Global Migration and Betrayal of Immigrants: Lessons Learned from Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*

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Cultural critic and post-colonialist, Paul Gilroy, in his article "Race is Ordinary: Britain's Post-Colonial Melancholia," identifies modern Britain as a place where "nationalism and racism continue to be articulated together" (31). Reflecting on the historical moment of large scale global migration from the former colonized countries to Britain, Gilroy reminds us that, even after many decades since the end of the Empire, Britain has not been able to grapple with the reality of living in such a world and such "chronic inability has been intertwined with successive political and economic crises" as an aftermath of decolonization of its subject-nations compounded "with the arrival of substantial numbers of post-colonial citizen migrants, and with the shock and anxiety that followed" (Gilroy, 32) such a historical transformation. In the same article, Gilroy also laments "symptomatic refusal" among his academic peers "to address the interconnections of nationalism and racism in popular [British] culture" (Gilroy, 33). This essay addresses such a gap. It argues that in *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Samuel Selvon provides powerful lessons in the betrayals of the Windrush migrants on multiple levels. With the uptick in global migration in recent times, the novel serves as a powerful blueprint of the societal and governmental instruments that lure and exploit cheap labor from poor countries to serve the global capitalist machine without giving them minimal human dignity. Additionally, these policies are crafted under a broader umbrella of national interest but undergirding such patriotic nationalism is racism.

Historical Context

During the initial phases of the COVID-19 era, which saw the Western countries implement race-based immigration policies that jolted but did not surprise the rest of the world, two other significant historical events about the former Empire have revealed the interconnectedness of immigration policies with racism. These two are the Windrush scandal and

Brexit. Although these two consequential political stances may seem unrelated, they both are connected through the government's response to public attitude towards immigrants.

The trickling in of small numbers of people from around the world has been an age-old phenomenon in Britain but this changed when the government's British Nationality Act of 1948 allowed the Commonwealth subjects the ability to reside and work in the UK freely, a privilege similar to that of the British nationals, resulting in massive immigration.[1] The immigrants were popularly known as the Windrush generation, and the ship that reached the shores of Britain with the first wave of such immigrants was named HMT Empire Windrush. The initial euphoria of these Windrush generation immigrants quickly dissipated, as they faced the reality on the ground. The full scale of atrocities towards migrants described below came to light when another historical event, Brexit, happened and the British population voted to leave the European Union. Thus, treating the two contemporary historical events as intertwining is not out of the norm among historians and social critics such as Ronald Cummings, who states that the goal of doing so is to locate these two events within one "longer historical framework" (594). Cummings, in his article "Ain't no black in the (Brexit) Union Jack? Race and empire in the era of Brexit and the *Windrush* scandal," writes:

> In 2018, two years following the June 2016 Brexit referendum, the *Windrush* scandal came to public attention through a series of investigative newspaper reports. These news stories documented in stark detail how changes and restrictions in immigration laws (set in motion over previous decades) and an unfair culture of punitive enforcement of immigration legislation and procedure, had resulted in migrants of the *Windrush* generation and their children being detained, refused access to social benefits, and in many cases forcibly expelled from the UK to countries where they had never lived or where they had few or no sustained ties. (594)

A report titled "Immigration Policy From Post-War To Post-Brexit: How New Immigration Policy Can Reconcile Public Attitudes And Employer Preferences" further cements Cummings' allegations by providing a list of all anti-immigrant policy changes from Windrush to Brexit that shaped the popular rhetoric and ended in Britain leaving the European Union.[2]

The voluntary, as well as involuntary, global dispersal of human capital also happens to coincide with the celebration of the centenary birthday of Samuel Selvon, an author belonging to and vocal on the Windrush migration. And that makes this subject all the more pertinent as during his birth centenary we remember Selvon and how he dealt with this most personal topic and created a narrative that contextualizes and gives relevance to his experience even today. Selvon was a visionary and raised his voice against the systemic racism faced by his people, but what is most

important is that, by his own admission, in his oeuvre he presents the struggles of the West Indian migrants not as black or brown but as human beings and citizens of the world, who found themselves trapped in a political situation through no fault of theirs and were made to relocate. In this aspect, Selvon's craft varied somewhat from that of his West Indian peers such as George Lamming, who also belonged to the Windrush generation but looked at it with a Pan-African focus as in *The Pleasures of Exile*. Selvon was a lone voice of this generation that looked at the Windrush migration not as a localized issue but as a prognosticator of a larger global labor migration issue. In his novel *The Lonely Londoners* he presents this with vigor. The novel further problematizes the issue by not keeping it confined within the boundaries of racism, as his peers do—it portrays the poor migrants as doubly betrayed: first as members of Britain's working class and, then again, as immigrants.

In his book *From Nation to Diaspora: Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and the Cultural Performance of Gender*, Curdella Forbes calls the three novels by Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *The Housing Lark* (1965) and *Moses Ascending* (1975), "exile novels" as all three novels delineate various nuances of black migration experiences to an alien land, and, more importantly, of relocating to the homeland of their former colonial master. In *The Lonely Londoners,* Selvon creates a new black, post-world war identity that is showcased in a group of creolized, urban-calypsonian migrant figures. By writing from the perspective of the colonized, the master's Eurocentric narrative is immediately challenged and the power of owning the narrative is immediately assigned back to the colonized, whereby another history—of lived experience—can be presented. Under such a directive the colonizer's own home turf, London, is seen through the eyes of the colonized body as "some strange place on another planet" (23) whereby it instantly loses its immediacy and prominence as a seat of global power. Under this shift in the narrative—from colonizer to colonized—the colonial topography is also re-ordered, based on the living experience of its colonized subjects, an experience that strips away the glamor and exuberance from the metropolis, London, and by its association with and relevance in colonial conquests, from the entire imperial apparatus: "The place where Tolroy [the former black, colonized subject] and the family lives" in London is strikingly different from the rich part of the city and actually represents "the real world" (73) for these migrants, one that chronicles the daily battles of the diaspora as they negotiate around systemic racism that informs the discriminatory public policies against the colonized Windrush immigrants.

These West Indian migrants to the UK, known as the Windrush generation, were casualties of history in the aftermath of British colonization and its subsequent retreat from the colonies. What is unique about this phenomenon is that the conditions of such migrations are very different from those of today's global migrants as the customary push and pull factors of the contemporary global migration,[3] where several undesirable factors in the birth country have pushed people out to seek

residence somewhere else, were not the dominant operative forces for the group's movement from their home country to the new host country. The Windrush generation's arrival in Britain was a unique moment in history because of its promises and betrayal.[4] In "The Politics Of Migration And Empire in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*," Kenneth Usongo discusses at length who these West Indian migrants were and the historical positioning of this very unique nature of migration whereby the migrants were offered residency and cajoled to move to the UK, not the other way round. He writes that the blacks from the Caribbean islands had fought alongside British soldiers during World War II as citizens of the British colony and, in recognition of their war contribution to Britain, the British parliament passed the Nationality Act of 1948, which welcomed Caribbean immigrants to Britain as citizens (181). The Windrush migration thus becomes a watershed moment in British history around which much of the good faith, trust, and expectations of these migrants were built, and what followed was the reality on the ground—discrimination, racism, lack of opportunity, and governmental neglect—that sank in for these immigrants as they arrived in their new home. Selvon's work captures this moment in history by contextualizing it in the narrative of the first generation of West Indian migrants to Britain.

Being a member of such a group of migrants himself, Selvon lends a great degree of authenticity as he draws from personal experience[5] when in *The Lonely Londoners* he creates a captivating and heart-wrenching narrative of struggles of the West Indian migrant community in an alien, unfriendly, and harsh environment. Another powerful feature of this novel is the innovative use of the dialect used by this diaspora, which adds more authenticity to his narrative. In the interview with Susheila Nasta,[6] Selvon himself speaks about this: "the voice, in the idiom of the people which was the only way that he could speak to express himself" (5). As a journalist, Selvon investigates the narrative of human struggles from a point of utmost sincerity and authenticity, which makes it a valuable contribution in Black British literature, and *The Lonely Londoners* has been recognized as a pioneering work in these terms. Scholarship on *The Lonely Londoners* can be broadly divided into two groups: one group deals with the narrative element of the novel (creole language, use of calypso, humor, etc.) and the other focuses on the novel's historical positioning as a text about the Windrush generation which migrated to post-war Britain. Critics have largely looked at Selvon's use of Creolized English to create a narrative of "colonization in reverse." [7] In addition to looking at this new language as a "language of struggle" (Kabesh 1), critics have attached the significance of language in this work to several other noteworthy contexts. For example, critics such as Rebecca Dyer[8] have proposed that we look at the symbiotic relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in the production and consumption of language at the same time, while Tzu-Yu Lin[9] noted the ballad-like quality of the language in Selvon's work and its effectiveness. Like Lin, Kathie Birat[10] and Elizabeth Ingram's[11] focus is also on the innovative use of

calypso to create a new identity on foreign soil. While these critics have focused on the language occupying London's textual and literary space, other critics[12] have focused on the narrative's oral tradition that gives power to the migrants' voice.

While a large number of critics have focused on the narrative elements, such as language, both oral and textual, and humor[13] as a postcolonial discourse of resistance in *The Lonely Londoners*, some of the prominent scholars have produced readings of Selvon's work in the context of its historical and geographical locus. Such a position is taken in the essay "A Happy English Colonial Family in 1950s London: Immigration, Containment and Transgression in *The Lonely Londoners*" by Stephen Wolfe who argues that, in *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon investigates the experience of migration from the Caribbean to London in the 1950s. The argument centers on the ideology of the 'English Colonial Family' and the positioning of the Windrush generation migrants within that context. Although the ideology is inclusive in theory, it is far from that in its application and thus, when the colonial subject arrives, according to Wolfe, he undergoes three forms of disorientations: "disorientation based on racial prejudice, disorientation based upon the migrants' outsider position within the colonial policing structures of the State and the media, and the disorientation of the characters' excursions throughout London" (43). The concluding section of the essay examines the migrant community's response as they negotiate places within London. Joining Wolfe are other critics[14] who have taken a similar approach and have used the historical positioning of the novel to analyze its merit.

Although both these groups cover a wide range of topics in *The Lonely Londoners*, practically all of these critics have failed to identify clear markings of a specific political discourse, such as black empowerment or postcolonial discourse in Selvon's work. Bentley in "Black London: The Politics of Representation in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*" deems it difficult to describe the ambivalence of the textual portrayal of blacks that other critics have struggled to pinpoint. Bentley explains that the narrative in *The Lonely Londoners* serves as an "empowering framework" for the black but at the same time "the text re-activates the very stereotypes it claims to challenge" (43). In "*The Lonely Londoners*: Sam Selvon and the Literary Heritage," Elizabeth Ingram explains Selvon's apolitical position in the literary space: "In his lifetime Selvon suffered for his outspoken refusal to ally himself with any one political cause" (5). MacLeod makes the same observation about Selvon. [15] Macleod writes: "Lacking the critical apparatus to deal with him effectively, critics have opted either to ignore him or to kidnap certain sections of his work and force them into ill-fitting analytical frameworks aligned with particular political projects (MacLeod 157). Clearly, Bentley, Ingram, and MacLeod are part of this group of critics who have a difficult time assigning Selvon's work to a neatly formulated political discourse.

As discussed, critics are puzzled when Selvon correctly shows the systemic racism that migrants face and yet at the same time the West

Indian migrant "boys" in his novel engage in criminal activity, such as cheating on many levels: Galahad suggests putting "in a piece of lead shaped like a shilling instead" to light a gas fire (36); Moses tells Galahad that manipulation of the state welfare system is rampant among the migrants and that "… a lot of parasites muddy water for the boys" (41). There are more serious crimes committed by these immigrants, as well: Cap, a Nigerian migrant would "put on a soft tone and a hard luck story" (49) to swindle all his friends and white girlfriends, sometimes resorting to stealing, and Louis beats his wife, Agnes, every night out of his own insecurity (66). All these elements present in Selvon's work admittedly reaffirm the biases of the dominant culture against the 'Other.' So, the question that arises is what posture the novel is taking in presenting such ambiguities and, so far, the scholarship has not successfully answered this question.

To address this gap, I propose that looking at the work *only* from the perspective of institutionalized racism in a postcolonial context limits its contribution and so, instead, I take my cue from the author himself to understand his posture. In an interview, published as "Selvon Talking: A Conversation with Kenneth Ramchand," when asked about what he thinks his work represents, Selvon said: "Also it is not so much to get the feel of the period for itself, as to get the feel of the people of the period, because I would be after human relationships, lifestyle, social behavior and so on" (59). In other words, Selvon is presenting, as already argued, the struggles of the West Indian migrants not as black or brown bodies but as human beings who found themselves trapped in a historical moment through no fault of theirs. In another interview with Peter Nazareth, Selvon makes it even clearer that his novels are about the plight of all the suffering people and not just his people: "This question of being black, white or brown never really made any impression on me" (436). Based on the posture articulated by Selvon himself**,** I present *The Lonely Londoners* not as a study of political ideology but as a study of human plights in a world torn by war, hunger, and lack of employment where migration is a necessity to survive. I identify the betrayals that the new migrants faced on two fronts: one, betrayal of the British government to deliver the benefits of legal citizenship, and two, betrayal by the same to deliver social equity to the working class in the British economic system. I argue that these two issues are not separate and that the economically disadvantaged West Indian subjects were brought for political,[16] as well as economic reasons. These migrants never got acknowledged as British citizens; additionally, their status in Britain was that of a sub-proletariat class. *The Lonely Londoners* speaks to these two betrayals that the Windrush migrants face as poverty and exploitation ravage their very existence in their new motherland.

Betrayal Regarding Legal Status: Dis-enfranchisement

In *The Lonely Londoners*, each migrant from Trinidad arrives in Britain with dreams that are at once both valid and unrealistic: “Tonight is his night. This was something he used to dream about in Trinidad” (90) or “the streets of London paved with gold” (130) and he hopes that his dreams are going to be fulfilled with this prized citizenship. But this hope turns into a shattering disillusionment. Selvon opens his novel with a description of the alien space, London, as a metaphor for the cunning deceptiveness of the immigrant’s new country, which is his former colonial master’s birth country: there is a “kind of unrealness about London, with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as if it is not London at all but some strange place on another planet” (23). The sun, too, here in this alien world, is part of this deceptive apparatus: “The sun shining, but Galahad never see the sun look how it is looking now. No heat from it, it just there in the sky like force-ripe orange. When he look up the color of the sky so desolate it make him more frighten” (42). As a result, a certain feeling of disorientation, both spatial and temporal, follows the newly arrived migrant Henry Oliver, who is nicknamed Galahad by his fellow migrants: “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” (42). These scenes delineate the betrayal faced by the Windrush migrants as recipients of symbolic citizenship, which was a byproduct of a historical accident and upon arrival the Windrush migrants quickly realized the deception.

Discussing such deceptive posture of the British against the black and brown immigrants based on the cultural myth of them as a backward race practicing cannibalism, witchcraft, polygamy, and infanticide, Mead writes:

> Driven by this contradictory desire to prevent the arrival of black and Asian immigrants while maintaining a façade characterized by the notion of British “fair play”, in the first decade after the Second World War governments preferred to complicate exit from the country of origin rather than turn Empire/Commonwealth immigrants away at the borders of the United Kingdom; something which, legally, they were unable to do. (144)

Moses Aloetta, a veteran immigrant, emphatically conveys to Henry, the newly arrived immigrant, that the British people do not view them as their compatriots; rather, they view them as dangers and unwelcome invaders of Britain:

> And this sort of thing was happening at a time when the English people starting to make rab about how too much West Indians coming to the country: this was a time when any corner you turn, is ten to one, you bound to bounce up a spade. In fact, the boys all over London, it ain't have a place where you wouldn't find them, and a big discussion going on in Parliament about the situation, though the old Brit'n too diplomatic to clamp down on the boys or to do anything drastic like stop them from coming to the Mother country. (23)

Here Moses is engaged in oral transmission of a warning against the deceptiveness of the apparent welcoming British policy. Moses tells Henry that the British government is aware of its citizens' hostile reaction and, yet, is too diplomatic to take any actions to quell such anxiety while thrusting the West Indian migrants into this precarious situation knowingly. In "From Nation to Diaspora: Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and the Cultural Performance of Gender" Curdella Forbes also speaks to this historical deception by the British. Forbes writes that the "West Indian migrant, already a creature of paradox, arrives in Britain at the heart of a contradiction: to a putative parent who has issued an invitation, only to find himself abandoned" (84). But the written Windrush inaugural history commemorating the arrival of 492 Jamaicans on 22 June 1948 aboard the MV Empire Windrush mentions none of these atrocities. The narrative is deliberate—a cultural effort to suppress marginalized narratives and the truth with careful omissions of governmental failures and the hostile environment that these immigrants stepped into. Thus, Selvon's use of the oral transmission method to present the suppressed history is at once strategic and does not fail to serve its purpose. The oral transmission of parallel history passing between the migrants presented here is important: it directly challenges the written official policy of citizenship and the betrayal of such policy by presenting the other version that is erased from the cultural memory.

The need for such a warning against betrayal and deception is not optional; it is crucial. And Tolroy's newly arrived immigrant family from Trinidad learns this the hard way. When the family first arrives at Waterloo Station, a journalist from a local newspaper approaches Tanty Bessie, his aunt, and tells her that he is interested in featuring a "good" story on "why so much Jamaican coming to London" (30). Tolroy being an old-timer and aware of the anti-immigrant sentiment towards West Indians warns her not to talk to the reporter. Tanty has just arrived and is naïve about these deceptive practices so she dismisses such lack of trust and rebukes Tolroy with "'Why you so prejudice?' Tanty say. 'The gentleman ask me a good question, why I shouldn't answer?'" (31). After this Tanty goes on to give honest answers telling the reporter that she has come to be with her family to take care of them, showing her utmost "good manners" (31). She also tells the reporter that most of the people from her country come here to work hard and make an honest living, only

to be surprised and betrayed by the published newspaper story the next day telling the public that, now, not only Jamaicans were coming, they were also bringing their entire family along to be a burden on Britain's resources: "The next day when the *Echo* appear it had a picture, and under the picture write: Now Jamaican Families Come to Britain." (32). This type of betrayal of trust and disrespect for the new legal citizens who were supposed to be receiving this citizenship as a token of appreciation for their role in fighting for Britain during World War II is rampant in the novel, telling a different kind of story that the dominant cultural narrative tries to suppress.

Betrayal is not confined to an ideological debate of what is fair and unfair, or how they have earned this citizenship and yet are not honored as citizens—the attitude towards the migrants demonstrates pure hate. The warning now becomes ominous and takes a serious tone when the veterans start warning the new migrants about the danger on the ground and ask them to consider returning back to Trinidad: 'I would advise you to hustle a passage back home to Trinidad today,' Moses say, 'but I know you would never want to do that … every shipload is big news, and English people don't like the boys coming to work and live' (39). The "like" here is a mild form of expression considering the violence by the natives against the migrants—in reality there were incidents such as the Notting Hill riots[17] and attacks on these immigrants as Ashley Dawson writes about in *Mongrel Nation.*

Despite the knowledge of deception about citizenship, each migrant knows that such status is his/her right and that s/he is more deserving than any other migrant living in Britain. This shared knowledge is apparent when Moses tells the new migrant, Henry, about how unfair and wrong it is that they—the West Indian migrants—are treated as outsiders, even by the Polish restaurant owner, who himself is an illegal immigrant:

> The Pole who have that 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. (40)

The expression, "we is British subjects and he is only a foreigner" is the ultimate recognition of betrayal by the migrant—it weighs down on the systematic failure of the British government to provide the respect, rights, and security that their new West Indian Windrush citizens deserve.

Betrayal Towards the Entire Proletariat

Along with the knowledge of betrayal about the status of their symbolic citizenship, these new migrants are fully aware of why they were brought to Britain, which is for infusing labor into the economic market. Although their citizenship status "centres on the hegemonic ideology of the 'English Colonial Family', both as a Commonwealth of Nations and as a domestic national family" (Wolfe 121), the migrants can see through this political façade. They know that the import of cheap labor played a big part in such a decision. The narrator in *The Lonely Londoners* tells us that this is an open secret: "Everybody know how after the war them rich English family sending to the continent to get domestic" (103). The relationship between the existing working class of Britain and the migrant labor from West Indian islands becomes a tenuous one in *The Lonely Londoners* due to this big influx of labor into the market. It is not hard to imagine the sentiments of the white working class when so many of them remain unemployed for an extended period: "'You see that fellar there?' Moses nod his head at an old English fellar rolling a cigarette. 'He is one of the regulars. He does only draw dole. The last time I was here was last year, and he is still in the queue'" (45). With this, Moses reveals to the new migrant, Galahad, how his arrival adds a burden on the white working class considering the job market is thinly stretched and they are facing long-term unemployment.

Due to the lack of opportunity, this cheap migrant labor force then, as a class, ranks even below the working-class British who are already poor and often exploited: "for the work is a hard work and mostly is spades they have working in the factory, paying lower wages than they would have to pay white fellars" (67). The overburdened and overstretched blue-collar job market becomes contentious with such wage manipulation where the native British worker feels hostile towards their replacement. And yet, looking at it from the perspective of betrayal, it is the entire British working class that is betrayed by their own government. In "Immigrant Labor and Working Class Politics: The French and British Experience," Gary Freeman discusses this link between immigrant labor and burdening the existing working class in the host country. He writes, "[h]orizontally, it has added an underlayer, or sub proletariat, of immigrants below the manual workers of the indigenous working-class. Vertically, it has divided the working class into white/non-white" (24). Andrew Dawson puts forward a similar theory of the overburden of the working-class poor in Britain.[18] The failure of the labor market to provide opportunity to the working class (both white natives and migrants) then becomes an equalizer in a way—the British government betrays the entire working class. The movement of the text in *The Lonely Londoners* centers on the theme that the British government has betrayed the working class in terms of job opportunities, lack of housing, and vast wealth inequity between the rich and the poor.

In *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon makes painstaking efforts to delineate the fact that the working-class community, be it white or migrant, were all in this together: “It have a kind of communal feeling with the Working Class and the spades, because when you poor things does level out, it don’t have much up and down” (75). In *The Lonely Londoners*, the communal feeling comprises a feeling of betrayal: an “us” versus “them” where the former includes all the poor working class, and the latter represents the rich in Britain:

> It have people living in London who don’t know what happening in the room next to them, far more the street, or how other people living. London is a place like that. It divide up in little worlds, and you stay in the world you belong to and you don’t know anything about what happening in the other ones except what you read in the papers. (74)

The above sentiment speaks of a divide that is based on income inequality. The divide is spatial and temporal: these two social classes are far removed from each other in distance and understanding of the everyday struggles of the other. This divide is prominent in the novel as the parts of rich London neighborhoods, like Kingston, are far removed in terms of propriety and sanitation from its counterpart, the slums of the working class located in Harrow Road. The rich live in their own separate world only to read about the working class via the media:

> This is the real world, where men know what it is to hustle a pound to pay the rent when Friday come. The houses around here old and grey and weatherbeaten, the walls cracking like the last days of Pompeii it ain’t have no hot water, and in the whole street that Tolroy and them living in, none of houses have bath. (73)

The economic divide knows no color; the only differentiator is wealth. All the members of the working class in *The Lonely Londoners* face government failure. The government fails to provide them with any dignity.

When it comes to the lack of job opportunities for all working class, betrayal by the government towards both whites and migrants acts as an equalizer, just like the housing condition of the working class; this issue takes center stage in *The Lonely Londoners*. The promise of many good jobs is a deceptive measure that the government uses to lure new migrants and also towards its own working class to give them a false sense of security. In the novel, a migrant arrives with the knowledge that “it have more work in England, and better pay” (31) and that you could be “getting

five pounds a week" (31) which the migrant later finds out to be widely exaggerated. As when the new migrant walks into the Ministry of Labor, he sees "a lot of notice box with glass window on the walls with all kind of vacancies" (44) only to hear from the employment clerk: "'We haven't got anything for you at the moment'" (45). Although this is a betrayal towards the migrant, we are quickly told that the whole employment system is rigged, not only for the migrants but for the entire working class: "It ain't have no place in the world that exactly like a place where a lot of men get together to look for work and draw money from the welfare state while they ain't working" (45).

The government's betrayal towards *all* working-class members (whites and non-whites) in terms of employment opportunities acts as the equalizer and is the central theme in *The Lonely Londoners*. Just like his section on housing inequity, Selvon's entire narrative on this topic, which is quoted below, needs special attention as it explains his posture on global wealth inequity that the poor and working-class encounter. In other words, Selvon's treatment of the subject elevates it from a local issue to make it more about a global crisis of humanity:

> It ain't have no place in the world that exactly like a place where a lot of men get together to look for work and draw money from the Welfare State while they ain't working. Is a kind of place where hate and disgust and avarice and malice and sympathy and sorrow and pity all mix up. Is a place where everyone is your enemy and your friend. Even when you go to draw a national assistance it don't be so bad, because you reach that stage is because you touch bottom 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. It have some men if they lose their job it like the world end, and when two-three weeks go by and they still ain't working, they get so desperate they would do anything. (45)

The pathos in this sentiment of injustice speaks on a global scale. In one instant, the local becomes global—the plight of the unemployed in London becomes the plight of all humans suffering the same injustice. The unemployment center in London identifies with any other such center around the world "where a lot of men get together to look for work" and the local working-class unemployed identify with all unemployed people, globally. They all have the *same* emotions, which are "hate and disgust and avarice and malice and sympathy and sorrow and pity" (141). Selvon sees injustice and betrayal towards a humanity that faces the same struggles. This is the reason his novel ends with the imagery of a "forlorn shadow of doom" where a sea of human race is seen struggling to swim

upstream against the current: he could see “black faces bobbing up and down” together with “millions of white, stained faces” (141).

A careful study of *The Lonely Londoners* when done by taking into account not only Selvon’s background as a first-generation West Indian Windrush migrant but, most importantly, his multiethnic background explains the ambiguities that some critics have noticed. Selvon was the first generation Windrush migrant and so he had to place Windrush migration in a global historical context and investigate what citizenship meant in practice. But there was another larger issue he was investigating. Selvon was from the Caribbean, but he was not of African descent. His father was from India and his mother was part Scottish. Growing up, the family culture was more global. In an interview with Kenneth Ramchand,[19] Selvon says, “I was never Indianized. As a child I grew up completely Creolized, …. And, of course, with a great deal of western influence - I grew up on American films and music.” This global cultural perspective made him unable to identify with any particular ethnic race or identity. In the same interview, he says: “who the hell am I? And where do I fit into it, have I got roots” (45). Just like his contemporaries’, his work speaks to the racial discrimination that the West Indian diaspora faces in a post-colonial setup, and yet, what differentiates his work is that it largely speaks about the struggles of the entire human race. Struggling with poverty makes everyone feel like “a fish out of water gasping for breath” and irrespective of their skin color or country of origin, it would “have some men if they lose their job it like the world end, and when two-three weeks go by and they still ain’t working, they get so desperate they would do anything” (45). And yes, unemployment among the underserved community does show an increase in depression, suicide, and crime to say the least.

Notes

1. In the study entitled “Immigration Policy From Post-War To Post-Brexit: How New Immigration Policy Can Reconcile Public Attitudes And Employer Preferences” by Heather Rolfe, Johnny Runge and Nathan Hudson-Sharp, report that the migration levels peaked at 136,400 in 1961 and that caused a huge tension within the general population.

2. The report provides useful data from surveys, several governmental and other independent studies done on this topic.

3. In their article the authors explain the basic phenomenon that drives global migration: “It commonly takes place because of the push factors of

fewer opportunities in the socio-economic situation and also because of pull factors that exist in more developed areas. Push and Pull factors are forces that can either induce people to move to a new location or oblige them to leave old residences." (1)

4. See notes 1 and 2 for further information on this topic.

5. In "The Moses Trilogy: Sam Selvon discusses his London novels with Susheila Nasta," Selvon talks about his own experience being very similar to the central character of these exile novels.

6. In the interview mentioned in the above note, Selvon also talks about why he chose to write in this non-Standard English. He said it made more sense because all the older generation Trinidadians are "using this identical voice which is so much a part of the West Indian immigrant." (6)

7. In "Mapping Freedom, or Its Limits: The Politics of Movement in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*," Lisa M. Kabesh writes that much of the criticism surrounding *The Lonely Londoners* "take up the language of struggle in their analyses of the text, specifically turning to Louise Bennett's poem 'Colonization in Reverse' to grasp the resistance that *The Lonely Londoners* represents" (1).

8. Rebecca Dyer in the article "Immigration, Postwar London, and the Politics of Everyday Life in Sam Selvon's Fiction" looks at Selvon's use of creolized language as an empowering colonial tool by which the migrants take over the dominant culture and create their own culture.

9. Tzu-Yu Lin in "Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and Diasporic Caribbean Identity In Literature" argues that in *The Lonely Londoners* the "ballads" format helps capture the narrative of the West Indian immigrants in 1950s London "living as a diasporic identity." (157)

10. Kathie Birat focuses on Selvon's use of Calypso and his innovative use of Creole in *The Lonely Londoners* helps recreate Caribbean identity.

11. Ingrams maintains that Selvon appropriates and then reworks the colonizer's language to produce chronicles and ballads of the everyday existence of the 'Other': this new fictional London is celebratory of the culture and language of the diaspora and has been showcased in many works by West Indian writers who succeeded Selvon.

12. In her essay, Anna Levi argues that *The Lonely Londoners*' importance lies in the fact that the work not only gives voice to the

colonized, it actually subverts the language of the dominant culture and then uses it as a tool to create a new post-colonial identity in the heart of London, the epicenter of the colonial enterprise. And writing in a similar vein, Giselle Rampaul shows the relationship between the voice used and theories of the carnivalesque and its importance in popular West Indian Literature such as *The Lonely Londoners*. Rampaul defines carnivalesque as "the themes associated with Carnival [that] are written or expressed in the literary text" (309) and argues that since Carnivalesque themes "may involve the subversion of authority" (309), this is what Selvon uses in combination with the common man's voice to produce a postcolonial narrative that "writes back against dominant and 'superior' discourses" (309).

13. Okawa argues that Selvon relies on laughter and light-hearted comic relief to deal with the inherent power imbalance that besieges the postcolonial encounters between the former colonizer and the colonized: "laughter erupts from the cultural conflicts and tensions between not just the centre and the margins, but also between individual members within each marginalized group" (18)

14. Dawson focuses on Selvon's black migrant characters and their status in the dominant culture as they try to resist different colonial tropes such as racism and other forms of unequal power structure.

15. MacLeod addresses this issue of not being able to neatly fit Samuel Selvon's work into a category. MacLeod writes: "The basic problem is that Selvon is not a neat writer and his idiosyncratic fictional worlds have not really accommodated any of the more prevalent critical approaches in postcolonial discourse" (157).

16. Usongo writes about the political reason such citizenship was offered: "in line with the Nationality Act of 1948, all residents born in the United Kingdom and the colonies were regarded as British citizens. Viewed critically, this ordinance was a ploy on the part of the British government to discourage colonies from seeking independence. The independence of India in 1947 was alarming to the British government, and it sought ways to abort attempts to decolonize its colonial holdings" (182).

17. Ashley Dawson writes about a hate crime incident that took place on a Friday evening in late August 1958 at the Latimer Road underground station in London's Notting Dale neighborhood. This incident involved

the white natives assaulting a Black migrant and his Swedish wife on account of their mixed-race relationship. This incident took a life of its own and became a riot against the West Indian migrant community. Although aware of the racist violence, the administration took no action against the white perpetrators (27-29).

18. Andrew Dawson puts forward a similar theory of the overburden on working-class poor in Britain: “The cohort of the population most affected by the combination of precarity, immiseration and immigration has been the working-class, especially the white working-class in de-industrialised areas” (6).

19. For more read “Sam Selvon Talking: A Conversation with Kenneth Ramchand” (56-64).

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