CHAPTER IV: Creole Identity in Selvon’s Immigrant Novels

Selvon’s novels can be divided into three categories—peasant novels, middle class novels and immigrant novels. They offer a broader glimpse into the ongoing process of creolization in the Caribbean setting which remains dynamic. Selvon’s immigrant novels are also called ‘London novels’ which depict the experience of West Indian black immigrants living in London, viewed as the ‘Promised Land’. Selvon’s immigrant novels, notably, *The Lonely Londoners, Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*, secure a heavy bearing on the understanding and assessing of the creole identity in manifold planes. On critical examination, the novels open up avenues for the researcher to analyze the rampant notion of ‘creole/black’ and ‘hybrid’ identity formation and definition through a plethora of postcolonial themes. Simultaneously, this research work also makes an attempt to analyze deeply the prominent theme of exile in the Caribbean context.

Diasporic writing captures the two invariables of their experience: exile and homeland. All diasporic literature is an attempt to negotiate between these two polarities. The writings of exiled/immigrant writers undertake to moves from temporal to spatial. The temporal move entails a looking back at the past and looking forward at the future. Past involves a negotiation with a retreating history, past, traditions and customs. It produces nostalgic, and reclamation as literary themes. ‘Future’ involves a different treatment of time, where the writer looks forward at the future, seeking new vistas and new changes. This produces themes of the ethnics of work, survival and cultured assimilation (creolization) (Nayar, 188). In this context, the best expression of this dual moment occurs in Rushdie’s *Shame*:

> What is the best thing about migrant peoples..? I think it is their hopefulness… And what’s the worst thing? It’s the emptiness of one’s baggage. We’ve come unstruck from more than land. We’ve floated upwards from history, from memory, from time. (91)

The spatial move involves a de-territorialisation and a re-territorialisation connected by journey/travel. De-territorialisation is a loss of territory, both geographical and cultural. It is surely not a coincidence that a large number of diasporic writing has spatial location implied in it, some examples are: *An Area of
Diaspora as communities living together in one country who acknowledge that the old country… a notion often buried deep in language, religion, customs or folklore- always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions… a member adherence to a diasporic community is demonstrated by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-existing with others of a similar background. (ix)

In this definition, Cohen gives importance to the old country. He says that a nostalgic notion of the home country is the main reason for diasporic feelings. Avtar Brah defines this concept in his Cartographic of Diaspora: Contesting Identities: “Diasporic communities are created out of the merging of narratives about journeys...
form the old country to the new.” Brah emphasizes that the merging of the past (old) and the present, that is the ‘old’ and the ‘new,’ is the cause for the emergence of the diasporas. In the postcolonial Caribbean context, the society and cultural identities are ‘creolized’ and ‘hybridized’ which create a ‘new society’ and a ‘new culture’ (Start Hall).

Today, the forces of history made the Caribbean culture as dynamic. As a new paradigm of globalization, the people have been leaving their ‘homelands,’ some in search of the ‘El Dorado’ of metropolitan wealth, some for higher learning, and some for the sheer adventure of it. What then are the differences between these two migrations, that of the ‘past’ and that of the ‘present’? For one, the Caribbean people of today, whose ancestors came from many diasporas, are living as one. Despite the presence of some ethnocentric ‘Caribbean’ organizations around the world, the vast majority of Caribbean immigrants to countries like Canada, the US and the U.K. (and, it should be added, countries less known for accommodating Caribbean migrants), identify themselves first with their homeland, and then to the Caribbean region as a whole.

The Caribbean diaspora falls into the category of a cultural diaspora as it is held together by a common culture and identity. Wilson (1998) defines the Caribbean culture as “the result of the violent mixture of indigenous people from Quisqueya, Xaymaca, Borinquén and Cuba, European immigrants who invaded these territories and African slaves brought to work in the gold mines, sugar plantations and sugar mills.” (“The Multiple Dimensions of Caribbean Culture”). Stuart Hall examines the Caribbean cultural identity and explains:

…‘cultural identity’ in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective’ one true self,’ hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves,’ which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people,’ with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. This ‘oneness,’ underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence, of ‘Caribbeanness,’ of the black experience. It is this
identity which a Caribbean or black diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light and express through cinematic representation. (“Cultural Identity and Diaspora” in Contemporary Postcolonial Theory, 116)

Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* deals with the sheltering of the illusion of belonging in the metropolitan country, England. Selvon avers the illusion of being English, and indeed the illusion about who the English are: “the journey to England is a journey to an illusion” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 144). The illusion is firstly a material dream about wealth, and secondly, hospitality, courtesy, and human warmth of the English. Galahad reveals this illusion on the eve of his first date with a white woman in *The Lonely Londoners*:

This was something he used dream about in Trinidad. The time when he was leaving, Frank tell him: ‘Boy, it have bags of white… in London, and you will eat till you tired’ and now, the first date, in the heart of London, dressed to kill, ready to escort the number around the town, anywhere she want to go, any place at all. (*The Lonely Londoners*, 3)

Diasporic writers such as Selvon and Naipaul are invariably seeking a form and a language (Creole) in which they can capture the trauma of colonial history with its forced migration and enslaving voyages, as well as the condition of a postcolonial migrancy. ‘Diaspora’ is simply the displacement of a community culture into another geographical and cultural region. Such movements were common during colonialism. Such diasporic movements developed their own distinctive cultures which preserved, extended, and developed their original cultures.

Selvon’s novels are about cultural assimilation leading towards creolization. Diaspora culture is the offshoot of migration, immigration, and exile. Diaspora is a particularly fascinating phenomenon because it has existed since the arrival of humans on earth (Nayar, 187). As communities settle down, they acquire and build certain traditions and customs. Later, when members of this community move away, that take with them the baggage of these customs and belief systems. They live in a ‘New World,’ a ‘New community,’ a ‘New culture’ and a ‘New society’ (hybrid and creole). However, it is important to distinguish between different kinds of migration and diaspora— refugees, asylum-seekers, illegal immigrants, voluntary migrants, and job seekers constitute different entities from diasporic citizen. Europeans moved all
over the world, leading to colonial settlements (Canada, Australia, the America). They also transported Africans to colonies for slave labour, leading to yet another diaspora. Curiously, ‘diasporic’ writing today has come to signify the recent phenomenon of ‘Third World’ writers in Western metropolises (Selvon and Lamming).

**Theme of Exile and Immigration in the Caribbean Context**

Writers such as V.S. Naipaul, J.M. Coetzee, Samuel Selvon, Wilson Harris, George Lamming, Chinua Achebe, and Jean Rhys have all rewritten specific works from the English ‘canon’ with an aim of restructuring ‘realities’ in postcolonial terms by reversing the hierarchical order. Postcolonial theory is an area of literary and cultural study which has come into being as part of the decentering tendency of post-1960s. As theorists, the postcolonial writers might be slow to acknowledge the role of specific literary works such as V.S. Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men* (1967) and Samuel Selvon’s immigrant novels, *The Lonely Londoners, Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*. They do provide some amount of discussion on the various ‘models’ of postcolonial theory such as ‘migration,’ ‘racism,’ ‘exile,’ ‘hybridity,’ ‘decolonization’ and so on. The remarkable upsurge of writings in countries involved in the decolonization process since the Second World War, especially from Third World countries, has led readers worldwide to see that their own communities could produce writings of great power and relevance. Postcolonial theory is greatly needed because it has a subversive postulate towards the canon, in celebrating the neglected or marginalized, bringing with it a particular politics, history and geography. Therefore, Selvon’s experimentation of the ‘creole dialect’ and the themes of ‘self-exile,’ ‘mimicry,’ and ‘hybridity’ highlight the assertion of the marginal voices. Selvon uses ‘creole dialect,’ and the themes such as ‘self-exile,’ ‘mimicry,’ and ‘hybridity’ as a form of resistance in ‘white society’.

Many writers from the Caribbean have chosen to live abroad, often in the former colonial centers in Britain, France or, since it has become a massive force in the area, the United States. Writers like V.S. Naipaul, Edgar Mittelholzer, Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, and Wilson Harris have experienced what Naipaul called the “threat of failure, the need to escape…. Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is, where he stands” (*Middle Passage*, 45, 73). C.L.R James himself sailed to England at the age of thirty-one with
the aim of becoming a novelist and produced his classic work about slave resistance, *The Black Jacobins*. He writes:

The West Indies have never been a traditional colonial territory with clearly distinguished economic and political relations between two different cultures. Native culture there was none. The aboriginal Amerindian civilization had been destroyed. Every succeeding year, therefore, saw the laboring population, slave or free, incorporating into itself more and more to the language, customs, aims and outlook of its masters. It steadily grew in numbers until it became a terrifying majority of the total population. The ruling minority therefore was in the position of the father who produced children and had to guard against being supplemented by them. There was only one way out, to seek strength abroad. This beginning has lasted unchanged to this very day. (*The Black Jacobins*, 405)

In the above passage James expresses the psychological, socio-cultural, familial, religious and political power structure of slave society. The structure of the society made the Caribbean people to be in ‘self-exile’ as a form of resistance.

The consequent concern of the Caribbean history with the social world and its impact on West Indian sensibility focused more on the 1950s and 1960s. The major themes of emigration and exile in the 1950s play an important role in the Caribbean countries. In this context, Edward Barthwaite says: “the desire to emigrate is at the heart of West Indian sensibility: Whether that migration is in fact or by metaphor” (*Caribbean Autobiography: Cultural Identity and Self-Representation*, 175). The concern was a response both to a ‘historical phenomenon’ and a ‘psychological colonial problem’. At the turn of the century, the decline of the sugar industry and of the importance of the West Indies, heightened the constriction, poverty and isolation of the islands. Most West Indians genuinely felt hemmed in by the poverty and deprivations of their worlds and looked elsewhere for greener pastures, ‘a better break’ as most emigrants envisaged.

In the early stages [1950s], West Indians drifted to Panama [London] where the building of the canal afforded the opportunity for work and enrichment. Most migrants to Panama did return home, however, often with riches, new flamboyant
cultures and a sharpened social awareness. Lamming’s old man Pa in *In the Castle of My Skin* recalls his own Panama days; the author Eric Walron recreates the exile’s life in Latin America with depth and compassion in *Tropic Death* (1926). The West Indian immigration in the 1940s and 1950s was however mostly directed to England, primarily for personal and psychological reasons. Similarly, the drift to Panama was also a search for a ‘break’ whereby the entire phenomenon was complicated by the assumption of a ‘shared heritage’. It was really the shattering of this illusion, of centuries of expectations fostered by colonial dependency and consolidated by a colonial education, causing trauma and alienation, which was so vividly recreated by novelists like Lamming and Selvon.

The sense of the need to migrate affected several early writers born in the West Indies, such as the Jamaican, Claude McKay who left in 1912 for the United States. A number of talented young West Indian novelists migrated mostly to London after the World War II. As Henry Swanzy, the producer of the B.B.C Radio Programme, “Caribbean Voices,” once aptly observed, London had become a ‘literary head quarter’ for creoles. It had become a centre for the writers from various West Indian Islands to meet and attempt to paradoxically write about their departure from the Islands to establish their cultural identity. To them, ‘exile’ meant ‘loss of ethos’ and ‘departure from their native country’. They could neither establish West Indian literary tradition nor boldly undertake publishing ventures. The expatriate writers as dispossessed beings without any affiliation to any racial or cultural tradition expressed their concerns for their native country and the predicaments in the Caribbean Society. So England provided them with a new socio-cultural environment to assert themselves. Early West Indian writing failed to interest the audience in West Indies and the writers could not make profit out of their writings and sustain themselves. Edgar Mittelholzer presenting the plight and crises of immigrants to Britain, tried his luck with British publishers and the British reading public, like several other expatriate writers in London.

Prominent young writers such as V.S. Naipaul, Samuel Selvon, Wilson Harris, George Lamming, Roger Mais and others who had published their works in the West Indies needed the resources of the metropolis to assert themselves as writers and to gain wide recognition through reputed publishing houses in England. Apart from these practical considerations, the writers from the colonies and even after they
became sovereign states, felt the need and thought it their responsibility to document the human predicament in the West Indies. The urgent task of the writers was to address themselves to the British readership about their social values and the treatment given to the Blacks and other non-whites in colonial and post-colonial setup. The West Indian writer assumed the role of a ‘missionary in reverse,’ to educate the British audience about West Indian culture. Selvon, in his 1979 interview with Peter Nazareth offered his personal reasons for emigration, and explained why he left Trinidad in 1950 to become a ‘displaced’ writer in London:

I was finding myself in a situation where life was beginning to become very complacent and easy-going; this general impression of beach parties and boozing up parties and driving a car around and going swimming in the blue Caribbean waters, and things like that, is part of the life in Trinidad. And I felt myself getting into it. (World Literature Writing in English, 425)

Irrespective of their origin and affiliation to any particular cultural tradition, all the West Indian writers, especially the expatriate writers, live in ‘double exile’. Brought up in a culture radically different from that of England, they have nevertheless chosen to write in English. They are therefore culturally and linguistically estranged, living in London while exploring the new landscape and human conditions in the West Indies.

Exile, in this sense has often proved to be a stimulant rather than a disability to writers as is evident from the works of Conrad, Beckett and Ionesco. Though the writer living in linguistic and cultural exile, has distanced and detached himself from his space and time, he could not restrain himself from his moral commitment to his society and its values. African and West Indian writers use ‘English’ as the medium to write about the native society but through universalizing imagination, the variety, range and force of which is evident in the writings of the latter half of this century.

Perhaps, the single most exciting fact about the writing is related to its unique qualities which have often grown directly out of the problems faced by the writers. Even the idiom of English used by the West Indian writers is different as it is influenced by the indigenous languages and their interaction with others within the West Indies and outside in Europe. It finally acquires its quite distinct character and
flavour in their works. Through this medium, the writers have not only defied the
cultural and linguistic supremacy of the whites but have also innovated a ‘new’ idiom
to suit their narration and expression of cultural experience.

The West Indians’ nostalgia about their native land also deals with racial and
‘colour’ conflicts as in George Lamming’s *The Emigrants*, Selvon’s *The Lonely
Londoners*, and Andrew Saleky’s *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*. Most of the novels
of the West Indian immigrant writers have explored the pleasures and perils of exile
along with their impact on the sensibilities of the West Indians. Lamming’s *The
Emigrants*, Selvon’s *Ways of Sunlight*, Moses Migrating, Moses Ascending, *The
Lonely Londoners* and *The Housing Lark*, Brathwaite’s *Rights of Passage*, and also
the novels of Austin Clarke published recently, have depicted the enlarged
consciousness of the emigrant with his peculiar disorientation in an alien world.
Increasingly, however, the idea of migration has become almost a ‘global
phenomenon,’ mainly in North America and other parts of the World.

The most sustained and passionate urge to leave the islands for a ‘better break’
is portrayed in Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* and George Lamming’s *The
Emigrants*. The immigrant novels of Selvon and Lamming trace the lives of a group
of emigrants who travelled to England to find a ‘better break’ and for ‘better future’.
The exile of each of these emigrants is a culmination of personal experiences, which
in most cases are precipitated by the historical background of colonization. In *The
Emigrants*, the middle part, “Rooms and Resident,” speaks of the individual destinies
of the voyagers when they reach London, scatter, and become anonymous in the
strange busy city. If we try to analyze what emigration unfolds to each of the
characters, the picture becomes very bleak and discouraging. Their life in London
shatters all their illusions about their ‘Mother Country’. They are treated only as
‘coloured masses,’ not as individuals. Life in London is a perpetual struggle for sheer
survival for the several emigrants who reach England in the same ship. None really
succeeds; some flop utterly, while many wear out in the struggle, like many of
Lamming’s characters. *The Emigrants* dramatizes the crumbling of the emigrant’s
illusions, his alienation and personal integration which was Lamming’s major
experience in the metropolis. In *In the Castle of My Skin*, Lamming’s Trumper, a
returned exile, presents a positive vision of exile and of the immigrant’s experience as
capable of fostering a sense of community, race, and of enlarging the West Indian’s
vision of himself. But, in *The Emigrants*, this is hardly realized and there is a sense of community on the ship that transports West Indian emigrants into England, because of shared vulnerability and dependence. In the metropolis, West Indian immigrants exist only on the periphery of the mainstream of British life, goaded by a sense of exile and unable to alter their past and unsure of their future which is beyond their control.

While Lamming’s immigrant characters appear in a perpetual somber cage, Selvon’s migrants are constantly outside, often on aimless fun-loving sprees, but usually maintaining a sense of togetherness, communal boning, a shared vocabulary and attitudes which make it possible for them to create their own ‘portion’ of England in spite of the wider loneliness they experience. Although the light-hearted tone often prevents a serious engagement and confrontation with the real psychological effects of alienation and disconnection, it establishes much more than Lamming does, a sense of West Indian presence, a warm and humane presence that often contrasts with the rigid coldness of their English neighbours. Some of the novels of Austin Clarke are about the West Indian, chiefly Barbadian immigrants to Canada, the attendant clash of the cultured, and the sense of disorientation and alienation. The psychological pressures and the situation in which the immigrants find themselves heighten their problems of self-realization. Like Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners*, Clarke’s immigrants are also mostly a working-class population which preserves West Indian cultural patterns even in exile. Clarke’s concern may not be as consistently sure as Selvon’s but he appears to be rather serious about the experience of the exile in London. He does not operate completely from within the comic mode, but blends it with protest. Clarke presents the black man in the white world, whereas Selvon makes the white world a backdrop for the events of the story in his novels.

**Theme of Exile and Immigration in Selvon’s Immigrant Novels**

Some West Indians migrated to England with a view to improving their standard of living and some in search of order, peace and recognition. But, many were disillusioned by London. The journey from the island to the city proved to be one of mere disillusion and disappointment. Moses, the eponymous ‘hero’ of Selvon’s well-known group of novels of immigration to Britain– *The Lonely Londoners, Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*– makes the following satiric observations on the plight of Black Londoners:
The alarms of all the black people in Britain are time to ring before the rest of the population. It is their destiny to be up and about at the crack O’dawn. In these days of pollution and environment, he is very lucky, for he can breathe the freshest air of the new day before anybody else. He does not know how fortunate he is. He does not know how privileged he is to be in charge of the city whilst the rest of Britain is still abed. He strides the streets… he is superintendent of all the hospital… He ain’t reached the stage at of scrubbing the floors of Buckingham Palace… There is scramble amongst the rest of the… these blessings reserved solely for him. He should realize that if it was not for him the city would go on sleeping forever. (*Moses Ascending*, 5-6)

The black man is therefore the backbone of the city but we see him only at night.

In *The Lonely Londoners* and in the London sections of the short stories *Ways of Sunlight* (1957), Selvon writes of the excitement and ‘cultural shock’ of the West Indian migrants living at the heart of that ‘real world’ and exposed to all kinds of deprivation and opposition, but clinging to the magic of that dream of ‘better future’. Moses, in *The Lonely Londoners*, reflects:

> I walked on Waterloo Bridge, “I rendezvoused at Charing Cross, Piccadilly Circus is my playground”, to say these things, to have lived these things, to have lived in the great city of London, centre of the world…. What it is that would keep men although by and large in truth and in fact, they catching their royal to make a living, staying in a cramp-up room where you have to do everything—sleep, eat, dress, wash, cook, live. Why it is that although they grumble about it all the time… everyone cagey about saying outright that if the chance come they will go back to them green islands in the sun? (*The Lonely Londoners*, 121-122)

Moses finds no answer to reassure himself with the hope that summer will soon be there, when, “flowers come and now and then the old sun shining, is as if life start all over again, as if it still have time… the summer does really be hearts” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 124-125). But, he is aware that there is misery and sorrow for the exile and isolated in the metropolis and he thinks:
He don’t know the right word, but he have the right feeling in his heart.
As if the boys laughing, but they only laughing because to think so much
about every thing would be a big calamity. (The Lonely Londoners, 126)

They realize that they exist in this world both as spectators and as participants, drawn
to its magic like moths to a flame. Yet, their minds are nurtured by prejudice and
antagonism. The Lonely Londoners also deals with the shattering of the illusion of
belonging, the illusion of being English, and indeed the illusion about who the
English are. The journey to England is a journey to an illusion and the sojourn in
England is a shattering of that illusion. The illusion is, firstly, a material dream about
the wealth of England; the streets are meant to be paved with gold, with work well-
paid and readily available. Secondly, it is an illusion about the courtesy, hospitality
and human warmth of the English as Moses remarks:

This is a lonely miserable city, as if it was that we didn’t together now
and then talk about things back home, we would suffer like hell… Here
is not like home where you have friends all about… Nobody in London
does really accepts you. They tolerate you, yes, but you can’t go to their
house and eat or sit down and talk. I ain’t have no sort of family life for
us here. (The Lonely Londoners, 114)

London, the ‘Promised Land’ breeds such social loneliness within the aliens that they
are constantly hanging in between two worlds. They try to renegotiate not only their
existentialist ‘self’ but also at the same time find an anchor point desperately in the
‘new’ environment.

The novel The Lonely Londoners focuses on the larger body of immigrants,
the working class. Selvon’s immigrants are offered the worst jobs. They pay high
prices for insecure tenancy in the most undesirable houses, and they indulge in sexual
exploits that seldom include anything other than sex. They are exposed to rain, snow,
wind and fog and are driven to live as pirates or parasites on the fringes of a host
society. The illusory hospitality of the English society involves an imagined
willingness of their white women to readily accept black men. As Galahad reveals on
the eve of his first date with a white woman:

This was something he used to dream about in Trinidad. The time when
he was leaving, Frank tell him: ‘Boy, it have bags of white pussy in
London, and you will eat till you tired’. And now, the first date in the heart of London, dressed to kill, ready to escort the number around the town, anywhere she want to go, any place at all. (*The Lonely Londoners*, 74)

Sexual exploits can be read as ‘reversed colonialism’ where the black man desires the white female body to get back the lost dignity which has been snatched by humiliation from the white men. England’s fabulous and romantic history attracted the West Indian emigrants but their participation in its history was only an illusion. Further, colonial education degraded their history and culture.

In the novel *The Lonely Londoners*, the dream of West Indian settlers in England was shattered and the West Indian psyche was damaged as they were exposed to a superior alien culture. Illusion and reality, or dream and awakening, become central in many West Indian novels, and it is for this reason Moses occupies the central position as the leader of the West Indian group in Selvon’s novels. The references to ‘Church’ and ‘Confession’ in the novel endow Moses with religious significance. Later, Selvon shifts the action to the embankment and Moses, a solitary figure, staring at the river, brooding on his fate, and the fate of his fellow West Indians:

The old Moses, standing on the banks of the Thames. Sometimes he thinks he see some sort of profound realization in his life, as if all that happen to him is experience that make him a better man, as if now he could draw apart from any hustling and just sit down and watch other people fight to live. Under the Kiff-Kiff laughter, behind the ballad and the episode, the what-happening, the summer-sis-hearts, he could see a great aimlessness, a great restless, swaying movement that leaving you standing in the same spot. As if a forlorn shadow of doom fall on all the spades in the country. (*The Lonely Londoners*, 125)

This picture of “old Moses standing on the banks of the Thames” (125) as a visionary, alludes to the Biblical Moses on the banks of the Nile, brooding on the fate of his people in bondage, his people stranded in a foreign land, brooding on the possibility of exodus and of locating the ‘promised land’. Selvon’s Moses, presented in the image of Biblical Moses, provides an added dimension to the novels of dream or
illusion of Utopia and the human bondage. But, the difference between Selvon’s Moses and the Biblical Moses is that the former and his fellow West Indians have no place to go, no ‘Promised Land’ to inherit and inhabit. England is not their ‘Promised Land’ and poverty prevents their return to the West Indies as they cannot afford their boat-fares to get back to their native country. However, they are forced to become optimistic about the possibilities of their ‘better future’ in England in course of time, thus realizing their long cherished dream of becoming prosperous and leading a peaceful and comfortable life in Europe. So, they resolve to stay back and try to establish some roots, and become part of the history of their place of settlement. Moses’ conversation with Harris and Galahad reveals their consciousness of their ‘rootlessness’ and their craving for roots:

Hello boy, what happening so what happening man, what happening. How Long you I Britain Boy? You think this winter bad? You should have been here in ‘52 what happening, What happening man. (The Lonely Londoners, 124)

By referring back to the winter of ‘52,’ Harris is indicating that he is now a part of history of the place, part of the national memory, as opposed to new comers such as Galahad, who are yet to establish themselves and mark their existence in the new land. This craving for identification with the English history and this desire to belong and to participate in the making of English history, are sustained throughout the novel. At the close of the novel, Moses also broods again on the History of England:

The changing of the seasons, the cold slicing winds, the falling leaves, sunlight on green grass, snow on the land, London particular. Oh what it is and where it is and why it is, no one knows but to have said: ‘I walked on Waterloo Bridge,’ ‘I rendezvoused at Charing Cross,’ ‘Piccadilly Circus is my playground,’ to say these things, to have lived these things, to have lived in the great city of London, centre of the World. To one day lean against the wind walking up the Bays water Road, to see the leaves swirl and dance and spin on the pavement, to write a casual letter home beginning: ‘Last night, in Trafalgar Square… (The Lonely Londoners, 121)
Moses, however, is finally detached from the English History because the white society does not allow any West Indian participation in the present nor does it recognize the West Indian dimension in its past history. The West Indian ‘self’ is thus stranded in England, both physically and spiritually. This alienation is emphasized in Galahad’s first outing in London, when he gets lost and suddenly feels wholly estranged, wholly alone:

Galahad make for the tube station when he left Moses, and he stand up there on Queensway watching everybody going about their business, and a feeling of loneliness and fright come on him all of his sudden. He forget all the brave words he was talking to Moses, and he realize that here he is, in London, and he ain’t have money nor work or place to sleep or any friend or anything…. They not afraid somebody thief the money?... He bounce up against a woman coming out… is only he who walking stupid… On top of that, is one of those winter mornings when a kind of fog hovering around. The sun shining…. it just there is the sky like a force-ripe orange. When he look up… he sees its only half past ten in the morning. (The Lonely Londoners, 25-26)

The coldness of the English weather, matched by the coldness of the people, and the strangeness of their streets, leaves Galahad in a state of loneliness. The immigrant’s illusion of England is one of hospitality and warmth, in human terms, and familiar in terms of the British that the West Indians possessed in the colonies, suddenly dissolves and panic sets in.

The disappointment with England takes many forms. The West Indians are faced with outright discrimination in housing and employment. Selvon’s immigrants are offered the worst jobs; they pay high prices for insecure tenancy in the most undesirable houses; and they indulge in sexual exploits that seldom include anything other than sex. They suffer from rain, snow, wind, and fog, and are driven to become pirates or parasites on the fringes of a host society which regards them with hostility or indifference, and with an often unacknowledged fear of contamination. When Moses “sit[s] down and pay fare he take out a white handkerchief and blow his nose. The handkerchief turn black …” (The Lonely Londoners, 7).
Galad addresses his black colour when he tried to understand why he is being treated so. The incident and conversation reflect the prejudice regarding race and colour:

And Galad would take his hand from under the blanket, as he lay there studying how the night before he was in the lavatory and two white fellars come in and say how these black bastards have the lavatory dirty, and they didn’t know that he was there, and when he come out they say hello mate have a cigarette. And Galad watch the colour of his hand, and talk to it, saying, “Colour, is you causing all this, you know. Why the hell you can’t be blue, or red or green, if you can’t be white? You know is you that cause a lot of misery in the world. Is not me, you know, is you: I ain’t do anything to infuriate the people and them, is you! Look at you, so black and innocent, and this time so you causing misery all over the world!” So Galad talking to the colour Black, as if is a person… ([The Lonely Londoners], 72)

The characters are the fictional representatives of the historical lens about racism and the colour prejudice which hampered the harmonious socio-racial fusion of the two worlds. Beneath the humour portrayed is Selvon’s exploration of the separation of self from body, the divorce of personality from flesh which racism affects. The West Indian finally becomes schizophrenic under the pressure of racism. The psychological implication of racist attitudes occurs due to colour prejudice.

Selvon’s immigrants face grinding poverty which forces them to eat pigeons snatched secretly from public parks. The white women they dreamt to be nothing but common sluts and old prostitutes, and possession of these women provides no entry into white society. For instance, Bart, a light-skinned Trinidadian, goes out with an ex-prostitute, telling her that he is a Latin-American, and comes from South America. He is ashamed of his West Indian background and is chased from his girlfriend’s house by her father. When she leaves him, he spends the rest of his time walking all over London, peering into buses, trains, tubes, to find her, until he becomes haggard and haunted. But the illusion continues, and he never finds her again.

Bart’s madness afflicts the conscience of other West Indian characters in the novel in different ways. Selvon’s concern is to explore the psychology of
deracination, disappointment and rejection. A Jamaican fellow, breaks down as the pressures of poverty and disappointment mount, and suddenly goes insane in the dole office, tearing up the files and beating up the officers, until the police arrive and whisk him away. One of the inhabitants of the city takes Cap, a character in the novel, to the back of the station where:

All Cap seeing is railway line and big junk of iron all about the yard, and some thick, heavy cable lying around. It have some snow on the ground, and the old fog at home as usual. It like hell… (*The Lonely Londoners*, 36)

Seeking a footing in this strange inhospitable ground also are even stranger creatures, including “a old woman who look like she would dead any minute” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 13), and on a cold winter evening, shambling out of sleep and the last carriage a ‘miracle of metabolism,’ the irrepressible phenomenon Henry Oliver, clad in “a old great tropical suit and a pair of witchekong and no overcoat or muffler or gloves or anything for the cold… (*The Lonely Londoners*, 16)

Selvon’s immigrants inhabit a nightmare world. They meet at Waterloo station, “a place of arrival and departure [for black immigrants] and a place where [we] see people crying good bye and kissing welcome” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 9). The immigrant next call upon the employment exchange:

It ain’t have no place in the world exactly like place where a lot of men get together to look for work and draw money from the welfare state while they ain’t working. Is a kind of place where hate and disgust and avarice and malice and sympathy and sorrow and pity all mix up. Is a place where every one is your enemy and your friend. (*The Lonely Londoners*, 29)

It is worth nothing that many of the details which go to make up the deathly universe of *The Lonely Londoners* are also present in Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men*. Describing the effects of the London city, Ralph Singh, the narrator and protagonist, speaks of the people being “trapped into fixed postures”, of “the personality divided bewilderingly into compartments”, and of “the panic of ceasing to feel myself as a whole person.” Selvon’s third person narrative voice sees London as a place which is “divide[d] up in little worlds, and you stay in the world you belong to and you don’t know about what
happening in the other ones except what you read in the papers” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 58).

The insecure Lewis develops a fixation that his wife entertains lovers while he is on night-shift; the smiling Cap’s innocent face masks a ruthless determination to survive and exploit a world that has neither meaning nor structure; and “Moses sigh a long sigh like a man who live life and see nothing at all in it and who frighten as the years go by wondering what it is all about” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 94).

Rather than experiencing significant changes in their values, Selvon’s immigrants failed to escape the pleasure-seeking syndrome and do not grow as emotionally mature, independent men. Selvon’s immigrants rigidly maintain a closely-knit male community. Women and family are on the periphery of this community; marriage is undesirable and those who do marry—Lewis and Joseph in *The Lonely Londoners*, Fitz in *The Housing Lark*—for instance are either ridiculed or come to grief. Women, both white and black, are merely ‘things,’ ‘children’ or ‘pieces’ to be used and discarded at the discretion of men. Selvon’s immigrants practice the chauvinistic philosophy that the female is at the service of the male. This attitude is all pervasive, and nowhere is it better illustrated than in Battersby’s brooding adolescent fantasy about an ever-compliant Geni:

The Geni say, “Master, it ain’t have no one women who is the nicest, but this one could change into anything you want. All you have to do is to press the right tit, and she would change into whatever you feel for in your mind. If you feel like a stalwart blonde... she will turn into one. If you feel like a slim brunette, just press the right tit. (*The Housing Lark*, 9)

For Battersby, the female presence—white or black— is merely a source of amusement, and indeed one thinks here of the older Moses’ decision now that he has risen in the world to “hit a white stroke for variety”. If and when he does marry, the woman, Battersby assures his friend Matilda, will exist merely for him.

Battersby’s attitude is neither extreme nor unique; it is so with most of Selvon’s immigrants. In some cases, there is a sub-conscious fear of the female; in others, the fear is rather overt. Often, too, this fear is mixed with hate and anger. All of these responses to the female are noticeable, for instance, in the story of ‘Small
CHAPTER IV: Creole Identity in Selvon’s Immigrant Novels

Change,’ whose rising fortunes with London Transport are ruined by an annoying woman in *Ways of Sunlight*. The older Battersby, who withers long since, wrung through the London mill, is still a misogynist. If it was in his power he “would chain women to the railings in Downing Street, and leave them there to attract foreign currency from the tourists” (*The Housing Lark*, 144).

**Black/Creole Identity in Selvon’s Immigrant Novels**

*The Lonely Londoners, Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating* are novels of West Indian immigrants and these novels are considered as the ‘London trilogy’. All the three novels have the same hero, Moses, and similar minor characters. Selvon’s fictional account of the narratives of West Indian migrant remains both a literary landmark and a historical reference for understanding the experience of the first wave of post Windrush Caribbean migrants.

*The Lonely Londoners* explores the first phase of Britain’s Black Community from the time of their arrival as ‘West Indian migrants’ to that of their ‘transition,’ to assume what Stuart Hall calls, the ‘New Ethnicity’. This novel is able to capture the changing identity of London’s West Indian migrants as a historical reference. It captures the process of identity change amongst London’s Caribbean migrant community in the 1950s from self-identifying as British into the emergence of a new ‘hybrid identity’. *The Lonely Londoners* captures the sense of British and hybrid identities amongst the Caribbean migrants in the conversation between Moses and Galahad with Moses stating:

…. see if they serve you. You know the hurtful part of it? The Pole who have that restaurant, he ain’t have no more right in this country than me. In fact we is British subjects and he is only a foreigner, we have more right that any people from the Continent (Europe)…. and enjoy what this country have because is we who bleed. (*The Lonely Londoners*, 24)

In this scene, Selvon uses Moses to depict how the West Indians saw themselves as socially and legally British when they arrived in Britain, rather than as strangers or foreigners.

The West Indians were initially the most flexible assimilationists of all coloured immigrants. Selvon captures the cultural identification of many of the Caribbean migrants as British and English through the character of Harris. The
narrator describes Harris as “a fellar who like ladeda, and he like English customs….and when he dress you think is some Englishman going to work in the city, bowler, and umbrella, with the Times, only thing Harris face black” (The Lonely Londoners, 111).

‘Cultural diversity’ or ‘multiculturalism’ is a key term in postcolonial study. In common usage, both terms refer interchangeably to the variety of cultures and the need to acknowledge this variety so as to avoid universal, prescriptive, cultural definitions. However, Homi Bhabha, in the essay “The Commitment to Theory” (1988), employs the terms as “oppositions to draw a distinction between two ways of representing culture” (in Ashcroft, 60). Selvon’s main characters reflect the diversity of West Indies. Moses and Galahad are from Trinidad, Tolroy is from Jamaica, and Cap hails from Nigeria. Despite this diversity, all Caribbean migrants, and all coloured migrants are identified as ‘black’ by white Britain. London has become a ‘salad bowl’ and a ‘melting pot’ of different cultures and ethnic people. Selvon captures the ‘black identity’ and ‘hybrid identity’ through the character of Bart. Readers can easily note the disturbing vibrations in the renegotiation of identity by immigrants:

Bart have light skin. Like a lot of brown-skin fellars who frighten for lash, he telling everybody that he is a Latin-American, that he come from South America. If a fellar too black he don’t like to be in the company of the boys [he says] “I am not one of them. Look at my skin colour” but a few door slam in Bart face, English people give him old diplomacy, and Bart boil down and come like one of the boys. (The Lonely Londoners, 45-46)

Set in the heart of the colonial metropolis, the novel evolves in London, the central locale for identity of the Caribbean migrants. The characters identify London, not Britain, as ‘Home’. Therefore, the emergence of ‘Black British identity,’ is captured by Selvon as the transition of Caribbean migrants into ‘black Londoners’. Selvon himself confesses that it was in “London where he became aware of his self and a ‘national pride,’ in being what [he] never felt at home” (Critical Perspective on Sam Selvon, 34). Throughout The Lonely Londoners, Galahad is the medium of the process of identification with London. The narrator states “[London] divides up in
little worlds, and you stay in the world you belong to and you don’t know anything about what happening in the other’s one’s” (The Lonely Londoners, 58).

*The Lonely Londoners* is a classic novel of West Indian immigrants in London. Creolization, then, would be very important in the novel. Selvon’s London trilogy was written in the crucial years between the post-war period and the 1980s. The language used in this novel is the Trinidadian Creole dialect. Throughout the writing process of the novel, Selvon speaks of the unconscious power of writing in dialect which, he feels, was the only means available to him. In an interview with Michal Fabre, he reveals that the practice of writing, for him, was being influenced by Trinidad Creole, which, he says, is “a modified dialect which could be understood by European readers” (*Critical Perspectives on Samuel Selvon*, 66).

*The Lonely Londoners* employs a loosely-knit plot structure to hold the barely-related sketches together. Selvon traces the West Indians’ exile to England to a lack of ‘stable’ political and cultural identity. But, for Lamming, there is in such critical writing, a tendency to emphasize on the spiritual trauma of the journey at the sacrifice of an analysis which shows the historical and social force. In this context, Selvon says in his interview with K.T. Sunitha: “[what] I am trying to do is to anlayse the cause as other learned or scholarly writers may do” (*Interviews by K.T. Sunitha*, 26).

*The Lonely Londoners* is a novel of realism and it depicts the lives of the immigrants in London. Selvon clearly explains about the real experience of life in London. He says:

I believe in trying to capture the realities of what exists, and in *The Lonely Londoners*, almost everyone of the experiences and the characters were drawn from real life... What really motivates and interests me is the behaviour of the people and the reasons why they behave as they do. I also like to record the reality of their lives and experiences which I think is enough to spark interests and curiosity and the desire to know more. (*Interviews by K.T. Sunitha*, 27)

The novel *The Lonely Londoners* deals with the issue of migration from the Caribbean to England between 1930 and 1950. It focuses on the large body of working class immigrants and the issue of nostalgia. It begins with Moses Aloetta receiving the newcomer Henry Oliver, known in the novel as Sir Galahad, who is coming from the
Caribbean to London. Moses is waiting at the “Waterloo station to meet a fellar (Oliver) who was coming from Trinidad on the boat train” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 7). There, he meets Tolroy, “a Jamaican friend” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 10), who came to receive his mother, and finds himself “nervous and frighten” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 10) to welcome his mother Tanty, an elderly lady, who came along with Lewis and Agnes, a couple. Moses experiences nostalgia and alienation when he waits for his friend at the waterloo station. He feels, “… a feeling of home sickness that he never felt in the nine-ten years. Feeling a nostalgia hit him and he was surprise (*The Lonely Londoners*, 10). Moses meets a reporter at the tube, assuming that Moses has just arrived at London and starts asking him questions. He explains about the realistic situation of London:

> The situation is desperate. They can’t get work, can’t get place to live, and we only getting worse jobs it have… He had a lot of things to say […] all the people in the place say they go strike…. Under a big headline, saying how the colour bar was causing trouble again. (*The Lonely Londoners*, 12-13)

The reporter then infers that Moses is not a new comer and moves over to Tanty and the family. He asks, “Why so many people are leaving Jamaica and come to England?” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 15) Tanty excitedly responds that “it have more work in England, and better pay” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 15), but in reality, “England is the country that only white people does like” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 15) and the immigrants (black/creole) people have the work “to cook and wash the clothes and clean the house” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 15). Galahad is made of a strange physical disposition as for as the climate is concerned: “he feels cold in winter and warm in summer” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 15), but for Moses it is “a test who living London a long” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 16) and he looks upon “winter as a beast” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 16). Galahad arrives into the London winter with no warm clothes. As he came with just three pounds, he had no money to purchase winter wear.

As all the immigrants have to find job for themselves, Galahad sets out alone in search of a job without the help of Moses though Moses says “both of us is Trinidadians and we must help out one another” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 21). Searching for a job is difficult for the immigrants. Moses advises Galahad:
London not like Port of Spain…. These days, spades all over the place, and every shipload is big news, and the English people don’t like the boys coming to England to work and live…. They frighten that we get job in front of them, though that does never happen. (*The Lonely Londoners*, 23-25)

The novel expresses the poor economic reality of the immigrants and a drastic failure to find the postures in the alien world. It also depicts the widely prevalent disillusioned existence at the heart of the metropolis.

There were more than 40,000 West Indians in London. The novel reveals the existence of fellow immigrants like Moses and Galahad, from Trinidad; Captain (Cap) from Nigeria; Mahal from India; Tolray from the West Indies; Daniel hails from France. Bartholomew (Bart), and Five Past Twelve are from Barbados, while Harris, Brackley and Joseph originate from West Indies. All the immigrants are universally treated as ‘black’ and they are identified as ‘Creole/Black’ or ‘Other’ in the white dominated English society. The characters in the novel work in tubes, factories, railway stations and perform household chores for low wages.

Captain, or Cap, is a Nigerian immigrant and “his father send him to London to study law, but Captain went stupid when he arrive in the big city” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 32). He is a lazy man who survives without work or food and he is a kind of person who can survive without anything. Cap’s trysts with women and his marriage to a French girl are vividly described. He “spent money wild on woman and cigarette and he would sleep all the day (*The Lonely Londoners*, 32). He continues with his carefree life even after marriage. Through Cap’s character Selvon describes the living condition in London. Cap explains:

> The people who living in London don’t really know how behind them railway station does be so desolate and discouraging. It like another world. It look like hell…. They [white people] send for a store keeper work and they want to put in the yard to lift heavy iron. They think that is all we good for, and they keeping all the soft clerical jobs for the white fellars. (*The Lonely Londoners*, 36)

Next, is the story of Bartholomew, or Bart, who is ashamed of being identified as ‘Caribbean/Black’. He is a friend of Moses and the author explains that, “Bart have
light skin he neither here nor there he go around telling everybody that he is a Latin-American, that he come from South America” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 45). Aided by his light skin, he claims to be a Latin American. He tries to imitate the white man. He had “ambition that always too big for him. He always talking about this party and that meeting” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 46). He is in a romantic relationship with an English girl whose parents are furious with him. Finally, Beatrice, his girl, also deserts him and Bart keeps on searching for her till the very end of the novel.

The novel moves back to Tolroy and his family. Tolroy gets every one jobs and settles them in London. Lewis starts to work on the same job as Moses, working in the factory on night shifts. He feels: “the work is a hard working and paying lower wages then they would have to pay white fellars” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 51). He gets suspicious about his wife Agnes, listening to hearsay about wives having affairs when husbands go out to work. Moses playfully fuels his doubts and Lewis beats up Agnes, prompting her to leave him. Tolroy lives with his family in the Harrow Road, and “the people in that area call the working class” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 57). Selvon provides a real picture of the status of working and also about the immigrant street:

> In London that it have Working Class; there you will find a lot of spades. This is the real world, where men know what it is to hustle a pound to pay the rent when Friday come. The houses around here old and grey and weather beaten, the walls cracking like the last days of Pompeii, it ain’t have no hot water, none of the house have bath … or else go to the public bath. Some of the houses still had gas light. The street does be always dirty except it rain fall. Sometime a truck does come with a kind of revolving broom to sweep the road. It always have little children playing in the road, they ain’t have no other place to play. (*The Lonely Londoners*, 57-58)

The next episode is Galahad’s date with Daisy, a white English Girl. In this episode, racism puzzles Galahad and he tries to find explanation for it. Galahad finally vents out his anger at ‘black’ and he thinks that his ‘black’ is the culprit for the humiliation he faced. He explains in disgust:
Lord, what it is we people do in this world that we have to suffer so? What it is we want that the white people and then find it so hard to give? A little work, a little food, a little place to sleep. We not asking for the Sun, or the Moon. We only want to get by we don’t even want to get on. … ‘colour is you that causing all this. Why the hell you can’t be blue or red or green, if you can’t be white? You know is you that cause a lot of misery in the world. Is not me, you know, is you! Look at you, you so black and innocent and this time so you causing misery all over the world!’ (*The Lonely Londoners*, 72)

Galahad is frustrated because of ‘colour’ and ‘racism’. He cannot understand why the blacks are being illtreated when all that the ‘black’ or ‘immigrants’ needed were just food, shelter and work. Black people want to survive. The black immigrants have no desire to enjoy equal rights with white people. His outburst: “we only want to get by, we don’t even want to get on” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 72), explains the real intention of black immigrants in London. Galahad starts speaking pejoratively about the colour ‘black,’ and racism for “all the misery in the world!” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 72)

In the next episode, the character of Big City is revealed. He “came from an orphanage in one of the country districts in Trinidad” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 77). He was greatly fascinated with metropolitan cities, in which he thinks that he can have a great life. Big City’s peculiar characteristic is that he gets confused with names: “instead of hearing ‘Music’ Big City thought ‘fusic’ and since that nobody could ever get him to say music” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 78). He calls ‘Notting Hill’ as ‘Nottingham Gate,’ ‘Gloucester Road’ as ‘Gloucestirshire Road’ and so on. He used to eat so much food and “he always thinking about the big cities of the world” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 78). That is why he got the name ‘Big City’. Big City wants to make quick money. He desires “to have money, buy out a whole street of houses, and give it to the boys and say: “Here look place live. And I would put a notice on all the boards, “Keep the Water Coloured, No Rooms For Whites” (*The Lonely Londoners*, 78). He would like to take revenge on white people and it clearly shows that Selvon ingrained the tendency to revenge in ‘black/immigrant’ people as a decolonization process.
The next character is Five Past Twelve, who came from Barbados to London after the war and got work as a truck driver. He is called ‘Five Past Twelve’ because he resembles, “black like midnight” (The Lonely Londoners, 94). He is fond of parties, fete, circus, carnivals and he also has “women all over London” (The Lonely Londoners, 94). In this episode, Harris is introduced has a fellow, “who like to play ladeda, and he like English customs and thing, he does be polite and does get up in the bus to let woman sit down, which is thing even English men don’t do. And when he dress, you think in some English man going work in the city, bowler hat and umbrella, and briefcase … only thing, Harris face black” (The Lonely Londoners, 95). Harris intended behaving like an English man. He wants to look well dignified like an English man.

The latter part of the novel plays an important role in questioning the ‘black identity’ and the ‘crises of unemployment’. The author explains: “nobody can’t get any work, fellars who had work looking it,” (The Lonely Londoners, 106). This episode also deals with the weather, poverty and also how Galahad catches a pigeon in the park to survive and Cap catches seagulls. Selvon depicts the episode of eating seagulls and pigeons as a mark of resistance on the part of black immigrants. This part also has long discussions about staying in London. The winter season in London is very bad. Galahad tries to catch a pigeon in the park to eat and he feels: “… in this country, people prefer to see man starve that a cat or dog want something to eat” (The Lonely Londoners, 107). Moses reveals the plight of the immigrants and their hard working condition and he confesses: “work hard like hell to get these days” (The Lonely Londoners, 110). The novel is full of social commentary, by the characters and by the narrator. The novel captures the loneliness of immigrants. Moses is sick of London and is waiting to get back to Trinidad.

… sometimes I look back on all the years I spend in Brit’n, … looking at things in general life really hard for the boys (immigrants) in London. This is a lonely miserable city, if it was that we didn’t get together now and then to talk about things back home, we would suffer like hell. Here is not like a home. (The Lonely Londoners, 114)

The title of the novel signifies at the end of the novel. Moses feels lonely and miserable in London. Moreover, all the characters depicted are immigrants and through whom the author explains the realistic identity of ‘black/creole’ people in the
white society. The title of the novel clearly notes that the characters in the story are represented as ‘Black Londoners’ and also ‘Lonely Londoners’. Racism is rejected outright by this change of title. The immigrants are ‘black,’ and their experience and identity are shown in the novel. So, there is racist depiction in the novel, but a realistic one, that of a city which breeds ‘loneliness’. The novel ends with Moses standing by the bridge feeling that “he had lived in the great city of London, centre of the world” (The Lonely Londoners, 121). Moses would like to write a book of memories as a form of resistance and he imagines the scenario, “one day sweating in the factory and next day all the newspapers have your [Moses] name and photo, saying how you [Moses] are a new literary giant” (The Lonely Londoners, 126).

Moses Ascending was written in 1975 and is considered a sequel to The Lonely Londoners. Moses Ascending updates issues and problems faced by the West Indian immigrants in London in the 1950s and 1960s. In this novel, Selvon explores the process of social transformations (creolization) and historical change. Regarding this novel, Selvon says in an interview:

Moses Ascending is a way of registering progress in the social situation of the West Indians in London, both personal and economic progress within the West Indian community or the society at large, and progress in the development of understanding between the groups and races. (Critical Perspective on Sam Selvon, 72)

Selvon attempts to deal with two central issues- ‘the economic progress’ and ‘socio-ethnic situation’- among the West Indian immigrants. Moses bought a house from his Jamaican friend, Tolroy, and he became a landlord where he was tenant in the early novel, The Lonely Londoners. Moses says:

I would be doomed to the basement brigade for the rest of my life. Having lived below the surface of the world all my life I ensconced myself in the highest flat in the house: If it had an attic I might of even gone higher still. (Moses Ascending, 3)

From the 1960s onwards, writers began to write on immigrants drawn largely from the Caribbean, India, Pakistan and East Africa and the changing British cultures. Selvon’s Moses Ascending reflects on the ways of “social mutation that involved the British community at large” (Creolizing Culture, 213). Moses Ascending depicts the
Black Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. It was written in 1975, almost twenty years after *The Lonely Londoners*. It is often considered a problematic sequel to *The Lonely Londoners*. Maria Grazia Sindoni says *Moses Ascending* is “a sort of problematic sequel. Its [Moses Ascending] material was drawn from topical realities of seventies, Britain, and as such, it updates issues and problems faced by West Indian immigrants in London” (*Creolizing Culture*, 212).

Arguably, modern British racism was born in the 1950s; the point at which colonial discourse was redeployed to account for a new colonial relationship. Homi K Bhabha describes colonial discourse as being the means to “construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (*The Location of Culture*, 70). This discourse provided the myths of Empire, underpinned by the scientific racism of the 19th Century which proved the ‘evolutionary inferiority’ of the subjects of Empire, along with the pornographic uses of Empire as a place of unrestrained, primitive sexuality.

The immigrant novel *Moses Ascending* by Samuel Selvon picks up the threads of Moses Aloetta’s life of twenty years later. At the beginning of the novel, written in a bold and often blundering first person, Moses buys a house, deciding that it is time to be a landlord living upstairs, living downstairs after being a tenant for so many years. Here, ‘house’ is symbolic of the accession of the colonized immigrants to hierarchical status within the metropolis. Moses also decides to write his memories. Moses plays off colonial archetypes and myths, using Prospero and Caliban, Robinson Crusoe, and British imperial history. Moses’ house becomes a hilarious symbol of the multicultural ferment of London in the 1970s. His basement becomes the headquarters of the local ‘Black Panther Party’. Two Pakistanis run an illegal immigration ring from his first floor.

In the introduction to *Moses Ascending* by Morris, explains that the novel is analyzed as an attack on the colonized minds: “the whole of the novel is largely a response to the assumption that the culture of others, whether Africans, Asians, or Caribbean people” (*Moses Ascending*, IX), Selvon attacks racial and cultural discrimination in a passage, in which Moses is concerned with the fact that black people in London often work on night shifts:
… has only to wait for the knell of midnight or thereabouts when the civilized of world is in bed or about to hit the hay for the Stalwart blacks to come tumbling out of ghettoes.

Once again, the city is in their hands. (Moses Ascending, 8)

It is opposing of the civilized world to ‘the stalwart blacks,’ in ironical way, the ‘civilized’ must be white. But, there is a triumphant quality that has the stereotypes of ‘confute and redirect’. Generally, the process of creolization would argued that the “Caribbean culture meet[s] domestic British Culture, as it has met many cultures before it, and leave[s] its obvious mark in the process of creolization, a process that for Selvon is the essence of Caribbean being” (Nationalism and Identity: Culture and the Imagination in a Caribbean Diaspora, 111). Moses comments on the domestic British culture in a typical fashion:

Some white men are taking the initiative and snatching up black things before the black man has a chance. Whereas it used to be the top of the social ladder to be seen escorting a white piece to the Dilly or the circus, brothers are scorning that sort of things nowadays and as these black beauties grace the scene, it is to be noted that they are found-dated soon enough. (Moses Ascending, 15)

Moses is witness to the creolization of urban British culture and he thinks that is “blessed to be coming of this new generation of Black Britons” (Moses Ascending, 3). Sir Galahad “drew attention to the property” (Moses Ascending, 1) to settle in Britain. He thinks about the culture and racial mix, which is an integral part of the creolization process; he also reflects on “desperate white woman seek blacks companion with a view to matrimony; and speculating when he come to the properties-for-sale page, buying houses and renovating them to sell and make big profit” (Moses Ascending, 1). Moses is a witness to the creolization and “not merely an illicit miscegenation but a wholesale cultural marriage…. and Selvon’s paean to the strength of Caribbean culture and its reincarnation in Black power” (Nationalism and Identity, 111).

London is considered the center of assimilation of all cultures and in Moses Ascending, Moses represents the Caribbean identity and culture and it is “observed fully the representation of creolization life in London” (Nationalism and Identity,
‘Marches,’ ‘demonstrations,’ and ‘movements’ dominate the news head-lines; Moses’ white Man Friday becomes a panther. In the novel, Moses mentions only contemporary Caribbean or Black American writers such as Lamming, Salkey and James Baldwin, and he himself begins to take on aspects of Muslim culture from his tenants. Thus “the novel is a delightful record of creolization of London in the making Black of White British, and the making white of Caribbean people. For Selvon, it is a process that indicates the strength and durability of Caribbean culture” (Nationalism and Identity, 112). The novel portrays the process of creolization through assimilation. Moses says: “He [Bob] is a willing worker, eager to learn the ways of Black man” (Moses Ascending, 4). Moses finds harmony of being in assimilation of cultures. In the novel, Moses represents the ‘Black’ and ‘Master’ where as Bob represents the ‘White’ and ‘Servant,’ is an ironic twist which reverses colonialism altogether. Selvon shows their relationship to be one of “good friends, or Master and Servant” (Moses Ascending, 5). Selvon is free from stereotypes like ‘Black’ or ‘White’. Moses argues:

I was indoctrinating him, I also learn a lesson myself, which is that Black and White could live harmony, for he was loyal and true, and never listened to all that shit you hear about black people. Afterwards he tell me he used to believe it, but since coming under my employ he realize that black people is human too. (Moses Ascending, 5)

On two occasions, Moses experiences police brutality, a part of the violent encounter with the police on Black Power demonstration in Trafalgar square. When a fight breaks out, the police descend on the crowd:

A set of Blacks was being towed, propelled, and dragged across Trafalgar Square. The place like it was full up of police as if the whole metropolitan force was lurking in the side streets waiting for signal. Blue lights flashing, radio-telephones going, sirens blowing, Alsatians baring their teeth for the kill, and Black Maria waiting with the doors fling wide open in welcome. (Moses Ascending, 36)

Commenting on the experience, Moses outlines important aspects of the impact of racism on Black identity:
I do know about you, but it is a shuddering thought for a black man to be locked up by the police… Any minute now the timekeeper was going to crack a whip in the Black Maria. I wonder if I play dead if they would jettison me in the Thames. And I could make my escape. (*Moses Ascending*, 36-37)

On the second occasion, Moses is present when the police break up a peaceful Black Power meeting and people leave in full panic:

I try to rationalize the situation, Okay. So it must have had some wanted criminals in the hall, in spite of the respectable aspects of the meeting. Right? So the police said and bust up the gathering. Right? That was it, simple and plain. Right? (*Moses Ascending*, 95)

Moses views the society in the way of younger Black people; he is identified as a non-political retired landlord. Reflecting on his life as a black immigrant, he concludes his experience of Britain, of the ‘mother country’ thus:

I don’t know if I can describe it properly, not being a man of words, but I had a kind of sad feeling that all Black people was doomed to suffer, and that we would never make any headway in Brit’n… we struggle or try to stay out of trouble. After spending the best years of my life in the Mother Country it was dismal conclusion to come to, making you feel that one and one make zero. It wasn’t so much depression as sheer terror really, to see you life falling to pieces like that. (*Moses Ascending*, 35)

The English word ‘ethnicity’ is derived from the Greek word *ethnos* translated as “nation”. The term refers currently to people who are thought to have a common ancestry and who share a distinctive culture. It was Herodotus who first stated the main characteristics of ethnicity in the 5th century BCE, with his famous account of what defines Greek identity, where he lists kinship, language, cults and customs. The modern meaning of ethnicity emerged in the mid 19th century and expresses the notion of “a people” or “a nation”. The term ethnicity is of 20th century, attested from the 1950s.

Writing about the usage of the term ‘ethnic’ generally prevailing in Great Britain and the United States, Wallman noted in 1977:
CHAPTER IV: Creole Identity in Selvon’s Immigrant Novels

The term ‘ethnic’ popularly connotes ‘[race]’ in Britain, only less precisely, and with a lighter value load. In North America, by contrast, ‘[race]’ most commonly means colour, and ‘ethnics’ are the descendents of relatively recent immigrants from non-English-speaking countries. ‘[Ethnic]’ is not a noun in Britain. In effect there are no ‘ethnics’; there are only ethnic relations. (Wallman, S. “Ethnicity Research in Britain”, Current Anthology. 1977: 531-532)

An ethnic group is a collectivity within a larger population having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared past, and a cultural focus upon one or more symbolic elements which define the groups’ identity such as kinship, religion, language, nationality, shared territory or physical appearance. The origins of the terms ethnicity and ethnic group lay outside the experiences of racial minorities.

Ethnicity plays a very important role in Moses Ascending. Moses, Galahad and Brenda are West Indian black immigrants, Jeannie and Bob are white, Faizull and Farouk are Pakistani immigrants. Ethnicity is shown in the novel as a problematic issue. This referred to a nation where different ethnic people live in a country. In any situation, ‘ethnic’ holds a wider context than ‘race’. Ethnic stereotypes are also reversed on their head. Moses, the black man is the Master. He says “I was master of the house” (Moses Ascending, 4) and Bob, the white man is the servant. Through ethnicity, the problems of racism are also highlighted in this novel. Moses is angry when Faizull, a Pakistani, brings in illegal immigrants. The police are represented as ‘white’ and considered to be brutal. They arrest Moses when he is involved in Black Movement, just because he is a black man.

Racial conflicts are unavoidable in both the novels The Lonely Londoners and Moses Ascending. In fact, racial violence is graphically represented in Moses Ascending. Selvon shows the weakness and infighting of the Black Power Movement. In his view, the resistant movement is unable to provide solutions to the basic problems faced by the black people. Moses was sent to jail because he was ‘black’. Galahad says:

We are all in the same boat. You can buy a house… but you can’t get a white skin if you beg. Things are like old days, Moses. The Revolution...
has come. At last the Black man is coming into his own. (*Moses Ascending*, 11-12)

When compared to the Whites, the Asians and the West Indians are treated as ‘Others’ and ‘Blacks,’ and were given fewer job opportunities. Both cultural and economic presence of the United State and the anti-racist movements are presented in *Moses Ascending*. Asian youth were given more job opportunities when compared to West Indian youth. Stuart Hall explains:

‘colonial life’ was… a defensive reaction a closing of ranks against official racism, punctuated by the 1964 Smethwick election, the anti-immigration legislation of the mid-1960s, Powellism and the birth of the repatriation lobby. In another sense…, colonial society meant the growth of internal cultural cohesiveness and solidarity within the ranks of black population inside the corporate boundaries of the ghetto: the weaving away of cultural space in which an alternative black social life could flourish (“Race, Acculturation and Societies Structured in Dominance in UNESCO”, 305-45)

Hall explains that the West Indians had very few means to cope with the harsh realities of a system which was going more and more intolerant and racist every day. One of these means was the creation of a ‘colonial society’.

*Moses Ascending* is a novel about the tension between the black individual and a community. At the beginning of the novel, Moses’ attention is attracted to a particular house, which is described in the newspaper advertisement: “highly desirable mansion in exclusive part of Shepherd’s bush. Vacant possession. Owner migrating to Jamaica viewing strictly by appointment with agent” (*Moses Ascending*, 1). Later, Moses feels that:

If you do not keep in touch with your friends and acquaintances you will think they are dead in this country. They vanish from your life; they go down in the underground and they never emerge; they are blurred into a crowd and become part of the density of humanity, and individualistic only in a kind of limbo memory. (*Moses Ascending*, 10)

After Moses becomes a landlord, his property allows him some social privileges. Salick points out: “becoming a landlord is an obsession for Moses, who
sees it primarily as a means of securing social ‘privileges,’ conferring upon him a new sense of social identity as it earns him respect and power as a Juror” (*Novels of Samuel Selvon*, 139). Moses stands for his ‘black community’. He says:

I can also be on the other side of the door when people come to look for rooms.

‘Is the landlord in?’

‘Oh I’m looking for a room’

‘I don’t let our black people’.

SLAM.

I might ever qualify for jury service.

These are only some of the privileges that would be mine. (*Moses Ascending*, 2)

New immigrant populations have arrived, meeting fresh hostility, and the children of the original immigrants are themselves now natives, born and raised in England. Moses, a central character, is still writing his memoirs and has come to regard himself as an intellectual figure. In the previous novel, *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses helped to shelter the immigrants and helped them to find their own lives. Now, in *Moses Ascending*, he lost track of his old friends. He becomes the landlord of Shepherd’s bush tenement house. Moses feels satisfied and comfortable being a landlord in the white society. He confesses:

I cannot tell you what joy and satisfaction I had the day I moved into these new quarters. I now had a bird’s view. I was master of house. I insert my key in the front door, I enter, I ascend the stairs. (*Moses Ascending*, 4)

The Jamaican poet, Louise Bennett, introduced the phrase ‘Colonization in Reverse,’ which is now a phrase used to indicate the influx of people of a colonized nation into a colonizer country, and almost taking over the nation. She says:

By de hundred, by de t’ousan

From country and from town

Be de ship load, by the plane-load
Selvon’s *Moses Ascending* exemplifies the phrase ‘colonization in reverse’ through the master-slave relationship. For instance, many postcolonial writers ‘re-write’ the European myths, legends, plays, novels and so on. The European traditional texts that were ‘re-written’ and manipulated by Caribbean authors like Selvon, Naipaul, Jean Rhys, Earl Lovelace and other writers are *The Tempest*, *Robison Crusoe*, *Jane Eyre* and so on. In *Moses Ascending*, Selvon reinterprets *Robinson Crusoe*—the relationship paradigm is more like in *The Tempest*. Prospero and Caliban relationship is identified with Robinson the ‘master’ who hires a ‘servant,’ a ‘white man,’ from the Black Country, Bob, who is his ‘Man Friday’. Bob is a white immigrant who came from somewhere in the Midlands to seek his fortunes in London. He was eager to learn the ways of the Black man. In no time at all he learns how to “cook peas and rice and make a beef stew, [Moses and Bob] become good friends, or rather master and servant” (*Moses Ascending*, 4). Moses says “I [Moses] also learn lesson myself, which in that black and white could live harmony” (*Moses Ascending*, 5). Moses identifies himself with Robinson’s condition, especially because “his prosperity leads him to believe that he has drastically changed status inside the rigidly structured British social ladder” (*Creolizing Culture*, 243).

In *Moses Ascending*, Selvon traces the process of ‘creolization’ through assimilation and acculturation of cultures. All the immigrants become a part of London and Moses asserts that “black people is human too” (*Moses Ascending*, 5). Selvon locates the importance of ‘Black people’ in a white dominated society and shows that they are the part of London/White society. He describes:

> The first flake of snow in the winter falls on a black man. The first ray of sunlight in the summer falls on black man. The first yellow leaf in the autumn falls on a black man. The first crows in the spring is seen by a black man… People what write to the newspapers to say they [black] was the first”. (*Moses Ascending*, 7)

The Black Movement which started all over the world in the 1960’s is depicted very realistically in *Moses Ascending*. The Black Movement for the equal rights has become “the revolution” (*Moses Ascending*, 12). Galahad says “the power
black… all over the world the cry is going up” (*Moses Ascending*, 12) and he thinks that Moses is like a leader and all the ‘boys’ would listen to his advice. Selvon lists some of the Black movement leaders such as “Bozer or Fadghewi or some other African names” (*Moses Ascending*, 12). Moses’ basement has become the centre of Black Movements. Galahad, Brenda, Moses and Bob have actively participated in this movement and fight for the Black rights. Galahad says that “some sort between black and white we cannot resist and protest against the Groups reinforce the party. And the party has to be supported” (*Moses Ascending*, 19).

Brenda was working seriously for the Black Party and she was fighting for the ‘Black Rights’ in London and Moses’ basement was littered with “all kinds of Black literature, Lamming and Salkey and Baldwin and photos and famous black men”. The members met to “plan the over throw of the White race and the uprising of the Black, by fair means or foul” (*Moses Ascending*, 27). The Black Movement protest for the Black rights proceeded to the London Street. Moses observes the notices the placards of ‘Black Protest’ and the slogans of the movement. The placards read: “KILL ALL WHITE PIGS, [Police] BLOOD AND, TOO LATE SHALL BE THE CRY, AND REMEMBER PEARL HARBOUR” (*Moses Ascending*, 27). He “listen[s] to chant: ‘Power what power? Black power’” (*Moses Ascending*, 27). They were setting out to revolutionize the country. Basement “looks like black Ary Headquarter” (*Moses Ascending*, 28). Brenda lists out all the immigrants who participated in the Black Movement:

Flow woman from Barbados… Alfonso from Cyprus…. Oja from African… Bangla-desh or one of them new states. “Macpherson, Australian”…the house with a lot of foreigners….two Pakis, Faizull and Farouk. (*Moses Ascending*, 32)

As a part of the protest, pigs are slaughtered to signify bloodshed. In the rally, a leader shouts “‘Blood will run!’ ‘Black power is here to stay, we will slaughter the pigs because there is no other remedy. Brother and sisters, I say blood will run!’” (*Moses Ascending*, 35). But, Moses does not want anything to do with “Black power, nor white power, nor any fucking power. ‘[Moses] just want to live in peace’” (*Moses Ascending*, 12), he writes in the ‘memories’. For Moses, ‘memories’ are personal and intimate. He was enjoying his hard earned retirement. He spent many “best years life in the Mother country” (*Moses Ascending*, 35). Moses started to write a book on
through his memory, he says “I relaxed and started to work on my memories” (*Moses Ascending*, 5).

In the penthouse, Moses leaves all the responsibilities of running the house to Bob. Soon, he “relaxed and started to work on my memories” (*Moses Ascending*, 5). Moses begins to compose his memories and starts to write a book on the privileges of black people in Britain thinking that, “they [white people] can avoid the rush hour as million of white mice dart to and fro, by they are actually paid higher wages that if they worked in daylight!” (*Moses Ascending*, 8-9) Moses takes an initiative to write his memories on black people about whom one can “only hear stories of their plights and sorrows, tales of tragedy whispered on the wind” (*Moses Ascending*, 10). Moses spent the best years of his life in the mother country and he had “a kind of sad feeling that all black people was doomed to suffer” (*Moses Ascending*, 35), reason enough for him to take up writing his memories. Moses is well aware of the difficulties of writing literature for the black writers. He says, “You [Bob] think writing is like kissing hand? You should leave that to people like Lamming and Salkey” (*Moses Ascending*, 42). Moses has to create history and he has to be the pioneer for ‘black literature’ whereby he says to Bob: “you are still living in the Dark ages! You don’t even know that we have created a Black Literature…. The whole world realize our existence and our struggle” (*Moses Ascending*, 43).

Moses wants to write in a realistic way. He knows about his people and he identifies himself with his people through his writing. He says “These are my people…. I know all the failings and shortcomings of my people, their foibles and chicanery, their apathy and disunity” (*Moses Ascending*, 97). He has to write his memories as a “dairy of current events” (*Moses Ascending*, 101) and he says that, “I longed to get back to my philosophizing and my analyzing and my rhapsodizing, decorating my thoughts with little grace-notes and showing the white people that we, too, could write book” (*Moses Ascending*, 101). Moses was eager to write about his (black) people. Moses feels satisfied with his works thinking “a masterpiece was coming to me… Vicious assessment of my work was stultified my brains” (*Moses Ascending*, 105). He is very serious in writing his memories and he explains “I am not that sort of writers, who is only after sensations and scandals. I am writing literature” (*Moses Ascending*, 103) and he feels that “black man lifts his head, his way own kind” (*Moses Ascending*, 105) by becoming a successful writer. He gives the example
of great writers like “Shakespeare and Billy Wordsworth” (*Moses Ascending*, 111) and further, he thinks that he has to write a book without “finding any grammatical errors or incorrect punctuations” (*Moses Ascending*, 111). As Mark Looker has observed, “Moses’ activity continually parodies romantic clichés about the writer: he retreats into solitude to write, he awaits inspiration, he struggles with ‘maelstroms’ of emotion, he finds he can’t write anymore” (171). Selvon uses a typical form of irony against Moses with the remark that “he was in fact unaware of the absurdities he is writing, being fully convinced that he is a talented writer” (*Creolizing Culture*, 251).

In *Moses Ascending*, Moses attempts to find a ‘Home’ and construct a fully realized individual identity. However, because he is setting upon doubtful grounds, his dream of having ‘arrived’ is shattered and he finds himself back at the basement of his house, dispossessed of his rights and privileges as landlord. Indeed nothing seems to have changed for him or for Third World man, even after several years of independence. This theme continues in *Moses Migrating*. Having lost his ‘penthouse’ in London, Moses decides to return to Trinidad for the Carnival. Travelling third class in a liner, Moses stays in the ‘upside-down’ world of the Trinidad Hilton— in other words, ‘a tourist,’ in his ‘own country’. Here, Nasta (1988) notes:

… the transitoriness, artificiality and unreality of the hotel room image the hollowness and disorientation of post-colonial identity, extending the metaphorical possibilities of rooms and houses in *The Lonely Londoners* and *Moses Ascending*, though this time, it is neither basement nor attic but a hotel room. (*Critical Perspective on Sam Selvon*, 6)

Black Power, developing strength in Britain in the late 1960s, and early 1970s, is ridiculed in *Moses Ascending*. *Moses Migrating* (1983) picks up the story of Moses at the same literal low point— cast down to his basement – at which he had been left at the end of *Moses Ascending*. Depressed, though not without loyal to his native place, Moses decides to leave the ‘old Brit’n’ to return to his native land, Trinidad, for Carnival. To assuage his guilt about abandoning the ‘Mother Country’ in its hour of need, Moses becomes an unofficial ambassador for Britain in Trinidad, telling the locals that:
Britain was not only still on her feet, but still the Onlyest country in the world where good breeding and culture come before ill-gotten gains or calls of the flesh. (*Moses Migrating*, 30)

Moses’ deepest instinct is freedom, and he evades Doris’ attempts to trap him into marriage, “it was some primitive instinct even stronger than my new found emotions, that bade me be wary and don’t rush in like a fool where angels fear to tread” (*Moses Migrating*, 118). Impersonation provides freedom for Moses both in the sense that he can choose his persona, and as a disguised, it permits him to be elusive and to survive. The irony is that through one kind of impersonation, he discovers part of himself, through another he loses it. This ambiguity is central to the novel. Moses as a Caribbean, is a composite man, though he has not himself grasped the point that it is in this feature that both his vulnerability and potential creativity life.

The Black Power Movement continues in the novel *Moses Migrating* “where Galahad and Brenda conducted their Black Power Party affairs” (*Moses Migrating*, 29) in London. Moses was returning to Trinidad. He is going back to his homeland from where he immigrated to London. He feels prejudiced in favour of his ‘Mother Country’ London, though he is a black. He expresses his prejudices by writing a letter to Mr. Powell, making clear his intentions:

Dear Mr. Powell, though Black I am writing you to express my support for your campaigns to keep Brit’n White, as I have been living here for more than twenty years and I have more black enemies than white and I have always tried to integrate successfully in spite of discriminations and prejudices according to race. Though I am deciding to return to Trinidad it is grieving immigrants as desire to return to their homelands that will make it possible for me… I have no ill-feelings or animosity for your sentiments re blacks. (*Moses Migrating*, 29-30)

Race relationship problems were hurting the white British population instead of the coloured immigrants, according to Powell, who argued that “[t]he discrimination and the deprivation, the sense of alarm and of resentment, lies not with the immigrant population but with those among whom they have come and are still coming” (*Moses Migrating*, 133). In the first pages of *Moses Migrating*, Moses writes to Powell directly, asking him to make good on his offer to subsidize the repatriation of Black
Britons and promising to name the business he plans to launch in Trinidad “Enoch-aided Enterprises” (Moses Migrating, 30). The letter to Powell illustrates Selvon’s comic approach as well as Moses’ characteristic refusal to rise to anger over racism. He continually attempts to use the system for his own purposes rather than overtly decrying its abuses. Despite the anti-immigrant stance of British politicians such as Powell and Margaret Thatcher, who were in power when this third Moses novel was published, Selvon depicts Moses’ ambivalence about his return to Trinidad. He elects not to sell his Shepherd’s Bush house in case he may later wish to “come back to the land of milk and honey” (37) and by the end of the novel, Selvon has him doing just that.

Moses is retired from his responsibility. As a black immigrant he struggles, stands and writes on behalf of Black immigrants. Galahad says “you have really retired from the scene… you mind me of that fellar who went to sleep for year and get up, Rip Van Winkle!” (Moses Migrating, 30). Galahad stands for the crisis of black people. Observing the plight of black people and their economic condition, he says to Moses: “you are landlord, a man of means. If I were in your shoes, I would be out of this country in a jiffy, the way how things are going bad enough being black and unwanted, but the whole economy collapse” (Moses Migrating, 30).

Moses is feeling uncomfortable about his going back to his homeland, Trinidad, after living in Britain for many years. It is very difficult to identify Moses as a Caribbean. He lost his Caribbean identity and seems to identify himself as white/hybrid. He feels, “I was leaving Brit’n after all these years to go and live in Trinidad, while I myself was merely toying with the idea” (Moses Migrating, 30). After twenty five years of living in Britain, Moses is depicted as changing his identity, “a new generation of Black Britons” came to existence and “an influx of Indian and Pakistanis to add more colour to the scene” (“A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esp.” in Moses Migrating, 26). Moses has become a landlord and is shown as “a kind of hybrid mixture of ye-olde and what happening” (“A Special Preface by Moses Aloetta Esp.” in Moses Migrating, 26).

Moses feels happy on hearing of the idea of ‘Homeland’ or ‘Caribbean’. He wants to go back to his homeland with Jeannie to attend the Carnival, which is significant for the Creole/Black identity. He expresses his wish to Bob that he and Jeannie are going to Trinidad for the Carnival. Bob feels very excited on hearing of
the Caribbean and the trip to the Caribbean. He expresses his desire: “It would be
great if we could get a Caribbean cruise, touching at all the islands, Jamaica-where-
the-rum-comes-from, Trinidad-the-land-of-the-humming bird, Barbados-the-little-
England. I’d like to see that little island where Princess Margaret hangs out with that
pop singer, too” (*Moses Migrating*, 33).

Moses has more black enemies than white because of his affinity with the
white people and ‘Mother Country,’ England. He does not like to sell his house that
he owned in London. He asks Galahad to look after his house. He says: “I’ve changed
my mind about selling. I think it prudent to hold on to the house. Only thing I got
nobody to look after it while I am away” (*Moses Migrating*, 35). Galahad suggests
promptly that Moses should, “leave the keys with him” (*Moses Migrating*, 35). Moses
is not inclined to sell his house in England because he does not like to lose his identity
in England as he had become a part of the British culture. Moses says:

> It occurred to me that I would be a fool to burn my bridges and sell my
> mansion. I could leave someone in charge while I do some
> reconnoitering in Trinidad, just in case I wanted to come back to the
> land of milk and honey. (*Moses Migrating*, 35)

The phrase “burn my bridges” from the above passage shows his connection with the
white society. Moses does not wish to lose his ‘bridge of connection’ with his
‘Mother Country,’ London, and the ‘White British culture’. Moses experiences the
living with difficulty of ‘dual nationality’ when he went to the passport office to get
his passport. He confesses: “I had to fill up so many details, and there was a much
protocol about dual nationality and if I was a British or Trinidadian” (*Moses
Migrating*, 40). Moses becomes nostalgic about his first arrival in England. He
gushes:

> How different were my thoughts and feelings in the forties, when, from
> this very same part, I caught my first glimpse of merry England! How
> my heart bounded as they sent a tug to take our luggage off the ship, for
> use was anchored a little way offshore, and I could see the greenery of
> the coast hills, the pretty little houses, and seagulls housing and
> fluttering around, waiting to drop a welcome on the heads of use black
> adventures! (*Moses Migrating*, 45)
Bob had a personal business in Trinidad. He wants to search for his family tree and he says, “I have been trying to trace my family tree. I went to Somerset House, and from what I could gather, it would appear that there may be some Caribbean connection” (Moses Migrating, 40). He comes to know that his family was connected to the Caribbean. Selvon shows Bob’s searching of his identity in an ironic way. Bob wants to trace his ancestry in the Caribbean.

Galahad regrets the depletion of Black forces in England. He feels that “the party grows weaker with each shipload of departures, and it is getting harder every day for new comers to get in” (Moses Migrating, 46). Moses was amazed at knowing that many immigrants were going back voluntarily. Moses asks: “Who and what are all these people, Galahad? “Have they just disembarked from a vessel to try their luck in Britain?” (Moses Migrating, 46). Galahad’s response surprises Moses:

They are going back… Immigrants don’t only come, old man. They go. But you don’t hear about the departures. They go back voluntarily. They serve their period of indentureship, or do their stints in the salt mines, than return to the islands. (Moses Migrating, 46)

Racism continues in this novel also. Galahad and Moses were in a station. A gentle woman thinks that they are porters due to their being black. She asks for the help, to pick up her luggage. She is ready to pay money for this service, but Moses does not like to take money from her. Galahad wants to take money from her as per the Union rules. Bob, Jeannie and Moses are celebrating the trip to their homelands. Bob and Jeannie were booked in first class and Moses had a “third-class cabin next to the engine room” (Moses Migrating, 48). Being black, Moses got a ‘third class’ cabin next to the engine room. The experience of ‘Middle Passage’ was narrated through the character of Moses while he travels to his homeland, Trinidad. Moses was feeling sea sick and was also suffering from stomach pain/appendicitis. He says: “I might die making the Middle passage. You know what happened to blacks in transit, how they were tossed to the sharks?” (Moses Migrating, 49).

Moses has become “an ambassador not only of good will but good manners” (Moses Migrating, 55). Moses is shown bringing credit to his beloved country by being an ‘ambassador’ for Great Britain and ‘bridge’ between ‘White’ and ‘Black’ cultures. Moses feels like an alien in his homeland. He sights the tips of the Northern
Range in the morning sunshine and his emotions overwhelm him when he obtains his first glimpse of his native land after many years. He took a deep breath and sighed as the brilliant Sun etched the houses and other buildings featured about the hills around Port-of-Spain and he imagines himself kneeling on the earth and “kiss[ing] the dear soil” ([Moses Migrating](#), 81). When the ship arrived at the harbor, Moses woke up and feels very sad that none of his mates were in the cabin. He says:

> When I awoke I could hear a lot of activity going on outside, but none in the cabin, and when I look around I see that nobody else was there. Only me and my luggage remaining. You would of thought one of the bastards who was my cabin-mates would of had the decency to give me a shake. ([Moses Migrating](#), 81)

Moses recalled his experience of travelling in London tube and he explains “when I was travelling on the tube in London, if it reach the terminus and I notice anybody asleep I used to give them a little shake and tell them journey’s end. I didn’t even left the ship yet and already I was sampling alien culture” ([Moses Migrating](#), 81). Later, Moses does not wish to cultivate any intimacy with his old friends. He wonders whether others may feel that he came back to Trinidad and pretended that he knew on one. Moses ignores his old friends. He held his head straight and wants to look for a taxi. He says: “I’m not having anything to do with old acquaintances. The news gets about that I am in town, they will all want to hang on and sponge on me. I am having none of that” ([Moses Migrating](#), 82).

Moses was born an orphan. Tanty Flora, a childless woman, took him under her wing and gave his name ‘Moses’ and raised him. Tanty was very religious which was why she named him ‘Moses’. Moses says:

> Tanty was heavy on religion and saving souls, and used to preach by the wayside evening Friday night.... It does not shame me to confess my lovely origin. Christ himself was born in a stable. ([Moses Migrating](#), 85)

Moses does not know anything about Tanty. Even she did not write and maintain contact with him when he was in London. Moses thinks that “she must of dead by now and gone to Limbo” ([Moses Migrating](#), 85). But, Tanty was still alive and she was selling oranges in Trinidad. Moses went directly to meet Tanty. Tanty finds his behaviour and attitude strange, not unlike that of the white people. She says:
“you sounding strange, Moses. You learn to talk like white people?”

“God forbid”

“You don’t sound Trinidadian to me no more, though may be as you been away so long”. (*Moses Migrating*, 88)

Moses gives money to Tanty but she rejects it. She says:

“you come back here on you highfaluting horses and trying to bribe your way into my good graces! Not a word from you all these years, for me to know if you alive or dead!”

“You come here with bad morning and bad manners” (*Moses Migrating*, 89-90)

Moses explains his softness towards the white people, saying: “nothing wrong with whites, “I live with them for years. You shouldn’t believe all the bad things you hear about them” (*Moses Migrating*, 90). Tanty explains to him regarding the status of ‘Black’ people in Trinidad: “we got no time for white people in Trinidad, Moses, them days is gone forever, Praise the Lord. Black is Power now” (*Moses Migrating*, 90). She expresses the idea of decolonization in the Caribbean society.

A reporter, Lennard, from *The Guardian* came to Moses to take an interview after his arrival from England to attend the Carnival. The reporter wants an interview about how Moses feels to be back in his native land and also he wanted a story from Moses. Moses explains, “All my life I have been hounded by the press…I remember the every day I stepped off the boat, train in London” (*Moses Migrating*, 91). The reporter wants to know exactly about “the beginning, what made [Moses] to leave Trinidad in the first place, his early experience in England, reactions to living in a white society” (*Moses Migrating*, 91-92). The reporter wants to know “the conditions that immigrants have put up with, that for years (Moses) have been active in pretext and rebellion” (*Moses Migrating*, 92). Moses reveals to the reporter the truth about his travel to England. He says “I did not immigrate to Brit’n, let’s get that straight for one thing. She (Brit’n) called me during the war to do my duty as a commonwealth citizen and British subject” (*Moses Migrating*, 93). Moses went to Brit’n because it was his duty to be near the scene of battle. The reporter noted all these things in his note book.
Moses was feeling “restlessness, depression and irritability” (*Moses Migrating*, 105), when he went to Frederick street in Port-of-Spain. Thousands of people and vehicles were moving due to the Carnival. In the crowd he became motionless and he wondered whether “he was a mad dog or an Englishman?” (*Moses Migrating*, 105). He felt alienation as he observed the changes in the society, culture, tradition and way of life of Trinidadian people. Moses states that:

I gave myself a stern talking to, come on, come on man, what is all this shit? What about all the things you miss when you was in England, besides a glass of frothy mauby [juice], which out of fashion anyway? Are you not now, at this very moment, among your countrymen, and do you mean to say that you do not know one single soul, male or female, or a juvenile, or even a tot, in all these crowds? Are there really no friends to look up, no particular spot or place in this colorful city which you remember? (*Moses Migrating*, 105) [Emphasized in text]

Moses feels for the first time that he has come back to his ‘home’ and he remembers his childhood days. He confesses: “I begin to feel as if I come back home in truth. It was in this section of Port of Spain that I grow up, pitching marbles in the dusty backyards, rolling a hoop or bicycle wheel without the tyre; climbing mango trees and thiefing fruit in season” (*Moses Migrating*, 107). He went to Tanty’s house and he became acquainted with Doris, a very beautiful girl. He introduced himself as Moses, of Shepherd’s bush, London and “an ambassador of Her [London] Majesty’s Service” (*Moses Migrating*, 109). Doris, a “poor girl was living with a step-mother who used to beat her every day for nothing at all, and she run away” (*Moses Migrating*, 109). Tanty found her walking about by the Savannah and brought her home to live with her.

Moses was in love with Doris. He asks Tanty about Doris’ boy friends. He discovered that “she (Doris) hardly even leave the house, no matter how much I encourage her to go out and enjoy herself. And as for Francis, it’s only because he treat her with a little respect that she talk to him, it ain’t having nothing in it”. She continued and explained that Doris’s would have “married a decent man and get out of Trinidad. It’s only because of me that still here, though God knows I won’t stand in the way if she get a decent one. But when I say decent, I mean decent, Moses, not
nobody sinful would swell up she belly and leave she to fend for herself” *(Moses Migrating, 114-115).*

Moses is in favour of London and British people. He was in a dilemma, whether to marry Doris and stay in Trinidad or get back to London. He expresses his love for his ‘Mother Country,’ London, to Tanty:

> How much I owe the country that took me in and nursed me all these years? I was hungry and they gave me fish and chips; I was thirsty and they gave me a cuppa; I was penniless and they gave me dole. I was destitute and today I am Landlord of a Mansions in West London. I was even awarded a prize once, by the National Front, which is the British they say against black people. *(Moses Migrating, 156)*

The novel depicts the assimilation processes leading successfully towards ‘creolization’. Jeannie and Bob are ready to play ‘Britannia’ in the Carnival. Moses says: “You (Bob) and Jeannie, being white and English, will add colour and significance and dimensions. Jesus, here I was thinking that you two would jump at the chance to help your country, and instead you behave like blacks, finding faults and picking holes in everything” *(Moses Migrating, 158).* Even Galahad and Brenda are also coming from Britain to Trinidad to attend the Carnival. Brenda and Galahad tell Moses about the changes in London. Brenda says: “Grim, boy, Grim. They have introduced even more restrictions on black immigration in the short time you have been away. You may not be able to return” *(Moses Migrating, 170)*

‘Carnival’ represents the Caribbean culture and tradition. It is shown as the process of creolization. Selvon gives a detailed description of the Carnival:

Carnival begins, officially, foreday morning on the Monday before Ash Wednesday. That is not to say that Trinidadians say their prayers and go to bed early the Sunday night, in order to have the strength and endurance to face the rigors of the two-day mas. In truth, they have scarcely opened their eyes from dreaming of White Christmas before the Carnival nightmare starts, and in the next two months or so, week by week the tempo and excitement, the preparations and the tuning-up work up steam for the big explosion on Monday morning when the cocks begin to crow. *(Moses Migrating, 174)*
Mimicry is an important term used in postcolonial studies. Bhabha defines mimicry as an exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners and ideas. According to Bhabha, ‘mimicry’ means repetition with difference, and repeating and copying colonizing culture, language, behaviour, manners and values by the colonized. Bhabha argues that ‘mimicry’ resemblance ‘menace’. He states: “both mimicry and ‘menace’ so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace” (The Location of Culture, 122). Therefore it is not representation of the servitude of the colonized, rather it can be considered as an attempt to change its identity which occurs by mimicry and copying the other culture. ‘Mimicry’ may be sometimes cause mockery and menace of self-identity and culture of both colonizer and colonized. Bhabha says “mimicry repeats rather that re-presents” (The Location of Culture, 122), besides Bhabha’s statements, mimicry represents “an ironic compromise between two ideas mimesis and mimicry” (The Location of Culture, 122).

Mimicry/mimicking of white people is shown in the novel. At the end of the novel, Moses is shown dressing for the Carnival. There was a discussion among Moses, Galahad, Brenda, Bob and Jeannie. Moses is trying to disguise as part of Carnival festival. Galahad wants him to try to be funny. Jeannie asks “could you not at least have painted your face black”- and as everybody went into fits of laughter- “I mean, white?” (Moses Migrating, 175). Galahad suggests: “you can turn all your clothes inside out, and wear your right sandal on your left foot” (Moses Migrating, 175). Brenda suggests that he could wear clothes back to front, “as you’re never seem to know if you’re coming or going” (Moses Migrating, 176). Moses is portrayed as a ‘half mimic man,’ for he neither belongs to ‘English/White’ nor ‘Black’ culture. Jeannie dresses like a Romany gypsy; she takes off one of her golden earrings and put it on Moses ears. Brenda offers some lipstick and powder to Moses. Galahad offers another brush, and trying to be funny, he jokes, “lend him some white skin, Bob” (Moses Migrating, 176). Moses resigns himself to “suffer all these decorations in silence, it was no skin off my teeth if they wanted to amuse themselves, even at my expense”. Moses asks Galahad how he looked. Galahad crisply responds: “reality at last- a composite man among mimic men!” (Moses Migrating, 176)

Carnival represents the Caribbean identity for freedom and tradition. Moses remembers the past of slavery and the years he stayed in Britain. He expresses his experience of the Carnival, “I was in the midst of my countrymen now, the pulse and
the sweat and the smell and the hysterical excitement, but my head was giddy with a kind of irresistible exultation like I just get emancipated from slavery” (*Moses Migrating*, 180). Selvon narrates the tale of ‘slave resistance’ through the Carnival celebration:

> All of we chanting and slaving to out the fire in Musa Sugarcane plantations; foreday morning come; Jouvert, Canboulay, Massa come to play mas too, mass in your arse:, slave ancestors jump out their graves and come to play too, oh God Massa, play mas, play mas, the vap take me, the nap take the nap take all and Last Lap go make misery! (*Moses Migrating*, 180) [Emphasized in the text]

In the Carnival Moses won the first prize for the “Most Original Individual Costume” (*Moses Migrating*, 188). He got a silver cup and one hundred dollars in cash. He proposes to Doris, decides to marry her and stays in Trinidad.
CHAPTER IV: Creole Identity in Selvon’s Immigrant Novels

Works Cited


