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From the Caribbean to London:
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PREFACE

The Post-World War II, which ended with the defeat of the Axis Powers by the Allies, marked an important point in the collapse of the British imperial power. Although Great Britain emerged as victorious after the Second World War, its prestige, power and wealth were deeply affected. For example, the Empire had to deal with the fact that important colonies were gaining power, strength, and were also acquiring some forms of independence or self-govern. Moreover, Great Britain was hit by several waves of immigrants arriving from the colonies (especially from the Caribbean), attracted to the Mother Country by the British Nationality Act of 1948, by the need of new workforce for post-war reconstruction and by the idyllic images of Great Britain which the centre had instilled into the colonized people. Basically, the periphery of the Empire moved to the centre, and this led to discontent and new struggles between blacks and whites within the Mother Country.

In this dissertation, some works by two migrant authors, namely Sam Selvon and Linton Kwesi Johnson, are explored and discussed. This analysis focuses mainly on how they contributed to the disalienation and reappropriation of Caribbean language and identity. For the first author *The Lonely Londoners*, *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating* have been analysed; while for the latter one, *Yout Rebels, Sonny's Lettah, Inglan is a Bitch, It Dread Inna Inglan, Forces of Victri Mekkin Histri* and *Di great Insoreckshan* have been considered.

The reason why these two authors were chosen lies in the fact that they have in common many aspects while representing two different stages of the same post-colonial period and of the process of West Indians' decolonization and disalienation. Indeed, they both migrated to the Mother Country from the Caribbean during the Post-World War II period and, then, they dedicated their lives to documenting hostilities migrants encountered, as well as to documenting and enhancing the process of decolonization and of "colonization in reverse" carried out by blacks. Moreover, they were both aware of the key role that language played in the decolonization of the mind and in the importance it had for a truthful and effective expression of the West Indians' conditions and opinions. However, as will be shown, they still present some differences, mainly because they migrated at different ages and in different periods, and this, of course, influenced their visions and their reactions.

In the first chapter, some historical information about the Empire, the migration waves from the Caribbean and the consequent reactions of the white Britons are given. This brief historical overview is necessary to better understand the situation of the migrant from the Caribbean, presented in the following chapter. Migrants were indeed affected by a deep-rooted inferiority complex and were also completely alienated and "Anglicized". Therefore, in the second chapter, the concepts of Caribbean identity, language and "colonization in reverse" are explored. The third and the fourth chapters are then dedicated to the analysis of the works of Selvon and Johnson. Particular attention is given to the concepts mentioned above. Finally, a comparison between the two authors is made, always keeping identity, language and "colonization in reverse" as the *fil rouge,* and, then, some possible conclusions are drawn.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. The Rise and the Fall of the British Empire: An Overview[1]

The British Empire included all the territories brought under the sovereignty of the crown of Great Britain from the 17th century to the 20th. At its height, it was the largest empire in history, including territories in all the continents and resulting in one of the most powerful entities in the world for an extremely long period. This left a legacy which is still visible today: it is enough to think about the Commonwealth and how widespread the English language is.

First settlements overseas were established in North America and in the Caribbean already during the 17th century. With some important losses (represented by the American colonies) compensated by many more settlements, the expansion of the Empire continued especially towards the East, reaching its maximum extension in 1919-1921, immediately after the First World War. At that time, the British Empire

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[1] For this section, the following resources were consulted and used:
Levine P., *L'impero britannico*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009
Stockwell S., *The British Empire. Themes and Perspectives*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

included colonies[2], protectorates[3], dominions[4] and mandates[5] in the Caribbean, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and Asia in general, Africa and in the Middle East.
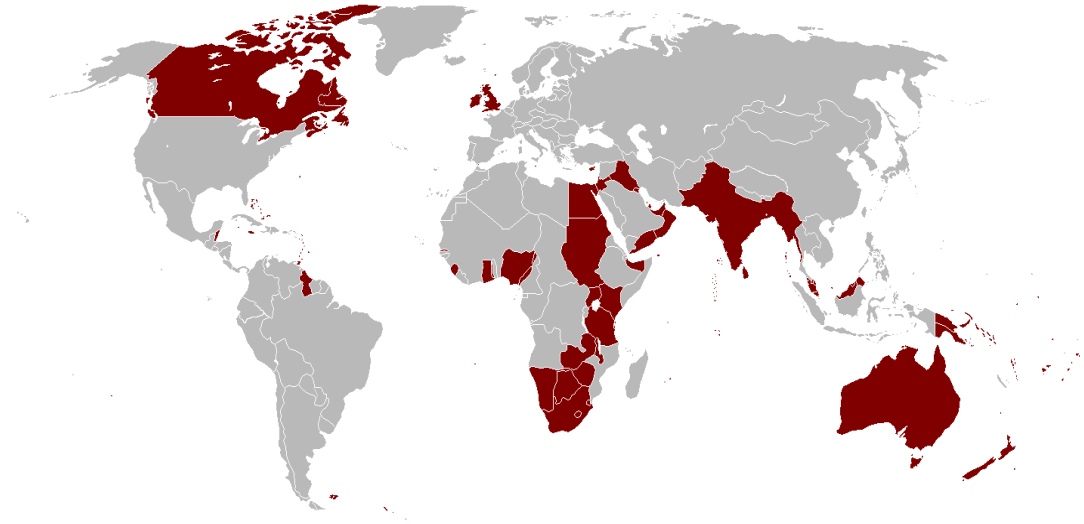
British Empire in 1921.[6]

Already from the second half of the 19th century, the so-called "white colonies" began their path to independence it: first of all, Canada which made the first step in 1867[7] by becoming a self-governing Dominion and then was officially recognized as independent with the promulgation of the Statute of Westminster in 1931; Australia in 1901[8], officially recognized as independent with the same Statute of Westminster (but

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[2] "A country or area under the full or partial political control of another country and occupied by settlers from that country", definition provided by the Oxford Dictionaries online. Available at: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/colony.

[3] "A state that is controlled and protected by another", definition provided by the Oxford Dictionaries online. Available at: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/protectorate.

[4] "Each of the self-governing territories of the British Commonwealth", definition provided by the Oxford dictionaries online. Available at: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/dominion.

[5] "A commission from the League of Nations to a member state to administer a territory", definition provided by the Oxford Dictionaries online. Available at: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mandate.

[6] British Empire in 1921, source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ABritish_Empire_1921.png. Public Domain.

[7] Government of Canada, "Canada's History", http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/discover/section-06.asp?_ga=1.187908776.1881103514.1475583484.

[8] Australian Government, "Federation" http://www.australia.gov.au/about-government/how-government-works/federation.

which was adopted some years later); then there is Ireland, which after years of struggle, eventually declared independence in 1922 (with the Irish Free State)[9]; and finally, New Zealand, which made its first steps in 1907 and officially gained independence in 1947-48.[10] This did not change the extension of the Empire, however, it changed its composition. By gaining self-government, the above mentioned white colonies fell under the new label of "Dominions", which during the 1920s came to identify autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status. These were the first steps towards the establishment of the Commonwealth of Nations, a process started already in 1926 and formally and officially constituted in 1949, during the period of the decolonization.

Decolonization and the consequent decline of the Empire began after the Second World War. Although Britain was among those which emerged as victorious, the war and its aftermaths were enormous, and the Nation was left in ruins. In addition to this, nationalist feelings and anti-colonial movements in the European colonies were already on the rise. It was in this unstable and thorny situation that India, one of the most important British colonies, claimed and successfully gained independence. From then on, the Empire irremediably began its decline. The Pakistani, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Burma (Myanmar) independence followed the Indian one in 1947, while the Gold Coast (now Ghana), in 1957, was the first African territory to gain self-government. From that point onwards, one by one all the colonies, from the Caribbean to Africa, gained independence. The last one was Hong Kong in 1997: The Empire was over.

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[9]Department of the Taoiseach, "Former Taosigh", http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical_Information/Former_Taoisigh/.

[10] Te Ara – The Enciclopedia of New Zaeland, "Story: Self Government and Independence", http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/self-government-and-independence.

Of peculiar interest in the context of this thesis is the history of Caribbean colonies, the first most important and lucrative colonies for England. Indeed, during the 18th century, as the extension, the prestige and the power of the British Empire increased, these Atlantic territories became extremely important. As well as other colonies, they were regarded as a fundamental source of raw material for the Mother Country, which, in return, granted monopolies in its internal market. Already from the beginning, in these settlements, extremely profitable plantations of cotton, tobacco and, above all, sugar were established. That was a period in which international trades and the necessity for those products grew at a very rapid rate, therefore more workforce was needed in order to meet the demand. At a first stage, imported manpower was constituted by white servants, commonly criminals or political prisoners (especially from Ireland) hired with an indenture contract. However, they were gradually substituted by black slaves coercively imported from Africa. Although slavery was already established, this Atlantic slave trade stands out mainly because of the numbers, the racial specificity of the slaves and the fact that they were brought extremely far from their home countries. It is estimated that 60.000 slaves were transported overseas every year and that the mortality rate was extremely high: more than one-third of this people -from the trip to the African coasts to the travel by ship- would die before reaching the Americas. Furthermore, once there, one slave every three would not survive more than three years due to the unbearable conditions of work and life.[11] Slave trade escalated inexorably, and soon only black slaves, considered inferior and objectified, were employed in plantations. Obviously, protests and rebellions were not uncommon, but they had to wait until 1807 to see the slave trade abolished in British

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[11] Levine, 2009.

colonies (the Act made illegal for Britain to take part in slave trade). Notwithstanding, this did not lead immediately to slaves' emancipation, which was ratified only in 1833-34 and, furthermore, in some parts of the Empire slavery was anyway still present.[12]

Slavery, as well as imperialism and colonialism profoundly and indelibly affected both Africa and the Caribbean. The consequences are still visible today. Indeed, it enough to think about the racial diversity present in the West Indies, the lack of a strong national identity and pride (that was able to emerge only recently) and the inadequacy and inferiority perceived by its population in comparison with Britain, the former Mother Country. These topics will be further analysed and developed in the following sections.[13]

2. Caribbean Migration to Great Britain: From the 1950s to the 1970s[14]

Great Britain, in the past, was not generally regarded as a country of immigration, or at least until the Second World War. The century before white Europeans, Irish above all, dominated the scene, while after 1945 black migrants represented the majority of newcomers. Many factors encouraged this wave of black migration from the colonies (West Indies, India and Pakistan in particular): the war, the internal situation in these territories, the British Nationality Act in 1948, the need

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[12] Sherwood M, "Britain, slavery and the trade in enslaved Africans", *History in Focus,* Institute of Historical Research, http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Slavery/articles/sherwood.html. Accessed: September 27th, 2016.
[13] See: Levine, 2009 and Stockwell, 2008.
[14] For this section, the following resources were consulted and used:
 Phillips M., Phillips T., *Windrush*, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999.
 Rose E. J. B. (and associates), *Colour & Citizenship. A report on British Race Relations*, London: Oxford University Press, Institute of Race Relations, 1969.

for a surplus labour for the post-war reconstruction and the McCarran Walter Act in 1952. Attention will here be given to Caribbean immigration.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Britain controlled the largest numbers of islands in the Caribbean: Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, St. Kitts and Nevis, Guyana and Bermuda are just some of them. These overseas colonies created an enormous potential population of English-speaking migrants, which became a reality in the second half of the century for the above-mentioned reasons. Of course, when the well-known *MV Empire Windrush* –the symbol of Caribbean post-war migration par excellence- arrived at Tilbury Docks on 22nd June 1948, there were already groups of black people which had already established there centuries before, due to slavery.

The Second World War was one of the first factors that influenced and encouraged migration. There were two different strands of military recruitments from the Caribbean during the war. The first group (1940) came from what could be somehow defined the officer class. Being part of that class, they represented a high level of social and educational achievement and saw this recruitment as a short cut to study abroad. Of course, conscious of their own worth, they joined the RAF, a prestigious fighting force. Thanks to their high achievements they were more or less exempt from racism and, ironically, less likely to stay in Britain after the end of the war. In 1943-44, due to changes in the conflict, Britain needed support to maintain the front-line soldiers in its project of invading Europe. Therefore, this time, recruitment was opened to a wider spectrum of population, farmer and artisans included. Motivated by the opportunity to change their life and travel abroad, they came in their thousands. Once the war was over, returning to the Caribbean was an extremely disappointing experience. Having seen the opportunities that the "centre" offered, their former home

seemed poorer, slower and smaller than before. Therefore, also thanks to the provisions of the British Nationality Act of 1948 and the *MV Empire Windrush*, the first troop ship passing through the Caribbean, 492 immigrants embarked for Britain: they would be later known as the "*Windrush Generation*".[15]

In 1948 the British Nationality Act was introduced, in part as a mean to contain the possible political turmoil that could spread from the recent independence of India, and in part as a necessary step towards the creation and formalization of the Commonwealth of Nations. The provisions it contained basically divided British citizenship into two different categories: the one of the United Kingdom and Colonies, and the one of independent Commonwealth countries. Same rights throughout the Empire were granted to citizens of the UK and Colonies, and this was then extended to the second group, the citizens of the independent Commonwealth nations. People arriving from 1948 to 1952 are usually referred to as "migrants of the first wave". They were characterized by relatively small number (until 1951 total migration from the West Indies never realized a figure of 1,000 in a year[16]) and the desire of "returning home with money in their pockets": they did not have plans of settling in Britain for a long period. Furthermore, their generation was a disillusioned one. Growing up in a society almost fully anglicized, they went to Britain convinced that they were British citizens and that they would be welcomed, being "sons and daughters" of a caring and full of opportunities Mother Country. Instead, they had to cope with an increasingly hostile society. At a very initial stage, agitation was due to distress at the arrival of a group of unknown workers whose movements were completely unregulated but later, it was caused by race problems.

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[15] Phillips and Phillips, 1999.
[16] Rose (and associates), 1969.

It must be said that, at least until 1952 when the McCarran Walter Act was ratified, the USA were the preferable destination for Caribbean workers. It was after this law that regulated and restricted migration to the United States that arrivals from the West Indies to Great Britain began to assume numerically significant proportions. Apparently, there was a precise correlation between the numbers of arrivals and work availability: this was because migrants already in Britain communicated to their relatives and friends back home when the labour market was facing a shortage of workers. Another peak was in 1961, right before the introduction of the Commonwealth Immigration Act in 1962: people tried to get in before doors were closed. Usually, this decade 1952-1962 is known as the "second wave". What differentiated its travellers from their predecessor was the fact they already knew what to expect from the Mother Country but they still deliberately chose to leave. Despite this, they were not more prepared than the previous migrants. However, black communities were forming, and this definitively helped new and old arrivals to cope and, later, resist. After 1961-1962 incomers used to be families – women, children or other relatives who already had someone in Britain.[17]

3. White Rejection: From the 1950s to the 1970s[18]

The more the number of immigrants increased, the more hostile Britain became. When the first wave of migrants arrived, Civil Service and white British politicians were worried and irritated mainly because they were caught unprepared.

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[17] Rose (and associates), 1969.
[18] For this section, the following resources were consulted and used:
  Phillips M., Phillips T., *Windrush*, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999.
  Rose E. J. B. (and associates), *Colour & Citizenship. A report on British Race Relations*, London: Oxford University Press, Institute of Race Relations, 1969.

Distress was not immediately caused by race and colour but rather because they did not how to control and deal with those unexpected migrants. Fortunately, at that time shortage of labour made possible to West Indians to easily find a job and settle. Actually, they were extremely important since they were employed in underpaid and unskilled jobs discarded by whites. However, as reported by Phillips and Phillips[19], as soon as the *Windrush* arrived they were welcomed, and warned by some MPs that "Britain was not paradise" and that they might encounter prejudice and difficulties but they should try and stand on their feet as soon as they could.

More difficult to deal with was the situation with the rest of the white British. Many of the oral testimonies collected in *Windrush*[20] report that it was extremely problematic for newcomers to find, first of all, accommodation, since many landlords did not want to rent rooms to blacks. Secondly, the colour bar was soon adopted in the employment offices: applicants were registered according to their skin colour and provenience and, therefore, they were precluded from semi-skilled or skilled jobs. Furthermore, it took just few weeks to start charging West Indians with different crimes even when not really committed by them. What was interesting was that social conflicts were caused by a paradoxical situation: even though new workers were needed, they could not stay anywhere, since, apparently, there was shortage of accommodations.

Migrants were perceived as a threat and the general attitude was that black people were not welcomed and they should not have entered the country at all. Basically, until the Second World War, colonies and colonized people were something exotic and separate from Britain, something that did not really affect the white

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[19] Phillips and Phillips, 1999.
[20] Phillips and Phillips, 1999.

population. Yet, after the world conflict, the Empire's subjects were entering the Mother Country and all the mechanisms of imperialism and colonialism that were part of the daily life in the periphery were proposed again and repeated in the centre. British people felt their *Britishness* threatened and felt the need to underline that to be British meant to be a white Anglo Saxon, something that West Indians soon understood. It was clear that even though they were anglicized and formally citizens, they could not fully be British citizens because of their skin and ethnicity, and because they were perceived and regarded as intrinsically inferior.

Despite all that, people continued to arrive and they started, somehow coercively, to gather together and recreate some small communities in the poorest and most uncomfortable neighbourhoods, which then became the stage of riots and protests. Animosity towards blacks was increasingly strong, and it then resulted in the well-known Notting Hill Riots in 1958. According to Phillips and Phillips[21] they were not as unexpected as one might think. Public behaviour was generally rude and hostile, and almost every fight between whites – especially "Teddy Boys"- and blacks ended with always the same question to latter ones: "*why don't you go back where you came from?*"[22]. The issue of race was emerging, both because what was happening outside the country (racial segregation, African countries gaining independence, etc.) and because white British had to confront themselves with someone new. It was in this atmosphere that in the summer of 1958 "Teddy Boys" became open about their aggressive intentions towards immigrants, especially black ones, and eventually attacked West Indian Houses. From this moment onward, race and immigration was put in the forefront of public consciousness. However, it appears that riots had much

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[21] Phillips and Phillips, 1999.
[22] Phillips and Phillips, 1999, p. 163.

to do with general feelings of exclusion and deprivation and that black immigrants were just a "scapegoat".

Politicians, seeing this connection between unrest and immigrants, tried to solve the situation by introducing a new law that would control and restrict immigration: The Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962. According to its provisions, from that moment onward only those who had a government-issued employment voucher could enter and settle. This caused a peak of immigration right before its ratification, and things did not change much. Indeed, on the one hand, media continued connecting black immigrants to the riots of 1958, incrementing people's negative opinions and attitudes towards them. On the other hand, immigrants started to violently respond to this oppression and abhorrence.

In the following years things got even worse. As a consequence to municipal elections which saw anti-immigration parties winning over the more tolerant ones, the Labour government was forced to further tighten immigration restrictions, by reducing labour vouchers, in 1964. In addition to this, during the same year, a new bill was enacted: The Race Relations Act. This was the first legislation in the United Kingdom that aimed to outlaw racial discrimination on "grounds of colour, race, or ethnic or national origins"[23]. Labour representatives argued that this was not sufficient, since it did not cover housing or employment and considered racial discrimination a civil offence and not a criminal one. On the contrary, the Opposition feared that this provisions would only exacerbate and worsen unrest and fights between blacks and whites. Certainly, one thing was clear: race and immigration was now formally and

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[23] BBC On This Day, "1965: New UK Race Law 'Not though enough'", http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/December/8/newsid_4457000/4457112.stm

officially a central political issue. The path was made for the subsequent emergence of *Powellism*.

Meanwhile, former British colonies continued fighting and gaining independence from the Mother Country, and started a process of Nationalization of their countries, indirectly affecting Great Britain. This is the case, for example, of Kenya and Uganda in 1967. The development of "Africanization", and the fear of discrimination from their own governments, made Asians from those countries migrate to the United Kingdom. Part of the Conservative wing, led by Enoch Powell, started a campaign aiming for tighter controls. Therefore, the Labour Government introduced, in 1968, the Commonwealth Immigration Act which restricted the future right of entry only to those born in the United Kingdom and Colonies or who had a parent or grandparent born there, distinguishing from citizens who were "patrials" from those who were not. Once again, this legislation was received in two different ways. Some politicians marked it as highly discriminatory, since it was clear that "patrials" would be almost exclusively whites. On the contrary, for anti-immigration politicians it was needed in order to protect the United Kingdom from further arrivals and consequent unrests. Enoch Powell was among the latter, and the same year pronounced his famous "Rivers of Blood" speech, where, among other things, he reacted to what was happening and to legislations such as the Race Relation Act in the following terms:

> "We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation, to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre. So insane are we that we actually permit unmarried persons to immigrate for the purpose of founding a family with spouses and fiancés whom they have never seen."[24]

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[24] The Telegraph, "Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech", www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html.

After this clear anti-immigration, as well as racist, speech the leader of the Conservative Party relieved him of his duties within the Party, but Powell definitely gained the support of the people.[25]

The Seventies were characterized by the fact that the United Kingdom started to see itself no more as an imperial country, but more as a middle-sized European state, and also by the fact that turmoil and unrest continued unrelentingly. The already mentioned "*Powellism*" was already rooted in the society. This led, once more, to the introduction of new controls on immigration. In 1971, the former Commonwealth Immigration Act was superseded: employment vouchers were substituted with work permits which allowed only temporary permanence in the United Kingdom. The only ones who were exempted from this provisions were the "patrials". In addition to this, some provisions were made for assisting voluntarily repatriation. [26]

Finally, is is important to mention other norms that deeply affected blacks' lives during the Seventies: the so-called "Sus Laws". They were introduced by the Vagrancy Act in 1824 and abrogated only in 1981, after some violent black riots. Therefore, during these decades of strong social unrest and distress towards immigrants, Police was legally and formally allowed to stop and search, and potentially arrest anyone they suspected might commit a crime. Obviously, policemen targeted almost only people belonging to the black community or ethnic minorities.

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[25] BBC On This Day, "1968: Powell slates immigration policy", http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/20/newsid_2489000/2489357.stm.
The National Archives, "Commonwealth Immigration Control and Legislation", http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/commonwealth-immigration-control-legislation.htm
[26] The National Archives, "Commonwealth Immigration Control and Legislation", http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/commonwealth-immigration-control-legislation.htm.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MIGRANT FROM THE CARIBBEAN

1. Identity

1.1. Theoretical Overview

According to J. D. Fearon[1], the current concept of "identity" is a historically recent one: it is enough to think that 15 years ago the only definition provided by English dictionaries of that time was related to the concept of "sameness" and to the state of being who or what a person or a thing claims or is claimed to be. In his paper, he argues that the present sense of the term evolved from the 1960s, mainly thanks to scientific and academic research in psychoanalysis, cultural studies and the humanities in general. It is indeed interesting to underline that "[Identity is] not something that people have eternally needed or sought as such"[2]. Indeed, taking into consideration Caribbean people, the aftermaths of slavery, colonization and the struggle for independence definitely influenced and accelerated the process of finding and defining their identity. In the past 50 years, many scholars provided formulations and brief explanations about the term, and despite their differences, it is possible to find some common features and characteristics helpful to deeply understand what is meant by this concept.

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[1] Fearon, J. D., "What Is Identity (As We Now Use the Word)?", Stanford University, November 1999. Available at: https://web.stanford.edu/group/fearon-research/cgi-bin/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/What-is-Identity-as-we-now-use-the-word-.pdf.

[2] Fearon, 1999, p. 10.

First, it emerges that identity is linked to a sense and a process of recognition and identification. Hall, explaining the term "identification" says that it is something

> constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation.[3]

Much of its meaning derives directly from the psychoanalytical use of the term, therefore, he then adds that this process might entail a certain degree of attractiveness as well as repulsion for the object of identification. Furthermore, Hall adds that usually there is not a proper fit, a full equivalence between the two objects but rather there is an over-determination or a lack of something.[4] This is visibly linked to the concept of "mimicry" and "ambivalence" and their effect on colonial discourse argued by Bhabha[5], which will be further explained in the next section.

Secondly, identity entails a process, a constant dialogue between oneself and the characteristics, the person or the group one wants to identify with. Therefore, it is clear that it cannot be something stable, fixed, predetermined or truly coherent through time. Identity is fluid, slippery, it is never unified but rather increasingly fractured, multifaceted and fragmented and it is the result of intersections between different discourses, practices and positions.[6] Indeed, it is closely related to, for example, gender, sexuality, language, nationalism, ethnicity, race and culture.[7]

Finally, quoting Bauman, identity is something that emerges

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[3] Hall, S., "Who Needs Identity?" in Hall, S. and Du Gay, P. (ed. By) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: SAGE Publications, 1996, p. 2.

[4] Hall, 1996.

[5] Bhabha H. K., "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", *The MIT Press,* Vol. 28, Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis, 1984, pp. 125-133. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/778467?seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents.

[6] Hall, 1996.

  Hall, C., "Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain", in Stockwell S., *The British Empire. Themes and Perspectives*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp. 199-215.

[7] Gilroy P. "British Cultural Studies and the Pitfalls of Identity" in Houston A. et al, *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp 223-239.

  Fearon, 1999.

whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go on in each other's presence. 'Identity' is a name given to the escape sought from that uncertainty.[8]

It is, therefore, clear it is a social construct and it emerges from the interaction with the Other in a specific time and context.[9] The construction of it is an act of power, it is the result of the play between power and exclusion. Indeed, in order to find fundamental and constitutive features, the comparison with the Other is necessary. It is through the marking of differences and lacks that it is possible to find and shape one's identity. As the product of the establishment of differences and consequent exclusion, each identity has its own margins, which are constantly destabilized by what is left outside.[10]

To briefly summarize, identity is a recent and slippery concept that entails an ongoing process of identification with something or someone. It is a flexible and social construct which is time- and culture- specific. It needs comparison with the Other in order to understand and establish what the differences are and what or who cannot be included. Moreover, it is an act of power, and this means that identity can be self-shaped or imposed (or even deleted).

1.2. Caribbean Identity

The Caribbean islands were all colonies, most of which under the British government. Predictably, imperialism, colonialism and slavery deeply influenced the

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[8] Bauman Z., "From Pilgrim to Tourist – Or a Short History of Identity" in Hall, S. and Du Gay, P. (ed. By) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: SAGE Publications, 1996, p. 19.
[9] Hall, S., "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in Rutherford J., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 1990, pp.222-237.
    Fearon, 1999.
    Hall, 1996.
    Gilroy, 1996.
    Kortright, C., "Colonization and Identity", 2003. Available at: http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Chris_Kortright__Colonization_and_Identity.html.
[10] Hall, 1996.

shaping of Caribbean identity, a process that truly started around the 1960s and that influenced -and was influenced by- the struggle for independence from the Mother Country. It is true that each isle has its own differences and peculiarities in history, language, society etc., however, as a consequence of the common past as colonized countries, it is still possible to draw a general and common profile regarding identity.

Colonization is based on an ideology of racial, cultural and psychological supremacy and hierarchy over a population. Feeling the necessity of controlling and "civilizing" those considered inferior, the only solution seemed erasing their original identity and values and imposing new ones. It should be noted that this process of construction did not involve only those colonized but also the colonizers: the latter had to create a strong and opposite identity that could serve as an explanation and legitimization of their –violent and otherwise unjustifiable- actions.[11] Consequently, on the one hand, there was the strong and "enlightened" colonizer who felt committed to implant his/her own culture, values, identity in the native population -the "savages". He/she was convinced that this has to be done in order to free the native people from their poor situation. Many images were purposely created in order to justify this relationship based on subjugation: the colonized was underdeveloped, lazy, unable to self-govern his/her countries and not suitable for skilled or semiskilled jobs. Further support for this was usually provided by racial and colour differences: skin colour and origins seemed to confirm any prejudice and stereotype. On the other hand, at least until a certain point, there was the colonized, who was persuaded of his/her inferiority and was therefore psychologically, as well as economically and socially, dependent from his/her "master".

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[11]Kortright, 2003.

Consequently, he/she tried to emulate the colonizer in the hope of having a better future and being accepted as integral part of the society.[12]

This process of destruction of the Afro-Caribbean identity started during slavery and the slave trade. As a matter of fact, already from the very beginning -in ships that brought slaves from Africa to the Caribbean- people from the same tribe were kept separated. Then, once arrived in the mainland, those who had survived were scattered and mixed with other from different tribes in order to avoid any possibility of communication that could led to revolts and riots. This, for example, dramatically destroyed the continuity of their social order as well as their communal way of life. Furthermore, the experience of slavery itself deprived them of any spirit of enterprise or even self-confidence: they underwent a deep psychological transformation that left them at the mercy of the colonizer.[13] It is, therefore, possible to talk about a proper "loss of identity, which has been integral to the Caribbean experience".[14]

Quoting Hiro

> imperialist Europe had banished the abundant cultural heritage of Africans underneath centuries of slave trade. These oppressive, dehumanizing layers needed to be removed if black people were ever to liberate themselves.[15]

Objectified and deprived of anything related to his/her origin and identity, the colonized was then suitable for "re-education" according to the colonialist values. Anglicization took place in every aspect of Caribbean life: from places' names (e.g. Trafalgar Square in Barbados, Cornwall, Middlesex and Surrey in Jamaica), to church and, above all, school and education. Education was indeed regarded as the fundamental

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[12] Memmi in Kortright, 2003.
[13] Hiro D., *Black British White British: A History of Race Relations in Britain*, London: Grafton Books, 1991.
[14] Hall, 1990.
[15] Hiro, 1991, p. 74.

part of this civilizing mission that the British Government felt committed to accomplish.[16]

Caribbean pupils, for example, had to salute the Union Jack before starting classes; British history, life, culture and literature were given importance over local ones. Often, books and material which had been written for British students were not re-contextualized or adapted for the Caribbean student, and it happened that books contained unnecessary information such as definition of the coffee plant or sentences as "two kinds of tea are imported into *this country*".[17] Particularly interesting in this context is the testimony of the Jamaican poet Linton Kwesi Johnson and the Trinidadian writer V.S. Naipaul. Johnson, in an interview with Parolai[18] reported that they were not taught anything related to their culture, anything that could make them appreciate their culture and their origins, adding that "as negroes we sometimes appeared in short footnotes […] we were not conscious about who we were and where we came from".[19] While, in his book "The Mimic Men", an emblematic work regarding Caribbean identity, V. S. Naipaul through the memory of the protagonist says that pupils had to bring an apple to the teacher. The interesting fact, he adds, is that there were no apples in Isabella (the fictional place where he lives, a typical Caribbean city that could resemble, for example, Trinidad). Furthermore, he adds that due to this process of Anglicization that was taking place through education, schools were becoming a completed different hemisphere, separated and disconnected from the outside.[20]

This process of Anglicization led the colonized – the black man – to a situation of deep crisis and alienation, analysed by the psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon in

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[16] Tiffin, H., "The Institution of Literature", in in Arnold, A. J. (ed. by), *A History of Literature in the Caribbean. Vol. 2: English- and Dutch-Speaking Regions*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001.
[17] Tiffin, 2001, p. 46.
[18] Parolai, S., *LKJ. Vita e battaglie del poeta del reggae*, Genova: Chinaski Edizioni, 2009.
[19] Parolai, 2009, p. 23. My translation.
[20] Naipaul V. S., *The Mimic Men*, London: Picador, 2012.

"Black Skin, White Masks". According to Fanon,[21] the black man finds himself locked in his blackness, which becomes the wrapping of specific – negative – values. He is affected by a deep inferiority complex which leads him to feel uncomfortable in his body and position: "the Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly".[22] Therefore, the black man sees only one destiny, he has only one desire: that of becoming like the white man, that of achieving a white existence.[23] This not only entailed adopting western institutions, values and language, but also manners, way of dressing and combing their hair. However, this generated a sense of ambivalence, as well as a process of mimicry, both adapted to the colonial discourse by Bhabha.[24] The first concept, ambivalence refers to

> a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It also refers to a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object person or action. […] it [also] describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized[25]

Mimicry, closely related to the concept above explained, originates when the colonized imitates and internalizes the culture of the colonizer. The result is not a simple reproduction, rather a "blurred copy".[26] Bhabha continues by saying that for this reason mimicry is not far from mockery and menace: the product is something that is "almost the same, but not quite" and becomes a threat to the colonial authority.[27]

From the 1960s onwards, events in Africa (especially those related to Congo/Zaire in 1960-61)[28], made many black people from the Caribbean identify themselves openly

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[21] Fanon F., *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: Pluto Press, 1986, originally *Peau Noire, Masques Blanc*, France: Editions de Seuil, 1952.

[22] Fanon, 1952, p. 113.

[23] Fanon, 1952.

[24] Bhabha, 1984.

[25] Ashcroft B., Griffith G., Tiffin H., "Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts", London: Routlege, 2013.

[26] Ashcroft B., Griffith G., Triffin H., 2013.

[27] Bhabha, H. K., "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", The MIT Press, Vol. 28, Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis, 1984, pp. 125-133. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/778467?seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents;

[28] Struggles, secessionist movements and executions subsequent the declaration of independence of the Republic of Congo.

with Africa. Each country, one after the other, was beginning its path towards independence. This obviously entailed a process of decolonization of institutions and of the mind: they felt the need to write their own history as well as to shape their national identity and pride. Thus, previously ignored leaders of slave revolts and leaders of movements which focused and emphasized self-pride and African origins were claimed as national heroes. Furthermore, at universities and colleges, much interest was given in examining elements belonging to their African past and creole life hitherto ignored or coercively deleted by the European-oriented élite. Link with their African origins was found in popular dances, in language and in their oral tradition with, for example, the calypso. Furthermore, this African culture revival led to –and was then supported by- the rise of Black movements and Rastafarianism.[29] The latter was a black nationalist religion that emerged already in the 1930s as an amalgam of pride in being black African and the need for redemption and freedom from oppression and discrimination.[30] However, both of them were the elements that also linked Afro-Caribbean settled in the West Indies with those who migrated to the Mother Country.

Meanwhile, in Great Britain the stimuli for this black awareness was given by general hostility, discrimination and racism as well as Enoch Powell's campaign. According to Hiro

> for many West Indians, migration to Britain was a continuation of the same self-denial, a part of the psychological fight undertaken in the belief that residence in Britain would bestow upon them the inheritance of a Christian-Hellenic civilization, and release them, for ever, from he chains of their African heritage.[31]

Unfortunately, their hopes of integration and acceptance were destroyed: it was soon clear that to be Anglicized did not mean to be British, and that they would always be labelled

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[29] Hiro D., "Black British white British: A History of Race Relations in Britain", London: Grafton Books, 1991, pp. 1-25, 59-80;
[30] Ashcroft B., Griffith G., Tiffin H., "Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts", London: Routlege, 2013;
[31] Hiro, 1991, p. 15.**

simply as "blacks". This was particularly true for second generation of migrants, who found themselves in a precarious position. On the one hand, they were born -and subsequently grew up- in Britain, for this reason they felt to be fully British. On the other hand, they had Afro-Caribbean origins and black skin and this, despite their English education and accent, relegated them among blacks. Feelings of injustice consequently developed and many of the Afro-Caribbean newcomers were highly motivated to re-examine their past and their heritage. A new sense of community and resistance was evolving, and West Indian migrants felt the need to collect together and create a community. Rastafarianism and Black movements (e.g. the Black Panthers) offered a suitable meeting point as well as the opportunity to rediscover values and cultures dismantled during colonialism. Moreover, as it has already been said, they served as links between black awareness arising in the Caribbean countries and in Great Britain. In addition to that, black consciousness was spread by various forms of art: from poetry to music, from movies to the revival of the traditional carnival, from the use of Caribbean languages to the rediscovery of traditional forms of oral communication (e.g. calypso[32]). Moreover, an extremely interesting and peculiar sign of a socio-psychological change in the black community was the fact that migrants stopped considering "black" as a word with negative connotations and black girls, for example, stopped straightening and combing their hair according to Western fashion.[33]

To summarize, providing a definition of "identity" it is not easy; doing so for the Afro-Caribbean one might be even more difficult. The common past of Caribbean colonies made of slavery, colonization and diaspora led to an extremely hybrid and

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[32] From the Collins dictionary online: "a popular type of satirical, usually topical, West Indian ballad, especially from Trinidad, usually extemporized to a percussive syncopated accompaniment; a dance done to the rhythm of this song. http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/calypso;
[33] Hiro, 1991.

alienated community whose identity, culture and values had been purposely erased by colonizers and coercively substituted with Western ones. This was mainly done in order to keep colonies under strict control: to anglicize those considered inferior meant to construct a "recognizable Other". Furthermore, shaping images –usually negative ones- and stereotypes about those colonialized served as a justification for what colonialists were doing. Therefore, West Indians underwent a traumatic uprooting, suffered the indignity of slavery, the trauma of diaspora and the anxiety and neurosis about their colour. They grew up feeling the desire to be white since they were the product of a "white –biased" society. Denying their past and aiming at resembling the white masters seemed for them the only escape from discrimination and racism. However, around the 1960s, the already unstable situation reached a turning point thanks to the events in Africa, the struggle for independence in the Colonies and migration to the Mother country. West Indians started to realize that they had been deceived: to be anglicized and perfectly master English did not mean to be British. Consciousness about themselves and self-awareness was emerging. They were men, as the white ones; they were not inferior; the colour of their skin did not shape who they were. Their past was worthy of being retrieved and reintegrated in their life as well as in their identity. Different movements and associations (e.g. Rastafarianism and Black Panthers) supported this rediscovery that involved music, language, carnival, poetry, novels, oral traditions, ways of dressing and combing, etc. In conclusion, Caribbean identity can be defined as extremely fluid and hybrid: it is the result of a common past of slavery and colonialism, blended with different cultures, tastes, pigmentations and origins.

2. Language

Language, an integral part of one's identity and culture, is not simply a matter of words and grammar. It is, rather, a way of being, of communicating a certain point of view, of representing in a meaningful and effective way the world to other people. Representation, as it will be shown, lies at the core of the question of language. Indeed, according to Hall, representation is

> […] the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the "real" world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events. [34]

This definition introduces the existence of two systems of representation: mental maps and language. The first one refers to ways of organizing, classifying, arranging concepts and establishing different relations between them. These maps so created allow people to form complex thoughts and ideas and to communicate them to others. Indeed, despite personal and unique ways of interpreting the world, effective communication is possible because people share more or less the same conceptual maps or, to say it differently, interpret the world in similar ways. The second system of representation is language, a set of signs used to "translate" concepts into words, images and sounds that other people can comprehend. Then, codes set up the culture specific correlation between concepts and signs. From this definition of representation derives the idea that culture can also be defined as a set of shared conceptual maps, language systems and codes.[35] Since is involved in this process of representing the world, it is therefore possible to infer, and it will be shown in the following sections, that it becomes extremely important in culture and identity formation.

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[34] Hall, S., "Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices", London: SAGE Publications Ltd in association with The Open University, 1997. *******************
[35] Hall, 1997.

The Caribbean countries are probably among the most hybrid ones in the world, and this is true not only in relation to race but also to language. This geographical area is indeed a real "melting pot" of linguistic diversity, it is the home to a great number of creole languages. It is enough to think that among the 31 territories belonging to "the Caribbean", there are 59 living languages spoken.[36] Without any doubt, the dominant (and official) ones are European: French, Spanish, Dutch and English – languages which were spoken by former colonialists. English is, obviously, the official language of the West Indies (properly independent territories of the British Commonwealth and Overseas British territories). However, most varieties of English here spoken are far from being considered really close to Standard English. Furthermore, most of the times, despite being the official language, English is not the only nor the most spoken one: almost every island has its own variety of creole, or, often, even more than one. This creates a true situation of *diglossia*, where one language (English) functions as the language for official purposes and formal situation, while the creole is used in domestic situations.[37] It has to be noted that dialects and creoles are not simply the combination between English and African languages or former native languages. Indeed, to be more precise, in many occasions influences from other European languages – such as Spanish, Dutch, French spoken by previous colonizers - can be identified. This causes an additional linguistic hybridization that sometimes leads to an interesting fact: linguistic areas may not coincide with nations. The following table adapted from "Nations Online"[38] and "Ethnologue"[39] websites briefly shows and summarizes the linguistic situation in the West Indies:

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[36] Society for the Caribbean Linguistic, http://www.scl-online.net/FAQS/caribbean.htm.

[37] Patzelt, C., "Language Contact and Linguistic Imperialism in the Caribbean", Crossroads. Special Issue-2008 Rhizomes Conferences, Vol. 111, N. 11, 2009, pp. 110-119. Available at: http://www.uq.edu.au/crossroads/Archives/Vol%203/Issue%202%202009/Vol3Iss209%20-%2015.Patzelt%20(p.110-119).pdf.

[38] Nations Online, http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/first.shtml.

[39] Ethnologue: Languages of the World, https://www.ethnologue.com/.

Country	Other Language(s) – apart from English
Anguilla	Anguillian (Leeward Caribbean Creole, an English-based Creole)
Antigua & Barbuda	Antiguan Creole (Leeward Caribbean Creole language)
The Bahamas	Bahamianese (English-Based Creole), Bahamian dialect, Creole (among Haitian immigrants)
Barbados	Bajan (English-based Creole)
Belize	Belizean Creole (English-based Creole), Spanish, Mayan, Garifuna (Carib), Plautdietsch
Bermuda	Bermudian English
British Virgin Island	Local dialect, Spanish
Cayman Islands	Cayman Islands English (English-based Creole)
Dominica	Antillean (French-Based creole), Kokoy (Dominican Creole and Leeward Caribbean Creole), Igneri
Grenada	Grenadian Creole English, Grenadian Creole French
Guyana	Guyanese Creole (English-Based Creole), Cariban Languages, Hindi
Jamaica*	Jamaican Patois
Monsterrat	Irish Language
St. Kittis & Nevis	Leeward Caribbean Creole
St. Lucia	Saint Lucian Creole French, Antillean Creole
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	Vicentian Creole (English-Based Creole)
Trinidad & Tobago	Trinidadian English, Trinidadian Creole, Tobagonian Creole, Hindi, Spanish, Chinese.

Turks & Caicos Islands	Turks and Caicos Islands Creole, Haitian Creole

*The official language is called Jamaican Standard English, a variety of English.

Once again, colonialism and slavery might serve as an explanation for this multilingualism. African slaves from the same ethnic group were systematically kept apart to prevent communication between them and possible revolts. Furthermore, teaching English was forbidden for the same reasons. The only thing they were taught was to imitate lip movements of the white masters and assistants, with the result that slaves accumulated only a limited and distorted vocabulary. Starting from this point, the foundations for the shaping of creole languages were laid.[40] Indeed, the origins of creole languages can be dated back to the late 17th and early 18th centuries, when African slaves, in order to communicate between them and exclude whites, needed a *lingua franca.* Consequently, they created their own form of contact language, a *pidgin.* As reported by Ashcroft et. all, *pidgin* is any contact language which is extremely reduced in vocabulary and grammar and is not native to either side.[41] When this language is passed on to the next generation, and thus acquires native speakers, it can be considered a *creole.[42]*

It has been shown that there is nothing as a linguistic homogeneity for English-based creoles and varieties of English (hitherto called Caribbean English). However, it is still possible to identify some common and general characteristics of Caribbean English. As reported by Allsopp, firstly, there is generally more lung and mouth pressure in the articulations, leading to a language that sounds louder than British English. Secondly, it is usually accompanied by more release of laugher and exclamatory sounds as well as

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[40] Hiro D., "Black British white British: A History of Race Relations in Britain", London: Grafton Books, 1991, pp. 1-25, 59-80;

[41] Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 2013.

[42] Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 2013.
Patzelt, C., "Language Contact and Linguistic Imperialism in the Caribbean", *Crossroads. Special Issue-2008 Rhizomes Conferences*, Vol. 111, N. 11, 2009, pp. 110-119. Available at: http://www.uq.edu.au/crossroads/Archives/Vol%203/Issue%202%202009/Vol3Iss209%20-%2015.Patzelt%20(p.110-119).pdf.

facial and hand gesture. Thirdly, despite national differences, there is a widespread idea that "West Indian accent" is recognizable and distinguishable among the others. This is mainly due to phrasal intonation and difference in syllabic pitch and stress. Next, for what concerns phonology, the "standard average Caribbean" presents some differences:

(ə) → ʌ   (ŋ) → n   (θ) → t, f   (ð) → d   [-ɪŋ] → [-ɪn]

In addition, some vowels of British SE, namely [ɜ:], [æ], [ɔ:], [ɒ:], are present in just some varieties of CE; all consonants, in particularly plosive ones, tend to be articulated with more breath force; in some varieties, a palatalization of the [k, g] before the vowel [a] occours; the sound /h/ is generally lost, especially in Jamaica, whence (h)im, (h)ave, (h)ard, etc. Pluralizing phonemes /-s/, /-z/ are usually absent in the names of fruits, food, animals, etc. Furthermore, functional shift (adjectives that function as adverbs and vice versa; nouns, adjectives, idiophones as verbs and vice versa) is a common and distinctive feature of CE. Finally, syntax and grammar, far from being "destroyed English grammar" as it had been considered for a long period, presents its own peculiarities: pronominal forms have acquired function and features by themselves; many verbs have developed semantic and idiomatic functions independent of their base verbs; usually transitive verbs in their base forms can signal both passive and active form; there is no S-V inversion in questions but question tone is different; intensity of expression, peculiar characteristic of CE, is evident from reduplicated forms (*big big big, fool-fool*, etc.), repetition of sentences or even front-shifting (*Is five dollars I hear you say five dollars?)* and finally, high degree of direct and personal communication (impersonal pronoun *one* is uncommon).

Obviously, during colonialism, Anglicization influenced language too. The educational system, in addition to imparting Victorian social values and knowledge about the Mother Country, stressed the importance of learning standard English, encouraging

the West Indian to disown their creole languages, considered "broken English". Convinced that "Britishness" passed also through the perfect mastery of the language of their masters, Caribbean people embraced this imposition without too many questions. Indeed, quoting Fanon:

> Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul and inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality- finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. [43]

It is clear that there was this idea that the more fluently one spoke English, the whiter he/she could become. However, it is undeniable that they were at least bilingual, and their preferable language –and probably the most spoken one- was still their creole or dialect, which differs from country to country. However, as soon as they faced the situation in the Mother Country, they realized that it did not matter if one had been educated like an Englishman. If one was born in the Caribbean and was black, he/she could not be fully British.

Racism, discrimination and hostility freely and bitterly expressed by whites, led to the rise of black consciousness and self-awareness in relation to language too. Since to master and use a language means also to assume a culture[44] and, quoting Linton Kwesi Johnson "language defines who we are",[45] West Indians felt committed to elevating their creoles to the status of languages highly representative of their new Afro-Caribbean identities, to languages worthy of being used in literature. Indeed, many authors and artists in general soon realized that

> We haven't got the syllables, the syllabic intelligence, to describe the hurricane, which is our own experience, whereas we can describe the imported alien experience of the snowfall […] what English has given us as a model for poetry, and to a lesser extent, for

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[43] Fanon, 1952, p. 18.
[44] Fanon, 1952.
[45] Parolai, 2009, p. 39. My translation.

prose, is the pentameter [...] by the time we reach Chaucer (1345-1400) the pentameter prevails […] and it carries with it a certain kind of experience, which is not the experience of a hurricane. The hurricane does not roar in pentameters.[46]

Also thanks to Black Power movements and Rastafarianism, after their journey to disillusionment, the new voice they were assuming became the word of "powah", of self-definition and realization. Especially among young and second generation migrants (those who were born in Great Britain and were, therefore, fully educated as British but still not integrated), the use of the British form of Creole, which they called "Patois", increased. Even when their background was different (meaning that their parents were from different Caribbean countries), the variety of creole spoken was of Jamaican inflection. It is clear that the necessity of collecting together and resisting a bitter situation was stronger than linguistic and cultural differences. Indeed, language became the first common bond. It served as "an edifice on which [was] constructed racial pride and power as well as a defence against the assimilationist encroachment of the dominant society".[47] This new language – defined as Creole, Patois, Jamaican Talk, dialect, "Backyard" lingo etc.- was used both for artistic or aesthetic purposes as well as for a symbolic and interactive resistance and protest. Soon, competence in this language, also validated by the growing popularity of Rastafarianism and reggae music, became one of the most visible signs of this new allegiance and subculture. Furthermore, it was increasingly used in Caribbean prose and poetry based in England (the pioneer, as it will be later shown, was the Trinidadian author Sam Selvon) as well as in music. This was a clear reaction against the dominant language – English – which did not give the tools to fully express ideas, feelings and events related to the Caribbean community. It must be said that, of course, the Creole based in England is different from the ones spoken in the Caribbean.

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[46] Brathwaite, V. E. K., in Parolai, 2009, p. 27.
[47] Sutcliffe D. (ed. & introd.), Wong, A. (ed.). "The Language of the Black Experience: Cultural Expression through Word and Sound in the Caribbean and Black Britain", New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 112.

Indeed, taking into consideration what happened linguistically in the city of London, what linguists call "London Jamaican", derives from the contact between different Caribbean Creoles, the London English (mainly Cockney) spoken by first generation of migrants, and the influences from the second generation of migrants, who are fluent in British English, London English and at least one Caribbean Creole.[48]

To conclude, language, a central issue in identity, becomes even more important in relation to the situation in the Caribbean. It has been explained how slavery and colonialism led to a strong and deep process of Anglicization. English, an alien language was imposed on West Indians, and this became a key factor in their breakdown and psychosis related to their colour and culture. Indeed, they were required to speak a language that could not represent themselves and their point of view. Rather, the language they had to speak devalued them. Therefore, pidgins out of the coloniser's languages as well as out of African languages were soon created. They first served to slaves to communicate between them while leaving out the whites. As soon as those pidgins acquired native speakers, they became fully-fledged Creoles, and a new starting point for a new way of being and living was set. Despite the extremely high degree of hybridity -that involve languages too- some general characteristic about phonetics, word formations, syntax and grammar have been identified. Finally, it is important to underline that Caribbean Creoles with their direct influences from British English assumed a central position also in Great Britain. Indeed, they became visible signs of a new black awareness and power among West Indians migrants. Year after year, Creole acquired importance and its new status was supported both by movements such as Rastafarianism and Black power, as well as by literature and the arts in general.

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[48] Sutcliffe, 1986.

3. "Colonization in Reverse"[49]

Wat a joyful news, Miss Mattie,
I feel like me heart gwine burs
Jamaica people colonizin
Englan in Reverse

Be the hundred, be de tousan
Fro country and from town,
By de ship-load, be the plane load
Jamaica is Englan boun.

Dem pour out a Jamaica,
Everybody future plan
Is fe get a big-time job
An settle in de mother lan.

What an islan! What a people!
Man an woman, old an young
Jus a pack dem bag an baggage
An turn history upside dung!

[…]

Oonoo see how life is funny,
Oonoo see da turnabout?
Jamaica live fe box bread
Out a English people mout'.

For wen dem ketch a Englan,
An start play dem different role,
Some will settle down to work
An some will settle fe de dole.

[…]

Wat a devilment a Englan!
Dem face war an brave de worse,
But me wondering how dem gwine stan
Colonizin in reverse.

[Louise Bennett, "Colonization in
Reverse", 1966]

These excerpts taken from Louise Bennett's poem "Colonization in Reverse"[50] perfectly summarize the Caribbean diaspora and its legacies. It is an ironic poem of subversion of what West Indians had to endure: it is their turn now to cross the ocean, inhabit and work in Great Britain, just as the English did in the Caribbean. In a hyperbolic way, it gives an idea of the fact that a lot of people were "pouring out Jamaica", that they were migrating to settle in the "Mother Land". Furthermore, it says that, by doing so, they

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[49] From the title of Louise Bennett's poem "Colonization in Reverse", 1966;
[50] Bennett, L., "Colonization in Reverse", 1966, in Dawson A., "Mongrel Nation. Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain", University of Michigan Press, 2007;

were "turning history upside down" and that, ironically, it is their turn now of "living off someone". In her poem, Bennett suggests that this mass migration not only was encouraged by social and economic reason, but it was also a challenge to this history of subjugation, a wilful and aggressive act originated from what West Indians had to suffer. This, obviously had its effects both on migrants, and on British people, who felt that their supremacy and superiority was under attack.

At the peak of the Empire, Great Britain grew a strong sense of cultural superiority and political hegemony over many other countries, especially over its colonies. Opposite as one may expect, when the British Empire lost strength, people's illusion of superiority based on skin colour hardened, with the result of a sort of colonial apartheid. Basically, the periphery – black – had to be kept separated from the centre – white – Among the other reason, there was a certain degree of concern with the possible degeneration of whites after the encounter with the underdeveloped, and black, colonial subjects. Post war mass migration made this strict separation collapse: the periphery and the imperial mechanisms based on subordination had finally entered the centre. This event showed the harsh truth to both parties: migrants were not really "British"; "British" were not part of a "pure" community but rather of Mongrel Nation – as Defoe had satirically defined it– based on imperialism and racism.[51] It has already been said that identity originates from and it is shaped by the encounter with the other: this was, of course, also the case in England. It was indeed during this period that the concept of "*Britishness*", closely related to white race and origins, was constantly redefined and strengthened. It is therefore clear the extremely important role that immigration laws were playing: they indeed regulated

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[51] Dawson A., "Mongrel Nation. Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain", University of Michigan Press, 2007;

waves of newcomers, constantly defining who did not embody the qualities considered typical of British people and, consequently, had to be "kept out".

West Indians and blacks in general were seen as the cause of economic and social issues, they were considered parasites living at the expenses of the State. Generally, this was not true –even official accusations made by some politicians could not provide real evidence for it.[52] When, on the contrary, this occurred it can be seen as an act of opposition: it can be seen as the appropriation and the inversion of colonial history. Furthermore, there were other forms of opposition: new subcultures, illicit sexuality, new form of arts and traditions -such as carnival, calypso, reggae, dub poetry, rock music etc.- and the use of creoles.[53] Particularly interesting is the case of carnival. Born as a Christian tradition fuelled with the temporary possibility of inversion of the dominant order, it assumes in the Trinidadian version and later in the British one, an important role. Indeed, behind this masquerade one can find an interesting history of community formation and transformation. In the Caribbean isles, it became the celebration and commemoration of the liberation from slavery, festivity that the British Government feared and tried to suppress. In the Mother Country its celebration, imported by immigrants, became the vehicle of unity and community formation between West Indians. It became a public site for them to affirm their diasporic heritage and their local connections, a vehicle of "the vernacular cosmopolitanism of Britain's diaspora populations".[54] However, the police forces were not able to see it as an art form but rather as a threat, and therefore they harshly obstructed its celebration. Carnival in Britain developed in two different stages. It was first introduced in 1959 by a Trinidadian journalist and activist, Claudia Jones,

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[52] Phillips M., "London Crossings. A biography of Black Britain", London: Continuum, 2001.
[53] Dawson, 2007.
[54] Mercer in Dawson, 2007, p. 76.

with the intent to unify isolated migrants from different islands and make them feel part of a community. After Jones's death, the organization of this festival was abandoned for a decade-long period. In the early 1970s, a second generation of black Britons resuscitated this tradition that was less the meeting point for exiled Caribbean migrants and more a celebration of the new hybrid cultural forms that black Britons were creating.[55]

To conclude, not only were West Indian finding and shaping their identity, but also colonizing Britain in reverse. They were making their presence clear and evident, even though until that moment they had been completely deleted by the English, since their presence in the isle as well as their contribution to modernity had not been recorded. Moreover, their "colonization in reverse" was not simply "physical" (they were indeed migrating in the Mother Country) but it affected also other aspects of British life such as culture, identity and language. After centuries of subjugation, they were finally writing their own history, they were recording their voices and making them heard, and most of the times they were doing so while appropriating of typical Western forms (e.g. novels, poetry etc.) and shaping and adapting them in order to convey their message.

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[55] Dawson, 2007.

CHAPTER THREE

SAMUEL SELVON

Streets are not Paved with Gold: The Disillusionment of the First Migrants.

1. Biography[1]

Samuel Dickson Selvon (better known as Sam Selvon) was a Caribbean novelist and short story writer born in Trinidad in 1923. Being a Trinidad-born and of East Indian descent (his father was a first-generation immigrant from South India, while his mother was Indian-Scottish), he grew up in a racially mixed context. Indeed, he defined himself as completely "Westernized" and "Creolized":

> I come from mixed parentage, mainly Indian. But I was never Indianized. As a child I grew up completely Creolized, which is a term we use in Trinidad, meaning that you live among the people, whatever races they are, and you are a real born Trinidadian, you can't get away from it. And, of course, with a great deal of western influence […].[2]

> I grew up in Trinidad completely Westernized, completely Creolized, not following any harsh, strict religious or racial idea at all.[3]

He was educated at Naparima College, one of the first colleges to educate Indo-Trinidadians; after graduation, during the Second World War, he served the Trinidad

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[1] For this section, the following resources were consulted and used:
  Blamires, H., *A Guide to Twentieth Century Literature in English*, London/New York: Methuen, 1983.
  Nasta S. (ed. by), *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988. Pp. 1-15.
[2] Nazareth P., "Interview with Sam Selvon" in Nasta S. (ed. by), *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988, p. 83.
[3] Selvon in Thieme J., Dotti, A., "Oldtalk: Two interviews with Sam Selvon", Caribana 1, 1990, pp. 72. Available at: http://www.academia.edu/910377/_Oldtalk_An_Interview_with_Sam_Selvon.

Royal Naval Reserve. While working as a wireless operator there, he began writing. After the war, from 1945 to 1950 he worked as a journalist at the *Trinidad Guardian* and as a literary editor of the *Guardian Weekly*, a magazine principally devoted to creative writing. During this period, he published (under various pseudonyms) some short stories and poems in several Caribbean literary magazines -such as the Barbadian journal *BIM-,* which were well received in the Caribbean. Furthermore, at that time, some of his work was broadcasted in the BBC radio programme *Caribbean Voices.*[4]

In 1950 he departed for London, escaping the parochialism of the West Indian middle-classe and looking for an international audience for his work. However, unlike his fellow Trinidadian writer V. S. Naipaul, he arrived in the Mother Country looking for an employment. Still, he hoped to continue the career of writer that he had begun in his native island. Once in the UK, he became a civil servant with the Indian High Commission and did other part time jobs while continuing writing as a freelancer. Many of his reviews and stories were published in British newspapers such as *The Evening Standard, The London Magazine, The Sunday Times* and *The Evergreen Review.* Soon after his arrival in London, in 1952, he published his first full-length novel, *A Brighter Sun*, which received much international interest and acclaim, and launched the "great period of Trinidadian novels".[5] It was indeed this work the one that established him as one of the major voices in contemporary literature and in the so-called Caribbean literary renaissance. In 1955, he published his second full-length novel, *An Island is a World*, and in that same year he was awarded his first Guggenheim Fellowship (he then received the

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[4] *Caribbean Voices* was a weekly radio programme broadcasted by the BBC World Service directly from London. Poets, playwrights and prose writers -both amateurs and professional- could send their work, which was then selected, edited, recorded in the Antilles and then broadcast in the Mother Country. Information taken from the BBC World Service website, http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/documentaries/2009/07/090721_caribbean_voices_1.shtml.
[5] Gonzalez in Nasta, S. (ed. by), *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988, p. 2.

second one in 1968). For this reason, he decided to fully dedicate himself to writing and started earning his living by doing so. The decade from the 1950 to the 1960 represented an extremely prolific period for Selvon. Indeed, he published many works such as his well-known novel of exile *The Lonely Londoners* (1956); *Ways of Sunlight* (1957), a collection of short stories set both in London and Trinidad; and *Turn Again Tiger* (1957), the sequel to *A Brighter Sun,* work that marks the end of the first period. Other influential works are *The Housing Lark* (1965) and *Moses Ascending* (1975), both set in London, and *I Hear Thunder* (1963), *The Plains of Caroni* (1970), *Those Who Eat the Cascadura* (1972) and *Moses Migrating* (1983), which are set in Trinidad. He became the first author based and publishing in England who wrote a full-length novel using a West Indian dialect (or, as defined by Nasta, a Caribbean literary English[6]). Already in *A Brighter Sun* he started to deviate from Standard English, departing also from the fixed forms of representing blacks or West Indian peasants in literary works. However, it is with *The Lonely Londoners* that he further experimented with language and that, for the first time, he employed dialect in both narration and dialogue, writing also a complete chapter in a stream-of-consciousness style.

Almost in each of his works, if not in all of them, the problems related to creolization, identity and the migrants' sense of displacement emerge. A certain degree of oscillation between the two fictional landscapes of Trinidad (or the Caribbean in general) and the metropolitan London is evident in many cases, and this is clearly linked to the concept of ambivalence that affects every colonial subject. Furthermore, it has to be noted that Selvon grew up under the colonial influence and its educational system, and this of course affected his knowledge, his views and his writing. Indeed, as he said: "I

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[6] Nasta, 1988, p. 7.

was indoctrinated, of course, colonized completely in English literature as a child in school".[7] It was only when he migrated to Great Britain that could see everything from a different point of view and a different perspective and could, therefore, explore Caribbean consciousness and sensibility. This experience of exile in the British metropolis helped him to find his purpose in life: trough the demythologization of the Mother Country he could help preventing and healing the sense of disillusionment which was affecting every West Indian immigrant. Selvon, along with the other Caribbean writers in exile, could bridge the past made of alienation, exploitation and disorientation with the present, which was represented by the search for identity.

Selvon remained in London until 1978, when he decided to migrate to Canada. By then he had already earned the title the "father of black writing" in Britain[8] - he had a high degree of influence in following generation of writers. During his stay in Great Britain, he not only wrote prose and poems, but also several radio and television plays (many of which were broadcast in England by the BBC). Furthermore, he was the author of a stage play, *Switch* (1977)*,* and co-author of the film script of *Pressure* (1978), directed by Horace Ové. Moreover, he gave courses and held lectures in several educational institutions in the Caribbean, the United States of America, Canada and Britain. During his permanence in London, he rarely returned back to his island and, when he did it, it usually was just for brief visits, such the one in 1963 when he was awarded a Trinidad Government Scholarship. His longest stay there was in 1969, when he visited the small village of Ticarigua and wrote *The Plains of Caroni* (1970). Moreover, in thas same year he won the Humming Bird Medal for Literature, a Trinidadian literary prize. Sam Selvon died in 1994, during one of his return trips to Trinidad.

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[7] Selvon in Nasta S. (ed. by), *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988, p. 4.
[8] Sam Selvon's biography in Selvon. S, *The Lonely Londoners,* London: Penguin, 2006.

2. The three "Moses" Novels: Language and Content Analysis

For the purpose of this thesis, three novels will be analysed: *The Lonely Londoners* (1956)*, Moses Ascending* (1975) and *Moses Migrating* (1983). While some authors consider these novels a trilogy – term that implies development and growth-, some others argue that this term might not be fully appropriate. Indeed, while the two latter books are more closely linked to each other, making it possible to consider one the sequel to the other, they both present some important differences compared to the first book.

It is true that there are several direct intertextual links between the three novels, which include the setting, some stories, details and some characters (for example Moses and his fellow Galahad are present in all three books, Tolroy and Big City, in the first and the second book and Bob, Jeannie and Brenda in the last two). Moreover, the Moses of *Moses Ascending* talks about a previous unnamed work which might be identified as *The Lonely Londoners*. Furthermore, when read as a whole, these three books might be seen as the narration of the life cycle of an immigrant.[9] However, it should be noted that the Moses of the latter books is not really consistent with the one presented in *The Lonely Londoners*. First of all, at the end of the first book, the narrator tells that Moses has left a grandmother and a girlfriend in Trinidad, while in *Moses Migrating* the protagonist will affirm that the only relative he has is Tanty Flora, a cousin who brought him up. Moreover, the mood and the tone seem to be different in *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*, and the main character at the end of the first book is "seeking answers to profound questions with an intensity that suggests a closeness to the author"[10] that the

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[9] Nasta, S., "Introduction" in Selvon, S., *Moses Migrating*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p.8.
[10] Ramchand, K. "An Introduction to this Novel" in Selvon, S., *The Lonely Londoners*, Harlow: Longman, 1985 [I ed. 1956], p. 21.

same character in the last two books hardly poses. It is the author himself, Selvon, that in an interview with Dotti declares that:

> the difference between the two books [The Lonely Londoners and Moses Ascending] is a question of time really. […] I don't consider Moses Ascending to be a sequel. I just felt that I would use some of the same characters, that I would use Moses and Galahad and some of the other and update the situation of what was happening with the black communities in London. So really there is a big time gap between the time and the events of the Lonely Londoners to the later periods when I wrote Moses ascending.[11]

The analysis of these three novels will mainly focus on language and content, which will give an overview about the question of the immigrant's identity in different periods. Selvon was aware of the importance that language has not only as a mean of expression, but also as one of the most important tools of representation and decolonization from the Mother Country. As it will be shown, through his experimentation with different forms of language, the author was able to give an identity and a voice at least to a group of immigrants which were, at least until that moment, voiceless and anonymous. Moreover, he officially elevated varieties of English (which were considered forms of broken English) to languages worthy to be used in literature.

From his work, a great degree of reality and attachment to the contemporary situation is visible. Far from being actively involved in the struggle as other authors or artists have been, he has still helped migrants' "survival" and "resistance" in the Mother Country; to tell this in other words he contributed to the process of "colonization in reverse", sometimes in more subtle ways, other times more overtly. Language was definitely one of the most important tools he used to contribute to the cause and to the formation of a Caribbean identity as well as to the reshaping of the metropolis. Secondly, he tried to show immigrants' point of view and to challenge deeply-rooted stereotypes about black newcomers (e.g. that they were lazy, savage, agent of negative contamination,

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[11] Thieme J., Dotti, A., "Oldtalk: Two interviews with Sam Selvon", *Caribana 1*, 1990, p 77. Available at: http://www.academia.edu/910377/_Oldtalk_An_Interview_with_Sam_Selvon.

rapists, parasites etc.). Finally, he denounced unfair discrimination and racism, criticized imperialistic and bourgeois practices and he attempted, by doing so, to decolonize the immigrant's mind while raising his consciousness and self-awareness.

2.1. The Lonely Londoners

2.1.1. Summary

The Lonely Londoners can be briefly described as a novel about the first generation of West Indian migrants – those who belong to the so-called *Windrush* generation- arriving in London during the 1950s, after the enactment of the British Nationality Act (1948) but before the Notting Hill riots of 1958. The book contains many details about the life of working-class immigrants who arrived at that time in what they considered to be their Mother Country, their "promised land": the London of the post-World War II. It depicts this mainly male generation of migrants struggling to cope with prejudices and harsh policies they encountered in Britain. Indeed, they were perceived as parasites who came to plunder London. The book is not a novel in the proper sense of the term, it is rather a collection of stories and misadventures of "a handful of black migrants". It is interesting to note that that this lack of structure reflects the condition of the characters, who, deprived of their identity, wander aimlessly -and try to survive- in a city that does not want them. Furthermore, it does not have a proper protagonist, even though it focuses mainly on one of "the boys", Moses Aloetta, who acts as the glue that holds the group together.

Moses is actually the veteran of the group who, despite his ten-years' experience in London, has not achieved anything apart from being acknowledged by the other immigrants as the "welfare officer" for the new incomers. Indeed, he scatters new West

Indians all around London, in order to avoid high concentration of blacks in the same quarter, thing that the English people were starting to fear and fight (according to Ramchand, by 1956 the annual figures for migrants from the Caribbean was about 25,000 people).[12] Furthermore, he takes care of "showing them around", and after having found them a place where to sleep, at least for the first few days, he brings new immigrants to the employment office. This is part of a consolidated routine, and it is exactly what happens at the beginning of the novel with the new character introduced, Galahad.

On a foggy, winter evening Moses is travelling to Waterloo Station, the point of arrival or departure for any immigrant, a place that evokes nostalgic feelings to anyone, Moses included. He is going there, reluctantly, to meet a new fellow from Trinidad, about whom he knows nothing apart his name, Henry Oliver (soon baptized by Moses as "Sir Galahad"). The first meeting with him leaves Moses astonished: Henry arrives in a tropical suit and even though it is winter, he does not feel cold (on the contrary, he feels rather warm); he has no luggage apart from a toothbrush and a pyjama and he declares he has only 3£ with him, two of which he had already gambled on the train. Galahad is indeed convinced that he will easily find work and will soon be able to buy anything he will need.

While waiting for his fellow, Moses meets Tolroy, one of "the Boys", who is waiting for his mother who is coming from his home land, Jamaica. By his surprise, he finds himself greeting his whole family, which decided to migrate to London after

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[12]Ramchand, K. "An Introduction to this Novel" in Selvon, S., *The Lonely Londoners*, Harlow: Longman, 1985 [I ed. 1956], p. 4.

knowing that he was getting paid 5£ a week,[13] a respectable amount of money as comments Tanty, Tolroy's aunt:

> But they say that it have more work in England, and better pay. And to tell you the truth, when I hear that Tolroy getting five pound a week, I had to agree.[14]

In addition to his mum and aunt, Tolroy unexpectedly welcomes his sister Agnes, her husband Lewis and their two children. Lewis and Agnes will be at the centre of one of the stories narrated in this book. Indeed, Moses convinces Lewis that women betray men while they are at work. Consequently, Lewis starts beating his wife, recreating the patriarchal and chauvinist family pattern that would be considered normal in Jamaica. However, in the metropolis, this is unbearable and Agnes eventually leaves his husband.

Apart from Moses, Galahad and Tolroy, Selvon narrates the misadventures of other black characters such as Captain (Cap), Daniel, Bart, Big City, Five Past Twelve and Harris. Cap is a Nigerian man who was sent to London by his family to study law, but once in the metropolis he started to spend all his money on cigarettes and women. He is, quoting Moses, a real "hustler"[15] sometimes mistakable for a West Indian, living at the expenses of others (especially white girls), and escaping from any responsibility he might have. This happens even when he gets married to a French girl. Then there is Daniel, warm-hearted man who treats women very well and who is quite rich for being black, is forced to help Cap in dealing the situation of having a wife but no place where to live. Next there is Bart who, because of his light skin "he neither here nor there".[16] He is ashamed by his "blackness", he tells everybody he is from Latin America, and tries to

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[13] Taking into consideration that 1£ in the 1950s is approximately equivalent to 31.90£ in 2016, it means that the salary amounted approximately to 159.5£ per week. Equivalence provided by the "Historical UK inflation rates and calculator" website, available at: http://inflation.stephenmorley.org/.

[14] Selvon, S., *The Lonely Londoners,* London: Penguin, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 10-11.

[15] Hustler: A slick, fairly well-dressed beggar; a con man. From Allsopp R., "Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage", Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

[16] Selvon S., *The Lonely Londoners,* London: Penguin, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 46.

take the distances from the other boys when other people see them together. He does not trust anyone, especially when it comes to lending money, and spends much time looking for his lost girl Beatrice. Next, there is Big City, a fellow who likes to dream big and to tell tall stories. He started to be called so because he was used to talk about big cities. However, he is an illiterate drunkard who is not even able to fill in the football pools. There is also Five Past Twelve, a Barbadian man "blacker than midnight" who always asks other to lend him money. Finally, there is Harris, a pseudo-English gentleman, always wearing a bowler hat, carrying around an umbrella and *The Times* exactly as the stereotypical Briton would do. He is used to work with high class people and does not like when the other boys burst into one of his parties. Moses is at the centre of this small community of black, all the others rely on him. Every Sunday his house becomes the meeting point of these "hustlers", but towards the end of the book Moses seems have reached his limits and seems that he is not able to stand this situation anymore. He becomes just a listener of what happens to the others, anyone exploits him somehow, and he feels increasingly lonelier. He longs for his old Trinidad, even though he knows that returning is impossible; he feels that he has gone nowhere, that his life has not improved in any way, and he starts wondering what would happen if he became a writer.

2.1.2. *Colour and identity*

In this work of fiction, Selvon records and describes the movements of West Indians in the 1950s as well as the conditions they have to endure after their arrival to London, the bitter-sweet reward after their journey to an expectation. In their Mother Country, they are offered the worst jobs and rooms; they are discriminated in every aspect of life. For example, at the employment office, Moses has to explain to Galahad that he

will be registered with a particular red mark on top of his form, "J-A. Col.", which means that the person is from Jamaica and is coloured (for English people everyone was from Jamaica, they ignored the existence of other Caribbean countries). According to Moses this "saves a lot of time", since many employers do not want any black for certain jobs.[17] Indeed, it used to happen -and it happened to Cap for example- that employers, as soon as they realized that the employment office had sent them black workers, they changed the job offer or invented some kind of justification to not to hire them.[18] The discrimination in the labour market is evident also in the fact that Galahad, a skilled worker (an electrician) in the Caribbean, is downgraded and deskilled in the Mother Country; his freedom, self-realization and mobility are limited by the colour bar. This was caused by the high degree of hostility toward blacks as well as by the common and accepted stereotypes that blacks were lazy and not suitable for certain types of employments. The Caribbean men were still vulnerable to the whims of British people; the mechanism of objectification and alienation were, therefore, still present. Indeed, according to Dawson, the sense of identity and stability, also connected to and guaranteed by a satisfying job, was so again denied.[19] Quoting Moses:

> But in the world today, a job is all the security a man have. A job mean place to sleep, food to eat, cigarette to smoke. And even though it have the Welfare State in the background, when a man out of work he like a fish out of water gasping for breath.[20]

Generally, white people could aim at skilled and better paid jobs, while black people had to replace white workers in physically demanding and low paid jobs, refused by the latter. Therefore, the truth was that they were not "stealing" anyone's place as it was perceived by English people; on the contrary, they had an extremely important role in restraining

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[17] Selvon, S., *The Lonely Londoners,* London: Penguin, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 28-29.
[18] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 35.
[19] Dawson A., *Mongrel Nation. Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain*, University of Michigan Press, 2007, p 37.
[20] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p 27.

wage increase.[21] Kabesh identifies another ironical element concerning work, identity and freedom of mobility. At the employment office there are several job offers for the British Post and the British Railway system, both symbols of progress, mobility and national power. Yet, they become places of exploitation and oppression offering black immigrants the most undesirable work opportunities.[22] Particularly interesting is, once again, Cap's experience at the Railway station where he is physically segregated and asked to do a strenuous job.[23] Racist and segregating colonial practices, that were the characteristic of the British imperialistic power over its colonies, have now entered the Mother Country. The periphery has now invaded the centre, the empire has shrunk, and colonial routines are here replicated.

The problem of colour emerges several times throughout the novel, and not only concerning the job market. Already from the beginning it is clear that the colour of the immigrants (as well as the immigrants themselves) is perceived as a contaminating factor. image of Moses blowing his nose in a *white* handkerchief which turns *black* is indeed extremely evocative.[24] It is clear, from the words of Moses, that they are not welcomed in any way, especially now that there are so many West Indians there:

> It had a time when I first was here, when it only had a few West Indians, in London, and things used to go good enough. These days, spades all over the place, and every shipload is big news, and the English people don't like the boys coming to England to work and live.[25]

Moses knows that finding a shelter and a work is not easy, and he immediately warns his fellow, Galahad. Furthermore, knowing the degree of hostility reserved for immigrants, he takes care of scattering blacks in different places, recreating a sort of second diaspora.

[21] Kabesh, L. M., "Mapping Freedom, or Its Limits: The Politics of Movement in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*", in *Postcolonial Text*, Vol. 6, N. 3, 2011. Available at: http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/viewArticle/1255.
[22] Kabesh, 2011, p 7
[23] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 30.
[24] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 1. My emphasis.
[25] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 20.

The episode relating Galahad and a little boy who, looking up to the man, says "Mummy, look at that *black* man!" is interesting in this context.[26] This unpleasant incident was also registered by Fanon in his *Black Skin White Masks*[27] (1952). Galahad tries to act nonchalantly, but this episode eventually enacts a painful reflection about colour:

> Colour, is you that causing all this, you know. Why the hell you can't be blue, or red or green, if you can't be white? You know is you that cause a lot of misery in the world. Is not me, you know, is you! I ain't do anything to infuriate the people and them, is you! Look at you, you so black and innocent, and this time so you causing misery all over the world! […] Why the hell you can't change colour? [...] Is not we that the people don't like, is the colour black![28]

Colour causes trouble, pain; colour is the problem, it is what to be ashamed of. Bart, who makes the others believe he his South American, is the perfect example of a man alienated by the colonial discourse. However, all his efforts of hiding his real identity painfully fail when he is harshly rejected on the grounds of race and colour by the father of his white girlfriend Beatrice:

> 'You' the father shouted, pointing a finger at Bart, 'you! What are you doing in my house? Get out! Get out this minute!'
>
> The old Bart start to stutter about how he is a Latin-American but the girl father wouldn't give him a chance.
>
> 'Get out! Get out, I say!' The father want to throw Bart out the house, because he don't want no curly-hair children in the family.[29]

Eventually, "a few door slam in Bart face, a few English people give him the old diplomacy, and Bart boil down and come like one of the boys".[30] Another element that shows how the problem of colour was affecting every aspect of life is, for example, the cardboard saying "Keep the Water White".[31] "The boys" cannot simply be men, they will always be *black* men with all that this entails: being seen as lazy, savage, underdeveloped

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[26] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 76. My emphasis.
[27] Fanon, F., *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: Pluto Press, 1986, originally *Peau Noire, Masques Blanc*, France: Editions de Seuil, 1952, p. 111.
[28] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 77.
[29] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 50.
[30] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 48.
[31] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 77.

and in need of a (British) education. Thus, even when they will achieve some

respectability, they will have to pay double attention to not to lose it and not to negatively

affect the image of the whole community. Indeed, Harris – the black gentleman- in one

of the multiple times when "the boys" sneak in one of his parties, warns his friends:

> Now it have decent people here tonight, and if you don't get on respectable it will be a
> bad reflection not only on me but on all the boys, and you know how thinks hard already
> in Brit'n. the English people we are still uncivilised and don't know how to behave
> properly.[32]

Moreover, also Moses is aware of the fact that their race and identity are the ones which

cause the problems, and not only among British but also among white immigrants in

general. Warning Galahad, sceptical about British hostility, he says -fully aware of his

origins and of being a British subject:

> Listen, I will give you the name of a place. I call Ipswich. There it have a restaurant rub
> by a Pole call the Rendezvous Restaurant. Go there and see if they will serve you. And
> you know the hurtful part of it? The Pole who have the restaurant, he ain't have no more
> right in this country than we. In fact, we is British subjects and he is only a foreigner, we
> have more right than any people from the damn continent to live and work in this
> country, and enjoy what this country have, because is we who bleed to make this country
> prosperous.[33]

This theme of discrimination is here dealt with a great degree of irony and this is visible,

for example, in their way of referring to the problem by talking about "British diplomacy"

in contrast with the American one, which is more direct in telling immigrants that they

do not like them.

> 'The thing is, in America they don't like you, and they tell you so straight, so that you
> know how you stand. Over here is the old English diplomacy: "thank you sir," and "how
> do you do" and that sort of thing. In America you see a sign telling you to keep off, but
> over here you don't see any, but when you go in the hotel or the restaurant they will
> politely tell you to haul – or else give you the cold treatment.'[34]

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[32] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 116.
[33] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 21.
[34] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 21.

2.1.3. Language

This novel is also important and interesting for the use of language. Selvon was the first Caribbean author based in England who used a language different from Standard English, namely a West Indian dialect, for both the narrative voice and the dialogues, as he declared:

> I think I can say without 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.[35]

In an interview with Fabre, Selvon declared also that he wanted to recapture a certain quality of the West Indian way of living, and had many anecdotes to tell, but that English was making everything more difficult and unreal. Therefore, striving for truth and verisimilitude, he decided to rewrite everything using dialect for both the narration and the dialogues and "the novel just shot along" in 6 months.[36] It has to be underlined that the dialect used has been somehow constructed, it is part of a *continuum*. It is not the real Trinidadian language, nor the London dialect, it is something in between. He indeed declared that he used a modified dialect which could be easily understood by European readers, but that could still maintain the flavour and the essence of the Trinidadian speech. Furthermore, he added that he chose to modify the Trinidadian language because, compared to the Jamaican or the Barbadian one, it was closer to Standard English.[37]

In line with the ideas about language discussed in the second chapter, Selvon agrees that through language one can express thoughts, feelings and his/her personal representation of the world around him/her. Therefore, by using a language closer to the characters, it was easier for him to convey the message he wanted to express through his

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[35] Selvon, S., "A Note on Dialect" in Nasta, S. (ed. by), *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988, p. 63.
[36] Fabre, M., "Samuel Selvon: Interviews and Conversations" in Nasta, 1988, p 66.
[37] Fabre, in Nasta, 1988, p 67.

novel, as well as easier for his characters to express themselves and to be seen as credible.[38] It is interesting, though, that Selvon was able to maintain a certain flexibility, and easily and unnoticeably switched from Creole to Standard English. Generally, the reader has the feeling that toward the end of the novel, the dialect is increasingly less marked. Moreover, some passages and dialogues – mainly those involving Harris – are written in Standard English. On the other hand, from the very first lines certain features of the Caribbean vernacular are recognizable and they will be present until the end of the novel. Just by analysing the first section of the novel, many examples that show the rhythms, idioms and vocabulary of Caribbean speech are possible to identify: "[…] is not as if this *fellar* is his brother or cousin or even friend […]",[39] "Too *much spades* in the Water[40] now",[41] "You *send* for *she*?",[42] "I wish I was like *allyou* Jamaican",[43] etc. According to the *Dictionary of Caribbean Usage,[44] fellar* is the West Indian spelling for "fellow"; *much* means "many" and probably derives from a characteristic of Caribbean Creole and mesolectal economy of word-choice which especially occurs where sense is not affected; *spades* means "Black person living in England", and it is a term known and used mostly by West Indians living – or who have lived – in England; "*You send for she?*" is a perfect example of economy and functional shift typical of Caribbean creoles, discussed in the second chapter; *allyou* is one of the many variation of "all of you", and it shows the influence of African languages which generally add "all" to a plural pronoun. Throughout the text, many other words or sentences typical of Caribbean Creole are

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[38] Fabre, in Nasta, 1988, p 67.
   Nazareth, P., "Interview with Sam Selvon" in Nasta, 1988, p 79.
[39] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 1.
[40] Bayswater.
[41] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 3.
[42] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 5.
[43] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 5.
[44] Allsopp R., *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

identifiable: *we* instead of "us"; *ants,* which in Trinidadian speech indicates a person who is a parasite; lack of inversion in questions, e.g. "that small fire does keep the room warm?"[45]; absence of the pluralizing phoneme, e.g. "two chair"; and finally, the rhythm and fixed sayings that interpose communication, e.g. "You don't know this place *boy* […] But take a little advice, *old man*",[46] "*Listen*, I know fellars like you, *you know*".[47]

Language becomes relevant also for what concerns names and naming in general. It is interesting to note that many characters have a nickname, a peculiar feature of the Caribbean culture, but less usual in the European one; it was when Selvon arrived in England that he discovered the importance of having a name, a tradition, ancestors and heritage.[48] As soon as Henry Oliver arrives in London, after making clear the he does not want to "live off the dole" and that he is able to take care of himself, he "loses" his name and acquires a new one. He is, indeed, renamed by Moses "Sir Galahad", with a clear reference to the purest and most gallant knight of King Arthur's Round Table. In a sense Henry is in search of the Holy Grail as the knight was, but in his case the Holy Grail is represented by the quest for a new life in London. From the point of view of the Western reader, this change of name might symbolize and be seen as a further loss of identity and alienation of an immigrant arriving in the metropolitan city. Moreover, Selvon affirms that he probably chose "Moses" as the name for one of the characters for symbolic reasons.[49] It is possible, indeed, to glimpse some superficial similarities with the Biblical and mythological figure of Moses: both of them travelled to the "promised land" and are a sort of "guide" for their people. Finally, this process of naming and renaming affects

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[45] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 17.
[46] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 19.
[47] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 20.
[48] Fabre, in Nasta, 1988, p 70.
[49] Fabre, in Nasta, 1988, p 70.

also the city itself. All the characters give new names to some places and monuments, for example "Marble Arch" becomes "the Arch", "Notting Hill Gate" becomes "the Gate", "Bayswater" is called simply "the Water", etc. This might seem an attempt to familiarize with the city that makes them feel so disorientated and lonely.

2.1.4. *Other aspects of colonization in reverse: Calypso and women*

Many scholars have identified in this novel a certain influence of the calypso music, mainly conveyed through the usage of a creolized language and the loose structure organized in "ballads". According to Nasta, the pace of the novel is driven by the influence of melodrama, political satire and wit, peculiar of the Trinidadian calypso, which was particularly in vogue at that time, mainly thanks to Lord Kitchener and Lord Beginner.[50] Already from the first encounter between the periphery and the metropolis, the process of "colonization in reverse" began: British cultural hegemony started to be unsettled and undermined mainly from the diffusion of creolized forms of Caribbean vernacular culture, and calypso is probably the most vivid example. After the World War II, calypso music became one of the dominant forms of popular culture, especially when artists such as Lord Kitchener and Lord Beginner, as well as their audiences, migrated to Britain.[51] There, they found fertile ground and slowly became a unifying thread among the immigrants. Calypso music originally accompanied the stick fightings in the *canboulay* festival in Trinidad, precursor of the Trinidadian Carnival. During these fights, songs whose aim was to deride the membes of the opponent band were sung. Then, these songs evolved in the more modern calypso, in which singers inserted also topical and

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[50] Nasta, S., "Introduction" in Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. xiii.
[51] Dawson A., *Mongrel Nation. Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain*, University of Michigan Press, 2007.

inflammatory subjects expressing social discontent with colonial subjugation. These elements of bravado, as well as hyperbolic assertions of masculinity -especially in opposition to the emasculation imposed by colonialism- influenced also the calypso music of the 1950s, at that point completely independent from carnival. If at a first stage creolized languages were used in song and lyrics, by the end of 19th century, reflecting Anglicization of the colonies, singers were mainly using English. However, soon intellectuals started to support this form of art in its creolized version, seeing it as a genuine expression of national identity.[52]

Through the influence of this Trinidadian element, Selvon could "colonize in reverse" the British literary canon: he was able to appropriate the British novel and reshape it into a vehicle for the expression of the Caribbean identity as well as to give voice to – until that moment – voiceless British subjects. Of course, when calypso reached the centre, it – and its audience – brought their attitudes about gender and power with them. Despite the commercialization of this music, calypsonians lived precariously and, therefore, had to rely on female backers. It is comprehensible that those relationships could not last long. Hence, lyrics often attacked women – depicted as sexual objects who had to be disciplined – and were full of description of masculine sexual superheroism.[53]

This element of misogynism typical of calypso music is extremely evident in the characters of *The Lonely Londoners*. In the novel, women – mainly white ones – are treated as merely "pieces of flesh" and are valued only for their sexual side. Through the "conquest" of white girls – attracted to black men because of the common stereotypes about their vigorous masculinity –, black men enact a sort of "revenge" over the British empire and its colonial subjugation and feminization. This is evident, for example, in

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[52] Dawson,2007, pp. 32-33.
[53] Dawson, 2007, p. 35.

Cap's attitude. He is responsible for a small and symbolic victory when he makes his Austrian girlfriend dependent on him: she has to sell everything that she possesses in order to economically sustain both.[54] Furthermore, it is through white girls that black men can validate their worthiness, their "whiteness" and, somehow, their integration. Once again a link with Fanon and his book *Black Skin, White Masks* is visible. Indeed, in his chapter "The Man of Colour and the White Woman" he declares:

> Now – and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged – who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man.
>
> I am a white man.
>
> Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization…
>
> I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine.[55]

Through the "possession" of the white woman, through this "triumph in bed", the black man wants to reaffirm his masculinity, which has been taken off and belittled by the Empire and its practices. However, sex used as a mean of self-assertion does not free black men from their condition, it does not lead egalitarianism. On the contrary, by treating women so, they are mirroring the violence that characterized the white supremacy.[56] Moreover, while white women are perceived as a mean to subvert the system; black women are perceived as a threat.

Very few female characters are present in the novel, but, still, two of them have an important role: Agnes and Tanty. The first one, with the help of the second one, challenges abuse and leaves her husband, something unexpected and new in the patriarchal family model imported from the Caribbean. Then, Tanty is the most static character, yet the most important agent of change. She is static for choice, she does not

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[54] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 36.
[55] Fanon,1952, p 63.
[56] Dawson, 2007, p. 35.

want to separate from her family and she does not want to "explore" London. However, one day, she is forced to leave her house to bring the keys to Tolroy's mom and, unlike Galahad who freezes in fear the first time he has to take a bus by himself, she is determined and eventually reaches her destination. Moreover, she is able to activate a system of "trust" in the grocery store next to her house, exactly as it was back in Trinidad.[57] In other words, quoting Kabesh:

> while the boys' ideal community is gender-restrictive and appears invested in maintaining the privileges that masculinity affords them, Tanty works to challenge systemic forms of exclusion and oppression that act upon her community from both outside and within.[58]

2.1.5. Further considerations

Giving a look to the title, it is possible to say that it relates to the novel's main theme and immediately gives an idea about the feelings of these unwanted immigrants from the Caribbean. Newcomers are lonely and completely isolated one from the other, and, probably, it is possible to identify two main reasons for this. On the one hand, they have to scatter around London, as in a second diaspora, in order to make themselves less "visible" to the eyes of the British people, a painful attempt to limit negative reactions towards them. On the other hand, life in London is hard, and they probably find it easier to take care only of themselves, living in their little personal world without taking interest in what happens outside.[59] Caribbean people grew up imbibing a culture that did not belong to them, they had to cut themselves off their roots, heritage and tradition. Completely deceived, they were convinced that migrating to England meant finding a new home. However, it did not take long to realise that it was not so, and that despite

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[57] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 65-71.
[58] Kabesh, 2011, p 7.
[59] Nasta in Selvon 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. viii.

being formally British, they were not part of that society and that "streets were not paved with gold". Some passages might clarify the feelings of desolation, disorientation, loneliness and emptiness they experienced in this alien city:

> Though the boys does not have no s--- over here like 'both of we is Trinidadians and we must help out one another.' You going to meet a lot of fellars from home who don't even want to talk to you, because they have matters on the mind.[60]
>
> Galahad make for the tube station when he left Moses, and he stand up there on Queensway watching everybody going about their business, and a feeling of loneliness and fright come on him all of a sudden. [...] On top of that, is one of those winter mornings when a kind of fog hovering around. The sun is shining, but Galahad never see the sun look like how it looking now. No heat from it, it just there in the sky like a force-ripe orange. When he look up, the colour of the sky so desolate it make him more frighten.[61]
>
> A feeling come over him as if he lost everything he have – clothes, shoes, hat – and he start to touch himself here and there as if he in a daze.[62]
>
> When Moses did arrive fresh in London, he look around for a place where he couldn't have to spend much money, where he could get plenty of food, and where he could meet the boys and coast a old talk to pass the time away – for this city powerfully lonely when you on your own.[63]

The situation is not dissimilar at the employment office, place that should give at least some security. Moses accompanies Galahad there for the first time, and the narrating voice tells the reader that:

> When they enter a kind of atmosphere hit Galahad hard so that he had to stand up against the wall for a minute. [...] 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 you enemy and your friend.[64]

However, toward the end, it is possible to notice that a primordial sense of community is growing, at least among "the boys". It is indeed narrated that every Sunday morning, they meet at Moses's house, as if they are going to church, and they moan, groan, sing and cry.[65] In addition, another sign of the desire to create this sort of community and resist to white treatments and supremacy is Cap's dream to, one day, affix a board which says

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[60] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 17.
[61] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 23.
[62] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 24.
[63] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 29.
[64] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 27.
[65] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 135.

"Keep the Water black" (in contrast to the one hung by British people).[66] Nonetheless, sense of aimlessness, desolation and restlessness are still overwhelming.

Selvon, through this novel, gave a realistic voice to the voiceless, explored the relationship between the immigrant and the centre,[67] as well as made the first steps of this process of "colonization in reverse" and towards an embryonic process of community formation. Language was one of the most important tools he used in this sense, since it not only allowed to show and reflect Caribbean origin, but was a specific narrative device that permitted the narrator to bridge the gap between Caribbean content and European form.[68] In other word, he increased the capacity of language, which now expresses more than Caribbean reality and identity: it a real tool of decolonization and appropriation. He was able to record the difficulties that immigrants faced in being accepted, their nostalgia, their disillusion hidden behind irony, comedy and laughter, characteristics that Caribbean people developed already during slavery, as a safety valve to release frustration and misery.[69] Quoting the narrator talking about the ambivalent feelings of Moses at the end of the book (he basically does not know whether to return to Trinidad or stay in London and continue to hope for a better future):

> As if the boys laughing, but the they only laughing because they afraid to cry, they only laughing because to think so much about everything would be a big calamity – like how he here now, the thoughts so heavy like he unable to move his body.[70]

West Indian newcomers found themselves in an alien city, "[…] as if is not London at all but some strange place on another planet […]".[71] Post-war London became the new contact zone, where the immigrants could influence the society from the bottom

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[66] Kabesh, 2011.

[67] Roldan-Santiago, S., "Samuel Selvon's Moses Trilogy: The Concoction of Hybrid Identities", in *The Atlantic Critical Review*, Vol. 3, N. 1, Jan-March 2004. Available at: http://www.srs-pr.com/scholarship/acr-1.pdf.

[68] Birat, K. "Seeking Sam Selvon: Michael Fabre and the Fiction of the Caribbean", in *Transatlantica,* 1, 2009. Available at: http://transatlantica.revues.org/4259.

[69] Hiro, D., *Black British white British: A History of Race Relations in Britain*, London: Grafton Books, 1991, p. 22.

[70] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 139.

[71] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 1.

up. In other words, they colonized it in reverse though renaming monuments, eating its pigeons or seagulls (Galahad and Cap),[72] refusing jobs (Cap and the job at the railway station), establishing systems of credit and, finally, through the imagination and formation of an embryonic community.[73] There is still one thing that has to be noted regarding places. The Waterloo station, site of arrivals and departure, becomes the symbol of this new contact and of the ambivalent feelings of the immigrants. Indeed, it becomes the gateway to the city, a rite of passage, the place where the borders of Great Britain are "violated" and disrupted as well as the place where a mixture of feelings (happiness, fear, nostalgia, disillusionment) all mix together.

2.2. Moses Ascending

2.2.1. Summary

Moses Ascending was written in 1975, almost twenty years after *The Lonely Londoners*. Some of the characters are present in both novels, the setting is the same – London –, but the time and the mood are different, and this might be the most important reasons why they are not considered one the sequel to the other. The first book, written in 1956, was set in the 1950s before the Notting Hill riots of 1958, this second book is set between the 1960s and the 1970s, when the Black Power movement was becoming popular. Another important difference lies on the fact that while *The Lonely Londoners* was written in third person and did not really have a protagonist, here there is a first-person narrator and Moses could definitely be defined the protagonist. In this second novel, apart from Moses, also Galahad is present until the end, while other characters from *The Lonely Londoners* like Tolroy and Big City are just mentioned.

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[72] Selvon, 2006 [I ed. 1956], p. 118-120; p.133.
[73] Kabesh, 2011.

The book begins with Moses telling that he became a landlord by buying Tolroy's house in Shepherd's Bush, a crumbling mansion due to demolition in three years. Moses sees it as an opportunity to ascend (from here the title) and to fulfil his aspirations: he switches from the status of tenant to the one of landlord; he goes to live in the highest floor of the mansion, in the attic, his "penthouse" with a satisfying "bird's view"; finally, he can now dedicate himself in writing his memoirs. He wants to cut with his past, and with Galahad in particular; he wants to separate himself from anything related to the new movements of resistance and struggle, such as the Black Power movement. He wants to become a respectful English man who is able to master English and its literary canon. At the beginning, everything seems to follow his plan: he finds some tenants and, moreover, he hires a sort of "servant", Bob, a white "immigrant" coming from the "black" land of the Midlands. Unfortunately, the situation takes several unexpected turns: the basement of his mansion becomes the headquarter of the Black Power movement led by a young girl, Brenda; Moses becomes involved in an illegal traffic of Asian immigrant lead by one of his tenants; he then gets arrested and imprisoned while attending as a spectator a Black Power's demonstration; and finally, when Bob finds out that Moses is having some sexual intercourse with Jeannie - Bob's girlfriend - the former takes revenge on the latter and relegates him in the basement (immediately after this Moses will be forced to leave the basement too and to seek hospitality at Galahad's house).

2.2.2. *Colour and identity*

It has been noted that this novel is full of carnivalesque atmosphere, mockery and dirty jokes as well as an underlying tone of cynicism. Moses seems to be acting a charade of aristocratic power, he wants to take the distance from the old brigade of Caribbean,

from the community of West Indians which has formed,[74] he wants to wash himself white. However, at the end he realizes, at his own expenses, that this will require to completely deny his identity and his past, thing that appears to be extremely difficult since he seems to be trapped in what Bhabha called "ambivalence".[75] Indeed, on the one hand, he "praises" the black man and acknowledges his important role in society, and hopes for a better future:

> He should realize that if it wasn't for him, the city would go on sleeping forever. He should look upon himself as a pioneer what preparing the way for the city's day, polishing the brass and chrome, washing the pots and pans. […] what is the heavy footfall on the cold damp pavement before the rest of the world is awake? What is that freezing figure fumbling through the fog, feeling its way to the bus stop, or clattering down the steps of the sleepy underground at this unearthly hour? It is the black man. He is the first passenger of the day. He is the harbinger who will put the kettle on to boil. He holds the keys of the city, and he will unlock the doors and tidy the papers on the desk […][76]

Furthermore, after an unpleasant episode when a policeman went to knock at his door asking if he was having some illegal affairs going on, he feels the need to go out, take some fresh air and calm down. He has the desire to meet some old acquaintances and friendly faces. However, depressed, he realizes that all black people seem doomed to suffer and that it does not matter how much they struggle, they would never achieve a better life and a better position.[77] On the other hand, he has been living in London for almost thirty years and, therefore, he has absorbed the English culture directly from its centre, and for him, aiming at a white existence seems the only possibility of survival. This is also because, as Moses tells to the reader, he has been taught from a very young age to act like an Englishman:

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[74] Kunzru, H., "Introduction" in Selvon, S. *Moses Ascending*, London: Penguin, 2008 [I ed. 1975].
[75] Bhabha H. K., "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", *The MIT Press*, Vol. 28, Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis, 1984, pp. 125-133. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/778467?seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents.
[76] Selvon, S. *Moses Ascending*, London: Penguin, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 8.
[77] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 46.

> When I was a little boy in Trinidad, the old ones use to tell the children to try and live and behave like white people, and I used to imagine that white people live in Paradise […][78]

Moses is a sort of *picaro*, in the sense that he tries everything, even egoistically, to reach an upper level in society (in this case a white existence) but, in truth, he cannot really aspire to do so. After years of living in what he considered to be his Mother Country, and after having experienced overt and harsh hostility from its inhabitants, he his persuaded that mimicking British people is the only thing left to do for black immigrants who have found a new home in London. Indeed, he appears to have a pessimistic view about communities committed to resistance, and he prefers to rely on self-help, as the following passages show:

> [Galahad] start the rap again. 'We are all in the same boat. You can buy a house or a limousine, and eat caviar and best end of lamb, but you can't get a white skin if you beg, borrow or steal. Things not like the old days, Moses.'
> 'You telling me,' I say.
> 'The revolution has come. At least the Black man is coming into his own.'
> 'Exactly,' I say. 'I am coming into my own, and I just want to be left in peace.[79]

Or again:

> 'Galahad' I say, 'I will tell you one thing that I have learnt in this life. It is that the black man cannot unite. I have seen various causes taken up and dropped like hot coals. I have seen them come together and then scatter like when you pitching marbles and you hit a set of them in the rings and they fly off in all directions.[80]

This is clearly a novel that narrates the tension between a first generation migrant and his community - and the society in general - in a London that is changing, in a country that he, veteran of the group, is not able to understand anymore.[81] Even though Moses knows he cannot physically become white, he still hopes that in the capitalistic metropolis, where everything is on sale, he can buy at least a simulation of whiteness, aiming to reach the

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[78] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 106.
[79] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 15.
[80] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 55.
[81] Booker K.M., Juraga D., *The Caribbean Novel in English: An Introduction*, Portsmouth: Heinemann; Kingston: I. Randle; Oxford: J. Currey.

same economic and cultural achievement of a white Englishmen.[82] According to his view, he will be able to do so by becoming a landlord and a writer. Nonetheless, at the end the reader, and probably Moses too, is left with a sense of hopelessness: it is clear that he cannot change his condition and that he will always remain a black immigrant, as Galahad constantly reminds him.[83] And this is clear when at the end everything resembles the beginning: the black man is relegated downstairs - in specific in his old basement -, while the white man lives upstairs.

2.2.3. *Language*

Selvon, in this novel, has further experimented with language and styles, and these are basically two of the central themes. Moses, as most of the West Indian migrants (at least the ones belonging to the first generation), has been convinced of the cultural superiority of the English culture and language. He indeed seeks the perfect mastery of English, the Queen's language, for obtaining validation, because he had imbibed the (deceiving) idea which has been discussed by both Fanon[84] and Bhabha[85]: the better one could speak the colonizer's language, the whiter he/she was. Already from the first few lines, it is easy to notice that Moses has left behind (or at least is trying to leave behind) his West Indian dialect and has started to speak more similarly to what it was considered to be "proper English":

> 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 though bed sitter land; picking out secondhand miscellany he need and could afford; musing on the lonely hearts column

[82] Booker and Juraga, 2001.
[83] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 14-15.
[84] Fanon, F., *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: Pluto Press, 1986, originally *Peau Noire, Masques Blanc*, France: Editions de Seuil, 1952, p. 111
[85] Bhabha, 1984.

to see if any desperate riche white woman seeks black companion with a view to matrimony;[86]

Sometimes he even uses some formal, archaic or even biblical words, such as *ignoramus*[87] which shows how much "outdated" he is, or "[…] to be obtained, even if they came with gifts od *myrrh* and *frankincense*"; some other times he even inserts foreigner words that often falls in malapropisms, such as *oui, bona fide, flagrento delicto, and kai sir rah, sir rah.*[88] This last one is particularly interesting and comic, because Moses, who wants to show his knowledge and culture, says it is a Japanese saying, while, in truth, it probably comes from the famous song "que sera, sera". However, at the end, despite his attempts, he is not able to fully master English and completely hide his background. This is visible in many occasions, especially when he is among other blacks:

> 'I don't know, maybe you was. Were.'[89]
>
> 'I had to peddle [paddle] my own canoe for survival.'[90]
>
> 'It hard enough to live in one, and you-all making three. […] 'Sister' I say earnestly to Brenda, 'how does the struggle fare? Are we really making any headway against the fuzz[91] and the pigs from Babylon[92]?[93]
>
> 'Don't make no pappyshow [puppet show] of my ambitions.'[94]

Styles and languages follow one another very quickly, and sometimes it is difficult to understand whether it was the author, Selvon, or the character, Moses, the person behind this change. [95] Moses is really committed to his cause:

> 'I will knock them in the Old Kent Road with my language alone, 'I boast. 'My very usage of English will have them rolling in the aisles. Mark my words, Galahad.'[96]

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[86] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p.1.
[87] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p.56;
[88] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p.88;
[89] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 33.
[90] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p.51.
[91] Fuzz: an insulting way of talking to or about the police, used especially in the 1960s and 1970s. From the Longman Dictionary online, http://www.ldoceonline.com/.
[92] Babylon: the police, or more in general, any Western power or Western-style society or government. From Allsopp R., *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
[93] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p.108.
[94] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 129.
[95] Booker and Juraga, 2001.
[96] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 103.

he absolutely wants to "mimic" white men and white writers, convinced that that is the canon he should follow. Indeed, he completely ignores the existence of Black Literature and the existence of authors such as Lamming and Salkey:

> 'I know Accles and Pollock, but not Lamming and Salkey.'
>
> 'You see what I mean? Man Moses, you are still living in the Dark Ages! You don't even know that we have created a Black Literature, that it have writers who write some powerful books what making the whole world realize our existence and our struggle.'
>
> 'So? Well, my Memoirs will create a new dimension.'
>
> 'A new diversion, you mean,' […]
>
> 'Let me remind you that literary masterpieces have been written in garrets by candlelight, by men who shut themselves away from the distraction of the world.[97]

Many times, both Brenda and Galahad encourage him to write a politically committed book, a book that could support "the struggle". Furthermore, Brenda, being born in England, heavily and harshly criticizes his usage of English, suggesting him to "leave the written word to them what knows their business", and to "stick to oral communication".[98] Therefore, Moses, hurt and offended, tries to add some new materials to his manuscript, recording some events related to the black struggle, however soon regrets it:

> I longed to get back to my philosophizing and my analysing and my rhapsodizing, decorating my thoughts with little grace-notes and showing the white people that we, too, could write book.[99]

Through this experimentation with languages and styles, from literary and archaic English to the street language or Caribbean vernacular, from the narration through the first-person singular to directly addressing to the reader ("Dear R",) Selvon challenged the hierarchy imposed by literature and society. He wanted to demonstrate as "low" styles and forms were as appropriate in literature as the higher ones, as well as mock the "good old English tradition of Fielding and the 18th century British novel".[100] He wanted, in

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[97] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p.56-57.
[98] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p.137-138.
[99] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p.133.
[100] Fabre, in Nasta, 1988, p 72.

other words, to respond to the common assumption that the English language and culture was superior to any other one.[101] Furthermore, by letting Moses to relegate himself in the penthouse with a servant at his service, free to dedicate himself to the cultivation of his literary aspiration, Selvon attacked also British the bourgeois values. Finally, Moses "linguistic extravaganza", reflects "the temptations and perils of any acculturation process through its bizarre juxtapositions and comic excess".[102] Basically, his language, despite all his attempts, still betrays his marginal status of migrant and outsider.

2.2.4. *Other aspects of colonization in reverse: The Crusoe-Friday model and Black Power movement*

The dichotomy black and white, illiterate and literate (along with all the stereotypes that these two terms entail) is very much analysed in this novel, especially through the relationship between Bob and Moses, and also through the one between the Asian tenants and the latter. Moses, ascended, continues his mimicking of English manners and firstly hires Bob as his servant, secondly, he "civilizes" him and saves him from his "savage" position. The relationship between Moses and Bob is explored though the reversed metaphor of Crusoe and Friday, where the black man becomes the Crusoe who saves the white – but surprisingly illiterate – Friday:

> All these arrangements were attended to by my man Friday, a white immigrant name Bob from somewhere in the Midlands, who came to seek his fortunes in London. […] He was a willing worker, eager to learn the ways of the Black man. In no time at all he learn to cook peas and rice and to make a beef stew […] The only thing I didn't like about him was he went out most evenings and come back pissed, drunk like a lord. As we became good friends, or rather Master and Servant, I try to convert him from the evils of alcohol, but it was no use.[103]

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[101] Booker and Juraga, 2001.
[102] Warner-Lewis, M., "Samuel Selvon Linguistic Extravaganza: Moses Ascending", *Caribbean Quarterly,* vol. 28, n. 4, December 1982, p. 61.
[103] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 6.

Moses domesticates him according to his culture exactly as a master would do with his servant, subverting and redistributing roles and power. However, at the end of the same passage, Moses adds that eventually Bob realizes that blacks are human too, and this presupposes the prior power of whites.

Growing up believing that the British were culturally superior, Moses is shocked when he finds out that Bob cannot write nor read. Indeed, he cannot understand how a white man can possibly be illiterate:

> I could understand the ignorance of black, backwards people, but I have a soft spot for whites.[104]

This comic reversal of roles goes on with Moses, the colonial subject in the Mother Country, becoming the teacher, while the white man becomes now the barbarian that learns his own culture from a non-British.[105] What is interesting, is that the protagonist feels the need to indoctrinate his white servant through the Bible too, one of the most used tools during colonialism, as argued by Bhabha.[106] Though this Friday-Crusoe metaphor directly taken from the English literary canon, Selvon definitely wants to criticize racism embedded in literature as well as ironically subvert the colonial and imperialistic system[107] based on the civilization and education of the people living in colonies according to Western practices and ideals.

In addition to that, Moses mimics the white man and employs his practices and thoughts even in the relationship with the Asian tenant. He describes them using all the

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[104] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 170.
[105] Nazareth, P "The Clown in the Slave Ship" in (ed. by), *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988, p. 237.
Rampaul, G. "Black Crusoe, White Friday: Carnivalesque Reversals in Samuel Selvon's *Moses Ascending* and Derek Walcott's *Pantomime*", *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representaciòn / Culture, Language and Representation* – Revista de estudios culturales de la Universitat Jaume I / Cultural Studies Journal of Universitat Jaume I, vol. 1, 2004, pp. 69-80.
[106] Bhabha H. K., "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", *The MIT Press*, Vol. 28, Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis, 1984, pp. 125-133. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/778467?seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents
[107] Booker and Juraga, 2001, p. 67.

Orientalist stereotypes created by English people, above all those that labelled Asians as not trustworthy and always involved in traffics of immigrants. Moses perceives himself as culturally superior to them (i.e. more British).[108] Indeed, unsure about their mastery of English, he approaches one of them asking "Speakee English?" hoping to be understood; surprised and shocked, he receives an answer in perfect "Queen's language".[109] Furthermore, he criticizes the English for not being able to recognize West Indians from Asians, Jamaicans from Trinidadian people, but he does the same thing when he talks about the "Pakis" he is hosting:

> 'What about that story I read about, how chaps who ride motorbikes got to take off their turbans and wear crash helmets?'
>
> 'That's the Sikhs.'
>
> 'Well, whatever you call them.' I wave it aside. I wasn't going to divide up the Asian races, research or no research. Besides, I know that English people so stupid that the whole lot of Orientals and Blacks is the same kettle of fish as far as they are concerned.[110]

However, as it has been said, this "perfect" reversed situation where the black immigrant is more cultivated and civilized than the white man, and where the former is basically in a position of superiority to other migrants does not last long, since eventually the idyllic word that Moses has created for himself collapses. Here, in an ironic and comic way, Selvon once again was able to criticize and overtly attack bourgeois values and colonialist and imperialistic practices and views which have seen, for centuries, the black man subjected and inferior to the European one.

Another important theme developed here is that of the Black Power movement and the Black Revolution. Moses, looking for "black pussy" and hoping to have an unpaid housekeeper, hosts Brenda, a young black Briton (she was born in England from a family of migrants). However, he will later find out that she is one of the leaders of the Black

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[108] Booker and Juraga, 2001, p. 71.
[109] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 91.
[110] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 67.

Power party, and that she has turned the basement in one of their headquarters. Moses, who prefers to rely on self-help, is cynical about commitment and, unlike his biblical namesake, he does not want to be socially involved.[111] However, at the end, he has to admit that the Party has some legitimate points. He, himself, gets arrested for no reason during a pacific black meeting and, feeling "in the hold of a slave ship",[112] he realizes that Police persecutes black people with no apparent reason (these were indeed the years when the dispositions of the so-called "Sus Laws" were harshly applied). In *Moses Ascending,* the Black Power Party, despite its fundamental role in those years, is not given much space, nor even a really sympathetic description. This might be researched both in Moses's desire to take the distances with the militants as well as in his being part of the "old generation" which recognized that London was changing but which could not really fit in nor understand that new environment; moreover, it can be researched in the fact that Selvon himself was less engaged with Black Power as it was, for example, his compatriot Horace Ové.[113]

Finally, it is interesting to note that there are some similarities between the novel and the script of *Pressure* (1976), which Selvon has co-written with Ové more or less at the same time as he was writing *Moses Ascending*. The film *Pressure* narrates the story of Tony, a young black Briton and the difficulties he has in being fully accepted in the British society. Tony was born in Britain and has been, of course, fully educated there, therefore, he is more integrated into the society in comparison to his older brother Colin, who was born in the Caribbean. The young boy loves fish and chips, he has mainly white friends, he perfectly masters English, he dresses according to the British styles and he has

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[111] Nazareth in Nasta, 1988, p. 236.
[112] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 48.
[113] Kunzru in Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. xvi.

graduated with the highest grades; still he is not able to find a suitable job, and he is slowly alienated from the "white world". For these reasons, at the end, frustrated and pushed by his brother, an active member of the Black Power movement, he joins their cause.

The movie is linked with the book first of all by the presence of the Black Power movement (here, in contrast, described more accurately and sympathetically). Secondly, some characters of the movie bear something in common with the ones of the book. Sir Galahad, for example, is similar to Tony's brother. Both were born in the Caribbean, both are actively committed to the struggle and the black cause, and both try to involve the protagonist. Then, Brenda is similar to Sister Louise, one of the leaders of the Movement and Moses resembles Tony's parents, first generation of migrants, who are mimicking the white manners and pursuing "the white dream". It is enough to think about the fact that Tony's mom also wears a wig to hide her natural hair. Moreover, in both the novel and the movie it is depicted an extremely similar violent Police irruption during one peaceful meeting. Next, in *Moses Ascending* there is a scene that resembles the ending of the movie, where Tony's has a dream of killing a pig with a knife:

'Action will speak louder than words,' I tell him.
'You're going to slaughter a pig?" Bob ask.
'I will slaughter the whole herd,' I say.[114]

However, they are not different only in their description of the Black Movement but also the main characters' attitudes are not similar. While they are both encouraged to join the cause, only Tony will eventually do so. Moses belongs to the old generation, and he probably has imbibed too much of the colonial discourse to really accept the situation and the changes.

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[114] Selvon, 2008 [I ed. 1975], p. 51.

Moses Migrating is the third and last novel of the Moses novels. Written in 1983, it is by some considered the sequel to *Moses Ascending*. The novel starts with Moses at the same low point (cast in his basement) at which he has been left at the end of the previous book. The protagonists tells the reader that he has decided to return to Trinidad and that he wants to write a letter to Powell in order to thank him for his economic support to migrants for a repatriation and for his attempt to keep Britain white (since, he says, he has more black enemies than whites, and since he has tried to integrate despite prejudices). Many characters, apart from Moses, reappear in this novel: Bob, Jeannie, Galahad and Brenda. Bob, still living in the penthouse with Jeannie, is now a fully educated man and has reobtained the "usual" and "normal" role of the white master: it is Moses, now, the one who has to pour drinks (in contrast to what happened in the previous novel). He has absorbed the bourgeois values to such a degree that he now complains about his wife for not being able to meet his expectations.

Bob decides, along with Jeannie, to follow Moses to Trinidad to see the famous and Carnival. In this first section of the novel, Moses narrates his journey in the third class of an ocean liner. He has to share a cabin with other Caribbean men such as: A Dominican and always-laughing man renamed by Moses as "Dominica"; Owen, a Trinidadian who fully masters English language and its accent; and Walter, a white man, who Moses considers "a good fellow" even before getting to know him. During this journey, taking advantage of the fact that Bob is seasick, the protagonist takes a sort of revenge on his white friend by continuing his intercourse with Jeannie.

Arrived in Trinidad, Moses, disoriented, spends the majority of his time in the upside-down hotel, as a tourist. One day, from his window, he recognizes his adoptive mom, Tanty Flora, who brought him up. Their first meeting does not evolve as Moses expected, therefore he returns to her house to apologise to her. There, he meets Doris, a young girl also brought up by Tanty Flora, and he suddenly falls in love with her. Tanty Flora and Doris will then help him in preparing the costumes for his participation to the Carnival: he wants to represent Britannia in an attempt to defend Great Britain and becomes a sort of unofficial "Ambassador of Her Majesty's Service",[115] attempt that will result in a comical and subversive reversal.

The love for Doris seems so strong that, for a moment, he looks convinced to stay in Trinidad and marry her. However, probably familiar with his chameleonic ability, everybody ridicules him: Bob, Jeannie, Lennard -a local journalist-, and even Galahad and Brenda, who have joined them in Trinidad. Sadly, the novel ends with Moses at the airport, returning to Britain with the prize he won at the parade, without Doris and without having said goodbye to Tanty Flora, who preferred to think that his nephew had never been there. His being a man of many parts has won once again over his possibility of growth as well as over the possibility of making a step forward, and Moses seems aware of this:

> [...] and he go off to the office with my passport, leaving me holding the cup in the air like I was still playing charades.[116]

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[115] Selvon, S., *Moses Migrating*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 109.
[116] Selvon, 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 194.

2.3.2. *Identity*

One of the most important themes of this novel is certainly the question of identity. Moses returns "home", if Trinidad can be defined so, but this repatriation is not as joyful and liberating as one may think; it is not a "return to the roots" as it was conveyed, for example, in the movie *Sankofa* (1993). Moses has been living in London for almost thirty years by the time he decides to leave, and it is evident that this long stay has deeply influenced his way of thinking, his identity and his language. At the harbour, he is amazed and shocked to see that there are many immigrants who want to go back home: "I can't conceive of anyone stupid like me to leave Brit'n".[117] From the beginning, it is clear that he does not really want to leave Great Britain; indeed, when he is almost in front of the Officer who will control his passport he starts to panic:

> I grunted. The drinks was wearing off, and I was back in the dumps as I find myself in the line of departing blacks. As I shuffled up the queue I thought of several things to tell the Officer to prevent my departure, like I was chief instigator of a race riot in Notting Hill, or that I was responsible for that bomb what explode in Oxford Street, and not the Irish terrorists. I even thought of fainting: it occur to me I should of learnt some of them Paki tricks like going into a trance so everybody believe you dead. With each inexorable step forward, I counted the inches that was taking me away from Brit'n.[118]

Moreover, it has to be noted that Moses keeps a foothold in London by not selling his house and by leaving it in the hands of Galahad.[119] On the board of the ship, while it is docking, he says he was already sampling bits of the "alien culture"[120] (while in *The Lonely Londoners* the alien place and culture were terms used to describe Great Britain). Then, once arrived in the Caribbean, he feels displaced and disoriented. Streets have changed, he feels lost, irritated and depressed; the bottom-up hotel becomes his sanctuary,[121] his shelter, his piece of England in Trinidad. He has spent so much time

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[117] Selvon, 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 46.
[118] Selvon, 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 49-50.
[119] Nasta, S., "Introduction", in Selvon 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 10.
[120] Selvon, 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 81
[121] Selvon, 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 90.

away from Trinidad and he is so detached from his origins that he is not even sure about Tanty's identity, and the same is for her in regard to Moses. While he speaks with her, in the middle of the Savannah, he feels like he is losing his identity; he feels naked and vulnerable outside The Hilton:

> I began to rue my impulsive dash from the hotel. Not that I wasn't please to see Tanty, but it was as if you our here by the Savannah I lose my identity and became prey to incidents and accidents: you remember that sanctuary thing I tell you about in London when I went for my passport, well, I feel the same way about de-Hilton. I wish Bob and Jeannie was either me, they would of sustain me with their presence, even make light of the encounter and push on something else.[122]

Back to what should be his roots, the false and deceiving "white identity" he has created for himself during his London stay, shows all its fragility: he needs the white presence to validate his "whiteness".

This novel depicts Moses as a perfect "composite man among mimic men",[123] he is a "man of many parts",[124] always wearing a mask, always playing "mas", as Doris reproaches him. Doris represent his only opportunity to return to his roots and reintegrate in the Caribbean environment. He seems to be convinced to marry her and to live forever in Trinidad, however nobody takes him seriously.[125] As Nasta notes, it is interesting that the meetings between Moses and Doris are framed, from the first time to the last one, by preparations for the Carnival and the creation of his costume.[126] Furthermore, the climax of their relationship is exactly during the *Jouvert*[127] morning: he both proposes to her (but his proposal falls unheard) and deflowers her in the middle of Carnival, making it clear that nothing of what is happening should be taken seriously.

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[122] Selvon, 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 88.
[123] Selvon, 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 176.
[124] Selvon, 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 111.
[125] Selvon, 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 192.
[126] Nasta in Selvon 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 17.
[127] The Jouvert morning (name that derives from the French word *jour ouvert* menaning "daybreak") signals the beginning of the two days of carnival. Jouvert Carnival Tradition, http://www.itzcaribbean.com/carnival/jouvert/.

Everyone seems to be aware of his condition of jester and homeless. For example, Bob (whose identity will also be under attack after he discovered he has black blood running though his veins):

> You are just a fluke […] a random bastard who adopted England as his home. No wonder you don't know if you're coming or going[128].

In this novel, Selvon explores though Moses the painful question of the diasporic identity, of those migrants who, deprived of their traditions and heritage, travel to the Mother Country convinced that they will feel finally at home. Unfortunately, they will discover that they do not even belong there; even after innumerable attempts to wash themselves white they are still unwelcome. What is probably more painful is the fact that after that, they cannot neither return home. Indeed, to return to the Caribbean after a long absence means to experience again the shock of doubleness od similarity and difference,[129] as the episode of Moses's research of the Mauby – a beverage already disappeared - in the Trinidadian bars shows.[130] People colonized imbibed the culture and the traditions of their masters; they grew up believing that they were British citizens exactly as the whites, but they soon realized it was not so. Rejected from the centre and misunderstood at home (Moses is the perfect example here), they found themselves in a sort of *limbo*: they did not belong anywhere.

2.3.3. Language

Moses struggles between multiple roles, masks and identities in order to survive, and this is probably because, according to Roldan-Santiago, the immigrant has no other

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[128] Selvon, 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 148.
[129] Hall, S., "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in Rutherford J., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 1990, pp.227.
[130] Selvon, 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 102-104.

choice but to develop multiple personalities.[131] Of course, to any role he assumes it corresponds a different linguistic style, and this reflects the West Indians' adaptability, once argued by Selvon himself.[132] As in the other novels, the author experiments once again with language. Since Moses is going home, Selvon felt the need to adjust his thoughts, his moves and his way of talking.[133] Indeed, the protagonist leaves London speaking like the Britons, and this is visible when he talks with Dominica, whose speech has a completely different tone and rhythm:

> 'Aye man! What you want here? This is my cabin"
> 'Aren't you ashamed of yourself?' I cried.
> 'Eh?' He peep to see if all his things was intact. "You belong to this cabin?"
> 'Alas'[134]

However, when he arrives in the Caribbean, his language gradually adapts to the new circumstances. He has not really forgotten his vernacular language, which reappears when he talks with Trinidadians, especially Tanty Flora and Doris:

> 'I did nothing to upset her, Tanty,' I say. 'She just resents the fact that I went away to England to better myself.'
>
> 'Listen how he talk, Doris!' Tanty exclaim. 'Just like white people! Keep on talking, Moses, I love to hear you!'
>
> 'I could talk like we when I want to. It's just that I am a man of many parts. I suppose even that she vex about.'[135]

Furthermore, he further demonstrates his ability in mastery the Caribbean vernacular by writing a calypso for Doris, one of the most traditional art forms linked to Trinidad and creole language and aesthetic. By doing so, by constantly shifting from vernacular to "Queen's language" - still blemished by some comical mistakes such as *pappyshow* (puppet show), *masoshit* (masochist), *squibbly* (squiggly) etc. –, Moses shows his ability

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[131] Roldan-Santiago, S., "Samuel Selvon's Moses Trilogy: The Concoction of Hybrid Identities", in *The Atlantic Critical Review*, Vol. 3, N. 1, Jan-March 2004. Available at: http://www.srs-pr.com/scholarship/acr-1.pdf
[132] Nazareth in Nasta, 1988, p 89.
[133] Nazareth in Nasta, 1988, p 82.
[134] Selvon 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 51.
[135] Selvon 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 111.

to linguistically survive in both places. Unfortunately, even though this might be true, he cannot really live in none of them. He has many masks to wear - even linguistic ones-, each of one hiding the real Moses, a man without a home; a man who has lost contact with his language, with his culture, tradition and heritage; a man who has ambivalent feelings toward the periphery and the centre; a man who cannot stay, nor go back.

2.3.4. *The impossibility of return and the Carnival reversal*

The protagonist is an orphan; he is abandoned in every sense of the word. He had lost both of his parents and has been brought up by one distant cousin, the only relative he has in Trinidad. This is the reason why his return cannot properly be considered a proper one: he does not have anyone who is waiting for him apart from the old Tanty Flora, who does not even know he is coming back from London. Not only he is fatherless and motherless, but also homeless. It is interesting, in fact, that when he is asked by Dominica where he is from, the first answer he provides is "Britain" and not "Trinidad".[136]

While crossing the ocean, he feels like Columbus, but in truth his was not really a voyage of discovery of the New World. Indeed, nothing has to be discovered, since that island is the place where he comes from. However, this will be once again a journey to an illusion, as it was the one to London.[137] Many things have changed, time has passed and Moses, with an image of the Trinidad of the old days in his mind, does not fit in the new city. He becomes a tourist in his own Country, locked in the safety of his hotel. Rejected in the Mother Country and misunderstood in Trinidad, not fitting anywhere, he becomes the real son of the Empire, the "product" of the contact zone between the old

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[136] Selvon 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 52.
[137] Nasta in Selvon 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 12.

Caribbean periphery of and the newer London immigrant periphery.[138] He cannot freely and fully inhabit any home, he finds himself even more trapped between the two worlds. It is indeed interesting that the book ends in the hall of the Heathrow airport, a "no man's land", with the Officer checking whether he can enter the Country or not. According to Roldan-Santiago, this is Selvon's strategy to satirize about mental colonialism, still very present in many of the first-generation migrants, as well as satirize about the myth of Britain as a welcoming society.[139]

Another interesting theme that should be analysed is the Atlantic crossing, the ship journey, which is then linked to many other themes such as identity, homeland and again the dichotomy of master-servant, high-low, white-black. Moses compares himself to one of the crew of Columbus and he informs the reader that he is increasingly frightened and disoriented because of this trip:

> They say that once at sea a great pace comes to a man, and clarity of thought, as if he get away from the milling masses of humanity and the din and cacophony of life on land, that out here on the bosom of the ocean, under the canopy of the wide skies, he can come to grips with Eternity even. I look out to the horizons but I couldn't see Eternity, nothing but grey water and grey sky. Instead of feeling philosophical and meditative, I feel like one of the crew on Columbus ship as it sail across the Atlantic who shitting his pants wondering if the ship would topple over into oblivion when it reach the place where sly meet sea.[140]

Moreover, he links his experience to the one of the Middle Passage; cast into the cabin 13B, the lowest and the nearest to the engine room, he feels like a slave:

> 'I might die making the Middle Passage.' I say. 'You know what happened to blacks in transit, how they were tossed to the sharks?'[141]

> I descended into the bowels of the ship seeking my cabin, 13 B. […] Cabin 13B was the nearest one to the engine room: they couldn't get one any lower unless they bore a hole in the bottom of the ship.[142]

[138] Roldan-Santiago, 2004.
[139] Roldan-Santiago, 2004.
[140] Selvon 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 58.
[141] Selvon 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 49.
[142] Selvon 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 50-51.

As in the other books, even in this one there is a high degree of comedy and irony that reaches the highest point in the masquerade of Britannia. Great Britain was acquiring a bad reputation in those years, mainly for economic reasons. For this reason, already during the crossing of the Atlantic, he concludes that he will act as an unofficial ambassador of Great Britain:

> Out on the deck, ere we left English Channel, I had to come to the conclusion as Brit'n faded on the horizon that I would be a credit to the country, an ambassador not only of goodwill but good manners. The idea put a different complexion on my circumstances. I now had a purposes, which was to show the outlanders in the Caribbean that Brit'n was not only still on her feet, but also still the onlyest country in the world where good breeding and culture come before ill-gotten gains or calls of the flesh.[143]

However, unfortunately, Bob and Jeannie, representatives of the British culture, prove the exact opposite[144] making his efforts vain. Furthermore, while talking with Lennard, a local journalist from the *Trinidad Guardian* who wants to interview the protagonist about his repatriation, Moses catches the opportunity to defend Great Britain decides to transform his journey into a heroic mission:

> It struck to me then that I was being a fool and taking the wrong attitude. Was this not a golden opportunity for me to defend the old country from all the calumniations and rumours of doom and disaster? Had I not honorarily delegated myself to the mission of correcting all the false reports and hearsays, that the children of Brit'n did not play spoon-and-potato races no more because potatoes was expensive?[145]

It is when he is looking at one old coin belonging to Jeannie's collection that he realizes how he will defend Great Britain: he decides to impersonate Britannia at the Carnival parade. In order to convey his message about the vitality and prosperity of his beloved Mother Country, he wants not only to play the part of Britannia to suggest its invincible solidity, but he also asks Jeannie and Bob to play the part of his servants. While Moses wants simply to show and demonstrate English racial tolerance, the whole

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[143] Selvon 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 55-56.
[144] Poynting, J., "Samuel Selvon, *Moses Migrating*" in Nasta S. (ed. by), *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988, p 260.
[145] Selvon, 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 92.

masquerade is perceived by Trinidadians as a brilliant and subtle way to subvert the colonial system and Great Britain's superiority over the Caribbean. This is a performance that "not only destabilized the imperial stereotype, but literally sets it spinning".[146] The carnival exhibition prepared by Moses – Britannia – is the representation of the complete hybrid composite man he is, consisting of British ideas, Trinidadian colonial sentiment and racial/ethnic diversity; this masquerade represents his own personal voice and representation.[147] Finally, as it is noted by Nasta,[148] Carnival and the masquerade offer the author the possibility to continue his critic toward the authority of colonial and canonical discourse, as well as the opportunity to focus on the diasporic identity of the migrants, especially those belonging to the first generation, who find themselves to be a completely hybrid forms not belonging to anywhere.

3. Critical Remarks

These three books about Moses, the first-generation immigrant from the West Indies, offer an opportunity to better understand and analyse the concepts of language and identity related to colonial subjects making contact with the Mother Country. Even though they cannot be identified properly as a "trilogy", these three novels, when read one after the other, offer a glimpse on the "cycle" that affected Caribbean migrants.

In the first book, *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses, who is already a veteran in London, is at the bottom of the society, as probably all the other immigrants. He is still an outsider and is part of the "second rate citizen" group. Having already experienced the hostility to them reserved by the English people, he takes care of new immigrants, acting

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[146] Nasta in Selvon, 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p. 14.
[147] Roldan-Santiago, 2004, p. 130.
[148] Nasta in Selvon, 2009 [I. ed. 1983], p.

almost as a "Welfare Officer". One of his "duties" is also that to scatter them around London, in order to avoid high concentration of blacks in the same area, thing that would improve negative feelings towards them. Here immigrants are not part of a real community, there is still not a common identity; only at the end of the book it is clear that "the boys" feel the need to meet every Sunday in order to feel less lonely, less isolated and less alienated, and this could be seen as a first small and extremely embryonic seed of community formation.

The immigrant here is still very much West Indian, but with a strong colonial mindset and a slight hope for a better future that entails a full integration into the British society. This whole idea is mainly conveyed through the usage of language and the particular structure of the novel. Regarding language, it has been noted the strong presence of a creolized voice for both the narrative and the dialogues – Selvon was the pioneer among the authors based in England in doing so. Selvon knew the importance of language, which is the tool that empowers people, that gives them the opportunity to fully express their ideas, opinion and their point of view. The author made this idea clear in an interview with Nazareth, while talking about the American and the Canadian languages as variations of English:

> This interests me a great deal because I feel that a nation that can always keep using words and not controlled by the words, as I think the English are in their literature, has some hope of widening communication and understanding of other people.[149]

Regarding the structure of the novel, it has been noted that it does not follow the standard structure of a canonical novel; it is, rather, a collection of episodes which narrates the misadventures of a series of immigrants. Therefore, there is not a real protagonist: Moses is somehow at the centre because he is the one that helps the others,

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[149] Nazareth in Nasta, 1988, p 86.

and because his house becomes the meeting place. In addition to that, this peculiar structure gives even more this idea of the loneliness immigrant felt. Furthermore, the Caribbean oral tradition melts together with the English written one: the episodes are narrated as "ballads" and bear many things in common with the musicality and content of Calypso songs.

Calypso not only influenced the language and the structure, but also the content of some of those "ballads". Indeed, Calypso lyrics were often addressed to women, or at least supported machismo and misogynistic attitudes. This is clearly reflected in the novel, especially in the relationship between black men and white girls. Women are portrayed as "things", "cats", "pieces of flesh", etc. and approaches to them are described as "conquests". Behind this, it is possible to see immigrants desire to reaffirm their masculinity, since black men have been feminised by the colonial discourse. It is a sort of revenge, a validation of their manhood.

The issues of colour and discrimination are also very present: Harris dissimulates his real origins, he is indeed ashamed about his skin and about the fact of being West Indian; Galahad has a painful reflection about his colour, which is causing them their sufferance; finally, because of their race, they are downgraded and deskilled and cannot aim at satisfactory or well-paid jobs, which are instead reserved for whites. Even though there is not the presence and the support of a real community, there are still some attempts of "colonization in reverse". They should be researched in the renaming of streets and monuments, in the refusal of certain jobs, in Tanty's establishment of a trust movement and in Agnes' reaction (who, unfairly beaten, decides to leave her husband).

It is possible to conclude that, though this novel, Selvon wanted first to narrate about the conditions of life of the first generation of migrants and their damaging effects

on immigrants. Secondly, he wanted to explore their colonial mindset which brought them to trust in the Mother Country and to rely only on self-help, at least during the first years. Thirdly, he probably wanted to show the first seeds of "resistance" and of "colonization in reverse". Next, through laughter (first tool of defence for Caribbean people), language and the influence of Calypso, he has made his characters reshaping London's geography while also subverting the British imperialistic practices and the British literary canon, which had been inculcated to all the colonial subjects. Finally, as he declared in an interview with Nazareth, with this book, and with the following ones, he definitively tried to put Trinidad on the map:

> I started out with the ambition to project my part of the world onto the map because I found when I went to live in England that people never knew where Trinidad was. They started calling me a Jamaican because English people feel that all black immigrants come from one island – Jamaica. [150]

In *Moses Ascending*, set in the London of the 1960s-1970s - after the Notting Hill riots - many themes are developed. First of all, attention is given to the relationship between the West Indian immigrant and the black community (represented here by the Black Panther movement), and the relationship between the first one and the white man. Secondly, importance is given to the fact that immigrants, at that point, started to consider Britain as their new home and to change their mind about a possible return. Finally, the last theme developed, and probably the most important one, concerns once again language.

In this novel, Moses, who represents the outdated voice of the old generation still very much with a colonial mind, has very high aspirations. He is indeed trying to ascend in three directions: he becomes a landlord, buying a house due to demolition in three years; he settles himself in the "penthouse", the mansion's attic; and, finally, he becomes

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[150] Nazareth in Nasta, 1988, p 80.

a writer. He is aware that London is changing, however, he does not want to be an active part of that change. He still believes immigrants can reach equal levels as the whites, he wants to show the British people that even blacks can be respectable landlords and good writers, but, in order to achieve his purposes, he prefers to rely only on himself. He does not trust the community as an active and effective agent of change.

In order to socially ascend, he starts mimicking all the white manners and language, and conscious that this will require him to deny his past and his identity, he tries to wash himself white. For example, he inverts the Crusoe-Friday model, and spends much time in educating his white - but illiterate and "savage" - servant; he starts writing his Memoirs following the models that the British literary canon imposes; and finally, he tries his best to perfectly master the Queen's language. Despite all his efforts, his endeavour miserably fails: at the end of the novel he is back in the basement, and Bob, the white servant, takes control over their relationship restoring the imperialistic practice according to which the black is subordinate to the white. Moreover, his English, which he has never fully mastered, is harshly criticized by Brenda, a black Briton. He basically is not in a position of power and control in regard to no one and anyone.

Through the comic attempt of Moses to elevate himself at the same level as white English people, Selvon heavily criticizes the bourgeois values. By including expressions coming from street language, Caribbean vernacular, Standard and archaic English he shows that any variation of English, even those considered low forms of expression, are worthy of being used in literature. In other words, he provides his response to the assumption that European culture is superior to any other culture.

Already in *Moses Ascending* it is possible to identify a growing fragmentation of the old immigrant personality. However, its highest level is reached in *Moses Migrating.*

The protagonist, here, decides to return to Trinidad but, having assimilated the English values, soon regrets his decision and feels, already before arriving, that he is approaching an alien culture. In his situation, it will in truth be so: he is so detached from his roots that he feels completely disoriented and vulnerable; he is not able to understand the new dynamics and geographies of the city; furthermore, his white mannerism makes him completely misunderstood by others.

During his long stay in London he has built for himself a new – but ineffective - white identity, and the only place where he feels safe from any "contamination" with the Caribbean world is the hotel, which becomes his sanctuary. Yet, Doris, a young Trinidadian girl, is able to make re-emerge his Caribbean identity and language to such a degree that he is almost convinced to marry her and move definitely to Trinidad. However, at the end he returns to Great Britain, and it is therefore clear that he is the perfect emblem of the son of the Empire: a hybrid and ambivalent man, a man of many parts who does not belong to anywhere. He has indeed created many masks which enable him to survive both in the Caribbean and in London. Nonetheless, despite his efforts, he is not able to integrate anywhere: he is rejected in London and misunderstood in Trinidad. In regard to this, it is particularly interesting that the novel ends in the hall of the airport, a no man's land, with Moses waiting to be reaccepted in Great Britain.

Once again, through the perfect mastery of irony and comic, Selvon shows and criticizes the effect that imperialistic practices left on immigrants. Moreover, he moves the attention to the problematic existence of those migrants that educated (but deceived) to become "white", now find themselves trapped in two worlds as completely hybrid forms with ambivalent feelings as well as with multiple personalities and no real and genuine identity.

Selvon was probably not a black revolutionary man (and this might also be visible in the less accurate and sympathetic description of the Black Power movement), however, it cannot be said that he was completely detached from the struggle that blacks were facing, nor that he did not give his support in this direction. It has been shown that, sometimes in a subtle way while other times more overtly, he tried to subvert the deeply-rooted idea of the English superiority regarding culture and language. He was able to appropriate the literary forms provided by the English canon and reshape and combine them with forms typically belonging to the Caribbean tradition. His intents in doing so were multiple. First of all, he wanted to criticize the colonial system and show its effects on Caribbean people. Secondly, being aware of the importance of language as a mean to express ideas, opinions and also as a useful tool to find and then strengthen one's identity, he wanted to put the Creole language at the same level as Standard English. Moreover, he put the light on black presence and on the fact that despite all white attempts to limit them, black people were gaining voice and importance: they were becoming conscious and aware of the fact that their identities and roots were as worthy as the other ones; they were, moreover, colonizing Britain in reverse. Finally, he not only gave voice to the anonymous and voiceless immigrants, but he also eventually put Trinidad on the map. In other words, he showed to the Mother Country that they were not simply "West Indians" or "Jamaican", but that first they were humans, and secondly people with their own personal identity and origins, which could be rooted back in Trinidad, Barbuda, Antigua etc. His work and his attitude definitely influenced and prepared the path for other artists. One, for example, could be Linton Kwesi Johnson, who will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

LINTON KWESI JOHNSON

England as a New Home: Resistance.

1. Biography[1]

Linton Kwesi Johnson (LKJ) was born in Chapelton, a small town in the rural parish of Clarendon (Jamaica) on 24th August 1952. At the age of 11, in 1963, he moved to London following his mother, who had already emigrated there two years before. His arrival in the overtly racist and hostile metropolis of the 1960s was for him a traumatic experience. He attended the Tulse Hill Comprehensive School, where the British educational system deeply disappointed him: the programs taught there during his first year were the same he had already studied in Jamaica at the age of 9. Later, studied Sociology at Goldsmiths' College, University of London. During the university years, he started writing politically charged poetry influenced by the turbulence of the 1960s and the 1970s in Great Britain. Indeed, racism and restrictive economic policies made living conditions extremely difficult for minorities. In 1970, he joined the Black Panther

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[1] For this section, the following resources were consulted and used:
British Council – Literature, "Linton Kwesi Johnson", https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/linton-kwesi-johnson.
França Junior J. L., "The Arts of Resistance in the Poetry od Linton Kwesi Johnson", Revista Africa y Africanidades, Vol. 3, 2010, pp. 1-30. Available at: http://www.ufsj.edu.br/portal2-repositorio/File/vertentes/v.%2019%20n.%201/Franca_Junior.pdf
Linton Kwesi Johnson Records, http://www.lintonkwesijohnson.com/.
Parolai S., "LKJ. Vita e battaglie del poeta del reggae", Genova: Chinaski Edizioni, 2009.
The Poetry Archive, "Linton Kwesi Johnson", http://www.poetryarchive.org/poet/linton-kwesi-johnson.

movement. There he helped to organise a poetry workshop and developed his work with *Rasta Love*, a group of poets and percussionists.

In 1974 he joined the Brixton-based Race Today Collective[2], and the same year he published his first book of poems *Voices of the Living and the Dead* by the Race Today imprint. His second book, *Dread, Beat An' Blood,* which included poems written in Jamaican, was published in 1975 by Bogle-L'Overture. Those poems were then released by Virgin as a record in 1978. This same year also saw the released of the film *Dread Beat An' Blood*, a documentary on Johnson' work. The previous year, in 1977, he was awarded a C Day Lewis Fellowship, and became the writer-in-residence for the London Borough of Lambeth for that year. Then, he started working as the Library Resources and Education Officer at the Keskidee Centre, which became the first home of Black theatre and art. In 1980 Race Today published his third book, *Inglan Is A Bitch.* During that extremely prolific period, he also released four more albums on the Island label: *Forced of Victory* (1979), *Bass Culture* (1980), *LKJ in Dub* (1981) and *Making History* (1984).

It was in these years that he began to be widely regarded as the father of "dub poetry", a term he coined to describe the way a number of reggae DJs blended music and verses. He considers this term misleading when applied to his own work for the simple reason that he gives more importance to poetry itself composed before the music, and not for the music. However, it has to be noted that his dub poetry, with its culturally specific Jamaican patois (or simply Jamaican, as he prefers to call it) and reggae backbeat, was a precursor to the spoken word and rap music movements. Much of Johnson's poetry was political from the very beginning, dealing primarily with the experiences of being and

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[2] The Race Today Collective was an institute whose aim was an analysis of race relations in Britain. It was founded in 1974 from a break with the Institute of Race Relations. It included journalists, poets and activist who then published the radical journal *Race Today.* George Padmore Insitute, "Race Today", http://www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org/the-pioneering-years/new-beacon-books-early-history/towards-radical-black-publishing-space/race.

Afro-Caribbean migrant in Britain. Furthermore, he wrote also about issues such as British foreign policy and the shocking murder of the anti-racist white marcher as well as Anti-Nazi League member Blair Peach, killed in Southall 1979 by the Special Patrol Group[3]. However, his most striking and celebrated work was produced in the 1980s, when the Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government arose his spirit of anger and protest. For example, poems such *Sonny's Lettah* (1980) and *Di Great Insohreckshan* (1984) record accounts of police brutality upon black men as well as attitudes of resistance and antagonism in their description of rioting and imprisonment, greatly conveyed by the creolized voice used.

In 1981 he founded his own record label, LKJ, with two singles by the Jamaican poet Michael Smith, *Mi Cyaan Believe It* and *Roots*. Moreover, he wrote a 10-part radio series on Jamaican popular music, *From Mento to Lovers Rock*, which was broadcast on BBC Radio 1 in 1982 and was then repeated in 1983. From 1985-88 he worked as a reporter on Channel 4′s *The Bandung File*. Furthermore, during those hears he also toured regularly with the Dennis Bovell Dub Band and produced albums by the writer Jean Binta Breeze and by jazz trumpeter Shake Keane. During the same period, he recorded at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London the album *LKJ Live in Concert with the Dub Band* (1985) and was nominated for a Grammy Award soon after. In 1991 *Tings An' Times: Selected Poems* was co-published by Bloodaxe Books and LKJ Music Publishers the same year as both a book and musical recording. In 1992 the poet and musician collaborated with Dennis Bovell and they produced *LKJ in Dub: Volume Two.* Four years later, a compilation of various artists including Linton Kwesi Johnson called *LKJ Presents* (1996) was released; this was followed in the same year by *LKJ A Cappella Live,* a

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[3] Johnson, 2014, p. 110.

collection of 14 poems including some previously unreleased works. Another album was released in 1998, *More Time,* to celebrate his 20th anniversary in the recording business; the same year Island released also a two disk anthology of his dub poems called *Independent Intavenshan.*

The 2002 was an extremely important year for Linton Kwesi Johnson. Indeed, a selection of his poetry was published under the title *Mi Revalueshanary Fren* as a Penguin Classic edition with an introduction by Fred D'Aguiar. This made him become the second living poet and the first black poet who published his work in Penguin's Modern Classics series. Moreover, the BBC made a TV programme about his poetry, and he released the CD *LKJ in Dub Volume Three.* Two years later, to celebrate his 25th anniversary as a reggae recording artist, released a CD entitled *LKJ Live in Paris with the Dennis Bovell Dub Band,* which, for the first time, was then released as a DVD two years later.

Linton Kwesi Johnson was not only an active poet and performer, but was also made Associate Fellow at Warwick University in 1985 and Honorary Fellow at Wolverhampton Polytechnic in 1987. Furthermore, in 1990, he received an award at the XIII Premio Internazionale Ultimo Novecento from the city of Pisa for his precious contribution to poetry and popular music. This was not the only reward he received in Italy, since in 1998 he was awarded the Premio Piero Ciampi città di Livorno Concorso Musicale Nazionale. In 2003, was bestowed with a further Honorary Fellowship from the Goldsmith College and the next year he became Honorary Visiting Professor of Middlesex University in London. Finally, in 2005, he was awarded a Musgrave medal by the Institute of Jamaica, for eminence in the field of poetry. He currently lives in Brixton, South London.

2. Dub Poetry: An Overview

The dub poetry is a genre popularized in the 1970s by artists as Mutabaruka[4], Jean 'Binta' Breeze[5], Oku Onuora[6], Mikey Smith[7] and by the textual and musical outputs of Linton Kwesi Johnson. This kind of poetry is associated with Jamaican writers and finds its antecedents in dialectal poems of Louise Bennett and Claude McKay.[8] It is, therefore, a literary form born in Jamaica that finds its roots in the oral forms of expression derived from African traditions and culture; it was born as a form of expression of black consciousness and political denunciation of suppression, racism and alienation. It is mainly a performative form of poetry, usually accompanied by music, but which also embeds music in its words and verses through alliterations, assonances and other linguistic and literary techniques. As will be shown, every aspect of this kind of poetry has its own importance, from form to language, from words to music.

The term "dub poetry" was coined by Linton Kwesi Johnson in 1976 in an article published in *Race and Class*, who wrote the following about dub-lyricists:

> The "dub-lyricist" is the DJ turned poet. He intones his lyrics rather than sings them. Dub lyricism is a new form of (oral) music-poetry, wherein the lyricist overdubs rhythmic phrases on the rhythm background of a popular song. Dub-lyricists include poets like Big Youth, I Roy, U Roy, Dillinger, Shorty the President, Prince Jazzbo and others.[9]

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[4] Jamaican Rastafari dub poet born in Kingston, 1952. Between the 1960s and the 1970s he was drawn into the Black Awareness movement in Jamaica. He is the first well publicized of the wave of poets of the 1970s and his poems have much to do with black awareness, religion, politics, discrimination and race. He has also interpreted "Shango" in *Sankofa* (1993) directed by Haile Gerima. Mutabaruka Biography, http://www.mutabaruka.com/.

[5] Jamaican poet bon in 1956. She left Jamaica during her thirties together with Linton Kwesi Johnson and found in the black community in Britain an interested audience for her poems characterized by reggae rhythms and political content. She is recognized as the first woman performer in this usually male-dominated field. The Poetry Archive, "Jean 'Binta' Breeze", http://www.poetryarchive.org/poet/jean-binta-breeze.

[6] Jamaican best known dub poet born in Kingston in 1952. He is considered the "father of Jamaican dub poetry". All Music.com, Artist Biography – Oku Onuora, http://www.allmusic.com/artist/oku-onuora-mn0000464123/biography.

[7] Jamaican poet born in 1954. His fervent poetry against the "Jamaican political machine" was brought to England by Linton Kwesi Johnson and Dennis Bovell with "Mi Cyaan Believe It" and "Roots". He was murdered in 1982 in Kingston. All Music.com, Artist Biography – Michael Smith, http://www.allmusic.com/artist/michael-smith-mn0001618215.

[8] Dabydeen D., Jones C., Gilmore J., *The Oxford Companion to Black British History,* Oxford: Oxford Univerity Press, 2007.

[9] Linton Kwesi Johnson in Morris M., "A Note on 'Dub Poetry'", *Wasafiri*, Vol. 26, Autumn 1997, pp. 66-67.

Johnson further explained the term during an interview reported by Parolai, underlying the importance that the oral and musical aspect have in this form, adding that when he coined it, he was not thinking about his work as a poet, but rather he was defying the outputs of deejays who used to "toast" or improvise rhymes over dub tracks (which were usually recorded in the side B of discs:

> Well, the term 'Dub-poetry' is not a very accurate one, but basically what it means is oral poetry which uses the spoken language of people in Jamaica and other parts of the Caribbean too. It's spoken poetry. It uses everyday language of ordinary people. It's very rhythmic. It lends itself easily to music. And it's working within the dub-reggae tradition. So, it's oral poetry combined with music, according to Oku Onuora who developed the idea of dub-poetry. I coined the term dub poetry, but when I coined the term dub poetry I wasn't talking about what I do, I was talking about the reggae DJs like Big youth, U Roy and I Roy… Oku Onuora developed a broad definition of dub poetry… which is 'any poetry which is oral and has some kind of musical base is 'dub poetry'. People come to understand dub-poetry as meaning oral poetry written by Caribbean poets in reggae tradition."[10]

To better understand the exact meaning of "dub poetry", it is also necessary to explain that the term "dub" derives from the recording technology, and it refers to the activity of adding and/or removing sound from a song.[11] In specific, dub music is characterized by a "two beat rhythm given principally by bass and drums without a dominating tune but originally derived from reggae"[12] mixed together with sounds effects (echoes, loops, reverberation etc.).[13] However, Oku Onuora later expanded dub poetry's definition by including any type of black musical backing and, therefore, not only reggae beats.[14] What distinguishes dub poetry from other forms of poetry is the close relation it has with music

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[10] Linton Kwesi Johnson in Parolai S., *LKJ. Vita e battaglie del poeta del reggae*, Genova: Chinaski Edizioni, 2009, p. 87.

[11] Morris, 1997.

[12] Allsopp R., *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

[13] França Junior J. L., "The Arts of Resistance in the Poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson", *Revista Africa y Africanidades*, Vol. 3, 2010, pp. 1-30. Available at: http://www.ufsj.edu.br/portal2-repositorio/File/vertentes/v.%2019%20n.%201/Franca_Junior.pdf.

[14] Morris, 1997.
Doumerc E., "Jamaica's First Dub Poets: Early Jamaican Deejaying as a Form of Oral Poetry", *Kunapipi*, 26(1), 2004, p. 129. Available at: http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol26/iss1/13.

and musicality, and the fact that music is not simply added to the poem, but it is already present in it. Indeed, Oku Onuora said that this literary form

> is not merely putting a piece of poem pon a reggae rhythm – hence when the poem is read without any reggae rhythm (so to speak) backing, one can distinctly hear the reggae rhythm coming out of the poem. [15]

Language used, which is not Standard English, is extremely important. Some critics call it "patois" or "patwa", some others "creole"; however, Linton Kwesi Johnson, one of the first artists who was able to transplant these existing Jamaican traditions into the Mother Country creating a new artistic and expressive form,[16] prefers to call it "Jamaican", since it identifies better the language used, the importance it has as language by itself and the fact of not being a form of "broken English", not even of "broken French" (as the terms patwa/patois would evoke). Indeed, during an interview with Ludes he declared that:

> The term 'Patois' is unhelpful to describe the languages of the Caribbean. I prefer to use the term which the Barbadian poet Brathwaite uses which is the term Nation Language. Patois really is a term which really refers to broken French. It is sometimes used to describe what is spoken on the English Caribbean islands, but I think it's an unhelpful term, because it is really basically referring to the French islands. But to give you a simple answer to your question, the language I'm writing is mostly Jamaican.**[17]**

Basically, he agrees with Brathwaite, who coined the term "Nation Language" in contrast with "dialect" because of the negative connotations related to the latter.[18]

Johnson, as other Caribbean artists, is aware of the importance of language related to Caribbean identity and the importance it has in any literary form, since the colonizer's language was not suitable to express the black experience. The Caribbean creoles have always been considered "broken forms of English" by those who had the cultural power,

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[15] Oku Onuora in Morris, 1997.
[16] Sabelli S., "'Dubbing di Diaspora': Gender and Reggae Music Inna Babylon", *Social Identities*, Vol. 17, No. 1, January 2011, pp. 137-152.
[17] Ludes K., "Classical Reggae interviews: Linton Kwesi Johnson", 1999, http://www.classical-reggae-interviews.org/.
[18] Hitchcock P., "It Dread Inna Inglan: Linton Kwesi Johnson, Dread, and Dub Identity", *Postmodern Culture*, Vol.4, N. 1, Sep 1993.

and people speaking them have always been considered inferior and ignorant. For this reason, it is clear that the reaffirmation of one's identity should pass also through language. Indeed, as reported by Parolai, Johnson, during an interview declared that

> Language is important because through it one can discuss about the reality. Language defines who we are. The Jamaican language became a tool to affirm our individual cultural identity in contrast to a hostile one. We were proud to be Jamaican or Caribbean. […] This aspect of language became important as a form of racial identification only due to the racist and hostile world we were living in. Maybe it would not have been so if English was taught at school as a second language: it was the official language of Jamaica but it wasn't our mother tongue. The Creole became the language of the resistance, the rebellion. It is the language of the reggae and the whole Jamaican music, of the rude boys, the Rastafarians. [19]

Moreover, he also added that those colonized did not have a fixed identity but rather an unstable one, and that they were also somehow "schizophrenic" for what concerns language, in the sense that they mastered two different languages: Standard English and, for example, Jamaican, or other Caribbean varieties. Johnson himself writes both in English (because he feels he is British), and in Jamaican, which is his mother tongue and which is the language of the people he talks about in his poems. In his opinion, using his mother tongue becomes extremely important to keep the authenticity of the voice that accounts a personal experience (and this could not be done through the language of someone else).[20] Therefore, it is clear that language is extremely important for what concerns identity, self-awareness, consciousness, resistance and protest. Furthermore, in dub poetry too, it becomes one of the means to overcome linguistic and mental colonization imposed in the colonies. Language, and consequently the voice of the poet (who becomes here a performer and not simply a reader of his/her poems) are strong means of appropriation of power and transmission of it to the audience.

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[19] Johnson in Parolai, 2009, p 39. My translation.
[20] Johnson in Parolai, 2009, p 88-89.

Dub poetry mainly focuses on racism, hostility, social inequalities and discrimination reserved to black British people; it is, quoting Morris "politically focused, attacking oppression and injustice".[21] This political side of dub poetry was particularly present in Linton Kwesi Johnson who, during an interview with Prasad declared that through this literary form his devotion to both poetry and politics came together and added that writing is, at least for him, a political act; all his writing is committed.[22] Moreover, this literary form, in Britain, offered an important and vital connection between the diasporic youth living in the UK and those back in the home country; furthermore, it became a perfect tool to contribute to and document the history and the oral tradition of Jamaica, as well as a tool that gave voice to the feelings of anger of the second generation youth caused by racism, xenophobia and alienation.[23] Black immigrants were colonizing Great Britain in reverse, they were "making history"; artists were recording this through different forms of art, they were "writing history" and giving voice to voiceless and alienated people.

To conclude, dub poetry, bringing together African oral tradition, Caribbean language and British content (in the sense that it recounts the situation of West Indians in Britain) is the perfect mix between past and present, experimentation and tradition, as reported by Martino[24]; it is the perfect example of the product of the encounter between the colonized and the colonizer, as well as the emergence of a new form of constructing one's identity. Indeed, as Bhabha said

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[21] Morris, 1997.
[22] Prasard Y., "Mekin Sense Outta Nansense", *Socialist Review,* Issue 263, May 2002. Available at: http://socialistreview.org.uk/263/mekin-sense-outta-nansense.
[23] Dawson A., *Mongrel Nation. Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain*, University of Michigan Press, 2007, p. 74.
[24] Martino P., "Transnational Metamorphoses of African Orality: L. K. Johnon's Dub Poetry", *Journal des africanistes*, 80- 1/2, 2010, pp. 193-214; https://africanistes.revues.org/2492.

> "In-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.[25]

Moreover, through new rhythms, language and content, dub poets attempt to support and enhance the rise of the black awareness, the struggle, the resistance, the decolonization of the immigrant's mind and the subversion of the British cultural and linguistic supremacy. Finally, by giving voice to the alienated and marginalised and by denouncing racism and discrimination, dub poetry becomes a political tool closely related to the present. As analysed in the following sections, those are elements clearly identifiable in many poems of Linton Kwesi Johnson.

3. LKJ's Poems: Content Analysis

3.1. Yout Rebels

This composition is collected among the poems of the 1970s in the selected ones contained in *Mi Revalueshanary Fren.*[26] What is interesting about it is the fact that it is a sort of "manifesto" of a new generation of blacks, to which the author belonged:

> a bran new breed of blacks
> have now emerged,
> leadin on the rough scene,
> breakin away
> takin the day,
> sayin to capital nevah
> movin fahwod evah.[27]

The message is clear: second generation migrants (black Britons or West Indian who migrated to Great Britain at a very young age) had different ideals from their parents. Indeed, as the same author declares in an interview with Parolai:

> My parent's generation didn't accept the situation in which they were living in Great Britain, but they didn't have any other choice but to try to draw the best from it. Before

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[25] Bhabha in França Junior, 2010 p. 6.

[26] Johnson, L. K., *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*, Washington: Copper Canion Press, 2014 [I EU/USA ed. 2006].

[27] Johnson, 2014, p 20. *A brand new breed of blacks / has now emerged, / leading on the rough scene / breaking away / taking the day / saying to the Capital never / moving away ever.* My translation.

arriving they had the illusion of Britain as the Mother Country but they had to adapt […]. They had children, responsibilities: they had to consider those things. But still they fought against racism creating an organization called West Indians Standing Conference which manifested against racial discrimination. On an individual side, however, they were limited by those responsibilities. My generation was made of youths who were going to school there and didn't feel inferior to whites, they didn't accept to be treated differently from others. We had more opportunities to oppose.[28]

In this poem, the spirit of resistance that belonged to this new generation brought up in the metropolis emerges. They knew their rights, they knew they did not have anything different from their white fellows, therefore, they were not anymore willing to suffer from discrimination and alienation. They belonged there and they would not move; that was their home, and white British had to accept this.

What is interesting, though, is the fact that they were "new in age / but not in rage",[29] as if they were also fighting against the injustices their parents had to endure. Moreover, in the last stanza, it is clear that they will not only stay there and passively adapt to the situation, but also that they were keen to change things and subvert the system. In other words, they were there and they would fight for their freedom, also by "colonizing Britain in reverse":

> young blood
> yout rebels:
> new shapes
> shapin
> new patterns
> creatin new links
> linkin
> blood risin surely
> carvin a new path,
> moving fahwod to freedom.[30]

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[28] Johnson in Parolai, 2009, p. 40.
[29] Johnson, 2014, p. 20.
[30] Johnson, 2014, p. 20. *Young blood / young rebels: / new shapes / shaping / new patterns / creating new links / linking / blood rising surely / carving a new path, / moving forward to freedom.* My translation.

3.2. Sonny's Lettah

Sonny's Lettah (Sonny's Letter) belongs to Johnson's poems of the 1970s.[31] It is a particular dub poem, since it is written following some of the characteristics typical of the letter - the place from where it is written (Brixton prison), the salutation "Dear Mama" and the signature at the end-, and lacks some of the typical parts of a dub lyrics – the refrain, for example. This poem draws attention to the conflicts between the members of the black British communities and the police forces which could stop, search and arrest anyone "suspected" to be about to commit an illegal act. Those were indeed the years when the so-called Sus Laws were revived and fiercely applied especially to blacks. It has to be noted that the choice of Brixton as the set of the events is not casual. Indeed, this district of London is particularly known to have been inhabited by a high number of West Indian families, and then it became the place of well-known riots in the early 1980s.[32] Brixton prison, settled in the well know prominently black district, becomes indeed the symbol of black oppression.

In this poem, Sonny, a second-generation immigrant, writes to his mother telling her that his little brother has been arrested and that he himself has been charged with murder after an unwarranted and unjustified attack by the police. Indeed, Sonny reports that he and his brother were waiting for the bus when three policemen carrying batons approached them and, even though they were not doing anything, declared they would arrest Jim, Sonny's little brother. Of course, this provoked a reaction on both parts: while Jimmy is stopped on sus and he is beaten for "resisting", the older brother Sonny tries to help him and accidentally kills one of the officers.

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[31] Johnson, 2014.
[32] Phillips M., Phillips T., *Windrush*, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999.

The rhythm, the intonation, the differentiation of the stanzas and the music perfectly follow and support the emphasis and the climax created by the conflict. Indeed, the music stops right before Sonny starts to recount the fight, and also stops when he tells his mother that he could not stand up there without doing nothing and that eventually one of the policemen has died. Here, the lack of music suggests and provokes a sense of desolation and discouragement because of the situation, as well as indignation at those biased and racist treatments of the police forces. Moreover, in the central part of the poem, when Sonny is telling his mother about the fight, the musical beat becomes faster and biting. The combination between rhythm and content in this part, creates a sort of violent dance with a deeply tragic end. As noted by Martino, in this passage, the rhythm and timbre of Johnson's voice change from the one used at the beginning and at the end of the poem. While in these latter parts it is characterized by a sort of liquidity and softness of tone, in the two central stanzas the accent becomes more emphatic and sharp,[33] merging with the underlying beat and so recreating a vivid image of the fight.

Through this few lines, which do not recount a real event but are based on the author's own experience of being arrested after trying to take down identification information of some police officers he saw chocking a man to death,[34] Johnson was able to recount and denounce the racial bias, brutality and abuses of the police forces towards blacks during the 1970s. What is interesting is the fact that this is not a poem openly and clearly denouncing racism, which was intrinsic in police forces (the term "sus", for example, appears only one time and at the end); it is rather done in a subtler way, through an affectionate and semi-formal letter from a son to his mother to simply apologize with

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[33] Martino, 2010.
[34] Dawson A., "Linton Kwesi Johnson's Dub Poetry and the Political Aesthetics of Carnival in Britain", Small Axe, Vol 10, N.3 , 2006, pp. 59-69.

her of not being able of taking care of her little son; it is an affectionate letter that tells a brutal and sad story where violence leads to other violence, and where fighting back does not lead to freedom but rather to prison.

3.3. Inglan is a Bitch

This poem too, as the previous one, belongs to the compositions of the seventies.[35] It has a completely different tone from *Sonny's Lettah:* this is indeed a poem full of anger towards what West Indian immigrants considered their Mother Country but, in truth, it reveals to be nothing but a "bitch". The voice behind this poem is a collective one: even though it is always the same person who recounts his experiences, his situation could be anyone's; he experiences what all his other fellows have come through when they arrived in Great Britain.

The speaker is a black immigrant, probably belonging to the first generation, who has done different and physically demanding jobs (worked in the underground, in factories and also washed dishes in an hotel, etc.) and he is still not recognized for what he does; on the contrary, he is constantly discriminated, even exploited, then dismissed and not hired even though there are vacant places:

> w'en mi jus' come to Landan toun
> mi use to work pan di andahgroud
> but workin' pan di andahgroun
> y'u don't get fi know your way aroun'
>
> […]
>
> well mi dhu day wok an' mi duh nite wok
> mi duh clean wok an' mi duh dutty wok
> dem seh dat black man is very lazy
> but it y'u si mi wok y'u woulda sey mi crazy
>
> […]
>
> dem have a lickle facktri up inna Brackly
> inna disya facktri all dem dhu is pack crackry

---

[35] Johnson, 2014.

fi di laas fifteen years dem get mi laybah
now awftah fiteen years mi fall out a fayvah

[…]

mi know dem have work, work in abundant
yet still, dem mek mi redundant
now, at fifty-five mi gettin' quite ol'
yet still, dem sen' mi fi goh draw dole[36]

    What is recounted in this poem is similar to what Selvon narrates in *The Lonely Londoners* (1956). In the first stanza, the voice behind the poem tells that he had to work in the underground and did not even know where he was. This recalls Cap's experience: he was hired to work for the British railways but was relegated behind the station, far from anyone. Both those works -the one at the railway station and the one in the underground- represent, on the one hand, the symbol of mobility and progress, on the other hand they become places of exploitation and alienation. In the third stanza, the reference to the serious economic difficulties the immigrants had to endure evokes the ballads of the characters in Selvon's book, who had to eat pigeons or seagulls to survive. Moreover, from the last stanza, the discrimination that affects all sectors, labour too, is evident: even though there are many job offers, blacks cannot find work because they are considered not suitable or too lazy (this stereotype is also mentioned in this poem). Finally, the question of "living off the dole" (receive an economical support from the State when unemployed) is also mentioned here, as it was done in *The Lonely Londoners*. It was a thorny topic for immigrants: for some it was something to be ashamed of (e.g. Moses, Galahad and the protagonist of this poem), for some other it was a way to subvert the colonial system and to take revenge on the Mother Country.

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[36] Johnson, 1991, pp. 13-14. *When I came to London town / I used to work in the underground / but when you are working in the underground / you don't get to know your way around […] well I did day work and I did night work / I did cleaning and other dirty works / they say that the black man is very lazy / but if you see how I work you would say I'm crazy […] they had a little factory up in Brackley / in this factory all they do is packing crockery / for the last fifteen years they gave me labour / now after fifteen years I've fallen out of favour […] I know they have work, work in abundance / yet, still they make me redundant / now at fifty-five I'm getting quite old / yet still, they send me to live on the dole*. My translation.

"Inglan is a bitch" is constantly repeated throughout the poem. England is not that welcoming, idyllic country with "streets paved with gold" that was depicted to Caribbean people. England was not a synonym of home for those whose skin was black; it was not the maternal and caring mother immigrants were expecting to encounter. On the contrary, it was a "bitch", an extremely hostile place, a place where "y'u haffi know how fi suvvive in it"[37]. The gender reversal that takes place here, as suggested by Sabelli[38], it is also an interesting aspect to analyse. Usually, gender has always been used to construct images of inferiority: colonies and those colonized were generally feminized and emasculated, while the colonizer was depicted as an extremely virile and strong masculine figure.[39] In this poem, on the contrary, there is a male (colonized) voice who calls the colonizer "bitch", an epithet that refers to female dogs or unpleasant women.

This poem, considered one of the "first working-class hymns of the black community"[40], aims at awakening blacks in regard to their conditions; England is not the "land of milk and honey"[41] and migrants have to realize and accept it. The London here depicted is very far from the one depicted by Lord Kitchener in his song *London Is the Place for Me* (1950). Then, Linton Kwesi Johnson, after fiercely denouncing exploitation, racism, alienation and discrimination, leaves the reader/listener, as well as the disillusioned migrant with a question "England is a bitch for real / what are we going to do about it?"[42]

> Inglan is a bitch
> Dere's no escapin' it
> Inglen is a bitch fi true
> Is whey wi goh dhu 'bout it?[43]

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[37] Johnson, 1991 p. 14.
[38] Sabelli, 2011.
[39] Ashcroft B., Griffith G., Tiffin H., *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, London: Routlege, 2013.
[40] Dhondy in Martino, 2010.
[41] Selvon S., *Moses Migrating*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2009 [I. ed. 1983].
[42] Johnson, 1991 p. 14. My translation.
[43] Johnson, 1991 p. 14.

3.4. It Dread Inna Inglan

Belonging to the poems of the seventies,[44] this poem was written for George Lindo, a Jamaican young worker living in Bradford who was wrongfully convicted of armed robbery.[45] Campaigning for the liberation of this "famili man" who "nevah do no wrang" is not the only purpose of the poem. Through these lines, the author marked an important difference with the previous generation: in that new community of black youths there was no ideology of return, they were there to stay, England was their home, they belonged there, and it did not matter if whites did not want them. The same author indeed declared that

> my generation didn't have the mentality of the immigrant. Our parents came in England with the idea to not settle permanently there, but to work four or five years in order to earn some money and then go back to their countries of origin. But at the end the majority of them stayed. Some went back – my mother, for example – but generally those first immigrants were joined by their children, who started to go to school here and definitely settled down. And while my parents' generation didn't feel at home, and still had the idea to return home one day, my generation adopted the slogan "Come what may we are here to stay": for us England was our Country, we had a strong sense of belonging to this nation. [46]

This idea is clearly evident in the poem, as is the critique of Margaret Thatcher and her government:

> Maggi Tatcha on di go
> wid a racist show
> but a she haffi go
> kaw,
> rite now,
> African
> Asian
> West Indian
> an´ Black British
> stan firm inna Inglan
> inna disya time yah.
> far noh mattah wat dey say,
> come wat may,
> we are here to stay
> inna Inglan

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[44] Johnson, 2014.
[45] Johnson, 2014, p. 108.
[46] Johnson in Parolai, 2009, p. 55-56. My translation.

inna disya time yah[47]

What is interesting and new in the poem here analysed is this inclusion of many other groups of "subalterns". Linton Kwesi Johnson does not only give voice to first and second generation of West Indian immigrants, but also to African and Asians (other consistent ethnic minorities) and Black British, people who were born in England from black (and most of the times immigrant) parents. The author was indeed aware of the fact that this condition of not being accepted affected everyone who did not fall under the label of "white British" and, therefore, wanted them to unite together and fight for their common ideals, since they all had the right to stay there and, consequently, they would have stayed there.

In this poem, then, a new and multifaceted concept is introduced: that of "dread". This term has different meanings, and it definitely has its roots in Jamaican Rastafari. First of all, it refers to a male member of the Rastafarian movement who typically wears his hair uncut and falling in long, plaited or matted locks or, more generally, it refers to any member of the Rastafarian community who adopts similar appearance or Rastafarian beliefs, practices and ways of expressions.[48] In addition according to Hitchcock,[49] more in depth it describes a communal realization, the fearful confrontation of a people with an original but denied racial selfhood. However, he also adds that more in general it refers to a sense of crisis, whether political or cultural, in which social contradictions that emerge destabilize the order of things. Dread is a threat, it challenges the norm and this is intrinsic in dub poetry, in its language, in its rhythm and in its content. Johnson was

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[47] Johnson, 2014, p. 23. *Margaret Tatcher on the go / with a racist show / but she has to go / 'cause / right now / African / Asian / West Indian / and Black British / stand firm in England / in this time yes / because it doesn't matter what they say / come what may / we are here to stay / in England / in this time yes.* My translation.
[48] Allsopp, 2013: Dread.
[49] Hitchcock, P., "It Dread Inna Inglan: Linton Kwesi Johnson, Dread, and Dub Identity", *Postmodern Culture*, Vol.4, N. 1, Sep 1993.

aware of this situation, and it is for this reason that this poem, as has also been noted by França Junior,[50] sounds as a powerful utterance for all diasporians (may they be from Asia, Africa or West Indies, or even their children) to unite and make it clear that they will stay there and fight against a hegemonic power which alienates and suppresses them.

3.5. Forces of Victri

This composition, classified among the poems of the seventies in *Mi Revalueshanary Fren,*[51] is a poem of resistance and, as Dawson has noted, serves as "an active performance of counterhegemonic black aesthetic".[52] Basically, it is a tribute to the victory in the battle to preserve the carnival in Britain. It has already been said that Caribbean Carnival developed in two phases. It was imported and implanted by the Trinidadian Claudia Jones in 1959, but following her death in the early 60s, it went to a ten years long period of hibernation. However, the festival began to be resuscitated in the early 70s by a second generation of black Britons. Unfortunately, the Government and the police feared this festival since it was provoking negative reactions from the white population, and since it was seen as something dangerous, as a disruption of public order. In 1976 more than fifteen hundred members of the police tried to move the manifestation into a stadium but they encountered a strong resistance and opposition from the black community.[53] Moreover, they tried to shut down the carnival also the following year, but once again they failed. Being the carnival the symbol of the black community and immigrants' new identity, this apparently small victory was in truth a great step forward for black youths; indeed, it established a new wave of self-confidence and self-awareness.

[50] França Junior, 2014.
[51] Johnson, 2014.
[52] Dawson, 2007, p. 83.
[53] Dawson, 2007, p. 78.

The following manifestations were generally regarded as "the coming-of-age ceremonies of the second generation of black Britons".[54]

Linton Kwesi Johnson was himself in the Carnival Movement which was fighting against the abolition of the Notting Hill Carnival[55], and with this tone of triumphant resistance which pervades the poem, the author wanted to celebrate their maintenance of the festival in 1978, as well as to encourage people to stand up and get justice:

> we're di forces af victri
> an wi comin rite through
> we're di forces af victri
> now wat yu gonna do
>
> wi mek a likkle date
> fi nineteen-seventy-eight
> an wi fite an wi fite
> an defeat di State
> den all a wi jus fahwod
> up to Not'n Hill Gate
> den all a wi jus fahwod
> up to Not'n Hill Gate[56]

This is also confirmed by the same author, that in an interview with Caesar Burt, reported by França Junior,[57] said:

> "Forces of Victory" itself was a celebration of the victory that the pro-carnivalists had won over those people who had tried to ban the Notting Hill Carnival, because, remember, they tried to police the carnival off the streets with so many policemen in 1976 it led to a riot, and another riot again in 1977. And in 1978 I celebrated because Race Today Renegades, which is the mas' band to which I belonged at the time, were playing a mas' called "The Forces of Victory" and the mas' was also symbolic of the victory of the pro-carnivalist forces against the anti-carnivalist forces, and it was a military mas' with tanks, infantry, air force, sailors and so on and so forth

The author, moreover, talks directly to "the police", making fun of them because they suffered such a heavy defeat that they did not even have the means to fight back:

> beg yu call a physician
> fi di poor opposition

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[54] Dawson, 2007, p.78.

[55] Parolai, 2009, p. 103.

[56] Johnson, 2014, p. 35. *We're the Forces of Victory / and we are coming right through / We are the Forces of Victory / Now, what are you going to do? / We made a little date / for 1978 / and we fought and we fought / and defeated the State / then we all just went forward / up to Notting Hill Gate / then we all just went forward / up to Notting Hill Gate.* My translation.

[57] França Junior, 2010, p. 14.

dem gat no ammunition
       an dem gat no position[58]

Johnson said that the mas' band he belonged to wore military costumes, and indeed they

based their outfits on those of the revolutionary anticolonial movements of the era[59], and

by doing so they appropriated the image of the power and the British Army and ironically

subverted it:

       wi comin wid wi army
       soh dont get yu bawmy
       wi comin wid wi plane
       and wi gonna drive you insane
       wi comin wid wi guns
       and wi mekin wi rouns
       wi comin wid wi tank
       an Babylan get vank[60]

     Johnson was able to embed in a single poem many elements of resistance, praise

of black identity and harsh critique towards the police and Great Britain in general. As it

has been shown, this poem aims to celebrate the fact that the black community was able

to preserve the Notting Hill Carnival, which had assumed an important role in the

celebration of the new hybrid identities and cultural forms that were emerging in Great

Britain; moreover, it is an overt critique to violence adopted by police as well as a

mockery of their actions; finally, it is an affirmation of the power black communities were

acquiring, indeed, the author asks the police (and the Government) what are they going

to do now that blacks are not anymore willing to be left aside and stifled.

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[58] Johnson, 2014, p 36. *I beg you to call a physician / for the poor opposition / they got no ammunitions / and they got no position.* My translation.
[59] Dawson, 2006, p. 67.
[60] Johnson, 2014, p 36. *We're coming with our army / so don't get barmy / we're coming with our planes / and we're going to drive you insane / we're coming with our guns / and we're making our rounds / we're coming with our tanks / and Babylon will get defeated.* My translation.

3.6. Mekkin Histri

Mekking Histri (Making History) is part of the poems of the eighties[61] and this poem is an overt and obvious denouncing to the Thatcher's government and the oppression blacks had to endure, both during colonialism and in the Mother Country. The black presence in the United Kingdom had been deleted, "airbrushed" from social history: history can be reinvented according to one's needs therefore, black people were made invisible.[62] Aware that history is written by those who have the power, and aware of the black rising, in this poem Linton Kwesi Johnson conveyed the idea that black immigrants were acquiring a voice and that, therefore, they were "colonizing England in reverse" and adding their point of view to contemporary history:

> it is no mistri
> we mekkin histry
> it is noh mistri
> wi winnin victri[63]

Directly addressing to "mistah govahment man", "mistah police spokesman" and "mistah ritewing man" (namely "mister Government man", "mister police spokesman" and "mister right-wing man") the author denounced tyranny, Government's hypocrisy and "silence" over several murders and racist attacks, such as the one in Southall in 1979 where the National Front organized a manifestation against Asian migrants and during the fight they murdered a white protestant, Blair Peach[64]; or also the consequent skirmish that took place in Bristol in 1980, when thirty-nine policemen raided the Black and White café in St. Paul's looking for cannabis and illegal consumption of alcohol and therefore caused a violent reaction from the black community which, at least at the beginning, made

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[61] Johnson, 2014.
[62] Phillips M., *London Crossings. A Biography of Black Britain*, London: Continuum, 2001, p. 35.
[63] Johnson, 1991, p. 45.
[64] Phillips, 2001, p. 77.

the police forces withdraw;[65] or even the Brixton Riots followed by the Toxteth ones

(Liverpool), both happened in 1981[66]:

> How lang yu really feel
> yu coulda keep wi andah heel
> wen di trute done reveal
> bout how yu grab an steal
> bout how yu mek yu crooked deal
>
> Well doun in soutall
> where Peach did get fall
> di asians dem faam-up a human wall
> gense di fashist an dem police sehil
> an dem show dat di asians gat plenty zeal / gat plenty zeal / gat plenty zeal
>
> […]
>
> How lang yu really tink
> wi woulda tek yu batn lick
> yu jackboot kick
> yu dutty bag a tricks
> an yu racist pallyticks
> yu racist pallyticks?
>
> Well doun in Bristal
> dey ad no pistal
> but dem chase di babylan away
> man yu shoulda si yu babylan
> how dem really run away
> yu shoulda si yu babylan dem dig-up dat day / dig-up dat day / dig-up dat day
>
> […]
>
> Well dere woz Toxteth
> an dere woz moss side
> an a lat a addah places
> whey di police ad to hide
> well dare woz brixtan
> an dere woz chapeltoun
> an a lat a addah place dat woz burnt to di groun / burnt to di groun / burnt to di groun[67]

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[65] Phillips and Phillips, 1999, p. 357.

[66] Phillips and Phillips, 1999, p. 358-66.

[67] Johnson, 1991, p. 45-46. *How long did you really think / you could keep us under your heel / when the truth is revealed / about how you grab and steal / about how you made your crooked deal / well down in Southall / where Peach has fallen / the Asians created a human wall / against the fascists and the police / and they've showed that the Asians have plenty of zeal […] How long did you really think / we would take your baton licks / your jackboots kicks / your dirty bag of tricks / and your racist politics / Well down in Bristol / they had no pistols / but they chased the Babylon away / man you should have seen your Babylon / how they really ran away / man you should have seen your Babylon / they dug them up that day […] How long did you really feel / we would've grovelled and squealed, / when so many murders have been cancelled / when our wounds can't heal / when we feel the way we feel / well there was Toxteth, / and there was Moss Side / and a lot of other places / where the police had to hide / well there was Brixton / and there was Chapeltown / and a lot of other places that were burned down.* My translation.

Through this poem, performed with a strong and angry tone and rhythm, Linton Kwesi Johnson recounted the fact that subalterns were assuming their own voice (in their own language, of course) and they were writing their own history, they were "winning" and colonizing Britain in reverse as well as contributing to Western history in general (and this is mainly conveyed by the several examples of real events). Furthermore, he heavily criticized the hypocrisy of the Mother Country that had always depicted itself as the civilized nation, but that was, in truth, a deeply corrupted society. The refrain becomes a powerful assertion and affirmation of the fact that black communities were "winning", were gaining some kind of status and were making themselves visible, also through the reshaping of the metropolis.

3.7. Di Great Insohreckshan

This poem belongs to a slightly more mature period, and as *Mekkin Histry* it is included in the poems of the eighties in *My Revalueshanary Fren*.[68] As the previous poem, it refers to the Brixton riots of 1981, as declared by the same author in an article published in *The Guardian*:

> I wrote two poems about the 81 uprisings: Di Great Insohreckshan and Mekkin Histri. I wrote those two poems from the perspective of those who had taken part in the Brixton riots. The tone of the poem is celebratory because I wanted to capture the mood of exhilaration felt by black people at the time.[69]

Many historical references are indeed here present: from the riots in April 1981 in Brixton to the Operation Swamp 81 and the consequent Scarman report. This violent riot, considered one of the worst outbreaks of disorder in the UK by Lord Scarman (an English judge and barrister), was caused by an unplanned crowd reaction against the police,

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[68] Johnson, 2014.
[69] The Guardian, "Trust Between Police and the Black Community is Still Broken – Linton Kwesi Johnson", https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/mar/28/trust-police-black-community-riots.

accused to be harassing black people. On the night of the 10th of April 1981 some police officers were attempting to help a black youth stabbed in his back, but were then approached by a suspicious and hostile crowd of black citizens. The unstable situation, already aggravated by the Operation Swamp 81 (an undercover operation which aim was to reduce crime in the district), worsen rapidly, and the confrontation quickly escalated, leading to 300 people injured and 23 vehicles damaged.[70]

As it is clear from the poem, Johnson did not take active part in those riots, but still he used a second plural pronoun, "wi", feeling to be part of a black community (thing that lacked to the migrants of the first generation, for example) and wanting to celebrate together with them in an uncompromising language the response to constant police oppression and harassment:

> it woz in april nineteen eighty wan
> doun inna di ghetto af Brixtan
> dat di babylan dem cauz such a frickshan
> dat it bring about a great insohreckshan
> an it spread all owevah di naeshan
> it woz truly an histarical occayshan
>
> it woz event af di year
> an I wish I ad been dere
> wen wi run riat all owevah Brixtan
> wen wi mash-up plenty police van
> wen wi mash-up di wicked wan plan
> wen wi mash-up di Swamp Eighty Wan
> fi wha?
> fi mek di rulah dem andastan
> dat wi naw tek noh more a dem oppreshan[71]

The author collected in his lines the stories and the points of view of blacks,

usually alienated and unheard, and gave them voice, because they felt the police had

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[70] Phillips and Phillips, 1999, p. 357-66.
BBC On This Day, "1981: Brixton Riots Report Blames Racial Tensions", http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/november/25/newsid_2546000/2546233.stm.
Johnson, 2014, p. 109.
[71] Johnson, 2014, p. 58. *It was in April 1981 / down in the ghetto of Brixton / that the Babylon caused such a friction / that brought about a great insurrection / and it spread all over the nation / it was truly an historical occasion / it was the event of the year / ad I wish I had been there / when we run a riot all over Brixton / when we smashed-up plenty of police vans / when we smashed-up the plan of the wicked one [Thatcher's plan] / when we smashed-up the Swamp 81 / for what? / for make the ruler understand / that we would take no more of their oppression.* My translation.

passed the limit and they had to react and make them understand that they were not

anymore a weak and suppressed community:

> an wen mi ckeck out di ghetto grape vine
> fi fine out all I coulda fine
> evry rebel jussa revel in dem story
> dem a taak bout di powah an di glory
> dem a taak bout di burnin an di lootin
> dem a taak bout smashin an di grabbin
> dem a tell mi bout di vanquish an di victri[72]

The poem ends with a clear mockery of the police and the government, that had

reportedly withdrew to plan a (probably ineffective) counter-action; moreover, the author

made fun of the findings of the Scarman report saying he did not care about his

suggestions:

> well now dem run gaan goh plan countah-ackshan
> but di plastic bullet an di waatah cannan
> will bring a blam-blam
> will bring a blam-blam
> nevah mine Scaraman
> will bring a blam-blam[73]

Lord Scarman, indeed declared that institutional racism did not exist, but rather

talked about racial disadvantage and discrimination. He recommended collaboration

between the police and the ethnic minorities: on the one hand, he suggested to recruit

more people belonging to ethnic minorities into the police forces, on the other hand he

called for blacks to speak Standard English.[74]

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[72] Johnson, 2014, p.58. *and when I checked out the ghetto's grapevine [gossip] / to find out all I could find / every rebel just revealed his story / they talked about the power and the glory / they talked about the burning and the looting / they talked about the smashing and the grabbing / they told me about the vanquish and the victory.* My translation.

[73] Johnson, 2014, p. 59. *Well now they've run and have gone planning a counter-action / but the plastic bullets and the water cannons / it will bring a blam-blam / it will bring a blam-blam / never mind Scarman / it will bring a blam-blam.* My translation.

[74] Procter J., *Writing Black Britain. 1948-1998: An Interdisciplinary anthology*, Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 97.

4. LKJ's Poems: Language Analysis

The language used in these poems is evidently not Standard English. There are many typical characteristics of Jamaican which are common to almost all the poems here analysed and which are also easy to identify. First of all, the most evident thing is the spelling of some words. For example, the phoneme /ŋ/ (graphically translated as -ng in Standard English) is in many cases rendered with /n/, e.g. *shapin* instead of *shaping*, *creatin* instead of *creating*, *linkin* instead of *linking* etc.

In addition, in Caribbean creoles the loss of the /h/ is very frequent, both at the beginning of the word and in other positions. This is visible, for example, in the words *yout* instead of *youth*, '*otell* instead of *hotel*, "dey *ad* no pistal" instead of "they *had* no pistols". However, it then frequently occurs in non-standard position, and it seems, sometimes, to substitute the /r/: *awftah* instead of *after*, *dhu* instead of *do*, *phu* instead of *put*, *goh* instead of *go*, *nevah* instead of *never*, *fahwod* instead of *forward, noh mattah* instead of *no matter*, *daggah* instead of *dagger* and *rabbah* instead of *ragger*.

Another common characteristic is represented by a peculiar use of the pronominal forms, which are usually the same for both the direct and the indirect object ("*mi* use to work" instead of "*I* used to work", *dem* instead of *they, "mi* tool" instead of "*my* tool", "*mi* seh *dem* frame-up George Lindo" that in Standard English would be "*I* say *they*'ve framed-up George Lindo", "yu coulda keep *wi* andah heel" instead of "you could keep *us* under your heel" and "wen *wi* wound cyaan heal" instead of "when *our* wounds can't heal").

Extremely often, then, the infinitive *to* is rendered with *fi*, as the following excerpt shows:

Mama,
I really doan know how *fi* tell y'u dis,

> cause I did mek a salim pramis
> *fi* tek care a lickle Jim
> an' try mi bes' *fi* look out fi him.[75]

Moreover, sometimes, the *fi* particle, when it follows the verb "have", combines with it, and they together form a new word: *haffi* (e.g. "but she *haffi* go" which in English would be "but she *has to* go").

Finally, many other phenomena described in Allsopp[76] are easy to find. For example, in many cases the pronunciation of -th- (/ð/) is rendered with /d/ (e.g. *dis* instead of *this, dere's* instead of *there's*, *den* instead of *then*, *disya* instead of *this*); the plosive [t] before [l] becomes [k] (e.g. *lickle* instead of *little*); some words are spelled and pronounced according to the local system of pronunciation (e.g. *mek* instead of *make, andahgroun* instead of *underground, bwoy* instead of *boy* and *fayvah* instead of *favour, Toun* instead of *Town, rite* instead of *right, wrang* instead of *wrong, victri* instead of *victory, ritewing* instead of *right wing, pallyticks* instead of *politics,* and also *frickshan, insohreckshan, naeshan, occayshan, Brixtan, andastan*); moreover, there is also clear example of palatalization of the [k] before [a] (*cyaan* pronounced /kyaan/ instead of *can*'t and *cyar* instead of *car*); and, finally, sometimes *fi* which means not only *to* but also *for,* and this in an evident example of the phenomena of word choice economy that is peculiar of Caribbean languages.

With regards to the first poem analysed, *Yout Rebels* it has to be noted that the word *fahwod* (forward) not only preserves the same meaning it has in Standard English, but it also acquires a new one. Indeed, in Caribbean languages, it may also signify "to move out/away", and this is exactly the significance it has here. Phenomena of this type, in which a word acquires a new meaning, is quite frequent in Caribbean varieties.

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[75] Johnson L. K., *Tings and Times: selected poems*, Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, London: Lkj, 1991, p. 25. My emphasis.
[76] Allsopp R., *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

In *Sonny's Lettah* is interesting to analyse the words used in the stanzas used to describe the fight:

> dem t'ump him in him belly
> An' it turn to jelly
> dem lick him pan him back
> an' him rib get pap
> dem thump him pan him head
> but it tuff like le'd
> dem kick him in him seed
> an' it started to bleed
>
> Mama,
> I jus' could'n' stan-up deh
> An' noh dhu not'n:
>
> soh mi jook one in him eye
> an him started to cry
> mi t'ump him pan him mout'
> an' him started to shout
> mi kick one pan him shin
> an' him started to spin
> mi tump him pan him chin
> an' him drap pan a bin[77]

It is indeed possible to notice that there are several words containing plosive consonants [p, t, d, k, g], which produce "harder" and more biting sounds; furthermore, there are many repetitions of words or even sentences; and finally, the words themselves, the rhymes and the alliteration produce a regular pattern of beats (which perfectly merges with the underlying music), particularly evident in the "a cappella" version. All this is in contrast with the more "liquid" verses which precede and follow this excerpt. Moreover, this violent image is also in contrast with the powerful rhyme "Jim start to wriggle/Di police start to giggle". The use of the word "giggle" here gives an idea about how the police was taking the situation very lightly, as it was funny (also because Jim's resistance gives them the perfect excuse to arrest him), while it is a very dangerous and serious situation for both Jim and Sonny. All these linguistic and literary techniques used by the

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[77] Johnson, 1991, p. 26.

author help to create a powerful and vivid image of the ferocity of the fight, and underline the brutality of the racist attacks by the police to black people, legitimate targets just because of their colour and because of the Sus Laws.

Worth to be underlined in *Inglan is a Bitch* is the juxtaposition of the adjectives "little" and "big" in "mi get a lickle jab in a big 'otell",[78] which give not only the idea that black immigrants can obtain only little jobs, but also that in that "big metropolis" which is London, they are "little" elements dispersed and alienated. Moreover, it has to be noted that here the use of Jamaican acquires an even more important role. Jamaican was used not only to recount the black experience from the point of view of the immigrants and to affirm their identity and the fact that Caribbean languages are worthy to be used in literature; indeed, as it happens in this poem, Jamaican becomes the symbol of subversion and of the process of rewriting and reshaping London. The colonizers had always described Great Britain using powerful and positive images and, of course, English served as the perfect tool; here, common images of London are destroyed and reformulated in a Caribbean variety, language that the colonizers had always tried to suppress, since they considered it being a "broken form of English". To tell this in other words, through this poem (and through the language used) the author is truly colonizing England in reverse, and this is also visible from the fact that the male voice talking is reshaping London also through the process of renaming places (exactly as the boys were doing in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*): *London town* becomes *Landan toun* and *Brackley* becomes *Brackly*.

In the fourth poem analysed, *It Dread Inna Inglan,* the author has used a typical Rastafarian word, "dread", an extremely important term which perfectly summarises the

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[78] Johnson, 1991, p. 45.

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condition of crisis of West Indians in Great Britain and which also refers, once again, to the process of "colonization in reverse" (indeed, the title of the poem says precisely *Dread Inna Inglan,* as to say that they are there and they will affect the order of things). Apart from that, the author also used a particularly powerful slogan "*come what may we are here to stay",* which was chanted by an angry crowd of blacks during one of the largest demonstrations Britain has ever seen (2nd March 1981)[79]. Through this slogan, once again they wanted to make clear that they were a generation determined to be seen and treated as British citizens, and that they were ready to fight to obtain this.

The use of Jamaican in the poem *Di Great Insohreckshan* acquires an extremely important role, since this poem was written in response to the 1981 Brixton riots and to the subsequent Scarman report, in which blacks were recommended to speak Queen's Language. Therefore, the author did not heed Scarman's suggestion; on the contrary, he continued to use a language considered inferior by the (at that point, former) colonizer, carrying on the important process of decolonization (of the body, of the language and of the mind) as well as overtly resisting to English tyranny, racism and sense of cultural and linguistic superiority. Moreover, it has to be noted that here some words and expression exclusively belonging to some Caribbean and Rastafarian languages are used. The first one is *Babylan* (Babylon), used also in *Forces of Victri* and *Mekkin Histri*, term that is used to indicate the police or any Wester-related system. The second term, belonging exclusively to the Jamaican language is "star", which is a slang expression to refer to a person, and can basically be translated as "dude". Finally, another peculiar expression is identifiable, and it is related to the pluralization of the noun signalled by the addition of "dem", as in "dem seh di *babylan dem* went too far".

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[79] "Union: Crush Racist Attacks", *Spartacist Britain,* April 1981, n. 31. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/spartacist-uk/031_1981_04_british-spart.pdf.

5. Critical Remarks

Through the analysis of these poems it was possible to understand the situation of the 1970s and the 1980s and also to understand how blacks decided to react. From the first poem, *Yout Rebels*, it is easy to understand that a new generation of blacks was emerging and that it was taking an active position against the government and the people who wanted to preserve a white country, utopic dream. It is clear that they could not stand the oppression, the racial discrimination and the alienation and that they wanted to fight for their rights as British citizens.

Sonny's Lettah is a subtle but incisive critique to the biased and racist police officers who, simply on the basis of the Sus-Laws, could stop, search and arrest anyone they basically wanted to obstacle (mainly people belonging to ethnic minorities). It is a sad but affectionate letter of a black youth to his mother, and it shows how black children could not easily defend themselves from abuses and how, at least at the beginning, a violent resistance could only bring more violence and lead to prison and not to a free life.

Then, *Inglan is a Bitch* is an extremely angry poem which aims to show the real face of Great Britain, which is not the idyllic and welcoming land migrants were expecting. It is considered a "working class hymn of the black community", and it bears many things in common with the ballads of "the Boys" recounted by Selvon in his *The Lonely Londoners*. First generation migrants were alienated and made invisible, they were discriminated especially in the labour market, and the voice behind this poem (a collective voice) focuses exactly on these problems. Moreover, it serves as a biting critique and denounce for racism and exploitation.

With *It Dread Inna Inglan* a poem that campaigned for the liberation of a Jamaican youth wrongly prosecuted for robbery, the idea of this new generation of migrants, who

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did not intend to move from Great Britain since that was their home, clearly emerges. The slogan used makes everything clearer: "come wat may / we are here to stay". Through this poem, Johnson was able to show the spirit of resistance that was spreading among the blacks (and also other ethnic minorities) and their desire to fit in the society and colonize it in reverse. This new confidence, this new sense of identity that was emerging, was getting stronger and made it possible for the black community to make some steps forward and win some battles, celebrated in *Forces of Victory, Mekkin Histri* and *Di Great Insohreckshan.* Moreover, all these poems remark the fact that Caribbean people, at least those belonging to the second generation, wanted to fight against oppression, wanted to make their voice heard and leave a sign of their presence both in the Mother Country and in Western history.

Linton Kwesi Johnson belonged to a generation that strongly identified with Great Britain and that did not intend to move from what they considered to be their home. Therefore, they felt the need to fight for their right to be treated as proper citizens, since that should be their status. They were the ones who were continuing the important process of colonization in reverse and decolonization of the body, the language and the mind of black people, which had been already timidly started by the previous generation. Johnson's dub poetry was an extremely important tool to enhance blacks' confidence and self-awareness as well as to give voice to voiceless people and spread their points of view. Moreover, it was helpful to denounce brutal treatments from both the government and the police.

CONCLUSION

The British Empire was one of the most powerful entities in the world, and this status was kept for a long period. Territories began to be brought under the sovereignty of Great Britain already from the early 17th century, and the Empire expanded until it reached its maximum in 1919-1921. After that, each colony slowly began to make important steps to gain full independence (it has to be underlined that some colonies had begun to claim some forms of self-government even before that date). Of course, lives and attitudes of both those colonized and the colonizers had been deeply affected by the power and the strength of the Empire and the colonial discourse that emerged. White British had always seen themselves as superior to any other British subject in any field: language, culture, labour skills etc.

After the Second World War, an extremely high number of people from the colonies (here attention was especially given to the situation related to the Caribbean) migrated to the Mother Country. They were mainly encouraged by the British Nationality Act in 1948, the fact that there was a need for new workforce for the post-war reconstruction and also by the idyllic image of Great Britain that the colonizer had instilled. However, white British felt invaded and felt necessary to draw boundaries between them and those "alien" people, both physical boundaries (e.g. segregation in certain districts) as well as psychological ones (e.g. perpetuating the inferiority

complex in those colonized, a complex already installed back in their home countries). They felt their *Britishness* threaten and their lives contaminated, therefore they tried to "protect" themselves by adopting a hostile attitude, and by enacting several laws whose purpose was that of limiting and discouraging immigration as well as reserving the status of being "British" only to white people. However, this did not produce the effects expected, but rather exacerbated the situation, leading to riots and conflicts.

On the other hand, those colonized found themselves entrapped in an unstable position. For centuries, West Indians had been dominated and enslaved by people from the Mother Country and this, of course, deeply affected the shaping of their own identity (a process that truly started during the 1960s, mainly thanks to the struggle for independence). Colonizers erased everything that belonged to their origins, their tradition and their past; then, feeling the need to conduct a "civilizing mission" on those who they considered uncivilized and inferior, they "re-educated" West Indians according to British values, language and traditions, inculcating the idea of British and white superiority into them. Of course, West Indians started to emulate their colonizers in every aspect, from mannerism to language, convinced that "washing themselves white" was their only possibility to achieve a better future. However, this process of Anglicization led Caribbean people to a deep crisis, since as soon as they migrated to Great Britain, they realized that they had been deceived and that to be Anglicized did not mean to be British. They realized that they were human beings exactly as the British, not inferior but rather with their same exact rights. Moreover, they became conscious of the fact that they did not have to be ashamed of their skin colour -which did not shape who they were-, and not even of or their origins -which were worthy of being retrieved and reintegrated in their lives-. As a consequence, a feeling of anger

and injustice and a desire to rediscover their origins and reaffirm the worthiness of their culture (and language) started to grow, and a process of decolonization of mind and body slowly took place both in the Caribbean and in the black communities that were forming in Great Britain.

What is interesting is the fact that, in the Mother Country, black immigrants not only were shaping their own identity and finding their own voice, but they were also "colonizing Britain in reverse". Aware of their past made of undeserved slavery and suppression, conscious of the fact that being black or coming from the colonies did not mean to be inferior, and aware of the fact that their stories, their presence and their language was as worth as those belonging to the white Britons, they began to subvert the colonial system and to turn history upside down. After years of alienation and after having been erased from the British past, they were finally acquiring their own voice and making themselves heard; moreover, they were also trying to leave a sign of their presence in Great Britain and Western history. This process of colonization in reverse developed in many different forms: from refusing jobs and "living off the dole" to importing customs and traditions directly belonging to the Caribbean (e.g. music and Carnival), from renaming streets and monuments, to adopting, in literature, a language different from Standard English.

The authors here analysed, Samuel Selvon and Linton Kwesi Johnson are interesting examples when examining concepts as the Caribbean identity, language (especially in comparison to Standard English) and the process of "colonization in reverse". They indeed have many things in common: apart from the provenance and their cultural background, they both experienced the difficulties related to migration, the hostility encountered in what they were taught to consider a welcoming and caring

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Mother Country, and the sense of alienation and humiliation that that situation was causing. Both Selvon and Johnson tried to record immigrants' conditions as well as to give voice to voiceless and usually unheard people. Moreover, and this is in truth an extremely important aspect, they were aware of the central role that language played in the decolonization of the mind, in shaping the Caribbean identity, in making themselves heard by former colonizers and in, then, subverting and reversing the system. In other words, they both wanted to make West Indians visible at the eyes of western people. On the one hand, Selvon, during an interview with Thieme, declared that English people did not know about the existence of other countries apart from Jamaica, therefore he wanted to put Trinidad on the map[1]. He did so by writing novels using a variety of language similar to the Trinidadian English, and which were set there or dealt about migrants from that country. On the other hand, Johnson wanted to record the presence of blacks in Great Britain and the changes they were making. Poems such as *Inglan is a Bitch* and *Mekkin Histri* are clear examples of this.

However, these two authors obviously present many differences. They indeed migrated to Britain in two different moments and at different ages. On the one hand, Selvon could fall under the "Windrush generation" label, since he arrived in Great Britain at the age of 27, in 1950 looking for an occupation. He, therefore, grew up and had been educated in his homeland, and migrating as an adult, he probably did not perceive Great Britain as his home (indeed, he then moved to Canada, feeling the need to go back to the New World and the Western hemisphere in general[2]). In these first migrants, who were moving mainly for economic reasons, there was not the idea of

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[1] Thieme J., Dotti, A., "Oldtalk: Two interviews with Sam Selvon", *Caribana 1*, 1990, pp. 71-84. Available at: http://www.academia.edu/910377/_Oldtalk_An_Interview_with_Sam_Selvon., p. 72.

[2] Fabre M., "Samuel Selvon: Interviews and Conversations", in Nasta S. (ed. by), *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988, p. 75.

settling permanently in that new country. Moreover, they were the ones that had a deeply colonialized mind and were stuck in a position of ambivalence: while still being nostalgic of home, its custom and traditions, and desiring to go back there, they were longing for integration in the British society knowing that it meant to wash themselves white and disown their own origins. This, as it has been shown, it is especially visible in Moses, the character present in all the three novels here analysed. However, it has to be underlined that Selvon, unlike his character, was aware of the fact that they had been deceived and that their origins, identity and, probably above all, language were worth of being retrieved and reintroduced not only in migrants' everyday life but also in literature. He was indeed conscious of the fact that West Indians underwent a traumatic uprooting and grew up with the trauma of diaspora and the anxiety and neurosis about their colour (elements present in his books: it is enough to think about the "loneliness" of these new Londoners and of the painful considerations about colour that one of the characters, Sir Galahad, had). Therefore, he was aware of the importance of decolonizing West Indians' mind and he tried to do so, or at least to contribute to this process, by writing about the effects of the colonial system on colonized people and using but mainly by using a Caribbean language. Finally, Selvon, in a subtler way compared to Johnson, subverted the system and the deeply rooted idea of the English culture and language superiority. Far from being a black revolutionary man, he still somehow supported, not in an active way as other authors did, the black cause. He did so precisely by appropriating the literary forms provided by English canon and reshaping and combining them with other forms, which typically belonged to the Caribbean tradition (e.g. Calypso and the stories recounted in forms of "ballads"), as well as by making his characters renaming the monuments or streets of

the city or making them refusing jobs and living "off the dole" and at the expenses of the white population (exactly the opposite of what usually happened).

On the other hand, Johnson was definitely more engaged and actively involved in the black struggle. Linton Kwesi Johnson's position was indeed slightly different from Selvon's one, and this was mainly due to the fact that he migrated to Great Britain at a later stage, in 1963, at the age of 11. Therefore, he grew up and was educated directly in the Mother Country, in a period when hostility and hatred towards West Indians reached new heights, and this, therefore, influenced his writing and his ideology. Indeed, during an interview, he declared that "writing was a political act and poetry was a cultural weapon"[3]. His generation did not have any "ideology of return"[4] as, on the contrary, had their parents. Indeed, being brought up there, they considered Great Britain as their home, and this is probably the main reason why they reacted so strongly and angrily to how white people were treating them. More than the previous generation, they felt that they had the same rights as any other British citizen but that they were not treated equally and with dignity. Therefore, they violently reacted and fought for their rights, and this was well documented by the poems of Linton Kwesi Johnson, a politically committed author, directly involved in the Black Panther movement and, more generally, in the Black struggle. Johnson clearly underlined the presence of a new generation of "Black Britons" keen to fight against a society that had the utopic dream of keeping the nation white. Moreover, he recorded riots and victories against the biased police forces and racist people in general, declaring that they were "making history" by making themselves heard and visible, by subverting

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[3] The Guardian, "I Did My Own Thing – Linton Kwesi Johnson" by Nicholas Wroe. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/mar/08/featuresreviews.guardianreview11.
[4] Hitchcock, P., "It Dread Inna Inglan: Linton Kwesi Johnson, Dread, and Dub Identity", *Postmodern Culture*, Vol.4, N. 1, Sep 1993.

the deeply rooted colonial system (e.g. by writing about the real face of Great Britain, which is not a caring and welcoming Mother Country but rather a "bitch") and by firmly stating that "come what may, they were there to stay".

To conclude, it might be possible to say that these two authors represent two different moments of the same period of post-colonialism, when Great Britain became a place of immigration. Indeed, the first one, Selvon, moved at the beginning of this period when waves of West Indians crossed the ocean to Great Britain; while the other one, Johnson, migrated at a later stage but when he was younger than the previous one. Therefore, it is clear that their age and the period when they migrated deeply influenced their opinions and their works. However, both of them, aware of the extremely negative effects that colonialism and imperialism had (and was still having) in people colonized, tried, in their own ways to react and resist to the humiliation and alienation they were suffering in the Mother Country. For example, both of them used language as an extremely powerful tool and, also, were able to take literary forms typically belonging to the British canon and to adapt and reshape them according to their purposes. Indeed, they used a Caribbean language not only for aesthetic reasons but mainly for the political implications that this decision entailed; moreover, they reshaped the novel and the poem inserting in it elements belonging to the Caribbean tradition (calypso, oral forms, musicality etc.), also carrying out a process of "colonization in reverse". Selvon in a subtler way compared to Johnson, tried to resist to and reverse the process of Anglicization which was, at that point, deeply rooted in almost every West Indian. He did so by recording the movements of the immigrants and their presence on the island and by making them subverting some aspects of the colonial practices. It is possible to say that, in a way, he prepared the path to more

aggressive reactions carried out through literature by successive authors such as the here analysed Linton Kwesi Johnson. Therefore, they represent, and were able to represent through their words, what people belonging to the two different generations had to endure, and whether they decided to organize themselves in communities or not, and, if they did so, how they decided to cooperate and react.

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Dai Caraibi a Londra: Samuel Selvon e Linton Kwesi Johnson

L'Impero britannico, formatosi tra il XVII ed il XX secolo, è stato, all'apice della sua estensione, il più grande impero della storia, nonché una delle entità con maggiore influenza e potenza a livello mondiale. L'attuale diffusione della lingua inglese e la presenza del Commonwealth delle Nazioni sono lasciti ancora visibili del potere e del prestigio del vecchio impero.

Tra il 1919 ed il 1921 la Gran Bretagna controllava territori in tutti i continenti: Australia, Nuova Zelanda, Canada, Caraibi, Irlanda, India e altri territori asiatici nonché territori del Medio Oriente. Le cosiddette *white colonies* (Canada, Australia, Irlanda e Nuova Zelanda) sono state tra le prime ad intraprendere il percorso verso l'indipendenza. Successivamente, e soprattutto dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale e dopo l'indipendenza dell'India nel 1947, è iniziato il vero e proprio processo di decolonizzazione che ha segnato il declino dell'impero.

Particolarmente interessante ai fini di questa tesi è la situazione delle colonie caraibiche, tra le più importanti per la Gran Bretagna: esse infatti fornivano materie prime estremamente redditizie (ad esempio tabacco, cotone e canna da zucchero) ed erano uno snodo chiave nella tratta commerciale degli schiavi africani. La popolazione africana, ritenuta inetta ed inferiore, era considerata manodopera a bassissimo costo, perfetta per essere impiegata nel duro lavoro nelle piantagioni. Questi schiavi venivano

forzatamente prelevati dalle loro case, brutalmente trasportati nel Nuovo Continente e, una volta lì, separati e dispersi nelle varie isole caraibiche. Quest'ultima operazione era estremamente importante in quanto, così facendo, i colonizzatori riducevano al minimo le possibilità di comunicazione tra schiavi di uguale etnia. Nonostante ciò, essi furono comunque in grado di unirsi, di comunicare e di lottare assieme per la loro libertà. Le conseguenze di questo violento passato fatto di colonialismo, diaspora e schiavitù sono tutt'ora visibili: le isole caraibiche presentano un elevato indice di diversità etnica e razziale e le loro popolazioni, per secoli schiacciate e alienate, hanno dovuto lottare duramente per potersi ricostruire una storia, un'identità ed un orgoglio nazionale che fossero indipendenti dalla madrepatria.

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Generalmente il Regno Unito non è mai stato un paese a forte indice di immigrazione. La situazione, però, si è ribaltata dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale: se prima i flussi migratori verso il Paese era rappresentati perlopiù dalla popolazione Irlandese, dopo il secondo conflitto mondiale i flussi provenienti delle Indie Occidentali, India e Pakistan presero il sopravvento. Molteplici sono stati i fattori che hanno attratto questi migranti verso la Gran Bretagna. Per prima cosa, molti coloni, combattendo anche in prima linea durante i due conflitti mondiali, avevano avuto la possibilità di vedere ciò che il centro dell'impero aveva loro da offrire. Secondariamente, la richiesta di manodopera da impiegare nella ricostruzione post-bellica unitamente alla promulgazione del *British Nationality Act* nel 1948 (che garantiva formalmente pari diritti ai cittadini inglesi e a quelli delle colonie) ha offerto loro la concreta possibilità di entrare nella madrepatria. A ciò si è poi unito, nel 1952,

il *McCarran Walter Act* che mirava a limitare drasticamente l'immigrazione afro-caraibica negli Stati Uniti (meta fino a quel momento preferita).

Mossi da questi fattori, moltissimi coloni (circa 1000 all'anno fino al 1951) decisero di migrare nel Vecchio Continente. In questa prima generazione di nuovi arrivi, poi rinominata *Windrush Generation,* che prende il nome dall'*Empire Windrush*, una delle prime navi a trasportare un elevato numero di migranti) non vi era, generalmente, alcun desiderio di trasferirsi definitivamente in Gran Bretagna. Il motivo principale per cui avevano intrapreso questa lunga traversata oceanica era quello di riuscire a trovare un impiego e poter accumulare il denaro necessario per poi rientrare in patria e vivere una vita più dignitosa. Le aspettative di questi uomini (principalmente) e donne caraibiche erano decisamente alte soprattutto a causa del fatto che i colonizzatori avevano sempre dipinto la madrepatria come una madre amorevole e protettiva che si prendeva cura dei suoi "figli", a prescindere dalle loro origini. Capirono presto, però, che essi non erano affatto i benvenuti e che nonostante il loro altissimo livello di "inglesizzazione", non sarebbero mai stati dei veri inglesi. Un'ulteriore ondata migratoria arrivò poi tra il 1952-1962, giusto prima della promulgazione del *Commonwealth Immigration Act* del 1962, normativa il cui scopo era quello di limitare l'accesso a nuovi immigrati. Se il primo flusso fu caratterizzato principalmente da uomini adulti ignari di ciò a cui andavano incontro, qui si registrò un incremento di donne, bambini e interi nuclei familiari consci di ciò che li aspettava (ma non per questo più preparati dei loro predecessori).

Man mano che il numero di immigrati aumentava, l'ostilità nei loro confronti cresceva e diventava sempre più evidente. Gli inglesi non erano affatto preparati a quella che loro consideravano "un'invasione aliena". Cominciarono subito a sentire la

loro identità, la loro *Britishness* minacciata e contaminata da coloro che provenivano dal lontano mondo esotico e selvaggio delle colonie, mondo che fino a poco prima erano riusciti a tenere separato e sotto controllo. Ovviamente ciò provocò una risposta, talvolta violenta, da parte degli immigrati, i quali si sentivano ingiustamente discriminati ed alienati. Dati i molti conflitti aperti tra bianchi e neri, i politici, identificando gli ultimi come causa dei disordini, cercarono di risolvere la situazione introducendo diverse leggi atte a limitare i flussi in entrata. Un chiaro esempio è il già citato *Commowealth Immigration Act* del 1962 emendato e reso ancora più rigido e severo nel 1968 e successivamente nel 1971. Altra legge promulgata al fine di ridurre i disordini è il *Race Relations Act* del 1964, che mirava ad abbattere le discriminazioni razziali. Gli anni Settanta poi furono caratterizzati dalla cosiddetta era di Enoch Powell, predecessore di Margareth Thatcher, durante la quale l'ostilità verso gli immigrati si trasformò in vero e proprio odio. È sufficiente pensare al fatto che vennero ripristinate le cosiddette *Sus Laws* (introdotte nel 1894 e abolite solo nel 1981), leggi che permettevano agli organi di Polizia di fermare, perquisire ed arrestare chiunque fosse sospettato di commettere un crimine, e che ovviamente, vennero applicate soprattutto contro soggetti provenienti da minoranze etniche.

<div align="center">***</div>

Nella successiva analisi di due autori caraibici, tre sono i punti fondamentali: il concetto di identità, di lingua e di "ricolonizzazione al contrario". Il primo è un concetto abbastanza recente ed è, purtroppo, di difficile definizione e diversi studiosi hanno cercato di spiegarne il significato. Ciò che emerge dai diversi contributi è il fatto che l'identità è un costrutto sociale estremamente flessibile e influenzato dal contesto storico-culturale in cui viene esaminato o viene a formarsi. Inoltre, esso implica un

processo di identificazione con qualcuno o qualcosa e si fonda necessariamente sul confronto con "l'altro", processo che aiuta a comprendere e ad identificare quali sono le differenze e anche cosa/chi può o non può essere incluso in quella particolare definizione di identità. Inoltre, tutti gli studiosi affermano che l'affermazione di un'identità, sia essa nazionale o personale, è un atto di potere e di volontà: ciò significa che questa può essere costruita da un gruppo oppure imposta, o cancellata, da chi invece detiene il potere.

Definire l'identità caraibica risulta essere un compito ancor più difficile: essa è infatti un concetto estremamente ibrido e fluido dato che è il risultato di un passato di colonialismo e schiavitù, che ha mescolato insieme diverse culture, origini e pigmentazioni. Il colonialismo, la schiavitù, la diaspora e l'imperialismo in generale hanno contribuito alla nascita di una popolazione totalmente alienata e privata della sua identità e cultura originale, popolazione nella quale sono stati poi instillati i valori e la cultura occidentali. Questo violento atto posava sulla volontà da parte dell'impero di tenere sotto controllo una popolazione considerata inetta ed inferiore: riprodurre infatti un "diverso" che fosse però riconoscibile rendeva il tutto più semplice. Molti sono stati poi gli stereotipi negativi costruiti sui coloni, i quali miravano a fornire una giustificazione della loro visione come semplici "oggetti" da poter sfruttare ed impiegare secondo le necessità. Ovviamente, ciò ha provocato un pesantissimo trauma che ha fatto maturare in loro un forte odio verso le loro origini ed il loro colore della pelle. Pertanto, il desiderio ultimo dei coloni divenne quello di mimetizzarsi completamente tra i bianchi per sentirsi a proprio agio in una società che così li voleva.

Nonostante ciò, durante gli anni Sessanta la popolazione caraibica cominciò a rendersi conto essere stata ingannata: poco importava quanto si sforzassero a

trasformarsi in "uomini bianchi", loro non sarebbero mai stati considerati dei veri e propri inglesi. Fu così che presero finalmente coscienza del fatto che le loro origini e la loro pelle non li rendevano inferiori a nessuno, e si resero conto di quanto fosse importante ritrovare una loro identità personale e nazionale che fosse indipendente da quella in loro inculcata dai colonizzatori. Inoltre, si resero presto conto del fatto che la loro storia e le loro origini e tradizioni meritavano di essere recuperate e reintrodotte in ogni aspetto della loro vita. Fu in questo periodo di presa di coscienza che nacquero diversi movimenti, come ad esempio il rastafarianismo e il partito delle *Black Panthers*, che molto fecero a supporto di questa riscoperta e rivalorizzazione delle origini e della lingua caraibica.

Secondo elemento importante (anche in relazione all'identità) e la questione della lingua. Il progetto di controllo sui territori colonizzati portò la Gran Bretagna ad attuare un processo di "inglesizzazione" che, ovviamente, fece dell'inglese il suo punto cardine. L'insegnamento di tale lingua mirò ad eliminare qualsiasi variante creola nata durante il periodo della tratta degli schiavi (forme nate dal contatto delle diverse lingue africane e dell'inglese). Ironicamente, le popolazioni caraibiche si ritrovarono obbligate a parlare una lingua che li denigrava e li svalutava e che non poteva realmente rappresentare la loro essenza e la loro realtà (citando il poeta Brathwaite, l'inglese non aveva parole per poter descrivere un uragano ma le aveva per parlare invece di una nevicata, avvenimento che non faceva parte della loro quotidianità).

Come si può immaginare, le lingue di contatto (*pidging*) che nacquero nel periodo della schiavitù e che poi si trasformarono in lingue creole non appena acquisirono parlanti nativi, furono moltissime. Nonostante ciò, è possibile delineare alcune caratteristiche comuni che riguardano la fonetica, la grammatica e la sintassi.

Ad esempio le varianti caraibiche sono più rumorose e più frequentemente accompagnate dalla risata, da esclamazioni e da comunicazioni non verbali (gesticolazioni ed espressioni facciali); l'accento e l'intonazione sono marcati ed immediatamente riconoscibili; infine, spesso alcuni fonemi sono sostituiti da altri (/ŋ/ con /n/, /ɵ/ con /t/ o /f/, /ð/ con /d/). Per molto tempo queste lingue sono state ritenute delle varianti scorrette dell'inglese, e per questo svalutate. In realtà, come già si è detto, queste hanno poi assunto un ruolo fondamentale in quella che fu la presa di coscienza della popolazione nera. Non appena i coloni si resero conto che anche la loro lingua, come del resto la loro storia e le loro origini, era meritevole di essere ripresa e riutilizzata, essa diventò strumento importantissimo nella ricerca e formazione di un'identità propria che fosse indipendente e contrapposta a quella inglese. Questo movimento di riscoperta e valorizzazione linguistica venne ovviamente supportato non solo dai già citati movimenti rastafariani e del "potere nero", ma anche da diversi autori caraibici che decisero di impiegare queste lingue in letteratura. Tra questi spiccano le figure di Sam Selvon e Linton Kwesi Johnson.

Il terzo punto ha a che vedere con il concetto di "ricolonizzazione al contrario", trasversale ai primi due. Questi immigrati caraibici, infatti, non solo riuscirono a ricostruirsi un'identità e a rendersi visibili ma riuscirono anche a rovesciare gli ormai consolidati rapporti di superiorità-inferiorità con la popolazione bianca, nonché a "contaminare" la cultura inglese con nuovi elementi tipici della cultura caraibica (come ad esempio la musica reggae). Autori come Selvon e Johnson riuscirono ad appropriarsi di forme letterarie tipiche del canone inglese (romanzo e poesia) e a modificarle e riadattarle in base alle oltre esigenze.

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Il primo autore analizzato è Sam Selvon, nato nel 1923 a Trinidad da padre indiano e madre indo-scozzese e migrato poi a Londra nel 1950. Nonostante in un primo momento si sia dovuto adattare a fare i lavori più disparati, egli riuscì poi a continuare la carriera di scrittore che già aveva intrapreso nel suo Paese. Pubblicò nel 1952 il suo primo romanzo, *A Brighter Sun* che suscitò interesse a livello internazionale. Nel 1956 scrisse invece *The Lonely Londoners,* e con questo fu il primo autore a pubblicare in Gran Bretagna un'opera scritta in una variante inglese caraibica. Successivamente, rispettivamente nel 1975 e nel 1983, scrisse quelli che per alcuni sono i sequel di questo libro: *Moses Ascending* e *Moses Migrating*. Dopo aver pubblicato molteplici opere, nonché aver contribuito alla scrittura del film *Pressure* (1978) diretto da Ovè e aver ricevuto diversi riconoscimenti letterari, decise, nello stesso anno, di ritornare nel Nuovo Continente in Canada. Morì poi nel 1994, durante uno dei suoi brevi viaggi verso Trinidad.

The Lonely Londoners, *Moses Ascending* e *Moses Migrating* sono romanzi interessanti e utili per comprendere ed analizzare i concetti di identità, lingua e "ricolonizzazione al contrario" in relazione agli immigrati caraibici. Dalla loro analisi emerge che l'autore, pur non essendo un "rivoluzionario" ha comunque tentato di dare il suo contributo alla lotta di emancipazione della popolazione nera. Egli infatti, in maniera sottile ed audace, narrando prima le disavventure di un gruppo di immigrati afro-caraibici (*The Lonely Londoners*) e poi principalmente quelle di uno di loro, Moses (*M. Ascending* e *M. Migrating*), ha cercato di sovvertire e ribaltare l'ormai radicata idea della superiorità inglese, sia appropriandosi del romanzo occidentale e rimodellandolo secondo le sue necessità, sia utilizzando una lingua creola al posto dell'inglese standard. Inoltre, è riuscito a documentare la presenza afro-caraibica nella

metropoli londinese, spostandosi sul punto di vista dell'immigrato, dandogli quindi la visibilità e la voce che fino a quel momento gli erano state negate, nonché la possibilità di ricolonizzare, a suo modo, la società inglese (per esempio rinominando strade e monumenti e vivendo con il sussidio statale). Oltre a questo, e ciò accade principalmente nel secondo romanzo, l'autore ha esplorato la relazione tra Moses, (sempre ancorato all'idea che per riuscire ad integrarsi nella società si debba imitare in tutto e per tutto l'uomo bianco) e la comunità afro-caraibica che andava formandosi nella capitale. Le strategie di sopravvivenza delle due parti sono estremamente diverse: Moses preferisce contare solo sulle sue forze e decide di indossare la maschera dell'uomo bianco, gli altri preferiscono invece unire le forze ed opporsi e lottare contro una società che non li vuole, o che comunque li vorrebbe diversi. Nell'ultimo romanzo, invece, Selvon analizza la situazione desolante in cui si trova il migrante il quale, essendo stato privato della sua identità, si trova intrappolato in un limbo tra due mondi: la madrepatria e la sua terra di origine. Egli infatti ha sviluppato l'abilità di crearsi ed indossare così tante maschere che può sopravvivere in entrambi i luoghi ma, purtroppo, non può integrarsi e sentirsi a suo agio in nessuno di questi.

Altri sono gli elementi interessanti che emergono dall'analisi di questi romanzi. Nella struttura del primo, ad esempio, è possibile identificare la contaminazione di forme letterarie diverse da quelle canoniche: il romanzo è infatti costituito da brevi storie che narrano le vicende di diversi personaggi, nessuno dei quali risulta essere il protagonista. Questa forma riprende la struttura in "ballate" tipica della musica calypso. In *Moses Ascending*, invece, Selvon riesce ad invertire il classico stereotipo di Crusoe, bianco ed acculturato e Venerdì, suo schiavo nero e selvaggio. Moses infatti si trova ad impersonare il primo e ad acculturare il suo maggiordomo bianco Bob. In

maniera audace, dato anche che questa relazione dura poco, l'autore va a criticare gli stereotipi generalmente utilizzati in letteratura nonché gli insensati valori borghesi.

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Il secondo autore analizzato è Linton Kwesi Johnson, nato in Jamaica nel 1952 ed emigrato a Londra nel 1963, all'età di 11 anni. Vista questa migrazione in giovane età, si può dire che egli è cresciuto in Gran Bretagna, luogo in cui ha anche ricevuto gran parte della sua educazione scolastica. Ciò ha fatto crescere in lui (e in molti altri suoi coetanei appartenenti alla seconda ondata migratoria) un forte senso di identificazione con il Paese anglosassone, luogo che ha da subito considerato la sua nuova casa. Per questo motivo, la reazione e la resistenza all'ostilità inglese fu molto più violenta in questo poeta dub, e ciò è visibile da molte delle sue poesie, la maggior parte delle quali sono scritte in giamaicano. In quelle qui analizzate, Johnson mostra, ad esempio, le desolanti conseguenze delle "Sus laws" (*Sonny's Lettah*): dal trattamento che riceve il ragazzo che racconta la vicenda si evince che la discriminazione razziale era insita anche nelle forze di Polizia, e che la violenza non poteva che portare ad altra violenza. In *Inglan is a Bitch*, invece, l'autore dà voce e visibilità all'immigrato denigrato e discriminato, rivelando la vera faccia della Gran Bretagna, che si è dimostrata essere una "cagna" e non una madre amorevole e protettiva come invece era solita dipingersi. Con la poesia *It Dread Inna Inglan*, l'autore va a sottolineare e a rimarcare la presenza di una nuova generazione di giovani bretoni di colore che, nonostante tutto quello che sarebbe potuto succedere, era decisa a restare e lottare per i propri diritti nel Paese che considerava casa propria, il Regno Unito. In aggiunta, in questa stessa poesia, Johnson mostra lo spirito combattivo di questa nuova generazione, nonché il suo desiderio di integrarsi nella società e di

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"ricolonizzarla al contrario", rendendo quindi visibili i segni della sua presenza. Infine l'autore, attraverso *Forces of Victory*, *Mekkin Histri* e *Di Great Insohreckshan* rimarca ancora una volta la volontà di questa nuova generazione di lottare per il cambiamento, e coglie l'occasione per celebrare la vittoria concreta in alcuni dei tanti scontri con la Polizia e la società. Infine, attraverso queste ed altre poesie celebra il nuovo senso di comunità ed identità che si era ormai quasi del tutto consolidato nella comunità afro-caraibica inglese.

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In conclusione, è possibile dire che entrambi gli autori qui analizzati, grazie ai diversi elementi in comune (origini, migrazione e ostilità incontrata nella metropoli), sono stati in grado di documentare l'umiliazione e l'alienazione subita nel Regno Unito da tutti i loro concittadini. Inoltre, attraverso il contenuto e la forma delle loro opere, hanno entrambi portato il loro diretto contributo al processo di "ricolonizzazione al contrario". Entrambi consci del ruolo chiave che assume la lingua nell'espressione veritiera e verosimile di concetti e realtà, hanno preferito usare delle varianti caraibiche al posto dell'inglese standard.

Ovviamente, però, Selvon e Johnson presentano alcune differenze, principalmente dovute al periodo e all'età in cui sono migrati. Il primo, ad esempio, migrando tra i primi e facendolo in età adulta, non si è mai sentito veramente a casa in Gran Bretagna (degno di nota è il fatto che abbia poi sentito la necessità di ritornare verso il Nuovo Continente). Pertanto, nonostante anche egli abbia dato il suo contributo alla lotta e alla resistenza "nera", non vi ha preso veramente parte attiva, come invece ha fatto il suo successore Johnson. Quest'ultimo infatti, era decisamente più coinvolto nella lotta, anche perché essendo cresciuto nella madrepatria non poteva

assolutamente sopportare l'idea che lui e la sua comunità venissero trattati diversamente dai coetanei bianchi, dato che ai suoi occhi entrambi potevano, e dovevano, godere degli stessi diritti.

Sembrerebbe quindi possibile dire che le loro opere e le forme che esse hanno assunto, rispecchiano decisamente le esperienze dei due autori, e sono direttamente collegabili con il periodo e l'età in cui sono migrati. È necessario sottolineare però che entrambi descrivono due punti diversi dello stesso momento storico: la decolonizzazione e il secondo dopoguerra. Visti i vari temi e le varie caratteristiche in comune, e prendendo in considerazione il fatto che tra il primo ed il secondo autore vi è stata una sorta di incremento per quanto riguarda la partecipazione alla lotta e la sua espressione in forma letteraria, si potrebbe affermare che Selvon ha in qualche modo preparato la strada a Johnson, suo successore.