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Sites and Sightlines: Staging Andrea Levy's *Small Island*

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Abstract: This article investigates the multiple adaptations and performances of Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island* (2004) as play, theatre production, and audiobook, noting the identities of its adapters in an environment of renewed criticism about the lack of inclusion of minoritized groups in Britain's performing arts sector. Stuart Hall's prompt to give "proper attention to chains of causation and conditions of existence, to questions of periodization and conjuncture" (23) underpins my analysis of both Helen Edmundson's dramatization and Rufus Norris' Royal National Theatre production of the 2019 play. I illuminate the complex factors inflecting their theatre event. *Small Island* might even be viewed as a socio-cultural barometer of what has changed and what remains the same in the British theatre complex since Levy first published *Small Island*. I further examine mediation and inter-mediality in Levy's self-narrated audiobook through the conceptual model of audio-narratology, in which Levy becomes both embodied and disembodied author(ity). While *Small Island*'s landmark season as an adapted play celebrates Levy's accomplishment and suggests a measure of responsiveness to longstanding criticism of mainstream British theatre's lack of diversity, I argue that the project also exposes the fault lines of the institution.

Keywords: black British drama, *Small Island*, Andrea Levy, audiobook, diversity

Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island* (2004) is an example of black British historical fiction, an emerging genre which, in James Procter's words,

fashions "a domestic story of the post-war British past through its historical representation in Black literature" (129). Set predominantly in Jamaica and England, *Small Island*'s narrative is conveyed through four interwoven first-person voices, the Jamaican characters Hortense and Gilbert and the English characters Queenie and Bernard whose lives Levy plaits together in the turbulent context of mid-twentieth-century history. Its non-chronological plotline ranges from the 1920s girlhoods of the two female protagonists to WWII, when Gilbert and Bernard both enlist to fight for the "mother country." The novel closes in 1948 London, in Britain's post-Empire reality, when the nation is dependent on the labour of invited Commonwealth emigrants like Hortense and Gilbert to rebuild its infrastructure and future.[1]

Small Island has had three significant adaptations, for radio, television, and theatre. Moreover, between 2005 and 2015 over ten audio recordings of the novel were available on technology ranging from audiocassette to CD to downloadable formats. Its polyvocal narrative lends itself to such transpositions and extends notions of the book and of reading as multisensory processes. The different media testify to the scope of *Small Island*'s adaptability and accessibility. This article considers the novel's adaptation into a published play text (what I henceforth will refer to as a "play"), theatre production, and audiobook, noting the identities of its adapters in an environment of renewed criticism about the lack of inclusion of minoritized groups in Britain's performing arts sector. *Small Island* might even be viewed as a socio-cultural barometer of what has changed and what remains the same since Levy first published *Small Island*. To date, each adaptation has been by a woman writer in contexts in which women are still under-represented.[2] Only one of these writers shares Levy's ethno-cultural history:[3] Patricia Cumper, the Jamaican-British writer and former Artistic Director of Talawa—Britain's longstanding premier black-led theatre company—who created the 2006 fifteen-episode radio play.[4] Paula Milne amended Sarah Williams' original adaptation of *Small Island* for television as a two-part British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) series in 2009 by adding a voiceover narrator.[5] The playwright Helen Edmundson adapted *Small Island* for the Royal National

Theatre (RNT) production directed by Rufus Norris, the venue's current Artistic Director.

If a novel were to be written from any of the scripts of *Small Island* designed for radio, television, or theatre in a reverse process, how representative would this novel be of black British experiences—especially since white women writers have adapted the novel for television and theatre and white men have directed both productions? British theatre as a whole has systemically excluded black Britons.[6] However, the zones of exclusion from or minimal inclusion in British theatre affect not only people racialised as black[7]—bearing in mind Paul Gilroy's caution against imposing a "powerfully empty and possibly anachronistic master-signifier" (xiv)—but also many others, as the RNT has long struggled to produce women writers' plays and address the under-representation of a socio-economic class spectrum and people with disabilities.[8]

While this article primarily explores the playwright's and theatre director's cultural closeness to or distance from *Small Island*'s topic and whether these adapters are able to restore black heritage, it also considers the novel's adaptation into other aural and visual forms, noting the distinguishing aesthetic dimensions of each medium in transmitting what Régis Durand terms "the disposition of the voice." Each form adapted off the page creates fresh semiotic frameworks for interpretation as determined by the textual conventions, modes of enunciation, and aesthetic heritages associated with each medium.

Across all formats (novel, play, theatre production, and audiobook), *Small Island* draws attention to Britain's cultural history—who has been in/excluded on whose and under what terms—to create a compelling consequentialist aesthetics.[9] While *Small Island*'s landmark season as an adapted play at the RNT intends to celebrate Levy's work and suggests a measure of responsiveness to longstanding criticism of the institution's lack of diversity, the project also exposes the fault lines in the mainstream British theatre complex, which require closer examination.

I. Theatre Complex—Simplex Obligatio

Three factors contour the "inter-artistic" (Severin 4) compositional process and adaptation of *Small Island* into a play and theatre production:

the under-representation of black British plays in British theatre, the makeup of RNT audiences, and the critical reception of the *Small Island* production. These factors highlight issues of commonality and difference in the continuing after-effects of colonization that are embedded within British theatre and reproduce the resilient dynamics of imperial-colonial power structures. Objectification, mediation, and restriction historically characterise black people's representation and presence in British theatre. From the medieval period onwards, white actors applied make-up and accessories to portray blackness to theatre audiences.[10] Until the 1980s, the legacy of this racialized, prosthetic technique remained entrenched in British culture, especially through blackface and minstrelsy in mainstream productions.[11] By the 1970s and 1980s, the acute lack of roles for black actors propelled the establishment of black theatre companies. While these companies were initially supported through Arts Council funding, a 1985 funding policy change instead mandated that mainstream institutions support black artists. Yet black theatre groups argued that funding should have been direct, rather than via white-dominated elitist venues, in a "racial politics of subsidy" (Ponnuswami 221).

The dissonance between anticipated, ideal, and actual audiences has long determined black playwrights' commissions, which problematizes *who* is served by the state-subsidised National Theatre. The RNT must figure out how to earn the allegiance of audiences that, for its future survival, will increasingly need to be composed of demographics it has traditionally ignored. As the most recently available statistics show, it appears that the RNT neither appeals to nor is as representative of the diverse nation as it should be. Of people in the 2018–19 audiences, nineteen percent were under thirty-five and nine percent "identified as from a BAME background" ("In Our Audiences").[12]

What might be the expectations of the "majority" audience members who dominate the RNT's subscriber base? To what degree do theatre makers prioritise this powerful commercial and critical body of people and ubiquitous cultural heritage? As Caryl Phillips archly observed in the early 1980s while rehearsing his play *Strange Fruit*, "The trouble is that as soon as any black person does anything a white person takes out

a little torch . . . and shines it on the black person" (qtd. in Bridglal 5). The dominant culture's scrutiny that Phillips mentions shape the circumstances that determine minoritized writers' institutional entry points and prospects for cultural longevity. Black theatre-makers have used a degree of compromise as a key strategy. The Black Theatre Forum's (BTF) second Black Theatre Season[13] (1985) aimed "to entice black people into the building, convince their white counterparts that the work is interesting and of an excellent standard and to prove to West End promoters that black plays can fill a conventional theatre in central London" (Miscellaneous).

In an echo of this approach, Kwame Kwei-Armah reflects, twenty years later, that "often there is a different reaction between the black and white communities' receptions" ("'Know'" 257). For him, it is important "to be *mindful* of the host while trying to be true to the black theatre audience" (260; emphasis in original). As for the prospect of black people making up the majority of an audience and of plays that centre black people's lives, Anton Phillips, who founded BTF and co-founded Carib Theatre, observed in 1990, "There are good things happening, but after close to 20 years of extraordinary growth in the theatre I still can't take my kids out any night of the week to see a black play" (qtd. in Miscellaneous). A decade later he notes that "[t]here is a large black audience out there who want to see their lives reflected on the stage. There is also a large white audience who have attended our plays and who have been educated and entertained by them. It is the black companies who should have what the Americans call 'first voice' in matters concerning black people" (Phillips). Phillips would probably not have envisaged that by 2020 (prior to the global pandemic), the same lack of opportunities would prevail, nor that having "'first voice' in matters concerning black people" would still be a matter of contention. The RNT production of *Small Island* (re-)exposes the shortcomings of the theatre complex in evolving into an institution that systematically nurtures work by black artists.

The final factor framing the play's production is critical reception. As an audience member, the theatre reviewer functions as unwitting archon. The review (as archival process) is shaped by the agendas and

value-judgement systems of reviewers in a context of media-journalism, which, Jane Martinson notes, "has remained dominated by three overlapping rings of power: overwhelmingly pale, male, posh."[14] Critics not only view performance through the lens of what they already know (as does any audience member) but also assert expertise derived from their knowledge of the history of theatre. When reviewer Dominic Cavendish enthuses, "I don't think it's overstating things to declare that in this inspiring adaptation, which compresses the book into a gripping three-hour state-of-the-nation epic—how 'we' were then, prefiguring who 'we' have become now—Small Island has found its ideal home. This feels like a landmark for the National," he exemplifies the cultural position and influence of his critical coterie, reinforced by his non-interrogated "we." Michael Billington similarly lauds the play: "From an aesthetic standpoint, there may be better plays this year. But in showing how aspiring Jamaicans left one small island to land in another of diminished hopes, it will surely rank as one of the most important." And yet he fails to explain just why it is so important. These reviews of *Small Island* offer unwitting testimony to Stuart Hall's point—they are "celebratory of a general and undifferentiated 'black presence'" (23).

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown criticises the under-representation of non-white theatre reviewers, arguing that it leads to "prejudice parading as expertise or patronising tolerance" ("Black Art"). She writes of white reviewers:

> Aroused by encounters with the unfamiliar and the unknown, a visceral excitement overwhelms their critical faculties and they end up giving us inflated valuations, instead of considered, intelligent and scrupulously dispassionate verdicts, which we have a right to expect. . . . The pity is that the coterie of British critics who are paid to reflect societal transformations, to promote the excellent and extraordinary, are huddled in their closed shop, wielding influence in a world they do not comprehend.

Bridget Minamore, co-founder of Critics of Colour Collective, agrees that "the standards for critics" are "a white, middle class standard," while

Naomi Obeng writes that "[f]or too long, critics' and editors' racism, discomfort with equality, and obsession with tradition, were passed off as critical judgement and became canonical theatre history." Billington (now retired) and Cavendish are not the sole standard bearers. Women critics (only ten percent of the coterie) such as Lyn Gardner, Susannah Clapp, Sarah Crompton, and Kate Bassett have also had influential reviewing careers. Yet as Crompton notes of her white male peers,

> The plays of women writers seemed under-valued; the plays of white men such as themselves over-praised. Works that rang a chord in my life, did not always chime with theirs. And if I felt that as a white woman, imagine how they read to a person of colour. . . . [J]ust as it is right to see yourself reflected on a stage or a screen, then it also matters that you can read reactions based on similar backgrounds . . . [o]r indeed write about theatre, drawing on your own experience and values.

The Guardian's appointments of Arifa Akbar as Chief Theatre Critic and Lanre Bakare as Arts and Culture Correspondent have already altered the balance of profiled work. However, as Obeng concludes, "this isn't a solution to, or an acknowledgement of, the industry-wide systemic issues, nor is it a guaranteed way of achieving the diverse anthologising of theatre." In the following section, I trace these fault lines through Edmundson's play and Norris' production of Levy's novel *Small Island.*

II. Sightlines and Fault Lines

Writers of Caribbean origin and descent such as Levy typically register how mid-century migratory generations faced a significant recalibration of their sense of social and national identities following immigration.[15] Levy's *Small Island* reminds readers of this disjuncture through class, status, and colourism, wherein Jamaica and England constitute divergent social and racialised locations. The novel vividly depicts the disconnection between how black Jamaicans thought of themselves, as British subjects, and their hostile reception in Britain during and after the war. Post-war Caribbean middle-class people who migrated soon found themselves "re-class-ified" as working class. Hortense is demoted

from being a teacher to finding sewing work, and Gilbert must put his law ambitions on hold while he works as a driver. Gilbert narrates Hortense's rage at her debunked hopes: "'Sewing?' She shout this, all tears outraged away. 'But I am a teacher'" (Levy, *Small Island* 464). He also describes her "suck[ing] on her teeth in a most unladylike manner" (465). In the play, this scene is represented in a single line by Hortense, "But I am a teacher" (Edmundson 110). The visceral and unrefined way in which she expresses her anger in the novel is reduced to a simple plaintive phrase in the play, which softens the intensity of the injustice. The novel situates this episode alongside another recalibration of Hortense's imported sense of superiority, in a stichomythic exchange that underscores how the Jamaican immigrants' acknowledgment of one another, irrespective of class origins, dissipates the relentlessness of the hostile white gaze:

> 'You know these men?' Hortense asked.
> 'They are from home,' I told her.
> 'And you know them all?'
> 'I know they are from home.'
> 'But you don't know them?'
> 'No, but they are from home.' I did not tell her that some days I was so pleased to see a black face I felt to run and hug the familiar stranger. (Levy, *Small Island* 463)[16]

The poetic alternating repetition of "know" and "home" creates an affective bond between Gilbert and his fellow migrants. The novel's empathic recognition of shared experience also illustrates how Hortense understands her changed class position and derogatory racialisation. Levy signals this understanding through her encounter with an impoverished fellow migrant, "his brown skin dusted grey with dirt" (466). Although Hortense would have once disdained this man, she now civilly returns his greeting, and their reciprocated humanity fortifies them against their dehumanising context. These nuanced lifeline moments help readers appreciate how the migratory generations withstood racist hostility and rejection. However, regrettably, Edmundson omits such moments from her adaptation.

The play also diminishes issues of colourism and omits the novel's Prologue, which implies a reticence to engage with racism as a daily norm and as part of British theatre's history. That people with lighter skin had a higher social status, a legacy of Jamaican plantocracy, was incomprehensible to the white English population who perceived anyone not white as black.[17] With haughty *froideur*, Hortense steadfastly adheres to what she believes is her superior status, having internalised colourism, a pellicular politics instilled from childhood: "I grew to look as my father did. My complexion was as light as his; the colour of warm honey. It was not the bitter chocolate hue. . . . With such a countenance there was a chance of a golden life" (38). Her light skin endows her with a superiority that in England can be asserted only over other Jamaicans. After first betraying Michael by exposing his affair with the white preacher's wife, Mrs Ryder, then betraying Celia, whose mother's dementia Hortense reveals in order to migrate to England in Celia's place, Hortense experiences a narrative reckoning. Once in Britain, she must metaphorically swallow a racist English cocktail that reduces her from the professional class to a manual worker who must endure squalid housing as a generalised "West Indian." Levy evokes compassion for Hortense as the victim of a greater wrong: that her social worth is determined by the assumption of her racial inferiority by white English people. In the play Hortense's ultimately misguided but unwavering sense of advantage is compressed into the line "England will give me a fine welcome because of my pale pale skin and my education" (Edmundson 76). The play thus curtails a crucial aspect of both individual and collective experience by evading the hierarchies of colourism that evolved in a plantation system and became socially encoded in post-plantocracy society.

Another key omission in the play is Gilbert's panoramic overview of the effects of colonial propaganda. In Chapter 12, when Gilbert is stationed in an English village as an enlisted serviceman, he addresses the "Motherland" as he articulates, in a monologue, the baffling problem of no one understanding where Jamaica is. By featuring this episode as a Socratic textual annex in the novel, Levy takes the reader on a striking narrative journey, recalling George Lamming's analogy in "The Coldest Spring in Fifty Years"[18] to establish just how oblivious the imperial centre

was of its colonial subjects. This information gap motivated Levy's project of restoring the interwoven histories of Britain and the Caribbean, England and Jamaica. The potent provocation and implication of Gilbert's overarching question "how come England did not know me?" (Levy *Small Island* 141) confronts the white reader's ignorance of imperial-colonial history. Levy punctuates Gilbert's monologue with phrases redolent of performance: "See me now—"; "Hear me now—"; "Now see this" (141). Edmundson compresses Gilbert's monologue into two sentences, which Gilbert addresses directly to the audience after he and his fellow "West Indian recruits" (50) are regarded as curios by English villagers, who think the West Indies are in Africa: "Africa? How come they know nothing about their own empire?" (50). Edmundson's cut erases Gilbert's descriptions of Britain as a "filthy tramp" and the decrepit and disappointing state of London. Although characters in Edmundson's play and Norris' production occasionally employ direct address, this missed opportunity for creating a space of empathy and understanding through Gilbert's monologue supports Tyrone Huggins' question about the production: "Whose story is it?" (qtd. in Huggins et al.).

At one point in the play, Gilbert promises to take Hortense to see "Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament. Big Ben. Piccadilly Circus. All the fine sights" (Edmundson 109) to cheer her up after her humiliating teaching rejection. Impoverishment and shabbiness are confined to the domestic accommodations of the immigrants. A body of Caribbean migratory literature vitally represents not only London's squalor but also hidden disappointment. Migrant generations wrote letters home that omitted the difficulty of surviving in a hostile, racist, and bankrupt nation. Just as Gilbert does not disclose the dilapidated single room where he resides in his letters, Hortense is expected to continue this migratory mythology: As he tells her, "This room is where you will sleep, eat, cook, dress and write your mummy to tell her how the Mother Country is so fine" (Levy, *Small Island* 33; Edmundson 88).

These omissions in the play point to the absence of what Henry Louis Gates Jr. claims are the foundations for creating a "black tradition." Quoting Ralph Ellison, Gates argues that African American culture is drawn together through "a sharing of that '*concord of sensibilities*' which

the group expressed through historical circumstance" (Gates 132; emphasis in original). Gates delineates the complicated tradition of "making the white written text speak with a black voice" (143).[19] As adapter and playwright, Edmundson is faced with how to make the black written text (portraying black and white characters) speak through her "white pen." This is not to suggest that Edmundson's "white pen" in principle impedes her adaptation, but that by diluting the textual material, it misses the opportunity to establish a cross-racial "concord of sensibilities." For instance, Edmundson's dramatization dispenses with aspects of the novel that would have raised the play above the predictability that Aleks Sierz describes as "so traditional, so unimaginative, so banal." In Matt Truman's critique, the adaptation's problematic structure prevents its successful dramatization: "Dropping her [Levy's] chopped up chronology, Edmundson's script adopts a plodding linearity (and then, and then) and a sketch-like simplicity. . . . Rather than turn *Small Island* into theatre, it merely sits Levy's story on a stage."

Furthermore, England as a setting dominates the dramatized adaptation in contrast to the many locales of the novel and its perspectival quartet of Hortense, Gilbert, Queenie, and Bernard. Although the play (unlike the novel) opens with the Jamaican setting of Hortense's girlhood, the scenes between Jamaican characters are minimal, occurring only in Act 1, Scenes 1, 3, and 6. Bernard's experiences in India are completely omitted, a choice that removes a significant aspect of the violent unravelling of Empire. While Maria Helena Lima argues that "Levy so humanises her racist protagonist that we actually feel sorry for him when he does not come home at the end of the war" ("'Pivoting the Centre'" 79), in the play Bernard becomes a one-dimensional figure. In present-day Britain, whose educational curriculum and cultural knowledge do not account for the full multi-perspectival aftermath of the nation's imperial past, these reductions to *Small Island* indicate the limits of how a cultural institution such as the RNT can approach such a subject.

Yet the black-authored British-Caribbean-diasporic play *is* a genre in contemporary British drama. It is one that gives testimony to migrant-generation experiences from the perspectives of enculturation and inheritance of indigene generations (those people born, raised, and educated

in Britain) trying to imagine and make sense of their parents' migratory lives.[20] For second-generation children (like Levy) who grew up in the country of their birth while witnessing their parents' devalued status and experiencing racism themselves, these plays record, validate, and valorise the hardships faced. Like Levy's novel, the diasporic plays' renderings of vernacular depict the social consequences of migration. The plays invite black audience members to identify with their characters and critique dominant socio-cultural models and expectations.

In Edmundson's *Small Island* play, this dynamic is flipped. As an adaptation, the play necessarily involves approximating the insider knowledge Levy uses to construct her novel and record her audiobooks. Huggins argues that the play/production fails to probe the brutal imperial residue that the novel explores. The dramatist's choice of tropes (for instance, the inept, repressed husband, in contrast to Bernard in the novel who is endowed with as much narrative richness as the other three narrators) means that the play cannot convey the depth and breadth of the consequences of colonialism that entwine Caribbean and British histories (qtd. in Huggins et al.). Edmundson's version of Levy's novel is a charming illustration of the migration story. It employs characters and visual motifs that are familiar to the majority of mainstream theatre-goers in Britain.[21] An enduring flashpoint of Commonwealth history, specifically black people's post-war migration to Britain, is the visual shorthand of the HMS *Empire Windrush*. In Levy's novel, the emigration episode is a hinge or unnarrated event between narrators, suggesting that Levy's thematic concern is not to repeat a known cultural narrative but to excavate the complexities of the individuals who figured in it. Contrastingly, Norris' production of the play closes Act I with a panoramic black and white photographic projection of the HMS *Empire Windrush* and passengers ascending the gangplank to present a majestic and haunting image. It suggests that there is no going back from this moment for British history. Covering the entire upstage area, the projection reinforces how this event mythologizes Caribbean citizens' entry into modern Britain's history. The Olivier Theatre's cavernous space was served by the stunning magnitude of projection designer Jon Driscoll's backdrop images and set and costume designer Katrina

Lindsay's versatile and portable set of frames, which indicated both physical barriers or openings such as doorways or walls and the metaphorical closeness or distance between characters. The projections evoked the grandeur of the cine reel era (Act 1 stage directions for opening scenes 1–5 specify "Pathé-style" footage or images [9, 28, 46, 61, 64]), when far-away people and places were brought to British audiences in a blast of Empire triumphalism, propaganda, and exotica.

In rendering Jamaica, the projections also represent a tropicalized backdrop to what becomes the adaptation's central focus, Britain. The production commendably weaves music, vibrancy, and evocations of carnival into the seams of the plotline—elements which are not accentuated in the novel. The musical score and the virtuosity of the musicians (the Associate Music Director Shiloh Coke also plays Celia) add an exhilarating dimension to the staging. Thus artists with cultural closeness are central to creating the jouissance of Caribbean heritage. Yet the evocations of carnival stand in for depictions of political unrest in post-war Jamaica, tempering these depictions into a mere glimpse of insurgency in diegetic space through the play's stage directions.

In performance, the cast were clearly directed to play for laughs. The barbed subtleties underlying the novel's comedic moments are often acted with slapstick humour, which primes an audience "for an all-out comedy" (Francis). As Sierz describes, "the overall tone of the production relies heavily on buffoonish comedy and rather clichéd situations." Cynthia James argues that in the novel, "Hortense is the window into the text. The other voices give relief to her experience" (56). But reviewing the production, Connor Campbell argues that Hortense becomes diminished as "the character that most suffers from this tendency to linger on the goodness of the white woman." Hortense, the cornerstone of Levy's novel, becomes a casualty of Norris' production's misplaced comedy inflections, "ill-served by a script that's keen to dial up the humour—relentless to the point where it swallows every scene" (Campbell). Similarly, J. N. Benjamin claims that "Edmundson's adaptation handles the backstory of Queenie, the white British landlady, with nuance and care, while elements of Hortense's narrative are reduced to caricature. The way Norris uses humour also feels, at best,

ill-informed." Such responses indicate that Edmundson's play text has not enabled dramaturgically fresh ways to re-encounter the wartime and post-war interconnectedness of British and Caribbean histories.

Examining the play's depictions of racism further illustrates Huggins' reservations about the play and production. The dramatization of *Small Island* inherits a pernicious performance history of "blacking up" and the fact that there is no extant evidence of a play penned by a black Briton until the twentieth century. In the theatre context, black and white counterparts have not experienced equal billing or representational agency. Does the play's rendering of racism act as a reminder of its present-day relevance or depict it as a thing of the past? Given the absence of black culture and study of the Empire and its consequences in British school curriculum, is the depiction a revelation for those audience members who do not experience racism in their everyday lives? In fact, the dramatized racism shows theatre's distance from rather than accountability for Britain's imperial consequences.[22] For black audience members, racism is the baseline experience linking the conditions of over sixty years ago (the era of *Small Island*) to the discrimination perpetuated today by the British state's political, social, and cultural institutions and in daily life.[23] Act 2, Scene 3 condenses workplace racism into a barrage of racist words from the rail workers aimed at Gilbert. The toll on the actors addressed night after night with racist slurs and on the actors who deliver these lines goes to the heart of how to stage such material so that it does not simply replay racist language. This problem can be traced back to Edmundson's reduction of the four narrative viewpoints. The insight into what fans Bernard's racist reflex is not represented in the play adaptation, thereby curtailing possibilities for thinking through how racism has been sustained from then to now.

The novel's Prologue has proven to be the most challenging section to adapt for stage and screen and has been omitted in both. In the Prologue in Levy's novel, the child Queenie encounters a black man for the first time in her life at the "African Village" part of the 1924 Empire Exhibition.[24] This experience of racialisation occurs in parallel to Hortense's internalisation of colourism growing up in Jamaica. As Rachel Carroll argues, "the way in which this scene is adapted in the

2009 BBC television adaptation tells us much about its dramatic priorities" (72). Rather than describing the exhibition through a child's eyes, the BBC adaptation depicts the adult Queenie recalling her memory of the exhibition just before her sexual encounter with Michael. By foregoing a dramatization of the white child meeting the black man amid her family's racism and her own, this reconfiguration "is indicative of the ways in which white British racism is contained and defused in the adaptation" (Carroll 73). Similarly, in the play, Edmundson delays Queenie's encounter with black people until adulthood: when she meets Michael, she has "never seen a black man before" (Edmundson 46). Removing the scenes in *Small Island*'s Prologue changes a crucial dimension of the novel—how racialisation evolves in childhood.

It is not surprising that the Prologue is absent from the play. On the one hand, how could Queenie's encounter with the African man—and the language she uses to articulate it—not replicate the racist history of black bodies as commodity, object, and curio in real-time performance? But on the other hand, the absence of this section means that the play shies away from acknowledging and questioning what remains reified in many museums and public institutions and which is derived from a history of degradation and racism. The Prologue's omission from the television adaptation, as Carroll puts it, "underplays the representation of racist sentiment by ordinary British subjects which is given such frank and provocative expression in Levy's novel" (76).

Such omissions by adapters, or what Joan Anim-Addo and Les Back refer to as "white interpreters," derive from their feelings of humiliation, guilt, and shame, the potent emotions underpinning the imperial-colonial relationship and its aftershocks today. The psychological damage of the internalization of inferiority and shame is a state that black British writers have long represented and tried to redress. As Levy recalls, her family had a code of silence regarding the racism they faced; it was a "source of complete shame" no one ever spoke about ("Andrea Levy: In Her Own Words"). She reveals a heart-rending account of her isolation from self and social place caused by her internalised sense of whiteness. Levy realised she was black after a race awareness training day at work when she lined up with the white group and members of the black

group told her she should be with them. It was an epiphany for Levy: she recalls thinking to herself that "everything you have been through is a black experience" ("Andrea Levy: In Her Own Words"). This moment infuses Levy's literary sensibility in *Small Island* in her depiction of the politics of colourism that derived from Jamaica's enslavement era.

As the novel shows, WWII mobilised a population of black service personnel from Britain's Caribbean and African colonies and the United States, creating a variegated demographic, especially in London. Interracial relationships left a post-war legacy of mixed-race children, many of whom were placed in orphanages. Unlike the presence of mixed families at other times in history, this wartime generation was evidence of taboo-defying and frequently out-of-wedlock or extra-marital sexual relationships. Theatre reviews of the production of *Small Island* characterise the ending, in which Queenie gives her baby to Hortense and Gilbert to raise, as heart-rending—without quite examining why. One reviewer inaccurately describes "the story's finale, concerning the fate of an unwanted mixed-race baby" as "agonising and uplifting to watch" (Evans). Firstly, the baby is not unwanted, and secondly, Queenie giving her baby away is hardly uplifting but rather provokes thoughts on why she is forced to do this. As Chamion Caballero and Rosalind Edwards point out, social censure fell disproportionately upon women who transgressed racial and moral codes. Yet Queenie does not actually feel ashamed for having had a child extra-maritally; instead, she understands that she will be shamed—as will her child—by her racist husband and the majority of British society. By giving up her child, she seeks to prevent the humiliation that she predicts Bernard would feel as an adoptive father of a biracial child. As Edmundson writes it in the play, Queenie says, "But he's going to grow up into a . . . a big, strapping coloured lad. And people will snigger at you in the street. . . . Are you going to be proud of him? Glad that he's your son?" (126). The stage directions then indicate "*Pause.* BERNARD *can't answer*" (126). The reader of Levy's novel can privately evaluate how they might react to Queenie's questions in Bernard's place, but when watching a play, the audience's reaction is directed by how the actor plays it—whether he conveys shame or guilt or indignation at Queenie's prediction.

Yet shame can be viewed as leading to possible reform, a rebirth of perceptions and conceptual boundaries. As Sara Ahmed argues, "shame requires an identification with the other who, as witness, returns the subject to itself. The view of this other is the view that I have taken on in relation to myself; I see myself *as if I were* this other" (106; emphasis in original). The reader of Levy's novel experiences the intense, unspoken sympatico between Hortense and Queenie, two characters who refuse the imposition of shame. Levy represents Hortense and Queenie as avoiding the internalisation of shame through pragmatism, even ruthlessness.

The scene recounting Queenie giving up her child to Hortense may also evoke the haunting colonial history of black mothers forcibly separated from children and sold as commodities, black women forced to raise plantation owners' children, as well as the weight of social opprobrium directed towards white women who crossed moral and racial boundaries and bore children from extra-marital relationships. However, though it is regrettable that Queenie decides she must give up her child, this situation is in no way analogous to that of enslaved mothers and their children from whom Hortense is descended. Focalised through Hortense, the aesthesis that occurs in this scene is between women, and it is maternalised. The narration of sorrow and relinquishment and compassion and acknowledgment, as Queenie gives up her child to Hortense, opens up multiple registers for understanding what the two women are feeling. Hortense narrates what is happening: "with only a flimsy piece of wood between us I could feel her on the other side. The distress in a halting breath. A timorous hand resting unsure on the doorknob. She was there—I knew" (Levy, *Small Island* 530). Queenie and Hortense negotiate an unspoken cont(r)act in an asymmetrical history of racialised and gendered maternal subjectivities. While their exchange is non-verbalised, it is the body that speaks affectively as Hortense hears and interprets Queenie's "distress in a halting breath" (530).

In the post-war British context of *Small Island*, the white mother of a mixed-race baby born outside of marriage must give up her child to avoid social censure. Her tragedy, however, is not comparable to the horrors of rape, forced reproduction, and chattel-hood of black mothers whose children were forcibly removed and sold.

Levy represents non-birth parenthood across two generations and two countries in *Small Island*. Hortense, as a black adoptive mother whose understanding is shaped by a distinctly colonial context, perceives that non-biological parenting may be best for a child's future prospects: "As a little child I was given away too. . . . They took me from my mummy because, with my golden skin, everyone agreed that I would have a golden future" (527). While Gilbert and Hortense are committed to raising Queenie's child to protect him from people like Bernard, his mixedness, just like Hortense's "golden skin," slots him into a British context in which all three characters are viewed as black.

However, there have been interracial families living in Britain for centuries who did not give up their children. Levy's dramatic narrative action perhaps gestures to how writing mixedness reveals representational limits. While in the novel Gilbert and Hortense agree to raise Queenie's baby because, as Gilbert states, "I truly believe there is nothing else we can do" (528), in Edmundson's play he decides that if he and Hortense do not take the child in "[h]e [the child] will grow up feeling he is inferior. I can't have that. I can't allow it" (Edmundson 128). In this sense, Hortense's question, "You wan' us to take the child, Gilbert?" (Edmundson 129), becomes a prelude to the first time they consummate their marriage and opens up the possibility of them having a biological child. The shift in rationale between the novel and play for this pivotal moment most tellingly reveals the friction between the novel and its adaptations.

In both Milne's television adaptation and Edmundson's play, Queenie's mixed-race baby requires voiceover narration and stage directions. Whereas James applauds Levy's novel as "able to present the Windrush era in naked culture clash and identity confrontation without the filter of an omniscient narrator" (54), Milne transforms Queenie's adult son (who was raised by Hortense and Gilbert) into an omniscient narrator. In the closing moments of the television dramatisation, he looks at a photograph album to reveal to his grandchildren that Queenie is his mother. Correspondingly, in the play Edmundson's stage directions indicate that "*there is only a spotlight on this baby—made by all of us—floating into an uncertain world*" (130). How are theatre audiences to

perceive this moment—the basket evoking the biblical Moses "*floating on the water*" (Edmundson 130)? While the image arguably invokes the Empire's four centuries of forcibly transporting people and resources as well as later post-war migration to Britain from former colonies, the production did not convey the "*made by all of us.*" Perhaps this is an unachievable stage direction. Instead, the idea conveyed by the stage directions was submerged in the production's special effects. The novel's final section is then condensed into "pass the baby" choreography: "HORTENSE *hands the baby to* GILBERT. ARTHUR *enters*. *He is followed by all the other characters of the play*—ELWOOD, DOROTHY, MISS JEWEL, QUEENIE'S *parents*, *etc*. *They watch as* GILBERT *hands the baby to* BERNARD. BERNARD *stares down at the baby for a few moments and then hands him to* QUEENIE" (130). While this scene might aim to contrive a unity of time and place—a shared inheritance that gestures towards the multi-ethnic realities of the modern British nation—neither the production nor the play's script engender a communitas but instead undermine it through aesthetics. While this is not the same as the fishbowl factor—wherein plays about black people's lives are designed "for the delectation of whites" (Howe 760) and can take up a "thank goodness my life is not like that" position towards historical material—it seals off the deeper negotiation with Britain's racist history under the theatrical guise of a hopeful future.

Edmundson also assembles a cavalcade of characters from the plot's past, as though to remind the audience of the Jamaican scenes and characters that become eclipsed because the play is mainly set in England. She also includes the earlier deceased English characters, including those who appear briefly, such as Queenie's parents, but curiously not the Phillipses, who raised Hortense and who are presumably those characters who fall under "*etc.*" in the stage directions referenced above. The symbolism of an orphaned child lit by a spotlight—the stage directions refer to "*a spotlight on this baby*" (130)—evokes Caryl Phillips' "little torch" (Bridglal 5) and might imply that recognition of this history is still nascent in the public's imagination. Yet as historian David Olusoga argues, "[i]t's a history that affects all of us: it is British history. . . . This idea that black history is only about, for, and of interest to black people

is breaking down. We are too integrated; our stories are now too conjoined for that idea. This is not about challenging mainstream history, it's saying that black people's stories are part of that history" ("'Black history'").

While the play in many ways decontextualizes the novel's perspectives on social history, the endings in both the novel and the play are equally problematic. The novel and play close with an optimistic outcome for the baby that ignores the transracial adoption and fostering system that evolved out of post-war welfare policies, which many British-based writers who are mixed-race and of African descent have experienced and represented in creative and critical work.[25] Thus, the play further entrenches the novel's rosy depiction of adoption. Unlike in the American context, it is not the black woman who had the labour of raising the white child but the reverse. White middle-class couples adopted black and mixed-race children as there was a shortage of babies available for adoption. White working-class women became house mothers in care homes or fostered children. In this sense, the novel and the play are at odds with the actual socio-historical conditions that prevailed.[26]

III. Hearing and Seeing

With her striking aural memory, Levy recalled growing up with the noise of the Arsenal Football ground in her neighbourhood and the family television constantly on. Her storytelling came from the "tv [and film] version" of stories, not books, and she said of her novels that "if I could tap dance it for ya I would do it" ("Andrea Levy: In Her Own Words"). *Small Island* in audible book form extends *Small Island*'s performative reach.[27] While an individual reader brings their social cognition, inner reading voice, and accent to the reading process, audiobooks and theatre dramatizations force readers to hear the flow of another person's thoughts and to see live people rendering characters we envisage in our minds through reading. Levy's audiobooks enlist a whole new sensorial experience of her work. She reads her text with a charismatic vocality that conveys a knowing edge—both as the book's author and in her cultural closeness with the subject-matter.[28]

Levy seems to have had a prescient sense of how her readers enjoy listening to the "soundings" (Bernstein)—the voicing and aurality—of her written texts, especially as read by the author herself.[29] These recordings are a reminder that aural technology has been a key conduit for disseminating Caribbean heritages in Britain. As instituted by black feminist and anti-colonial writer and activist Una Marson's 1930s and 1940s presence on the airwaves and in films and the launch of BBC Radio's *Caribbean Voices*, the aural legacy continued through post-war writers who altered the expectations of what accents, vernaculars, and performed oralities could contribute to literature's enunciation.

Levy's audiobook inherits the legacy of mediation by white scribes that, as Gates argues, shadows the access and understanding of black people's experiences. The genre of the narrative of enslavement established the black *speaking* subject and what K. C. Harrison terms "the white, Western system of written language as the prerequisite for reasoned discourse—and thus humanity" (150–51). What is the power and emotional impact of Levy as the *writer* also *speaking* her text?[30]

Levy's unabridged reading of *Small Island* as a 2015 audiobook restores a level of mediating authority in a process of authorial exhumation that speaks back to Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author." She retains sovereignty over her own words, and the audiobook listener must "tune in" to her style of reading and delivery; the listener is held in a relationship with the actual author whose presence cannot be denied. Although there are hallmarks of performance in Levy's delivery in that she renders various accents, cadences, and emphases and determines the pace at which she speaks, it is not acting but reading aloud.

To understand just what techniques Levy employs as an audiobook reader, we can turn to Smiljana Komar's model, which notes the prosodic features of spoken text as being divided into paratones (the aural equivalent of paragraphs) of pitch, pause, and intonation (89). Audiobook reader Finty Williams explains that a novel's layout can determine how quickly or slowly the text is read out loud: "When we get to the middle of a paragraph we speak slightly quicker, and then we tend to slow down" (qtd. in Dowling 35). In comparing one paragraph

and paratone division of *Small Island*, it becomes clear that the Prologue as read by Levy highlights the consequences of imperialism that the play and television adaptation avoid. As a writer who has experienced colonial subjection, Levy says the racist words of her invented white character and is fully implicated in the consequences of what and how these words are said. She employs a range of subtle accents, including Estuary English and cockney inflections—none are standard English. The physical elements of breath, pitch, and volume are subtle, audible presences in the recording and shape Levy's in-depth aural engagement with imperial politics.

English was the instrument of colonization and constituted for many a means of incarceration on unfavourable terms for the rest of one's natural life. In his watershed renderings of a literary black vernacular in *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Samuel Selvon closes the dialectic and dialogic distance between black migrant Londoners and surrounding white-dominant working-class society. In his text, pronunciations of English and British-Caribbean cultural references create either confusion or clarity, depending on speaker and auditor. Levy inherits Selvon's experiential and textual legacy but channels it through a female protagonist, restoring women's post-war migration presence, which can still remain vulnerable to exclusion in "post-Windrush" cultural conversations.[31] For Hortense, the polish of her education and elocution, which accords her a degree of privileged status in Jamaica, is neither acknowledged nor understood in London. Levy conveys this through her linguistic encounters: "I put on my best accent. An accent that had taken me to the top of the class in Miss Stuart's English pronunciation competition. . . . But still this taxi driver did not understand me. 'No, sorry, dear. Have you got it written down or something?'" (*Small Island* 16–17). Status as determined by accent (in English) and grammatical correctness had its antecedent not only in the British class system but operated this way throughout the Empire. One's accent and grasp of the hegemonic standard of spoken English was determined by one's ability to credibly reproduce it. As Mervyn Morris summarises, "the historical legacy lingers. Facility in Standard English—the language of the masters, originally—confers a measure of social status" (7).

In contrast, Levy's reading employs a variety of accents including Jamaican, and as mentioned above, Estuary English, and cockney London, as well as "g-dropping" (which is not in her printed text), that transform the written text's grapholectic cohesion into multiple aural possibilities. In the novel's Prologue, narrated by Hortense, the following lines are broken up into two paragraphs:

> But he said, in clear English, 'Perhaps we could shake hands instead?'
>
> Graham's smile fell off his face. And I shook an African man's hand. It was warm and sweaty like anyone else's. (Levy, *Small Island* 6)

In the audiobook it is narrated as one paratone:

> But instead [rising intonation] he said in clear [heightened pitch, emphasis on |klɪə|] English, 'Perhaps we could shake hands instead' [each syllable separately sounded, falling intonation, not a question].
>
> Graham's smile [increase in volume] fell off his face [falling intonation]. And [breath] I shook an African man's hand [rising intonation]. It was warm [pause] and sweaty like anyone else's [falling intonation]. (Levy, *Small Island* narrated by Levy)

Durand observes that "[n]othing is closer to me than my voice: the consciousness of the voice is consciousness itself" (100). Levy savours her text and cocoons her listener in an intimate aural encounter through the reading of her work. As Matthew Rubery argues, "[l]ittle attention has been given to the ways in which spoken narration is capable of enhancing a text (13). Not all authors can narrate their books, and it is testimony to Levy's skill as a storyteller that she brings her novel to life both on and off the page.

IV. Acts of Consequence

The posthumous audio access to Levy's candour in her recorded interview is a warm and haunting reminder of how Levy wrote truth derived from her knowledge and inherited experiences into history

and heritage—truth that provides alternative perspectives to those enshrined in mainstream cultural memory.[32] The adaptation of Levy's *Small Island* for the stage highlights the continued under-representation of people and projects from black British communities at the RNT. *Small Island*'s transition from a novel to an adapted play and theatrical production reveals how slowly mainstream culture relinquishes its dominance.[33] Olusoga poses a salient question to the British arts sector: "So in the end it comes down to this, does our industry have the will to genuinely share power with those who have, for so very long, been marginalised and silenced?" ("David Olusoga"). Although, as Gardner surmises, Levy would have signed off on the playscript well in advance of the rehearsal period, it is not known which, if any, black playwrights might have been considered as adapters. Leah Harvey, the actor who plays Hortense in the RNT production, notes in an interview, "Unfortunately, I never met Andrea Levy, . . . but she was deeply involved in this adaptation. She wanted Rufus Norris to direct it and Helen Edmundson to adapt it."

While Harvey indicates Levy's authorisation of the production, compromise has long underpinned black artists' experiences in relation to mainstream arts complexes. As Colin Chambers points out,

> [f]or non-white artists trying to tackle the question, the absence from—and even of—history has meant a responsibility to the pressure of history. . . . It meant—and means—not simply presence (though that was hard enough and necessary) but a distinct approach and attitude, . . . couching one's aims in terms that allow access to resources even if that substitutes race relations for art. . . . It means a battle to be taken seriously as artists while operating within a white imaginary. (*Black and Asian Theatre* 199)

Black British writers do register the conundrum of white mediation. Catherine Johnson applauds the increased recognition of minoritized perspectives in mainstream contexts but observes how these perspectives are consistently filtered through white writers who act as a buffer between the material and the anticipated majority viewer or reader. Her

challenge—"wouldn't it be even better if people didn't wait for a white person to say what other people have been saying for ages before they take any notice?"—remains pertinent. Of *Small Island*'s adaptation and RNT production, arts entrepreneur Joy Francis concludes: "What it signals is that our stories are big enough, important enough and translate well enough to be staged with high production values on a major British stage. What will be even more impressive, poignant and a testimony to Levy's aspiration (and the Windrush generation) is when the creative team looks as colourful as the cast." The fact that only three black British women playwrights have had work produced at the RNT supports a point I have made previously that "the theatre complex in Britain is not neutral territory for a black woman writer, but an environment still fringed with the unexpectedness of her presence" (Osborne, "'Hearing Voices'" 251). While a return season of the *Small Island* production was planned for October 2020 (but did not take place because of COVID-19 restrictions), in general, black British dramas have yet to find permanent cultural traction either through being commissioned or revived.[34]

Levy aimed to make visible experiences that have been culturally hidden, under-recognised, or diminished. As she observed, "no essay she ever read was so powerful an agent for change as a James Baldwin short story" (Lima, "Andrea Levy" 197). Genealogy was her lodestar. She fashioned her narrative signature to conduct an odyssey into her own familial and collective place in history and cultural heritage.[35] This paved the way for others to follow, as she explains: "I'm very happy to keep being called a Black British writer if it means that there are going to be other people who say, 'Yes I'm going to be a Black British writer too'" (Levy, "Andrea Levy" 338). Candice Carty-Williams was the first black British winner of the "Book of the Year" British Book Awards for her debut novel, *Queenie* (2020), which was inspired by Levy's *Small Island* character. She testifies to Levy's legacy: "most of all, I'm thankful that she has allowed me, and writers like me, to tell our own stories" ("The Week in Books").

Traction gained within an institution (as physical presence or critical influence) paves the way for cultural longevity. In the jolt of social awareness that the global momentum of the Black Lives Matter protests

engendered towards Britain's imperial-colonial past and its repercussions today, re-evaluations and reflections abound. Gardner argues that "if the production was being conceived now it couldn't be with anything other than a black creative team."[36] While there is value to the mainstreaming of Levy's work through complexes like the RNT and through eminent writers and directors adapting her work, we must pay attention to what is neglected in these adaptations. To render the material that examines the history of Empire in terms palatable to and comfortable for white audiences, these adaptations, often by white cultural producers, temper the radical black politics of Levy's writing.[37] If the RNT's production and Edmundson's adaptation of *Small Island* tell us anything, it is that any progress in this direction is most certainly being carefully "stage managed."

Notes

1 In 1949 Sir Henry Tizard, Chief Scientific Advisor to the Ministry of Defence, predicted, "We are not a great power and never will be again" and "if we continue to behave like a Great Power we shall soon cease to be a great nation" (qtd. in Hennessy 431).

2 The 2020 *Women in Theatre Forum Report* that includes Black Womxn in Theatre found that

- 16% of working filmmakers were women.
- Only 14% of prime time television was written by women. . . .
- 28% of television episodes by women.
- Nothing had changed at all in ten years—the graphic is a completely flat line, it shows things aren't getting better. (Tuckett 11)

3 OfCom's 2019 *Diversity and Equal Opportunities in Radio* report concludes that "[m]inority ethnic employees remain inadequately represented across the radio sector" (20). In television, recent figures confirm how non-diverse prime time programming is, as Masso documents.

4 Cumper's radio play was first broadcast on 29 July 2006 on BBC Radio 4, Radio Extra.

5 Milne explained, during a panel discussion with producer Vicky Licorish, that she thought white audiences needed an explanatory bridge to a black-centred story. The series was telecast on BBC1 on 6 and 13 December 2009 with the cast of Naomie Harris (Hortense), David Oyelowo (Gilbert), Ruth Wilson (Queenie), and Benedict Cumberbatch (Bernard). Williams noted of her approach to adapting Levy's novel *The Long Song*, "I didn't feel my take on this

book was as important as this book" (qtd. in Pickard). Polley observes of adapting books for the screen, "there's a lot of ethical responsibility in terms of how you're presenting people to the outside world. Because for a lot of people, that's the only context in which they'll know these people."

6 The statistics gathered in the Audience Agency's Arts Council England (ACE)-commissioned report state that more than eighty percent of audience members are white (Torreggiani). The *Analysis of Theatre in England* reports that

> [t]he largest group of [ticket] bookers by far—among commercial and subsidised theatre, in and outside London—continues to be 92%-96% white, and while London theatres show a slightly higher proportion of bookers from a non-white background (6.6% for commercial and 8.3% for subsidised theatre), this must be set against the fact that 40% of the city's population is of BAME [black, Asian and minority ethnic] origin. (Naylor et al. 8)

7 Chisholm writes about the racial politics of the theatre complex:

> Arguably, work created by *Black* creatives, does bring *Black audiences* to spaces that are deemed unwelcoming, as I myself have engaged in this practice. However, I don't think the work alone, is enough to make the invitation meaningful. . . . *Black audiences*, and ethnic minorities on a whole, shouldn't have to battle with the discriminatory rules and regulations of society, in the theatre environment. Like our *white* counterparts, theatre should be an escape, not a microcosm of our everyday injustices. (Emphasis added)

8 For a discussion of class in British theatre, see Love. Norris has said that "[t]he National Theatre is fully committed to reflecting the diversity of the nation on stage, and has set clear targets for increasing representation" while he contemporaneously commissioned a programme for May 2019 with six plays written by men and only one directed by a woman (Gerken). A statement that claims the RNT is "committed to representing diversity on its stages and welcoming D/deaf and disabled audience members" is repeated at various points throughout Craig's 2019 Ph.D. placement summary. Despite such statements, the RNT is clearly struggling to evince this diversity in its productions. Since Khan's watershed report, The Arts Britain Ignores, there have been follow-up plans, such as ACE's Cultural Diversity Action Plan from 1998, the Eclipse conference (Eclipse Report) that aimed to address racism in theatre, Whose Theatre? edited by Young, and most recently, Equality and Diversity: The Creative Case in 2018–19. However, the lack of diversity of projects and personnel continues.

9 My term "consequentialist aesthetics" proposes a method by which readers, listeners, and audiences can be sensitised to the ongoing aftershock of Britain's imperial past and its inequalities as experienced today by those people who bear

the consequences of the violence of imperial-colonial rule. Through the effects and affect produced by literature and the arts, we can recognize what Levine calls the persistent "spectre of imperialism" (115) that constitutes British culture and its institutions and foreground, in Burton's words, the state of the "perennial present-ness . . . of empire" (22).

10 See Jones, my article "Writing Black Back," Thompson, Tokson, and Waters.

11 On the longevity of the BBC's *Black and White Minstrel Show*, see Malik. On the longevity of "blacking up," Jonathan Miller caused a furor when he cast Anthony Hopkins as Othello in response to the British Equity Union's refusal to allow the African American actor James Earl Jones to play the role.

12 It should be noted that the faux-homogeneity and reductive label of "BAME" is generally rejected by people termed in this way. To read the statement that explains why, see "#BAMEOver."

13 The annual Black Theatre Season (1983–90) was programmed by the Black Theatre Forum as "a reminder to funders that black theatre did know how to organize and administer and had an important presence that needed to be recognised" (Chambers, *Black and Asian Theatre* 184).

14 Spilsbury reports that "around 94% of journalists are white—slightly higher than the proportion for the UK workforce as a whole (91%)" (6).

15 Selected examples of this recalibration include Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954), Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* (1960), and Riley's *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987); in poetry by Berry, LaRose, Collins, Bloom, and Nichols; and in plays, including *You in Your Small Corner* (1961) by Reckord and *Black Pieces* (1970) by Matura.

16 This loneliness resonates with contemporary theatre. As Gabrielle Brooks has said, "I've stood on the stage and I thought to myself: 'Wow, there is no one looking back at me that reflects me.' Not only does it make me feel lonely, but it also makes me makes me feel like there's no progression" (qtd. in Bakare).

17 As Hall explains,

> articulations between race, colour and class underpinned the entire social hierarchy . . . [with] virtually white people clustered at the top of the colonial class pyramid. Below it, the coloured, or more accurately the brown or creole middle and lower-middling strata . . . [were] the principal conscripts to the colonial order. At the bottom were the great mass of overwhelmingly black poor working-class or peasant Jamaicans. (Hall and Schwartz 97)

18 The passage from Lamming is as follows:

> Can you imagine waking up one morning and discovering a stranger asleep on the sofa of your living room? You wake this person up and ask them 'What are you doing here?' and the person replies 'I belong

> here'. This was exactly the extraordinary predicament quite ordinary English people found themselves in when they awoke one morning and saw these people metaphorically on the sofas of their living rooms and the people—meaning the authorities—who had brought these strangers into the 'native's living room' had not asked permission or invited consultation about this invitation. (4)

19 The genre of the narrative of enslavement is generally a mediated form, in which a white person sometimes transcribed and often shaped the black person's verbally recollected life, frequently with an abolitionist or religious motivation.

20 Pinnock, Kwei-Armah, green, Roy Williams, and the late Daley are British-born writers of Caribbean descent whose diasporic plays constitute an important presence in this genre. A musical that concerns the same period is *Big Life* by white British writer Sirett and black South African musician Joseph.

21 Chisholm identifies the disjuncture between watching the play *Nine Night* (one of the only three plays by a black British woman ever staged at the RNT) and the performance's majority audience:

> I remember feeling a two-tiered sense of consciousness. On one level, I was excited and proud to see a depiction of my Caribbean lived experience being centre stage. On the other, I was aware that I was at the National Theatre and made up a small minority of Black audience members. Despite the connection I had to the play, my societal anxieties surfaced, so much so, that at the beginning of the show, I found myself too embarrassed to laugh. As the play ensued, I questioned whether the majority of the audience would understand the humour and appreciate the play's authenticity. Were they here to learn or here to sneer at us, and to what extent does the play influence their perception of Black Caribbeans? Had I not gone with a group of friends, I am sure that I would've felt even more so on the outside looking in, on a play that almost felt like home.

22 This lack of consequentialist thinking is longstanding. Chambers notes that Unity Theatre, a pioneering company that employed Paul Robeson before and after WWII "during the war had refused membership on the grounds of racial attitude." However, during the period of post-war migration, "when Britain had become more multi-ethnic," even this company "remained overwhelmingly white though it continued to be staunchly anti-imperialist" (Chambers, *The Story of Unity Theatre* 400).

23 Guardian reporter Gentleman first exposed the deportations in 2017 and was awarded Journalist of the Year 2018 for unfolding the history of damning revelations concerning Home Office and immigration policies towards now elderly postwar Caribbean-origin migrants.

24 Britton notes that "[i]n 1924 a group of West African law students living in London articulated a set of grievances that culminated in the closure of the British Empire Exhibition's African Village to the public" (71).

25 See, for example, the work of Valerie Mason-John, Jackie Kay, Lemn Sissay, Michelle Scally-Clarke, Diran Adebayo, and Peters.

26 The corpus of non-literary scholarship concerning transracial adoption, fostering, and mixedness includes the work of Bland, Peters, Lee, Kirton, and Tizard and Phoenix.

27 The length of Levy's 2015 unabridged reading of *Small Island* (seventeen hours and twenty-four minutes) contrasts with the earlier version of fifteen hours narrated by Debra Michaels (2004) and the character cast audio version (2005) Peter Mackie had abridged to six hours and forty-six minutes—a two-thirds' reduction of the novel.

28 Levy's affinity with the audio medium is demonstrated by her frequent radio presence in a range of programmes not only reading and discussing her fiction but also contributing to various arts' series. As an indication of her eminence, she was a guest on BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs* in 2011.

29 The five-star reviews accorded to Levy readings of *Small Island*, *The Long Song*, and *Six Stories and an Essay* on *Goodreads* further indicate her audiobooks' success ("Small Island").

30 Well-documented declines in sales of literary fiction and novels and the growing popularity of audiobooks amongst the under-forty-five age group in Britain and the US suggest something of a sea change is underway in the preferred medium by which people engage with fictional narratives, especially the genre termed literary fiction, as described by Willingham. Dowling notes that "the audiobook market has grown from a publishing industry side hustle into a huge global business" and that "the UK audiobook market rose to £69m in 2018, an increase of 43%" (35).

31 For evidence of this exclusion, the upcoming Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) conference "The Post-Windrush Generation: Black British Voices of Resistance," which "will explore what it really means to be black in Britain," featured, three months after the event was first advertised, only one woman among the two convenors and eleven speakers ("The Post-Windrush Generation").

32 Her radio interview recorded in 2014 with oral historian Sarah O'Reilly that was broadcast, at Levy's request, after her death, poignantly captures Levy's "trademark wit and wisdom"
("BBC Radio 4"). The programme used very brief excerpts from fourteen hours of material collected over a series of interviews.

33 In response to the anti-racism protests and Black Lives Matter movement, Dominic Cooke stepped down as director of the 2021 West End show *Get Up,*

Stand Up! The Bob Marley Story in favour of Clint Dyer (Lewis). Dyer was also appointed Deputy Artistic director to Norris in January 2021.

34 The off-West End/Fringe sector has been more proactive with revivals. While Artistic Director at The Bush Theatre, Madani Younis programmed *Passing the Baton*, "a three-year initiative to reacquaint theatre goers with the artists of colour who carved their way through British playwriting with distinction" (Pinnock).

35 The relationship between Levy's personal project to reclaim her history and her fiction is evident in her comments to Lima: "the starting point of writing books has always been wanting to make the unseen visible, wanting to show the experience of [my] parents' generation and the children that came after, having to live in this country, quite a hostile environment, and how [we] cope with that" (qtd. in Lima, "'Pivoting the Centre'" 57).

36 During the compulsory UK theatre closures—for the first time since Cromwell's Commonwealth (1642–60)—as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a replay of the livestreamed film of the production of Edmundson's *Small Island* as part of the National Theatre at Home free season, a repertoire of sixteen plays staged in previous seasons at the RNT. Attracting over twelve million viewers, *Small Island* (18–25 June) joined archival filmed recordings of Lorraine Hansberry's *Les Blancs* and Inua Ellams' *Barbershop Chronicles*—all included in response to criticism over the lack of diversity in live theatre film streams by major theatres during the lockdown period. As Akbar points out, "These offerings have been . . . cited as an example of the industry's resourcefulness," yet some people, including Indhu Rubasingham, Artistic Director of the Kiln Theatre, and Linette Linton, Artistic Director of The Bush Theatre, "have noticed the marked lack of diversity in the big, 'predominantly white' productions."

37 Kwei-Armah, now in his role as the first Black British Artistic Director at the Young Vic, warns that a result of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown is that black artists and black-led theatres face a greater chance of disappearance: "recessions and depressions make us smaller, not larger. We become our smaller selves and I fear that the lockdown may contract us, not expand us" (Akbar).

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