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**“You fellars does live in a dream world.”: Identity Crisis in Sam Selvon’s Caribbean
Fiction**

“You fellars does live in a dream world.”: Krize identity v karibské próze Sama Selvona

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Sam Selvon, Karibská próza, Postkoloniální literatura, Koloniální identita, Diaspora, Migrace

KEY WORDS

Sam Selvon, Caribbean Fiction, Post-colonial Literature, Colonial Identity, Diaspora, Migration

ABSTRACT

The thesis aims to analyse Sam Selvon's fiction between 1950 and 1990 in relation to the colonial subjects' identity crisis. The thesis will argue that Selvon's fiction is independent of traditional and canonical categories because his representation of colonial subjects is entirely innovative and unprecedented. I will analyse Selvon's novels *A Brighter Sun* (1952), *An Island is a World* (1955), *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *The Housing Lark* (1965), *Moses Ascending* (1975), and *Moses Migrating* (1983). Each novel sheds light on a different facet of the colonial subject. Nevertheless, colonisation, migration, and identity crisis are common themes for the novels chosen.

From *A Brighter Sun* to *Moses Migrating*, Selvon destroys the caricatured image of the colonised subject. He reaches authenticity on the level of character depiction and through the vernacular, ballad-like narrative. Additionally, the novels represent different aspects of colonisation and migration: "back at home", "the motherland", and "back and forth". I will display how every aspect is fluid and undefinable. *A Brighter Sun* takes place in the West Indies. *An Island is a World* displays "back and forth" experience in the West Indies, USA, and Britain. *The Lonely Londoners*, *The Housing Lark*, and *Moses Ascending* take place in "the motherland". Chronologically the last one, *Moses Migrating*, explores the idea of going back home, which is a very subjective concept. Each novel can be described as a coming-of-age narrative of a man of colour in the colonial structure. However, each journey to self-awareness develops and ends differently. Not only the characters' journeys differ, but also Selvon's journey as a writer differs. The dialect of characters in *A Brighter Sun* takes possession of the entire narrative in *The Lonely Londoners*. The ballad-like structure and vernacular narrative represent the West Indian tradition of storytelling and weaving an identity. Some characters write memoirs, which helps them

during the process of building their consciousness. In a way, that makes Selvon's fiction to be about creating fiction and writing one's own self. Considering Selvon's experiences as a migrant writer, the novels and main characters will be analysed through three different perspectives: identity, politics, and psychology. Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* focused on identity, and the question of migration will explain the characters' experiences. Frantz Fanon's focus on the politics and physical side of the clash between individuals will be applied to explain some actions like violence, racism, and social justice in the novels. *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* take upon these problems caused by constant interaction between the coloniser and the colonised. Lastly, Sartre's ontological and psychological theories will help to understand the colonial subject's identity crisis. Sartre's writing on existence and self in *Being and Nothingness* is crucial for explaining the authenticity and accepting the temporality. It is this authenticity and temporality that make Selvon's fiction contemporary and independent from simple labels.

ABSTRAKT

Tato práce si klade za cíl analyzovat beletrii Sama Selvona v letech 1950 až 1990 ve vztahu ke krizi identity koloniálních subjektů. Cílem práce je zároveň dokázat, že Selvonova beletrie je nezávislá na tradiční a kanonické literatuře, jelikož zastoupení koloniálních subjektů v jeho knihách je zcela inovativní a bezprecedentní. V práci budu analyzovat Selvonovy romány *A Brighter Sun* (1952), *An Island is a World* (1955), *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *The Housing Lark* (1965), *Moses Ascending* (1975), a *Moses Migrating* (1983). Každý román poskytuje náhled na rozdílné aspekty koloniálního subjektu. Kolonizace, migrace a krize identity jsou nicméně společným tématem vybraných románů.

V těchto románech Selvon narušuje karikaturu kolonizovaného subjektu. Autenticity dosahuje na úrovni vyobrazení postav a lidového baladického vyprávění. Romány obsahují mnoho motivů kolonizace a migrace: „domov“, „vlast“ a „cesta tam a zpět“. V práci se budu snažit ukázat, jak je každý z motivů proměnlivý a nedefinovatelný. *A Brighter Sun* se odehrává v Západní Indii. *An Island is a World* pracující s motivem „cesty tam a zpět“ se odehrává v Západní Indii, USA a Británii. *The Lonely Londoners*, *The Housing Lark* a *Moses Ascending* jsou napsány na motiv „vlasti“. Chronologicky poslední, *Moses Migrating*, zkoumá myšlenku návratu domů, což je velmi subjektivní koncept. Každý román lze popsat jako příběh dospívání barevného muže v koloniální sféře. Každá cesta k uvědomění si sebe sama se však vyvíjí a končí jinak. Liší se nejen cesty postav, ale také Selvonova cesta jakožto spisovatele. Dialekt postav v *A Brighter Sun* je použit pro vyprávění příběhu v *The Lonely Londoners*. Baladická struktura a lidové vyprávění představují západoindickou tradici vyprávění a tvorby identity. Některé postavy píší vzpomínky a pomáhá jim to při budování jejich vědomí. Selvon tedy píše fikci obsahující

postavy píšící svoji vlastní fikci v rámci knihy. Vzhledem ke zkušenostem Selvona jako spisovatele z řad migrantů budou romány a hlavní postavy analyzovány ze tří různých pohledů: identita, politika a psychologie. Homiho K. Bhabhiho *The Location of Culture* zaměřené na identitu a otázku migrace objasní zkušenosti postav. Zaměření Frantze Fanona na politickou a fyzickou stránku střetu mezi jednotlivci bude použito k vysvětlení některých aspektů jako je násilí, rasismus a sociální spravedlnost. *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* se zabývají těmito problémy způsobenými neustálou interakcí mezi kolonizátorem a kolonizovanými. A konečně, Sartrovy ontologické a psychologické teorie pomohou porozumět krizi identity koloniálního subjektu. Sartrovo pasní o existenci a konceptu „já“ v *Being and Nothingness* je zásadní pro vysvětlení autenticity a přijetí dočasnosti. Právě tato autenticita a dočasnost činí Selvonovu fikci současnou a nezávislou.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	11
2	The Politics of Caribbean Identity	15
2.1.1	African Slavery in the Caribbean.....	16
2.2	<i>A Brighter Sun</i>	19
2.2.1	Knowledge	20
2.2.2	The Manichean World	23
2.3	<i>An Island Is a World</i>	25
2.3.1	The Politics of ‘Present’	26
2.3.2	Writing and Weaving.....	29
2.3.3	The Dizzy World.....	30
3	To the Motherland: Windrush Generation.....	32
3.1	Across the Atlantic Ocean	33
3.2	<i>The Lonely Londoners</i>	36
3.2.1	The Mythical Quest.....	40
3.2.2	Subversity and Authenticity Through West Indian Narrative	43
3.2.3	Politics of Identity in <i>The Lonely Londoners</i>	46
3.3	<i>The Housing Lark</i>	49
3.3.1	A housing “lark”	51
4	King of the Castle: Moses at Home.....	55
4.1	Moses Ascending	60
4.1.1	Moses as a Trickster Figure	62
4.1.2	Moses and “Friday”	65
4.2	Moses <i>Immigrating</i>	69
4.2.1	Colonial Identity: The Orphan of the World.....	72
4.2.2	Masquerade and the Carnival.....	73
4.2.3	“Play mas”	75
5	Conclusion	78

1 Introduction

This MA thesis aims to analyse and take a more in-depth look into Sam Selvon's authentic Caribbean fiction. To display the effect of the colonial system on the identity search, the following pages will provide different perspectives on colonialism, racism, authenticity, and politics of the self. These concepts have a crucial position in the world Selvon writes about. Six various texts that are written in the course of thirty years will be the primary sources for analysing colonial identities. The novels are *A Brighter Sun* (1952), *An Island Is A World* (1955), *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *The Housing Lark* (1965), *Moses Ascending* (1975), and *Moses Migrating* (1983).

Sam Selvon's cultural background has a significant influence on his artistry and creativity. Selvon has Indian and immigrant roots in his family. He was born in Trinidad. Like other islands in the West Indies, the place is a cultural mosaic. The experience of immigration is not only inherited by the previous generation in his family. Selvon also migrated to England and Canada later in his life.¹ The island life is important because, like the other Caribbean Islands, it is the image of the world on a smaller scale. As one of his novel's title, "An island is a world." It is a microcosm of an ethnically diverse group of people who forcedly or "freely" migrated mostly from the continents of Africa and Asia. The West Indian identity is one of the common points of the main characters in the novels. However, this heritage is the phenomenon that causes the main characters to differ at the same time. For the West Indian identity, all the characters are the same in sharing different experiences with authenticity. There is no periphery in Selvon's fiction. He displays how every character is in the centre of his identity narrative. Gayatri

¹ H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol 49 (New York: Oxford UP, 2004), 729-730.

Chakravorty Spivak similarly represents it as “the silent, silenced centre.”² Selvon’s fiction breaks the stereotypical image of “the other” in the colonial system through breaking the characters’ silence. The parallel between Selvon and some of the main characters is important because it manifests the novelist’s authenticity, together with his understanding of solidarity and emancipation of the colonized individuals. The parallel imagery will be discussed concerning specific novels in the following chapters.

The authenticity and politics of the self cannot and will not remain limited to character analysis, plot, and themes in the novels. The original techniques used by Selvon to create the stories for these colonial identities have an enormous impact on the way the novels are being analysed and “categorised”. The categorisation is vital because Selvon writes his narrative both in standard English and in the Caribbean/creole dialect. There are many examples of the use of dialect in American literature, but it is used in shorter body of works such as poetry and short stories. However, Selvon’s choice of dialect for the narrative voice in a novel is groundbreaking. Also, Selvon fuses standardised or dialect narrative with traditional Caribbean storytelling through calypso, ballad and ‘old-talk’. These techniques become a manifestation of solidarity and weaving through cultural identity at different points in the texts. They gain even more importance in the midst of the identity crisis experienced by the ‘skirts’ of the ethnocentric Western social system.

The colonial system and subjugation do not only highlight the power of Caribbean storytelling. This system precedes Selvon’s colonial narrative. Even though Selvon reflects the politics of colonialism and subjugation, it shall be discussed with the guidance of certain philosophers’ and politicians’ works. While colonialism can be described and categorised in a

² Rosalind C. Morris, *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia UP, 2010), 37.

certain way, the identity which is affected by this system cannot be classified or pinned down. The subsequent chapters need to carry a Derridean perspective upon identity, self and authenticity. For the identity cannot be defined and fixed, I shall focus on “what it is not” rather than focusing on what the identity is, as Derrida does on deconstruction in “Letter to a Japanese Friend.” The idea of identity is not an enclosed figure. It is not a destination that awaits to be reached. It is not a state of consciousness where the fixity and consistency are experienced from the moment of gaining, and it is not a state to be grasped or possessed. Stuart Hall’s words encapsulate the negative existence of identity as a concept, “the impossibility of identities.”³ Under many terms like self, subject or identity, it is clear that its existence and essence is questioned by different philosophers like Michel Foucault or Judith Butler. There is only one common point in attitude towards identity that it is absolutely problematic. According to Zygmunt Bauman, the identity “... was a ‘problem’ from its birth- was *born as a problem* (that is, as something one needs [to] do something about- as a task), could exist only as a problem; it was a problem, and thus ready to be born...”⁴ Nevertheless still, the thesis aims to narrow down the identity ‘problem’ in discovering the identity politics that is common in each novel selected. It is crucial to bear in mind that the identity under question in the thesis does not only refer to the protagonists, but it also refers to the identity and evolution of the Caribbean novel through Selvon’s fiction.

The politics of the self has become even more complicated with the idea of cultural identity and its relation to colonialism. One of the most critical terms that the colonial world provoked is “identification”. “Identification” carries imagination and dualism in its territory. This dualism is mentioned by Frantz Fanon as the Manichean system of colonialism frequently.

³ Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: SAGE Publication, 1996), 16.

⁴ Hall and du Gay 19.

The ‘practice’ of identity is more contradicting and fluid in colonial discourse. According to Judith Butler, identification belongs to the “imaginary.”⁵ It is indeed a fallacy in the dualism of the colonial system. However, this dualism does not only sum up the good and evil or the light and the dark concepts of Western civilisation. The duality is also carried within the subjugated colonial subject. It is W. E. B. Du Bois’s genius comment over the existence of the black person in a Western society dominated by ethnocentric, ‘nationalist’ white subjects. It is the “double-consciousness”. This term is crucial regarding the experiences of colonial subjects in Selvon’s fiction. The double state enables Selvon to represent both the periphery and the centre of Western society, even though all the novels take place only in peripheries.

The experiences of colonial subjects will be divided into chapters according to their relation to the physical realm they take place in. There are multiple texts for each location, such as in the West Indies, Britain or back and forth. The “similarity” of the colonial subjects is one of the most crucial points of Selvon’s fiction. Reading between the lines that seem repetitive is the key to the kingdom of authenticity. Hence, the thesis argues that the individuality and originality of the colonial subject’s experience behind the faulted image of stable and same sunshine in the West Indies is the manifestation of both characters’ and Selvon’s authenticity as a social and creative identity.

⁵ Hall and du Gay, 16.

2 The Politics of Caribbean Identity

It is important to set out the idea of Caribbean identity because the novels focus on the individuals existing in this cultural context. The Caribbean is a region including islands, a coastal area and a sea, which carry the same name, located in the eastern part of Central America. The south is the Caribbean Sea, and the east is the Atlantic Ocean. It is a big, diverse, and scattered region.¹ In the contemporary sense, when the terms “the Caribbean,” “the islands,” “the Caribbean region” are used for the idea of oneness and homogeneity is remote. Although there has been specific mutual exercises and traditions in the scattered region of the Caribbean, the diversity and originality of individual cultural groups date back to pre-Columbian expeditions. Even though the contact with the European world is taken as the initiative of the ‘divide and rule’ policy, the division in the cultural richness is a pre-existing phenomenon in the Caribbean. Hence, it is crucial for further discussion that there was no central, pure, and one ideal Caribbean identity even in the prehistoric period, according to archaeological research.

The diversity of these indigenous groups was refused and disregarded from the very first interaction with European sailors and explorers. Since Columbus visited the Caribbean for the first time and described the land and its people in his journals, these indigenous inhabitants were known as “Indians.” Also, according to Figueredo and Argote-Freyre’s work, “Tainos” was another word to describe all indigenous communities in the Caribbean. The reason behind the metaphorical confinement of the inhabitants in the Caribbean region into few words is that “taino” was one of the first words that Columbus heard and recorded.² The attitude inevitably indicates that the motive behind the geographical expeditions was never a claim to recognise

¹ D. H. Figueredo and Frank Argote-Freyre, *A Brief History of the Caribbean* (New York: Facts On File, 2008), 256.

² Figueredo and Argote-Freyre 2.

other cultures and cultural expedition. The policy of divide, rule, and conquer seems to be the prerequisite of the voyages made by European kingdoms. This is also clearly understood and unwished for the generations of the Caribbean culture when history is considered. According to Figueredo and Argote-Freyre, many Caribbean scholars, writers and thinkers thought that “Columbus was the destroyer of the Caribbean paradise and the initiator of the capitalist oppression that led to the slavery of Tainos, Caribs, and Africans.”³ With the beginning of the 16th century, the systematic colonisation of the Caribbean started. Even though the advanced system of European colonialism peaks in yielding in the 19th century, it dates back to the “invasion” of the Caribbean. In *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (1964), Sartre states that,

The fact is that colonisation is neither a series of chance occurrences nor the statistical result of thousands of individual undertakings. It is a system which was put in place around the middle of the nineteenth century, began to bear fruit in about 1880, started to decline after the First World War, and is today turning against the colonising nation.⁴

Through Sartre’s ontological perspective upon colonialism as a system in 1964, it can be argued that colonialism was neither Columbus’s nor Queen Isabella I of Castile’s “individual undertakings”. Even if its layout and development plan were consciously worked on in the 19th century, the forced labour and Christian religion were already imposed upon them systematically in the 16th century.

2.1.1 African Slavery in the Caribbean

The extermination of indigenous groups of the Caribbean region forced European colonisers to look for the labour force. It is important to bear in mind that the development of slavery and its effects on the economy in the colonies embedded them together in this system.

³ Figueredo and Argote-Freyre 17.

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 9.

This is the first crossing of the Atlantic towards the Caribbean/The West Indies. Hundreds of years later, descendants of the Africans will cross the Atlantic one more time for Britain. It is out of question that the “migration” of Selvon’s colonial subjects is as forceful as the slave trade that took place four hundred years ago between Africa and the Caribbean.

The increase in the number of Africans in the Caribbean is also significant for cultural diversity. European colonists topped the indigenous people’s cultural existence, and the Africans also brought their own cultural exercises. Considering the innumerable amount of different cultural concepts and practices of the whole African continent, this is the manifestation of heterogeneity. The keyword ‘heterogeneity’ is topped by forced migrations from continent Asia. Chinese and East Indians made the following crowded group of people after Africans in the West Indies. Among the heterogeneity and cultural diversity, there was one indisputable reality of the centralisation of the white identity and culture in the faces of many other cultural identities. The only common point Africans, the Caribbean’s indigenous people, Chinese or East Indian, shared was that they were the peripheries to the English-speaking white man’s autonomy. In his ground-breaking work, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon goes deep into the seeds of the politics of colonisation and ethnocentricity. Fanon states that,

If one adds that many Europeans go to the colonies because it is possible for them to grow rich quickly there, that with rare exceptions the colonial is a merchant, or rather a trafficker, one will have grasped the psychology of the man who arouses in the autochthonous population “the feeling of inferiority.”⁵

Even though Fanon focuses on the colonisation of Malagasy people in this chapter, the European coloniser’s image is repetitive in different decades and geographies. The image is a merchant. The coloniser first holds on to the land. It empties it from the indigenous existence, as happened

⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Finland: Grove Press, 1967), 108.

in the Caribbean. Then, the land is filled with the labouring force from different parts of the world. It creates a synthetic and artificial microcosm of the world in which he is the authority and centre. The process of stripping people of their cultural identities is commented on by Fanon as,

...I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me colonised native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself as quickly as possible into step with the white world...⁶

This is not special for Malagasy people. This is the politics of colonisation, as Sartre argued. This is at the centre of Caribbean identity. As discussed in the introduction, cultural identity is problematic on its own. Moreover, in relation to the subjugation of the cultural identity and sense of the self, the politics of colonialism is a manifestation of negativity and loss. As Hall explains, “the rift of separation, the loss of identity” is integral to the Caribbean experience.⁷ This will be seen in the following chapters in the analysis of novels that take place in the 1930s towards the end of the century. The reason behind this deconstruction is the sustainability of the British colonialism policy. After the abolition of slavery and emancipation, introducing the “independent” island nations into the commonwealth, and the Neocolonialism’s feeding on the rising capitalism of the century are the means for holding power in a postcolonial world. However, if there is one exercise of power that did not change its façade or severity, it is the deterioration of language.

Language is the carrier of culture, society and solidarity. Fanon discusses the relationship between systematic colonialism and language, which leads to his argument about the inferiority

⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 98.

⁷ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 224-25.

complex. Fanon argues that a person exists in the world that is created by the language that the person speaks. Hence, the burial of the colonised subject's local language is the burial of his/her culture.⁸ Therefore, English as a language and carrier of the mother country's culture and ideal, Britain is the only tool for weaving identity through text in Selvon's English Caribbean fiction. Suppose the mastery of the language is an immense power. In that case, Selvon manifests his and the colonised subjects' autonomy with the use of the language as a weapon directed against the Empire. Selvon's characters speak loudly in a language that was forced upon their ancestors, cause them to lose their mother tongues from the Caribbean, Africa, East India or the Far East.

2.2 *A Brighter Sun*

Selvon's first novel, *A Brighter Sun*, is an excellent example of the struggle of cultural identity and the journey towards acceptance. The main character Tiger is a sixteen years old boy from a small town called Chaguanas in Trinidad. For the sake of his close family ties and background, he can be classified among other Indian farmers that populated densely in the town in the 1930s. However, Tiger's struggle with Indianness, Trinidadian identity and creolisation is not evident at the beginning of the novel. It is a coming-of-age novel because it starts with Tiger's introduction to an unknown realm of marriage, and the novel describes crucial experiences about race, culture, and existence in general. However, this text is not merely a descriptive record of the daily life of Trinidadians. The idea of the repetitive and picaresque style of West Indian stories is explained with a particular point of view by Edward Kamau Brathwaite in "Sir Galahad and the Islands" (1957). In the essay, he comes up with a reason that the cultural poverty of the West Indian population leads to picaresque stories that have a rootless rogue pattern.⁹ Social poverty is because of the limitations of the colonial world for colonised subjects.

⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 18.

⁹ Kamau Edward Brathwaite, *Roots* (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1986), 8-9.

Diminishing opportunities for education, work, or social/cultural improvement leads to the picaresque and solely descriptive sunny texts of the West Indies. Yet, this is not the case for Selvon, which is the core of this thesis. Hence, *A Brighter Sun* is a coming-of-age novel not only concerning Tiger but also concerning the nature of Caribbean fiction and artistry. The development of the character and Selvon's narrative technique shall be analysed individually.

2.2.1 Knowledge

Knowledge is one of the key points to the understanding of autonomy in the novel. *A Brighter Sun* strikes the reader with the lack of knowledge right at the beginning on Tiger's behalf. "Tiger didn't know anything about the wedding until his father told him. He didn't even know the girl."¹⁰ Later, Tiger's first-ever direct speech in the novel is a question: "What you name?"¹¹ The lack of knowledge and inability to attain it is vital for the character's consciousness and existence. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, as an extensive study on the consciousness of existence, illuminates where Tiger stands at the beginning of the novel. According to Sartre, the two facades of existence are "being-in-itself" (l'être-en-soi) and "being-for-itself" (l'être-pour-soi). They are opposed to each other.¹² Being-for-itself is opposed to being-in-itself with the differentiation of being conscious of existence. The awareness is there with the constant changing and fluidity. However, being-in-itself is unaware, and the incapability of change is there. In his words,

Being-in-itself is never either possible or impossible....consciousness absolutely can not derive being from anything, either from another being, or from a

¹⁰ Samuel Selvon, *A Brighter Sun* (Harlow: Longman, 1985), 4.

¹¹ Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 5.

¹² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Pocket Books, 1978), lxiii.

possibility or from a necessary law. Uncreated, without reason for being, without any connection with another being, being-in-itself is de trop for eternity.¹³

The stillness and alleged structure of being-in-itself correlate with a fixed image, almost like a snapshot. Considering Tiger and the lack of consciousness towards his subjectivity represents him as a being-in-itself existence. The floating image of Tiger's existence supports the lack of consciousness. Tiger does not dwell in the present life in Chaguanas because he does not have intuition, which is vital to the culturally rich social life. Tiger does not understand or even guess the upcoming marriage. It is said, "Tiger didn't know anything about the wedding until his father told him."¹⁴ Until he is directly informed, he is incapable of requiring the information. According to Sartre, "...intuition is the presence of consciousness to the thing."¹⁵ Hence, Selvon introduces a young Trinidadian who is not conscious being at the beginning of the novel.

Knowledge is requisite for the being-for-itself. However, knowledge is a vast spectrum, and Tiger is interested in many ways. In the introduction of the novel, Roydon Salick outlines the challenge between knowledge and Tiger in an acknowledgeable manner. From the understanding of the outer world to the mythical, sexual experience, different aspects and instances of knowledge are displayed. The most crucial knowledge Salick notes is in the meaning of "knowing oneself,"¹⁶ which leads back to Sartre's theory about being-for-itself as an existence bearing consciousness of its existence. Tiger reaches the point where he is conscious of himself as Tiger, as a Trinidadian and as a colonial subject. Tiger is a colonial subject in the West Indies both at the beginning and end of his journey. The difference is the consciousness gained through many experiences in marriage, social relations and interaction with the Western civilisation. As a colonial subject in the form of being-in-itself, Tiger is a fallacy, an artificial image created and

¹³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, lxvi.

¹⁴ Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 4.

¹⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 172.

¹⁶ Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, xi.

assigned by the colonial power, Britain. This artificial image is the exact “role-play” the American workers look for during their time in Trinidad. Upon Larry’s insistence on eating with their hands, the chief says, “Okay then, we’ll all eat with fingers. This’ll be something to write to the folks about!”¹⁷ A mere usage or non-usage of forks and knives becomes a means for objectifying colonial subjects like Tiger and Urmilla. Also, the artificial and mythicised image can be seen in Larry and the chief’s comment on Trinidad. Larry says,

Funny, I never thought it would be like this. I expected hula-hula girls in grass skirts, and natives creeping through the bush with bows and arrows! Instead, what do I see? A modern city streaming with American cars, people dressed to kill in the latest fashions.¹⁸

The ethnocentric and essentialist fantasy of the colonial power confines Trinidad and the people in a fixed image. If Tiger becomes aware of this, he can reach being-for-itself. Yet, during the visit, he cannot name the problematic attitude of the chief and Larry. Tiger thinks to himself, “Something was wrong, he could sense it. He wanted to put it right, whatever it was.”¹⁹ Tiger cannot reach the fact that the chief and Larry display racist behaviour.

Even though Selvon represents Tiger as an unilluminated man during the visit episode, Tiger is a wise man at the end of the novel. Tiger experiences death, writing memoir and solidarity in the Trinidadian community. Therefore, his last words are a statement of the knowledge and capability of the plantation. Tiger states, “Now is a good time to plant corn.”²⁰ The being-in-itself state is substituted by the being-for-itself, which bears consciousness and the power of intuition.

¹⁷ Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 172.

¹⁸ Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 173.

¹⁹ Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 169.

²⁰ Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 215.

2.2.2 The Manichean World

Tiger's fight against the Manichean system of colonisation is the second phenomenon in the journey to autonomy and authenticity. The Manichean structure is an agency for power relations in the colonial system. It is an organisation, Fanon says, and it is no surprise. In the first chapter, "On Violence" of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon argues that the Manichean structure constitutes within colonisation. He argues,

The colonial regime owes its legitimacy to force and at no time does it ever endeavour to cover up this nature of things... And first and foremost, stating the principle 'It's them or us' is not a paradox since colonialism, as we have seen, is precisely the organization of a Manichaeian world, a compartmentalized world.²¹

Later, he argues that the colonized subject does not question the compartmentalized world. Instead of looking for justice, the subject internalises and takes place in combat. Notwithstanding this organization, Selvon provides Tiger with freedom and acquired consciousness. Hence, Tiger does not take his place in the combat of "them or us". Even though the mother country and white man's ideals exist, the initial power relation is between East Indian and African descendant islanders. Tiger's father represents the colonized subject who unconsciously serves the segregationist system. When he visits Tiger and Urmilla, he is alarmed by the friendship they developed with Rita and Joe, who are African descendant Trinidadians. His father says, "Is only nigger friend you makeam since you come?... Plenty Indian liveam dis side... Indian must keep together."²² Tiger's uncle adds saying, "What you bap say is right thing, though, ... Nigger people all right, but you must let creole people keep they distance.... Allyuh better make Indian friend."²³ However, Tiger never feels ultimately and solely Indian. When Joe tries to categorize

²¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 42-43.

²² Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 47.

²³ Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 48.

Tiger as an Indian concerning the living style, Tiger is extremely lucid in his answer, unlike in other conversations. “That is them, but I have ambition, Joe.” Tiger does not feel like belonging in the Indian community. He is not a supporter of the fallacy of “untouched” Indianness in the Caribbean. He cherishes creolization because he was born on the island, and he speaks creole English. Acceptance of heterogeneity of the Trinidadian cultural identity does not constitute of only black and Indian people. Tiger deconstructs the Manichaeism of black and white, good and evil, through his experience with the American visitors, Mrs Cuthbert and the white doctor from Port of Spain. Especially the doctor’s help in contrast to other doctors in the town is crucial in Tiger’s declaration of solidarity. He says, “And, Joe, ain’t all of we does live good? Ain’t coolie does live good with nigger? Is only wite man who want to keep we down, and even so it have some good one among them. You know something, Joe, they have good and bad all about, don’t matter if you wite or black.”²⁴ He manifests the creolization and solidarity of Trinidad. Tiger continues,

It have so many different kinds of people in Trinidad, boy! You think I should start to wear dhoti? Or I should dress as everybody else, and don’t worry about Indian so much, but think of all of we as a whole, living in one country, fighting for we rights?”²⁵

The house Tiger and Joe build at the end accentuates the deconstruction of Manichaeism. The house is a physical representation of the authenticity Tiger reached in the novel.

Tiger reaches autonomy, be that as it may, Selvon does not idealize or heroize his experience. The discrimination towards Joe and Rita or degradation of his cultural richness in the face of the Western tradition are represented bleakly by Selvon. This makes Selvon an authentic

²⁴ Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 194-5.

²⁵ Selvon, *A Brighter Sun*, 195.

novelist because the balance between reality and ideal is as fluid and fragmentary as his real-life experiences.

2.3 *An Island Is a World*

An Island Is a World follows the debut novel in an unexpected way. Selvon, as an experienced novel writer, now fearlessly expresses his ideals on authenticity and existentialism. He has an agenda, and Kenneth Ramchand narrates Selvon's ambition with his words that occurred in a personal communication right at the beginning of the introduction to the novel. Selvon says, "...my most ambitious novel in scope and theme, which does not mean to say the object was accomplished. It falls short, but of all the books I've ever written it is the only one in which I set out consciously to express or try out some of my beliefs..."²⁶ As quoted Braithwaite's explanation upon the nature of the Caribbean literature and West Indian traditional storytelling, Selvon sets out to go beyond the boundaries of "tradition" and familiarity. Selvon experiments and displays a West Indian colonial subject who is under the scope of postmodernism and fragmentation of identity. Foster is a struggling character concerning authenticity and individuality in the colonial world. However, Foster is a different character in his journey of authenticity compared to Tiger. Selvon deconstructs the image of the East Indian migrant, yearning for his motherland and unification with his community through a postmodern existence of Foster. Foster is not only removed from the concept of Indianness, but he also cannot come to terms with being Trinidadian. While in *A Brighter Sun*, Trinidad was a mosaic bearing possibility of unification, in *An Island Is a World*, it is the embodiment of fragmentation and angst. *An Island Is a World* is an antithesis of "history" as a narrated past and historicization of the colonial structure.

²⁶ Sam Selvon, *An Island Is a World* (Toronto: TSAR, 1993), v.

2.3.1 The Politics of 'Present'

Homi K. Bhabha, in his illuminating text *The Location of Culture*, initiates the issue of 'present' with the concept of "art". At the same time, he introduces that the border lives are interlinked with "the art of present". It is crucial that the idea of "beyond" as in future or breaking boundaries and "in-between" as a movement cannot be discussed or simply exist without its relation to the present. Bhabha explains,

'Beyond' signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary – the very act of going *beyond* – are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the 'present' which, in the process of repetition, becomes disjunct and displayed.... The present can no longer be simply envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past and the future, no longer a synchronic presence: our proximate self-presence, our public image, comes to be revealed for its discontinuities, its inequalities, its minorities.²⁷

Hence, viewing the present and existing in it with consciousness is art. It is breaking the shackles of narrated history and the fallacy of the quintessential self. Selvon tries to revive the idea of 'present' through Foster. As Ramchand specifies in the introduction to the novel, Selvon frequently uses the description "spinning world". The narrative starts with the information that every day, Foster woke up, and the world spun in his brain. The novel ends with the hither and thither movement towards the spinning world. "It was as if they were going towards it, but it kept its distance, they were never nearer."²⁸ In the constant swaying movement, Foster experiences and talks about the rootlessness and fragmentation of individuality. Even though he does not relate it to the politics of colonialism as a structure, it is based upon the circumstances created by colonialism in the West Indies. Foster feels lost, not only because of the postmodern individuality Selvon created, which brings forward the questioning of life and existence, but it is

²⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 4.

²⁸ Selvon, *An Island Is a World*, 237.

also because he was born into a synthetic cultural diversity. Trinidad is a place to eat and sleep for Foster. The colonizers emptied the Caribbean with systematic abuse, and they filled it back with groups of people from different parts of the world. So, in a way, the image Foster aggressively puts forward is correct. For Foster, Trinidad is a place that is outside of the world. The centre of the world and narrated, accepted identities belong to cities like London and New York for Foster. Foster does not belong to London, New York or Trinidad. The Indian migrants' return to India causes Foster to have an epiphanic moment about his Indianness and Caribbeanness. He cannot empathize with the people.

They were going back home. They had a home. It was far away, but they haven't forgotten....He had nothing...a Trinidadian---a member of a cosmopolitan community who recognized no creed or race, a creature born of all the peoples in the world, in a small island that no one knew anything about.²⁹

The composition of cultural diversity accentuates fragmentation and the postmodern attitude Selvon carries. Foster's focus on the colonial power's centre evokes Bhabha's explanation of how the unconscious is affected by the colonial power, referencing Fanon's "overdetermined from without".³⁰ Foster never holds a powerful position in the colonial structure. Yet, he can still feel the lack of it. This is being determined and confined from without.

Nevertheless, Foster resides in the boundaries of the present, and the undecipherable cultural identity renders him an authentic character. He questions his existence. Foster is conscious of his colonial-subject consciousness. Moreover, Selvon is conscious of representing an autonomous character. He skillfully harmonizes Foster's experience into the narrative style by the chapters that are fragmented and reintegrated systematically. Even though the novel focuses on Foster's identity crisis and the feeling of rootlessness, it is still within the boundaries of

²⁹ Selvon, *An Island Is a World*, 211.

³⁰ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 43.

Caribbean fiction. The narrative is bounded to Trinidad and West Indies. Selvon reflects the fragmentation of Trinidadian cultural identity with pastiche technique without idealizing or romanticizing the cultural diversity. Bhabha explains the nature of “nation” and its politics in relation to narration. According to Bhabha, a nation is a form of narrative that is created with language, literature and symbolic images through time.³¹ Also, he puts the idea of the nation in the category of concepts developed by Western civilization. Then he argues that there is a crucial ambivalence in the image of the nation, which is the difference between “the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it.”³² However, dualism cannot be seen in Selvon’s work because he is a Trinidadian writer who is a descendant of an East Indian parent. Hence, instead of “writing” the imaginary and ideal island nation of Trinidad, he writes the fragmented reality of Trinidad. Each chapter focuses on a different character. Although each chapter ends in another place, the new chapter starts with an immediate connection to the previous problem. For instance, chapter ten ends with Andrews saying, “ Marleen, darling, will you --- will you marry me?” and chapter eleven starts with Rufus contradicting Sylvia as “How can I marry you?”.³³ Even though the characters turn up in different parts of the world like Trinidad, the USA and England, Selvon brings together the narrative as a puzzle. The pastiche technique corresponds to Bhabha’s theory of present and temporality. The experiences of Foster, Rufus, Andrews, and Johnny’s family take place simultaneously. The past never settles down. Selvon does not historicize any occurrence in the novel. It has a postmodern attitude; it is about the present, and it takes place in the present. Hence, the world is spinning.

³¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 1.

³² Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 1.

³³ Selvon, *An Island Is a World*, 124-5.

2.3.2 Writing and Weaving

The narrator repeats “the spinning world” so much that it becomes a metaphor for the spinning wheel of time. Even though Foster seems to witness the spinning world and is incapable of doing something about it, he tries to spin and wheel to create a text, a narrative. According to Kathryn Sullivan Kruger’s theory on the relationship between weaving and narration, creating a text embodies a representation of personality or culture.³⁴ In Foster’s case, this is deconstructed repeatedly. If writing and producing a text could resolve Foster’s colonial identity crisis, then Foster is far from resolving it. He struggles writing as he struggles to figure out who he is in relation to Trinidad, the Caribbean or the world. Selvon displays the lack of integrity in Foster as,

“This will never do,” he told himself time and again, and hurried off to write down a few thoughts. “I shall call my work ‘Ha-ha,’ ” he said, “or ‘Skiff-skiff’ or ‘Hello How Are You This Morning,’ ” and he would sprawl over the typewriter with all his life pressing down on him... It would be a slow, painstaking effort, hesitation and memory, each sentence capable of standing on its own feet away from the others. The greatest compliment would be to hear someone say, “Ah, that’s *life* for you.”³⁵

The process of writing becomes a symbol of integrity and authenticity for Foster. Therefore, *life* replaces the word “real” or “truth” for him, meaning “Ah, that’s the real you.” Although he cannot produce his writing, he does not accept to complete the writing Father Hope started. As Bhabha says, the language is an agency to designate an identity.³⁶ The rejection of using an established language or narrative is still a sign of the authenticity of Foster.

³⁴ Kathryn Sullivan Kruger, *Weaving the Word* (London: Susquehanna UP Associated University Presses, 2001), 11.

³⁵ Selvon, *An Island Is a World*, 130.

³⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 49.

2.3.3 The Dizzy World

Another approach to the spinning world can be its effect on the colonial subject. Its effect is perceived negatively by Foster. The swaying movement and the nauseating world is like a shadow for Foster, while Andrews carefreely sums up as “Ah, we stray like yonder cattle, hither and thither.”³⁷ However, further Foster comments, he describes stress felt by the colonial power. “A pattern which is followed, and you can’t do anything about it. It’s like trying to escape from yourself. You live, and the pattern exists with you, the shadow thrown before you when you walk, your bed companion in the night.”³⁸ The pattern represents the stereotyped and moulded figures for people like Foster, Rufus or Andrews. The pattern is the colonial system itself, and it is why Foster despises coming from the colonies to England. The pattern works through small instances, which Fanon writes about in *Black Skin, White Masks*. The English sailors are surprised by the fact that Andrews could paint. The surprise roots solely from the fact that Andrews is an African descendant Trinidadian. Foster touches upon the image the English sailors believe in as the Trinidadians “lurk” in the bushes, and there are lions and tigers around the island. The same attitude can be seen in Rufus’s interaction with Florence, an American woman. She expects Rufus to speak Spanish because he “looks” Puerto Rican to her. The colour of the skin becomes a determinate for the skills one carries, the environment one lives in, and the behaviour one is expected to display.

Selvon’s characters never forget about their skin colour in the presence of any person who belongs to the west. The hypocritical projection of “otherness” to the colonial subjects is unbearable for Fanon. He strikes with the words, “I cannot go to a film without seeing myself...The people in the theatre are watching me, examining me, waiting for me...My heart

³⁷ Selvon, *An Island Is a World*, 63.

³⁸ Selvon, *An Island Is a World*, 64.

makes my head swim.”³⁹ Fanon represents how a black man is also watching himself from outside because the image of him is a fallacy. It is not authentic. Hence, “the other” or the colonized subject is living in a dream world that is a product of the western consciousness.

³⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 140.

3 To the Motherland: The Windrush Generation

The West Indians' identity crisis under the repressive cultural, economic and political colonialism of the British Empire continued with the Second World War and the postwar era. Many West Indians, as “subjects” of the Empire, took place in military forces. Undoubtedly, the “service” as a part of the regimented and controlled hegemony of the modern civilization added a new perspective and experience to the ongoing identity crisis as represented through characters like Tiger, Foster, Rufus or Andrews. Taking a step back from the narrative, Selvon’s life becomes a representative of these circumstances. Selvon is one of those immigrants who crossed the Atlantic Ocean and settled in London. Contrary to the overgeneralizing and essentialist Western philosophical and literary legacy, the experience of the colonial subjects changes according to each variable in the colonial structure. Even though the idea of migration and diasporic community existed in Tiger or in Selvon’s life as a primordial fact to the life in the West Indies, the first-hand experience of migration towards the “centre” of the colonial beast cannot be undermined in colonial and post-colonial psychology and literature. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin’s major work about colonial and post-colonial theory addresses many factors of the colonial experience. One of the pedestal concepts of the theory is ‘place and displacement’. Ashcroft bases the idea on the very initial relationship between the self and the location. He argues that “The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention, or a mixture of the two.”¹ He further argues that authenticity and identity are features common to all postcolonial literature.² Hence, the relationship between identity and place or displacement is

¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London New York: Routledge, 2002), 9, Taylor & Francis E-library, 2004.

² Ashcroft, *The Empire Writes Back*, 9.

very crucial. While these phenomena were represented through an invisible but oppressive legacy from the family ties in the previous novels, *The Lonely Londoners* takes Selvon's fiction to a new city. London is much more than a city. It is a new world for freshly migrated English subjects.

3.1 Across the Atlantic Ocean

Migration is not a state 'achieved' by a person who changes settlement from one place to another. It is an ongoing process, and the process does not start with the arrival at the new location. The process of migration begins with the departure from the inhabited place. Hence, the road trip or voyage is a very significant part of the migration, as in the case of West Indians' journey towards England. Although there were migrants from the Caribbean before the year 1948, *The SS Empire Windrush* is symbolic of the arrival of the crowds of West Indians in England. It is a contemporary perspective that enables reading the arrival of *Empire Windrush* as a milestone in history. The arrival of 492 Caribbeans is more than just a historical fact. In the article about the report of this arrival and its importance, Matthew Mead mentions Paul Carter's comment on the Botany Bay concerning *Empire Windrush*. Carter says, " 'the spatial event is replaced by a historical stage'."³ The spatial event of Captain Cook's landing in the Australian continent became a historical point that has been referred to as the start of the British Empire's interest in the lands of Australia. Similarly, the spatial event of the Caribbean migrants stepping into the soils of England turned into a historical scene carrying more meaning today.

As a pinpoint for mass migration, the journey has another symbolism. Changing the historical context to the Western literary context, the journey over the Atlantic Ocean represents a rebirth. The journey through the water is an archetype for a baby's journey in a mother's belly.

³ Matthew Mead. "Empire Windrush: Cultural Memory and Archival Disturbance," *Moveable Type* 3, (2007): 112, 10.14324/111.1755-4527.027.

It can be related to the biological factor, the amniotic fluid. Or, an epic like Homer's *Odyssey* where Odysseus is metaphorically born as a different hero after the journey over the sea. To clarify the importance of sea and rebirth in the motif of the journey, archetypal theorist Joseph Campbell's work on the repetitive patterns in a hero's journey *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949) is illuminative with a separate chapter on this specific stage in the hero's journey. In "The Belly of the Whale"⁴ Campbell explains the impactful experience with the sea or being swallowed, carried by the sea creature or vessel as a rejuvenating experience for the hero in his quest and trials along the way. The whale is a metaphor for hero's short journey in a vessel before being washed up to the shores of a new location and stage in his journey. A great example of this can be seen in one of the earliest novels of English literature *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). When Robinson Crusoe is washed up to the coast of the island, he is reborn out of the sea. His survival quest starts with this symbolic birth out of a body of sea which parallels the amniotic fluid surrounding a baby in the mother's belly. Similarly, with a revolutionary experience, Selvon starts *The Lonely Londoners* with Sir Galahad's arrival at the Waterloo station. The long and pendant sea metaphorically 'spits' Sir Galahad to the shores of England. With his rebirth out of the Atlantic Ocean, Sir Galahad's quest for the 'holy grail' starts, which represents identity, fulfilment, and recognition. Even though Selvon had already arrived in London before the publications of the first two novels, it is *The Lonely Londoners* where the idea of displacement and migration is blatantly represented. In *An Island Is a World*, Foster and Rufus live in England and the United States of America. Nevertheless, Selvon does not show the clash between the centre and peripheries of London. It is *The Lonely Londoners* that represents Caribbean London. Selvon introduces this version of London as Moses introduces it to Sir Galahad.

⁴ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 83-8.

While Selvon writes a novel that is quite different from previous novels and short stories, the politics of identity and the dynamics between migrants and Londoners are familiar subjects to a certain degree. The Caribbeans continue experiencing colonisation in London as well. It is the cultural colonisation and assimilation. Amid this familiarity and ongoing colonisation process, Selvon manages to represent London in a way that was not described before. Life in the West Indies merges into the life in London. Selvon uses two different techniques to enhance the effect of this authentic London. First and foremost, Selvon's London speaks in Creole English. The dialect of the narrative embraces the representation of the city and characters at the peripheries of British society. With this technique, Selvon breaks a possible barrier between the characters and their surroundings. Hence, he establishes a city that is narrated in a way that these migrants express themselves. It is clear that the characters will not be silent under the image of essentialized and idealized London. Selvon comments on dialect in dialogues and narrative, and he expresses the novelty and reformation within the narrative technique. He says, "I think I can say without a trace of modesty that I was the first Caribbean writer to explore and employ dialect in a full-length novel where it was used in both narrative and dialogue."⁵ Before expressing the novelty, he enounces the fear and anxiety on his behalf as a writer before using dialect. Nevertheless, this is the angst that follows an authentic act. So, the narrative technique reinforces the existence of colonial subjects. The colonial subjects also reinforce their authority regarding territory by identifying and naming different parts of London uniquely. This creates a new reality for Selvon's characters and the literary accumulation Selvon contributes.

Blatantly putting, the name of the contribution to the Caribbean fiction is: Trinidadian Creole English. Selvon explains the reasons for using the dialect for the entirety of the novel.⁶ It

⁵ Sam Selvon. "A Note on Dialect," *Kunapipi* 17, no. 1, (1995): 74.

⁶ Dasenbrock, Reed and Jussawalla, Feroza. "Sam Selvon: Interview with Reed Dasenbrock and Feroza

is not for making the narrative as particular and as obscure as possible for the English readership. On the contrary, the dialect articulates the authenticity of the characters. As Wyke explains, Selvon combines the dialect and standard form of English. Further, Wyke points a crucial element in Selvon's manipulation of language: "Selvon's characters speak in their various 'situation dialects'... In so far as these styles are part of Selvon's way of presenting his fictional material, they also constitute his style."⁷ Hence, it enables characters to be recognized through the authenticity the synthesis of language and culture brings forth in the form of Trinidadian Creole English.

3.2 *The Lonely Londoners*

It is crucial to differentiate between the new reality Selvon provides for the Caribbean Londoners and the reality of postwar Britain in both the social and economic scales. The Caribbean London and postwar "proverbial" London, which is represented in numerous historical works, coexist. The representation of Caribbean London is new and authentic, and it is not because it did not exist. Although the image of Caribbean London is supported by a unique narrative technique, it existed. Selvon did not create such a version of London that did not reflect an existing group of people or settlement. What Selvon narrated unquestionable existed. Yet, this façade of London or England was neglected, and Selvon enabled the colonial subjects to introduce themselves in their own narrative technique. *The Lonely Londoners* makes it clear that the moment those 492 Caribbean migrants landed in England, they did not evaporate as mere concepts and ideas concerning the 'true' Londoners. They continued their struggle for existence and search for an identity as it was in the West Indies. Selvon represented this without idealizing their struggle. Although Moses and Sir Galahad are the novel's heroes, there is nothing heroic in

Jussawalla," *Kunapipi* 17, no. 1, (1995): 114-6.

⁷ Clement H. Wyke. *Sam Selvon's Dialectal Style and Fictional Strategy* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991), 6.

their colonial power struggle. Besides, it is a never-ending struggle rather than a battle with a precise end.

The nature of their struggle and what Selvon achieves through this work of fiction is very dependent on the genre it is represented through. *The Lonely Londoners* is a novel that shares striking resemblance with the traditional quest pattern in the Romance narrative. The novel as a genre was already used two times by Selvon. Indeed, the entirety of the primary texts for the thesis is novels. Nevertheless, with *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon enables a different perspective, both over the novel as a genre and the politics of colonized identity through the implications of a mythical quest of Sir Galahad and Moses. Considering the theories upon the genre, the mythic quest of Sir Galahad and Moses is an integral part of the Romance. One of the most organized attempts to show the boundaries between literary patterns and how they functioned through the course of history is Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). In the third essay, "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths", he displays the nature of Romance and its effect on fiction. Frye explains, "The romance is nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfilment dream... Yet there is a genuinely "proletarian" element in romance too which is never satisfied with its various incarnations... romance will turn up again, as hungry as ever, looking for new hopes and desires to feed on."⁸ The quest involving a certain aim, struggle and many different thresholds, as explained through Joseph Campbell's 'hero's journey', becomes a skilfully subverted reflection of the "quest" a migrant goes through on his way to authenticity and acceptance.

The narrative voice is crucial in the Romance aspect of the novel. In *A Brighter Sun* and *An Island Is a World*, the narrative voice was omnipotent. Nevertheless, Tiger, Foster or Rufus were clueless about what expected them. The experience was crucial for the journey towards the integrity and authenticity of the character. In *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon takes one step ahead

⁸ Northrop Frye. *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 186.

and creates a world where both the narrative and the characters develop and reveal their authentic selves simultaneously. Although it seems like there is an omnipotent, at least a removed perspective on the Caribbean Londoners, the narrative merges into Moses's narrative of his identity and the 'characters' around him. Moses and Sir Galahad's experiences do not diminish the possibility of the reader's arguments. Frye's argument about the new position of the reader in the novel exists in *The Lonely Londoners*. As Romance represents, the idea of discovery and a more in-depth look into society, which are also the novel's fundamental principles, exists vividly in *The Lonely Londoners*. Selvon enables readers to understand how they negate the society they partake in through Moses's discovery of how he exists in the colonial system through a diasporic community, which is the human quest.

Here, it becomes clear that Selvon did not use the West Indian dialect just for the sake of the characters' authenticity. He had to represent the genuine style of communication because only in the genuine and authentic language Moses could make sense of and name the world around him. Therefore, the dialect or creolized English vocabulary is not a result of the innate authenticity of Selvon or Moses. It is the prerequisite for composing the colonial structure through the peripheries' eyes. The new composition is both metaphorical and literal in the narrative. The metaphorical aspect should be discussed in relation to identity and assessing the self's integrity in the following chapters. On the other hand, the way characters speak goes hand in hand with the mentioned approach of Selvon to the narrative. Here, the focus is not only on the written language, which is Hindi affected Trinidadian Creole English in *A Brighter Sun* or TCE of *The Lonely Londoners*, but also on the sound of *The Lonely Londoners* as well. It is not only the way sentences are structured, but the pronunciation of each word changes the sound and rhythm in the novel, considering the narrative of the novel is written in this style, not only the

dialogues. In addition to this, there are proper names that undergo either partial or complete transformation. For instance, Notting Hill becomes “The Gate” in the novel. Marble and Bayswater become “Arch” and “The Water” through the incessant wanderings of Cap and other characters around London. It is crucial to recognize the difference between abbreviation and naming. The names of London's important locations are not shortened or simply distorted, like Tanty’s altering Great Portland Street to Greatport Street. The migrant community has renamed them. Although this is a literal change of the names, it has a symbolic effect on the characters. The naming suggests authority. First and foremost, a name is used for the identification of an entity. To name is to indicate. This can vary from verbal language to body language. The power of naming through language can be seen as a pattern in Western literature. One of the earliest and most famous examples can be seen in Genesis when Adam names animals.⁹ Through naming a species, he holds the power of language referring to the entire abundance of that very species on Earth. Or the same power structure can be seen when Robinson Crusoe names Friday. Through naming, one holds power in the way Foucault explains the power that comes through knowledge.¹⁰ “The Gate” refers to Notting Hill in the specific version of London that is known and under control. The relationship between the pointing and power can be seen in many literary and visual works like Michelangelo’s *The Creation of Adam* (1512) or John Raphael Smith’s engraving of the three witches in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606), *The Weird Sisters* (1785). The three witches' authority over Macbeth’s fate is represented with three crooked index fingers pointing in the engraving. So, considering the symbolism of naming and pointing within the Western culture, the image of West Indian immigrants pointing their fingers over the heart of the

⁹ “And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.” Genesis 2:20.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

colonial power, London, and its ‘original’ inhabitants shows the power they gain through naming the city on their own. The Caribbean Londoners take the language imposed upon them as a means of colonization and use it right at the colonial structure, as the pointing fingers of three ‘weird’ sisters.

3.2.1 The Mythical Quest

As suggested previously, the subversiveness of the genre and Selvon’s focus on reality prevents *The Lonely Londoners* in general or specifically Moses from being idealized. The lack of idealization and divine heroism leads to the diversity of the characters. Although the narrative gives an equal amount of glimpses to different characters in the migrant community, the narrator seems to set out from and finally turn back to the dynamics between Moses and Sir Galahad. Taking the names of the characters into consideration relating to the mythical perspective is inevitable. The names “Moses” and “Sir Galahad” refer to two of Western literature's most influential literary works. Moses is on a quest of being a prophet and sharing the word of the Christian God. While Sir Galahad is also on a quest for the Holy Grail in the Arthurian legend. Even though the two different mythical and folkloric characters seem irrelevant, they both represent ideal heroes with flaws in their human nature or social context. According to various legends and narratives about Moses and his character, Elie Wiesel suggests Moses is one of the most influential Biblical tradition characters. What renders Moses a still-living name is his three-dimensional character in contrast to many other two-dimensional sketch characters of Bible narratives, representing particular virtues or deficiencies. Wiesel argues

...his portrait as sketched by tradition is carefully balanced; we are shown his shortcomings as well as his virtues. Unlike the founders of other religions or great leaders in other traditions, Moses is depicted as human, both great and fallible.

While every other religion tends to transform its founder into a semi-god, Judaism does everything to humanize Moses.¹¹

His leading figure in the Book of Exodus contributes to the human image Wiesel discusses. Moses was the leader in the escape of Israelites from the Egyptians, which makes him an archetypal figure of a human leader, and this brings Selvon's Moses closer to the prophet in his role in the novel, as a leader figure for the diasporic community. Also, Sir Galahad is a folklore character who is an admired knight, one of the leaders of the Holy Grail quest despite his deficiencies. His youth and being an illegitimate son render him low on the social scale from the conventional patriarchal society's perspective. So it can be said that Sir Galahad also bears similarity to Moses in the specific way he is considered a hero. He is a hero, but all too human. He is not an ideal and half-divine hero, which is almost two dimensional. Similarly, Selvon's Sir Galahad has an innate human nature in him. In his relationship with Moses, which provides comical relief in the novel, resembles almost a child-like pursuit of knowledge and novelty in the city. Selvon's Sir Galahad and his 'holy grail' quest envelops the novel with the Romance quality. Frye gives the gist of Romance quest as, "The perennially child-like quality of romance is marked by its extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space."¹² This pretty much sums up the 'holy grail' quest of the Caribbean Londoner Sir Galahad. His search for success, money, recognition and belonging is a nostalgia for a moment in which he felt happy. And maybe this is precisely why when he cannot reach this state in London, his awakening and recognition of the upper lift colonial Britons disappoint him.

So, Selvon's Moses and Sir Galahad are unheroic heroes of the quest in London no matter what the result is. Besides interpreting the historical and folkloric figures and the novel,

¹¹ Elie Wiesel. *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends* (New York: Pocket Books, 1977), 196.

¹² Frye 186.

Selvon enables readers to compare and contrast the mythological Moses and Sir Galahad to the 20th-century versions of them in the novel. Hence, Selvon introduces ironic and comical elements, especially in the initial paragraph. The readers are introduced to Moses, yet he wakes up and goes to the Waterloo Station to pick up a ‘fellar’ named Sir Galahad. The irony occurs at the reader's level as the characters do not know their names and symbolism. Hence the expectation of the readership about a figure who bears the name Moses having an elevated and idealized state in the society is completely turned upside down when Moses pays his fare ticket and sits down in the crowd of ‘underground’ people. Then, Selvon clarifies that Moses is unwilling to help any person he does not know, which creates the ironic effect for a character named Moses, a mythical figure who helps a group of crowds escape through the Red Sea regardless of knowing a single person there.¹³ Similarly, when Sir Galahad is introduced, his clothes and having no luggage represents his incompatibility with the quest he is in. Yet, due to his blind courage, Moses calls him Sir Galahad. So, in the ironical mode of narrative, the familiar moral judgements and values of the society, simply the expectations of the mass readership are suspended. This suspension reflects on the way London is pictured. Selvon indicates this as the image of London being unworldly: “One grim winter evening, when it had a kind of unrealness about London, with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as if is not London at all but some strange place on another planet.”¹⁴ This is the way that London looks in the morning. Therefore, all details that serve for irony, like a character named Moses being unwilling to help another person in need, or another character bearing the nickname Sir Galahad Esquire depicted as someone who is so under prepared for the quest of life in the bleak

¹³ “I don’t know these people at all, yet they coming to me as if I is some liaison officer, and I catching my arse as it is, how I could help them out?” See Sam Selvon. *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 16.

¹⁴ Ibid.

London, fall in place considering the unreal image of the city, unlike its well-known artificial façade. Instead of depicting London's social and cultural macrocosm through a superficial and scratchy narrative, Selvon narrates the microcosm of the Caribbean Londoners in an authentic and in-depth style. He takes the novel genre that can go in the direction of a highly mimetic realist novel and subverts it with irony and humour so that the colonial subjects can find loopholes in the systematic and cultural colonialism of the British Empire.

3.2.2 Subversity and Authenticity Through West Indian Narrative

Selvon provides the characters with these loopholes through not only the dialect they assert the identities but also through the West Indian narrative styles. The narrative style is a reminiscence of the Caribbean storytelling technique. Even though *The Lonely Londoners* is a novel with episodic nature, the interrelation between the episodes is not as strong as a conventional novel presents. After the initial introduction of Moses and Sir Galahad, other characters are introduced into the narrative through specific memories that took place in London. This is the ballad technique which is very essential to the Caribbean storytelling tradition. Ballad on Captain, Bart, Tolroy, Big City, Five past Twelve and Harris take place separately. However, they unite in being migrants. Even though their experiences are different, all are experiences of migrants. Kamau Brathwaite puts migration in the heart of the West Indian sensibility. He says, "I want to suggest... that whether we think it desirable or not, the emigrant has become a significant factor on the literary scene and is, in fact, a product of our social and cultural circumstances."¹⁵ Therefore the reader is obliged to move in two different directions while reading Selvon's novels, especially *The Lonely Londoners*. One approach is from the colonial conditions towards the colonial subjects. The other approach is from the migrants towards the

¹⁵ Brathwaite 7.

society around them. The second direction in which the migrants cast their looks upon the colonizers presupposes the first direction's existence. This statement might present the characters as completely autonomous individuals. Nevertheless, it should not be disregarded that those characters do not comprehend the second direction in which the ballad technique is used in creolized English to assert their identities. This structure is caught in the level of readership.

Yet, there is one character whose ballad is not about the things she had done in the past. The episode of Tanty's experience in London is represented as a cultural reformation that is continuous. Her episode is not structured upon two-dimensional facticity that took place and finalized. Tanty's actions publicly affect the social structure in her neighbourhood. She is by far the most assertive character in the novel. She boldly initiates the credit system in shopping. After taking the orders, she demands her name be written in the book and leaves "the white people shop brazen as ever".¹⁶ Friday comes, and she pays, winning the trust of the shopkeeper. Even though the shopkeeper decides to give credits only to her, Tanty "spreads the ballad" and changes the way the shop functions. The humour and almost farcical elements reduce the potential idealization or heroism of Tanty. Yet, she still achieves a big deal in a society where the division between black and white is immense. The base of her achievement is carried simply by language and communication. She spreads the word about the credit system. She gets into "big oldtalk" no matter how many people are in the line.¹⁷ So, Tanty does not only use language, she also uses a certain style to assert her individual requests. This style mirrors the entire narrative style of *The Lonely Londoners*. "As the speaker expresses his personality through his speech, so the writer reveals the distinctiveness of his style and the indigenoussness of his culture through his writing." says Clement H. Wyke about the fictional strategy. Further, focusing on Selvon's

¹⁶ Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 67.

¹⁷ Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 68.

career, Wyke explains, “Language is interpreted as the verbal raw material with which the writer composes his literary works. Style often incorporates and extends beyond language, but it usually does so in accordance with a principle of contextualization, as Nils Erik Enkvist argues in *Linguistics and Style*.”¹⁸ And, the focus on the language and style continually changes according to characters and situations. The “textual and extratextual categories” are represented through Tanty’s ballad. However, it is not her “strategy”. For a strategy presupposes intention. And Tanty does not act to reform her new social sphere in London. Brathwaite takes the image of Tanty as the “disintegration of the old West Indian, folk personality... under the impact of new, indifferent, and subtle, because not exactly alien, metropolitan forces.” and he suggests that the novels of London written until the mid-’60s are about disorganization and complication.¹⁹ It seems that Brathwaite’s disorganization is the West Indian writer’s own struggle in London in the process of writing. Brathwaite’s explanation stays simple, and it should not be taken at face value. It is evident that there is disorganization. This could be attributed to Moses, Galahad, Tanty or other characters’ physical and psychological reality. However, the disorganization of the novel’s narrative technique is polyphony rather than a tragedy imposed upon the characters and Selvon by the conditions. The polyphony is represented the best with the comic tone and farcical elements mentioned before. The immediate change of actions and constant up-tempo struggle is a façade of the polyphonic migrant community in London. In their words, it is the nature of “hustle”. When examined, the verb “hustle” is used for almost every action they do in their lives. It does not stand only for work. They hustle for food, job, women, a room or a passage back to Trinidad. Hustling is the struggle of living as a colonial subject. Brathwaite takes this bleakness as a tragic element, and he suggests *The Lonely Londoners* is one

¹⁸ Wyke 5.

¹⁹ Brathwaite 23-24.

of the “first, explicit West Indian novels of tragedy.”²⁰ However, strategically applied dialect narrative and ballad-like style suggest contrary to this.

Rather than creating a tragedy focusing on the fall of an individual, Selvon creates harmony out of the polyphony mentioned above. Additional to the ballad structure, the calypso becomes both an aesthetic and functional narrative device. After *The Lonely Londoners*, the second text that takes place in London, *The Housing Lark*, bears similarities concerning both the ballad and the calypso tradition. Dohra Ahmad points out, “...in *The Housing Lark* calypso influences the shape of the work of art on the most macro levels of plot and novelistic form as well as at the more line-by-line level of rhythm and language. To my mind, *The Housing Lark* represents one of fiction’s most fortuitous marriages of form and content...”²¹ Hence Selvon manages to create the harmony of multicultural groups of people through the very traditional narrative styles of the Caribbean culture like ballad and calypso.

3.2.3 Politics of Identity in *The Lonely Londoners*

The identity struggle and the colonial state that continues after arrival to the Motherland have been discussed concerning the politics of migration, narrative technique, and dialect use. The plot and particular incidents are also drawn carefully by Selvon. These scenes and events are vivid in displaying the problem of existence and race. As discussed briefly in the chapter about knowledge and *A Brighter Sun*, the different states of consciousness of existence are again crucial in *The Lonely Londoners*. The third state of consciousness of existence described in *Being and Nothingness* is “being-for-others”. Even though this state existed back in the West Indies regarding Tiger, Foster, Rufus, Andrews or many other colonial subjects, this category is

²⁰ Brathwaite 24.

²¹ Sam Selvon, *The Housing Lark* (New York: Penguin Books, 2020), 14.

highlighted with entrance to the mainly white population in Britain. Sartre explains being-for-others as,

...we have discovered that human reality is-for-itself. Is this *all* that it is? Without going outside our attitude of reflective description, we can encounter modes of consciousness which seem, even while themselves remaining strictly in for-itself, to point to a radically different type of ontological structure. This ontological structure is mine; it is in relation to myself as subject that I am concerned about myself, and yet this concern (for-myself reveals to me a being which is my being without being-for-me... the Other is the indispensable mediator between myself and me... I recognize that I *am* as the Other sees me... Thus the Other has not only revealed to me what I was; he has established me in a new type of being which can support new qualifications. This being was not in me potentially before the appearance of the Other, for it could not have found any place in the For-itself.²²

Thus, the idea of being-in-itself is different from being-for-others. The second is not a state of objectification without consciousness. Even though a person, or in Selvon's case, a character is in the state of being-for-itself, bearing the consciousness of its existence, he is still weighed by his image established by the other's counter authority. In simple terms, to reach the state of being-for-itself does not diminish the existence of being-for-others. For that matter, this becomes the struggle of those conscious characters. V. Y. Mudimbe, in the chapter "The Panacea of Otherness", discusses Sartre's work and this struggle between being-for-itself (*être-pour-soi*) and being-for-others (*être-pour-autrui*). Mudimbe argues that Sartre's theories are the "analysis of the concrete consequences of this dialectic as illustrated by colonial systems".²³ Through Sartre's theory of the destruction of identity and negritude by the colonial gaze, Mudimbe shows only

²² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 221-2.

²³ V. Y. Mudimbe. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 98.

one way out, constant endeavour. He warns that negritude “is made to be negated, to be exceeded. Among the ruins of the colonial era, its singers must again rework songs, reformulate their myths, and submit them to the service and to the need of the revolution of the proletariat.”²⁴

The Lonely Londoners represents the dilemma between two states of consciousness and constant fight with it in a very humorous language. However, the bleakness is there. Selvon does not idealize or wash away that feeling. One of the most crucial and vividly described episodes is when Moses helps Sir Galahad find a job after arriving in London.

Moses take him round the block to the next building. When they enter a kind of atmosphere hit Galahad hard so that he had to stand up against the wall for a minute. It ain't have no place in the world that exactly like a place where a lot of men get together to look for work and draw money from the Welfare State... 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 everyone is your enemy and your friend.²⁵

The “ruins” of the colonial system is so firmly stacked against the colonized subjects that Sir Galahad loses his physical stability for a moment. The dilemma of consciousness is represented through the relation of friend and enemy. One side of Moses or Sir Galahad has the potential of consciousness of their existence. They have the autonomy to recognize the colonial structure they exist in. Hence, it is a place of sympathy for other migrants. A place that is their friend because it serves to them as it serves to other migrants, gathering them under the same title and similar experiences. On the other hand, it is a place of hate and disgust. The office becomes an enemy for Sir Galahad and many more like him because it is literally the melting pot for migrants. From the essentialist and segregationist white population’s point of view, they are photocopies of the same man, representing negritude, parasite and malice to the Great Kingdom.

²⁴ Mudimbe 97.

²⁵ Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 36.

So, Sir Galahad is crashed under the image of all migrants from the Other's perspective, and he is just another photocopy of that stock image. The reader can catch a glimpse of Selvon's wit through minute details. The stock image of people waiting in the employment office is embodied humorously in Moses's memory. Moses says, " 'You see that fellar there?' Moses nod his head at a old English fellar rolling a cigarette. 'He is one of the regulars. He does only draw dole. The last time I was here was last year, and he still in the queue.'"²⁶ It does not make a difference if the person is English, Nigerian, Jamaican, White or Black. The focus should be on the permanence of the image in the office as if the "English fellar" was literally in the queue for an entire year. Hence, it becomes a scene where Sir Galahad is introduced to the double reality of migration and Welfare State's embodiment in the employment office.

The office affects Sir Galahad so strongly that there is a distinct change in his behaviour before the visit and after the visit. The enthusiasm for 'conquering' London leaves its place to the disappointed migrant anxiously questioning, "You think I will get a work?"²⁷ Retrospectively speaking, the bitter realization of Sir Galahad is one of the instances which Kamau Braithwaite attributed as the West Indian novels of tragedy. However, instead of a hero's fall, this bitter realization is the gradual rise of Sir Galahad's consciousness. It is the first step into the comprehension of the colonial system and the forthcoming struggle of negating the image of migrant or black as in Mudimbe's warning.

3.3 *The Housing Lark*

After the release of *Turn Again Tiger* (1959), the sequel novel to *A Brighter Sun*, Selvon harks back to the West Indian community in the postwar Britain with *The Housing Lark*. Although the novel was not acknowledged by critics as *A Brighter Sun* or *The Lonely Londoners*,

²⁶ Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 37.

²⁷ Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 38.

it is still a critical work defining and amplifying the post-colonial literature through Selvon's authentic narrative voice. Selvon is back again at the 'motherland' with a short time-lapse. The newly arrived migrants of *The Lonely Londoners* left their places to the West Indian-British Londoners who have lived in Britain for some years. So that, the novel focuses on a crucial development in the community's life in London; purchasing a house. Selvon deliberately chooses such an event as buying a house or becoming the owner of a house. This can be analyzed in two different spheres. First, ownership of a house is a strong indication of economic freedom and power. But, on the other hand, this freedom is symbolic for the novel and the characters' psychologies representing the Caribbean migrants in the 1950s towards the swinging sixties. To grasp the atmosphere of living standards of the Black population in Britain, Bob Carter, Clive Harris, and Shirley Joshi's study of conservative government's attitude towards migrants and minorities works as an elaborate reference point for further discussion. According to the study, the Working Party's reports worked deliberately against the coloured workforce, and this solely roots from racial discrimination. The study highlights the discrimination based on the "Draft Report of the Working Party on Coloured People Seeking Employment in the United Kingdom" reported in 1953. According to the report, the coloured workers were not suitable for many different conditions. Along with this, they lacked discipline and control over temperament. Similar discrimination was against the women workforce, lacking mental capacity.²⁸ Later, the inequality of housing between whites and blacks is displayed with the fact that most of the "not attractive and not available houses for the white buyers" were available for the black inhabitants.²⁹

²⁸ Bob Carter et al., "The 1951–55 Conservative Government and the Racialization of Black Immigration," *Immigrants & Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora* 6, no.3 (2010): 339, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619288.1987.9974665>.

²⁹ Carter et al. 340.

So, considering all the harsh conditions in which migrants and minorities tried to survive and keep their autonomy in the 1950s and the following decade, housing as the main event in a post-colonial novel is an undeniably conscious endeavour to point different perspectives of migrants and minorities' mundane conditions. Nevertheless, the aesthetic of the narrative is not affected by a direct and bleak representation like a political report. Instead, Selvon uses the symbolism of housing in a witty way. The humourous narrative and dream sequences in the novel indicate the unchallengeable authenticity of *The Housing Lark*. Selvon captures such a vast and bleak socio-economical reality in a significantly narrowed lens showing the inner turmoil and dreams of a group of migrants. And this turmoil is not only about the money they earn in Britain and the physical conditions they work and live in Britain as migrants. It is also about what a house represents for them. Caryl Phillips, one of the greatest authors and critics about diasporic communities, delves deep into the metaphorical traits of Britain and The Caribbean in the foreword to *The Housing Lark*. According to Phillips, Selvon presents the true nature and juxtaposition of the matriarchal Caribbean to patriarchal Britain.³⁰ Going deeper into this metaphor, one would find the archetypal imagery of a mother representing and almost wholly embodied by the home and earth, while a father is embodied by the outer world surrounding it. So, to obtain the embracing mother figure with a house in the borders of patriarchal Britain is an allegory that extends far from the socio-economic perspective further into the existential turmoil of the West Indians in Britain.

3.3.1 A housing “lark”

The allegory of owning a house is interlinked with the idea of “lark”, and a great subversion of the racist stereotypes Homi K. Bhabha and Frantz Fanon talks about

³⁰ Selvon, *The Housing Lark*, 8-9.

independently. The versatility of Selvon's approaches to the existential struggle of the migrant identity is crystal clear when *The Lonely Londoners* and *The Housing Lark* are compared. Although the latter gives voice to characters who are as marginalized and segregated as the migrants in *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon has two distinct tones in each text. *The Housing Lark* focuses on the aspect of "lark", a joke and humorous episode "that is not intended to cause serious harm or damage"³¹. The absence of serious intention relates to the childish fun, which highlights innocence as a significant component for a lark. Here, the subversiveness is using "children" imagery as opposed to the way colonial structure uses. According to Homi K. Bhabha, the colonial status quo points out its index finger, stereotypes the Other as a child, ignorant and savage, while Fanon dwells in the same subject in "The Fact of Blackness", he points out similar objectification of 'blackness' as savagery and intellectual deficiency.³² However, Selvon takes this stereotype image of a childish, ignorant and incapable 'black' and turns it into child imagery that was not used before. Selvon's child imagery is innocent, but not in the sense of ignorance and lack of experience and capacity. It is in the sense of childhood as the period where imagination and creativity are at the highest level. Childhood is a stage where the individual is not yet battered down by the essentialist and colonialist status quo, whether it is the colonialism of the soil or the minds of individuals. This authentic approach is enhanced by the authority figure positioned as opposed to the childish male characters, the female characters. Teena, Jean and Mathilda become the voice of 'reality'. It is Jean who gives the gist of the novel saying, " 'That is only a lark,' Jean say... 'Everything is 'if.' If this and if that. You fellars does live in a dream world.'" ³³ Although Jean speaks with the voice of the status quo and is probably

³¹ *Cambridge Dictionary*, s.v. "Lark," accessed March 17, 2021, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/lark>.

³² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112.

³³ Selvon, *The Housing Lark*, 76.

aware of the segregating social standards, Dohra Ahmad reframes the dream world Jean seems to despair. Ahmad says, “The “lark” of the title, Selvon insists, is at once amusing and deadly serious. While mocking unrealistic dreaming, the novel also valorizes it as a potentially transformative activity—as long as it’s combined with some degree of pragmatism. Being unrealistic is the only way that anything will ever change.”³⁴ Hence, Ahmad indirectly touches upon the existence of negritude. It does not exist outside of the minds of those who are part of the gnawing colonial beast. To dream about a different life standard is the only way to change it because the already existing one is only apparent in the dreams of the racist society. The dream of the white man is the nightmare of the black. Therefore, without intending severe harm with a housing lark, these migrants seriously strike the heart of the segregating social standards in Britain. If the colonial subjects, the commonwealth citizens, vision a house that belongs to them, the mindset believing the opposite will not matter anymore. As Sartre says, “it is the anti-Semite who *makes* the Jew.”³⁵ Similarly, the value judgments of being worthy of something and social rights are all dependent on the minds of the ‘makers’ of those concepts. The Anti-Semite who ‘makes’ the Jew also makes the social regulations against it.

Hence, Selvon challenges colonial Britain's authority and tyrannic London with a completely different approach to dreams and wishes. The achievement of the purchase is crowned with a hint of nostalgia. Amid the potent fantasy, Selvon proficiently turns the direction against reality with the novel's very last sentence. Even though the new house is a success and change in the standards they will live, the ongoing existence of social segregation and racism is indicated with Bat’s yearning to keep the initiative object, the wallpaper. In a mellow tone, the omniscient narrator harks us back to the beginning of the novel saying, “But Bat only smile and

³⁴ Selvon, *The Housing Lark*, 18.

³⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 49.

look around at the walls. You could see as if he wishing he could strip the lot and carry it go in new house.”³⁶ The wallpaper reminds the reader of the lark at the beginning and the achievement at the end as if Selvon wants to declare, “do not take the visions of others as the only possible reality, but be aware of the power that your visions carry. They can be your reality one day.”

³⁶ Selvon, *The Housing Lark*, 134.

4 King of the Castle: Moses at Home

As Sam Selvon spends over 20 years in England, his experiences as the British subject overflows into the Memoirs of great 'Briton' Moses Aloetta Esq. The experience required in more than 25 decades is expected to be beneficial in a straightforward manner by the readership and fictional characters as well. However, it is crucial to question what straightforward is and is not. In the logocentric approach based on the Western totalitarian tradition, forward is essentially good. To go ahead, to get old, to acquire experience and to move is to be better and improve. Nevertheless, as discussed already, in Selvon's fiction, one may move but not be aware of the direction he or she is moving towards. Or, learning is not always an enlightening experience considering the colonial subjects of the Empire because, in Selvon's narratives, the divine laws of the West and White exist only to frame the social reality of the colonial subjects. What is left for Selvon to discover or represent is deconstructed and displayed upside down by his subversive approach to the plot and novel as a genre. Hence, towards the end of his career, two notable novels *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating* subvert the idea of colonized subject as a mimic man to such an extreme level that the fictionality starts to step over the boundaries and manipulate reality. Slowly coming to the end of Moses's adventures, Selvon seems to fulfil the initial role he wanted to play as an author and narrative voice. Before discussing the nature of this end and its effect on his career, which continued for only ten years after the publication of *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*, the political atmosphere of the 1970s and 1980s Britain and the changed policies of migration should be discussed to observe the last journey of Moses Aloetta Esq. towards 'home'.

Even though not openly claimed or promoted as a sequel novel to *The Lonely Londoners*, a group of characters whom the readership and critics are acquainted with initialize and take over

the plot of *Moses Ascending*. It is not only the characters that suggest the sequel nature of the novel but also the preliminary sentences of the first chapter indicate a continuation to the narrative of *The Lonely Londoners*. While *The Lonely Londoners* starts off introducing the main character in the environment of London city and even the season that it takes place in, *Moses Ascending* dives into the undergoing activity of characters abruptly saying,

It was Sir Galahad who drew my attention to the property. He was reading *Dalton's Weekly*, as was his wont, looking for new jobs; roaming through bedsitter land; picking out secondhand miscellany he need and could afford; musing on the lonely hearts column to see if any desperate rich white woman seeks black companion with a view to matrimony...¹

Hence, the readership is taken back to a narrative style and plot they are familiar with thorough *The Lonely Londoners*. The previous novel's important character Sir Galahad and the mention of *Dalton's Weekly* bind the two novels together as if it is an uninterrupted narrative about the life of Caribbean Londoners and Moses's adventures in London. However, the commonality of characters and behaviours highlight the drastic changes that occurred or are about to happen. One is the impregnable flow of time and the present. The late 1960's and early 1970's social atmosphere and political background of Britain is represented through different details in the novel. One of the most critical growing movements of the turn of the decade is the Black Power movement. To shake down some of the characters and lay down their actions through their relation to the Black Power movement, post-war British politics, considering the colonialism and stirring phenomena of coloured migration, are illuminating for the atmosphere the subjects of the Empire dwelled in. In an observant manner, Richard T. Ashcroft and Mark Bevir lucidly formulize the steps taken in the name of colonialism and their outcome. Ashcroft and Bevir summarize the action and reaction in the following manner:

¹ Sam Selvon, *Moses Ascending* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books, 1984), 1.

The British Nationality Act 1948 was intended to secure Britain's place at the head of a robust Commonwealth of Nations, but instead led to an unexpectedly large influx of nonwhite migrants... postwar reconstitution of the British polity gave rise to a distinctive form of "British multiculturalism," which combined tough immigration controls with an internal regime of citizenship rights, race-relations legislation, and pluralistic accommodations for minorities.²

This is an exact summary of the developments and stirrings in the Empire the lonely migrants of London have experienced in the course of *The Lonely Londoners*. And in *Moses Ascending*, the growing number of non-white immigration and pluralistic accommodations for minorities are represented through the caricatured renters in Moses's house, Faizull and Farouk from Pakistan, and the episode about the illegal "Oriental"³ immigrants accommodated in Moses's house, as Brenda, a Black Briton describes. The fluctuant face of London is reflected through the marketing and trade of miscellaneous products for different minorities. The slow and novel change brought by Tanty's shopping principles and communication represented in *The Lonely Londoners* as a hopeful integration of two different cultures is long surpassed by individual shops for different cultures and cuisines. Selvon cannily sketches out the current state of 'multiculturalism' in a farcical scene of Moses rushing for "halal"⁴ food for the believers of Islam.

Nevertheless, the multiculturalism Ashcroft and Bevir claim to exist is not in the sense of political position the British government wanted to support. Don Sparling explains the term multiculturalism with its different meanings depending on its context. Sparling claims, "...the term may be simply descriptive, a label for a society market by ethnic diversity. And finally, it

² Richard T. Ashcroft and Mark Bevir, *Multiculturalism in the British Commonwealth: Comparative Perspectives on Theory and Practice* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 26.

³ Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 83.

⁴ "That which is untied or loosed." That which is lawful, as distinguished from *harām*, or that which is unlawful. See Thomas Patrick Hughes, *A Dictionary of Islam* (Princeton Theological Seminary Library: Internet Archive, 2008), 160.

can be understood as relating to a social policy implemented through specific laws and regulations of the state.”⁵ Considering the coinage of the term “multiculturalism” which comes from the 1970s, it is clear that the multicultural state Selvon displays through his sketching does not exist due to the regulations of the state. It is not a deliberate move of the British government. It is an unwanted state of migration, later controlled by force which is represented in the last novel of the trilogy, *Moses Migrating*. So, the British government, which took thousands of migrants each year from former colonies, kept segregation and racism in the borders of England as an authoritative power. Similar authority was established during the years of active colonization. Nadine El-Enany, in *(B)ordering Britain*, where she openly tries to visualize and represent the United Kingdom as Britain without its colonies, mentions racial ordering and the power of categorisation in colonies. El-Enany remarks, “Processes of categorisation...enabled colonial control over vast numbers of people and resources. The law was frequently deployed and advocated as the means through which to establish a global white British supremacist order in and beyond British colonies.”⁶ Even though the colonial subjects migrated to different parts of England, they faced segregation and racism that paralleled the colonies worldwide. That is why characters like Moses, Galahad or Faizull are still colonial subjects and segregated by different categories regardless of the 20 years they spent in the ‘mother country’ and lifestyles they managed to settle in London. Moreover, it is precisely why different groups of minorities are unable to accept or receive each other. Moses’s xenophobic attitude towards illegal migrants is a vivid example. In the face of an alien culture, Moses says, “They did rig up a clothes line right across the room, and it was full of saris, turbans, fezzes, dhotis, poshteens, lungis, shantungs,

⁵ Don Sparling, “Multiculturalism in Canada,” in *Nationalism and Racism in the Liberal Order* (Ústí nad Labem: Universita J. E. Purkyně, 1997), 263.

⁶ Nadine El-Enany, *(B)ordering Britain: Law, race and empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), chap. 1.

caftans, and other oriental items of dress what I had to look up in the dictionary afterwards.”⁷ It is ironic that as a Briton, who is not familiar with any of the clothing, he prefers to look it up in the dictionary, which is most likely to be an English dictionary, prepared by English linguists and researchers.

It is ironic because Moses is unable to identify terms that are probably attributed to himself by a White supremacist Briton. Although categorization was the key element to the government's authority, a melting pot in the centre of England was inevitable as well. Selvon makes sure that all categories and offensive terms are hinted at throughout the text, like “skinhead”, “paki”, or “negro”. Yet, Paul Gilroy points out the melting pot that is premature and Manichaeian as discussed by Fanon. Gilroy writes,

At certain points during the recent past, British racism generated turbulent economic, ideological, and political forces that have seemed to act upon the people they oppressed by concentrating their cultural identities into a single powerful configuration. Whether these people were of African, Caribbean, or Asian descent, their commonality was often defined by its reference to the central, irreducible sign of their common racial subordination- the colour black.⁸

Hence, Moses Aloetta Esq. faces even a harder fracture in the reflection of his colonial identity. Trying to ‘ascend’ above other Black migrants, he has to fight his way through the Asian and African immigrants who are also counted as Black people by the discriminating social system. His existential crisis doubles because, as a person undertaking the British gentleman landlord role, he crashes with the fear of the invasion of his castle and colonization once again. His castle in the Shepherd's Bush is a castle of the mind. As the title suggests, Moses ‘ascends’. Yet, he ascends for a short period, and he has to pay the price to be able to become a landlord, getting

⁷ Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 86.

⁸ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 86.

payback for 20 years passed in dark, soot and sweat. Considering the struggle to define and elevate his identity as a landlord, which was a recurrent theme in *The Housing Lark*, it is undeniable that Selvon lets Moses Aloetta Esq. transform into a more cynical, hysterical and desperate character. As Moses from the future cynically says, “ I represent sanity in madness.”⁹

4.1 Moses Ascending

The transformation of Moses into an even more cynical character contrasts with the very ending of *The Lonely Londoners*. At the end of *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses inevitably undertook the role of the leader for the lonely blokes of London. He and his basement room functioned as a reintegrative power for the Caribbean community in London. Selvon even suggested the image of a divine figure who holds the power of reconciliation with the storytelling and ballad culture that was regularly practised on Sunday mornings. Nevertheless, Selvon is very particular about not maintaining the hero/ protagonist in the traditional sense. The more subversive attitude Selvon has for his characters and the narrative, the more authentic they become. Hence, the elevated image of the black man who is aware of all the segregations and becomes a remedy for the reconciliation of other characters like him is being taken down with *Moses Ascending*. So, Moses ascends physically while descending in his state of conscious being.

It is no coincidence that Moses initiates the narrative with a first-person narrative voice, and his idealized and elevated figure, which could have represented the black man with insight into his swaying movement around the world, seem to disappear as the novel unfolds. Nevertheless, the first-person narrative voice does not necessarily mean losing the control which was represented through an omniscient narrative voice concentrated on Moses in *The Lonely*

⁹ Sam Selvon, *Moses Migrating* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), 175.

Londoners. The authority and autonomy Moses gains in *Moses Ascending* should be explained through the perspective of narratology and literary interpretation. Gérard Genette, in his influential work *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980), discusses the narrative methods and the narrative voice's effect on the interpretation and reception of the very text and speaker himself/ herself. In the chapter "Mood", where he focuses on the narrating performance, he differentiates between the voice of the narrative and the voice of the protagonist. Genette says,

However, to my mind most of the theoretical works on this subject (which are mainly classifications) suffer from a regrettable confusion between what I call here *mood* and *voice*, a confusion between the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?* —or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*¹⁰

So, it is clarified that in *Moses Ascending*, Moses both orients the narrative perspective and witnesses life around him. Even though this is enough power at once to accept his autonomy, the novel suggests that there is a superior level of authority which is hinted towards the end of the novel. It is the ambiguity between the Memoirs Moses writes and the novel itself. In certain instances, while Moses tells us, the readers, about what happened and the next episode, he seems to be concerned about the differentiation between fiction and reality. His endeavour for persuading the reader to believe what he tells is the truth, not the fiction is suspicious enough to be questioned. When he is so overwhelmed by the illegal migrants residing in his house for a certain time, he starts another episode with a defensive comment. Moses says, "None of this narrative is fiction: if I lie, I die. It might sound so, but I can't help if people in this city does live

¹⁰ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 186.

in a dream world...¹¹ Even though he testifies that he is telling the truth with “if I lie, I die.”, it is not a saying other than a colloquial and metaphorical expression. He does not mean the actual death. Even though Moses seems to grab all the powers of authorship, Selvon seems to mask his voice through Moses from time to time. Before Moses says, “if I lie, I die.” Selvon displays the instances where Moses utters the Islamic testimony of faith “Shahada”¹². He says, “ ‘There is no god but Allah,’ I mutter under my breath, giving myself some solacement, ‘and Mohammed is his prophet.’”¹³ Yet, rather than solacement, Moses uses the term as mimicry and cynicism towards the Muslim migrants he is dealing with. He does not mean what he utters. Hence, his persuasion about telling the truth, not fiction, loses its believability. Also, the switch in language register Moses uses compared to the narrative in *The Lonely Londoners* enhances the artificial sense mentioned above. The standard and sometimes, almost ridiculously archaic form of English detaches Moses and what he means by his words.

4.1.1 Moses as a Trickster Figure

The fictionality and giddy-paced nature of Moses’s behaviours and attitude are not only in his relation to the Muslim migrants. He is in a role play since he hears the chance of buying a house and being a landlord. He contemplates how he can be a landlord, and almost his identity changes in his fancy. He engages in imagination,

‘I beg your pardon, I *am* the landlord.’ ‘Oh... how silly of me... if you’ll just sign the form here, SIR... sit down... use my chair.’ I can also be on the other side of the door when people come to look for rooms. ‘Is the landlord in?’ ‘*I am* the landlord.’ ‘Oh... I’m looking for a room.’ ‘I don’t let out to black people.’

¹¹ Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 80.

¹² “Evidence.” [Witness]. See Hughes 571.

¹³ Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 72.

SLAM. I might even qualify for jury service. ‘I hereby deem you a rogue and a vagabond... These are only some of the privileges that would be mine.’¹⁴

Through being a landlord, he is not only ascending to the penthouse of the building, but he is ‘ascending’ on the social scale to the level of a white man. However, the ascension is ironic considering the treatment he gets from Bob, Faizull/Farouk and the amount of workload he has as a landlord. The irony is strongest when his subconscious echoes the treatment people of colour get in London when he imagines not giving a room for a black person. It was Moses Aloetta himself who was telling Galahad about the Polish man who did not let people of colour enter his restaurant. So, Moses takes the role of the supremacist white. On top of his imagination, the way he uses English supports the image of the British gentleman. The archaic English he uses highlights the arbitrariness of his mimicry of the white man. The archaic tone is not only used in conversations. He uses for inner voice as well. For instance, at the party he planned for the arrival of Bob’s partner Jeannie, he is disturbed by the behaviour of black people, defining it ‘primitive’, he thinks to himself “, But pride goeth before a fall.” So, after living 20 years in London, Moses seems to let all the surpassed insults and segregation haunt him and his surrounding. Allowing the id to flow through the narrative, Moses evokes the uncanny figure of the trickster. Carl Gustav Jung correlates the antique Roman god Mercurius to the indigenous mythological figure trickster to explain the psychology of its existence. “A curious combination of typical trickster motifs can be found in the alchemical figure of Mercurius; for instance, his fondness for sly jokes and malicious pranks, his powers as a shape-shifter, his dual nature,...and...his approximation to the figure of a saviour.”¹⁵ This curious combination is seen in Moses’s journey through being a landlord and his future journey of coming home in *Moses*

¹⁴ Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 2.

¹⁵ Carl Gustav Jung, “On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure,” in *Part I: Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 255.

Migrating. The dual nature that Mercurius embody makes a great statement of authenticity which takes a protagonist like Moses from the stereotypical moulds. Moses is a Black Briton, a black man who is more white than other whites, he is a Muslim looking for Halal food, he is a landlord, a true gentleman, a global man who shapeshifts through labels and moulds in the colonial structure. Indeed, Moses is still the fractured black man that was discussed in previous chapters based on Fanon's philosophy of Negritude. Yet, instead of idealizing and glorifying his victimhood, he takes part in victimizing others and serving the discriminating social system. Even though this attitude is not morally ideal or politically correct, it is still authentic because he is autonomous in his words and actions.

This autonomy and self-determinacy are highlighted by the contrast of Galahad's support of the Black Power movement, which is very particular and singular. Indeed, the Black Power movement and philosophy is not an all-inclusive and passivist reaction to the racist colonial system. Cedric Johnson makes a normative analysis of the Black Power and its politics in *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders* (2007). He reflects on the ideology as, "The demand for Black Power was rooted in the New Nationalist militancy of the late fifties and early sixties...The New Nationalists' sharp criticisms of liberal integration, calls for black self-determination, and anticolonial politics prefigured the tone and aims of Black Power radicalism."¹⁶ The philosophy is focused on gathering and improving black people's choices in education and economy, yet still supportive of people from different backgrounds to remove the functionality of Western colonialism. However, no part of this ideology can be seen in Galahad's attitude. The only way he supports "the cause" is his usage of the words "our cause" and "we" as a unifying element. However, his stand against Faizull's existence shows that as a black character who is supporting

¹⁶ Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xx-xxi.

the Black movement, he is so far away from self-determination. Galahad shows no empathy for the illegal migration. He says, “‘Don’t accuse me, I never told you anything about those bloody Pakis,’ he rejoined. ‘I meant Our People. If you had stuck to your own kind, you wouldn’t of been in this shit.’”¹⁷ Hence, the Black Power movement that included Bob just for his search for sexual satisfaction through women of colour or Galahad, who occasionally takes place for the sake of keeping his relations, is ridiculed by Selvon. So, Fanon’s concept of the Manichaeen system, which was discussed in previous chapters, firmly protects its position and effects. As anti-colonial writing tries to point out, the system itself should be deconstructed, not the variable symbol in it. Thereby, Galahad’s shortcoming philosophy of project mentality only ridicules himself as representing the Black Power movement’s voice. As long as the system that renders people from Pakistan as “bloody Pakis” exists, it does not matter if the black people are landlords or running magazines for the meetings against racism. Every minority is in danger as long as one of them is being segregated and exploited.

4.1.2 Moses and “Friday”

While Galahad and Brenda attend the meetings and involve in creating the magazine for the Black Power party, Moses focuses on a different role play. Galahad and Brenda choose to undertake the role of supporters for “their” struggle and cause to feel united and powerful. On the other hand, Moses tries to cease power through a different experience. This is not only being a landlord. Moses hires a servant for handling the renting and constant maintenance of the house. Hiring a servant is an important step in his colonial experience. He finds a loyal servant to depend on him rather than depending on a party like the Black Power. Jamaican author Curdella

¹⁷ Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 78.

Forbes analyzes this search for personal self-control. Forbes analyses ‘the mode of escape’ in Moses’s identity as,

Moses embarks on a self-making performance that evokes a completely carnival laughter, shifting on the edge of hilarity and tears. His aim is to recreate himself as a completely personal kind of man, outside the control of social forces (the mana of the gods), particularly the West Indian ones that beat insistently at his door, threatening to undermine his strategies of escape. But the social environment proves resistant to Moses’s new self-directed identity.¹⁸

To render himself ‘outside the control of social forces’, he chooses his servant as a representative of that order surrounding him, which is the white supremacist Western culture. Hence, Moses hires a white immigrant as his servant. He refers to Bob as “my man Friday”¹⁹ in reference to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which represents the prototype of a middle-class colonizer. Bob learns “the ways of the black man.”²⁰ He cooks beef stew, rice and peas. In the beginning, it seems that the reverse colonization of the white man by a black man is happening. At least, Moses is knowledgeable enough to refer him as of Friday and even think about their relationship as a “Master and Servant”²¹ bond. However, glimpses into Bob’s mind and the steady change in his attitude shows that Moses is being ridiculed by the very parody he tries to execute. Regarding the interaction between each other, Moses insensibly utters, “...Black and White could live in 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.”²² Although Moses is aware of Robinson

¹⁸ Curdella Forbes, “Representing Exile: The Flight from Gender in Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners*, *Moses Ascending* and *The Housing Lark*,” in *From Nation to Diaspora: Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and the Cultural Performance of Gender* (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2005), 90-1.

¹⁹ Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 4.

²⁰ Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 4.

²¹ Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 5.

²² Ibid.

Crusoe- Friday relationship, he is not aware of the further sarcasm that Selvon makes in a tricky manner. The authenticity brought up by Selvon's masked voice in the narrative is praised by Michel Fabre. He writes, "Selvon does not assimilate into the European mainstream; he explodes it, he subverts it... This is really a "novelist's novel", refined to the point of indulging in pun, parody and allusion in the same breath."²³ Further, the readership catches the possible glimpse of Bob rising from the status of a servant and re-establishing the colonial dynamic between the white and black man.

However, the rise of Bob is not as simple as him fulfilling or not performing the role of servant. For Moses, Bob's presence is there to fulfil the image of the slave, which was inarguably black. The parallelism between Bob and a black slave is supreme when Bob's illiteracy is found out. Paul Gilroy discusses the importance of music grown in the black Atlantic. So, he refers to illiteracy in relation to slavery. "It is important to remember" writes Gilroy, "that the slaves' access to literacy was often denied on pain of death and only a few cultural opportunities were offered as a surrogate for the other forms of individual autonomy denied by life on the plantations and in the barracoons."²⁴ Nevertheless, this is not the case for Bob. His shortcoming is not even recognized due to his skin colour. As Brenda points out atrociously, "He is illiterate, but being as he's white we say he is suffering from dyslexia."²⁵ Not only that his illiteracy is not accepted, but he also overcomes this at the end of the novel. So, his image as a substitute slave is also parodied. At the end of the novel, he settles in the penthouse, and Moses takes the basement as a landlord. So, Bob proves to be the only character who gains development through the plot. And it is no coincidence that he is the only white character from the main characters. Bob establishes and integrates his identity on the coast of the disintegration

²³ Michel Fabre, "Samuel Selvon," *Trinidad and Tobago Review* 4, no. 4 (Christmas 1980): 15.

²⁴ Gilroy 74.

²⁵ Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 128.

of Moses's identity. Moses has struggled to weave his image as a landlord and writer. Yet, Bob's curiosity of the Memoirs deconstructs everything that Moses put together delicately. Bob picks the lock, reaches the Memoirs and seeks help from Brenda to read Moses's work. Through this instance, his illiteracy is debouched, which triggers his endeavour to learn reading and writing. Yet, Moses feels being raped by a white man, who reached his most personal work and, even worse, helped by a black person. It is Brenda's words that causes Moses's 'kiff-kiff laughter and jester mask to fall. Brenda explains how she found out Bob's illiteracy, "That night be brought me that crap you're writing. I had to read for him.' I winced."²⁶ Bob has invaded as an outsider and shattered Moses's identity. Hence, Bob, who started as a folio character to Defoe's Friday, completes the novel as a white colonizer who takes away the penthouse and invades Moses's personal sphere, which Moses tried to establish so hard as Curdella Forbes discusses. Bob's mission as Friday comes to an end when he imposes his full name upon Moses to establish the barriers between races and classes. He makes a harsh laugh in contrast to the kiff-kiff laughter of West Indian tests, and he says, "Nothing will ever be the same. And for one thing, "Bobbie" is for my friends. You'd better begin to call me Robert."²⁷ All this, Messrs Robert and Robinson. When his dream of being a landlord and a king in the castle is taken away from him, what is left for Moses is to take upon the jester figure further and "plot" as a chance to get even with Bob. Moses finishes the narrative with these words, " But I have an epilogue up my sleeve... What I plot to do is to go up top...arrange for the both of we to catch Master Robert in *flagrento delicto*, when I will fling down the gauntlet."²⁸ Selvon reassures that even after the re-establishment of the colonial segregating power, Moses turns to 'plotting', aka weaving a text and keeping an epilogue up in his sleeve.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 134.

²⁸ Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 140.

4.2 Moses *Immigrading*

Migrating, or as Tolroy says in *Moses Ascending*, “immigrading” is in the roots of the black experience as a diasporic community. But, as discussed in the third chapter, migration is not a state of being that can be pinned down. Especially considering the doubled version of migration that Moses goes through in his last journey. Considering the borders of lands that presents itself with its own rules of cultures and politics of travelling back-and-forth, a return to Homi K. Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* will be helpful to remain faithful to the focus on the existential angst of being in the borderline. While discussing Jacques Derrida’s supplementary logic, Bhabha points out a grey area of the diaspora politics. Bhabha says,

What *takes (the) place*, in Derrida's supplementary sense, is the disembodied evil eye, the subaltern instance, that wreaks its revenge by circulating, without being seen. It cuts across the boundaries of master and slave; it opens up a space *in-between* the poem's two locations, the Southern Hemisphere of slavery and the Northern Hemisphere of diaspora and migration, which then become uncannily doubled in the phantasmic scenario of the political unconscious.²⁹

What breaks the boundaries and opens up an “in-between” is the phenomena of “origin’ in the supplementary logic. The lack of an essential origin is ‘supplied’ by a supplement, which later might lead to the composition of an origin. Derrida uses the idea on language and speech act. However, it is still suitable enough to any idea digging for the term ‘origin’. A piece of land as an origin of a group of people is an excellent example of the non-existence of the origin place, as in diasporic communities or in the generations whose parents migrated multiple times that the idea of origin is lost in the records for long. Derrida refers to the failing origin as, “The question is of an originary supplement,...totally unacceptable as it is within classical logic. Rather the supplement of origin: which supplements the failing origin and which is yet not derived; this

²⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 55.

supplement is, as one says of a spare part...of the original make...”³⁰ So, the question of a supplement that was the original cannot be traced back—more than that, it is against logic. So, questioning the direction Moses migrates is futile. Yet still, Moses Aloetta himself seem to put the concept of home in Trinidad as the original substitute when he says that he cannot remember when the idea of “going back home” hit him.³¹ Yet again, as discussed in *Moses Ascending*, the layout of the concepts like migrating, going back and coming home does not correspond to the reality that is masked by Selvon’s whispers throughout the text. Moses might call it “going home”, but it does not affect the existential crisis he is in as long as he really considers Trinidad as home and reconciles with the image of a land that was raped and transformed by the White colonialist.

Even though Moses cannot recollect where the ‘origin’ of the idea of going back home comes, the text winks at the political and economic change in Britain and the government regulations to support the difference in the conditions. With the expansion of the migrant communities in Britain and the rise of the living coast, the British government started applying tight regulations to begin introducing the plan of return back to the Caribbean. Margaret Byron and Stephanie Condon survey the socio-economic and cultural context of the return flow to the Caribbean from France and Britain. They refer to the differences between two governmental regulations. And British regulations are obviously more focused on the mission of return migration. The survey presents,

The publication of the 1991 *Census of Great Britain* enables comparison of the size of the Caribbean-born population with the 1981 figures... the decline in population due to migration appears to be 26 988 over this period... Meanwhile,

³⁰ Jaques Derrida, “The Supplement of (at) the Origin,” in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 313.

³¹ Selvon, *Moses Migrating*, 29.

the 1991 *Commonwealth Caribbean population and housing census* included questions on birthplace and residence, on periods spent in another country and on date of resettlement in the Caribbean, providing valuable data on the size and timing of the return flow to each territory.³²

Hence, the end of the 1970s and the upcoming 1980s is the time when Moses subconsciously decides to go back to Trinidad. Before the regulations of 1991, Enoch Powell's politics of keeping the United Kingdom as the white man's land was the declaration of upcoming regulations and further ostracizing of Afro-Asian migrants. The most crucial attitude towards the migrants is the use of the word 'alien' by Powell. His understanding of British subjects, aliens and white Britons is a great chart of the colonial system and its exploitation of the colonised subjects' status of citizenship and identity. Powell was strictly against differentiating between alien migrants and migrants from the Commonwealth countries. British subjects were as alien as any other migrant seeking for settlement, disregarding the reason for their residence in Britain in the eyes of Powell and the Conservative Party.³³ Hence, the unnamed and unrecalled origin of the idea of going back to Trinidad was a grand slam in the face of the Caribbean society in Britain. For this reason, the novel starts with the cynical letter from Moses to dear Mr Powell. The identity crisis Moses went through in *The Lonely Londoners* and *Moses Ascending* does not come to an end with the idea of going back home. Bhabha's 'in-between' state is represented in this ludicrous and subversive letter. Moses starts the letter as, "Dear Mr Powell, though Black I am writing you to express my support for your campaigns to keep Brit'n White..."³⁴ and he

³² Margaret Byron and Stephanie Condon, "A Comparative Study of Caribbean Return Migration from Britain and France: Towards a Context-Dependent Explanation," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 21, no.1 (1996): 96. <https://doi.org/10.2307/622927>.

³³ Simon Heffer, *Like the Roman: The Life of Enoch Powell* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), 942. E-book, 2014.

³⁴ Selvon, *Moses Migrating*, 29.

kindly requests the two thousand pounds grant that is given to support British subjects going back 'home'.

Even though his departure is being supported by the people around him and the government, his inner conflict is represented at its highest in the last novel of the trilogy. Except for Moses, every character has a specific idea and attitude towards going back to the Caribbean or staying in London. For instance, before boarding on the ship, the Immigration Officer becomes the voice of the government; echoing Powell, he says, "You enjoyed your visit, then?"³⁵ not recognizing the citizenship and residence of Moses over 20 years. The happiness of the officer who affixes the seal on the passport of the returners is the bitter laughter of Moses throughout the novel. He tries to handle the split identity of a migrant through the kiff-kiff laughter he hides behind.

4.2.1 Colonial Identity: The Orphan of the World

The hesitation about going back to Trinidad does not disappear with Moses's arrival to the place he was born and spent his childhood. Selvon subverts the idea of 'going home' and reconciliation at the end of the journey of Moses. In the Western traditional literary background, the idea of coming home is associated with coming-of-age and reconciliation on both social and personal levels. It represents the closure for the quest the hero went for. Yet, once again, Selvon deconstructs the European traditional storytelling and idealization of the protagonist with Moses's alienated and absurd existence in Trinidad. As Susheila Nasta analyses in the introduction, Moses being an orphan and being brought up by the matriarch Tanty is a reflection of his rootlessness. Nasta interprets, "So weak, in fact, is Moses's link with his childhood in St. John that he is unsure of Tanty's identity when he first sees her. Perhaps most significantly,

³⁵ Selvon, *Moses Migrating*, 50.

Moses, as an orphan of the world, has developed agoraphobia...”.³⁶ The fractured identity of the diasporic communities is embodied by the unchanging, singular and ambiguous image of Moses, swaying back and forth between the streets in Trinidad and the foggy Shepherd’s Bush. In the midst of the swaying movement, Selvon uses laughter to feed the readership the existential angst of migrants. However, some instances where the racist, condescending and thunderous voice of the white man is heard crystal clear. For instance, Bob’s hypocritical search for his ancestry causes Moses to ridicule Bob, leading to Bob's genuine ideas and essentialism. Bob attacks the fragmented image of the diasporic people, “‘What you are saying is that you are just a fluke,’ he sneer, ‘a random bastard who adopted England as his home. No wonder you don’t know if you’re coming or going.’”³⁷ It is people like Bob who can assign the otherness of a black man and split into pieces like Fanon describes the disintegration of the black man’s identity by the colonizer.

4.2.2 Masquerade and the Carnival

Facing the loneliness in Trinidad and the elapsing role of the English gentleman, Moses once finds role-playing and laughter as the solution to his existential struggle. Ridiculed by Selvon, instead of trying to reconcile with his past and ‘native’ land, Moses prefers to acquit the reputation of Great Britain in relation to colonial economy and racism. Even if Moses decides to prove the economic strength of the motherland under her Majesty’s rule, the text forbids the readership to miss the irony. When the reporter suggests fusing the Carnival and Moses’s incognito as “Britannia”³⁸, Moses degrades the Carnival culture. He says, “ I disagree. Carnival is a pretentious masquerade, man, and my theme is a solemn, serious, patriotic one. How can we

³⁶ Selvon, *Moses Migrating*, 13.

³⁷ Selvon, *Moses Migrating*, 148.

³⁸ Britannia is the national personification of Britain as a helmeted female warrior holding a trident and shield. See *A Dictionary of Reference and Allusion*, ed. Andrew Delahunty and Sheila Dignen, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press,2010), s.s. “Britannia.”

mix the two?”³⁹ Irony deconstructs the image Moses builds and hides under it. It is Moses who actually plays masquerade. As an orphan of the diasporic community, he takes up the mask of Trinidadian, Englishman, Muslim, writer, Black Power supporter, Queen’s loyal servant and Britannia with her trident. However, even if he chides the masquerade, he is aware of his own jester/ trickster figure. He reflects upon the constant masquerading fashion and says, “If all the men in the world was a pack of cards, and you shuffle the pack, I would come out the joker.”⁴⁰ This is the insight that Selvon weaves carefully throughout his novels. Moses may condemn masquerade, yet he is aware of his own performance and mimicry. The kiff-kiff laughter becomes only a veil to survive through the identity crisis.

He is a ‘joker’, indeed. As used in card games, he can be a substitute for other cards or nationalities he does not belong to. The mimicry which echoes Bhabha is also addressed by consequential writer James Weldon Johnson. In *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912), Johnson touches upon the mimicry and masquerade of the black man. He writes,

It is remarkable, after all, what an adaptable creature the Negro is. I have seen the black West Indian gentleman in London, and he is in speech and manners a perfect Englishman. I have seen the natives of Haiti and Martinique in Paris, and they are more Frenchy than a Frenchman. I have no doubt that the Negro would make a good chinaman, with the exception of the pigtail.⁴¹

It is this mimicry that deconstructed the idea of colonization and authority. It is the similar masquerade that Brenda has in *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*. Brenda having the perfect British accent, masquerades her skin colour uncannily in her voice. Similarly, Moses finally crosses the boundary between metaphor and reality, and he covers his skin colour with the

³⁹ Selvon, *Moses Migrating*, 121.

⁴⁰ Selvon, *Moses Migrating*, 74.

⁴¹ James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (New York: Vintage Press, 1989), 153.

bronze colouring for his role as Britannia. It is deconstructive on many levels that his absolute masquerade and cover happens back in Trinidad, where his journey and narrative ends.

4.2.3 “Play mas”

How can Moses and his mimicry be an authentic narrative like other works of Selvon? Where is the integrity when Doris and Tanty spray Moses with the bronze body paint? Is the integrity at issue a part of Moses’s identity or his narrative? These questions should be answered and discussed in relation to the cultural context in which Selvon brings the Moses trilogy to a close; ‘mas’. To understand the authenticity of Selvon, and the novelist’s novel, the performance of ‘mas’ should be understood in its relation to acting, performing and construction. As Peter Minshall austere explains, there is no dictionary entry or academic work on the concept “to play mas”. Yet, he breaks into the phenomenon by the experience and cultural heritage. Minshall gives the gist of ‘mas’:

...‘mas’ involves conception, design, craft, construction, making. The thing made is worn or carried by one or more persons... It also involves the act of the wearing,...and to the accompaniment of sound - a beaten rhythm, a speech, a soca road march, moving, dancing, miming, or otherwise portraying the thing, or idea, or mood, or character the costume or structure is meant to represent. It seems to me that this last characteristic,... is fundamental to what makes a mas, a ‘mas’. It is performance, granted it is performance in a raw, primitive, essential form. The performance occurs in an environment that is often spontaneous and chaotic. On a city, street or a cold wooden platform.⁴²

The natural outburst and flow of the performance is the most primitive and authentic fulfilment a human being gets in mas. Conversely, through the most demanding physical activity, one actualizes himself. And this is precisely why Selvon ends the trilogy right after Moses

⁴² Peter Minshall, “ ‘To Play Mas’,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 45, no.2/3 (June-Sept. 1999): 30. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40654077>.

experiences the Jouvert morning. All of the miming, speech and endeavour for the Memoirs is tumbled down by the chaotic and rejuvenating experience of ‘play mas’. For the first time in the trilogy, Moses drops all the mask and role-play, indulging in fundamental performance. And he describes, what Peter Minshall described, from the perspective of the performer. Moses soliloquizes,

And in truth, I don’t know what come over me that morning,... but my head was giddy with a kind of irresistible exultation like I just get emancipated from slavery. *All of we chanting and slaving to out the fire in Massa sugarcane plantations; foreday morning come; Jouvert, Canboulay, Massa come to play mas too, mas in your arse; slave ancestors jump out their graves and come play too, oh God Massa, play mas, play mas, the vap take me, the vap take the vap take all of and Last Lap go make misery!*⁴³

Here Moses not only experiences mas physically on the Jouvert morning, but some unclear metamorphosis takes over the narrative that was not seen in any of the novels analyzed in this thesis work. The italicized words remind of chanting. Through the ‘mas’, Moses reaches his real potential of being an author and creating a text. This is maybe the only genuine piece of literature he ever produces in the course of three novels. And Moses loses all the shackles and labels of the colonial system he lives in. The concepts of being white, black, colonized subject, alien, migrant or prodigal son gets out of perspective for Moses. The emancipating effect of the Carnival attacks these concepts and the hierarchical layout. The subversion and rejuvenation through the chaos evoke the image Mikhail Bakhtin originates as “carnavalesque”, a literary mode. Bakhtin works on the territory of the carnival, which echoes what Minshall depicts and Moses experiences. “Carnival is not contemplated” remarks Bakhtin, “its participants *live* in it, they live by its laws as long as those laws are in effect; that is, they live a *carnivalistic life*. Because

⁴³ Selvon, *Moses Migrating*, 180.

carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its *usual* rut, it is to some extent ‘life turned inside out,’ ‘the reverse side of the world’”.⁴⁴ Hence, Moses manages to get out of the usual rut. All social and cultural impediments are turned upside down by Selvon. Through the deconstruction of the social and colonial dynamic, Moses, the representation of the black man, the world's orphan, fulfils himself for a moment in the carnival.

Nevertheless, Selvon does not finish the work on such a high note. The ecstatic release in Carnival is followed by the re-establishment of the social and usual order. In the immigration line, Moses’s image freezes up like a mimic man as if he was “still playing charades”.⁴⁵ Play is permanent, never reaching integrity and fulfilment of the fractured colonial identity. The sudden shift between the ecstatic Carnival and the mundane image in the passport line becomes the summary of the constant up and down movement in Moses’s integrity as a split identity in all three novels. The artificiality and almost grotesque mimicry in *Moses Ascending* is actually a negative answer to the utopian question Moses was after in *The Lonely Londoners*. Still, the similar utopian visions reintroduced in *Moses Migrating* seems unattainable at the end. So, once again, the play is permanent. As *An Island Is a World*’s Andrews says: “We stray like yonder cattle, hither and thither...A pattern which is followed, and you can’t do anything about it.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 122.

⁴⁵ Selvon, *Moses Migrating*, 194.

⁴⁶ Selvon, *An Island Is a World*, 63-4.

5 Conclusion

The study of colonized subjects in Selvon's six novels demonstrated that the fragmented, split identity of the colonized subjects of the diasporic communities is embedded within the experience of colonization and migration. As Selvon represented skillfully, the literary burlesque is the only style a novelist can propose to subvert the tone of the bleak world of supremacy and racism. The hither-and-thither movement of the rootless Caribbean protagonists is embodied by the hither-and-thither flow of Selvon's narrative genius.

On the representation of the existential crisis of colonial identities, Selvon brings the politics of the colonization and deconstruction together through his authentic authorship. The theoretical approaches on colonization, the phenomenon of culture and Negritude are cherished by the most unique literary style. While Fanon discusses the politics of colonization and Bhabha produces his theory on the liminality of what is perceived as 'present,' Selvon exercises all these theories by displaying the disintegration of each protagonist and re-integration through metanarrative. Masking his authorship through Moses Aloetta Esq., Selvon takes an opportunity to use laughter as a deconstructive element in his re-establishment of the post-colonial scenery. The periphery of the colonial Great Britain becomes the writer of the *Magnus Opium*. As Mervyn Morris deduces, Selvon shifts the reception of the effects of colonization and the Manichaeian mindset through "provoking laughter against snobbery, racism, deceit; against English assumptions of superiority; against people...who are slow to value anything outside the mainstream of traditional English Literature."¹ His protagonists become untraditional and taboo-breaking representations of colonization by the white man. Their constant struggle to create stories to keep their integrity moves them towards the loopholes in the subversive function of the novel genre. Thereby, to

¹ Mervyn Morris, "Introduction," in *Moses Ascending*, xvi.

read and study them is to move them closer to fulfilling their disintegrated bodies by the white colonist. And through re-writing of her Majesty's disintegrated subjects, they will be given status and understanding of their own identities outside the boundaries of the essentialist and routinized canon of Western Literature.

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