CHAPTER-V

EXILE EXPERIENCES IN BRITAIN
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The most well-known work of Sam Selvon is *The Lonely Londoners* (1956). It deals with the life of the West Indian emigrants in London. Their joys and sorrows make up the novel. Selvon’s novel was similar to George Lamming’s *The Emigrants* (1954) in subject matter, but Selvon gave *The Lonely Londoners* a distinctive voice and identity.

Exile means to be away from one's home (i.e. city, state or country), while either being explicitly refused permission to return and/or being threatened with imprisonment or death upon return. It can be a form of punishment and solitude. Readers need to look at a few themes to understand the novel.

Exile is a topic dealt with in this chapter. According to wikipedia.com, it is common to distinguish between internal exile, i.e., forced resettlement within the country of residence, and external exile, deportation outside the country of residence. Although most commonly used to describe an individual situation, the term is also used for groups (especially ethnic or national groups), or for an entire government. ‘Terms such as diaspora and refugee describe group exile, both voluntary and forced, and government in exile describes a government of a country that has been forced to relocate and argue its legitimacy from outside that country’ (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exile_in_Greek_tragedy#In_Greek_tragedy ).
The site goes on to say that Exile can also be a self-imposed departure from one's homeland. Self-exile is often depicted as a form of protest by the person that claims it, to avoid persecution or legal matters (such as tax or criminal allegations), an act of shame or repentance, or isolating oneself to be able to devote time to a particular thing. Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that, "no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile."

Hybridity is one more issue dealt in the novel. According to wikipedia.com, Hybridity refers in its most basic sense to mixture. The term originates from biology and was subsequently employed in linguistics and in racial theory in the nineteenth century. Its contemporary uses are scattered across numerous academic disciplines and is salient in popular culture. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hybridity).

Hybridity originates from the Latin ‘hybrida’, a term used to classify the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar. A hybrid is something that is mixed, and hybridity is simply mixture. As an explicative term, hybridity became a useful tool in forming a fearful discourse of racial mixing that arose toward the end of the 18th Century. Scientific models of anatomy and craniometry were used to argue that Africans, Asians, Native Americans and Pacific Islanders were racially inferior to Europeans. The fear of miscegenation that followed responds to the
concern that the offspring of racial interbreeding would result in the dilution of the European race. Hybrids were seen as an aberration, worse than the inferior races, a weak and diseased mutation. Hybridity as a concern for racial purity responds clearly to the zeitgeist of colonialism where, despite the backdrop of the humanitarian age of enlightenment, social hierarchy was beyond contention as was the position of Europeans at its summit. The social transformations that followed the ending of colonial mandates, rising immigration, and economic liberalisation profoundly altered the use and understanding of the term hybridity.

The rhetoric of hybridity, sometimes referred to as hybrid talk, is fundamentally associated with the emergence of postcolonial discourse and its critiques of cultural imperialism. This second stage in the history of hybridity is characterised by literature and theory that focuses on the effects of mixture upon identity and culture. Key theorists in this realm are Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Gayatri Spivak, and Paul Gilroy, whose work responds to the increasing multicultural awareness of the early nineteen nineties. Often the literature of postcolonial and magical realist authors such as Salman Rushdie, Gabriel García Márquez, Milan Kundera, and J. M. Coetzee recur in their discussions. A key text in the development of hybridity theory is Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994) which analyses the liminality of hybridity as a paradigm of colonial anxiety. His key argument is that colonial hybridity, as a cultural form, produced ambivalence in the colonial masters and as such altered the authority of power.
Bhabha’s arguments have become key in the discussion of hybridity. While he originally developed his thesis with respect to narratives of cultural imperialism, his work also develops the concept with respect to the cultural politics of migrancy in the contemporary metropolis.

Along with hybridity issues, the main reason for the existence of *The Lonely Londoners* is the issue of Migration. There was a wave of migrants from Caribbean to England from 1930s to 1950s. This wave of West Indian migration, the conditions the migrants endured on arrival, and all their experiences are today represented by two books with different approaches. While George Lamming’s *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) looked at the situation as it affected the intellectual, *The Lonely Londoners’* focus is the larger body of working-class immigrants.

*The Lonely Londoners* does not have a plot *per se*. It is a bunch of incidents put together, dealing with the lives of Caribbean immigrants in London. The episodes are from the lives of Moses, Galahad, Tolroy and others. The novel roughly covers a period of three years, although incidents before that are mentioned.

No single character can be isolated as the central character of the novel. However, the novel is filtered through the consciousness of the ‘veteran’ Moses Aloetta. He is the moral centre of the novel.
The Lonely Londoners begins with Moses receiving the newcomer Henry Oliver, known in the novel as Galahad, at the Waterloo station. Moses, like other emigrants in London, regularly receives new emigrants and sets them up. There, he meets Tolroy, an acquaintance of his, who comes to receive his mother and finds himself burdened with other Trinidad neighbours and relatives: Tanty, an elderly lady, Lewis and Agnes, a couple. A reporter meets Moses at the tube station, assuming that he has just arrived at London and starts asking him questions. But the moment Moses speaks of the problems in London, the reporter figures out that he is not a new arrival and moves over to Tanty and family.

Galahad is made of a queer physical disposition that is opposed to nature. He feels cold in winter and warm in summer. Therefore, he arrives in the London winter with no warm clothes on him, much to the amazement of Moses. Galahad has not brought enough money with him as well.

The next day, Galahad embarks on the task of finding himself a job. He thinks he can do it on his own and rejects Moses’ help. But he is clueless and lost, just a few minutes later and is relieved to see Moses. They first go to the Unemployment Office and get Galahad’s name registered.
From then on, a coherent story escapes the reader. There begins a series of descriptions of fellow-immigrants. Stories or ‘ballads’ about these characters emerge.

First is Captain, or Cap, a Nigerian immigrant, a lazy man who survives without work or food. Cap is the kind of person who can survive without anything. Cap’s trysts with women and his marriage with a French girl are described. He continues with his carefree life even after marriage.

Next is the story of Bartholomew, or Bart. Bart is ashamed of being Caribbean and, taking the aid of his light skin, claims to be Latin-American. He tries to imitate the white man. He is in a relationship with an English girl, whose parents are furious with him. Finally, the girl, Beatrice, also deserts him and Bart keeps on searching for her, till the end of the novel.

The novel gets back to Tolroy and his family. Tolroy gets everyone jobs and settles them in London. Lewis works on the same job as Moses-getting pot scourers ready for packing at the night shift. 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 Agnes up, prompting Agnes to leave him. An account of Tanty’s life and her successful tube ride in the city is also narrated.
Galahad’s date with an English girl is described. Galahad’s romantic fascination with place-names, his getting ready elaborately for the date, the date and the end is all told to readers. Galahad is subject to racism on the way and readers have a glimpse of his issues with racism.

The next character is Big City, who is called by that name, owing to his fascination with metropolitan cities, where, he thinks, he will have a great life. Big City’s peculiarity is that he gets confused with names. He calls music ‘fusic’, Notting Hill ‘Nottingham Gate’, Gloucester Road ‘Gloucestershire Road’ and so on. Big City wants to make quick money. Galahad is forced on to a stage, one day, in a political meeting, and Galahad is angry with Big City. Big City has constant dreams of being in the company of English royalty. The reader is then treated to a passage, written in the stream of consciousness method that describes the glorious London summer.

The next character is Five Past Twelve who is called so because he looks the colour of midnight. He is fond of parties. This brings readers to Harris, another Anglicised West Indian who hosts parties to cater to his English friends. But all his Caribbean friends also rush in and Harris is forever scared of being embarrassed by them. The account of one party of Harris is given.
The next part deals with the stinging cold and poverty and how Galahad catches a pigeon in the park to survive and Cap catches a seagull. This section also has long discussions for and against staying in London.

There are accounts of the emigrants meeting in the house of Moses every Sunday. The novel ends with Moses standing by the bridge and contemplating writing a book of memoirs.

The immigrants manage to maintain a cheerful attitude despite their hardships. The book is full of social commentary, by the characters and by the narrator. The novel leaves one with a sense of the loneliness of the immigrants with Moses sick of London and yearning to go back to Trinidad.

*The Lonely Londoners* is different from Selvon’s preceding novels. The central theme, especially, is diametrically opposed to its immediate predecessor, *An Island is a World*, in which Trinidad is shown as an island home that offers to everyone who cares to try, ample opportunity for self-actualization. *The Lonely Londoners*, on the other hand, establishes the need to leave the land of one’s birth to better one’s opportunities.

If *The Lonely Londoners* sounded more convincing than *An Island is a World*, it is maybe because Selvon himself ‘felt the urgent need to leave the
seductive, enervating island life in quest of a shelter of security that would encourage creative activity’. Selvon is similar to Moses in the urge to leave the home-country.

_The Lonely Londoners_ is a novel of West Indian immigrants, in London. Creolisation, then, would be very important in the novel. _The Lonely Londoners, Moses Ascending_ and _Moses Migrating_ are often called the ‘London trilogy’. All three books were written in the crucial years between the post-war period and the 1980s. As all three novels have the same protagonist, Moses and similar minor characters, it is said to be a trilogy. But critics do not share the same view regarding the trilogy.

Kenneth Ramchand, in his introduction to the Longman edition of _The Lonely Londoners_, points out the Moses of _The Lonely Londoners_ is more similar to Tiger of _A Brighter Sun_ than to the ‘Moses’ characters of the other London novels.

Roydon Salick opts for a challenging interpretation of the trilogy, which Selvon himself appears to disrupt. Although Selvon himself called _Moses Ascending_ a sequel to _The Lonely Londoners_, the three books cannot be defined as a trilogy. So Salick suggests a rearrangement of the novels that does not follow chronological order.
According to Salick, *The Lonely Londoners* is to be read as the ideal ending of the other two novels. Therefore, the sequence of novels would be as follows: *Moses Ascending, Moses Migrating* and then *The Lonely Londoners*. This would rid the readers of the absurd situation of finding Moses getting more and more ridiculous in every book. Salick says that the mature and worldly-wise Moses of *The Lonely Londoners* is not to be found in the other novels.

Sindoni has the last word on this controversy. She says that ‘it can be argued that Selvon deliberately disrupted and subverted the traditional trilogy form as well as the genre of the novel’.²

Readers had already seen in the preceding chapters, how subversion of colonial institutions is an effective means of protest by the post-colonial writer. Selvon here attempts to subvert the genre of the novel as well as the wider ‘trilogy’ structure prevalent in European literary circles.

This subversion of established norms can be seen in the characters of *The Lonely Londoners* as well. Big City calls music ‘fusic’, Notting Hill ‘Nottingham Gate’, Gloucester Road ‘Gloucestrshire Road’. By investing them with ridiculous names, Big City does not accept the given names. He makes those places his own.
This is in contrast to Galahad, who finds pleasure in saying aloud the names of places that everyone knows about.

It can be said that in this novel, Selvon establishes ‘the inappropriateness and the inadequacy of standard English, and affirms the versatility and flexibility of dialect, using it as the language of narration, of dialogue, of description, and of philosophizing’. The language used in *The Lonely Londoners* is a Trinidadian creole dialect.

Describing the writing process of the novel, Selvon speaks of the unconscious power of the writing in “dialect”, which, he says, was the only means available to him. In an interview with Michel Fabre, he reveals how the practice of writing was being influenced by the paradigm of ‘voice’ and rhythms of Trinidad Creole, which finally turned into “a modified dialect which could be understood by European readers”.

Selvon, when asked about the amount of invention of such a modified dialect, says, “First, dialect is on form of language, the way a certain language is *spoken* is a certain areas by a certain people. In that sense it expresses the thoughts and the voice of those who speak it (…)”. 
We have seen in the preceding chapters how Creole is in no way inferior to ‘Standard’ English. It is just a kind of English spoken by a certain section of people. This attitude comes through in *The Lonely Londoners* too. As Galahad replies to Lucy when she says she cannot understand what he is saying, ‘Is English we speaking’ (Selvon1956: 93).

The structural looseness of *The Lonely Londoners* has been one of the most debated issues in Selvon’s fiction. The presumed slackness of the text was one of the most influential factors in its reception. Selvon said in an interview that “the episodic quality of my novel may come of the quality of west Indian life in London itself. Most of the characters live from day to day, with ups and downs; encounters and chance occurrences are just as important as social rituals.” The structure, thus, is, reflective of content. The life of a particular community is highlighted through this device. It also brings to fore the native elements of West Indian culture. Whitney Balliet claimed:

The book is both an impressionistic portrait of the commingling of two wholly alien races and a buoyant celebration of that eternal folk hero, the pioneer. It is done in a series of sketches of a dozen Negroes- Cap, a hopeless drifter, Bartholomew, a miser, Lewis, an ingénue; and so forth-who revolve like moths around Moses Aloetta.
The episodic structure of *The Lonely Londoners* also means that there is no controlling point of view. Although the novel appears to have been filtered through the consciousness of Moses, the narrative flows freely. This kind of fiction is not an indicator of Selvon’s technical ineptitude. On the other hand, it emphasise ‘the value of factual accuracy at the expense of a controlling point of view that derives from studied analysis of the facts’.  

It is established beyond doubt that *The Lonely Londoners* is a novel of realism, as it depicts the lives of the immigrants of London. However, instead of settling for a “respectable” realism, that would involve exotic details and folklore, Selvon re-invented language, that became the central point of the collision of two traditions, notwithstanding their reciprocal and unequal contacts.

As Sindoni puts it, ‘no merging of European and “New World” experiences is envisioned in Selvon’s fiction, but a contamination’. The European notions of a ‘melting pot’, of a healthy mix of two cultures do not work here. It is rejected in place of the realistic depiction of a contaminated mixture of the cultures.

The title too makes clear the author’s wish to enfranchise his characters and their stories from a serialised representation: they are not “Black Londoners” but “Lonely Londoners”. Racism is rejected outright by this change of title. The
emigrants are black, but black experience is not what the novel is just about. It is about the dreary city of London.

So, there is no racist depiction, but a realistic one, that of a city that induces ‘loneliness’. It emerges as ‘a powerful antidote to British ignorance’. It tells readers that there is something worse than being ‘black’. The immigration experience also meant Selvon had to renegotiate his identity, that Selvon calls ‘East Indian Trinidadian West Indian’. This tells people about the ethnic complexities that are present in a West Indian. These kinds of racial and national complexities are experienced by the characters in The Lonely Londoners. Galahad wonders why the colour black is such a bad thing, while Moses remarks upon how all West Indians are assumed to be Jamaicans.

Race also means a racial, national identity. In the novel, there is a contrast presented between British and Caribbean life. Caribbean life consists of oral modes of communication such as calypso, Carnival and religious influences. British life, on the other hand, is associated with modern rituals, such as the reading of newspapers, which is in contrast with the West Indian everyday rites. England is linked with secondary literacy, which is a solitary practice needing no other human. West Indian standards of living are based on communal ties, geographical affiliations and language similarities. The two lifestyles are in
opposition to each other. In Caribbean culture, identity formation is purported to be group-bound and not individualistic.

The following passage from the novel also shows the contrasting attitudes of the British and the West Indians.

*While Moses smiling to see the test hustling tenants, a newspaper fellar come up to him and say, ‘Excuse me sir, have you just arrived from Jamaica?’*

*And Moses don’t know why but he tell the fellar yes.*

*‘Would you like to tell me what conditions there are like?’*

*The fellar take out notebook and pencil and look at Moses.*

*Now Moses don’t know a damn thing about Jamaica-Moses come from Trinidad, which is a thousand miles from Jamaica, but the English people believe that everybody who come from the West Indies come from Jamaica.*

*‘Ah,’ Moses say, [...] ‘And furthermore, let me give you my view of the situation in this country. We [West Indian immigrants] cant get no place to live, and we only getting the worse jobs it have-’*
But by this time the infant feel that he get catch with Moses, and he say, ‘Thank you’, and hurry off.

Moses was sorry, it was the first time he ever really get a good chance to say his mind, and he had a lot of things to say (Selvon, 1956: 28-9).

This passage is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, the reporter assumes that Moses is from Jamaica. This is stereotyping, a very typical feature of Racism. The ‘black’ West Indians are all grouped together as Jamaicans. There is not even an assumption of diversity. This is one of the problems of post-colonialism too, as seen in the previous chapters.

Moses wants to take this opportunity to make a few things clear, but for the reporter, Moses is just the means to writing a particular kind of news. When he learns that Moses wants to speak of the appalling conditions in London instead of those in Jamaica, he deserts him. This passage in the beginning of the novel is an indicator to the white-black relations in the novel.

Galahad, a primary character in The Lonely Londoners, is caught up in foreign culture. He thinks that being familiar with names associated with English culture gives him a sense of pride. Here is a quotation from the novel:
He [Galahad] had a way, whenever he talking with the boys, he using the names of the places like they mean big romance, as if to say, 'I was in Oxford Street' have more prestige than if he just say ‘I was up the road’. And once he had a date with a frauline, and he make a big point of saying he was meeting she by Charing Cross, because just to say ‘Charing Cross’ have a lot of romance in it, he remember it had a song called ‘Roseann of Charing Cross.’ [...] 

[...] When he say ‘Charing Cross’, when he realise that it is he, Sir Galahad, who going there, near that place that everybody in the world know about it (it even have the name in the dictionary), he feel like a new man. [...] Even if he was just going to coast a lime, to stand up and watch the white people, still, it would have been something.

The same way with the big clock they have in Piccadilly Tube Station, what does tell the time of places all over the world (Selvon,1956: 83-4).

Selvon’s immigrants also try to blend what is familiar with what is alien. They creolise in their own way. Sindoni maintains that Selvon’s immigrants, in The Lonely Londoners, reduplicate patterns that were common at home and seek to recreate familiar models of behaviour (with regards to sex, women, friendship and so on) that however alien may seem to
Women are not a very important part of the immigrants’ life, except as objects of sex. However, if there is one woman who succeeds in maintaining her identity, it is Tanty. Tanty manages to maintain her cultural identity defending it from external assaults. When she goes shopping, she manages to create a familiar atmosphere, closer to her home in the Caribbean. She even manages to make the shopkeeper give goods on credit, something he has never done. Considering Galahad is confused by London roads, an old lady like Tanty travels by Tube across the city to get the keys and not just mope around.

The hostility that the English hold towards the black is highlighted throughout the novel. When Galahad asks Moses the reason for this, Moses replies, “well, as far as I could figure, they frighten that we get job in front of them, though that does never happen. The other thing is that they just don’t like black people, and don’t ask me why, because that is a question that bigger brains than mine trying to find out from way back” (Selvon, 1956: 39).
The situation is bad in all ‘white’ nations- England or America.

Things as bad over here as in America?’ Galahad ask.

‘That is a point the boys always debating’, Moses say. ‘Some say yes, and some say no. The thing is, in America they don’t like you, and they tell you so straight, so that you know how you stand. Over here is the old English diplomacy: “thank you sir,” and “how do you do” and that sort of thing. In America you see a sign telling you to keep off, but over here you don’t see any, but when you go in the hotel or the restaurant they will politely tell you to haul—or else give you the cold treatment’ (Selvon,1956: 39-40).

There are, therefore, different forms of hostility.

London is a very hostile city, as experienced by the immigrants. This is not unlike the thoughts expressed by the protagonist in Jean Rhys’ *Voyage in the Dark* (1934):

This is London—hundreds thousands of white people rushing along and the dark houses all alike frowning down one after the other all alike and stuck together- the streets like smooth shut-in ravines and the dark houses frowning down- oh I’m not going to like this place I’m not going to like this place.
London is a city, where people have no identity. The huge population is measured by stuff like dirty dishes. “Only from the washing up Ma form an idea of the population of London: ‘I never see so much dirty wares in my life’, she tell Tanty, ‘it does have mountains of washing coming in. Where all these people come from?” (Selvon, 1956: 81).

The immigrants, who try to make sense of a bewildering milieu, much like Tiger in *A Brighter Sun*, ask questions about existence, identity and manhood. However, the ‘boys’ as they are called, remain fragmental, partial personalities. One real good indicator of their fragmented existence, according to Gordon Roehler, is the fact that they have nicknames and not real names. As Roehler says, ‘Perhaps nicknames are an acknowledgement of individual richness of personality, but they are also suggestive of an incompleteness of self’.

This is the case with V.S. Naipaul’s *Miguel Street* as well, that seems to owe much to early Selvon.

The term ‘the boys’ also begins to gain a lot of importance as the book proceeds. It is indicative of not just the strange pre-moral innocence that Selvon’s immigrants seem to preserve wherever they are, but also a kind of immaturity, which is persistent because the immigrants do not wake up to responsibility, even under the weight of metropolitan pressures.
It is reiterated throughout the novel that London is a lonely city that is hostile and unfriendly. The rush makes one feel insignificant as well. As Galahad realises,

[...] he realise that here he is, in London, and he ain’t have money or work or place to sleep or any friend or anything, and he standing up here by the tube station watching people, and everybody look so busy he frighten to ask questions from any of them. you think any of them bothering with what going on in his mind? Or in anybody else mind but their own? He see a test come and take a newspaper and put down the money on a box-nobody there to watch the fellar and yet he put the money down. What sort of thing is that? Galahad wonder, they not afraid somebody thief the money?

[...] Everybody doing something or going somewhere, is only he who walking stupid (Selvon, 1956: 42).

Comparisons are made between The Lonely Londoners and a novel by another Trinidadian, V.S. Naipaul (b.1932), The Mimic Men (1967). The deathly universe that makes up the world of Selvon’s immigrants is present in Naipaul’s novel as well. Kenneth Ramchand, in his Introduction to the Longman edition of
The Lonely Londoners gives a few examples. While describing the reducing effects of the city, Ralph Singh, the protagonist of The Mimic Men speaks of people being ‘trapped in fixed postures’, of ‘the personality divided bewilderingly into compartments’ and of ‘the panic of ceasing to feel myself as a whole person’. Let readers have a look at what Selvon’s narrator says about London, it have people living in London who don’t know what happening in the room next to them, far more the street, or how other people living. London is a place like that. It divide 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 ones except what you read in the papers […] (Selvon,1956: 74).

While the characters of The Lonely Londoners might not experience the psychic crash that Ralph Singh suffers, they do experience hysteria, eccentricity and irresponsible non-moral behaviour. Lewis, for instance, is obsessed with the idea that his wife is an entertaining lover when he goes to work. Harris dresses like the English and is always scared of being embarrassed by his countrymen. Bart wastes his life away looking for his lost love Beatrice. Cap’s carefree ways belie his tough interior that survives anything. Moses, by the end of the book, is weary and scared.

Most of the characters in the novel are forever mimicking the white man. In this attempt, they also distance themselves from their own friends and country-
men. They feel that being seen as one of the white men is a privilege. The feeling of inferiority that the white man instilled in the black man is intact. Take Bartholomew for instance,

_Bart have light skin. That is to say, he neither here nor there, though he more here than there. When he first hit Brit’n, like a lot of other brown-skin fellars who frighten for the lash, he go around telling everybody that he is a Latin-American, that he come from South America. [...]

[Bart] get a clerical job and he hold on to it like if is gold, for he frighten if he have to go and work in factory- that is not for him at all. Many nights he think about how many West Indians coming, and it give him more fear than it give the Englishman, for Bart frighten if they make things hard in Brit’n. If a fellar too black, Bart not companying him much, and he don’t like to be found in the company of the boys, he always have an embarrass air when he with them in public, he does look around as much as to say: ‘I here with these boys, but I not one of them, look at the colour of my skin.’

But a few door slam in Bart face, a few English people give him the old diplomacy, and Bart boil down and come like one of the boys (Selvon, 1956: 61-3).
All of Bart’s attempts are bound to fail. Harris’ introduction is telling.

Harris is a fellar who like to play ladeda, and he likes English customs and things, he dos be polite and say thank you and eh does get up in the bus and the tube to let woman sit down, 

*which is a thing even them Englishmen don’t do.* And when he dress, you think is some Englishman going to work in the city, bowler hat and umbrella, and briefcase tuck under the arm, with *The Times* fold up in the pocket so the name would show, and he walking upright like if he alone who alive in the world. Only thing, Harris face black (Selvon,1956: 111, italics mine).

Harris is smitten with the idea of behaving like an Englishman. He does things that an Englishman has grown out of, like being chivalrous.

Harris is another person who wants to look dignified in front of the English. He is scared that his black friends will embarrass him in the parties he throws. In fact, the parties are for impressing his English friends. Towards the end of one such party, he tells his black friends,
‘Another thing’, Harris say, [...] forgetting to speak proper English for a minute, ‘is when the fete finish and the band playing God Save the Queen, some of you have a habit of walking about as if the fete is still going on, and you, Five, the last time you come to one of my dances you was even jocking waist when everybody else standing at attention. Now it have decent people here tonight, and if you don’t get on respectable it will be a bad reflection not only on me but on all the boys, and you know how things already bad in Brit’n. the English people will say we are still uncivilised and don’t know how to behave properly [...]’ (Selvon,1956: 122).

The desire to look decent is predominant. But also, Harris wants to pay respect to all that the English claim to be sacred. He wants everyone else to do so.

Even Tanty cannot be free of the desire to look decent. As she tells Ma minutes after arriving in London, ‘What happening to you?’ Tanty tell Ma. ‘You can’t see this gentleman from the newspapers come to meet we by the station? We have to show that we have good manners, you know ‘(Selvon,1956: 31).
Racism puzzles people like Galahad, and they try to find explanations for it. Galahad finally vents out his anger at black, the colour, which he thinks is the culprit.

‘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 them 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.’ [...] And Galahad watch the colour of this hand, an talk to it, saying, ‘Colour, is you that 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! Look at you, you so black and innocent, and this time so you causing misery all over the world’ (Selvon, 1956: 88).

Galahad speaking to his hand might seem like humour when first read, but the passage is actually an introspective one and a sad one. Galahad cannot understand why the blacks are being mistreated when all they ask for is food and shelter, and work to get both.
‘We only want to get by, we don’t even want to get on’ (Selvon 1956:88) is a telling statement. The black immigrants have no sinister design of usurping the rights of the white people. They want to survive. But that is also denied to them. Galahad starts speaking with the colour black, in his hand, blaming it for all the misery in the world.

It can be seen that all the characters, though hailing from different places in West Indies, some even from other places, like Cap from Nigeria, have a sense of belonging and unity. The sense of community comes through here. This phenomenon is explained by Samuel Selvon himself in an interview given to Susheila Nasta:

[...] You see when this immigration happened, for the first time the Trinidadian got to know the Jamaican or the Barbadian, because in the islands themselves the communications were so bad that they never really got to know what happened in other islands. And it was only when they all came to London that this turned out to be a kind of meeting places where the Jamaican met the Trinidadian and the Barbadian and they got to know one another, they got to identify in a way as a people coming from a certain part of the world. Not so much as islanders, no, but as black
immigrants living in the city of London. and so they got together, and it’s a very strange thing that they had to move out of their own part of the world, and it was only when they came to London that this kind of identity happened to them. [...] all the blacks living in London were thrown together. For the first time West Indians were in contact with people from Africa who were black like themselves, and it was a strange kind of experience [...] but it helped in a way to form a feeling of community and this is why they tended to get together and talk about their troubles and relate incidents that happened to them.13

The concept of ‘nation’ is very important for the understanding of citizenship, identity, and the socio-political modes of incorporation. In order to talk about the rights (civil, political, social) and the obligations that imply, people need to understand the foundational myths, invented traditions and imagined communities (Anderson, 1983) that state dominant elites, dominant classes, and/or dominant racial/ethnic groups construct.

A boundary/border/frontier is drawn between who part are of and those who are not part of the nation. The nation is often imagined in core zones as being equivalent to White middle class values and behaviour. The construction of national identity is entangled with racial categories.
A common feature of the colonial Caribbean migrations is that each in its own way contributed to the emergence of a crisis in the metropolitan national identity, which in turn, is related to a shift in racial discourses.

Coloniality is the reproduction and persistence of the old colonial racial/ethnic hierarchies in a postcolonial world. The end of colonial administrations in the modern world did not imply the end of coloniality. With the large post war colonial migrations, the coloniality of power is reproduced inside the metropoles.

No colonial Caribbean migration passed unnoticed in the European imaginary. These migrants are colonial not only due to their long colonial relationship with the metropole, but also due to their current stereotypical representation in the European imagination which is reflected in their subordinated location in the metropolitan labor market. The representations of colonial subjects as lazy, criminals, dumb, inferior, stupid, untrustworthy, uncivilized, primitive and dirty opportunists have a long colonial history.

In Great Britain the notion of empire, that is Britishness, defines the imagined community. To be British is equivalent to being White English. Accordingly, any talk about a Black British is an oxymoron. As Paul Gilroy said about the British case, nationalism and racism become so closely identified that to
speak of the nation is to speak automatically in racially exclusive terms. Blackness and Englishness are constructed as incompatible, mutually exclusive identities. To speak of the British or English is to speak of white people.14

West Indian migration to Great Britain brought about a crisis in the British imagined community. As in the Netherlands and the United States, colonial Caribbean migration played an important role in questioning British national identity despite their relatively small numbers. The Black British claim of belonging to the imagined community was too radical for the racist construction of the British nation.

Unlike European migrants, West Indians were unwelcome in Great Britain. After 1950, White workers from Poland and Ireland were accepted, but a massive flow of Black immigrants was something White British people from all social classes were unwilling to tolerate. For the government this created a contradictory situation between the British people's racist rejection of a massive Black colonial workers' migration responding to labour needs in the metropoles and the post war Labour governments attempt to build a new imperial partners between Britain and the colonial Commonwealth governments.15

Many Black people from the colonies were sent to the metropolitan cities as students and trainees so that they would return and spread British ideas, favouring
the West in its struggle against Communism. Negative experiences of White British racism and their hostility towards the presence of Black people would jeopardize this strategic political education, affecting British attempts to reconstitute its Colonial Empire by way of the Commonwealth. Nevertheless, the British government secretly tried to stop this colonial migratory flow. There were several reasons why these efforts were concealed from the public.

First, immigration controls against colonial subjects would have created negative international criticism that could have affected its relations with the colonial Commonwealth governments and in turn affected Great Britain's symbolic image world-wide. After the British Nationality Act of 1948, citizenship was extended to all the Commonwealth subjects. It would have been an international embarrassment to prohibit the entrance of Black British citizens while recruiting the non citizen White European labour.

Secondly, even more embarrassing and controversial would have been the association of immigration controls to racism immediately "after a world war partly waged against the racial genocide of the Hider regime". These contradictions hindered the British government from passing anti-immigration laws earlier than it did. This context allowed the massive migration from the West Indies to Great Britain during the 1950's and early 1960's, especially after the U.S. Congress passed a law in 1952 limiting West Indian migration.
In the mid-1950's, there were new attempts by the conservative government to control immigration. Cyril Osborne British Politician attempted to introduce a Private Member's Bill to control Black immigration. This is well summarized by Carter et al.:

*In discussions before the Common Affairs Committee, it was pointed out that the measures proposed in the Bill were difficult to reconcile with British position as head of Commonwealth and Empire. As the Chief Whip summarized: "Why should mainly loyal and hard-working Jamaicans be discriminated against ten times that quantity of disloyal [sic] Southern Irish (some of the Sinn Feiners) come and go as they please?" The timing, too, created problems. With the forthcoming General Election, there was a desire to avoid controversial issues which might improve the chances of a Labour victory. The celebration of Jamaica's three hundredth anniversary of British rule in 1955--at which Princess Margaret was the principal guest--also made it inopportune to present what would have appeared as 'anti-Jamaican Bill.' This was underlined by the feeling in some quarters that colonial development and not legislation was*
the solution to immigration. Finally, the measure refused leave on the grounds that it was too important a measure to be left to a Private Member ....\textsuperscript{17}

The measure was again presented as a Draft Bill in the Cabinet by the Home Secretary in October, 1955. The same objections to Osborne's Bill were put forward. But, in addition, new arguments were raised in the November 3 Cabinet meeting.

Firstly, they realized that there was no consent in public opinion towards this racist bill. Secondly, colonial immigration recognized as a means of increasing British labor resources. For the first time there were arguments in Cabinet meetings about the economic benefits of immigrants. Thirdly, there was recognition that immigration could be stopped by creating jobs in the colonies. The advantage of this alternative was that it would not jeopardize British capital and the reconstruction of the Empire in the colonial territories. As a result, the British Cabinet did not approve the bill.

Since the extension of full citizen rights to Blacks with the passing of the 1948 Nationality Act, there have been dissident voices against colonial migrants. From many circles, including British labour, there was a questioning of this legislation based on a racialized construction of Britishness. The latter excluded
and included groups based on skin colour. Belonging to British national identity was equivalent to being White, whereas immigrants and foreigners were associated with being Black. These racialized identities continued throughout the 1950's.

The 1958 anti-Black riots in Nottingham and Notting Hill were the turning point that shifted British public opinion in favor of black immigration control. From then on it was a matter of time before the controls were actually approved. By July 1, 1962, the government approved an immigration control bill prohibiting the continued flow of migrants from Commonwealth territories to the Motherland. Great Britain was the only country to impose state controls over colonial Caribbean migrations to the metropole. Although migration from the Commonwealth colonies significantly declined after this date, the existence of a Black British minority was already an irreversible process.

The success and influence of African-American Civil Rights struggles in the early 1960's stimulated and fostered Black British struggles. The 1968 Race Relations Bill was an important achievement by the anti-racist movement. However, this Bill was a turning point in the shift from biological racist discourses to cultural racist discourses. The new racism was articulated by British Conservative leader Enoch Powell in the late 1960's. This was a racism where the word race was hardly mentioned and biological racism was criticized.
The new racism was articulated in terms of Blacks' high propensity toward crime, unassimilability to British culture, and irreconcilable cultural differences. These differences were understood as natural, fixed, and essential or, as Gilroy would say, as an "ethnic absolutism." The new racist discourse is entangled with a sectarian definition of the nation.

As Powell said in response to those who critiqued his views as racist, "It is even a heresy to say that the English are a white nation." Thus, one of consequences is to stop Blacks from entering the country and if possible, repatriate them. As Powell said, "... suspension of immigration and encouragement of re-emigration hang together, logically and humanly, as two aspects of the same approach." Part of the new racist rhetoric is to transmute racist arguments into rhetoric of population growth as a major factor justifying the policies against Black migration.

This is how Powell articulates his justification for stopping Black migration

[...] I would have thought that a glance at the world would show easily tensions leading to violence arise where there is a majority and minority . . . with sharp differences, recognizable differences, and mutual fears . . . when the
numbers of minorities are small, then this danger hardly exists. It is as the numbers of the minority (which in some area is the majority) rise, that the danger grows. Consequently the whole of this issue to me ... is one of number.20

Historically, while incorporated in the labor market during a capitalist systemic expansion, Caribbean people have not received the same income, jobs, or status as compared to the dominant European/Euro-American populations. In times of crisis, Caribbean people have been marginalized from the labor market. In both cases, a cultural racist discourse has been mobilized to justify either a low-wage incorporation or a marginalization from the labor market in terms of cultural behaviour, habits, and values.

In November 1961, a Commonwealth Immigrants Bill was introduced in the House of Commons in England that restricted the flow of immigrants to Britain. From then on, the surge of immigrants slowed down.

Readers can see how the background to immigration is important to the study of the novel The Lonely Londoners. When it comes to exile, readers can see how the emigrants in England are all exiles. They cannot love their nation of
abode, although they try to. They cannot get back to their roots. They are indeed in a sad situation.

There is also the hybridity of the people in London, where there are many immigrants. In *The Housing Lark*, (1965) Selvon experiments with dialogue and dialect. It was meant to be a funny, farcical novel about the working and housing conditions of the black immigrants in London. Positioned between two serious and humourless novels, *I Hear Thunder* and *The Plains of Caroni*, *The Housing Lark* is Selvon’s most deliberately and decidedly humorous novel. In this novel, description, dialogue and balladry all combine to evoke laughter for its own sake. This is however a mask to cover serious matters.

The novel is the story of how three men, two Trinidadians and one Jamaican pool money together to buy a house. The novel seems to be a celebration of the possibilities of effectively combining dreaming and constructive action. Battersby is the hero of the novel. He achieves his desired goal against daunting odds. The three men come up with the idea of pooling their resources to buy a house during their first meeting. This idea starts getting more and more serious and the lives of the men and women in the get-together get involved in the plan. This plan happens in a basement in Brixton, the West Indian equivalent of Hampton Court.
In close observations *The Housing Lark* is the immigrant version of a historical plot, part of the black adventurers’ mission to re-colonise and nigrify London.

This plan of a housing lark ensures the dignity of the characters. The comic spirit of the novel is an indication of the reformation of the group of West Indian men and women and the restoration of some measure of dignity, identity of pride through the acquiring of house and spouse. *The Housing Lark* is Selvon’s only immigrant novel that entrusts women with the ability to alter the lives of West Indian immigrants in London.

The comedy of *A Housing Lark* wears a double mask; one face inviting and forcing readers to enjoy the abundant humour and the other face telling that behind the comic mask, there are serious issues that need to be addressed. Selvon himself says that the novel “has to do with the difficulties of finding a place to live in London”.21 There is an obvious concern to draw attention to the wretched living conditions to which the West Indian immigrants were subjected.

Thus, the important issues are highlighted in the two immigrant novels, *The Lonely Londoners* and *The Housing Lark*. 
REFERENCES


5. Ibid, p.67


10. Ibid p.152.

11. Ibid p.184


