Mapping Freedom, or Its Limits: The Politics of Movement in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*

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> How it is that Big City get a car, nobody know. But all of a sudden the boys see him driving car all over London.
>   "Where you get that car, Big City?"
>   "Mind your own —ing business. You want a drive?"
> The week he get this car he meet with a accident with a number fortynine bus and he had was to go to court. He went around by Moses moaning, with a lot of forms he had to full up. Big City always confuse when he have forms to fill up, and in the old Brit'n it have bags of that to do.
>   —Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*

Although a brief scene in the novel, the above-quoted excerpt plays out a central drama of Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*. This is a drama of movement, or perhaps more accurately, considering the tone Selvon adopts, this is a *comedy* of movement, of the freedom of movement that proves unfree, or of the collision of freedom with the unfreedoms imposed by the systemic racism of the modern state, and of post-war England in particular. Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* is a text preoccupied with movement—it maps a London transformed by West Indian immigrants as they search for work, travel to and from their jobs, move in and out of rented apartments, and tour the city's public spaces in search of women. This emphasis on mapping has led many critics to engage with the text as a work of community-building. Indeed, *The Lonely Londoners* is an enunciative text; it produces the community it describes in the act of writing, recording and mapping its voices and movements. However, Selvon's novel traces not only mobility, but immobility. It charts where his characters might go and where they might not, where they are free to move and where the colour bar literally bars that movement. Put simply, *The Lonely Londoners* maps freedom and its limitations. The novel's preoccupation with movement thus marks a preoccupation with freedom, one that finally functions to query and problematize a straightforward reading of movement that equates liberty with mobility. In the following, I argue that throughout *The Lonely Londoners*, the writing of community not only produces community, but also queries the movement of that community and the political objects around which it mobilizes.

Published in 1956, *The Lonely Londoners* engages with the period of mass migration from Britain's colonies to the metropole that followed the end of World War II. The novel's mapping of individual transit through

the city of London is set against this backdrop of large-scale, trans-Atlantic migration from the West Indies to England. *The Lonely Londoners* therefore is situated squarely in the global politics of the postwar period, despite the restriction of its narrative to the geographic limits of London. Indeed, the novel arises out of and speaks back to the shifting racial politics involved in the contraction of the British empire and Britain's consequent need to re-imagine its relationship to its colonies. In 1948, the Attlee government passed the Nationality Act, which implemented a new definition of citizenship that was to be held by all residents born in the United Kingdom or a colony (Paul 17). Combined with the strong affective and political ties felt by colonial subjects to the "motherland," the Nationality Act opened the door to immigration to England from the colonies.[1] However, while the Act might be seen positively, in terms of the accordance of legal equality to all British subjects, Kathleen Paul suggests that "it was the opening ploy in the game of citizenship politics in postwar Britain" (9). Ashley Dawson clarifies that its passing marked a political manoeuvre on the part of the Attlee government when faced with the threat of the loss of colonies—a threat made real by India's independence in 1947. According to Dawson, the Nationality Act offered "a powerful symbolic reaffirmation of the imperial system," which was intended to "defuse anticolonial nationalist movements" (10). Furthermore, with immigration recruitment continuing to focus on European states, the Act was in fact intended to reinscribe the "system of global apartheid" wherein "imperial subjects were to be formally equal but geographically separate" (10). England's national policy, then, was predicated on a concern with both the mercantile management of the colonies as a source of resource extraction and export consumption as well as with the maintenance of a system of racial segregation that would allow the definition of English ethnicity and English whiteness to continue against that of the colonial "other."

As a result, West Indians and other colonials who chose to migrate to England under the auspices of the Nationality Act found that the formal equality of subjecthood promised by the Act did not, in fact, translate into real social or material equity. Instead, migrants discovered that systemic discrimination limited their access to jobs and housing, resulting in an informal but pernicious system of segregation in the metropole. In this way, England's postwar policy effectively internalized colonial systems of racial hierarchy and segregation. In other words, the post-war period revealed the ways in which the racial hierarchies and racial segregation of colonial rule were brought "home" to England. *The Lonely Londoners* documents this internal hierarchization of race in its engagement with the lived lives of West Indian migrants in London, especially in its negotiation of the mobility that life in the metropole affords, or, as may be the case, does *not* afford. It is important to note that by 1956, the year of the first publication of *The Lonely Londoners,* the number of migrants arriving in England from the West Indies annually had reached over 25,000 (Ramchand 4). I quote this figure to emphasize that the movement of

migrants to England and their subsequent settlement there cannot be conceived of only as the product of a top-down system of power. Rather, this figure shows the power of migrants to affect that system from the bottom-up. As Paul Gilroy suggests, "the penetration of black [cultural] forms into the dominant culture mean[s] that it is impossible to theorize black culture in Britain without developing a new perspective on British culture *as a whole*" (*Ain't No Black* 156, original emphasis). The penetration of black cultures into British culture is therefore mutually transformative; it transforms post-war London into a site of cultural struggle, or what Mary Louise Pratt identifies as a "contact zone." Pratt defines contact zones as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or its aftermaths" (34). I turn here to this language of struggle—of a "clash" or a "grappling"—because it is important to identify the cultural struggle that Selvon's text both describes and enacts, and to thereby recognize the functioning of power in the London of his novel, which might otherwise be conceived of as a neutral space of cultural performance or cultural exchange.

Much of the criticism surrounding *The Lonely Londoners* recognizes the novel as just such a site of struggle or resistance. Ashley Dawson and Kenneth Ramchand, for example, 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. Dawson asserts that Bennett's poem—and by implication, Selvon's novel—describes "a mass migration that overturned the spatial and cultural apartheid cementing colonial rule" and further remarks that "[t]o migrate to the motherland is, then, to issue a radical challenge to this history of subjugation" (4). For Ramchand, on the other hand, the "colonization in reverse" that Selvon's text documents is not only material or referential; rather, this "colonization in reverse" is also "a work of imagination" (7). This reading of the novel, which sees *The Lonely Londoners* as a work of imaginative or discursive reverse colonization, is an important one, for it recognizes that the text performs the very act of resistance that it documents.[2]

Recent criticism also recognizes the connection between this project of reverse settlement and that of community-building. Jed Esty, for example, convincingly argues that the novel functions as a "reverse auto-ethnographic *self-fashioning*" (203, my emphasis).[3] The consensus amongst critics thus appears to be that in *The Lonely Londoners*, the process of "reverse colonization" is at once that of a communal "self-fashioning."[4] One such interpretation proves especially pertinent to this article and its discussion of mobility. Rebecca Dyer argues intriguingly that the mapping of movement functions to create a "new 'immigrant' London" in and through Selvon's novel (112). Dyer refers to Michel de Certeau's theory of tactics in order to attend to the subjects of Selvon's novel as active agents in their everyday lives. De Certeau attempts an intervention in a Foucaultian analysis of power that stresses the diffusion

of power and discipline into the minutiae of the everyday, which is significant for its positioning of subjects not only as objects of power but as active "users" of the very system in which power operates (xii). In this way, De Certeau recognizes in everyday practices political tactics that work to resist strategies of power, and it is this recognition of the political in the everyday that Dyer emphasizes in her reading of *The Lonely Londoners*. She writes: "The migrant characters' everyday lives—the trajectories of their walks, their gatherings in small rented rooms, their manipulations of 'proper' English—are political acts ... however incomplete in their ability to alleviate the hardships of actual immigrants' lives in London" (112-13). Dyer's astute analysis recognizes both the resistance enacted by diverse actions in the text—from renaming city monuments to refusing to work de-skilled jobs, or from organizing and attending dances to eating the city's pigeons—as well as the productive capacity of these everyday practices to recreate the city and imagine a new, immigrant community.

Critical analyses of the production of community in *The Lonely Londoners* are thus extremely valuable for their examination of how putatively "marginal" literatures might both document systems of oppression while appropriating and reconstructing the "centre." However, there is a tendency in the criticism surrounding Selvon's novel to conflate or equate mobility with political resistance, or, at the very least, to present all community movements as equally politicized and equally productive. This is a position which, I suggest, the complexity of Selvon's novel cannot support. A closer reading of de Certeau's theory of tactics reveals that recognizing the political in everyday practices is not enough. Rather, as his analysis of walking as an everyday tactic shows—a tactic that is deployed throughout Selvon's novel—these enunciative practices are *multivocal*, and therefore require further consideration. According to de Certeau, "[w]alking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it 'speaks'" (99). Walking creates space in its very use, but in its production or enunciation, walking and other everyday practices might reify strategies of power, might transgress, might experiment and might even comment upon modes of transgression. We therefore must recognize that these enunciative practices are neither homogenous nor necessarily coherent. As a result, it is imperative to query the conditions and objectives of such practices. Following de Certeau, I assert that one must attend to how "users make ... innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy *in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules*" (xiii-xiv, my emphasis). I argue that a reading of the enunciation of community in *The Lonely Londoners* requires not only a recognition of the mechanisms of its production, but further demands careful consideration of its "interests" and "rules." If we accept that the process of mapping is simultaneously a process of construction, and that this process does not passively record material existence but actively inflects social relations, we must ask

ourselves what type of sociality Selvon seeks to promote or critique in *The Lonely Londoners*.

Selvon begins to ask these questions—to ask what type of political movement is possible and what type is desirable, to ask what might be its "terms" and "rules"—in a negotiation of *physical* movement in his text. The work of imagining a movement of resistance in *The Lonely Londoners* appears at first glance to manifest itself, not surprisingly, in movement—in the movement of the "boys" as they travel across London. However, it is important to recognize that Selvon also maps the *limitations* they face, by carefully documenting the numerous barriers they encounter in their travels across the city, barriers that are at once physical and social or economic. In charting these sites of racist exclusion alongside well-known landmarks like Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square, which might appear on any tourist map of the city, Selvon makes visible and legible a system of racial hierarchy that, as an unnamed, diffuse network of state and private practices, otherwise might elude apprehension. Selvon's depiction of London thus maps routes and destinations just as a traditional map does, but, unlike modern maps of London, this map draws attention to its own limits, to what it *cannot* access, and to what *cannot* be seen. As a result, *The Lonely Londoners* offers a detailed topography of racial hierarchy in the metropole: it puts in relief different gradations of mobility and freedom that are accessible, or, as the case may be, inaccessible to the text's West Indian characters. In mapping the movement of its characters alongside the restrictions they face, *The Lonely Londoners* succeeds in charting both freedom and its limits, a powerful gesture that comes to trouble the often untroubled equation of freedom of movement with *political* freedom.

The novel begins to trouble the conflation of freedom of movement with political freedom at its very outset. The narrative opens with a trip to Waterloo Station, which is also the rail entry point for new immigrants to London. The new arrivals on the platform of Waterloo Station are optimistic; however, Moses remains pessimistic, for he is fully aware of the "colour bar" that these new immigrants will face in the city (29). It is through the search for housing that these immigrants to London will recognize that many "points of entry" into the country remain barred to them, the reality of which the boys repeatedly face in their encounters with signs reading "Keep the Water White" (89). Procter argues that in postwar London, "[t]he dwelling place was, perhaps more than the official point of entry, the site at which the regulation, policing and deferral of black settlement were most effectively played out. It was around housing that the national panic surrounding black immigration tended to accumulate and stage itself in this period" (22). Moses is keenly aware of the "national panic" surrounding immigration and housing, and it is for this reason that he ironically appoints himself as "welfare officer" vested with the duty of "scattering the boys around London, for he don't want no concentrated area in the Water" (25). Significantly, Moses's "scattering of the boys" is suggestive of a secondary dispersal after the first diasporic "scattering" of

West Indians from the Caribbean. The movement of migrants to the metropole thereby transforms into a disempowering dispersal, and Moses, in his role as self-appointed "welfare officer," implicates himself in the privatized segregation practices surrounding housing in post-war London. Rather than labouring to create a sense of diasporic community, then, Moses works to transform London into a site of dispersion, and, indeed, a site of the loneliness of Selvon's title.

Another point of entry that proves difficult to penetrate for the boys of Selvon's novel is the job market. Like the housing market, the employment sector proves discriminatory in the postwar England of *The Lonely Londoners*, although Selvon's treatment of the job market points more explicitly to the relationship between state and supposedly "private" discrimination. Dawson shows that the postwar period witnessed the development of a segregated workforce, with capital and the state working in tandem to keep whites in skilled jobs and to push blacks into manual labour. As Dawson points out, this segregation was legitimated by one form of popular racism of the day: "nonwhites were perceived as simply unfit for skilled tasks, despite their formal qualifications" (11). However, segregationist practices proved profitable for both the state and business in two ways. First, they supplied a workforce for a labour market that proved difficult to fill. Dawson explains:

> [w]ith the full employment that accompanied the economic boom of the 1950s and early 1960s in Britain giving employers relatively small leverage on workers, migrants from the colonies played the vital role of replacing white workers who refused to take up physically demanding and socially undesirable forms of manual labour. (10-11)

Second, a segregated workforce also "played the vital role of restraining wage increases during the postwar period" (11). The influx of migrant workers provided a reserve army of labour for deskilled jobs, which increased competition for otherwise undesirable jobs, and thereby limited migrant workers' leverage to demand better wages.

The Lonely Londoners documents this segregation and its effects on the mobility of migrant labourers who provided England with a labour pool for jobs not wanted by whites. The reader watches as Galahad, qualified as an electrician, presents himself at the employment exchange office, but is told that there is no work available. Moses takes him next door, to the Ministry of Labour—the office where social insurance and "the dole" is distributed—and here state segregationist policy and the privatized interests of capital become explicit, for Galahad's records are marked "J-A, Col."—indicating, incorrectly, that he is from Jamaica and that he is "coloured." Moses explains: "[s]uppose a vacancy come and they want to send a fellar, first they will find out if the firm want coloured fellars before they send you. That save a lot of time and bother, you see" (46). This trip to the Ministry of Labour emphatically marks the boundaries faced by migrants from the colonies; it is only Galahad's second day in London and his mobility, both physical and material in

terms of *upward* mobility, is blocked by the colour bar. Dyer attributes such negative portrayals of the welfare state in *The Lonely Londoners* to a critique of the boys and of "exploitation *within* the group," a critique which she locates in Selvon's choice to "unflatteringly [portray] a number of 'the boys' taking illegal advantage of social services" (121, original emphasis). Dawson recognizes another possible motive for critical depictions of the welfare state in the cultural texts of black Britons: a critique of its "infantilizing ministrations" (23).[5] However, while authors like Selvon may have certainly used their works to level a critique at the welfare state and its supposedly socially-deleterious effects on a population of unemployed workers, such a reading overlooks the co-articulation of the welfare state with race and racial hierarchization. The key point in Selvon's depiction of the welfare office is not only that he reveals the artificial origins of popular racisms—that immigrants are lazy, for example, or that nonwhites are best suited to manual labour—but that the period of decolonization and modern state formation marked by the 1950s was also a period of *race* formation, of the internalization of racist exclusions and racial hierarchies previously externalized in Britain's system of colonial rule. Selvon's text, then, does not simply represent a critique of the welfare state. Rather, *The Lonely Londoners* critiques its racial ministrations—it explores the re-iteration or translation of racist *colonial* hierarchies and systems of *colonial* segregation in and through the institutions of the modern nation-state.

If a trip to the employment exchange office only underscores the growing disconnect between movement and opportunity experienced by West Indians in the segregated London of the postwar era, Selvon's depiction of actual employment opportunities in the text works to further undo the traditional equation of freedom with mobility. He does so by presenting two symbols of British progress and movement—the post office and the railway—and subverting their symbolic power. In Selvon's hands, the British Post shifts dramatically from a sign of movement and the dissemination of state power to that of state-sponsored segregation and the limitation of social mobility. At the office of the Ministry of Labour, Galahad and Moses encounter a sign that reads: "Gateway to a Secure Future Join the Post Office as a Postman" (44). Next to it, Galahad and Moses find "a lot of others encouraging you to join the army and the navy and the air force" (44). Read side by side, these posters link the British Post to the state's military endeavours—including its violent colonial history. In *The Lonely Londoners*, then, sites of national power and expansion become sites of exploitation and oppression, with the state targeting a largely nonwhite "underclass" for its most undesirable jobs, thereby limiting their movement in British society to strictly delimited spheres.

Cap's attempt to find work at a rail yard has a similar, if not greater effect. The reader learns that Cap is sent by the employment exchange office to the rail yard to "get a storekeeping work for seven pounds" (51). Upon his arrival, though, Cap's job offer changes. As Moses later explains

the situation to Cap, "[t]hey send you for a storekeeper work and they want to put you in the yard to lift heavy iron. They think that is all we good for, and this time they keeping all the soft clerical jobs for them white fellars" (52). However, Cap's experience at the rail yard does more than explicate the racial hierarchy of labour in postwar London; it further uncouples the symbol of British progress *par excellence*—the railway— from its association with freedom and mobility. Here we see quite plainly that Cap is not able to access the freedom of movement represented by the British railway system. Rather, he discovers that the rail yard is a physically segregated space—he is taken to "the back of the station, and behind there real grim" (52). The implication of this separation is that the colonial system of segregation is in the process of reification at home, in England, in this period of decolonization. Furthermore, Cap is excluded from the economic progress the British railway represents. Rail systems in the colonies were built at the expense, rather than the benefit, of colonials during Britain's imperial expansion. Constructed as routes of resource extraction, railways operated as a function of imperial exploitation and appropriation. The appearance of a segregated rail yard in *The Lonely Londoners*—located notably in the metropolis itself—works to show the extent to which racist colonial practices were brought home with the shrinking of the British empire.

The uncoupling of freedom and mobility in *The Lonely Londoners* thus functions as a mode of subversive state critique. In troubling the traditional affiliation between the two, Selvon simultaneously discredits both the myth of equal opportunity offered by the developing welfare state in England, as well as the imperial myth of progress that proves still potent in Britain's postwar era. However, it is important to note that while Selvon works to challenge the conflation of freedom with mobility, his text does not cast aside the possibility of building a meaningful social and political movement amongst West Indians in London. Indeed, Selvon's text clearly calls out for social movement, for the building of community ties where racist exclusions make community necessary for survival. However, the repeated disconnect seen between mobility and forms of freedom that are real or productive for the characters of the novel underscores that not all "freedoms" are equal. Gilroy asserts that "solidarity ends and danger arises when freedom entails little more than winning a long-denied opportunity to shop on the same terms as the other, more privileged citizens further up the wobbly ladder of racial hierarchy and economic advantage" ("Get Free" 25). *The Lonely Londoners* recognizes precisely this problematic conflation of individual mobility— and the limited freedoms it often entails—with large-scale or broad-based social movement and the *systemic* changes it can effect. For this reason, a straight-forward reading of the apparently unbridled movement of the characters of the text as empowering requires further examination.

The men of the text are able to at least partially transcend racial divisions through mobility, although it must be asked what this type of mobility accomplishes. The boys are able to travel to and from work, and

from different residences in different parts of the city to meet each Sunday at Moses's place. The movement of the boys brings them together, and so becomes a necessary response to both the racial segregation and the more general atomization of urban life. However, if we take a closer look at the "cruising" of the boys as an everyday practice, we learn that their everyday movement does not always function to transcend power structures. This is not to say that the boys' walking of the city is not political in nature—that it does not offer a means by which they can come to own or appropriate London. Indeed, to recall de Certeau's terminology, we can recognize in these movements a series of *tactics*. However, it is imperative that we ask how these tactics "speak"—that we ask how they interact with existing strategies or systems of power, and that we query whether these practices speak with or against the strategic operation of state power and colonial rule in postwar England. Indeed, a closer examination of the movement of the boys reveals that "freedom of movement" does not necessarily translate into freedom from systemic power structures, nor does sexual pursuit necessarily translate into greater sexual freedom or equality. While we see men in the text constantly on the move, women are generally represented as static. This is best seen in the "happy hunting ground" of Hyde Park (107). Heterosexual men here become pursuers of women who are figured as passive prey, their numbers increasing as "fresh blood" arrives each year (107). Men are also repeatedly figured as shoppers who "cruise" London's public spaces selecting objects of desire, which again renders women passive objects—here as commodities—while figuring men as consumers equipped with the power of choice.

The Lonely Londoners thus engages with the multivocality of political movement, for while walking the city to meet women proves empowering for the black men of the text, it also functions to reinscribe inequitable gender and racial hierarchies. We learn, for example, that for many white men it is a "thrill to hit a black number" whereas a "spade wouldn't hit a spade" (107). Many critics problematically remark that the interracial sexual relationships of the text simply attest to the lived experience of black men in the metropolis. Dyer's response to the heterosexism displayed by the men of the novel, for example, defers uncritically to realism and referentiality. Specifically responding to the accounts of spousal abuse in the text, Dyer writes: "in Selvon's defense, since the perspective is unwaveringly male, the storyteller's voice has the ring of an actual person with prejudices and shortcomings" (122). Similarly, readings of the novel that turn to Fanon's analysis of the split subjectivity of black men are also subject to this troubling deferral to referentiality. Fanon's articulation of the desire of the black man for (white) legitimacy is certainly important when considering the sexual politics of Selvon's novel. Fanon's famous claim, "[b]etween these white breasts that my wandering hands fondle, white civilization and worthiness become mine," offers a key insight into Selvon's depiction of black male desire (45).[6] However, it is important to recognize that sexual freedom in

The Lonely Londoners fails to translate into political or social movement; what is more, it is purchased at the expense of the freedom and mobility of subjects who are othered by their gender and sexual orientation. In this way, a strict reading of Fanon's theory of black masculinity remains highly problematic in that his work largely disregards the impact male desire would have on women and on other "subaltern" subjects. Rather than simply asserting that Selvon's text reflects Fanon's conceptualization of black masculinity, or that the novel offers a realistic portrait of black masculine culture, it is therefore critical to recognize in the male colonial subject a potential locus of the re-articulation of colonial forms of power. In *The Lonely Londoners*, then, it is important to recognize that sexual freedom does not necessarily translate into broader political or social freedoms; in fact, it becomes a means by which racial and sexual hierarchies are re-inscribed in new forms.[7]

Much like the novel's engagement with the movement and travels of the boys elsewhere in the text, its depiction of their sexual pursuits ultimately works to untie the conceptualization of freedom from its superficial association with mobility. I wish to turn here to Paul Gilroy's recent work, *Darker than Blue*, which attends to this question of the relationship between freedom and movement in regards to black youth culture in the United States. While Gilroy's discussion of political movement deals exclusively with car culture in America, his analysis of the traditionally coterminous concepts of freedom and mobility proves salient to a discussion of *The Lonely Londoners*, especially his critique of private modes of mobility as that which market freedom while producing what he calls "unfreedoms." Gilroy remarks on the "intense association of cars and freedom," an association that for Gilroy effectively privatizes freedom—offering it up for purchase and private consumption—and thereby divests freedom of its *political* power (14). According to Gilroy, private modes of transportation individualize movement and "confiscat[e] the possibility of collective experience" in and amongst disempowered groups (22). For Gilroy, then, car culture becomes a means by which the desire for freedom is diverted into the fetish of the commodity, a diversion which strips the desire for freedom of both its power to unite a political and social community as well as the potential for such a community to achieve political gains.

With Gilroy's reading in mind, we can return to the scene that opens this paper: the almost comedic collision of a London city bus with Big City's car. Notably, Big City's car does not provide him with mobility—neither the upward mobility through class hierarchies that car purchases often suggest, nor even physical mobility. Big City only has his car for one week before he collides with a bus. In fact, it would appear that the bus collides with the car, as Big City's emphasis on the movement of the bus suggests that it hit him. He explains to Moses that he was "going slow... [a]nd same time this bus fly round the corner—" (95-6). While Big City's car brings him neither physical nor class mobility, the ambivalence with which this short scene is recounted plays out in brief the stakes of

private, upward mobility. As a result, the collision of Big City's car with a city bus can be read as Selvon's staging of the collision of the desire for the depoliticized individualism promoted through consumerism and the opposing need for political collectivity in a supposedly post-colonial, multicultural order. The drama, or, in this case, the comedy, of collision is played out repeatedly in Selvon's text. Take the ballad recounted by Moses of a Jamaican man who spends one night with a wealthy, presumably white woman. Moses explains:

> In the big city the sex life gone wild you would meet women who beg you to go with them one night a Jamaican with a woman in Chelsea in a smart flat with all sorts of surrealistic painting on the walls and contemporary furniture in the G-plan the poor fellar bewildered and asking questions to improve himself because the set up look like the World of Art but the number not interested in passing on knowledge she only interested in one thing and in the heat of emotion she call the Jamaican a black bastard though she didn't mean it as an insult but as a compliment under the circumstances but the Jamaican fellar get vex and he stop and say why the hell you call me a black bastard and he thump the woman and went away. (109)

Dawson reads this encounter as evidence of the emasculation experienced by black men in the metropolis, where their treatment as fetishized objects does not and cannot translate into "class mobility or even the acquisition of cultural knowledge" (40). Though accurate, this reading suggests that Selvon works only to represent the reality of the difficulty of upward class mobility in the political and social climate of post-war London. However, episodes like this one in *The Lonely Londoners* suggest that not only is "uplift" difficult to achieve, but that it might also be *undesirable* in its predication on a form of individual mobility that precludes and even anaesthetizes the desire for collective, anti-racist movement.

The question emerges, then: does Selvon offer any positive or productive models of social and political movement in *The Lonely Londoners*? One answer might lie in the hostel where Moses stays upon first arriving in London. The hostel provided a space where "he wouldn'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" (47). While Moses subsequently moves to a single-occupancy basement flat, it still provides a meeting place for the boys, where, "every Sunday morning, like if they going to church, the boys liming in Moses room, coming together for a oldtalk" (138). This desire for a communal meeting place is also expressed by Big City, who explains that if he wins the football pools, he would "buy out a whole street of house, and give it to the boys and say: 'Here, look place to live'" (97).[8] Significantly, Big City envisions this space as exclusive, explaining that he "would put a notice on all the boards: 'Keep the Water Coloured, No Rooms for Whites'" (97). Selvon here clearly presents the building of community amongst West Indian men as one avenue of political and social movement capable of offering a space for the expression and conceptualization of resistance against the racism they face in the city. Intriguingly, however, this

solidarity amongst the boys requires a certain amount of immobility, and, imagined by Big City in its idealized form, this political movement in fact revolves around a form of appropriation that is fixed and stable.

While the fraternal relationship shared amongst the boys creates the conditions for their politicization, it is in fact Tanty—a woman excluded from this fraternal solidarity—who proves the most effective agent of change in *The Lonely Londoners*. Tanty initiates what might be termed a "trust movement" at her local market. The reader learns that "[i]t was Tanty who cause the shopkeeper to give people credit" (78). "One day" we are told, "she ask the shopkeeper if he don't know about trust," and after demanding credit for her purchases, she "walk out the white people shop brazen as ever" (79). Tanty further challenges problems she recognizes *within* her community, specifically gender inequality. She provides Agnes, who is beaten by her husband, a place to escape from his abuse. She also encourages Agnes to leave her husband, and advocates for legal action against him, asking Tolroy to "advice that Lewis that he better stop beating Agnes. Here is not Jamaica, you know" (72). She then refuses to divulge where Agnes is and warns Tolroy, "You know what? Agnes going to bring him up for assault!" (72). Like Big City, then, Tanty wants to make changes that will benefit a larger community. However, 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.

It is Tanty, then, who provides a model for the instigation of an inclusive political movement in the West Indian community of postwar London; yet, ironically, Tanty is one of the most immobile characters of the text. In contrast to the male characters of the novel, Tanty does not like to travel much. Rather, Moses explains that "[l]ike how some people live in small village and never go to the city, so Tanty settle down in the Harrow Road in the Working Class area" (80). Moses' characterization of Tanty might at first appear pejorative, for his invocation of a "small village" may invite readers to think of Tanty as "backward" in her supposed inability to adjust to modern, city life. However, Moses' characterization of Harrow Road as a village invokes a strong sense of community. While Moses the "welfare officer" disperses blacks across the city to counter white fears surrounding immigration and miscegenation, Tanty refuses to be separated from her family and her community. When asked to have her photo taken upon arrival at Waterloo Station, she insists, "'you can't take me alone. You have to take the whole family'" (32). Indeed, the only physical journey Tanty makes outside of the community is founded on a "good excuse"—to get the keys for the cupboard to make dinner for her family (81). Tanty's first trip through London contrasts sharply with Galahad's recounted earlier in the novel. Whereas Galahad's bravado changes quickly into paralysing fear, Tanty's fear of the London tube does not deter her because "the thought that she would never be able to say she went made her carry on" (82). Upon finally arriving at her

destination, Tanty's sister offers her some lunch. Tanty's response?: "'What! ... eat this English food when I have peas and rice waiting home to cook? You must be mad!'" (83). What is important to recognize here is that Tanty is both able and ready to take on the challenge of travelling through and around what may feel like a foreign and intimidating city. She stays home not because she cannot leave, but because she *will* not. Tanty's static position in the "village" of her neighbourhood is a position of choice; moreover, it represents a choice to remain bound to the needs and desires of her family and to the other working class West Indians who are her neighbours.

Ironically, then, Tanty's attachment to location and community becomes a powerful and effective model of social and political movement in Selvon's novel. While the boys of the text may appear free to move and free to "cruise" the city, Tanty appears fixed and static, perhaps even "backwards." Yet it is this fixed, stationary character who instigates a real movement in her community, and thereby powerfully shows readers that resistance often requires a refusal to move. Tanty remains attentive to the gender and racial inequities that she encounters around her. Her refusal to move thus marks a refusal to *be moved* by the prospect of individual upward mobility promised by England's developing multicultural policy and its "free market" economy. In other words, Tanty refuses to purchase individual freedom at the cost of systemic change. Through Tanty, then, Selvon's novel promotes a certain type of "standing still." It promotes stillness as a powerful reaction against narratives of progress—narratives of "moving forward" in which colonial ideology and multicultural policy alike have been invested—and, further, as a form of contestation of the imperative to ascend capitalist society's class hierarchy. Moreover, it reminds readers of the consonance between stillness and community-building.

The Lonely Londoners powerfully destabilizes the association of freedom with mobility and, in so doing, embarks upon a consideration of the relationship between political collectivity and liberty. It asks again and again of a community of black Londoners, is your journey really necessary?[9] Whether in the purchase of a car, in the "cruising" for women like commodities, or in the hope of trading one's sexual subordination for economic or social "uplift," *The Lonely Londoners* repeatedly asks which forms of freedom might translate into broader political and social change. In so doing, the novel launches an anti-racist critique that targets the state, while challenging capitalism and its privatization of the racial hierarchies of European imperialism, as well as black masculine chauvinism and its re-inscription of gender hierarchies. However, it is the novel's powerful uncoupling of the traditional association of freedom with mobility that I have attempted to underscore throughout this paper, and to which I wish to return here, in its conclusion. Gilroy notes that anti-racist movements have "a variety of goals other than the elimination of racist ideology" (*Ain't No Black* 25). And de Certeau's theory of tactics shows that everyday practices, while always political and often politicized, are also necessarily

multivocal in nature; they can speak against existing power systems, but can also speak to and in support of such systems. Selvon's novel confirms both of these points. It asks what forms of political movement the segregated space of postwar London both denies and demands, while simultaneously acknowledging that political acts are neither always resistive, nor are they necessarily productive. It is this recognition of both the political in the everyday and the multivocality of political action itself that makes the novel's disarticulation of freedom and mobility such a powerful gesture. For, in this disarticulation, *The Lonely Londoners* begins to query what forms of political movement might bring about productive change and real freedoms for colonial subjects in postwar England.

Notes

1. Ashley Dawson notes that many of those emigrating to England from the colonies "felt that they were coming to collect the reward for their faithfulness as British subjects," and yet others were "intent on helping to rebuild the devastated motherland" (2). Kenneth Ramchand also points to the material motivations for migration. He notes that the settlement of many West Indians in England actually marked a return motivated by material factors, as many migrants had served in Britain's armed forces or had worked in England's war factories and were therefore drawn back to England in search of greater job opportunities and a higher standard of living (3-4).

2. See also Mark Looker's analysis of Selvon's intervention in the "tradition of the urban narrative" as a means by which the author discursively appropriates the city and its literary canon (81). He points to the opening paragraph of *The Lonely Londoners* as one example of this mode of appropriation, arguing that its description of a grim London fog "set[s] the book squarely in the tradition of English urban literature," specifically in its similarity to the opening passages of both Dickens' *Bleak House* and T.S. Eliot's *The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock* (75).

3. According to Esty, a "self-fashioning" of community is achieved through the novel itself, which functions as an ethnography that at once destabilizes Englishness in a treatment of English culture as the anthropological object "othered" by its study, while simultaneously defining or producing a community of West Indians through and against this study of Englishness (203).

4. For example, see Procter's analysis of the use of language in the text. Procter asserts: "It is by naming the city, that London is effectively 'settled' by the boys, becoming more than simply a site of dislocation and alienation, but also a landscape of belonging, of accommodation and of dwelling" (53). For Procter, the renaming of Bayswater as "the Water,"

for example, represents the production of a language of "communal significance," where the city is reproduced as "the repository for a group consciousness" (55). According to Procter, then, language allows Selvon to exceed the referential and perform a reverse "settlement" of London, a process that produces a discursive space for black immigrants.

5. Dawson here is referring to the work of Buchi Emecheta, not to Sam Selvon. However, I draw on his analysis because it shows how critiques of the welfare state often focus exclusively on what are seen as its social effects without taking into account its co-emergence with decolonization, modern state formation and the attendant processes of racial formation in both.

6. Fanon's theories of desire and black subjectivity are valuable, insofar as they attest to the lived experiences of black men oppressed by a system of colonial apartheid. Fanon's work thus cannot be disregarded to the extent to which it answers the question first set forth by W.E.B. DuBois: "How does it feel to be a problem?" (213). However, certain strains of interpretations of DuBois' theory of "double consciousness" and Fanon's later and explicitly sexual elaboration of this concept are troubling. Such readings become problematic when they function to effectively reify the supposed pathology of the black subject. Lewis MacLeod's reading of masculinity in Selvon's work falls prey to this tendency. In his analysis of *The Lonely Londoners*, MacLeod writes: "the light-hearted attitude about sex cannot disguise the pathology that underlies it" (164). According to MacLeod, the male characters of the text exhibit a "schizoid approach to sex" (165). DuBois' and Fanon's theories of double consciousness and black masculinity are extremely valuable in that they address the experience of a sense of divided—"schizoid"— subjectivity in the divided, and, indeed, schizoid world of colonial apartheid. However, critics like MacLeod step into dangerous territory when the signifiers "pathological" and "healthy" are taken as static and referential.

7. Dawson takes up this line of argumentation in his discussion of Selvon's representation of black masculinity, but goes on to assert that "[f]ar from being heterosexist ..., Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* offers an explicit and prescient critique of these modes of black male style and the cultural nationalism they embody" (36). While I cannot agree that Selvon's treatment of sexual and gender politics marks a form of *explicit* critique, I find Dawson's supporting argumentation of this point compelling. Dawson writes:

> *The Lonely Londoners* also stresses the hollow character of the sexual adventurism of "the boys," suggesting that their triumphs in the bedroom fail to create truly egalitarian and postimperial relations among the novel's characters. Instead of

dismantling colonial power relations, that is, the boys' conquests simply invert those relations through the creation of gender hierarchy. (36)

8. This option of becoming a property owner is satirized in *Moses Ascending*.

9. In her article "'Is Your Journey Really Necessary?': Going Nowhere in Late Modernist London," Marina Mackay draws attention to a poster that might have papered any number of British railway stations in the 1940s. The poster asks: "Is your journey really necessary?" For Mackay, this admonitory message conjures feelings of entrapment and forced communality evocative of a structure of feeling particular to England of the 40s and 50s, a structure of feeling that speaks to "the form and politics of another kind of modernism, a modernism that *cannot leave home*" (1601, my emphasis). I point to a similar project at the heart of Selvon's novel. Much as wartime propaganda posters work to produce a sense of national solidarity in the face of the terrors and pressures of war, Selvon's reverse auto-ethnographic project works to produce a community and a sense of social solidarity in a space of racial exclusions and social atomization.

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