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IDENTITY FORMATION BETWEEN ROOTLESSNESS AND BELONGING IN ANDREA
LEVY'S *FRUIT OF THE LEMON*

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ABSTRACT

Identity is an umbrella term for people's understanding of themselves, from where they belong and who they really are which is nourished by their own acceptance about their originality and recognition by the society. Identity crisis arises when the understanding of one's origin and roots is not strong specially when it's the case of a migrant. This paper focuses on Faith's journey from rootlessness, where she is unaware and largely in denial about her being black and of Jamaican origin to belonging, where she accepts her originality, her race and family and her Jamaican roots which provides her new sense of identity and self-worth. Through *Fruit of the Lemon* Levy highlights the life and the struggles of people who are coloured in the nation that is majorly white and are dismissive about their existence.

Keywords: Identity crisis, Rootlessness, Belonging.

The world after the World War II didn't remain the same. The 20th century transformed the global power equilibrium and the World War II created a new order. The colonized countries started gaining their independence and the 'mother country' started losing its grip over the major part of the world. The consequences of the War were felt across the globe transforming nations and societies.

With the disintegration of power, impact of war and economy in shambles, Britain landed in dire need of labor to carry out several works in the country. In order to meet this demand, the labor was called from nations such as Africa and Caribbean islands with a promise of new world, greater living standards and remarkable English life. The arrival of the ship SS Empire Windrush in England in 1948, changed the face of Britain forever. It brought passengers of West Indian origin who came to their 'mother country' with a dream that it would accept them as their own child but the reality was very much different. There have been many works written around the disillusionment of the migrant workers and immigrant life in Britain. Andrea Levy is one such writer who pens the life and experience of immigrants from Caribbean Island whose lives are governed by their origin and skin colour.

Andrea Levy was an acclaimed British author of Afro-Jamaican descent who extensively wrote about how it is to be Black and British. She highlights the closely connected histories of Britain and the Caribbean. Being herself a second-generation immigrant her works chronicled the post-War experience of her as well as her parents' generation. Levy having faced several incidents that made her question her own identity, her characters

too go through the same situations. She wrote stories on the issues that she herself wanted to know in her early years. Born to Jamaican parents, she creates same environment for Faith in her novel *Fruit of the Lemon*.

Rene Descartes, Father of Modern Western philosophy, famously said *cogito ergo sum* i.e. "I think, therefore I am". It highlights the most basic of all facets of human nature that is self-consciousness. The awareness of "I" is what defines human life, his or her existence. Identity is what an individual understands about him or her as an individual, unique entity. It is who we are, from where we belong, the experiences, the connections, the belief that combines altogether and make an individual's understanding of the self. But what happens when a person's comprehension of his or her belonging is questioned. They land into Identity crisis.

Levy's novel *Fruit of the Lemon* is a story about Faith Jackson, a British born young middle-class woman, whose parents are Jamaica born Windrush immigrants. Born and brought up in Britain Faith is very little informed about her roots and ancestry. She considers herself British and leads an indifferent life towards her race. However, a series of events leads her to realize her difference causing an identity crisis. It is a tale of an individual gaining her sense of identity when she reunites with her roots.

Identity crisis is a psychological phenomenon in which an individual suffers from confusion about himself/herself by the situations created in the society. Identity works on two aspects; one on how people identify themselves and another how they are recognized by the society they live in. The crisis arises when a person develops conflict and confusion about himself/herself and his/her place in the society. In the case of immigrants, they are more exposed and prone to this crisis because of their inability to assimilate in the host society despite trying their level best. The rootlessness and absence of sense of belonging is what results in the chaos in their being. Faith suffers from the same situation in the novel.

Faith, is the daughter of Wade and Mildred Jackson, the first-generation Caribbean immigrant. They came to England, the mother country with many dreams and aspirations, to have a better English life, what they were informed and taught about in their country. But what they dreamt of and what they came to know were two starkly different realities. They were shocked to realize that the country they considered as an epitome of class and sophistication has nothing to offer them other than the sub-standard life, they never got the real acceptance by the host country and were discriminated on the basis of their origin and color. With time they somehow managed to fit themselves in with their silence about the past and acceptance of whatever the country and its people offered them.

Faith and her brother Carl were born and brought up in England. Without the knowledge of their history and their roots they lived an English life, they were starved of any information about the country from where their parents came and the experiences they had in their lives. The information that her parents arrived to England on a slave ship "banana boat" as they called it came from her fellow classmates who teased her about it. Faith unaware about this, feels alienated and ashamed of the fact that her parents have roots that went back to slavery and "banana boat".

Carl and Mildred hid their history, ethnic beliefs, their relationships anything that highlights their race from their children to fit in the white majority society. The initial experience in London whether the accommodation issues or the abject poverty they faced due to their skin colour and origin made them realize that their being black can't come in their children's path of prosperity. As Caryl Philips in his Arthur Ravenscroft Memorial Lecture says that the parents' generation of migrants "often held their tongues in order that they might protect their children" (114). But it caused more harm than good. Faith became ignorant of her originality harming her sense of self.

Faith from the very beginning has been a target of racial slurs. The boys at her school used to bully her "Faith is a darkie, and her mum and dad came on a banana boat" (1). Faith never came to terms with her parents' background. She hated the slavery lessons at school and college because she was not able to relate to them and felt it to be blemishing. Her English upbringing, western education, her circle of white friends encapsulates her into thinking her to be British until realities of life unfold.

Faith's education from art college and leaving family home to live with white friends is when she is forced into thinking about her "difference". Still unable to accept it she moves in society ignoring her reality. She becomes colour conscious when Olivia who offered her job says "Your work has an ethnicity which shines through...A sort of African or South American feel which is obviously part of you. Don't you find it exciting Faith?" (32). Faith still tries to evade the possibility of her difference.

Faith's reluctance to talk about colour and her own self has reached to such a great extent that when her father Wade visits her place and asks if she has any friend of her own kind, she is unable to understand the question. When Wade specifies that he meant "coloured", Faith doesn't even wish to listen to him about this. She strongly suppresses any sense of her racial identity. She even feels indifferent and aloof from her brother Carl, who she feels do not belong to the world she is trying to fit in, the world of Whites. She time and again describes him as a "big man with dark complexion", "large and dark" (59).

Faith faces racism on every step. In BBC she is told not to sit anywhere she wants which highlights the involvement of culture, hierarchy and social strata in all the social activities. She is made to face her ethnicity in her best friend Marion's home, where her (Marion's) father without thinking that Faith is also of the same community comments on Blacks ruthlessly. And when Faith says that she is also black, he says that she's "different". They treat Faith as family but demean people like her in her presence.

Faith's belief that people around her accept her as their own comes to an end when she witnesses racial hate crime on a black woman. The police's views about the incident who do not acknowledge the institutionalized form of racism behind the attack but calls the attacker a "bunch of thugs" (179). They also blame the bookshop owner for the incident. Her friend Simon though helps the woman but at home they mock her without realizing that Faith is also black. Faith unable to ignore this extreme level of racism that took the form of violence and her friends' indifference towards the fact that three white men attacked a black woman leads her to despair and ultimately to nervous breakdown. Faith reacted extremely "I tipped my cup of tea slowly over table. 'Will you all just shut up. Just fucking Shut up. It's not funny!'" (184).

Faith all her life suffered "anxiety of belonging". She was unable to accept that she has been discriminated all along whether directly or indirectly. Faith's ignorance towards racism and inacceptance of her identity is starkly opposite to the well aware personality of Carl's girlfriend Ruth who is very active when it comes to opposing any form of discrimination. Ruth wants to fight back and claim England as her home.

All the racial incidents piling up in Faith's being led her to identity crisis. Terrified she reaches her parents' home to find comfort "to be with my own people" (185) with a thought that they would "understand how I felt-black on the outside and cowardly custard yellow on the inside" (185). This marks Faith's journey from vehemently denying the existence of race to her readiness to live just as black makes her more vulnerable. Her stay at her parents' house creates more chaos than calm as Ruth's family was visiting. Ruth who always talked about black cause, acceptance of black identity etc belonged to a white family. This shatters Faith's identity more.

Faith disturbed with the happening around her locks herself in her bedroom, and there all she sees is a black girl lying on the bed. "I didn't want to be black anymore I just want to live. The other mirror in the room I covered with a tee-shirt. Voila! I was no longer black" (187). Faith wanted to belong, wanted to have a universal identity but now neither she belonged to Britain nor she could connect to Jamaica. Her parents seeing her condition suggest her to visit Jamaica, her family as it might help her in easing this breakdown. Her mother says, "Child, everyone should know where they come from." (190)

Faith thus embarks on a journey that takes her to the background, the knowledge of her history that her identity needed the most. The theme of return is important in literature of Blacks specially black British writers. The writers of Caribbean origin have time and again explored the phenomenon of return or moving backward in order to move forward. The first reaction to Jamaica and its people in Faith's own words is "cultural shock" (197).

Faith is in a state of surprise seeing the airport "packed with black faces" (197). Faith's reaction to the people and the environment seems to be just like that of the Colonizers. "Everywhere I turned- black faces. Black

faces of people in uniforms. Black faces waiting for luggage. Black faces behind counters” (197). Faith’s first reaction witnessing this on airport was “cultural shock” a reaction similar to that of Colonizers. She felt as if she can’t belong here too as she says “I felt out of place- everything was a little familiar but not quite. Like a dream. Culture shock is how the feeling is described” (197).

As Faith gets to know Jamaica, she realizes that Jamaica is not faultless, it is a third world nation but it is surely not as backward as it is made to appear by her parents and her fellow Britishers. She is quite shocked to see large houses instead of mud huts. Her mother’s sister, aunt Coral lives in a bungalow, uses modern appliances and wares and not animal skins and earthen pots “I don’t know what I was expecting but somewhere in my mind was an image of a mud hut with a pointy stick roof and dirt floors” (212).

Franz Fanon in “On National Culture” says that a person in order to free himself/herself from white dominancy and supremacy needs to go back his/her roots. To detangle himself or herself from the mesh of contradictions that pile up to become insurmountable a person journeys back to homeland, to people to whom there is original belonging however difficult it might be. Fanon says that if it is not achieved “there will be serious psycho-affective injuries and the result will be individuals without anchor, without a horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless- a race of angels” (375).

Levy during Faith’s visit to Jamaica uses oral tradition for the revelation of family history which was lacking in her own life in England. Faith is surrounded by the stories of Aunt Coral, Vincent, her mother Mildred, Constance, her father Wade, and many more. Each story fills the gap that was created because of her parents’ silence and her own disinterest. The stories also threw light on the multiplicity of origin that the family has, as they not only are connected to Jamaica but many other countries and thus share a wide history, diversified and rich familial heritage.

Faith on her new discoveries about her family gets to know about Constance, her mother’s cousin who underwent identity crisis too which arose out of her being light skinned in a nation that is mostly coloured. Constance, having fair skinned mother and being her self light skinned enjoyed importance in old times when light skinned mattered more than it mattered now. She was taught English ways by her mother and was sent to England. When she came back after the War, she realized that her light skin holds no importance and tries to assimilate in Jamaican society but always faced rejection because of her light skin. She lingers in between her Englishness and acquired Jamaican identity and is still unable to find her own individuality. Constance mirrored Faith’s life and experience and served as a learning experience for her.

The stories and incidents told to Faith changed her view about her colour, her origin, her people forever. She who was always reluctant in accepting her colour let alone her roots and origin has now assimilated herself to Jamaica “I changed my clothes. Out of my jeans and in to a cotton blouse and a skirt...I put sandals on my feet and pulled my hair back tight off my face and into a bun on the top of my head...When Auntie Coral saw me, she gave me that look...the misty-eyed tearful look. She gasped... clapped and shouted “Ahh my Faith, but now you look like a Jamaica!”” (280)

Faith through her journey not only gets awareness about existence of race and the discrimination that is played out because of that but also realizes that her parents remained silent, and went on living in England for their children, especially for Faith herself. They wanted her to have her life together, to settle and live happily. She also realized that her parents survived in such hostile environment because they knew “they were Jamaican. They knew where they came from and where they wanted to go...They learnt to get along with people. They learnt to smile and laugh and all the while just quietly make the life they wanted.” (390-391)

Faith in her quest to know about her roots also gets to know about the matricentric side of Jamaican society, where women of generations brought up their families without men. Her great-grandmother Cecilia’s story is a prime example of this. Levy not only gives space and voice to immigrants but also brings that section to the centre who have faced double brunt of discrimination. In most of the stories of Faith’s family women are central and men are not that important. The stories mostly revolve around the women characters. This brings a new perspective to Faith in her journey to know herself.

Through her journey, living in her familial setting Faith achieves a sense of belonging, and anchored life which she needed to move in the world that discriminates and subjugates. The rich familial history, multiplicity of origin, the strength and resilience of her family fills Faith with the required confidence. She inherits a proud Jamaican identity without giving up on her British side strengthening her self-worth. She is no longer conscious of her ethnicity and proudly declares "Let those bully boys walk behind me in the playground. Let them call me, 'You're a darkie. Faith's a darkie.' I am the granddaughter of Grace and William Campbell. I am the great-grandchild of Cecilia Hilton. I am descended from Katherine whose mother was a slave. I am the cousin of Africa. I am the niece of Coral Thompson and the daughter of Wade and Mildred Jackson. Let them say what they like. Because I am the bastard child of Empire and I will have my day". (385)

Faith's conflict of her black and British identity arose due to her own rejection of her originality coupled with society's incapability and unwillingness to accept a black girl's right to be treated equally just like any British-born white citizen. The denial, the prejudice on every step along with the absence of anchor of originality to hold on to made her life chaotic. The moment she accepts her roots becomes the moment of her liberation where she becomes a more confident person, an individual in her own right who can face whatever the world has to offer her.

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