Hybrid identities in *The Lonely Londoners* by Samuel Selvon

A character analysis of the two characters Moses and Galahad.

Hybrida identiteter i *The Lonely Londoners* av Samuel Selvon
En karaktärsanalys av karaktärena Moses och Galahad.

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Abstract

This essay reads and analyses the novel *The Lonely Londoners* by Samuel Selvon through the lens of postcolonial theory. It examines the West Indian migrants who migrated to Britain in the 1950s, searching for a better life. They had been indoctrinated by the colonizers for decades of the prosperous life awaiting them in the Motherland. They arrived in Britain with high hopes and eager minds to find a possibility of abandoning the colonial oppression in exchange for a life in London. However, that did not become the reality for the migrants. The novel depicts the shattering of the sensation of self-worth and identity which they sacrificed in their attempts to adapt to and belong in English society. The migrants find themselves confused and ambivalent in this very harsh and cold British society. Further, this essay investigates the ways in which mimicry and hybridity have been portrayed in the novel through analysing two of the main characters applying theories by Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, and Edouard Glissant.

*Keywords*: Hybridity, Racism, Identity, Language

Sammanfattning

samhällsklimatet. Vidare undersöks hur och på vilka sätt mimicking och hybriditet skildras i romanen genom att analysera två av huvudkaraktärerna genom att applicera teorier av bland annat Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall och Edouard Glissant.

_Nyckelord: Hybrid identitet, racism, identitet, språk_
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Introduction

A frequently debated subject and constantly current, and recurrent, topic for decades has been migration and racism. There are no signs of decline of the problems, which becomes obvious when organizations such as Black Lives Matter demonstrate in the streets around the world, against racism and inequality, 2021.

Many scholars have written on topics such as racism, integration, and migration, both within the psychological-, sociological- but also under the literary field. They have come to different conclusions and offered solutions; however, politicians appear paralyzed. In 2018, António Guterres, the Secretary-General of United Nations, states that “migration is a positive global phenomenon” (United Nations). Bill Ashcroft summarizes the phenomenon of migration “globalization proves to be an endless source of cultural surprise” (Postcolonial 206). This quote, I believe, puts a light on the reason migration and integration are recurring questions on an individual as well as political and societal level. Ashcroft further points out that, despite the fact migration is nothing new, the politicians seem, and act surprised and puzzled by the nature and after-effects of migration (Postcolonial 208). He concludes different types of globalism, such as economical, sociological, political, and cultural “all of them may be addressed in terms of the model of power relations developed over several centuries of European imperialism” (208). Edward Said confirms that one of the consequences of colonialism, and later globalisation, is migration (Culture 279, 308).

The aftermath of British colonization of the West Indies is migration of the former colonised people to the Motherland, Britain. The process of adapting to a foreign country is a dilemma that is affecting every individual migrant to different extent. Though, people have migrated since long before colonialism, it has become one of the continuing topics the contemporary world face and deal with, in different ways, through different perspectives, ever since. For that reason, I find literary work written by those who belonged to the first wave of migrants arriving to a foreign country, particularly interesting. Raising questions such as; Why do we still experience the same alienation against different people trying to relocate as 100 years ago? Why do people still act the same way? Why do we not learn nor evolve? are of interest to me. I find it intriguing, that all these questions can be found in literature, but the answers are few. The issues migrants dealt with 100 years ago remain the same, illustrated in both in fiction and reality.

This paper aims to analyse the way in which Samuel Selvon presents the effects migrating to Britain in the 1950s have on the characters in the novel The Lonely Londoners. I
argue that the daily struggles of survival the characters experience, mainly caused by racism, are so great that it decreases their possibilities to adapt. These characters blame their own bodies (skin colour) instead of the system for all the challenges they face to integrate into the British society. The main questions addressed and explored in this paper are the ones concerning the consequences the characters of the novel experience on an individual level. This is exhibited by examining and analysing two of the main characters, Moses and Galahad. These two characters handle the transition differently, but the result is the same. They both struggle and find it difficult to assimilate due to the harsh living conditions they are forced to live under. They face language barrier, and they are exposed to racism daily. They constantly get excluded from the main society which results in an isolated life, they become lonely as the title of the novel suggests. They suffer from both physical and psychological segregation which is demonstrated in this paper.

**Background**

Since Christopher Columbus landed on the banks of the island, we today know as Trinidad, 1498, the Spanish Colonialism of the West Indies began. Later the British Empire conquered several of the islands, and they fell under British rule. The local inhabitants were forced to adapt to the Brits, both when it came to their culture and language (Ashcroft, Postcolonial 39).

Fast forward about 450 years to the post-war era, Great Britain was suffering and there was a great shortage of labour. Great Britain’s need for labour was so great a ship, the S/S Empire Windrush, started trafficking the route from Trinidad via several islands in the West Indies to London, holding over 500 passengers. The islanders were invited to cross the ocean to help rebuild the shattered British economy post World War II, with promises of a better life (McDowell). One can argue that the Windrush ship also was a form of slave trade as the West Indians were lured by false promises by the Brits of a prosperous life in the Motherland, which in reality was not that prosperous. However, the living conditions on the islands were often poor, so many were encouraged by the urge to find better living conditions elsewhere. It is from this type of motivation of a better life Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* starts. Furthermore, West Indians had been separated from their ancestral home once before by their forced removal from Africa by slave traders. This resulted in that their identity already was based less on inherited cultural practices and more on forced submission into what they had been taught was “Britishness” in the British influenced school on the islands (Grace
In a similar fashion, the characters of *The Lonely Londoners*’ dreams were not fulfilled. Daphne Grace explains: “The tragedy is exacerbated when the new location of exile is also found to be inadequate and cannot fulfil the dreams it promised. Exile may mean freedom, but at the cost of a life of perpetual alienation, fragmentation and loneliness” (178). There is a constant undertone of loneliness and displacement in the novel.

Literature written by the formerly colonised, who left their native country, can be referred to diasporic literature. The term diaspora refers to people who have migrated, separated voluntarily or involuntarily, from their native country (McLeod 234). Historically, texts written by them have been an important channel of communicating and expressing the problematic nature that migrating to a different country brings, often narrated out of a personal perspective (Grace 216). *The Lonely Londoners* is depicted from the West Indian migrants’ point of view.

The author Samuel Selvon was one of the passengers boarding the S/S Empire Windrush in 1948. This brief biographical overview will later connect to the analysis of the depiction, presentation, and destiny of the characters in the novel *The Lonely Londoners*, and their struggles of identity they suffer. To survive and make a living in London, Selvon had to change and adapt his identity as he arrived in London, for example his language and his clothing. Homi Bhabha calls this kind of imitation “mimicry”. He means a migrant must mimic the native inhabitants to fit into the ways of which their new motherland expects them to act and function (33). This is similar to what the characters in the novel *The Lonely Londoners* experience. However, the characters attempt to mimic were not always enough nor successful. Often, the characters found themselves unwelcomed and unaccepted by the local Londoners, regardless of them trying to mimic or not.

In the novel *The Lonely Londoners* Selvon explores the daily struggles with identity and belonging a group of West Indian migrants’ experience in London in the 1950s. Particularly, their struggles to balance between retaining and clinging on to their cultural native roots while facing the need to assimilate to the metropolitan London life, which creates internal conflict. Each character in the group is presented as a black African-Caribbean migrant originating from similar backgrounds in the West Indies. They are all caught in a space of transformation between the past and the present, between resisting and accepting, while navigating the maze of a foreign place where they are slowly moving towards a new life. A constantly dynamic experience, both when it comes to identity and the place in which they try to navigate. However, they do struggle along the way as they attempt to adapt and create a life in
London. While they try to assimilate, simultaneously, they suffer from resistance, from remaining unwelcomed and unaccepted as newcomers in the cosmopolitan London society.

**Postcolonial Theory and Terminology**

There are several definitions of and opinions about postcolonial theory. Ashcroft, et al. define postcolonial theory as a discussion of “migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe [...] and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being” (Postcolonial 2).

One of the main postcolonial theorists, Edward Said, explains in *Culture and Imperialism* that “the movements and migration of people from their homelands is a central historical fact of colonization” (402). The former colonized, either staying or relocating, developed what is referred to in literature as postcolonial identities. In *Critical Theory Today* Lois Tyson states that “a good deal of postcolonial criticism addresses the problem of cultural identity” (419). She refers to theorists such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha who seek to define the essentials of cultural- and postcolonial identity. She further states, that “a merger of the indigenous, precolonial culture and the culture of the colonizer has formed the postcolonial culture of the colonized people” (Tyson 419). Therefore, the identities of the decolonized people are already challenged by the mix of different cultures, forced upon them and inherited.

A central theme in most postcolonial literature is identity. Peter Childs and Patrick Williams explains the nature of postcolonial identity in *An introduction to post-colonial theory* as “the search for identity lies between colonized and colonizer. It is an ambivalent identification, containing both fear and desire” (Childs and Williams 125). In *The Lonely Londoners*, it indeed appears to be a mix of fear and desire that form the main characters’ identities, but also their ambition to adapt. But what infest all characters foremost is ambivalence.

According to Bulhan, identity is socially constructed, jointly, Stuart Hall in *Who needs identity?* states the same. They mean that identity is constructed and produced within a specific social, cultural, economic, and historical contexts and people have differential access to identity resources because of power relations. In other words, race, gender, ethnicity, and other dimensions of diversity are formed and also negotiated within certain sociocultural and historical contexts. John McLeod claims that race may be a factor that excludes the migrant from being recognized as part of the community in the new homeland. This disqualifies them from claiming their new land as their home (212).
A different perspective on claiming and regaining one’s identity is presented by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. He states that “colonialism is a source of destruction and trauma for colonized people who are taught to look negatively upon their people, their culture and themselves” (227). Frantz Fanon concludes that a definite step for colonial people in finding a voice and an identity is to “reclaim their own past” (Black 227). The forefathers of the Windrush generation were colonized, this heritage is carried by generations to follow, up until this day (as discussed in the introduction). This ongoing process of forming a new identity, questioning, and adapting, again and again cause internal confusion and conflict which is illustrated in the characters of the *The Lonely Londoners*. As Said points out that they “bear their past within them as scars of humiliating wounds” (Culture 31).

Tyson argues that the colonial subject often is described in a sense of possessing a “double-consciousness” which means that the world is perceived as a division between two cultures: “caught in what would now be termed the state of “hybridity”, belonging to two worlds and two cultures” (92). Further, she elaborates on this particular state of mind as “double consciousness” which produces an unstable sense of self, a feeling of being caught between cultures and belonging to neither (92). This is similar to the ambivalence described by Childs and Williams in the last section. Bhabha uses the term “unhomeliness”, which he explains as “to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself” (15). So, it has both a physical(location) and psychological (emotions of not feeling at home) perspective forming one’s identity which causes an ambivalence due to the double-consciousness.

Said explains in *The Mind of Winter* his own personal experiences living in exile in reference to the challenges of feelings of “homelessness”:

> The unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile’s life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement (49).

In the text analysis section of this essay, the pain and sorrow described by Said is similarly displayed in Selvon’s characters. The complicated matters connected with identity, the search for, the longing, and the belonging related to postcolonial theory is one of the highlighted
themes in *The Lonely Londoners*. Through the characters, Selvon portrays several key post-colonial concepts that affect and construct identity such as home, nostalgia, ambivalence, homelessness, and hybridity, which the following section of this essay will explain.

Another well-established term used to partly explain the dilemmas individuals experienced due to relocation is hybridity. In the context of postcolonial theory, hybridity refers to the merging, or the conflict, of two opposite poles, such as the colonial power and the colonized subject. According to Bhabha, it is essential for the migrant to form a hybrid identity, despite the problematic nature migrants experience dealing with unhomeliness and culture clashes. He describes hybrid identity as an interaction between the migrant’s culture and the culture of the host country. He explains it to be a way to re-create one’s identity to better fit in the new environment (33). Hybridity is a process of merging cultures in one’s identities. He claims it to be a necessary process for the migrants to fit in and adapt to the new environment. However, it is also a painful process, and often times not as fruitful compared to the suffering. According to Bhabha, hybridity is about the process of that “when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them” (216).

A connected and closely related concept, and one of the key components necessary to develop a hybrid identity, is the ability to mimic the host culture and its people. According to Bhabha mimicry is the way in which one learn to imitate the host culture’s peoples’ behaviour and customs (86). In the text analysis section, these concepts will be used in order to reveal how different characters in the novel reason and negotiate to develop, more or less, hybrid identities and how it affects their own personal growth and state of mind.

Another concept of importance for this paper is what is described by Bhabha as the “third space”. He explains it as an in-between space where the pre-established practices are challenged and negotiated. This space signifies a resistance to polarization, binaries, labels, and unitary identities. It is a fluid space where a migrant can move in and out and within. According to Bhabha, the concept “third space” indicate the “place where identity is constructed and re-constructed” (39). This is later presented clearly in the character of Galahad.

In addition to the theoretical concepts explained above, language is a central component in postcolonial studies and literature. One of the main elements of imperial oppression is the control over language (Ashcroft, et al. Empire 7). Migge and Léglise explain that terms such as “broken/bad language” were particularly used in reference to languages which had emerged out of the contact between European and non-European languages such as Creoles (6). Another factor of language is interesting in the postcolonial study is that the countries,
even post-independence, with predominantly Creole-speaking populations in the Caribbean generally adopted the European languages inherited from their colonizers as their teaching language in schools. This decision of continuation of colonial practices was due to most people believed that their native (Creole) language was a “lesser” language and not a viable means of instruction, and its adoption as an official language would allegedly obstruct access to modern science and information (Devonish in Migge and Léglise 18). Most Creoles had not been (and are still not) sufficiently codified and they are more or less oral languages e.g., lack of vocabularies and few, if any, written books, let alone textbooks suitable for schools, existed at the time of decolonization (Prudent in Migge and Léglise 18).

For those reasons, the choice of language used in postcolonial literature is one of the key components, either to demonstrate resistance, or to show acceptance into developing a hybrid identity. Both Fanon and Ngũgĩ argue that the fact that “African writers using languages other than their indigenous mother tongue are vehicles of a foreign culture whose continuing imitation or acceptance in the literature of post-colonial society is indicative of persisting subjugation” (Grace 170). However, the question whether English Creole is a dialect, or a language is beyond the scope of this essay. I will refer to it as a language in this essay.

Selvon is distancing himself and his work/characters by manipulating the language. He is writing in a self-created Creolized English, a hybrid English, a mix between Standard English and Trinidadian English Creole. The choice to write in a creolized English also illustrated, amplifies, and symbolizes the differences and gap that exist between the characters, the locals, and the migrants. Glissant is quoted in An Introduction to Post Colonial Theory where he states that the refusal of using Standard English, is a way to show resistance of subjugation “contemporary cultural production in Creole could be seen as an act of resistance to metropolitan influence, just as the original development of Creole involved resistance to the slave owners” (Childs and Williams 47). This thought is developed by Ashcroft, et al. “the social and economic hierarchies produced by colonialism have been retained in post-colonial society through the medium of language” (Empire 75) and the function of doing so is that “its (language) role in most literature is both to install class difference and to signify its (the languages’) presence” (Empire 75).

Creole languages arose throughout the Caribbean in the era of forced diaspora and enslavement of the islands. Glissant explains that the Creole language was developed out of a need to communicate secretly under the brutality of plantation life, being able to communicate amongst the slaves, not understood by the master (68).
The use of a hybrid language, including different dialects, construct and emphasize a unique identity through the written word in postcolonial literature, highlighting the cultural ambivalence of the characters. Throughout the *The Lonely Londoners* a modified version of English Creole is used, by both the narrator and the characters. The use of dialects in post-colonial literature has often been used to amplify the identity of the character, but also to “talk back” to the colonizer to demonstrate resistance (Ashcroft, et al. Empire 7) Edouard Glissant, a Martiniquan philosopher and literary critic, whose line of thought originates out of Fanon’s (46), is quoted in Childs and Williams. He argues that “Creole could be seen as an act of resistance to metropolitan influence just as the original development of Creole involved resistance to the slave owner” (47).

In *Decolonising the Mind* the author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’O explains his view on the use of English language in literature. Ngũgĩ states that language and culture are inseparable, therefore the loss of one, results in the loss of the other: Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world … Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world (15-16).

He points out that for example the English language in Africa is a “bomb” that continues a process of erasing memories of pre-colonial history which contributes to install a dominance of a new and more insidious form of colonialism (21). Which by some is referred to as linguistic imperialism. Ngũgĩ explained this phenomenon in a lecture “The Imperialism of Language” that “the French faithful to the philosophical and aesthetic traditions of their culture, had given the whole process a name: assimilation. The British, less aesthetically and philosophically inclined, simply called it education”. In 1977 Ngũgĩ was imprisoned in Kenya for a year for writing a novel in the Kikuyu language, his mother tongue. This shows how controversial it was for an author writing in different languages at the time. He also said that in exile, he used the language to connect to the homeland, Kenya. He says it was essential for him to survive, both in prison and in exile to be able to use his language (Adam 2019). Selvon was one of the first authors to publish a novel in other than Standard English in Britain at the time.
The Lonely Londoners

The novel *The Lonely Londoners* is a collection of fragmented vignettes, collectively describing the experiences of a group of West Indian migrants in London in the 1950s. There is no protagonist per se, but there are several characters that play main roles. However, the story revolves mostly around the character of Moses. Already in the first paragraph of the novel, he is portrayed as a role model and almost a chaperone to newcomers arriving from the West Indies. Moses has lived in London for about six years. Another main character is Galahad. Due to his ambition and energetic personality, he lands a job in a factory fairly quickly, as opposed to several other migrants who endlessly are searching for employment. However, he loses it due to racism. In the end of the novel, Moses arrives at a turning point in his relationship with the group of West Indian migrants, referred to as the “fellas”. He grows into awareness of the meaningless repetition and circularity life is contained of.

There are several themes in the novel, two of them are identity and racism which this essay focuses on. The following section of the essay contains a character analysis of the two main characters in the novel, Moses and Galahad.

Moses

Moses is one of the main characters in the novel. He holds a sort of seniority within the group, as he has been in London the longest and is also older than the other characters of the group. He interacts with several other migrants frequently, which gives him regular connection to the West Indian culture, on an almost daily basis. He says he meet up with countrymen from Trinidad “for old time’s sake” (Selvon 23).

The nostalgia and loneliness they all experience, more or less, are held at bay by them by sharing their collective experience “early every Sunday morning, like if they are going to church, the boys liming in Moses room, coming together for a oldtalk” (138). The conversations mostly repeat itself weekly. They discuss the challenges of finding work, food, and the pleasures of “coasting lime”, venting the question to return home soon, without intending to leave. Interactions and the comradery with likeminded result in that the character of Moses’ identity forms, not only by his experiences and influences by native British people, but by the continuing interactions with his fellow countrymen residing in Britain and, via mail and word-of-mouth from acquaintances from Trinidad. In this way he clings on to his roots, simultane-
ously, adapting into Britishness. He finds himself in a space in-between which Bhabha describes as “a liminal, in-between space where the pre-established practices are challenged and negotiated. This space signifies a resistance to polarization, binaries, labels, and unitary identities. It is a fluid space (139). It reveals, the process of creating a hybrid identity has begun.

However, Moses is aware of the challenges. Almost every single relation or encounter with local Londoners the migrant’s experience, are infected by coldness, racism, and discrimination. He often complaints about the difficulties the group of migrant’s encounters, while all they long for is a decent social life. Moses describes London as “a miserable lonely city” (Selvon 130). This quote indicates that the migrants have a hard time connecting with the locals. And it also refers to what described earlier by Grace that life in exile is dominated by “alienation, fragmentation and loneliness” (178). Moses concludes the situation: “Nobody in London does really accept you. They tolerate you” (126).

Moses uses the language to separate himself from the newly arrived migrants. For instance, he uses colloquial diminution (contraction) when referring to local places in London. For example, he refers to the Bayswater area as “waters”. This can be interpreted as him taking possession of a part of London’s topography but also expressing himself and talking like the Londoners do. In this way he declares a pride in the fact that he talks like a local resident. Moses explains to newcomers that one must have been in the area for “at least two years” to be entitled to use such contractions (Selvon 35). This reveals some kind of new identity, a process in developing a hybrid identity, and connection and that he somewhat identifies himself as a Londoner. He takes possession of a part of London’s topography by the language and declares pride in the fact that he has been a local resident for “at least two years”. Even though forced to live in temporary accommodations, Moses claims his position as a local holding an appropriate taken British identity.

Another example of Moses using the language in his hybridization process is that he proficiently shifts from Creolized English to standard English. In the dialogues throughout the novel, he uses English Creole, but his thoughts are in a language closer to standard English. This is illustrated in the end of the novel when he is contemplating writing “a book that everyone would buy” (Selvon 139). In this section, the use of elevated locutions suggests Moses has access to it:

Sometimes he think he see some sort of profound realisation in his life, as if now he could draw apart from any hustling(...) Still, it had a greatness and a
vastness in the way he was feeling tonight, like it was something solid after feeling everything else give away, and though he ain’t getting no happiness out of the cogitations he still pondering, for is the first time that he ever find himself thinking like that (138-139).

The mixture of words such as “vastness”, “cogitation” and “pondering” along with creolized grammar, “he think” (instead of thinks) symbolizes Moses’ hybridization ability. Selvon illustrates Moses’ hybrid identity and hybridization process through the way in which he speaks. This is similar to what Tyson refers to as “double consciousness”.

Every time Moses helps a newcomer to settle, he affirms his position and establishes himself as a local. He shows great knowledge of different neighbourhoods, informs them how to behave to get accepted and how to get employed. In this way he reinforces his understanding of London as his home. He has at least to an extent adopted enough Britishness required to survive in London. However, Moses is not consistent. On the one hand, he acts out of hegemony, helping the newly arrived migrants to settle in London. On the other hand, he says “don’t want no concentrated area in the Water, as it is, things bad enough already” (25). Which means that he is aware of the negative effects a too dense migrant population can have. Therefore, Moses tries to disperse the new migrants around town, not because he does not want to live amongst them, but because he has experienced how the local Brits respond in a negative way towards a high concentration of West Indians in any neighbourhood. In this event, his comment comes from the desire to adapt and being accepted but is caused by racism and the alienation from the Brits he has been experiencing for years. Moses is overwhelmed by the daily struggles, so regardless of his harsh and defensive actions towards the newcomers, he is convinced that it will ultimately help them to avoid going through the same efforts. These actions are rather about survival, adaption, and assimilation than his own desires. Moses tells newcomers that there are “too much spades in the Water now” (Selvon 25). He imitates and mimic certain British peoples’ opinions, rather than his own personal. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2021), “spade” is an offensive word for a black person. The reason for Moses verbally mimicking the locals’ language, is not that he agrees with them, but that it is his instinct to do so for self-preservation purposes, to protect himself and the other migrants and ensure an easier transition for all.

Apart from Moses, who has accepted racist abuse as part of daily life and also uses racist slurs himself, the newcomers are quite shocked by the prejudice and racism aimed at
them. Moses has become blunt, depressed, and pulled down by how life is treating him. He has sunk into “an evil mood” (89) he says. This depressed mood is an effect of the harsh living conditions, he has had to put up with for years. These emotions are similar to those expressed by Said: “exile’s life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement “(Mind 49). The newcomers, on the other hand still has the energy to resist the oppression “start to get on ignorant … and want to get in big argument with the white people standing around” (Selvon 89). Moses lacks energy to resist, he has accepted the racial abuse as a price of living in Britain.

Despite the hardships the characters in the novel experience, Moses can outline a few benefits London life brings him. Apart from the fact that he has become acculturated to London life, and that he is depressed, he has achieved a certain amount of respect within the West Indian community in London, which he finds enjoyable and positive. Another positive outcome his years in London has brought him, is that his feelings of strong nostalgia is decreasing. He has also come to realize the political and economic conditions back on the islands are on some levels even worse than living as a migrant in London. Moses makes a comment regarding the idyllic island of Trinidad, “I ain’t have no prospects back home” (130). Which means he has even less work opportunities, less possibilities to make a decent living and less options to support himself there. Hall argues that for migrants, the notion of returning “home” is “a spiritual, cultural and political metaphor” that must remain forever “deferred” (Cultural 231). Which is illustrated in several of the characters, but foremost in Moses. He has even deferred his feelings of nostalgia about his homeland.

One way Moses found to show resistance, to gain self-worth, is when he refuses to pose for a British newspaper photographer regarding his dismissal from his railway yard job because other workers objected to his skin color (Selvon 29). In an interview 1990 with Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha points out that within the third space ”we do negotiate even when we don’t know we’re negotiating we are always negotiating in any situation of political opposition or antagonism. Subversion is negotiation; transgression is negotiation” (qtd. in Rutherford 207).

By refusing being photographed, he stands his ground, Moses effectively negotiates his stance. Further, this action forces the news reporter to tell his story through the written word, not along with a picture. Moses’ action forces the reporter, and the reader of the article, to perceive the story colourlessly, without any preconceptions based on those normally held by white British people towards black migrants. Moses unintentionally negotiated.
The question asked to Moses by the other migrants in the group, is valid: “how come you still holding on in Brit’n?” (40). Foremost because Moses is determined to assert the full benefits of the British citizenship. Moses emphasizes: “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). In this quote, Moses refers to the large numbers of West Indians who served Britain and died in the wars. However, he tries to justify their equal rights using the horrific loss of lives among the people from the colonies fighting for Britain, not because they are, and should be, equals due to citizenship.

**Galahad**

Galahad is a character who plays a main role in the novel. He arrives to London full of dreams along with strong ambitions and energy. His preconceived image of London is that of a city where the “streets are paved with gold” and a city full of possibilities. However, after some time in London, he gets exposed to, and experiences several cultural differences and also racial discrimination, which will later be presented in this section of the essay. His status as an outsider becomes clear. He experiences alienation, racism, and an unwelcoming environment. Selvon describes the experience of Galahad in detail, including the dilemma of identity caused by the attitude of the Brits. He starts to question himself and his self-worth. Prior to this moment, he had not realized that all his troubles in job search, and in life in general, all originated from his ethnicity.

Galahad appears to have scattered identity into at least three different parts; one who comes home from his nightshifts “groggy and tired,” wearing clothes that would “shame them ragandbone man”; another, the reflective philosopher, and the gentleman who wears expensive, tailor-made suits. For Galahad, dressing up is an essential component of his identity. By wearing different pieces of clothing, he transforms into different identities. For example, dressing up he “feel like a king living in London” (85). Galahad puts a lot of pride in his appearance. He spends a large amount of his wage buying clothes. This gives him confidence to walk down the street “cool as a lord” and “not giving a blast” whether women respond to his “polite Good evening” or not (87). Galahad appropriates Britishness in a subversive way which helps him boost to his ego.

Fanon writes that “the black man has two dimensions, one with his fellows, the other with the white man” (Black 17). This is apparent in the character of Galahad and it helps him to cross boundaries between different aspects that life contains, such as culture and language.
He is comfortable existing in the “third space”, as described above. Galahad appears to float between the two worlds quite well, adapting and transitioning with ease. Bhabha explains the function of this space is to “provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (143). Momentarily, Galahad has plowed the terrain to be able to elaborate strategies of self-actualization.

Subsequently, Galahad is reminded of the two different worlds’ hierarchies which he tries to balance. For instance, waiting for the bus one morning, he is reminded of his position in society and his foreign status overhearing a conversation between two ladies “a old lady look at him with a loud tone in her eye” (44) and says to her companion, “they’ll have to do better you know” (44). This quote shows the attitude the Brits have towards the migrants. To place migrants as the Other, grouping them together as “they” and not recognizing all citizens as “us” was part of what Tyson calls “social imaginary” (23). It means the ways in which the native Londoners imagine their social existence, the way they would fit together with others, or not, who they would include or exclude (Tyson 23). These well-established social racist behaviours of exclusion became constant obstacles to overcome and handle to be able to move towards acceptance and to get integrated and accepted into the British society. These attitudes made the negotiation of identity much more difficult and complicated. This dilemma is shared collectively by all the characters in The Lonely Londoners.

Simultaneously, it is quite puzzling and ironic, even though Galahad appears relaxed in his own skin, meanwhile, he imitates the typical traditional British dressing style. This is another indicator of Galahad’s split identity, which works as a means of survival. Galahad shakes much of the racism aimed at him off, hiding behind his happy-go-lucky personality and maintains an easy approach to life. He achieves this at the cost of a fractured identity. However, after multiple incidents of racial abuse, Galahad start to put on a stone face while entering public places. In private, he doubts himself. He starts talking to, analysing, and blaming the colour of his skin in a monologue he exclaims “Colour, is you that causing all this, you know. Why the hell you can’t be blue, or red or green, if you can’t be white? You know is you that cause a lot of misery in the world. Is not me, you know, is you!” (88). In this powerful monologue, Galahad reveals he has embodied racial discrimination, it has become a part of him, his body and therefore developed a self-hatred for his skin colour because it has caused him so much suffering which results in this negativity infected way of looking at himself. Failing to realise that it is racism (structural racism) who causes him grief, not the color
of his skin. Feeling defeated by the system and society, he does not turn outwards to accomplish change to remove the pain, instead, he demands of his skin to change “Why the hell you can’t change colour?” (89).

In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* Stuart Hall points out that the individual’s capability and own resources for resistance and realizing identity are compromised when external criticism and prejudice becomes internalized “inner expropriation of cultural identity cripples and deforms” (qtd. in Rutherford 226). Similar to what Galahad is experiencing, due to external criticism(racism) his identity cripples.

There are two clear identities present in the character of Galahad; one that is confident and adapted to the British society and another which is insecure and lost in himself. It becomes very clear when he examines his hand. The unprotected naked hand of Galahad while he is wearing a British tailor-made suite, which in a sense protects him and it becomes a necessity for him while adapting to Britishness. This shows that Galahad is in the process of transforming, a hybrid identity is formed. Another example is illustrated when Galahad is confronted with a child’s racist remark. He immediately changes to Standard English trying to ease the effect of the racial verbal abuse:

- Mummy, look at the black man!’ A little child holding on to the mother hand, look up at Sir Galahad.

- You mustn’t say that, dear! The mother chide the child. But Galahad skin like rubber at this stage, he bend down and pet the child check, and the child cower and shrink and begin to cry.

- What a sweet child! Galahad say, putting on the old English accent, What’s your name? (Selvon 76).

This dialogue demonstrates a linguistic ambivalence, such explained by Fanon who states that the migrant “must take great pains with my speech, because I shall be more or less judged by it” (Black 20). Another instance of language ambivalence is Galahad talking to his girlfriend Daisy, which sometimes causes confusion: “What did you say? You know it will take me some time to understand everything you say. The way you West Indians speak!” (Selvon 83). His reaction demonstrates that he is aware of the language hybridity and that he is in the process of negotiating his identity using the language: “What wrong with it?’ Galahad asks: ‘Is
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English we speaking’ “(82). Here he also negotiates the position of Creolized English opposed to standardized English.

Conclusion

In the novel The Lonely Londoners Selvon describes the everyday lives, struggles and encounters of a group of West Indians migrants in London in the 1950s. This essay demonstrates how two of the main characters adjusts social behavior, clothing, and language in order to transition into a hybrid identity.

Despite the Brits rigidness, the racial abuse and exclusion the characters of the novel experience, gradually they adapt to the local life by changing their identities. Even though they psychically stagnated during the process and the pressures of finding ways to survive in the hostile, nationalist Britain, they started to lay a foundation of a new way of life. They managed to do so unconsciously, through their struggles and also by being able to handle and cope the racial abuse they were subjected to. As a result, they abandoned any level of self-actualization. They actually resigned.

Another aspect that affects the identity of the characters is the harsh racism they were subjected to, and the coping strategies they developed. Both Moses and Galahad developed signs of depression and they resigned to hopelessness over their situation. They failed accusing the system of the harsh living conditions the migrants were subjected to, instead they blamed themselves which is demonstrated in Galahad’s conversation with his hand.

This essay has demonstrated that the migrants were constantly separated to the white majority society by the always present racism aimed at them, which made them feel unwanted, unaccepted, and unwelcomed in Britain. Throughout the novel, Selvon highlights the lack of equality due to ethnicity, and further puts the finger on the harsh racism experienced by the characters. The consequences of being subjected to racist attitudes and verbal abuse cannot be ignored and it eventually becomes a part of the character’s identity. Fanon explains that one way to part oneself to this repressed state is to “burst apart in anger, only then can the individual reconstruct his identity” (Black 109). It is from this space that Selvon produced The Lonely Londoners.

In an interview, Selvon states that there is no particular reason for him writing the novel in a Creolized English, it just happened (Dasenbrock and Jussawalla). However, reading the novel, accompanied by the theories of Ngūgī, Glissen and Fanon, I believe the choice of language is very calculated and the message is clear. The author takes a particular stance
through the written word. Great authors, want the reader to be a “good reader” like Nabokov points out in a lecture in 1980. He argues that the “good reader” uses his intellect and mind reading a novel (5). With other words, not everything is served by the author, either in his fiction or by his persona. He also states that a good writer is the one “that go-between, that prism, is the art of literature “(4). The use of Creolized English is a stance against, and separation to, the colonizer. A prism. It also functions as a part of the migrants’ hybridization process. Language is a part of one’s identity, to modify your language, in a way you change your identity. Therefore, Selvon incorporates the creolized language to emphasize his message.

Selvon’s characters are so marginalized and oppressed by the society and their own outlook on themselves is deteriorating that they do not even dream of equality. They only try to survive, as Galahad says: “We only want to get by, we don’t even want to get on” (88).

Said points out “Many of the most interesting post-colonial writers bear their past within them as scars of humiliating wounds” (Culture 31). Selvon displays his own scars caused by migrating and racism thorough the characters of The Lonely Londoners and he leaves us a glimpse of the past that lets us explore the (same) issues society deal with and faces today.
Adam, Tania. “Europe and the West must also be decolonized”. Interview with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’O. CCCB Interviews, 10 September 2019.


