

University of Pardubice
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

**Racial attitudes of the mid 20th century Britain as
reflected in “*Ten Little Niggers*” by Agatha Christie**

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Firstly, theories of the use of race and ethnicity in fiction in general and especially in British interwar literature should be outlined, especially how texts both reflect and inscribe attitudes in the wider culture of the period. The theory selected should be directly applicable to TEN LITTLE NIGGERS and should then be used to analyze the novel in later chapters. The longest and most significant part of the BP should be this analysis of the book using the background and theoretical tools in the earlier chapters. Specific events, ideas and figures in the book that show diverse attitudes toward race and ethnicity should be described and examined with emphasis on racial and ethnic stereotypes and countertypes. Similar and dissimilar elements in other works by Christie and by her contemporaries writing detective fiction can be used to support the BP author's main points about how race and ethnicity are represented. The publishing history of the work originally published as TEN LITTLE NIGGERS should be traced, particularly how these changes throughout the years reflect evolving attitudes.

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- **DIAMOND,Michael. "Lesser Breeds".Racial attitudes in popular British culture,1890-1940.Anthem Press.2006.ISBN:9781843312161**
- **CHRISTIE,Agatha. Ten little niggers.Glasgow.Collins.1976.ISBN:0006117279**
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Annotation

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to analyse racial attitudes of the mid 20th century Britain as they are reflected in the novel *Ten Little Niggers* by Agatha Christie. Firstly, the theoretical part deals with historical development of race and racism, particularly in Britain, and focuses on historical periods, which were crucial for evolving racial and ethnic attitudes such as slavery, colonization or immigration. Further, the field of cultural studies is introduced as an approach to an analysis of literary works and also various theories about race and racism in literature, mainly in detective fiction, are presented. The application of the theory is shown on the analysis of specific situations and characters from the novel *Ten Little Niggers* as well as from other similar works of the same period written by Agatha Christie.

Keywords: *Ten Little Niggers*, Agatha Christie, racism, attitudes, Britain, analysis, detective fiction.

Název

Rasové postoje v Británii v polovině 20. století zobrazeny v románu Agathy Christie “*Deset malých černoušků*“

Anotace

Cílem této práce je analyzovat rasové postoje v polovině 20. století v Británii zobrazené v románu Agathy Christie *Deset malých černoušků*. Nejdříve se teoretická část zabývá historickým vývojem rasy a rasismu převážně v Británii a zaměřuje se na historická období, která byla klíčová pro rozvoj rasových a etnických postojů, a to například otroctví, kolonizace a imigrace. Dále je, jako přístup k analýze literárního díla, představena oblast kulturních studií a také různé teorie týkající se rasismu v literatuře, zejména v oblasti detektivní literatury. Aplikování těchto teorií je v literatuře prokázáno analýzou konkrétních situací a postav z románu *Deset malých černoušků* a podpořeno analýzou dalších děl napsaných Agathou Christie ve stejném období.

Klíčová slova: *Deset malých černoušků*, Agatha Christie, rasismus, postoje, Británie, analýza, detektivní literatura.

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Introduction

Immense numbers of books, essays, articles etc, were written about one of the most controversial topics of all time, racism. It is an ideology that is trying to legitimize human inequality on the basis of biological (racial) differences between people. In more general sense it can be said that diverse development of various human races and ethnicities determines the character and abilities of an individual. The idea of race and racism has its particular history beginning far back in the past with the earliest human writings, when people already somehow recognized the difference between “us” and “them” or “the other.” The distinction between people can be on various levels – appearance, traditions, language and the western thinkers have always looked back to two major cultures – the classical Greeks and the ancient Hebrews. The Greeks saw the distinction in people’s appearance and customs whereas the Hebrews inclined towards the opinion that the differentiation comes from the relationship to God. In the Victorian England, the idea of dividing people in groups called “races”, which share same biological, intellectual and other characteristics, prevailed. In 1850, an English anatomist Robert Knox introduced his theory, based on an autopsy of a black person, that black people are biologically inferior, which was later rejected by scientists and it was stated that people are not divided into any groups and that race is socially constructed. Racism as an ideology that firstly developed in Britain as a defence of slavery, later during the colonization period people in Britain were convinced that they are superior to others and that they should be colonizing and “helping” uneducated black people in Africa and other countries all over the world. This racist ideology spread through culture, media, via education etc, thus, attitudes towards people of colour were becoming to form. In the twentieth century, during the Great War, and also during the Second World War a lot of immigrants settled in Britain and British people started to feel uneasy about large numbers of immigrants staying in Britain and taking their jobs which also had a great impact on the evolving attitudes of British people. The twentieth century is also a period of the Golden Age detective fiction and Agatha Christie is an important part of it. Her novel *Ten Little Niggers* is controversial already because of the title and it reflects the culture and the evolving racial attitudes in Britain, especially in the mid 20th century. Therefore, this literary work is examined in this bachelor thesis.

Ten people are invited to a fabulous mansion on Nigger Island off the coast of Devon by a mysterious host. Even though they all have something to hide, they arrive expecting a wonderful summer vacation. But soon as they arrive, strange things begin to happen and subsequently, the visitors one by one die according to the nursery rhyme.

The purpose of this bachelor thesis is to analyse racial attitudes of the mid 20th century Britain in the novel *Ten Little Niggers* on the basis of the theoretical background. The first two chapters focus mainly on definitions of race and development of racism from an idea of biological distinction to the idea of racism as a social construct. An emphasis is also put on the nineteenth century colonization period and the racist ideology that white people are superior to black people and propaganda of this ideology through media. “Britishness” as a new concept is introduced in the second chapter as well. The third chapter closely examines the idea of “Britishness” and “Otherness”, provides definitions and traces the concept of “Britishness” in the nineteenth century. Immigration issues during the Great War and the Second World War are examined in chapter four. A great number of immigrants coming to Britain during the Great War were Belgian refugees that were looking for asylum while their country was occupied by Germans. After the Second World War, when the country was devastated, a lot of immigrants came from former colonies, which created open hostility between British people and foreigners. The next chapter provides brief history and development of the word Negro. The last chapter of the theoretical part introduces the field of cultural studies as an approach to an analysis of a literary work, presents theories about race and racism in literature, especially in detective fiction, and key principles underlying the analysis of race and ethnicity in literary and cultural texts. Brief examples and quotes from the novel are provided throughout the theoretical part as previews of the analytical part, where it is shown how all the theories and the historical background are reflected in the novel *Ten Little Niggers*. Since the nursery rhyme is the core of the novel, brief history and an analysis of several lines is presented in the analytical part as well. The analysis of racial attitudes in *Ten Little Niggers* is supported by examples from other similar works written in the same period by Agatha Christie.

1 Race, racism and its historical construction

As a well-known Ghanaian-American philosopher, cultural theorist and novelist Kwame Anthony Appiah¹ has commented in *Critical Terms for Literary Study* “Almost as far back as the earliest human writings, we can find more or less well articulated views about the differences between “our own kind” and the people of other cultures.”² Any group of human beings, however loosely structured, seems to have views about what are the differences between people – appearance, customs and language. This is definitely true in two main ancient cultures to which western thinkers look back – the classical Greeks and the ancient Hebrews.³

In terms of appearance the general opinion of educated Greeks has been that “both the black “Ethiopians” to the south and the blonde “Scythians” to the north were inferior to the Hellenes”⁴, though this assumption was never seen as irredeemable. There are arguments in the works of the pre-Socratic Sophists that “it is individual character and not skin colour that determines a person’s worth.”⁵ The Hebrew view is quite different. The distinction between people is not so much in appearance and customs, but in the relationship to God. These two views on race as such can be called “Greek environmentalism” and the “Hebrews’ theocentric notion.”⁶

Martin Tupper’s use of the idea of race was quite different. Martin Farguhar Tupper, born in London 1810, was an English writer, poet and an author of *Proverbial Philosophy: a Book of Thoughts and Arguments, Originally Treated*.⁷ He can be called a *racialist* and he believed, as most people in the Victorian era that human beings can be divided into small groups, “races”, sharing elementary, biological, intellectual and moral characteristics with each other. These features can be called the “*essence*” of race. For racialists, unlike for the Greeks or Hebrews, the racial essence was connected with more than physical and visual appearance

¹ “Kwame, Anthony Appiah”, Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed June 6th, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/973115/Kwame-Anthony-Appiah>

² Kwame, Anthony Appiah, “Race,” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 274

³ Appiah, “Race”, 275

⁴ Appiah, “Race”, 275

⁵ Appiah, “Race”, 275

⁶ Appiah, “Race”, 276

⁷ “Martin Farguhar Tupper”, PoemHunter.com, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.poemhunter.com/martin-farguhar-tupper/biography/>

thus, the word “Negro” did not only evoke black skin but also other important qualities for instance intelligence, honesty etc.⁸

An English anatomist Robert Knox was researching on biological inferiority of black people and, in his work *The Races of Man: a Fragment* written in 1850, made several conclusions. As he explains, inferiority of black people stems from the fact that the texture of the brain is darker than of white people and more fibrous. Moreover, he claims that the whole skull is differently placed on the neck and the upper jaw is also of an extraordinary size, which gives oddness to the shape of the whole face.⁹ In later years it was found out that this “scientific conviction” was based on the autopsy of only one black person.¹⁰ In the first chapter of the novel *Ten Little Niggers* one of the main characters Mr. Henry Blore speaks about Nigger Island and the origin of its name: “...Smelly sort of rock covered with gulls-stood about a mile from the coast. It had got its name from its resemblance to a man’s head – a man with negroid lips.”¹¹ The term “negroid lips” can refer to the extraordinary size of the jaw, which is according to Knox’s research a biological sign of inferiority of black people.

Later on, scientists from the field of biology and anthropology concluded that “race” as it is used in lay discussions, “refers to nothing that science should recognize as real.”¹² Moreover, they believed that classifications such as “Negro,” etc. are not important for biological purposes and refused the idea that a racial essence can explain a “person’s intellectual, moral or literary aptitudes.”¹³ People are not divided into different subspecies in the way some animals are, and genetic features like skin colour are separated from physical and mental traits. Thus, the opinion among academics is that “race is socially constructed.”¹⁴ Of course there are various perspectives and views on race and racism. In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* John Storey, a professor of cultural studies at the University of Sunderland in Great Britain¹⁵, claims that there is just one human race and that it is not biology that divides people into different “races” but it is “racism” that creates the division.

⁸ Appiah. “Race”, 276

⁹ Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Fragment* (London:H.Renshaw,1850), 151-152

¹⁰ David Rogers and Moira Bowman. “A History: Construction of Race and Racism,” *Dismantling Racism Project, Western States Center* (2012), accessed June 16 , 2014, 6

¹¹ Agatha Christie, *Ten Little Niggers* (Great Britain: Collins-Type Press, 1939),14

¹² Appiah, “Race”, 277

¹³ Appiah, “Race”, 277

¹⁴ Michael P. Jeffries, *Paint the White House Black: Barack Obama and the Meaning of Race in America*,(California: Stanford University Press 2013), 3

¹⁵ “Prof. John Storey’s Profile”, Centre for Research in Media and Cultural Studies, University of Sunderland, last modified May 14, 2014, accessed June 6, 2014. <http://www.crmcs.sunderland.ac.uk/research-staff/john-storey/>

The difference as such is of no importance but it's the signification and how it is made meaningful in terms of political and social hierarchy.¹⁶ A great contributor to African diasporic intellectual and political exchange and an author of a well-known book *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: the Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*¹⁷, Paul Gilroy, argues that:

Race³ has to be politically and socially constructed and elaborate ideological work is done to secure and maintain different forms of "racialization" which have characterized capitalist development. Recognizing this makes it all the more important to compare and evaluate the different historical situations in which "race" has become politically pertinent. Working from this perspective, analysis of "race" in popular culture would be the exploration of the different ways in which it has and can be made to signify.¹⁸

Apart from the classification of human beings based on false scientific or biological truth, race can be a product of political construction for various purposes or a concept of the classification of people with the purpose of differentiating black people from powerful and dominant white people.¹⁹ When mentioning the dominance of white people, the term "White privilege" cannot be overlooked. The main idea behind the "white privilege" is that "it is a collective, implicit acceptance of whiteness as virtuous, normal, unremarkable and expected."²⁰ The same pattern can be applied to male privilege. The humankind is automatically reduced to "mankind" rather than "womankind", simply because "mankind" is viewed and accepted as a standard.²¹

The historical construct of race and racism dates far back into the past. In the reformation period the Europeans became more exposed to Africans and Indigenous people. Thus, a key question arose among Christians, whether Blacks and Indians had souls. At that time the Catholic and Protestant churches had different answers to this question. The Catholics were the first to admit that Blacks and Indians had souls, whereas the Protestants wanted to distinguish themselves and therefore the process of recognition was much slower. Later, religion was used as a means to justify divisions between people of different races due to the

¹⁶John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, 5th edition(Great Britain: Henry Ling, Ltd., 2009), 167

¹⁷ Paul Gilroy", Black cultural studies.org, accessed March 1, 2014, http://www.blackculturalstudies.org/gilroy/gilroy_index.html

¹⁸ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, as quoted in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, by John Storey (Great Britain: Henry Ling, Ltd., 2009), 167-168

¹⁹ Rogers and Bowman. "A History: Construction of Race and Racism", 2

²⁰ Michael P. Jeffries, *Paint the White House Black*, 1

²¹ Michael P. Jeffries, *Paint the White House Black*, 2

increasing importance of slavery. The slave-based economy needed a racist system, which led to multiple theories explaining human differences and vindicating slavery.²²

²² Rogers and Bowman. "A History: Construction of Race and Racism", 3

2 Emergence of racism in Britain

In the subchapter of Storey's book called "The ideology of racism: its historical emergence", it is evident that racism has a very particular history. Racism in England first developed as a defence of slavery and slave trade.²³ A writer and journalist, Peter Fryer, claims in the book *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* published in 1984:

Once the English slave trade, English sugar-producing plantation slavery, and English manufacturing industry had begun to operate as a trebly profitable interlocking system, the economic bases had been laid for all those ancient scraps of myth and prejudice to be woven into a more or less coherent racist ideology: a mythology of race.²⁴

Further, Storey states that "racism emerges as a defensive ideology, promulgated in order to defend the economic profits of slavery and the slave trade."²⁵

Views on people of different race in the time of slave trades were mostly very negative. Samuel Estwick, who wrote *Considerations on the Negroe cause (1772)*, argued that "black people should be prevented from entering the country in order to preserve the race of Britons from stains and contamination."²⁶ The abolition of slavery was directly linked to the negative idea that when the slavery ends one day all the "Negroes" will blend into the society of the British common people, thus increase criminality and "make Britain the sink of all the earth for mongrels, vagrants and vagabonds."²⁷

The conviction of the nineteenth century was that white people were superior to the others and with such persuasion it was easy to believe that Europeans should be establishing colonies all over the world, because scientists and intellectuals took for granted that only the whites are capable of thinking and governing others. The colonial conquest in the nineteenth century was even constructed as if directed by God.²⁸ Generally from the 1840s the racist ideology spread in Britain by all means. In culture, media, churches, missionaries, education system etc. The newly created Asiatic and African empire served as a source of employment of the British middle-class. Millions of working-class British emigrated in order to colonise this new empire and therefore the notion of the "British" had to be constructed as superior in relation to the others. The imperialist expansion was held under the umbrella of "civilising

²³ Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, 168

²⁴ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 134

²⁵ Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, 169

²⁶ Samuel Estwick, *Considerations on the Negroe cause*, as quoted in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, by John Storey. 169

²⁷ Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, 170

²⁸ Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, 171

mission” and the colonials were portrayed as unable to rule themselves, uneducated, without rules and law etc. Though, it has to be clear that not every white person became infused with racism.²⁹ An example from the novel *Ten Little Niggers* illustrates white superiority in the colonization era. During a dialogue between Captain Philip Lombard and Vera Claythorne about Mr. Lombard’s activities as a soldier in Africa after he was accused of killing several people from an African tribe:

Lombard spoke. His eyes were amused. He said: “About those natives...”...Phillip Lombard grinned. “Story’s quite true! I left ‘em! Matter of self-preservation. We were lost in the bush. I and a couple of other fellows took what food there was and cleared out”. General Macarthur said sternly: “You abandoned your men-left them to starve?”Lombard said: “Not quite the act of *pukka sahib*, I’m afraid. But self-preservation’s a man’s first duty. And natives don’t mind dying, you know. They don’t feel about it as Europeans do.”³⁰

The quote demonstrates the indifferent attitude of Phillip Lombard towards the death of people in the tribe “natives don’t mind dying”, which indicates that British people were not so much concerned with lives of natives in the colonies and thought of them as inferiors. White superiority is illustrated on the very last sentence.

It is also important to briefly mention that British history in a lot of cases omits certain information about blacks and their participation for example in the army. In 1688, William of Orange arrived in Exeter with 20,000 troops, which included around three hundred black men as well. Subsequently the men were employed by the British army but mostly as musicians. In the nineteenth century the colonial regiments were only used for colonial wars due to the fact that Britain was afraid of the gradual assimilation of many ex-soldiers, who settled in the country and therefore, multiple of them were obliged to participate in colonial wars, while the historiographical impression until today is that there were no black men in the army at all. The troops must have been in the army; otherwise it would be nonsense to introduce the King’s Regulations in 1917 imposing a colour bar in the army. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century the general opinion was that all the black were enslaved as servants. But there is a story of Nathaniel Wells, a son of a plantation owner, who was sent to England and

²⁹ Marika Sherwood, “White myths, black omissions: the historical origins of racism in Britain“, *International Journal of Historical Teaching, Learning and Research* , Vol. 3, No. 1 (2003), accessed June 17 , 2014.

³⁰ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers* , 44

educated. He married a white woman, became sheriff and Deputy Lieutenant in Monmouthshire in 1818.³¹

To reinforce a certain view on “Britishness”, Empire exhibitions were organised, showing colonies as a source of material and as consumers of manufactured goods. In 1924, the Empire exhibition was visited by 27 million people. For this purpose, leaflets have been produced warning that “many primitive beliefs and customs appear repulsive to the civilised man.”³² Such exhibitions presented mostly cultural, educational and linguistic inferiority of the natives, which met with disagreements from black people living in Britain at that time. Milton Brown, a Nigerian living in Britain wrote a protest called “An African at the Colonial Exhibition.” For example he claimed that Africans could not afford to have better education because their wages at that time were very small. Also propaganda was very widespread. Brown stated that it has been explained to the visitors that:

When the traders and slavers had to come to Africa the British government was reluctantly forced to follow, to take over the administration of my country, to put a stop to bloodshed and to ensure justice, as it were, between the traders and the native peoples.³³

A huge propaganda venture of the 20th century was The Empire Marketing Board (EMB). The EMB’s goal was to emphasize the “helping” role of the Empire in the colonies; colonies provided the raw material for the UK and purchased manufactured goods. Posters were used to explain and spread the notion nation-wide. In posters, colonials were mostly portrayed as scantily dressed workers supervised by a strong white officer. The character of Captain Philip Lombard, in the novel *Ten Little Niggers*, could be an example of such a strong white officer. He spent some time in the colonies and as he says himself in the novel while talking to Mr. Blore: “I know South Africa and Natal.”³⁴ He also should have been responsible for the people in the colonies, yet in reality he is indifferent and concerned only with his own profits and self-preservation, as above mentioned in the quote. The message was extremely racist and misinforming. It came as no surprise that after the WWII black people, working in Britain during the war, were immediately asked to go back home. The post-war black immigrants

³¹ Sherwood, “White myths, black omissions: the historical origins of racism in Britain“

³² Sherwood, “White myths, black omissions: the historical origins of racism in Britain”

³³ Milton Brown, “An African at the Colonial Exhibition,” as quoted in “White myths, black omissions: the historical origins of racism in Britain” by Marika Sherwood, *International Journal of Historical Teaching, Learning and Research*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2003), accessed June 17, 2014.

³⁴ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers*, 40

were seen as intruders into the civilised society. The creation of “colour bars” was prevalent.³⁵ The term “colour bar” refers to the segregation and discrimination of people on the basis of their “race”. The term appeared in Britain in the 1950s and the 60s and even though the “colour bars” were not supported by the law, it was a harsh reality with negative impact on many people immigrating to the country.³⁶

In 1949, a Royal Commission on Population was set up and reported that people immigrating to Britain should be “of good human stock and not prevented by their religion or race from intermarrying with the host population and becoming merged in it.”³⁷ Originally raised in 1941, the idea of introducing legislation against the “colour bar” continued without being resolved until the year 1976 when the Race Relations Act provided some powers of the investigation of certain forms of racism. No power of prosecution, however, was granted until the year 2002 when the Act was amended. Ignorance and racism were also manifested in the educational system. According to the Board of Education race and racism were knotty topics and some parents might have strong negative feelings about the idea of mixing children with different skin colours. Later the Board officially stated that “many teachers were indifferent and ignorant of colonial matters”.³⁸ Blacks were, in the post-war period from the 1950s on, socially, culturally, politically and economically affected by racism. The concept of “Britishness” was created as a myth that the British people are “white.”³⁹

³⁵ Sherwood, “White myths, black omissions: the historical origins of racism in Britain“,

³⁶ Sarah Dar, “Migration and Settlement in the late 20th century Birmingham: Facing the Colour Bar”, Connecting Histories, accessed March 1, 2014
http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/Learning%20Packages/Migration/migration_settlement_20c_lp_02b.asp

³⁷ Sherwood, “White myths, black omissions: the historical origins of racism in Britain“

³⁸ Sherwood, “White myths, black omissions: the historical origins of racism in Britain“

³⁹ Sherwood “White myths, black omissions: the historical origins of racism in Britain“

3 The concept of “Otherness” and “Britishness”

3.1 Defining “Otherness” and “Britishness”

“Otherness” or the “Other” is a very abstract and complicated issue and the definition is necessary in order to understand the further theory. International Encyclopedia of Human Geography provides the following definition:

Otherness is a result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group (“Us”, the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups (“Them”, Other) by stigmatizing a difference—real or imagined—presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination.⁴⁰

In other words, difference is connected with fact but “Otherness” is rather connected with discourse. The further explanation can be provided by an example; “biological sex is a difference, whereas gender is otherness.”⁴¹ The creation of “Otherness” is based on applications of principles that put individuals in two hierarchical groups: them and us. The in-group, meaning the group where the speaker belongs, gives itself an identity by constructing several “others”. The “Other” can only exist relative to self and vice versa, therefore “Otherness” and identity are inseparable. The out-group, meaning the group where the speaker doesn’t belong, only logically exists when opposing to the in-group and its lack of identity, which is based on stereotypes and stigmatizing.⁴² An illustration of the idea of “self” and “other” as well as “them” and “us” can be provided from chapter five in the novel. After the first death when Anthony Marston, a young, rich playboy ingloriously known for his dangerous driving, choked after gulping his drink Vera Claythorne thinks about whether Anthony Marston committed a suicide: “ Why had Anthony Marston wanted to die? She didn’t want to die. She couldn’t imagine wanting to die...Death was for – the other people...”⁴³ From the viewpoint of Vera Claythorne it seems like the death of the “other” people, possibly the people of colour, is of less importance than her own.

Another term, closely connected to “Otherness”, that needs to be examined, in connection with British literature, is “Britishness” or the perception of British national identity. An expert on British history, Linda Colley, in her essay “Britishness and Otherness: An argument”, argues that historians and anthropologist recognized national identity “like ethnic or

⁴⁰ Jean-Francois Staszak, “Other/otherness”, *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography* (Elsevier:2008), accessed May 17, 2014, 2

⁴¹ Staszak, “Other/otherness”, 2

⁴² Staszak, “Other/otherness”, 2

⁴³ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers*, 58

communal identity, contingent and relational.”⁴⁴ According to a historian, Peter Sahlins national identity is defined as:

the social or territorial boundaries drawn to distinguish the collective self and its implicit negation, the other, rather than being dependent on objective criteria such as language or race or cultural uniformity.⁴⁵

Social scientist; Robin Cohen; presents another view on national identity of the British by presenting the term “frontier”. One only knows who one is by knowing who one is not. The unstated and metaphorical “frontier” lies between the “familiar” and the “strange” creating a barrier to integration and development of pluralist society. The level of openness of the frontier influences the level of tolerance and association. The more open the higher tolerance towards the “other”, the more closed the higher level of xenophobia.⁴⁶ The time when the concept of “Britishness” became interesting for historians is quite difficult to determine. Some argue that national identity was the concern of the nineteenth and twentieth century, some say that it has been the concern of study at least since the eighteenth century. Scholar discussions about British national identity have much more recent origins. Linda Colley’s book called *Britons: forging the nation 1707-1837* and the *Nineteenth-century Britain* by Keith Robbins give two views on the concept of “Britishness”. Colley presents “Britishness” as:

an over-arching identity which was “superimposed” over a series of older attachments and loyalties, whether these were to a region, a religious denomination, or the one subsidiary national identities.⁴⁷

On the other hand Robbins, as mentioned above, argues that “Britishness” was formed in the nineteenth century by, as he called it, “blending of the English, Scots and the Welsh” criticising Colley’s theory that English, Scottish and Welsh are culturally distinct people.⁴⁸ The idea of “Britishness” also has a negative connotation due to the associations with the British Empire, which for a long period of time legitimized slavery, oppression of colonies,

⁴⁴ Linda Colley, “Britishness and Otherness: An Argument”, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (October:1992), accessed March 8, 2014, 311

⁴⁵ Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain*, as quoted in “Britishness and Otherness: An Argument,” by Linda Colley *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (October:1992), accessed March 8, 2014, 311

⁴⁶ Robin Cohen, “Fuzzy Frontiers of Identity: The British Case”, *Social Identities*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1995), accessed March 8, 2014, 1

⁴⁷ Joseph Hardwick “Historians and ‘Britishness’”, Institute for the Public Understanding of the Past, The University of York, accessed March 15, 2014

<http://www.york.ac.uk/ipup/projects/britishness/discussion/hardwick.html>

⁴⁸ Hardwick, “Historians and ‘Britishness’”

etc. Therefore, some British inhabitants living in a post-colonial world do not feel comfortable to support the nationalist idea of “Britishness.”⁴⁹

3.2 “Britishness” since 1870

A book called *Britishness since 1870*, written by Paul Ward, presents the term “Britishness” from various viewpoints in the particular period. In the late nineteenth and twentieth century the idea of British nationality was closely connected to the monarchy. When Queen Victoria obtained the title of Empress of India in 1876, the monarchy was entwined with the idea of British Empire and together they formed the basic foundation upon which “Britishness” was built. Before the First World War the loyalty to the state meant both the loyalty to the Empire and to the monarchy, and also the monarchy was always seen as a device to maintain loyalty of colonies and dominions. The monarchy and imperialism were also seen in a negative light as forging “Britishness” through propaganda, subjecting the British society to an ideological barrage, from which there was no escape between the 1880s and the 1960s. Propaganda of imperialism came to people from school textbooks, teachers, literature, exhibitions, cinema, radio and also appeared in advertising and packaging for example on biscuit tins and cigarette cards. The empire was everywhere trying to create the British national consciousness.⁵⁰

Gender and nationality is another issue that Ward mentions in the book. Being British was different for women and for men; therefore the phrase “separate spheres” is used. Men were usually connected with the sphere of work, politics and war whereas women’s sphere was rather private one connected with home and domestic responsibilities. The impact of the First World War on National identity was profound and interwar years were seen as feminised and domesticated.⁵¹ Agatha Christie herself helped during the First World War by working in a hospital where she, besides other things, learned a lot about poisons and used her knowledge for writing books.⁵² The women involvement in the Second World War was even greater than in the First, suggesting greater integration of women into the nation and also questioning the role of the men within the nation.⁵³

In the post-war period the domestication and construction of “Britishness” were used to exclude immigrant from the nation. In the book *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and*

⁴⁹ Chris Rojek, *Brit-myth: who do the British think they are?*(London: Reaktion books Ltd., 2007), 9

⁵⁰ Paul Ward, *Britishness since 1870*, (London:Routledge, 2004), 14-15

⁵¹ Ward, *Britishness since 1870*, 14-15

⁵² “Agatha Christie – The Influences On Her Writing”, The Christie Mystery 2007&2011, accessed June 10, 2014, <http://www.chriestymystery.co.uk/influences.html>

⁵³ Ward, *Britishness since 1870*, 14-15

Conservatism between the Wars, Alison Light claims that the impact of the Great War on English identity was profound and she states that:

in the years between 1920 and 1940, a revolt against, an embarrassment about, and distaste for the romantic languages of national pride produced a realignment of sexual identities which was part of redefinition of Englishness...the 1920s and 30s saw a move away from formerly heroic and officially masculine public rhetorics of national destiny and from a dynamic and missionary view of the Victorian and Edwardian middle classes in “Great Britain” to an Englishness at once less imperial and more inward-looking, more domestic and more private – and, in terms of pre-war standards, more “feminine.”⁵⁴

She takes evidence from literary sources for example Agatha Christie and argues that those who read detective fiction of Agatha Christie especially from the interwar period can identify English as nice, decent and private people. The perfect example is Miss Marple, investigator and typical Englishwoman and her ideal rural English garden.⁵⁵

After the Second World War in the 1960s the idea of British Empire began to disintegrate and was replaced by the voices of colonised people calling for freedom and the position of the “glorious” Empire began to be untenable. The West Indies, parts of Asia and Africa got their independence mostly in the late 1950s and the 60s; therefore, these years were seen as a period of the most rapid decolonisation. At the end of the Empire there was a major effort to separate Britain from its imperial past. In terms of social and cultural history there was a debate about the influence of the end of the Empire on general public, more specifically, the British working-class, and it has been agreed that the impact was not so crucial. Even the transmission from British Empire to Commonwealth, which is the intergovernmental organisation of states that were mostly former territories of the Empire, was seen as “successful” and easy.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London, Routledge, 1991), 8

⁵⁵ Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*, 11

⁵⁶ Jodi Burkett, *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain: Britishness, ‘Race’ and the Radical Left in the 1960s* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan., 2013), 1-2

4 Immigration, race and “Britishness”

4.1 Racism in England during and after the Great War

The number of immigrants coming to Great Britain in the years 1815-1945 exceeded the number of people entering Britain since the Norman invasion. Many people were moving to Britain looking either for a new life and settlement or only work opportunity. Firstly, it was the Irish that settled in Britain from 1800 – 1900. The nineteenth century was marked by large immigration of Germans, who formed the second largest group of immigrants in Britain until 1891 and then Russians and Jewish Poles were the ones to create even larger group after 1891. However, the German invasion of Belgium at the beginning of the First World War started the largest immigration in British history, when 240,000 Belgian refugees, escaping from their land came to Britain, even though many of them were not planning to settle there permanently and returned back to their homeland at the at the end of the Great War.⁵⁷ Hercule Poirot is a clear example of a refugee who left his homeland during the Great War and starts life in a foreign country full of people that feel certain unease about immigrants.⁵⁸

Apart from major groups of people also smaller amounts of people were settling in the country, namely: Italians, French people, Greeks, Indians and others, bringing another 300,000 immigrants into the country. Another 200,000 European refugees came to Britain during the period from 1939 – 1945, especially Poles and Jews, fleeing the country from the Nazi regime.⁵⁹

Another important issue connected with the increasing racism in Britain is the arrival of Caribbean people before the First World War. Originally they arrived as slaves, domestic servants and lived mainly in seaports. At the beginning of the First World War the men mostly worked in the war industries and the merchant navy and women sometimes worked as nurses. During the Great War significant number of Caribbean men who were involved with the army, were brought to Europe as serviceman and about 15,000 Caribbean men joined the British West Indies Regiment. They have also been creating ghettos in the cities like Cardiff, London and Liverpool. White hostility, prejudice and anger towards these people stemmed from the lack of employment for white people, especially in seafaring business. Therefore,

⁵⁷ Panikos Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity and Racism in Britain 1815-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 23

⁵⁸ Gwen Robyns, *The Mystery of Agatha Christie: An Intimate Biography of the First Lady of Crime* (New York: DoubleDay&Company Inc., 1978), 43

⁵⁹ Panikos Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity and Racism in Britain 1815-1945*, 23

many race riots took place in Cardiff, Liverpool and London between the years 1919 and 1921. White seamen unions were strictly against the employment of “coloured aliens”, resulting in The Aliens Order of 1920, which basically meant that all “aliens” looking for employment or dwelling had to register with the police. Even though that Caribbean people were not “aliens” but citizens of the Empire, violence and harassment towards them did not disappear. Passports were taken from them and unable to prove their identity and status they were deprived of the right to work and threatened with deportation. Racial discrimination in the interwar years was very intense resulting in poverty and unemployment of the discriminated people.⁶⁰ Even though the black community in Britain was not very large in the 1930s racial prejudice and discrimination from the white society pervaded and it was strengthened through popular literature, cinema and the patriotic propaganda of the Empire.⁶¹

4.2 Immigration in the second half of the 20th century

The Second World War was the breaking point in the history of immigration into Great Britain. After the Second World War Britain was devastated and like many other countries had to face labour shortages, therefore the government in the post-war period was attracting workers from various European places and also to some extent from its former colonies.⁶² The government was aware of the fact that immigrants would provide a form of a cheap labour and Britain also wanted to resurrect the long lost glory of the imperial times and stated the British Nationality Act in 1948, which basically meant that immigrants from the Commonwealth could now have a legal settlement in Britain and be a part of British society. In the 1950s a lot of immigrants took the opportunity and came to Britain, searching for a better job and provide better education for their children.⁶³

Immigration in the 1950s and the 60s grew very rapidly and spontaneously. Neither the government nor the society was satisfied with this kind of situation, because such vast immigration was not foreseen. The novel *Ten Little Niggers* provides examples of rather negative and suspicious attitudes towards foreigners. Firstly, in chapter two one of the main characters, Miss Brent, expresses her negative attitude towards a man claiming to be from

⁶⁰ Mike Phillips, “Caribbean/Settling”, Moving Here, Migration Histories, The National Archives, accessed April 2, 2014, <http://www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/histories/caribbean/settling/settling.htm>

⁶¹ Barbara Bush, “Black People in Britain: The 1930s”, *History Today*, Vol. 31, No. 9 (1981), accessed April 6th, 2014, <http://www.historytoday.com/barbara-bush/black-people-britain-1930s>

⁶² James Hampshire, “Immigration Policy in the United Kingdom”, Sussex Centre for Migration Research , accessed March 22 , 2014, <http://migrationeducation.de/49.0.html>

⁶³ Pavlína Vlčková, “Living with Difference” – Immigration in the UK in the 20th and 21st century”, (Bachelor Thesis, Tomas Baťa University in Zlín, Faculty of Humanities, 2010), 17

South Africa, Mr. Davis, which is closely examined later in the analysis. Secondly, an unnamed character appears, who is supposed to take the passengers on the island and he is described only as: “a man of the sea. He had a weatherbeaten face and dark eyes with a slightly evasive expression.”⁶⁴ The sudden appearance of a “stranger” makes Miss Brent feel slightly uncomfortable: “Rather doubtfully, Miss Brent permitted herself to be helped into the boat.”⁶⁵

The government tried to discuss how to restrict the immigration from the colonies, stop the flow of people coming to the UK and even the legislation was considered already in 1955. The reason why the legislation was not passed was the British Nationality Act from 1948, which gave residency rights to all colonial subjects.⁶⁶ The 1960s were associated with negative tensions within the society. A lot of British people did not want to accept the new non-white citizens for various reasons. Firstly, they were afraid of the “difference” in the culture, behaviour, habits etc. Secondly, not every immigrant coming to the UK wanted to adapt to the British society and culture, and the vision of multi-ethnic society was not acceptable to all British, therefore riots were very frequent. Subsequently, the British were also afraid of losing their homes and jobs to immigrants. The society was rather divided to those unsatisfied whites, who disliked the growing immigrant communities and those non-white immigrants, who had lawful right to live and work in the UK. The positive view on immigration from the 1940s changed to hatred and prejudice.⁶⁷ The immigration did not stop in the 1970s and the 80s, but it was reduced. The 1981 British Nationality Act differed from the one in 1948 and defined citizenship in a narrow way, focusing on establishment of visa regimes and carrier sanctions.⁶⁸

The unease about immigration in the second half of the 20th century was clear and noticeable. A very controversial speech called “Rivers of Blood” was made in 1968 by a British politician, scholar, linguist, poet and a Conservative Member of Parliament Enoch Powell⁶⁹, in which he was not afraid to openly express his sometimes rather offensive opinions towards immigrants. He commented on the situation for example like this:

⁶⁴ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers*, 19

⁶⁵ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers*, 20

⁶⁶ Hampshire, “Immigration Policy in the United Kingdom”

⁶⁷ Vlčková, “Living with Difference” – Immigration in the UK in the 20th and 21st century”, 17

⁶⁸ Hampshire, “Immigration Policy in the United Kingdom”

⁶⁹ “Enoch Powell“ Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed June 12, 2014
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/473245/Enoch-Powell>

in this country in 15 or 20 years' time the black will have the whip hand over the white man....Whole areas, towns and parts of towns across England will be occupied by sections of the immigrant and immigrant-descended population.⁷⁰

People in the country were becoming more and more suspicious of foreigners and immigrants and this kind of public speech just worsened the situation and helped to create the negative public view on immigrants.⁷¹ The reality of the post-war Britain was that the non-British people experienced prejudice, coldness and refusal from the natives as well as from the media that were influencing people's opinions from a very early age by creating politically incorrect children's books such as for instance *The Story of Little black Sambo*, written by Helen Bannerman, (firstly appeared in 1899), or various nursery rhymes like "Ten Little Niggers."⁷²

⁷⁰ Enoch Powell, "Rivers of Blood," in "Living with Difference" – Immigration in the UK in the 20th and 21st century," by Pavlína Vlčková ", (Bachelor Thesis, Tomas Baťa University in Zlín, Faculty of Humanities, 2010)

⁷¹ Vlčková, "Living with Difference" – Immigration in the UK in the 20th and 21st century",

⁷² Panikos, Panayi, *The impact of immigration: A documentary history of the effects and experiences of immigrants in Britain since 1945*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999)

5 The word “Nigger”

This word, mostly considered as rather offensive, has its history and development. The history often begins with the Latin word *niger*, which means black. In various languages it developed differently. The noun *negro*, meaning the black person, comes from English language while in early modern French language the word *niger* became *negre* and later changed to *negress*, referring to a black woman. Other substitutes of this word have been created in the early English language such as *neger*, *negar* and *niggor*, from which the true lexico-semantic version in English language comes from. The word *nigger* could also be derived from the mispronunciation of the already mentioned noun *negro*.⁷³

The word *negro* has its negative connotation from the early 1800s. No other ethnic or racial group has been given so many offensive nicknames as blacks: savage, pickaninny, coon and many others. Such appellations together with traditional pseudo-scientific, cinematic, literary distortions spoken or written created the anti-Black prejudice.⁷⁴ Caricatures of black men often portrayed them as lazy, uncouth, sometimes even angry, animalistic, brute, intellectually childlike, unattractive etc.⁷⁵ The word “Nigger” is a tool of verbal discrimination, strengthening the stereotype connected with black people such as laziness, dirtiness, unintelligence. The word has many forms, each of which has its own specific meaning, for example: “Nigger work: Demeaning, menial tasks.”, “Naggers: Acting in a lazy and irresponsible manner.”, “Niggerlover: Derogatory term aimed at Whites lacking in the necessary loathing of Blacks.”⁷⁶

In order to keep the blacks under control a hierarchy was established based on an ideology that justified practices such as exploitation, intimidation, lies and deception. Every major social institution legitimized racial hierarchy. For instance children in schools were taught that blacks were less evolved in terms of intelligence and social abilities. Also entertainment media such as film and television generally portrayed blacks mostly as easy to control, not very bright and dangerous. The entertainment industry produced also a lot of products and games titled with the word “Nigger”, which was at not seen as too offensive at that time. To mention a few; in 1874 a puzzle game “Chopped up Niggers” by McLoughlin Brothers, in

⁷³ Dr. Phillip Middleton and Dr. David Pilgrim., “Nigger (the word), a brief history”, African American Registry, accessed February 20, 2014, http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/nigger-word-brief-history

⁷⁴ Middleton and Pilgrim “Nigger (the word), a brief history“

⁷⁵ Dr. Phillip Middleton and Dr. David Pilgrim “Nigger and Caricatures”, Ferris State University, accessed February 21, 2014, <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/news/jimcrow/caricature/>

⁷⁶ Middleton and Pilgrim, “Nigger (the word), a brief history“

1878 a NiggerHair smoking tobacco, years later in 1916 a magazine advertisement by Morris & Bendien revealed a black child drinking ink with the title “Nigger Milk.”⁷⁷ Children’s nursery rhyme “Ten Little Niggers”, which inspired a writer Agatha Christie to write a novel with the same title, was very popular in the beginning of 20th century. Not only was it common in the first half of the 20th century to freely use the word in a conversation or as a title of a nursery rhyme or a novel, but it was also widely used in the music business for the names of the songs. Even a picture of a hanged black figure as a cover of a book was acceptable, as was the case with the first publication of Agatha Christie’s *Ten Little Niggers*.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Middleton and Pilgrim, “Nigger (the word), a brief history“

⁷⁸ Middleton and Pilgrim, “Nigger (the word), a brief history“

6 Racism in literature

This chapter deals with theories about race and ethnicity in literature, especially British, and also deals with detective fiction. Firstly, the field of cultural studies should be mentioned as it is a kind of approach to an analysis a work of literature. Secondly, the focus goes to British popular culture and detective fiction.

There are many ways to describe cultural studies. A professor of Language and Literary studies at Athabasca University, Dr. Joseph Pivato⁷⁹, explains that the field of cultural studies examines “the arts in all their theoretical and critical contexts, but also in the larger economical, political and historical environments.”⁸⁰ Cultural studies also does not separate the high culture from the low culture, the high culture being major works of literature, arts, film, theatre etc. Since cultural studies deals with the whole of human creativity, the impact of Agatha Christie’s detective stories and novels are of the same importance for cultural studies as canonical works of literature such as Shakespeare and Tolstoy.⁸¹

Furthermore, cultural studies can be identified basically as a discipline investigating “the ways in which culture creates and transforms individual experiences, everyday life, social relations and power”. The movement was created in the second half of the twentieth century, rapidly arising in the 80s and the 90s, providing an analysis of expanding global culture, which includes film, television, entertainment, advertising etc. Methods and approaches are applied in order to analyze and question recent culture and its categories. As for the representatives of cultural studies for example Stuart Hall, a profound contributor to the field of cultural studies, can be mentioned.⁸² The field of Cultural Studies contains a wide range of other theoretical disciplines that apply to general study of culture such as: sociology, cultural anthropology, economics, media studies and literary theory. “Literary theory”, sometimes called “Critical theory”, or only “theory”, which is now transforming into “Cultural theory”, can be understood and explained as:

the set of concepts and intellectual assumptions on which rests the work of explaining or interpreting literary texts. Literary theory refers to any principles derived from

⁷⁹ “Dr. Joseph Pivato” Athabasca University Research Centre, accessed June 12, 2014
<http://research.athabasca.ca/researchers/jpivato.php>

⁸⁰ Joseph Pivato, “A Brief Introduction to Cultural Studies”, English 591:Cultural Studies ,accessed June 12, 2014, <http://www.athabasca.ca/courses/engl/591/briefintro.html>

⁸¹ Pivato, “A Brief Introduction to Cultural Studies”

⁸² Vince Brewton, “Literary Theory”, Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, accessed March 2, 2014
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/literary/#SH10b>

internal analysis of literary texts or from knowledge external to the text that can be applied in multiple interpretive situations.⁸³

Literary theory reveals what literature actually means, by describing hidden principles and tools, by which the reader tries to understand it.⁸⁴

British popular culture was marked by the massive immigrant population growth in the second half of the 20th century. Detective fiction of the 1970s consisted of many figures that would be, in the era of Golden Age, considered as “other”. The aspect of “other” in Detective fiction is also closely connected with the creation and expansion of ethnic minority characters in British popular culture.⁸⁵ As for the explanation, the Golden Age of detective fiction covers the years between 1920 and 1939. It is often spoken about in a very respectful way considering the fact that in this era Agatha Christie firstly introduced Hercule Poirot to the public. Also other well-known writers of this era of crime fiction are Dorothy L. Sayers or Margery Allingham.⁸⁶

More general sense is given to the “other” considering that a typical mystery or detective story consists of at least three others: victim, detective and offender. Moreover, what is more “othering” than being dead and not being a part of any community? The detectives themselves are usually portrayed as the outcast of a certain community, strangers or foreigners; on the other hand the criminals and culprits are usually less “other” than detectives and victims.⁸⁷ For instance, Agatha Christie created the detective, Hercule Poirot, who is portrayed as an outcast in the British society being originally from Belgium. Also the novel *Ten Little Niggers* has a surprising ending considering that the murderer, who eventually killed himself as well, is a former judge⁸⁸, thus he is not a foreigner or a stranger but a white British citizen in a very high social position, which only proves the statement above that the murderer is not always the stranger.

Another aspect that needs to be examined is race in British detective fiction. Paul Gilroy, a professor of American and English literature, in his work *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* states that “in Britain “race” cannot be adequately understood if it is falsely divorced or

⁸³ Brewton, “Literary Theory“

⁸⁴ Brewton, “Literary Theory”

⁸⁵ Julie H. Kim., *Race and Religion in the Postcolonial British Detective Story: Ten essays*, (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2005), 1

⁸⁶ R.D. Collins, “The Golden Age of Detective fiction: A brief history”, *Classic Crime fiction*, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://www.classiccrimefiction.com/goldenage.htm>

⁸⁷ Kim., *Race and Religion in the Postcolonial British Detective Story: Ten essays*, 1

⁸⁸ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers*, 180-190

abstracted from other social relations.”⁸⁹The fact that one would come across “Otherness” in relation to gender, class, ethnicity etc. in a study of racial otherness is unavoidable.

Stuart Hall, “considered the founder of British cultural studies”, argues that large scale immigration from the Caribbean after the Second World War made the British “host” society ask many questions such as: “Who are these people?”, “How long are they here for?”, “What do we think about them and Why do they speak English?”. A Simple answer follows; because the British colonized them.⁹⁰In increasingly multiracial Britain, the change in British literature and culture has brought about bigger visibility of racial and ethnic “other” in fiction in general as well as in detective fiction. The middle twentieth century is also a period when the sense of anxiety about British national identity as well as identity in general is undeniable due to the fact that massive invasion of immigrants, “strangers” and “foreigners” after the World War II somehow disrupted the tranquillity of the idealized “English village” as it is reflected in works of conservative and traditional authors such as Agatha Christie, more specifically a novel called *A Murder is Announced* (1950). Owing to the increase in minority population, racial identity and ethnic voices emerge very rapidly. Hall argues that “because everybody comes from a cultural tradition, a cultural production...everybody has ethnicity – including the British: Englishness.”⁹¹ Hall also examines the term multiculturalism and argues that “multiculturalism very much invokes ethnicity” but he uses this word very cautiously, especially in the British context:

What I mean by multicultural, then, is that society has been mongrelized. You look out and you don’t know whether kids are black or white or North African; it’s just the pluralization of kinds of people (not cultures) which now make up a city like London. You have no idea how London has been transformed in fifteen or twenty years; you have no conception. It did not look like this a tone time....

....It’s a funny piece of history that the U.S. has a much longer tradition and history of ethnic pluralism – it’s made out of it - whereas Britain has always conceived of itself as culturally homogeneous. But the impact of globalization and migration on the two societies has been absorbed into and has complexified the pluralist hierarchy, whereas in Britain what it has done is simply blur its homogeneous origin.⁹²

This collection of essays edited by Julie H. Kim in 2005 presents different uses of multiculturalism as Hall points out above. The earlier essays in this volume imply that “racial

⁸⁹ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: The cultural politics of race and nation* (London: Input Typesetting Ltd, 1987), 14

⁹⁰ Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham, *Race, Rhetoric and the Postcolonial*, as quoted in *Race and Religion in the Postcolonial British Detective Story: Ten essays*, by Julie H. Kim (London: Input Typesetting Ltd, 1987), 2

⁹¹ Olson and Worsham, *Race, Rhetoric and the Postcolonial*, 3

⁹² Olson and Worsham, *Race, Rhetoric and the Postcolonial*, 4

or ethnic others” are only dimming and obscuring the view of homogeneity of British culture with no significant impact whereas the later essays in the volume, especially written in the twenty-first century, present rather “individualized ethnic identities.”⁹³

Another issue is the creation of multicultural detective characters and generally the boom of ethnic detective fiction. Some people are fond of new approaches to fiction by providing the ethnic aspect but there are still people, longing for the classical “murder mystery” in Poe’s style of ratiocination, which is not affected by gender or ethnicity of the detective.⁹⁴ Poe gave his detective short stories the label of “ratiocination”, which basically means that the detective uses only logic, detailed reasoning and rational methods of investigation.⁹⁵ Maureen T. Reddy wrote a book called *Traces, Codes and Clues: Reading Race in Crime fiction*, where she, besides other things, deals with white authors, who are writing about “the others” and she explains: “One crucial problem in whites’ depiction of characters of colour relates to the problem of identity itself, which is always relational, never a fixed position.” She basically points out that in a white society; the identity of ethnic minorities is always somehow influenced by the idea of “Whiteness” and therefore she argues that even novels featuring ethnic or racial minority detectives with detailed descriptions are targeted at mostly a white audience.⁹⁶

An analysis of race and ethnicity can enrich reading of a literary text and also discover a relation between a concrete text and social context, basically following the ways in which certain culture of a certain time and place is reflected in literary representation. Defining the used terminology is the essential starting point; therefore terms such as race and ethnicity are defined. According to a distinguished professor, contributor to the fields of British studies and cultural studies, Donald E. Hall, “Race” refers “to the ways that physiological characteristics (such as skin tone) are combined with distinctions in social history (such as region of original habitation) to distinguish and identify groups of people,”⁹⁷ “Ethnicity” is rather about the “nonphysiological aspects of cultural identity, such as religious affiliation and/or shared

⁹³ Kim., *Race and Religion in the Postcolonial British Detective Story: Ten essays*, 4

⁹⁴ Kim., *Race and Religion in the Postcolonial British Detective Story: Ten essays*, 4-5

⁹⁵ Stephen Mackereth, “Truth from an Infinite Number of Fictions? Resolving the Problem of Ratiocination in Edgar Allan Poe’s Detective Fiction”, *Exposé*, Harvard University (2012), accessed April 29, 2014. http://expose.fas.harvard.edu/issues/issue_2012/mackereth.html

⁹⁶ Maureen T. Reddy, *Traces, Codes and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 156-179

⁹⁷ Hall, “Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Analysis”, 265-266

customs or language.”⁹⁸ Other important terms that are closely connected with race and ethnicity are “Ethnocentrism”, which means “the viewing of one’s own ethnic group’s perspectives as universally legitimate and appropriate for all” and also “Post-coloniality” focusing more significantly on “national and regional legacies of imperialism and colonialism.”⁹⁹ Hall presents several key principles to provide wider information background about how is racism portrayed in literature. Firstly he claims that “Categories of Race and Ethnicity have been used in ways that have empowered and oppressed”. The categories of race and ethnicity have been used in order to divide, as Hall explains, groups of *us* and *them* (*the self and other*) and particularly to create a notion about *them* as being a menace to the security and well-being of *us*. The consequences of racism have increased largely in the last 500 years also owing to sophistication of technologies of oppression and it were technological and also economical privileges that allowed certain groups of people, especially Europeans to dominate other by force. Force is the key constituent in this case because when distinguishing between racism and other social issues such as fear towards those who are different, racism is perceived as race-based assessment with social power in the background.¹⁰⁰ Paul Gilroy has also been dealing with categories of race and race formation. In his book *There Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack* he states that race “is a political category that can accommodate various meanings which are in turn determined by struggle”.¹⁰¹ Gilroy also argues that race can be an important feature at the level of for example economic development, considering the fact that forms of economic coercion in the past were included in for instance plantation slavery, migrant labour etc. Having this in mind, Gilroy tries to emphasize and demonstrate that “race” is a social construct and a political category.¹⁰²

Another principle presented by Hall is that “This differentiation of peoples is reflected in and reinforced by language and metaphor.”¹⁰³ Firstly, this principle is connected with the skin colour because various skin colours or even shades of colours have different meanings. Whiteness or light colour skin has always been associated, especially in the Western culture, with purity, kindness, righteousness and moral or intellectual superiority of a person, whereas

⁹⁸ Donald E. Hall, “Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Analysis”, in *Literary and Cultural Theory: From Basic Principles to Advanced Applications*, by Donald E. Hall. (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 265-266

⁹⁹ Hall, “Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Analysis”, 265-266

¹⁰⁰ Hall, “Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Analysis”, 266-268

¹⁰¹ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: The cultural politics of race and nation*, 38-39.

¹⁰² Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: The cultural politics of race and nation*, 38-39.

¹⁰³ Hall, “Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Analysis”, 268

Dark colour rather implied evil and contempt.¹⁰⁴ For example, in the very first chapter of the novel *Ten Little Niggers*, Miss Brent, an elderly white woman is described as: “Enveloped in an aura of righteousness and unyielding principles.”¹⁰⁵ An article called “Interrogating “Whiteness”, (De) Constructing “Race”” by a professor of English at Eastern New Mexico University AnnLouise Keating examines “Whiteness” mentioned above and also earlier in the text. She claims that “White” and “Whiteness” is a racialized identity, continually reinforced and reinvented in literature” and later she gives a brief definition that “Whiteness” has functioned as pseudo-universal category that hides its specific values, epistemology – being “the study of knowledge and justified belief,”¹⁰⁶ and other attributes under the guise of a nonracialized supposedly colourless, “human nature””.¹⁰⁷ In chapter two of the novel Vera Claythorne meets a servant Mrs. Rogers and thinks: “What a white, bloodless ghost of a woman! Very respectable looking, with her hair dragged back from her face and her black dress.”¹⁰⁸ Firstly, she points out that her face is too pale and immediately afterwards she thinks that Mrs. Rogers is very respectable looking. Vera Claythorne may be evaluating the character of Mrs. Rogers on the basis of her skin colour and as it was stated above colours are associated with different positive attributes; in this case it can be respectability. Giving such labels to colours has led to judgmental attitudes and even actions, which main purpose was to hide the social construction by the people in power under the designation of “naturalness.”¹⁰⁹ Colette Guillaumin, a French sociologist and feminist has certain views on the idea of race as natural, which are expressed in the book called *Theory of Race and Racism: A Reader* edited and introduced by Les Back, a professor of Sociology at the University of London, and John Solomos, also a professor of Sociology at the University of Warwick, both specializing on race a racism. She sees the idea of race as “essentially ideological.”¹¹⁰ Any analysis of the idea of race reveals that it has been created by people in power in certain historical periods and it is supposed to represent for example various political interests, though not denying the fact that there are differences between individual people. The signification of characteristics of a person resulting from his/her genes combination in order to divide people into groups

¹⁰⁴ Hall, “Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Analysis”, 268

¹⁰⁵ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers*, 9

¹⁰⁶ “Epistemology” Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, accessed May 20 , 2014
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology/>

¹⁰⁷ AnnLouise Keating, “Interrogating “Whiteness”, (De)Constructing “Race”, *College English* 57 (1995): 904, accessed May 1, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/378620>

¹⁰⁸ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers*, 23

¹⁰⁹ Hall, “Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Analysis”, 268

¹¹⁰ Colette Gillaumin, “The Idea of Race and its elevation to autonomous scientific and legal status,” as quoted in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, by Les Back and John Solomos (New York: Routledge,2000), 137

named “natural” is according to Guillaumin “not a universal feature of social relations.” This division can be traced in Europe to the eighteenth century, therefore “naturalness” is considered to be “more modern than the idea of race.”¹¹¹

Secondly the principle focuses on the language of the literary texts, which basically means that a lot of hateful and pejorative terminology is used, for instance the often mentioned word “Nigger”, to emphasize the superiority of the oppressors, who are assigned to diminish social role and value of people of colour for example. ¹¹²

The next principle is “This differentiation of peoples, as well as forces of economic greed and expansionism, are also reflected in centuries-long history of imperialism and colonization.”¹¹³ This is very closely connected with Post-colonial studies, the 17-19th century colonization, the economic side of colonization and also the human side focusing on colonized people. Then there is a principle named “This differentiation of peoples and its political consequences are reflected not only in literary and other forms of representation but also in our very notion of literature.”¹¹⁴ The representations of literary text but also films, advertisements, music etc constructs the views on race and ethnicity of the audience but a literary or cultural critic has to be always aware of the biases and underlined messages of the texts or media. Also the critics should not focus only on the canonical texts but also on the “popular” literature and texts which are full of hidden themes, because they are influenced by the background they are produced in. The last two principles put emphasis on cultural history and a belief system that are applicable in today’s society, they are: “Thus an understanding of textual reflections of racism and ethnocentrism demands an attention to the cultural history and belief system of the social groups being portrayed and discussed” and “The analysis of racism and ethnocentrism in texts from past may have relevance to the ways we live our lives today.”¹¹⁵

Furthermore two terms are defined: prejudice and stereotyping. These terms are very much connected with the issue of multiculturalism, mentioned above, and as Gonca Ekşi from Gazi University, the department of English language teaching states in an article called “Foreign language learning, prejudice and Stereotyping” with expansion of communication

¹¹¹ Colette Guillaumin, “Race and Nature: The system of marks,” as quoted in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, by Les Back and John Solomos, (New York: Routledge,2000),137

¹¹² Hall, “Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Analysis”, 269

¹¹³ Hall, “Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Analysis”, 269

¹¹⁴ Hall, “Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Analysis”, 271

¹¹⁵ Hall, “Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Analysis”, 268-273

technologies through which people from different cultures and of various ethnicities are much more in contact and therefore there are tendencies to make often negative judgments about people of different ethnicity or culture on the basis of one's own values that are based on the culture one lives in.¹¹⁶ Prejudice is generally defined as “an unfair negative attitude toward a social group or a member of that group” and similarly stereotypes are explained as “overgeneralizations about a group or its members that are factually incorrect and inordinately rigid, are set of beliefs that can accompany the negative feeling associated with prejudice.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Gonca Ekşi, “Foreign language learning, prejudice and stereotyping” *Ekev Academic Review*, Vol.13(2009), accessed May 20, 2014, 318

¹¹⁷ J. F. Dovidio and S. L. Gaertner, “Reducing Prejudice: Combating Intergroup Biases,” as quoted in “Foreign language learning, prejudice and stereotyping,” by Gonca Ekşi, *Ekev Academic Review*, Vol. 13(2009), accessed May 20, 2014, 318

7 *Ten Little Niggers*

Agatha Christie's "golden age" fiction is "unforgettable never-never land of chintz and country houses" as a scholar and writer Alison Light, states in her book called *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*. Light argues that Christie's overall fiction is typically conservative and traditional, her social attitudes are snobbish, her depiction of the "long summers" in the picturesque English countryside and English upper middle class in a strictly class bound society is rather idealised.¹¹⁸ Christie's writing suggests that the middle class in the interwar period was rather a fragmented group of people, suspicious of one another as it is shown in novel *Ten Little Niggers* (1939), where a group of supposedly "nice" people is enjoying a free holiday on Nigger Island up until the point when their layer of respectability is disturbed, they are accused of being murderers and soon after that they begin to die according to the nursery rhyme. On one hand this work functions as an image of the self-centred and clannish British middle class in the 1930s, on the other hand the setting being "an island off the Devon coast"¹¹⁹, named Nigger Island, belonging to England yet different from it automatically evokes the idea of exciting "Otherness", a place where the crimes of the people involved and the English "dark side" is exposed.¹²⁰

Ten little nigger boys went out to dine;
One choked his little self and then there were Nine.

Nine little nigger boys sat up very late;
One overslept himself and then there were Eight.

Eight little nigger boys travelling in Devon;
One said he'd stay there and then there were Seven.

Seven little nigger boys chopping up sticks;
One chopped himself in halves and then there were Six.

Six little nigger boys playing in a hive;
A bumble bee stung one and then there were Five.

Five little nigger boys going in for law;
One got in Chancery and then there were Four.

Four little nigger boys going out to sea;
A red herring swallowed one and then there were Three.

¹¹⁸ Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*, 62.

¹¹⁹ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers*, 12.

¹²⁰ Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*, 98-99.

Three little nigger boys walking in the Zoo;
A big bear hugged one and then there were Two.

Two little nigger boys sitting in the sun;
One got frizzled up and then there was One.

One little nigger boy left all alone;
He went and hanged himself and then there were None.¹²¹

Originally this children's nursery rhyme inspired the "Queen of Crime" Agatha Christie to write a bestselling novel *Ten Little Niggers* (1939). The title has gone through many changes. The American reprint was named *Ten Little Indians*, which however did not have anything in common with the original children's nursery rhyme:

One little, two little, three little Indians,
Four little, five little, six little Indians,
Seven little, eight little, nine little Indians,
Ten little Indian Boys.¹²²

In Great Britain in 1939, the title of the novel was not considered offensive. Nowadays the word "Nigger" is no longer acceptable nor is "negro", even though it basically means "black". Yet the word "black", which basically means "negro", is not objected to. In the United States the term "Nigger" was seen as a very negative expression primarily before the Civil War. Thus, there is no surprise that Christie's book was not actually in favour. In 1940 the title was changed and the novel was firstly published in the USA as *Ten Little Indians*. However, the change was not accurate, so the title changed again using the last words of the nursery rhyme. *And Then There Were None* was the official title for all English language editions in the 1980s.¹²³ The novel was made into a play called *Ten Little Indians* and had its first production on Broadway in 1944. In the years 1959, 1965 and 1989 film versions were created under the same title.¹²⁴

History of the nursery rhyme is complicated and there is, as usual with Agatha Christie, a lot of misinformation and mystery. In a magazine article written by Sudie Hofman special focus is given to deeper history of the book and the play. The title "Ten Little Niggers" is based on a song written by a songwriter, Septimus Winner. Initially, there was a rhyme called "Old

¹²¹ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers*, 24-25

¹²² Charles Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie: A Biographical Companion to the Works of Agatha Christie* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2000), 169

¹²³ Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, 170

¹²⁴ William Wetherall, "Agatha Christie Niggers, Indians and none", *The Steamy East*, accessed February 25, 2014, http://members.jcom.home.ne.jp/yosha/se/wetherall/Christie_1939_ten_little_niggers.html

John Brown” containing refrain “one little, two little, three little Indians”. Later, Winner expanded the song and changed the name to “Ten Little Indians”, which was full of references to American Indians. In 1869 two composers, Frank Green and Marc Mason, created a minstrel tune from the song and because of its popularity among children the song eventually became a nursery rhyme, which spread to England, the USA, Germany and eventually served as a basis for Christie’s novel. Another source states that it was originally a popular song, even considered a folk verse and originally it was named “Ten Little Injuns”. Allegedly written for a party the Winner family organized for the neighbourhood children in 1864, subsequently its popularity made the songwriter publish it in 1868.¹²⁵

An anthropologist Julianne Jennings has another theory about the origin of the rhyme. The original version was written in 1868 by Septimus Winner and performed at minstrel shows, which was a type of entertainment containing dancing, music and comic skits performed by white people with black makeup. Later in 1869 the song “Ten Little Niggers” was adopted by Frank J. Green and became a standard tune in minstrel shows after the Civil War in the USA. Furthermore, in the 1920s the shows were satirizing black people, making them look stupid and lazy.¹²⁶

Before the Civil War in the USA, minstrel shows were very popular. However, the content of the shows radically changed once freedom was given to slaves after the war. Initially, a typical show consisted of white men in black make-up, singing, dancing and lampooning the blacks by using improper English to show their inferiority, etc. After the war, the white people with black makeup were replaced by the freed slaves. These new performers continued to wear the black makeup but the overall tone of the shows was quite unpleasant and damaging for blacks. The minstrel shows transformed into coon shows, which focused on creating comic caricatures and mocking of emancipated blacks. It was during these shows that the song “Ten Little Niggers” appeared.¹²⁷

The nursery rhyme is the core of the novel; therefore an analysis of several lines is necessary. Tiffany M. B. Anderson, M.A. from the Southern Methodist University, looks at the nursery rhyme with a modern perspective and reveals hidden messages and stereotypes. The fifth and sixth line deals with a character who chooses to stay in Devon: “Eight little nigger boys

¹²⁵ Dennis Wepman, “Winner, Septimus”, American National Biography Online, accessed February 25, 2014, <http://www.anb.org/articles/18/18-03837.html>

¹²⁶ Julianne Jennings, “The History of Ten Little Indians,” *Indian Country Today Media Network* (2012), accessed February 26, 2014, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2012/10/11/history-ten-little-indians>

¹²⁷ Tiffany M. B. Anderson, “Ten Little Niggers“: The Making of a Black Man’s Consciousness“, *Folklore Forum*, accessed April 2, 2014, <http://folkloreforum.net/2009/05/01/%E2%80%9Cten-little-niggers%E2%80%9D-the-making-of-a-black-man%E2%80%99s-consciousness/>

travelling in Devon; One said he'd stay there and then there were seven.”¹²⁸ The character's status suddenly changes from travelling to staying, in other words from a tourist or a visitor to an immigrant. These two lines terrified the English readers and even before the listeners of the minstrel tune, because at the end of the nineteenth century former slaves were allowed to travel freely, which frightened the white audience. Migration of black people was only acceptable if connected with slavery as the white people were not ready to face the idea of equality.¹²⁹

The next stanza deals with labour and working oneself to death: “Seven little nigger boys chopping up sticks; One chopped himself in half and then there were six.”¹³⁰ These lines basically demonstrate a danger of an “inferior” human being with a weapon and warn against providing jobs for black people. The stanza also indicates not to give such small tasks to freed slaves and through such advice and warnings slave's economic status was suddenly in danger considering the fact that most of the work given to them was by white people.¹³¹

In the lines thirteen and fourteen one “little nigger” is swallowed by a red herring: “Four little nigger boys going out to sea; A red herring swallowed one and then there were three.”¹³² The word “red herring” is the most important in this case and has various connotations. The sixteenth century explanation focuses on the in-betweenness of the red herring, which is a parallel to the in-betweenness of the black person, because white people have also had problems with naming the blacks: the boundary between human and an animal.¹³³ This idiom firstly appeared as a proverb describing red herring as “neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring” and it used to describe something valueless and of no purpose.¹³⁴ The focus has to be also given to its metaphorical meaning, which is “an unimportant fact etc. takes people's attention away from the important ones.”¹³⁵ This metaphorical reference is an allusion to the Civil War, because apart from the slavery, which was established as the main reason for the war, there were also other very important economic and political issues for the Union as well

¹²⁸ Anderson, “Ten Little Niggers”: The Making of the Black Man's Consciousness

¹²⁹ Anderson, “Ten Little Niggers”: The Making of the Black Man's Consciousness

¹³⁰ Anderson, “Ten Little Niggers”: The Making of the Black Man's Consciousness

¹³¹ Anderson, “Ten Little Niggers”: The Making of the Black Man's Consciousness

¹³² Anderson, “Ten Little Niggers”: The Making of the Black Man's Consciousness

¹³³ Anderson, “Ten Little Niggers”: The Making of the Black Man's Consciousness

¹³⁴ “Origin of the English Idiom – A Red Herring,” HubPages, Inc., last modified May 5, 2014.

<http://betheaglescliffe.hubpages.com/hub/Origin-and-meaning-of-the-phrase-A-Red-Herring-Day>

¹³⁵ “Red Herring,” Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, accessed June 19, 2014.

<http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/red-herring>

as for the Confederacy.¹³⁶The following stanza presents a bear hugging “little nigger” to death: “Three little nigger boys walking in the Zoo; A big bear hugged one and then there were two.”¹³⁷ Anderson claims that these lines focus on humanity relating to the black man. The bear likes the “little nigger” and does not see him as a danger such as human being does; therefore he is so affectionate towards him.¹³⁸

Concrete examples of racial and ethnic attitudes of the main characters are to be found in the novel itself. In the first chapter, where the reader meets all the characters, one of them Captain Lombard, a soldier responsible for several deaths of natives in an African tribe, receives money from a Jew to go on the Nigger Island and he comments on the character of the Jew:

He said it in a casual way as though a hundred guineas was nothing to him. *A hundred guineas* when he was literally down to his last square meal! He had fancied, though, that the little Jew had not been deceived – that was the dimmable part about Jews, you couldn’t deceive them about money – they *knew!*¹³⁹

In this case the theory about prejudice and stereotyping can be applied considering that Captain Lombard shows baseless negative attitude towards the Jew and to the whole ethnic group by saying “that was the dimmable part about Jews.” He generalizes and creates his view on the person on the basis of beliefs and incorrect factual information.¹⁴⁰ Later when Lombard asks the Jew whether he is about to undertake something illegal and he comments the expression on the Jew’s face: “There had been a very faint smile on the thick Semitic lips of Mr. Morris”...”Damn the smooth little brute, he had smiled.”¹⁴¹ Lombard uses expressions such as “thick Semitic lips”, basically making fun of his looks and referring to typical physical features of Jews, or “brute”, basically using pejorative terminology¹⁴² in order to express the negative and derisive attitude towards the Jew based on his ethnic background and various stereotypes and prejudices.

In chapter two on the way to the Nigger Island, outside a little Inn called the Seven Stars stood three figures. Miss Emily Brent, Mr. Justice Wargrave and a third man who comes and introduces himself:

¹³⁶ Anderson, “Ten Little Niggers”:The Making of the Black Man’s Consciousness”

¹³⁷ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers* , 25

¹³⁸ Anderson, “Ten Little Niggers”:The Making of the Black Man’s Consciousness”

¹³⁹ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers* , 8

¹⁴⁰ J. F. Dovidio and S. L. Gaertner, “Reducing Prejudice: Combating Intergroup Biases”, 318

¹⁴¹ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers*, 8

¹⁴² Hall, “Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Analysis”, 268-273

Allow me to introduce myself. Name's Davis. Natal, South Africa's my natal spot, ha, ha" He laughed breezily. Mr. Justice Wargrave looked at him with active malevolence. He seemed to be wishing that he could order the court to be cleared. Miss Emily Brent was clearly not sure if she liked Colonials.¹⁴³

Both of these characters show contempt about meeting this person, revealing the negative attitudes towards "colonials" and people of colour. The attitude of Miss Brent as well as of Mr. Wargrave can be connected with vast immigration during the second half of the twentieth century when people from the colonies came to Britain some only for work, some for permanent settlement.¹⁴⁴ Major waves of immigrants made the British people feel a little bit uneasy and thus caused that the "colonials" were experiencing contempt and hatred from the British people as it is visible from the quote.

In the same chapter when Mr. Justice Wargrave asks the servant about the presence of Lady Culmington, by whom he has been invited on the island and gets a negative answer, he is expressing his doubts about the situation, using a rather offensive phrase: "The Judge's eyebrows rose. But he only grunted. He thought: "Nigger Island, eh? There's a nigger in the woodpile."¹⁴⁵ This is directly connected with Hall's principle "Differentiation of peoples is reflected and reinforced by language and metaphor."¹⁴⁶ The metaphor here is used to refer to something obscure, a concealed motif¹⁴⁷ and thus the word "Nigger" here receives a negative and offensive connotation meaning something doubtful, questionable or even suspicious.

But there is also a more positive view on the natives or black people, which slightly contradicts previous examples. Couple pages later in chapter seven during a conversation of Vera Claythorne and Emily Brent about Mr. Lombard abandoning twenty natives to their deaths: "Vera said: "They were only natives..." Emily Brent said sharply: "Black or white, they are our brothers" Vera thought: "Our black brothers-our black brothers. Oh, I'm going to laugh."¹⁴⁸ When Emily Brent makes this statement it shows a more positive outlook on racial and ethnic minorities.

¹⁴³ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers*, 19

¹⁴⁴ Vlčková, "Living with Difference" – Immigration in the UK in the 20th and 21st century", 17

¹⁴⁵ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers*, 27

¹⁴⁶ Hall, "Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Analysis", 268

¹⁴⁷ "nigger in the woodpile," Merriam-Webster, An Encyclopaedia Britannica Company, accessed May 13, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nigger%20in%20the%20woodpile>

¹⁴⁸ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers*, 70-71

Racial and ethnic attitudes in the novel *Ten Little Niggers* can be also supported by examples from other works by Agatha Christie. The examples that have been chosen are all around the same time of publishing as the novel *Ten Little Niggers*, the 1930s. Not only the examples help to show often negative attitudes towards people of colour in the mid 20th century, but also emphasize the important issue of immigration in the twentieth century Britain and the mistrustful view on foreigners and immigrants at that time, which can also be counted as a certain form of racism. This is closely connected with the character of the well-known detective, Hercule Poirot, which is examined later in the paper.

The short story by Agatha Christie called “Problem at Sea” published in 1935 includes Hercule Poirot and a group of other passengers travelling to Alexandria. After arriving there they all leave the boat to see the city and in the meantime a murder is committed and the suspicion from one of the passengers, Miss Henderson, falls on a native person: “I’ll never feel safe on a ship again”, said Miss Henderson with a shiver. “Any clue as to which of those coffee-coloured brutes did it?”¹⁴⁹ The author uses a very disparaging word “brute” and rather pejorative expression “coffee-coloured” to emphasize inferiority of the native person and point out his skin colour as a sign of inferiority. This is an example of labelling of people on the basis of their skin colour as it was examined in one of Hall’s principles above. The dark skin or as it is stated here the “coffee-coloured” skin and therefore the person is automatically connected with evil, contempt and suspicion.¹⁵⁰ The people were also very much influenced by the entertainment industry, media, which portrayed black people as dangerous.¹⁵¹

The following examples are bound to the concept of ethnicity and immigration issues. A short story published in 1935 called “How Does Your Garden Grow?” also involves the character of Hercule Poirot and it is based on a children nursery rhyme named “Mistress Mary, Quite Contrary”. The main characters in the story are an old lady that is later murdered and a young Russian girl that takes care of her and is suspicious in the first place, yet the murderer is somebody totally different. This story mainly focuses on ethnicity and distrust of foreigners. Incredulity towards immigrants is visible for example when Hercule Poirot goes to the old lady’s house to meet up with her and the maid tells him that the lady had already passed away:

¹⁴⁹ Agatha Christie, *Hercule Poirot’s Early Cases* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1974), 227

¹⁵⁰ Hall, “Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Analysis”, 268

¹⁵¹ Middleton and Pilgrim, “Nigger (the word), a brief history“

Poirot raised his hat with courtesy and addressed her: “Pardon, but does a Miss Amelia Barrowby live here?” The little maid gasped and her eyes grew rounder. “Oh, sir, didn’t you know? She’s dead. Ever so sudden it was. Tuesday night.” She hesitated, divided between two strong instincts: the first, distrust of a foreigner; the second, the pleasurable enjoyment of her class in dwelling on the subject of illness and death.¹⁵²

The servant was reserved and uncomfortable when she was talking to an immigrant. The shift from the Empire of Great Britain to the multiracial Great Britain due to massive immigration during the Great War as well as during and after the Second World War made the British people feel a bit anxious about their national identity¹⁵³ and thus the attitudes were rather distant.

Another example focuses on the Russian girl that serves the old lady who had been murdered. Poirot wants Miss Lemon to imagine that she is the Russian girl and then explains to her how the murder could have happened waiting for Miss Lemon’s opinion whether his theory could be true or not: “Tell me, does that seem to you reasonable?” “Quite reasonable,” said Miss Lemon. “Quite reasonable for a Russian, that is.”¹⁵⁴ The character of the Russian girl is being somehow mocked in this situation that even though she is Russian she might think of such a perfect plan, which gives the sentence a bit disdainful undertone, which is again connected with unease about massive immigration in the years 1815-1945.

Hercule Poirot, the most famous character of Agatha Christie’s novels and stories has been throughout his whole career dealing with the status of an immigrant and a foreigner. The best way to describe this legendary detective is to use a quote from the very first novel of Agatha Christie *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920) where his friend and an investigation colleague Captain Hastings says:

Poirot was an extraordinary-looking little man. He was hardly more than five feet four inches. His head was exactly the shape of an egg, and he always perched it a little on one side. His moustache was very stiff and military. The neatness of his attire was almost incredible; I believe a speck of a dust would have caused him more pain than a bullet wound. Yet this quaint dandified little man who, I was sorry to see, now limped badly has been in his time one of the most celebrated members of the Belgian police.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Christie, *Hercule Poirot’s Early Cases*, 238

¹⁵³ Olson and Worsham, *Race, Rhetoric and the Postcolonial*, 3

¹⁵⁴ Christie, *Hercule Poirot’s Early Cases*, 246

¹⁵⁵ Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles: Hercule Poirot’s First Case* (New York: Cosimo Inc., 2007), 14

As it is obvious from the quote, the character of Hercule Poirot was a retired Belgian police officer, who lived in a small village of Styles during the First World War together with other Belgian refugees. In his speech he always uses a lot of French expressions and sometimes doesn't know what are certain things called in English and he speaks so-called "fractured English", which was purposely done by Agatha Christie in order to strengthen the "foreignness" of his character.¹⁵⁶ A quote from a novel *Three Act Tragedy* published in 1935 proves that people made prejudices about foreigners only on the basis of their ethnic background but it also shows how Poirot could turn it into an advantage and somehow tries to turn the tables and mock the English:

To speak the broken English is an enormous asset. It leads people to despise you. They say – a foreigner – he can't even speak English properly. It is not my policy to terrify people – instead I invite their gentle ridicule...And so you see, I put people of their guard.¹⁵⁷

A crucial question that follows is why is he a Belgian? Agatha Christie, formerly, Agatha Miller spent her childhood and teenage years in the city of Torquay, which was during the Great War full of Belgian refugees that escaped from their occupied country. Even though she never met a Belgian in person and she also thought about making her main character an American after her father or French, in the end she decided for Belgian nationality.¹⁵⁸ A writer Alison Light also deals with Poirot's ethnic background saying that his refugee status is rather unclear. She for example claims that: "he can be the object of English charity and condescension – "we" were the saviours of gallant little Belgium"¹⁵⁹, when during the Great War British government guaranteed support for Belgium. This theory can be proved by an example from the first novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* when Poirot explains to Captain Hastings how he got to Britain during the war and expresses his gratefulness to a young lady for helping him:

I know Mademoiselle Cynthia. It is by the charity of that good Mrs. Inglethorp that I am here. Then, as I looked at him inquiringly: "Yes my friend, she had kindly extended hospitality to seven of my country people who, alas, are refugees from the native land. We Belgians will always remember her with gratitude."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ James Zembo, *The Detective Novels of Agatha Christie: A Reader's Guide*, (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2008), 16

¹⁵⁷ Agatha Christie, *Three Act Tragedy*, as quoted in *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*, by Alison Light (London: Routledge, 1991), 85

¹⁵⁸ Robyns, *The Mystery of Agatha Christie: An Intimate Biography of the First Lady of Crime*, 43

¹⁵⁹ Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*, 74

¹⁶⁰ Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, 14

Poirot has always been looked at rather contemptuously because he is a foreigner; he is not the cliché heroic character such as Sherlock Holmes, who is lean and tall but he is rather short with his eccentric behaviour such as cutting his moustache into a perfect shape. It almost appears that he has been created as “a neat travesty of conventional British masculinity.”¹⁶¹ Scornful looks and inappropriate comments follow him wherever his case takes him to. This can be proven by providing a quote from a very famous novel *Murder on the Orient Express*, firstly published in 1934, particularly in the part where the passengers of the Express are having breakfast and one of the passengers Colonel Arbuthnot come to the table and recognizes Hercule Poirot:

The Colonel sat down. “Boy”, he called in peremptory fashion. He gave an order for eggs and coffee. His eyes rested for a moment on Hercule Poirot, but they passed on indifferently. Poirot, reading the English mind correctly, knew that he had said to himself: “Only some damned foreigner.”¹⁶²

The issue of English prejudice and xenophobia can be found in manifold of stories and novels and does not only involve the main character, Hercule Poirot, but also various other people featuring in the novels such as Mr. Shaitana from the novel *Cards on the Table*, first published in 1936. He is a foreigner of unspecified heritage, which attracts the English negative prejudice:

Every healthy Englishman who saw him longed earnestly and fervently to kick him! They said with a singular lack of originality, “There’s that damned Dago, Shaitana!”...Whether Mr. Shaitana was an Argentine, or a Portuguese, or a Greek, or some other nationality rightly despised by the insular Briton, nobody knew.¹⁶³

The word “Dago” used has a very negative connotation and according to the urban dictionary it means racial and ethnic slur from Italy, Spain or Portuguese.¹⁶⁴ On the other hand a British writer of detective fiction Colin Watson argues in Alison Light’s book *Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* that Christie in this case uses ironical expressions for instance “rightly despised” and therefore the readers may have misunderstood the irony.¹⁶⁵ Even though an offensive word is used in this quote, it is possible that the intention of the

¹⁶¹Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*, 73

¹⁶² Agatha Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*, (New York:HarperPaperbacks,1991), 6

¹⁶³ AgathaChristie, *Cards on the Table*, as quoted in *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*, by Alison Light (London: Routledge, 1991)84

¹⁶⁴ “Dago”, Urban Dictionary, accessed May 25, 2014, <http://cs.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=dago>

¹⁶⁵ Collin Watson , *Snobbery With Violence: English Crime Stories and Their Audience*, as quoted in *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*, by Alison Light (London: Routledge, 1991)84

author was rather ironical but there is still a negative attitude underlying this quote expressed by rather violent speech such as “ every healthy Englishman who saw him...longed to kick him.”

Conclusion

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to analyse racial attitudes of the mid 20th century Britain and show them on examples from the novel *Ten Little Niggers* by Agatha Christie and support the main ideas by providing examples from other similar novels and stories from the same period written by Agatha Christie.

The theoretical part was tracing the formation of racial attitudes throughout British history, because the novel *Ten Little Niggers* is a work of popular literature, thus, it is influenced by the background that it was created in as well as by overall historical development of race and racism, particularly in Britain. The theoretical part also presented history of the word Negro, as it is a crucial term that is often used in the novel as well as in the analysis, and concepts such as “Britishness” and “Otherness” were explained. The first chapter examined the term race from various viewpoints and how the meaning and definition was changing from a biological difference towards a social construct. The second chapter firstly briefly mentioned slavery as a point in history when the ideology of racism began to form and secondly, it was mostly concerned with the nineteenth century colonization period. The colonization period is one of the main points in history when the negative attitudes towards people of colour were forming rapidly, which was proved by the example provided in the chapter as well as later in the analysis. The colonization of various territories was hidden under the guise of “civilising mission”, which created the idea of superiority of white people and black people were looked at as inferiors. This was also the period when the concept of “Britishness” firstly appeared. Therefore the third chapter defined the terms “Britishness” and “Otherness”, focusing on the idea of “Britishness” and British national identity mainly from the 1870s on. The fourth chapter focused on another key moment in history of racism in Britain and that was immigration during the twentieth century. This chapter was divided into two subchapters, the first subchapter examined immigration issues during the Great War. A lot of immigrants found their new home in Britain while Europe suffered from German attacks such as a great number of Belgian refugees escaping from their land, some of which either stayed in Britain permanently or moved back to their homeland after the War. The second subchapter was dealing with the period during and after the Second World War. After the Second World War the country was devastated and had to face labour shortages, thus, the government was attracting people from the former colonies to help and hopefully to restore the British Empire, yet what they did not expect was the amount of immigrants coming to the country to settle there and the idea of multiracial and multiethnic Britain made the British people feel uneasy,

which resulted in negative attitudes, hostility of British citizens towards immigrants and people of colour supported by the government and some of their conservative representatives such as Enoch Powell. The next chapter was dealing with history of the word Negro and the sixth chapter firstly presented the field of cultural studies and later focused on theories about race and ethnicity in literature, especially in detective fiction. Several key principles, important for an analysis of literary texts, for example “This differentiation of peoples is reflected in and reinforced by language and metaphor” were presented together with definitions of other significant terminology such as prejudice and stereotyping.

An analysis of several lines of the nursery rhyme, which was created in the nineteenth century and reflects negative attitudes towards black people, was introduced in the practical part. Later the analytical part was showing the evolving attitudes, discussed in the theoretical part, on direct examples from the novel *Ten Little Niggers* as well as on other examples from similar works by Agatha Christie. From these examples it is obvious that people of colour were viewed as inferiors, they were looked at with indifference and sometimes even with contempt. The character of a detective, Hercule Poirot, was also analysed in the practical part, because of his Belgian origin, which is connected with immigration issues during the Great War, and generally because he is a foreigner, therefore he was always seen as an intruder and people looked at him with distrust and treated him with disdain.

To conclude, it has been found out that negative racial attitudes in Britain were forming throughout whole history of racism in Britain and that they are connected with several key moments in history such as colonization when the idea of superiority of white people over black people emerged and most importantly the twentieth century, especially the mid 20th century when the vast immigration caused the expansion of negative attitudes as they were reflected in the novel *Ten Little Niggers*.

Resumé

Tato práce se věnuje dílu anglicky psané populární literatury, zejména té detektivní, a to románu *Deset malých černoušků* od Agathy Christie. V díle jsou zachyceny rasové postoje tak, jak se vyvíjeli v průběhu historie rasismu v Británii a hlavně v druhé polovině 20. století. Hlavním cílem této práce je proto analýza těchto rasových postojů ve výše zmíněném díle, jež je podpořena také příklady z dalších, podobných děl, napsaných ve stejném období Agathou Christie.

Nespočet knižních titulů, esejí a článků se již zabývalo jedním z nejkontroverznějších témat všech dob, rasismem. Pojetí rasy a rasismu má svou konkrétní historii, která sahá až do dob prvních písemných záznamů, kde již tehdy lidé pociťovali rozdíl mezi pojmem „my“ a „oni“ nebo „ti druzí“, což se v podstatě dá označit jako začátek vývoje rasismu. Ve viktoriánské Anglii převažovala teorie o rozdělení lidí do skupin nazvaných „rasy“, jež spolu sdílejí různé biologické, morální a další rysy. Známy anglický lékař, Robert Knox, se v roce 1850 zabýval biologickou podřazeností osob tmavé pleti a přišel s tvrzením, že lidé s tmavou pletí jsou podřazeni lidem se světlou pletí na základě jiné textury mozku, jiného tvaru lebky a dalších biologických nedostatků, což bylo později vědci zamítnuto a objevila se teorie o rase jako o vykonstruovaném sociálním konceptu.

Román *Deset malých černoušků* je, jak již bylo zmíněno, dílem populární literatury, tudíž je ovlivněn kulturním pozadím, ve kterém byl vytvořen a také celkovým historickým vývojem konceptu rasy a rasismu, zejména v Británii. Proto se teoretická část zabývá tímto vývojem a klade důraz na klíčová období, jež signifikantně ovlivnila rasové postoje v Británii. První kapitola se zabývá pojmem „rasy“ z různých úhlů pohledu a také sleduje vývoj tohoto termínu od „rasy“ jako biologického rozlišení lidí až po „rasu“ jako vykonstruovaný sociální koncept. Dále se teoretická část zabývá ideologií rasismu, tak jak se vyvíjela v Británii a to nejdříve ve spojení s otroctvím, kde bylo v podstatě vyzkoumáno, že rasismus vznikl jako obhajoba otroctví. V devatenáctém století pak přišlo období kolonizace, což je jedno ze stěžejních období pro vývoj rasových postojů. Oficiálním cílem kolonizace bylo pomáhat necivilizovaným zemím stát se civilizovanými, což vedlo k vytvoření dojmu, že lidé bílé pleti jsou nadřazeni lidem černé pleti, kteří potřebují, aby jim někdo pomohl. Lidé nebrali osoby v koloniích za sobě rovné, proto se chovali mnohdy opovržlivě nebo lhostejně, což je ukázáno na chování a postojích postav v románu *Deset malých černoušků*. Dva další koncepty jsou rozvíjeny v teoretické části a to nejprve velice abstraktní koncept tzv. „odlišnosti“, nebo

„jinakosti“, jež je vytvořen na základě principu rozdělování lidí do skupin: „my“ a „oni“ a dále tzv. „britskost“ neboli britská národní identita, která je v této práci sledovaná a analyzovaná zejména v období druhé poloviny 19. století. Dalším stěžejním okamžikem ve vývoji rasismu v britské historii je imigrace ve 20. století. V teoretické části je téma imigrace ve 20. století rozděleno na dvě části zaprvé imigrace během první světové války a za druhé imigrace během a po druhé světové válce. Během první světové války imigrovalo do Británie spousta lidí z různých zemí, hlavně z Evropy, jež byla okupovaná německými jednotkami. Například velké množství belgických uprchlíků, kteří utíkali ze své země obsazené Němci, se usadilo v Británii. Někteří z nich tam zůstali natrvalo a někteří se po válce vrátili do své rodné země. Po druhé světové válce byla Británie zdevastovaná, byl nedostatek pracovní síly a vláda proto lákala občany z různých zemí, aby se přišli pokusit znovu obnovit již zašlou slávu britského impéria. Nepočítali však s tak obrovským přívalem imigrantů, například z původních kolonií, což vyvolalo vlnu negativních emocí a postojů ze strany britských občanů a vytvořila se tak nenávistná atmosféra vůči občanům tmavé pleti i ostatním cizincům, doprovázená výtržnostmi a podporovaná vládou v čele s některými jejími představiteli jako byl například britský konzervativní politik, Enoch Powell. Negativní a mnohdy podezřívavé nebo opovržlivé postoje vůči cizincům nebo osobám tmavé pleti jsou v analytické části ukázány na příkladech z románu *Deset malých černoušků*, a také podpořeny analýzou postavy známého belgického detektiva, jež vystupuje ve většině románů a příběhů od Agathy Christie, Hercula Poirota. Dále je v teoretické části také prezentována stručná historie slova „Negr“, jež je v díle často používané a dnes má již velice negativní konotaci. Poslední kapitola teoretické části nejdříve představuje oblast kulturních studií jako přístup k analýze literárních děl, poté se zabývá různými teoriemi známých představitelů kulturních studií, jako jsou například Stuart Hall nebo Paul Gilroy, o rasismu v literatuře a také zkoumá několik klíčových principů pro analýzu literárních a kulturních textů jako je například „Diferenciace lidí zobrazená a upevněná jazykem a metaforou“ a další. V této části jsou také definovány termíny jako „předsudek“ nebo „stereotyp“, jež jsou také úzce spojeny s rasovými postoji.

Dětská říkanka „Deset malých černoušků“ je jádrem celého románu Agathy Christie, proto je v úvodu analytické části rozebírána stručně její historie a také jsou dále samostatně analyzovány některé řádky říkanky, jež v sobě ukrývají svůj, na první pohled neodhalitelný, význam. Dále analytická část zobrazuje vyvíjející se rasové postoje, jakožto i teorie o rasismu v literatuře a klíčové principy pro analýzu literárních a kulturních textů, jež byly rozebírány v teoretické části, na konkrétních příkladech, postavách a situacích v románu *Deset malých*

černoušků a tyto hlavní myšlenky jsou, jak již bylo řečeno, podpořeny příklady z podobných románů a příběhů napsaných ve stejném období Agathou Christie.

Po zevrubné analýze románu *Deset malých černoušků* bylo zjištěno, že rasové postoje v Británii se formovali během celého vývoje rasismu v Británii a jsou spojeny s některými klíčovými obdobími v Britské historii, jež na ně měli velký dopad například období kolonizace, tedy 19. století, nebo období rozsáhlé imigrace ve 20. století., zejména v polovině 20. století. Celkově je tedy možné shrnout, že rasové postoje zobrazeny v románu *Deset malých černoušků* jsou vesměs negativní.

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