulthood is described in similar terms: "Everyone loves a bredrin when he's ten. . . . After that he's a problem. . . . There's no way to live in this country when you're grown. They don't want you, your own people don't want you, no one wants you" (313). While the novels offer only partial narratives of young black British men—even the story of Felix, a young black British man who is fatally stabbed, is told through the section titled "Guest" in *NW*, and Carl certainly does not conform to the negative stereotypes of black men as dangerous and potentially criminal—the emphasis both Smith and Levy place on "they" and "everyone" demonstrates how harmful these social contexts are through their limited and limiting trajectories for black men. As JJ Bola writes, "we desperately need to construct a Black male identity that is free of the remnants of colonial impositions, and that does not reproduce the oppressive, hierarchical structures that come with them" (8). Carl's awareness of the racialization of black men offers a useful counterpoint to Faith's traumatic experiences.

In addition to presenting how images of overdetermined blackness as always already threatening circulate in the white collective unconscious, the novel uses ellipses and repetition to explore the effects of living in a society built on anti-blackness and structural racism. Faith has a series of "mini-breakdown[s]" that are caused by this structural violence before she witnesses a violent racist attack on a black woman bookstore owner later in the novel. Blackness is simultaneously hyper-visible and erased in

her school's curriculum and at her workplace. Mark Stein comments on the significance of the national institution that is the BBC in the novel as a "pars pro toto figure" and "a sphere where racism is played out" (67). Faith wants to apply for the position of dresser since she has the ability to do it. To do so, she has to navigate a workplace that presents itself as colour blind but is, in fact, institutionally racist. This is shown through a catalogue of problematic episodes. Her colleague Lorraine's comment that the BBC does not have black dressers, her astonishment at Faith's failure to notice "that there aren't any coloured people dressing" (Levy, *Fruit* 71), the overheard conversations between the managers that the actors would not like "a coloured person putting their clothes on" (71), and the moment in which her colleague Henry asks "what if the actor is coloured?" (70) effectively capture the structural violence being done on absent and present black bodies. Levy uses repetition to explore the impact of this traumatic event on Faith, who is at the receiving end of these conversations. Faith is visibly upset—her hands are shaking—but Lorraine takes on the problematic role of white saviour when she desperately tries to make Faith feel better: "[Y]ou should try because everyone likes you. . . . [Y]ou're not upset? . . . [O]h, don't be upset. You're not upset, are you? You shouldn't let them upset you. You're not upset, are you? Don't let them upset you. They're not worth getting upset about. . . . Lorraine carried on insisting until she thought she had made me smile" (71). Levy is at her best when she tries to capture the blockage points that prevent what Cheng describes as the "transformation from grief to grievance, from suffering injury to speaking out against that injury" (3). When Faith tries to tell her mother about her first realisation that the institution is racist, her mother calls it "foolishness" (72) and this word is repeated several times throughout the passage. This is also the first time that Faith tries to verbally formulate and speak against "racial injury" (Cheng 5): "[S]omeone told me they don't employ black people as dressers," she tells her mum as she "sat back from me like she'd just seen fire coming from my mouth" (Levy, *Fruit* 73).

Faith's anger is defused when her mother tries to reassure her that, since she is an educated woman from a good and devout home, "they can't mess with you" (72). Faith's mother's reaction to racism that her

daughter experiences at work is described through her repetition of the word "foolishness" (72–73) five times in this extraordinary passage and can be read as a form of parental protection. At the same time, by defusing racism as "foolishness" her mother evades the question of blackness and both women's (un)belonging in Britain. Faith's anger seeks a different outlet that she does not have at home or in her wider community—a collective form of anti-racist solidarity. Levy powerfully conveys the irony of Faith's predicament as she glances over the packing boxes that her parents keep accumulating in their flat in case they decide to go back to Jamaica as a perfect metaphor for transgenerational black lives that are constantly "boxed-in" in postimperial Britain and are at risk of being told to go back where they came from. At the same time, Faith's retelling of the incident and her refusal to be placed in an inferior position by her white colleagues brings up memories of earlier racial injury for her mother—"[Y]ou can hate me but please love my children" (73), Faith imagines her mother saying—and a painful realisation that little has changed for her children. She notes: "[T]here are laws now, you know. When me and your dad first came to this country . . ." (73). The moment offers a brief instance of the solidarity that Faith desperately seeks. The sentence also provides another effective use of the ellipsis that draws attention to the silenced histories of racial abuse endured by the Windrush generation. The novel shows how difficult it is for Faith to "translate racial grief into social claims" and to achieve this "transformation from grief to grievance" (Cheng 3), even when her brother's girlfriend, Ruth, later tells her that she was "the victim of racism" at work (Levy, *Fruit* 141). Ruth is the first character who calls out racism and I will return to her later in the article.

Levy also uses ellipses to draw attention to the dominant whiteness and its modes of erasure and assimilation. Faith's mother's way of protecting her daughter is implicated in these assimilating tendencies as Faith feels her "mentally combing at my 'too long and a little fuzzy' hair, straightening it, cutting it short, neat[,] . . . so I would look more . . ." (73). More white, the reader assumes. Cheng reminds us of the ambivalences and contradictions in racial melancholia, noting that "while much critical energy has been directed towards deconstructing

categories such as gender and race, less attention has been given to the ways in which individuals and communities remain invested in maintaining such categories, even when such identities prove to be prohibitive or debilitating" (7). In the second part of Levy's novel, we find out indirectly that Faith's parents were, at the same time, concerned about Faith's lack of interest in her parents' heritage and how being surrounded by "white people [who] were not brought up as [she] was" (330) would impact her wellbeing, as Faith's Jamaican cousin Vincent tells her when he relays what her parents explained to their Jamaican relatives. The novel's engagement with accumulative silences, with what is seen and unseen, marked and unmarked, is crucial for contextualising and understanding the lead-up to Faith's breakdown.

In addition to cataloguing everyday microaggressions, the novel explores a multitude of ways in which racism as a violent and speech-based act is performed. When Faith goes to visit her friend Marion's family, she witnesses a disturbingly racist conversation about an incident at school involving Marion's sister Trina and a young black classmate of hers. The fight that ensued between the two girls is described by Trina and her father as a response to alleged bullying, but the actual violence that readers see takes place through the dehumanisation of the unnamed black girl. The sheer repetition of racist words—"wog" (83), "coon" (83), "darkie" (84), and "nig-nog" (85), uttered reciprocally by Trina, her father, and her grandmother—is also performative because it violates Faith, who is standing there, listening. Cheng writes that Trinh Minh-ha observes that both "the imperial gaze" and "the liberal critics" love "the image of the 'native' as a violated site" (Minh-ha qtd. in Cheng 144). Levy asks readers to imagine the traumatic impact of witnessing that this seen and unseen violence has on Faith and the unnamed black girl—and to which Marion's family is clearly oblivious. By presenting an image of absent and present bodies in pain, Levy asks readers to pay close attention to the accumulation of racism over several generations and, in the second part of the novel, several centuries. These histories of hurt account for Faith's and her parents' positioning in the present as well as for the complicated exclusion/inclusion of blackness by both white and black characters.

The complete absence of political blackness and positive role models is explored when Faith goes out to a pub with her housemates and Marion's family. When the last performing act, a black poet, is introduced, Marion winks at Faith in a problematic instance of collusion that aligns Faith with the black poet on the basis of racial markers. In that moment, Faith notices the overwhelming whiteness of the space, which is also traumatic for her. She secretly hopes for the black poet to "be good" and sees him transforming into "every black man—ever" (Levy, *Fruit* 93). Her realisation about the lack of representation of the diversity of the black male experience is equally traumatic: Faith imagines the poet becoming her dad, her brother, "the unknown black faces in our photo album," "the old man on the bus who called me sister," and "the man in the bank with the strong Trinidadian accent who could not make himself understood" (92). The moment stands in stark contrast with Carl's representation earlier. The dub poet's discussion of the serious issue of police brutality in his performance is devalued by Marion's father, who goes on about not liking this particular act. Marion tries to defuse the situation with a series of justifications. She tells Faith that her father is "a bit . . . racist" (92), but not really that bad, and reminds her father that Faith is black and that his words have an impact on her, a prompt he brushes off. Ironically, Faith's trauma and voice are also silenced as Marion overtakes the conversation. She delivers her vision of racial equality, lecturing Faith that "all racism would be swept away after the revolution" as "the working classes are already forming allegiances with a lot of black organisations . . ." (94). While Marion offers a glimpse into forms of coalition based on shared interests, by justifying her father's reaction as a "cultural thing" (93) she fails to properly address racism as a structural issue and unpack and challenge oppressive whiteness. Marion's superficial politics is not the kind of collective anti-racist solidarity that Faith seeks. These justifications are another form of violence, and Faith's finally speaking and telling her to "shut up" (94) is reminiscent of Hazel Carby's famous "White Woman Listen!" Intertextual references to Carby's discussion of the triple oppression of gender, race, and class are later made in the novel by Ruth (144), but neither Faith nor her mother are aware of

black feminist struggles and alliances. Levy shows how racism can be both an obstacle and a mobilising force in the formation of a political community. In the next section, I look at the novel's exploration of anger in relation to these issues.

III. Becoming an Angry Black Woman: The Bastard Child of Empire Speaks Back

As the novel progresses, Faith's refusal to remain silent grows, although when that anger is finally heard, it is also deeply racialized and isolated from wider collective struggles. Lorde's ground-breaking essay "The Uses of Anger: Responding to Racism" (1981) discusses productive and transformational uses of black women's anger as a response to racist attitudes and the process it takes to arrive at the recognition that would enable changing "those distortions which history has created around our difference" (113). Faith learns about those histories in Part 2, and when the novel ends she is only at the beginning of that productive process. Lorde describes it powerfully: "[A]nger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies . . . and who are our enemies" (111). Lorde's anti-racist anger has transformative potential but it can also be exhausting when the racist structures remain stubbornly in place. This is what Faith learns in the aftermath of a racist attack on a black woman when she listens to her white housemates' reactions. It is a painful and traumatic process. Building on Lorde's and bell hooks' work, Ahmed discusses "the labour of becoming conscious of racism and what that does to how we inhabit the world" (*Promise* 84). That is the political landscape in which the figure of "the angry Black woman" emerges. When this figure expresses anger or fury at forms of racism that persist within feminist politics or society, she is "'encountered' as being negative" and the "cause of tension" (Ahmed, *Promise* 66, 68). Focusing attention on black women's anger, as Lorde reminds us, is "merely another way of preserving racial blindness, the power of unaddressed privilege" (116), as seen in the episode with Marion in *Fruit of the Lemon*.

At the beginning of her interview for the position of dresser at the BBC, Faith is labelled as "argumentative" and "temperamental" (Levy, *Fruit* 107). When she tries to challenge institutional racism by ruining the atmosphere (Ahmed, *Promise* 65) and asks the white panel to confirm the "rumours" that they "don't like to have black people dressing" because they "have no other black people in the department" (Levy, *Fruit* 108), she is shut down and the panel is more interested in finding out who was spreading such rumours than acknowledging and addressing a real and existing issue.[5] Faith's colleague Henry adds to this silencing by finding "the interview very, very funny" (110). Ahmed reminds us how "histories are condensed in the very intangibility of an atmosphere, or in the tangibility of the bodies that seem to get in the way" (*Promise* 67). The novel also invites a critical reflection on how blackness is lived through Faith's experience as a racially marked body in other public places.

When Faith goes to visit her boyfriend Simon's family in the countryside, for example, she is stared at and viewed as a curiosity out of place (Levy, *Fruit* 128). She is exposed to further violations in the local pub when a friend of Simon's parents, Mr. Bunyan, keeps asking her where she is from. It is important to note that Faith is fully aware of what exactly takes place as she reflects on this microaggression: "I didn't bother to say I was born in England, because I knew that was not what he wanted to hear" (130). In addition to placing Faith as being from Jamaica rather than Britain, Mr. Bunyan also recounts his recent visit to Jamaica and shares his astonishment at learning that he shares the same last name with a black man he met there called Winston Bunyan, whom he describes using racist language. He interpellates Faith by asking her to shed her opinion on this curiosity. As Njeri Githire argues, "Levy portrays the English countryside as a realm that constantly evokes the country's imperial past" (120). Faith finally speaks back and ruins the atmosphere by revealing the true origins of Mr. Bunyan's name, which is rooted in colonial violence and slavery: "'Well, the thing is, that would have been his slave name, you see.' Then before I really knew what I was saying I'd said, 'your family probably owned his family once'. The man

blinked hard . . . [and] still stared at me like I'd just spat in his face" (Levy, *Fruit* 131).

As in the scene depicting Faith's job interview, Mr. Bunyan deflects historical fact by assuring her that his family "were not in that sort of business" and displaying the arrogance of white privilege. He distorts and erases colonial violence, particularly the history of sexual violence and rape of enslaved black women by white slave owners, by imposing his version of the events: "[Y]ou know what it was? A wayward vicar . . . just going round sowing his seed. Producing lots of dark babies. That sort of thing happened all the time" (131). Levy provides a powerful passage that delivers a punch into a shaky edifice of post-imperial melancholia and the ways in which the legacy of racial injury remains unacknowledged. How can Faith not be traumatized by these reverberations of colonial violence in the present (and after suffering numerous microaggressions)?

Perhaps this is why Faith proudly announces to her family that she got the job as a dresser based on merit alone. Perpetuating this illusion offers a way of protecting herself. Carl and Ruth, however, bring up the reverberations of colonial violence in the present when they tell her that she was hired as a token minority. Faith thinks that the BBC is making a positive structural change by hiring her as "the first black dresser they've had," but Carl does not believe that and compares being a dresser to being "a bit like . . . a servant" (139). As they hear the details about how the interview went, Ruth delivers a final blow by asking Faith if she had complained about her treatment to appropriate institutions ranging from the union, the higher managers, the Commission for Racial Equality and Equity, and the actor's union (140). Ruth, who is clearly much more politically aware and active than Faith, sees Faith's experience in a larger context of "hundreds of years of oppression by white people" and calls on Faith to make a further step "from suffering injury to speaking out against that injury" (Cheng 3). What has been happening to Faith is properly named for the first time in the novel; Ruth tells her, "it's racism, you were the victim of racism" (Levy, *Fruit* 141). Levy shows how hard it is to achieve that "transformation from grief to grievance" (Cheng 3) for Faith without any firm support mechanisms

and explores the psychic landscape of structural racism. Faith starts feeling sick when she realises she has been silenced once again ("But . . . I got the job in the end" [Levy, *Fruit* 140]) and questions the validity of her experience ("But I may have got it wrong" [141]). Of course, all of Ruth's explanations are proven to be true in the next chapter when Faith is not given any opportunities to be in the studio dressing rooms and is later relegated to being a dresser for children's TV because of her blackness that is made hyper-visible under the pretence of a colour-blind institution. The incident is another realisation of what it means to be a "black person" in a structurally racist society (148).

For Faith, a huge part of that existence had been about navigating everyday microaggressions on her own without having a space or the capacity to speak about the resultant trauma. Faith and Simon's witnessing of a violent racist attack on a black woman in a bookshop selling gay, lesbian, and third world books (152) is traumatic for both of them, but it is the ensuing treatment of that violence that has an impact on Faith. She is mistaken for a bookstore worker and a sneering policeman almost justifies the ongoing attacks on people of colour and "leftie bookshops" (154) by blaming the victims rather than the perpetrators when he—disregarding the presence of the two black women—tells Simon: "[W]e've told them not to have people in the shop on their own. One woman like that on her own. I mean, they're just asking for trouble" (154). Faith overhears the woman's name, Yemi, from the paramedic, as she tries to protect these two racially marked and physically and mentally injured bodies from further violent and patronising assaults. Faith's "head was hurting like it had come out in sympathy with Yemi" as the paramedic shouts at Yemi "as if she had gone deaf or stupid" (154) to explain that they are going to take her to the hospital. When Faith and Simon return to their flat, the actual violence that happened is whitewashed, fetishized, and simplified. Just as Marion tries to make things better after the incident in the pub, Simon becomes a central figure in his retelling of the incident to their housemates. Marion and others keep attending to this white saviour's body that has Yemi's blood on his t-shirt but is not actually injured. Faith is made into a silent observer, a role that she once again refuses, and has to interrupt several times to remind

them that Yemi "was a black woman," which Simon repeatedly fails to mention, and "tell them that the woman that was struck on the head was black like me" (156).

Faith's white housemates are completely ignorant of the additional traumatic impact they are causing. Simon tells them how he has been asked by the police to identify the perpetrators who are clearly members of the National Front, but their organised racist violence is brushed off by their housemate Mick, who calls them "just a bunch of thugs" who "couldn't make you change direction in the street or take cover in the shop until they passed" (157). Levy's exploration of this dynamic reminds me of a recent conversation between Robin DiAngelo, author of *White Fragility* (2018), and Resmaa Menakem, therapist, trauma specialist, and author of *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (2017). Among other things, DiAngelo talked about a racist worldview that is embedded in everything "as a result of being raised in this society as a white person" and Menakem discussed the impact of white body supremacy and not "speaking the same embodied language." The lived experience of whiteness and its normative world-making needs to be exposed, interrogated, and dismantled. The white housemates maintain this supremacy when they dismiss Faith's anger and trauma and the severity of the racist attack. They keep giggling and suggest that Simon should "wear a mask" so the NF "thugs" don't recognize him (Levy, *Fruit* 158), as if he is the target. Faith yet again has to ruin the atmosphere and tips her "cup of tea slowly over the table," telling them that it is not funny and to shut up (158). The impact of her bubbling anger is also directed at the reader to reflect on the racist worldview outside of the novel.

This accumulation of real and symbolic violence is a tipping point for Faith. She decides to go home "to be with [her] own people" and seek alternative supportive networks as "they would understand how I felt—black on the outside and cowardly custard-yellow on the inside" (158). At her mum and dad's house she comes across Ruth's family, who are visiting. She meets Ruth's mother, siblings, and stepfather, who are all white, and learns that Ruth's father is from Guyana but that they do not see each other. This is a significant encounter as Faith realises

what an empowering sense of blackness Ruth possesses. Seeing this ordinary "multiculture" (Gilroy xv) in Ruth's family make-up, signified in the repetition that it should be "so simple" (Levy, *Fruit* 160), is a stark counterpoint to the restrictive constructions of blackness by hegemonic whiteness up until this point in the novel. A chasm opens up between this idealised alternative kinship and Faith's lived experience of structural racism that pervades every level of society.

It is tempting to read Faith's ensuing breakdown in dialogue with Levy's essay "Back to My Own Country" in which she talks about a life-changing moment when she attended a racism awareness course in her workplace in the 1980s. The attendees were asked to split into two groups consisting of white and black people, and Levy, who walked over to the white side of the room, found herself "being beckoned over by people on the black side" (10). She writes how this "rude awakening" sent her "to bed for a week" (10). This also happens to Faith, who runs back to her house-share and shuts herself in her room, covering the mirror with a t-shirt so she does not see her own reflection. I agree with Stein that it would "be incorrect to summarize the first half of the novel as Faith's development toward 'disowning her blackness'" (69). Her statement—"I didn't want to be black anymore. I just wanted to live" (Levy, *Fruit* 160)—is a refusal to live the racialized blackness as much as it is about how "racism and racial trauma lodge in our bodies" (Menakem). While a diagnosis of that trauma remains obscure and unclear, even though Faith's workplace demands to know what is wrong with her—"they wanted certificates from a doctor" or she would "lose [her] job" (Levy, *Fruit* 161), Simon tells her—it is also an integral part of the novel's sustained engagement with understanding and diagnosing the everyday and structural racism that is rooted in the violence of British colonialism. This is what Faith learns when her parents send her to Jamaica to get better and meet her extended family.

IV. Conclusion: Open Endings

The novel's second part explores new meanings of blackness against the racial regimes of white authority. When Faith lands at the Kingston airport, seeing black faces everywhere is both exhilarating and disorientating.

She compares herself to a piece of lost luggage, as she announces the arrival of "Faith Columbine Jackson, from England" (173) and invites a kind of claiming different than Columbus' violent "claiming" of the Caribbean. Her need for an uncomplicated belonging is juxtaposed with an advertisement that she later sees showing what at first seems to be a celebration of the diverse people of Jamaica—"Chinese, Indian, black with light skin, black with dark"—but includes the words, written in "bold red letters," "Have you been nice to a tourist today?" (226). This passage, together with an earlier episode in which Faith is followed through the airport by a destitute man who resembles her brother and tries to help her find her lost bag in return for money (169–70), echoes a critique of the enduring effects of colonization and economic imperialism so well explored in Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988).[6] As Elena Machado Sáez also notes, focusing on the commodities that Faith brings with her to England, "the novel ambivalently figures the global market as a space that opens and closes avenues for the construction of cultural and political consciousness" (1). The family stories that she receives from her Auntie Coral are rooted in difficult histories but are also an important gift towards healing and empowerment. Faith returns to England in possession of a rich heritage and family history, but the fact that she is "smuggling it home" (Levy, *Fruit* 326) indicates just how much silence and secrecy remains in Britain about its colonial heritage. While Faith has healed temporarily, it will take much longer for "the bastard child of Empire" to have her "day" (327). Full reparations for the immorality and illegality of colonialism and slavery require ongoing work by the whole nation and some major structural changes.

The novel's last pages, in which Faith's cousin Vincent tells her what reasons her parents gave to the family for sending her to Jamaica, illustrate the kind of ongoing work that needs to happen. Faith's parents said that she had a breakdown because she lost her job and tried to hide it from her parents (329) and left home too early to move in with white "men and a promiscuous girl" who "were not brought up as [Faith] was [and] did not go to Church" (330). Competing versions of the events leading to Faith's breakdown also contribute to the whitewashing of her racial trauma. Indeed, this retold, second-hand version is repeated with

slight variations. According to her parents, she lost her job because she "would not get out of bed" (331). There is a mention of the racial abuse her parents experienced when they came to England—"everyone called them 'Wog' and 'Darkie'" (331)—but despite all the hardships, her parents remained resilient: "[T]hey knew they were Jamaican [and] they just got on with it" (331). Faith, on the other hand, was much more restless and vulnerable and not really interested in her Jamaican relatives. According to her parents, "everywhere [Faith] looked [she] saw people were trying to . . . keep [her] down because [she] is black" (332). The facts of racism and blackness are acknowledged, but the similarities and vital connections between Faith's and her parents' experiences are toned down as part of a wider and long-lasting structural problem. The retelling suggests that Faith's issues were the result of her poor individual choices rather than structural racism, as if everything would have been fine if only she had followed her parents' vision of happiness for her to "settle down . . . with a nice home and a husband maybe" (331). Auntie Coral later casts doubt on the reliability of her parents' story and we find out how she "was surprised at how little of [Faith's] past had been carried on that banana boat to England" (333). This ambiguous passage before Faith's coming home "to tell *everyone*" (339; emphasis added) that her mum and dad came to England on a banana boat puts into question any triumphalist resolution and has a relational and reflective function. Cheng argues that we "need to step back and look at the desire for history, especially in minority literature[,] . . . as some kind of redemptive act [in which] both reader and writer embark on a journey in search of a 'whole' narrative—something along the lines of a package deal, ready for consumption" (143). These impulses are evident in the BBC adaptation of *Small Island*, which modifies the novel's ambiguous ending by fast-forwarding to the rosy image of a multiracial future in present-day London where an adult Michael, played by Hugh Quarshie, is doing a "genealogy ting" with his grandchildren and looking at a family album that includes a photograph of Queenie. The novel, however, gives Hortense the last word and it is unclear if Michael will be given the photograph of his mother or a full story about his heritage; this deliberate avoidance of a neat resolution reflects "the hopes and anxieties

associated with this period of transition" (Knepper 1). Similarly, in *Fruit of the Lemon*, the issue of (not) passing on stories to the British-born generations about their heritage and place in Britain is much more than a personal drama for the protagonists and is part of a wider and disputed legacy of the British Empire that continues to disrupt Faith's present "in ways that obstruct the development of a new kind of nation and new kinds of national identities" (Hall).

Instead of "working through" and "hence . . . privileging . . . the ideal of a national 'health,'" Cheng calls for "an alternative formulation whereby the desired goal may not be to 'work through' or 'get over' something but rather to negotiate between mourning and melancholia in a more complicated, even continuous way" (94). This sense of non-resolution marks *Fruit of the Lemon* as well as Levy's other novels. Reading the novel closely shows how "assimilation is a self-cure trying to be a remedy for the suffering racial body" (94)—a method of treatment Faith attempts during her breakdown—but, as Levy's open ending illustrates, "such a 'cure' remains dubious as long as assimilation reinforces the logic of incorporation that in turn repeats and prolongs the susceptibility of the already susceptible racialized body" (Cheng 94). Faith's well-being—and the well-being of the nation—depend on this continuous engagement. This is the important legacy that Levy leaves through the sharp and expansive imaginary of her fiction.

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Notes

1 See also Baxter's reading of the novel through the act of unfolding.

2 For recent representations of the Windrush generation in the British cultural imaginary see Katwala's discussion of its inclusion in the London Olympic Ceremony and Gentleman's exposure of the Windrush scandal.

3 The Windrush scandal is a direct consequence of the Conservative government's racist "hostile environment" policy introduced in 2012 by then-Home Secretary Theresa May. It saw systematic deportation and detention of hundreds of black

British citizens, many of whom were from the Windrush generation. For further reading, see Gentleman's *The Windrush Betrayal*.

4 See Hall.

5 See Levy's interview with Morrison in which she talks about how her earlier books were seen as angry (332).

6 Stereotypes of respectable and threatening gendered blackness also affect Jamaican society and are explored through Faith's encounter with the man and the elderly couple she meets on the plane.

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