Identity Dilemma of Light-skinned Black Protagonist in England in *Never Far from Nowhere* by Black British Writer Andrea Levy

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ABSTRACT

Light-skinned Black citizens are often perceived as integrating into predominantly white societies more easily than their dark-skinned counterparts. However, the identity dilemma encountered by Vivien, the light-skinned Black protagonist in *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996) by Andrea Levy, challenges this assumption. Vivien's adolescent experiences reveal that her identity struggles are more complex than those of her dark-skinned sister, Olive. While past studies of the novel primarily examine Black characters' social mobility and their varying attitudes toward Black identity, there remains a gap in scholarship regarding how differing social perceptions of the light-skinned protagonist Vivien influence her sense of belonging in England. This study focusses on Vivien's pre-encounter stage in her understanding of Black identity, emphasising how multiple external pressures contribute to the fragmentation of her identity. Frantz Fanon's concept of the "epidermalisation of inferiority" is employed to analyse how the ideology of Black inferiority, rooted in the colonial era, shapes Vivien's negative attitude toward Black identity in postcolonial England. Additionally, Tajfel and Turner's concept of social categorisation is used to investigate how these external pressures affect Vivien's sense of belonging. This study aims to enrich existing research on the double marginalisation experienced by light-skinned Black individuals within predominantly white societies, marginalisation that comes both from white society and from the Black community. The findings suggest that significant divergence exists in how Black citizens' racial identity is perceived both within white society and among Black individuals themselves, further intensifying Vivien's identity dilemma.

Keywords: Andrea Levy, black identity, epidermalisation of inferiority, Never Far from Nowhere, social categorisation

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Britain, the national identity of individuals from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds continues to provoke contention and critical discussion. According to Clarke (2023), in "post-racial" Britain, the articulation of Britishness by middle-class white Britons still reflects racial considerations (p. 279). Research involving non-white groups, particularly Black Britons, indicates that "British national identity" remains "racialised as white" and that the sense of belonging among Black citizens is frequently undermined by "cultural exclusion, misrecognition, and racism" (Clarke, 2023, p. 280). Clarke's argument underscores the precarity of national identity for Black citizens in Britain. Although Black individuals born in Britain regard themselves as British, their national identity is complicated by white society's racial discrimination and persistent Black stereotypes. Consequently, developing a secure sense of belonging in Britain becomes challenging for many Black citizens.

The national identity of Black citizens varies across skin tones. Dark-skinned Black individuals encounter more forms of racism compared to light-skinned individuals, who often enjoy relatively greater privileges (Craddock et al., 2023, p. 246; Mirmasoomi & Roshnavand, 2014, p. 56; Phoenix & Craddock, 2022, p. 1016). Studies in the United States reveal that the skin-colour hierarchy positions light-skinned African Americans in higher social and economic roles (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 760).

Lightness also becomes an implicit criterion for assessing beauty, competence, and value within American Black communities (Bond & Cash, 1992, p. 883; Russell et al., 1993, p. 1). However, the situation in Britain is more complex. Although light-skinned Black Britons may seem better able to integrate into white society, they still face significant racialised disadvantages that bar them from full national belonging (Phoenix & Craddock, 2024, p. 151). Light-skinned Black citizens who nearly succeed in assimilating into white society are often reclassified as Black "once their ancestry becomes known, despite having what many perceive as a visibly white appearance" (Spratt, 2023, p. 2). As a result, light-skinned Black citizens in England confront identity dilemmas that can be even more complicated than those faced by their dark-skinned counterparts. While dark-skinned citizens are consistently perceived as Black, perceptions of the identity of light-skinned Black citizens vary drastically among those who encounter them (Song, 2010, p. 279; Thompson, 2020, p. 11).

The presence of Black people in Britain traces back to the transatlantic slave trade and the nation's colonial history (Gabriel, 2007, p. 25). From the arrival of the first English settlers in the West Indies, the British Empire relied on enslaved Africans to provide labour on sugar plantations. Jamaica housed the largest enslaved population among all British colonies. Under white domination and oppression in Jamaica, skin colour became closely associated with presumed attributes: whiteness with superiority, and

Blackness with inferiority (Collins, 2019, p. 118). Miscegenation between African and white populations - often the result of rape - gave rise to a new racial group, the mulattoes. Colonial authorities afforded mulattoes limited access to education and wealth, reinforcing the ideology of white supremacy. By the eighteenth century, Jamaican social values were structured around proximity to whiteness. This skin-colour hierarchy persisted even after Jamaica gained independence (Alleyne, 2002, p. 191; Gabriel, 2007, p. 29).

Following World War II, during the 1950s, African Caribbeans were recruited by the British government to assist in rebuilding the nation. Although they expected preferential treatment as members of the Commonwealth, the reality was starkly different: they faced virulent racism in Britain (Reddie, 2020, p. 73; Small & Solomos, 2006, p. 239). The privileges previously extended to light-skinned individuals in Jamaica did not carry over to the British context. English-born light-skinned Black citizens from immigrant families experienced institutional racism, despite their birthright citizenship. Yet the shared experiences of racial disadvantage have often been overshadowed by the public perception that light-skinned Black Britons enjoy greater privilege. Ultimately, light-skinned Black citizens in England confront identity dilemmas like, though distinctly complicated in comparison with, those faced by their dark-skinned peers.

The identity struggles of light-skinned Black citizens are vividly reflected in *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996) by Andrea Levy. Levy's emphasis on English national identity, rather than British identity, can be linked to Britain's colonial history in Jamaica. For descendants of immigrants from former colonies, Britishness is associated with empire, hierarchy, and racism. After the dissolution of the political projects of Empire and Britain, Englishness became the "only body of cultural symbolic resources" from which Britishness could derive meaning (Asari et al., 2008, p. 12). As a Black English writer of light skin, Levy explores the identity struggles faced by first-generation Jamaican immigrants and second-generation Black citizens born in England. Although Levy was English-born and educated, she often felt like an outsider in her own country (Levy, 2000). In *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996), she examines the identity dilemmas of two England-born Black sisters, light-skinned Vivien and dark-skinned Olive, illustrating that Vivien's identity crisis is more complex in a predominantly white society in England.

Vivien is a young Black citizen in what Cross identifies as the pre-encounter stage, during which individuals lack a deep understanding of their Black identity. In predominantly white societies, Black identity formation involves five stages, each marked by different attitudes toward Blackness. The pre-encounter stage often involves a limited sense of identification with Black culture and, at times, an inclination toward white culture (Cross, 1991, p. 168). Young Black individuals with little understanding of Blackness may distance

themselves from their ingroup when faced with negative pressures (Cross, 1991, p. 168). For light-skinned Black citizens, early experiences, such as how parents address skin colour and the roles of family, friends, and community, significantly shape their racial self-perception (Cunningham, 1997, p. 377). For Vivien, who is a young Black citizen at the pre-encounter stage, her light skin enables her to deny or escape her Black identity. Yet as she navigates adolescence, her understanding of herself depends not only on "who and what [she is]" but also on how others interpret her appearance and identity (Cunningham, 1997, p. 387). Under the conflicting perceptions of white society, her light-skinned mother, her dark-skinned sister, and her white peers, Vivien becomes increasingly confused, undermining her sense of belonging in England.

Previous research shows that some light-skinned Black citizens face double marginalisation from both white society and the Black community (Cunningham, 1997, p. 375). Yet past studies overlook the divergent perceptions of light-skinned Black identity within white society and within Black communities. Existing scholarship on *Never Far from Nowhere* has mainly focussed on Black characters' social mobility and their differing attitudes toward racial identity (Medovarski, 2022, p. 47; Onunkwo & Chig, 2018, p. 705; Tolan, 2022, p. 26). However, only few studies examine how the varied social perceptions of Vivien's light-skinned identity shape her belonging in England. Addressing this gap, the present study employs Fanon's concept of "Epidermalisation of Inferiority" to explore how colonial ideologies of Black inferiority persist in postcolonial England (Fanon, 1986). Additionally, Henri Tajfel and John Turner's concept of "Social Categorisation" is used to analyse how multiple external pressures shape Vivien's sense of belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 2010).

LITERATURE REVIEW

As one of Andrea Levy's earlier works, *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996) has received less scholarly attention than her later and more popular novels. Existing research on this text is relatively limited and often focusses on the differing experiences of Black individuals with varying skin tones and their attitudes toward racial identity. Onunkwo and Chig (2018) examine the phenomenon of double consciousness in the novel through "the categorisation of psychoanalysis of Freud" (p. 705). They argue that Vivien and her mother, Rose, occupy the "white side" of double consciousness due to their light skin, whereas Olive is situated on the "black side" because of her dark complexion. Pready (2012) analyses the sisters' experiences through the lens of defamiliarised home, arguing that although their encounters differ based on skin tone, both ultimately experience dislocation and unbelonging in England. However, these studies overlook how the divergent perceptions of Vivien's racial identity, both within her family and within white society, shape her racial attitudes and deepen her identity conflict.

Some scholars debate whether *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996) should be classified as

a bildungsroman. Fischer (2004) argues that the novel does fit the bildungsroman model, claiming that Vivien undergoes an identity awakening, progressing from denial of her Black identity and pursuit of white acceptance to an acknowledgment of her Jamaican heritage and a reconstruction of her national identity as English. In Fischer's view, Vivien achieves self-reconciliation. In contrast, Gunning (2014) rejects the classification of the novel as a bildungsroman, asserting that such an interpretation is overly optimistic. According to Gunning, the dual oppressions of race and class prevent Vivien from achieving genuine transformation. Taunton (2014) supports Gunning's stance, describing the sisters' development as a limited bildungsroman constrained largely by their working-class upbringing in a council estate. This study aligns with Gunning and Taunton, situating Vivien in the pre-encounter stage of Black identity formation, a stage characterised by an inability to adopt a positive view of Blackness. Vivien's understanding of race is significantly shaped by multiple external pressures, and thus this study focusses on how differing perceptions within white society and the Black community affect her developing sense of racial identity.

Other scholars concentrate on how Levy and her Black characters negotiate national identity. Medovarski (2022) examines how Levy names herself, her characters, and her texts as English to challenge dominant national narratives and carve out a space for Black citizens in a largely hostile cultural environment. Tolan (2022) explores Levy's

interrogation of the figure of the "acceptable immigrant," arguing that Black characters in the novel pursue integration and class mobility through education and employment as means of challenging stigmatising constructions of immigrants. Building on this scholarship, this study focusses specifically on Vivien's attempts to negotiate a positive English national identity through integration with white peers, as well as the racial obstacles that impede this negotiation.

Therefore, this study integrates a postcolonial framework derived from Frantz Fanon with a social psychological framework developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner to examine the identity struggles of the light-skinned Black protagonist in *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996). It critically investigates how colonial ideologies of Black inferiority continue to shape Vivien's identity in postcolonial England and how multiple external pressures complicate her efforts to negotiate a stable sense of self.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Frantz Fanon's Epidermalisation of Inferiority

Frantz Fanon's concept of Epidermalisation of Inferiority provides a crucial lens for understanding the psychological consequences of racial oppression. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986), Fanon argues that the inferiority complex experienced by Black people results from long-term subjugation, which causes them to associate their skin colour with negative meanings (p. 118). In the colonial era, white colonisers constructed Blackness as inherently inferior,

attributing any characteristics that failed to align with European ideals of "civilisation" to Black people as a contrasting backdrop to white purity (Fanon, 1986, p. 194). Under the persistent gaze of white society, Black individuals became acutely aware of their devalued racial identity, which generated profound and enduring psychological pressure (Fanon, 1986, p. 110). Those who received a European education often internalised racist ideologies through both schooling and family upbringing (Fanon, 1986, p. 191), gradually developing a sense of inferiority rooted in colonial hierarchies. Fanon further argues that colonialism created deep divisions within Black communities through racial hierarchies and the elevation of whiteness as the standard of cultural superiority. Black individuals who internalised these values often regarded whiteness as synonymous with civilisation, distancing themselves from their racial identity and becoming self-alienated. Those with partial white ancestry attempted to reconstruct their social identity by emphasising their "white blood" in hopes of attaining higher social status (Fanon, 1986, p. 46). Fanon notes that individuals who were "almost white" frequently rejected other Black people to gain recognition from white society (Fanon, 1986, p. 116). However, despite adopting European cultural norms, these individuals remained "not white enough" in the eyes of white society (Fanon, 1986, p. 193), leaving them suspended in a state of racial ambiguity and marginalisation.

Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Categorisation

Henri Tajfel and John Turner's concept of Social Categorisation, a key component of Social Identity Theory (SIT), offers a complementary framework for examining how individuals derive self-concept from group membership. Social identity refers to the part of an individual's self-image that stems from the social groups to which they believe they belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). Tajfel (1981) describes it as "part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 255). Through social categorisation, individuals classify people into in-groups and out-groups, a process that defines their place in society by systematically including them within certain categories and excluding them from others (Turner, 2010, p. 18). This process generates stereotypes - oversimplified shared images of particular groups (Tajfel, 1981, p. 143) - and fuels in-group favouritism alongside out-group discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). Even the mere awareness of an out-group is sufficient to trigger discriminatory responses (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 38). When individuals experience negative social identity, they are often motivated to seek positive self-esteem by distancing themselves from their current group and aligning with groups perceived as more socially valued (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40).

METHODOLOGY

This study examines the identity dilemma encountered by the light-skinned Black protagonist, Vivien, in Andrea Levy's *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996). To achieve this aim, the analysis integrates a post-colonial framework with a social psychological framework. The first objective is to apply Frantz Fanon's concept of "Epidermalisation of Inferiority" to explore how the negative constructions of Blackness established during the colonial era continue to affect Black citizens in post-colonial England. This framework helps illuminate the ways in which such inherited ideologies contribute to Vivien's negative stance toward her own Black identity. The second objective draws on Tajfel and Turner's concept of "Social Categorisation" to investigate how divergent social perceptions of Vivien's racial identity shape her sense of belonging in England. The analysis centres primarily on Vivien, as her light skin and her English-born status form the core of the identity conflict under examination. However, the study also considers the roles of significant supporting characters - her immigrant mother, Rose; her dark-skinned sister, Olive; and her white classmates at grammar school - to assess how their interactions and attitudes influence Vivien's self-perception and belonging. Through this combined framework, the study argues that the lingering negative implications attached to Blackness foster Vivien's rejection of her Black identity. Furthermore, it seeks to demonstrate that the conflicting perceptions of her racial identity from both white society and the Black community contribute to Vivien's internal division and shape her complex sense of belonging in England.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Precarious National Identity and Negative Black Identity of the Light-skinned Black Protagonist

Vivien is depicted as a light-skinned Black English girl born in England to Jamaican parents who are first-generation immigrants. Her parents migrated to Britain as part of the British government's post-World War II recruitment initiative to rebuild the nation. Vivien's light skin reflects the complexity of her mixed Jamaican ancestry. Her mother, Rose, is a light-skinned mulatto descended from a formerly enslaved Black woman who later married a fair-skinned man, and from a mother who married a Scottish man. Her father, Newton, comes from a diverse lineage that includes Spanish, Indian, African, and North African ancestry (Levy, 1996, p. 2). This Caribbean heritage results in Vivien's light skin and her sister Olive's dark skin. Throughout the novel, Vivien is depicted as a young adolescent who holds a negative perception of her racial identity within England.

Although born and raised in England, Vivien exhibits uncertainty about her national identity as English. Birthright citizenship does not guarantee a secure sense of belonging for Black citizens in Britain. From an early age, Vivien becomes aware of social hostility through the unfriendly looks and attitudes of white passers-by (Levy, 1996, p. 5). Her awareness reflects Fanon's

argument that Black individuals come to understand their devalued racial identity through the white gaze, which exerts continuous psychological pressure (Fanon, 1986, p. 110). In the 1950s, exclusion toward Black immigrants was pervasive, and Tajfel and Turner's concept of social categorisation is useful in interpreting this phenomenon. Social categorisation "creates and defines the individual's place in society" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40) by systematically including some individuals and excluding others (Turner, 2010, p. 18). Post-colonial Britain failed to integrate its diverse ethnic populations into a unified national identity (Asari et al., 2008, p. 1). Black citizens were placed outside the boundaries of "Britishness", a process rooted in colonial ideologies that constructed Blackness as inferior (Fanon, 1986, p. 194). In post-colonial England, these inherited ideologies persist, rendering Black individuals, especially those of Caribbean descent, unwelcome. Consequently, Vivien recognises that white society in England does not regard her or her family as legitimate nationals, but as inferior outsiders, which destabilises her sense of belonging.

In addition to her precarious national identity, Vivien also develops a negative perception of her Black identity. This is shaped not only by the hostile racial environment in England but also by her mother Rose's internalised attitudes toward Blackness. Rose views other Black immigrants as socially inferior and asserts that her family is the "only ones with a

bit of class" among Jamaican migrants in England (Levy, 1996, p. 7). Her sense of superiority originates from the colonial-period Jamaican social hierarchy, which stratified individuals according to skin tone and degrees of whiteness (Gabriel, 2007, p. 27). Mulattos were historically valued because their lighter skin signified proximity to white privilege. According to Fanon (1986), colonised Black individuals who internalised white superiority came to valorise Whiteness as civilisation, denying their Black identity and becoming self-alienated. Those with white ancestors often highlighted their "white blood" to elevate their social position (p. 46). Rose similarly uses her family's light skin to distance them from other Black citizens in England. This behaviour reflects her internalisation of colonial racial hierarchies, linking high social status with Whiteness and transmitting to Vivien a devalued understanding of Blackness.

Vivien's internalisation of the ideology of white superiority is significantly shaped by her mother, Rose. Rose attempts to instil this ideology in her daughters by insisting that Black people are "nothing good" (Levy, 1996, p. 7). According to Turner (2010), individuals tend to assign positive characteristics to their ingroup and negative ones to outgroups (p. 30). Rose embodies this process: she internalises racist stereotypes that associate Blackness with negativity and Whiteness with value. Her pursuit of Whiteness is evident in her decision to send her daughters to an all-white school, which she describes as a

"respectable school with decent girls" (Levy, 1996, p. 24). For Rose, "respectability and decency are synonymous with whiteness" (Onunkwo & Chig, 2018, p. 722). Yet Rose simultaneously refuses to categorise her daughters racially; when Olive asks about her identity, Rose replies, "You're not white and you're not black - you're you" (Levy, 1996, p. 13). As Košta (2023) argues, Rose's ambiguous stance places her daughters in a state of confusion regarding their social identity (p. 6). Instead of guiding them toward a confident racial self-concept, she discourages inquiry into their Black identity. As a result, Vivien's negative attitude toward Blackness intensifies. Cunningham (1997) asserts that racial knowledge, transmitted by parents and communities, enables Black youth to develop pride in their racial identity into adulthood (p. 399). However, Vivien's experience is the opposite: confronted with external hostility from white society and internal devaluation of Blackness at home, she is unable, in adolescence, to embrace her Black identity.

The sense of inferiority tied to her Blackness prompts Vivien to evade her racial identity as she attempts to negotiate a national identity as English. This aligns with Tajfel and Turner's argument that negative social identity motivates individuals to seek strategies for positive self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). When individuals perceive their group membership as devalued, they may attempt to "leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). Vivien's strategy for attaining

a positive national identity is to assimilate into white society. At grammar school, she seeks recognition from white students, and her light skin enables her to "be taken for Italian or Spanish" (Levy, 1996, p. 2). In her efforts to pass, Vivien conceals her Jamaican origins and lies about her family background. Her light skin allows her to avoid immediate categorisation as Black within a racially hierarchical society. However, this evasive posture toward her ethnic heritage generates tension with her sister Olive, whose darker skin precludes similar concealment. The discord between the sisters reflects the broader identity conflict Vivien experiences as she attempts to navigate competing pressures from white society and the Black community.

Conflicts between the Sisters with Different Skin Tones

Conflicts between Vivien and Olive arise primarily from their opposing attitudes toward Black identity. While Vivien evades her racial identity, Olive openly embraces hers. In response to her mother's denial of their Blackness, Olive asserts that she likes "being black" and wants "to be black" (Levy, 1996, p. 7). Olive's dark skin makes her racial identity immediately visible, and this visibility exposes her earlier and more directly to racial discrimination. Scholars have long noted that dark-skinned Black individuals are more acutely aware of racism in predominantly white societies than their light-skinned counterparts (Edwards, 1973, p. 482). Thus, Olive recognises the marginalised status of Black citizens in

England earlier than Vivien does. This divergence reflects their different stages of racial-identity formation. Vivien inhabits the pre-encounter stage, while Olive possesses a more developed understanding of what Black identity entails in England. Within the all-white grammar school, Olive encounters overt racial discrimination. Teachers stereotype her as less intelligent than her white peers, irrespective of her academic performance. At primary school, they insist that Olive would never "come to anything" because she supposedly cannot "stick at things" (Levy, 1996, p. 25). Even her excellent academic record fails to alter these prejudicial assumptions. These discriminatory experiences cultivate in Olive a growing resentment toward the institution, ultimately prompting her to drop out. Over time, Olive develops anger toward the injustices rooted in racial identity. She rejects any illusion of acceptance by white society and instead affirms her Black identity as a means of resisting racism. In contrast, Vivien distances herself from Blackness because she associates it with negative social meanings. Seeking a positive national identity as English, she strives for upward mobility that she believes will counteract the inferiority linked to her racial and ethnic identity. She therefore constructs her social categories around career and class rather than race, attempting to define her Englishness through class-based achievement rather than racial belonging.

The grammar school further reinforces these divisions by categorising girls into three academic streams, namely A-stream, B-stream, and C-stream, based on academic performance and perceived career prospects. B-stream students occupy a middle position, superior to C-stream but inferior to A-stream. These categories are class-coded and used to assign students a social position. Vivien identifies herself as belonging to the B-stream, envisioning herself as one of the future "top secretaries and personal assistants in the country," while she categorises Olive as a C-stream girl whose prospects are limited to performing "gym" demonstrations and trivial domestic displays such as "what use can be made of a Victoria sandwich" (Levy, 1996, p. 100). Most of Vivien's friends are white B-stream girls, and aligning herself with them enables Vivien to rebuild her self-esteem. Her categorisation aligns with Tajfel and Turner's (1979) argument that individuals place themselves and others into groups to define their social position (p. 40). Vivien categorises herself alongside B-stream white girls to solidify her sense of Englishness. She thus internalises the racialised logic that equates Englishness with Whiteness, assuming that sharing a group identity with white peers secures her own national identity.

However, social categorisation often produces "in-group favouritism and discrimination against the out-group" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 39). Vivien's categorisation results in discriminatory attitudes toward C-stream girls like Olive, who drops out of school and becomes a young mother (Levy, 1996, p. 99). Vivien claims that:

"I didn't want to end up like Olive. I didn't want to be at home all day surrounded by steaming nappies, watching a baby playing on the floor. I didn't want to be too tired to get dressed, shuffling around in my dressing-gown and slippers. I didn't want to have a baby sucking at my tits every minute." (Levy, 1996, p. 99)

Vivien equates C-stream status with personal failure and interprets Olive's lack of upward mobility as a matter of poor choices rather than structural inequality. What Vivien fails to grasp is that Olive's struggles are rooted in the systemic anti-Black racism prevalent in England. Vivien's light skin allows her to obscure her Black background and avoid the overt racism that Olive faces. Having experienced less discrimination, Vivien misattributes Olive's hardships to personal shortcomings. She tells her sister, "[y]ou chose to lead your life, and I chose to lead mine" (Levy, 1996, p. 278), a statement that reflects her internalisation of meritocratic narratives while ignoring institutional oppression. Olive, by contrast, recognises the role of racism in shaping their divergent experiences. She voices her frustration plainly: "Vivien's the lucky one - always has been. She never had it as hard as me" (Levy, 1996, p. 6). The sisters' conflict therefore underscores how racialised social structures fracture familial relationships, creating barriers to empathy and mutual understanding between individuals who, despite sharing a family and national context, inhabit radically different racial realities.

The conflicts between the two sisters in the novel largely arise from Vivien's persistent evasion and concealment of her Black identity. A major confrontation occurs when Olive exposes Vivien's lie about her Jamaican origin to Vivien's white boyfriend, Eddie. Vivien's falsehood is rooted in her negative self-image and internalised racial stigma. Fearing discrimination against Black people, she claims to Eddie that she is from Mauritius, a place she knows little about but assumes he will not be "prejudiced against" (Levy, 1996, p. 136). Ironically, Vivien is unaware that Mauritius is also associated with Blackness. As Onunkwo and Chig (2018) observe, Vivien "goes the extra mile to protect her hard-earned delicate white identity" (p. 724). When Olive discovers the lie, she confronts Eddie, informing him that their parents are from Jamaica, not Mauritius, and that Vivien does not "want anyone to know we are black" (Levy, 1996, p. 171). Olive interprets Vivien's attempt to distance herself from Blackness as a betrayal of their racial heritage. Seeking retribution, she demands that Vivien openly admit she is ashamed of her Black identity. Although Vivien is furious at Olive for exposing her deception, she is unable to defend herself because she refuses to confront the reality of her racial identity.

The conflict between the sisters reflects an extension of social categorisation within the family. Their disagreements arise from divergent understandings of Vivien's racial identity. Vivien categorises herself as English while attempting to exclude her racial background from that category.

Her avoidance of Black identity functions as a coping strategy in response to racial inequality rather than a deliberate betrayal of her race. Olive, by contrast, recognises the social categorisation imposed by white society, in which their family is firmly classified as Black. Dark-skinned Black citizens tend to have "a greater sense of racial or ethnic identification" (Edwards, 1973, p. 482), and Olive therefore views Vivien's denial as a rejection of their shared identity. From Olive's perspective, Vivien aligns herself with white society's racist attitudes, making her an outsider to the racial in-group. Olive's anger can be understood through Tajfel and Turner's explanation of "in-group favouritism and discrimination against the out-group" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). For Olive, Black citizens are not inferior but victims of structural racism, and white society is responsible for the inequalities they face. However, Olive fails to recognise that Vivien is also struggling to reconcile her national identity with her racial identity. By evading her Blackness and attempting to assimilate into white society, Vivien seeks to overcome the deep-seated feelings of inferiority attached to her racial identity.

Failure to Achieve Complete Recognition and Acceptance by Whites

Vivien's attempts to assimilate into white society do not result in her achieving full recognition or sharing the same national identity as white citizens. Her acceptance by white girls, particularly Carol, depends on the fact that her light skin prevents her from being immediately identified as Black. The white girls' acceptance is conditional: it relies on Vivien's assimilationist efforts and her compliant disposition. She consistently imitates their behaviour and complies with their expectations, despite her reluctance. Furthermore, she never discloses her Jamaican origin. Consequently, the white girls categorise her as non-Black. This categorisation rests on superficial features i.e., her light skin allows them to associate her with European identity rather than with "a darkie" (Levy, 1996, p. 88). Their perception reflects Tajfel's notion of stereotypes emerging through social categorisation. Stereotypes function as "an over-simplified mental image of (usually) some category of person, institution or event which is shared, in essential features, by large numbers of people" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 143). Anti-Black stereotypes structure the white girls' thinking, making it difficult for them to associate Vivien with Blackness.

However, once Vivien's Jamaican origin is revealed, the white girls become divided in how they perceive her racial identity. When Vivien finally discloses her background, Pam quickly points out traits she now interprets as markers of Blackness, remarking that Vivien's nose is "big, though" (Levy, 1996, p. 88). Pam's response aligns with Tajfel and Turner's argument that awareness of an out-group's presence is sufficient to provoke discriminatory reactions from members of the in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 38). Exposure to Vivien's real ethnic background prompts some white girls to reclassify her as Black,

placing her at immediate risk of exclusion and prejudice. Carol, however, reassures Vivien by insisting that she is not "a darkie" but "one of us" (Levy, 1996, p. 88). Carol's reaction exemplifies Tajfel and Turner's "in-group favouritism" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). Her acceptance of Vivien depends not on a recognition of Vivien's racial complexity but on Vivien's continued disassociation with Blackness.

Vivien thus remains trapped in an identity dilemma she cannot resolve. Rejecting her Black identity generates guilt and feelings of betrayal, whereas acknowledging it exposes her to racial discrimination and social exclusion. Neither her denial of Blackness nor her efforts to integrate into white society resolve her internal conflict or alleviate her sense of inferiority. By the end of the novel, when Rose asks Vivien where she belongs, Vivien's confusion becomes unmistakable. She responds, "I don't know" (Levy, 1996, p. 281). Vivien ultimately loses her sense of belonging in England, caught between identities yet unable to fully inhabit any of them.

CONCLUSION

This study challenges earlier scholarship that highlights the privileges typically associated with light-skinned Black individuals in predominantly white societies. In *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996), Vivien's experiences reveal that her identity struggles are far more complex than those of her dark-skinned sister, Olive. Vivien embodies both internalised racism and a profound rupture of self, illustrating that light skin does not automatically yield social advantage. Instead, this study reinforces existing research on the double marginalisation that light-skinned Black individuals may face, being misrecognised or devalued by both white society and the Black community. It further demonstrates that racial divisions operate not only between groups but also within them, shaping identity formation in deeply fragmented ways. This study positions Vivien at the pre-encounter stage of Black identity development. At this stage, she is unable to reconcile the relationship between her racial identity and her desired national identity as English, resulting in a profound loss of belonging. Multiple external pressures, including white society's hostility toward Blackness, her mother's internalised anti-Black attitudes, the conflicts between sisters of different skin tones, and the contradictory responses of her white peers, collectively prevent Vivien from positively identifying with her Black identity. The convergence of these pressures produces a fractured sense of self in which Vivien cannot integrate the divergent ideas imposed upon her.

Implications of the Study

Through the integration of postcolonial framework and social psychological framework, this study demonstrates how the protagonist's negative attitudes toward Blackness are historically rooted in colonial ideologies of inferiority and socially reinforced through lived experience. Ultimately, Vivien's identity dilemma

in postcolonial England exemplifies the enduring legacy of racial hierarchies constructed during the colonial era. Her inability to form a positive racial identity at the pre-encounter stage obstructs her ability to negotiate a stable and affirming national identity as English. This study, therefore, underscores the necessity of examining identity formation as an intersection of historical, psychological, and socio-political forces.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies

This study focusses primarily on Vivien, the light-skinned Black protagonist, who is at the stage of pre-encounter of Black identity formation. Future research may further explore how Black individuals at different stages of racial identity development navigate similar pressures, and how these stages shape their negotiations of belonging within postcolonial and multicultural societies.

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