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**Identity in the Fiction by Samuel Selvon**

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.  
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## INTRODUCTION

This diploma thesis deals with identity in Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*. The objective is to analyse each novel and to explore how identity is involved in these novels. In my thesis, I want to find out how identity develops and how it is portrayed. My hypothesis is that the use of Trinidadian dialect contributes to the awareness and expression of the Caribbean self. The reason why I chose this topic was the lecture of doc. Mgr. Flajšarová, Ph.D. on Anglophone Literature of the Caribbean Diaspora in Great Britain after 1945 which excited my interest in Samuel Selvon's work.

The thesis consists of theoretical and analytical part. The first part has three major chapters. The analytical part includes three main subchapters which cover the analysis of Moses trilogy. In the first chapter, the term "identity" is introduced along with Caribbean identity. Moreover, I will cover Samuel Selvon's perception of identity. The term "identity" is widely used; however, its concept is unclear. It has a different denotation in many fields; however, I will introduce the definition complying with the topic of this thesis. The second chapter deals with Trinidadian literature and its definition, covering social and historical context of literature written by anglophone Trinidadian writers. This chapter also covers the change of the role of Trinidadian literature. Further, important factors which lead to emergence of Caribbean identity together with the challenges of Caribbean writers will be revealed. The third chapter of the thesis is concerned with Samuel Selvon's biography and literary background. This chapter also describes the position of Samuel Selvon in the context of his fellow writers. The chapter covers Selvon's work in relation to his arrival to Britain and his reception as an anglophone Caribbean writer. Lastly, the chapter includes literary criticism of Selvon's work. His writing career had to overcome a considerable extent of criticism. Many critics reported that the negative side of Selvon's writings is the identity struggle of his characters as well as the usage of the dialect. However, it is exactly what makes Moses trilogy an exceptional literary work.

The analytical part consists of analysis of three novels of Moses trilogy. The analysis stresses the development of Moses' identity which includes several stages: alienation, consciousness of Caribbean identity, identity crisis, hybrid identity and feeling of rootlessness. The first novel *The Lonely Londoners* tells

about Moses' life in London. He does not manage to be integrated to the British society and he feels alienated which has an effect on his identity. In *Moses Ascending*, Moses' attitude changes as well as his language. However, his effort to be integrated to the British society suppresses his Caribbean identity. Consequently, hybrid identity is formed. The analysis of the last novel, *Moses Migrating*, reveals Moses' experience back in Trinidad. He feels rootless because his identity has changed.

The thesis' analysis focuses on the identity development and its depiction by the means of Moses' dialect change. The analysis shows that by incorporating the Caribbean dialect, Selvon gives the immigrant community an opportunity to express their identity. The last part of the thesis is followed by a conclusion and Czech summary of the thesis.

# 1. IDENTITY

The focus of this chapter will be on the term “identity.” This thesis will explore how identity is involved in Selvon’s Moses trilogy; therefore, its terminology will be stated as well as Samuel Selvon’s perception of identity. The word “identity” is a term used in many fields; however, its concept is unclear. For example, in political science, identity may refer to gender, nationality or race, whereas in mathematics it has a different denotation.

## 1.1. Definition of identity

“Identity” is a widely used term which appears in many contexts. In order to write about identity in Samuel Selvon’s fiction, we have to understand what the term means. The word “identity” comes from latin *identitas* and it entails several meanings which can be found in both psychological and non-psychological literature. The problematics of the definition is that the term is ambiguous; nonetheless, it is frequently used.

Identity has several denotations; for example, the *Oxford English Dictionary* reports four meanings of identity. Firstly, it is “a condition of being a specified person or thing,”<sup>1</sup> secondly, it expresses “individuality, personality.”<sup>2</sup> Thirdly, identity signifies “absolute sameness”<sup>3</sup> which is the original meaning of the medieval Latin word. The last entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for identity is “equality of two expressions for all values of the quantities”<sup>4</sup> which refers to algebra. These definitions are not sufficient; hence, I will also take into consideration psychological literature to clarify this term.

Psychologists Gordon Allport and Erik Erikson made one of the first efforts to define “identity.” Gordon Allport’s *Becoming: Basic Considerations for a Psychology of Personality* looked at identity as an individual process of “how one ‘becomes’ a self.”<sup>5</sup> According to him, this “becoming” comprises realizing

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<sup>1</sup> Della Thompson, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 435.

<sup>2</sup> Thompson, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 435.

<sup>3</sup> Thompson, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 435.

<sup>4</sup> Thompson, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 435.

<sup>5</sup> Osborne Randall, “Current Reviews for Academic Libraries,” *American Library Association* 46, no. 9 (May 2009): 2, Literature Resource Center.



one's possibilities and results in individuation which "displays detachment, insight, and integration."<sup>6</sup> To put it simply, individuation is self-awareness. Erik Erikson's perception of identity was more complex and his definition points out that identity changes. In his work *Childhood and Society, Identity: Youth and Crisis*, he focused on identity and its crisis in the earlier stage of life in the context of society.<sup>7</sup> The strength of Erikson's theory is that it provides a broader framework from which we can observe the development of identity throughout the entire life. Moreover, it emphasizes the social nature of people and the influence of social relationships on its development. These definitions evidently refer more to the focus of this thesis because they perceive identity from the individual point of view as well as of the group. Erikson's definition is "the condition of being uncertain of one's feelings about oneself, especially with regard to character, goals, and origins, ... as a result of growing up under disruptive, fast-changing conditions."<sup>8</sup> This statement considers the individual definition of one self and shows how identity is shaped by society and has a potential of further development.<sup>9</sup>

When looking for the definition which would fit the topic of my thesis, I found James Fearon's definition the most accurate. It seems that he solved the problematics of the complicated concept of identity because he blended all of the meanings mentioned earlier and created one which seems to cover its substance:

An "identity" refer[s] to either (a) a social category, defined by membership rules and (alleged) characteristic attributes or expected behaviours, or (b) socially distinguishing features that a person takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential (or (a) and (b) at once). In the latter sense, "identity" is modern formulation of dignity, pride, or honour that implicitly links these to social categories.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Theodore McConnell, "Gordon Allport and the Quest for Selfhood," *Journal of Religion and Health* 8, no. 4 (1969): 375-81, JSTOR.

<sup>7</sup> Randall, "Current Reviews for Academic Libraries."

<sup>8</sup> James Fearon, *What Is Identity: As We Now Use the Word?* (California: Stanford University, 1999), 9-10.

<sup>9</sup> Fearon, *What Is Identity: As We Now Use the Word?*, 12-16.

<sup>10</sup> Fearon, *What Is Identity: As We Now Use the Word?*, 36.

Such social category can be an ethnic group, a religious community or a nation. This definition finally covers the meaning which is crucial for this thesis as we will concentrate on identity of a community (collective identity of a group) and individual identity mainly in the context of emigration.

Stuart Hall argues that it is the collective identity which “a Caribbean or black diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light and express ... in the re-telling of the past.”<sup>11</sup> Hall calls it an “act of imaginative rediscovery”<sup>12</sup> which implies “imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas.”<sup>13</sup> According to him, identity “operat[es] under erasure in the interval between reversal and emergence.”<sup>14</sup> This indicates that identity becomes very important in times when it seems we lost it. For example, in the context of emigration, many writers stress the importance of knowing one’s history and culture. This leads to the formation and maintenance of identity which we need in order to feel that we belong somewhere. Thus, the function of identity is not to be confused about one’s place in the world.

The word “identity” has become a frequently used term. It was even selected as the Word of the Year by the Australian National Centre in 2015. The popularity of this term also reflects the growing number of recently published English books which have “identity” in the title. Since 2010, more than 10 000 new books with this title have appeared.<sup>15</sup> However, its awakening came in 1950s when the word spread around the world due to “the cultural Americanization then in progress.”<sup>16</sup> As the language changes, there were more meanings recorded. For example, *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* records new entries containing “identity” such as “identity card,” “gender identity,” or “identity theft.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, future updates may register more additions. Identity is indeed a complicated term;

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<sup>11</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory* 36, no. 4 (1996): 222-237.

<sup>12</sup> Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.”

<sup>13</sup> Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.”

<sup>14</sup> Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.”

<sup>15</sup> Florian Coulmas, *Identity: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 39.

<sup>16</sup> Coulmas, *Identity: A Very Short Introduction*, 41.

<sup>17</sup> “Identity,” *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, *Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries*, accessed November 28, 2020, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/identity>.

however, it has a huge significance when referred to an individual. Even though there is not an easy answer for a question “Who am I?,” it is important to feel that we belong somewhere.

## 1.2. Trinidadian identity

When referring to identity of an inhabitant living in Trinidad, it is not clear which one of the three terms: “East Indian,” “West Indian,” “Trinidadian” to use even for a real Trinidadian. This sub-chapter will reveal the ambiguity of the existing terms and will monitor the journey of Selvon’s perception of identity.

The struggle of distinguishing Caribbean identity is there from the very beginning when Christopher Columbus called the islands the West Indies and its inhabitants Indians. This term was used for anyone who came from a newly discovered land; therefore, Africans were also called Indians. The paradox of this term is that East Indian is an inhabitant of East India which means that an East Indian born in Trinidad should be called East Indian Trinidadian. However, people living in Trinidad “are called West Indians. So by definition, what we have here is really an East Indian Trinidadian West Indian.”<sup>18</sup> For the purpose of my thesis, I will use the term Trinidadian identity as well as its broader meaning—Caribbean identity.

In 1979, Selvon wrote an important paper discussing the problematics of Trinidadian identity where he analysed cultural experience in his home country Trinidad. In this work, “Three into One Can’t Go: East Indian, Trinidadian, West Indian,” Selvon describes his perception of identity and how it was shaped. Samuel Selvon said that he did not know whether he was East Indian, Trinidadian, or West Indian because he was surrounded by multicultural companions of various social classes since childhood. This endured his whole life which confirms him being a Trinidadian “creature born of all the peoples in the world.”<sup>19</sup>

Selvon’s first experience with racial awareness dates back to his childhood when he felt “that the Indian was just a piece of cane trash while the white man

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<sup>18</sup> Alison Donnell, “Three into one can't go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity,” *Wasafiri* 3, no. 5 (2013): 10, doi: 10.1080/02690058608574127.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Selvon, *An Island is a World* (Michigan: Windgate, 1955), 257.

was to be honoured and respected.”<sup>20</sup> Selvon does not remember where this feeling came from, he is persuaded that no one really told him this neither at school nor at home. Selvon argues that he understood this feeling naturally: “it was some vague and undefined concept which I accepted without question as washing my face or brushing my teeth.”<sup>21</sup> Such feeling probably resulted from the fact that he was surrounded by white people who were the rich ones and were in charge—even the inspector at his school was white.<sup>22</sup>

Another preconception which Selvon as a child accepted without any questions was that negroes were even lower in the scale than Indians. Although these attitudes towards Afro-Caribbeans were part of general knowledge, they were not important to Selvon:

I was a product of my environment, as Trinidadian as anyone could claim to be, quite at ease with a cosmopolitan attitude, and I had no desire to isolate myself from the mixture of races that comprised the community.<sup>23</sup>

Selvon sees the mixture of ethnic identities in Trinidad positively—as a help which gives Trinidadians a broad outlook on the world.

However, this multicultural environment has also a negative effect on people’s identity: “It’s all well and good to appreciate what the world is like and what people are like, but, who the hell am I? And where do I fit into it, have I got roots, am I an Indian? Am I a Negro? What am I? What is a Trinidadian?”<sup>24</sup>

Trinidadians do not have neither a long history nor ancient civilisation. Even though Selvon is from one part an Indian and born Trinidadian, he feels displaced. According to him, Trinidadian is a “kind of new citizen, or whatever.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Donnell, “Three into one can’t go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity.”

<sup>21</sup> Donnell, “Three into one can’t go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity.”

<sup>22</sup> Nazareth, “Interview with Sam Selvon,” *World Literature Written in English* 2, no.18 (1979): 420-437, doi:10.1080/17449857908588620

<sup>23</sup> Donnell, “Three into one can’t go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity.”

<sup>24</sup> Nazareth, “Interview with Sam Selvon.”

<sup>25</sup> Nazareth, “Interview with Sam Selvon.”

Selvon and his generation experienced a “creolisation process”<sup>26</sup> or “westernisation”<sup>27</sup> which he describes as a social stigma. All the people in Trinidad, it does not matter of which race, were involved in this process of coming under influence of western culture which caused many Indians to stick to their own rituals. On the other hand, some of the Trinidadians had the opposite attitude. Selvon’s father, a Madrasee, for example spoke only English even with his Indian relatives because English language was on a higher level in the social hierarchy due to the creolization. Moreover, Selvon’s family ate traditional Indian food curry only once a week and the rest of the days it was Creole food such as English stew beef. Selvon’s family thus showed him that creolization is well perceived and that it is not necessary to stick to old habits including Indian language. Selvon’s mother tongue thus became English.<sup>28</sup>

The next key point in Selvon’s perception of identity was his life abroad. Selvon came to Britain which was poorly informed about his country of origin. After his arrival, he faced an identity crisis. Selvon had a first-hand experience of how Caribbean identity is perceived by the British:

You can imagine, after being brought up to believe that Britain was a fountainhead of knowledge and learning, how staggered I was to be asked if we lived in trees, or if there were lions and tigers in my part of the world. Their ignorance engendered a feeling of pride in my own country.<sup>29</sup>

Selvon was even told he was not a true Indian because he came from Trinidad—he neither was born in India nor he spoke Indian language. Selvon adds that “the greatest irony was that to the English, as long as you were not white you were black.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Donnell, “Three into one can't go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity.”

<sup>27</sup> Donnell, “Three into one can't go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity.”

<sup>28</sup> Nazareth, “Interview with Sam Selvon.”

<sup>29</sup> Donnell, “Three into one can't go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity.”

<sup>30</sup> Donnell, “Three into one can't go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity.”

Moreover, Selvon claims that the negative perception of Trinidadians was caused by Black Power movement which “widened the gulf and emphasized the displacement of the Indian. Black Power was never for the coloured races as such ... the strategy of keeping people apart, of creating division, came into operation.”<sup>31</sup> As a result, some of the Indians started to wear saris and turbans in order not to be perceived as the blacks and to preserve their identity. However, the Indians from the Caribbean were not accepted neither by those from India nor by the blacks or whites. As for the contemporary situation of the Trinidadian identity, Selvon notes that:

The vision of a Caribbean nation still seems remote...The question of identity has assumed greater importance, and in the context of the Third World the inhabitants seems to be thinking of themselves not as Trinidadians or Barbadians or Jamaicans, but as East Indian or African...The quest for identity remains.”<sup>32</sup>

The consequence of British misrecognition of Caribbean emigrants’ identity and misunderstanding of cultural differences was the creation of so called “a united West Indian identity”<sup>33</sup> of emigrants. It became beneficial for emigrant community because it united them and provided them a support which they needed when maintaining their culture. However, Selvon feels that in Trinidad, there is still “resentment, bitterness, tension and dissatisfaction ... It is no wonder to me that some of our best citizens have fled and have nightmares about returning to a crippled and voiceless community. For which we have nobody but ourselves to blame.”<sup>34</sup> According to Selvon, it is the Caribbean identity what some Caribbeans lack to hold on to after all the creolization process or their emigrant experience.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Donnell, “Three into one can't go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity.”

<sup>32</sup> Donnell, “Three into one can't go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity.”

<sup>33</sup> Malachi McIntosh, *Emigration and Caribbean literature* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2015), 186.

<sup>34</sup> Donnell, “Three into one can't go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity.”

<sup>35</sup> Nazareth, “Interview with Sam Selvon.”

From childhood to life of an adult man abroad, Selvon's perception of Trinidadian identity was shaped by external influences. Even though there were many negative experiences, Selvon followed his common sense and found a predilection for multicultural environment while trying to preserve his Trinidadian identity. He perceives Trinidadians as new people who were influenced by creolization, even though this process had many positives but also negative effects. Despite the fact that Trinidadian identity may be sometimes misunderstood, it is important to stick to the roots and culture to preserve one's identity.

## 2. TRINIDADIAN LITERATURE

This chapter discusses social and historical context of literature written by anglophone writers in Trinidad and it also comprises the definition of Trinidadian literature. The chapter covers early Trinidadian writings as well as the change of the role of Trinidadian literature. Moreover, important factors which lead to emergence of Trinidadian identity together with the challenges of Caribbean writers will be revealed.

### 2.1. Social and historical context

Social context is an important aspect of Trinidadian literature. From the beginning of Trinidadian literature, “the novels have a strong political and social impetus.”<sup>36</sup> Early novels express strong disagreement with slavery when it was illegal in Trinidad but still ongoing issue in the United States. Later works support freedom from colonialism and write about struggles which the characters in their writings have to surpass:

West Indian novelists apply themselves with unusual urgency and unanimity to an analysis and interpretation of their society’s ills, including the social and economic deprivation of the majority; the pervasive consciousness of race and colour ... the lack of a history to be proud of; and the absence of traditional or settled values ..<sup>37</sup>

Many of Trinidadian authors thus write about the chaos in their society, possibilities they have or about their identity which is easy to be neglected in this chaos.

Regarding the historical background of Trinidad, its history is diverse. The original inhabitants were colonised in the sixteenth century by the Spanish. Consequently, Amerindians were forced to migrate or assimilate, many of them

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<sup>36</sup> Edward Lanzer Joseph, *Warner Arundell: the adventures of a creole* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 15.

<sup>37</sup> Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 4.



died. The population of Trinidad was very small until 1783 when Roman Catholics encouraged immigration from the Caribbean. In 1797, the British conquered Trinidad. At that time, the population was mainly French or French Creole among which were various races. After 1797, new inhabitants came from the United Kingdom and from other British colonies. The abolition of slavery in Trinidad in 1838 led to demand for labour which resulted in higher number of immigrants coming from Africa, Venezuela, China, Madeira and Caribbean islands. The population thus consisted of many races. Trinidadian language remained French Creole but many inhabitants also used English Creole which spread in nineteenth century. English Creole became the dominant language in Trinidad.<sup>38</sup>

Trinidad entered into plantation development later, thus plantation slavery lasted about fifty years which is a short period of time in comparison with other slave colonies.<sup>39</sup> This fact enabled Trinidad to have more possibilities which allowed more literary development than in other slave colonies. In 1930s, protests spread across the Caribbean islands. The positives of the revolution were significant because it

acted as a catalyst for the rise of national consciousness and movements for self-government... Whether located in the Caribbean or living in exile abroad, Caribbean writers dedicated themselves to establishing authentic national literatures based on working-class ... not infrequently, they referred to this as the soul of the nation or of the people.<sup>40</sup>

During this literature awakening, writers continued in cultural nationalism which already appeared in nineteenth century. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Caribbean authors expressed in their writings political and cultural observations which provided foundations for Caribbean writers of twentieth century. For example, Seepersad Naipul's work was formed by this literary

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<sup>38</sup> Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 86-100.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph, *Warner Arundell: the adventures of a creole*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Leah Reade Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 1.

revolution by which his son, V. S. Naipaul was inspired. Other Caribbean writers of this era are Claude McKay or W. Adolphe Roberts who published in the *Jamaica Times*.<sup>41</sup>

Up to 1940, Caribbean literature mostly documented the transformation of Britain and Caribbean colonies. Writers from this era helped to establish modern Caribbean literature. Between 1845 and 1917, many labourers mainly from India were imported in order “to bolster the power of the white plantocracy by reducing wages and cutting off Afro-Caribbeans’ access to land.”<sup>42</sup> This importation resulted in Afro-Caribbean feeling of being in competition with Indians and other Asians; subsequently, the country was led into ethnic division. There was indeed higher unemployment which triggered migration of the Afro-Caribbeans to Latin America. Caribbean diaspora thus transformed the host country as well as their home country.<sup>43</sup>

Between 1920s and 1930s, many emigrants had to return to their homelands because of the Great Depression; however, they brought with them the new demands from the new country. By reason of their gained experience, they became important figures “in the rise in trade unionism and the labour rebellions that spread across the British West Indies.”<sup>44</sup> This period of time had a significant impact on the development of Caribbean literature. Moreover, this also led to a shift of its perspective. In the nineteenth century, some of the novels were part of a movement which was supposed to contribute to better perception of a particular ethnicity or class; whereas, twentieth century started to focus on a formation of national literature. In the first half of the twentieth century, the emergence of national literature firstly occurred in Trinidad, Guyana and Barbados.<sup>45</sup>

The change of the role of Caribbean literature was followed by the decline of British power over the Caribbean islands. It was a welcomed change; however, another threat for the Caribbean nation were the United States. Between the wars,

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<sup>41</sup> Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 1-3.

<sup>42</sup> Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Adrienne Baytop, “The Emergence of Caribbean English Literature,” *Latin American Literary Review* 4, no. 9 (1976): 29-38.

<sup>44</sup> Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 2.

the intervention of the United States caused a lot of damage by acquiring Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and military actions in Honduras, Haiti and many more. Moreover, Caribbean literature gained a political power during colonialism:

writing literature was at root part of an argument for Caribbean political rights, because both British and West Indian intellectuals regarded literature as evidence of a people's cultural legitimacy and political competence. After independence, the ability to produce national literature became a basis for claiming the right to determine national culture. As a result, canon formation has been and is likely to remain political.<sup>46</sup>

This course of events induced Caribbean writers to record changes in politics or social divisions. Caribbean literature thus had a strong political significance rather than the artistic one.

In 1960s, Anglophone Caribbean literature started to have the form which we know now. During this period of time, Caribbean intellectuals manifested strong feelings of nationalism. It is a beginning of the contemporary Caribbean literature which begins with George Lamming, V. S. Naipaul, Samuel Selvon and other Caribbean writers who brought “West Indian literature international claim.”<sup>47</sup> This generation formed Caribbean literature without a tradition from the previous years to follow. For the first time, the writings brought Caribbean nation their “true and original status of personality”<sup>48</sup> which thus is a very important event in the history of Caribbean literature. The birth of the new Caribbean literature was beneficial to the decolonization of West Indies and it eliminated embedded colonial norms.<sup>49</sup>

This literary revolution also had some negative effects. The issue related to it was that writers published in exile and thus they disconnected from the people they used to be in their homelands. Moreover, they “divorced from ... the societies their work was to transform, because colonial society failed to conceive

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<sup>46</sup> Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 3.

<sup>48</sup> George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 38-39.

<sup>49</sup> Kamau Brathwaite, “The New West Indian Novelists: Part One,” *Bim* 8, no. 31 (1960): 204.

that its subjects could create art, especially art that challenged European tradition.”<sup>50</sup> Literature from this period of time explores emigrant issues such as Austin’s Clark *The Meeting Point* (1970), or Samuel Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *Moses Ascending* (1975) or *Moses Migrating* (1983).<sup>51</sup>

Experiences with racism in Britain helped to maintain sense of national identity of West Indian emigrants and they formed the “way of seeing and representing the colonial experience by straining, and ultimately debunking, the illusion of empire.”<sup>52</sup> Therefore, exile of Caribbean writers functioned as the starting point of the development of Caribbean identity and/in literature.

## 2.2. Emergence of Trinidadian literature

According to George Lamming, West Indian novel is “the novel written by the West Indian about the West Indian reality.”<sup>53</sup> Kenneth Ramchand adds that West Indian novel has West Indian setting and incorporates characters and situations

whose social correlates are immediately recognizable as West Indian. The books have all been written in the twentieth century; and their native West Indian authors include descendants of Europeans, descendants of African slaves, descendants of indentured labourers from India, and various mixtures from these.<sup>54</sup>

It is important to note that there were also Trinidadian authors from nineteenth century who help to understand the overall development of works of later authors. Hence, we should expand the beginning of this period to nineteenth century.

Trinidadian novels were published much earlier; however, these works are mostly unknown. They can still serve as a demonstration of Trinidadian literary tradition. The first anglophone novel which is set in Trinidad was published in the first half of nineteenth century. It is a novel *Warner Arundell, The Adventures of*

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<sup>50</sup> Brathwaite, “The New West Indian Novelists: Part One.”

<sup>51</sup> Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 7.

<sup>52</sup> Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 33.

<sup>53</sup> Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*, 3.

*a Creole* (1838) written by Edward Lanzer Joseph. Joseph was born in England and he emigrated to Trinidad in his late twenties. The novel tells a story about a character called Warner Arundell who is a white Creole with British roots brought up in Trinidad. He lives an adventurous life including being defrauded by lawyers. He seeks fortune and finally he is reunited with his family and finds love of his life.<sup>55</sup>

Another early Trinidadian story *Adolphus, A Tale* was published in Trinidadian newspaper in 1853. The author is not known; nonetheless, it appears it was a person of a Trinidadian mixed race. Thus, it may be the first non-white author who was born and raised in Trinidad. The story reveals life of Adolphus whose mother was a black slave raped by a white man. The setting of the story is mainly Trinidad. The story narrates how Adolphus becomes a noble and educated man. He falls in love with a woman of mixed-race whom he rescues from kidnapping. Finally, there is a happy ending for Adolphus who can finally marry his love.<sup>56</sup>

The next important representative of Trinidadian literature which I would like to mention is Mrs William Noy Wilkins. She was born in Ireland but lived in Trinidad for many years. Wilkins is an author of *The Slave Son* (1854) which makes the novel one of the earliest Trinidadian novels written by a woman. For her book, she took as an inspiration Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to support the abolitionist movement in the United States. The main character Laurine, a freed slave of mixed race, works to buy the freedom for her mother. She has an opportunity to buy her mother's freedom with stolen money; however, she refuses this option. Laurine loves Belfond who is captured by a slave owner. After a slave uprising, the owner is dead and Belfond and Laurine manage to escape to Venezuela.<sup>57</sup>

There was nothing as remarkable until 1920s on Trinidadian literary scene because Trinidad did not produce much literature. In 1917, *Trinidad Guardian* was founded into which Samuel Selvon contributed with his writings later in 1946. The most important writers after 1920s are Cyril Lionel Robert James, Stephen Cobham and Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul. In 1929, magazine

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<sup>55</sup> Brathwaite, "The New West Indian Novelists: Part One."

<sup>56</sup> Joseph, *Warner Arundell: the adventures of a creole*, 12.

<sup>57</sup> Joseph, *Warner Arundell: the adventures of a creole*, 13.

*Trinidad*, which was later followed by *Beacon* magazine, started to publish short stories of authors such as C. L. R. James, Alfred Mendes or Katherine Archibald. Writers of the Beacon group were of various ethnic origins; “credited with uniting political nationalism and literature and creating yard fiction, the region's first literature centered on the urban working poor.”<sup>58</sup> The group has a valuable significance for political development and nationalism. Apart from the fact that writers experimented with language and used realistic themes, their fiction has features of “bourgeois British culture and Trinidad's working-class culture to assert the legitimacy of its middle-class authors in relation to other social groups, particularly the working and elite classes.”<sup>59</sup> Writers of the Beacon group thus manifest the same concerns which are seen as archetypes of West Indian literature.

There is a visible shift in the Caribbean literature since its beginning in the nineteenth century. The natural development connected to historical and political events which were described in the previous subchapter lead to a quest for national identity in literature. Important milestones for the development of Caribbean literature were the first anglophone writings and magazines which enabled Caribbean writers to make their voice matter.

### 2.3. Challenges of Caribbean writers

Along with an attention of the general public to the situation in developing countries, there has been an increased interest in local writers since late twentieth century. Caribbean English literature, also identified as West Indian or New World literature, has flourished.<sup>60</sup> Caribbean drama, poetry and fiction gradually emerged together with politics of decolonized Caribbean territories.

Even though it is not probable that Caribbean literature will ever have as powerful impact as the European or the American ones, its strength has already shown in capturing attention of non-Caribbean readers. After the shift of the course of Caribbean literature which deflected interest in writings about

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<sup>58</sup> Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 11.

<sup>60</sup> Baytop, “The Emergence of Caribbean English Literature.”

“a collective memory of lost homelands, of broken families and of utopian dreams,”<sup>61</sup> humour and Caribbean dialect started to prevail. Thus, for the contemporary Caribbean literature, it is not true anymore that it is based on: “novels and poetry of protest, or ... of slavery ... [The Caribbeans], not so long ago, were saying that you headed for the madhouse if you wanted to be a writer.”<sup>62</sup>

Nonetheless, there has been a continuing search “for a Caribbean cultural identification [which] becomes inseparable from the determined pursuit for independent government.”<sup>63</sup> One of the reasons why this quest persists is that Caribbean islands have been a place of migration. The population which started with the arrival of Christopher Columbus and colonialism has not stopped. Due to this fact, “the Caribbean is rightly understood as the arch-‘transnational’ space, one whose migrants are constantly renegotiating their feelings about themselves and their homes, uncertainties that are regularly expressed in their artworks.”<sup>64</sup> Position of emigrant writers thus changed with time as did their social position and general perception. In early Trinidadian literature,

the sometimes-troubling representations ... were performances of their reassessments-in-process. Their texts were ... unconscious products that were necessarily tainted with the prejudices ... and the problems of their own precarious positions as expected representatives.<sup>65</sup>

Emigrant authors felt the need to differentiate themselves from British writers which led to questions about authenticity or inauthenticity of their texts. Much of these claims whether the text is true came from a wider range of publishers and reviewers.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, *Tracing an Indian Diaspora: Contexts, Memories, Representations* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008), 480.

<sup>62</sup> Donnell, “Three into one can't go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity.”

<sup>63</sup> Baytop, “The Emergence of Caribbean English Literature.”

<sup>64</sup> McIntosh, *Emigration and Caribbean literature*, 189.

<sup>65</sup> McIntosh, *Emigration and Caribbean literature*, 187.

<sup>66</sup> McIntosh, *Emigration and Caribbean literature*, 189.

Caribbean writers have shown that the position of Caribbean literature has its place in the world thanks to its unique features. Caribbean writing is known for its unordinary humour with satiric tone which has been adopted from the oral tradition, “it is precisely this tonal quality which affords Caribbean literature a considerable amount of uniqueness.”<sup>67</sup> A rich tradition of oral narrative can be found for example in Barbados, Trinidad or Jamaica: “There are more unrecorded bards in the villages near Cave Hill, Barbados, Mona Heights, Jamaica, and St. Augustine, Trinidad, than there are published authors in those university towns.”<sup>68</sup> Moreover, writers show celebrative nature of Caribbean people which “mirrors that of the environment.”<sup>69</sup> The setting is rich and often includes carnivals which are particularly popular.

Despite the fact that the quantity of Caribbean literary works is not high, many critics reported that its quality seems to withstand on a global scale. However, I would like to add Selvon’s opinion on this matter because it is in the contrary in what literary critics or other intellectuals think. According to him,

population itself continues to be apathetic or indifferent towards those of us who try to elevate our values. It’s still common enough to see the works of Caribbean authors gather dust in the bookshops while foreign books are sold out.<sup>70</sup>

Even though Selvon is rather sceptical regarding the success of Trinidadian literature, he does not claim that the apathy towards Trinidadian writings is a fault of the Europeans or the Americans. Contrarily, it is the Caribbeans who let their own people down. He argues that there is a lack of the foundation which would help the Caribbeans to ameliorate their status in the literary field. The cause of this situation seems to be creolization which causes that “Caribbean societies ... are formed through the interaction of various social groups struggling against one another to establish identities.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Baytop, “The Emergence of Caribbean English Literature.”

<sup>68</sup> Baytop, “The Emergence of Caribbean English Literature.”

<sup>69</sup> Baytop, “The Emergence of Caribbean English Literature.”

<sup>70</sup> Donnell, “Three into one can’t go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity.”

<sup>71</sup> Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 7.



On the other hand, creolization has also a positive effect. Creolization does not only mean “a social process but also the process of literary production itself: Caribbean literature has emerged from the multiple social struggles that shaped the region.”<sup>72</sup> Caribbean writers participated in social and political development which helped in the process of gaining independence. Creolization thus helped to establish nationalism which was the first step to national literature.

The Caribbean community is still restricted from power and experiences conflicts linked to economic and social differences. However, it is not true that writings of Caribbean writers are only based on these issues. Even though Caribbean literature is still affected by historical events, its course has changed as did the perception of Caribbean writers. Earlier novels of slavery were replaced by writings seeking national identity; nonetheless, the search for Caribbean identity continues even in modern times.

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<sup>72</sup> Rosenberg, *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature*, 7.

### 3. SAMUEL SELVON AND LITERARY BACKGROUND

This chapter will focus on Selvon's biography. Moreover, I will describe position of Samuel Selvon in the context of his fellow writers and his contribution to Caribbean literature will be mentioned as well. I will talk about Selvon's work in relation to the arrival to Britain and his reception as an anglophone Caribbean writer. The last sub-chapter will talk about criticism which set the course of Selvon's career.

#### 3.1. Samuel Selvon's biography

Samuel Selvon, full name Samuel Dickinson Selvon, is one of the most popular Caribbean writers. He was born as the sixth of seven children in San Fernando in Trinidad in 1923 into a racially and culturally mixed family. His father, Bertwyn Fraser Selvon, was a Madrassi cocoa merchant. Selvon's mother, Daisy Irene Dickson, also came from a culturally-mixed background. Her father was a Scotsman and her mother was an East Indian. She spoke fluent Hindi; however, she never managed to pass this knowledge on her son because Samuel Selvon was more interested in "going to the cinema to see American films, or playing with an ethnic mixture of friends."<sup>73</sup>

Selvon grew up in an environment of cane fields, which was a place of work for descendants of Indians, and oilfields, where African descendants worked. He attended Miss Douglin's primary school and Vistabella Canadian Mission primary school. At Naparima College, he made his first attempts in writing.<sup>74</sup> Selvon left Naparima College in San Fernando without completing it and he started to work. He became a wireless operator for the Royal Navy on ships in the Caribbean sea during the Second World War. Selvon wrote poetry in his spare time. He moved to Port of Spain and worked there as a reporter and editor for the *Trinidad Guardian* from 1946 until 1950. In 1947 he married his first wife, Draupadi Persaud, with whom he had a daughter. They lived in Barataria for three years after which Selvon left to London. He began to write

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<sup>73</sup> Donnell, "Three into one can't go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity."

<sup>74</sup> Kenneth Ramchand, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 729.

social and philosophical columns for the *Evening News* under various pseudonyms—Michael Wentworth, Ack-Ack, Esses or Big Buffer and the collection *Foreday Morning: Selected Prose* (1989).<sup>75</sup>

Selvon left Trinidad in 1950 and moved to London where he became a clerk of the Indian Embassy. His wife followed him to London; however, they divorced shortly after. Two years later he published his first novel *A Brighter Sun* (1952) which is set amongst the Indian cane community and describes racial prejudices in Trinidad during the Second World War. The main protagonist is a young Indian named Tiger whose story continues in a sequel called *Turn Again Tiger* (1958). This novel incorporates usage of local dialect which can be also found in *The Lonely Londoners* (1956). In 1970s, Selvon turned several of his stories into radio scripts broadcasted by the BBC. The stories were collected in *Eldorado West One* (1988) and *Highway in the Sun* (1991). He also was a co-author of the film script for *Pressure* which was Britain's first film featuring black actors.<sup>76</sup>

In 1963, Selvon married for the second time. From this marriage he had two sons and a daughter. After living in London for twenty-eight years, Selvon moved with his family to Calgary, Canada, in 1978. During this period of time he worked for universities in Victoria, Calgary, Winnipeg, Alberta and he also gave lectures for the International Writing and Afro-American Studies at the University of Iowa. As a result of being a lifelong smoker, Selvon died on 16 April 1994 at the age of 71 of respiratory failure when he was on a trip in Trinidad. Selvon is a contributor to Trinidadian literature for which he got the Chaconia Medal Gold for Literature, posthumously in 1994. He was also awarded a NALIS Lifetime Achievement Literary Award and the honorary doctorate by Warwick University in 1989.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ramchand, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 729.

<sup>76</sup> Nazareth, "Interview with Sam Selvon."

<sup>77</sup> Ramchand, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 729-730.

### 3.2. Selvon in the context of British literary field

Caribbean authors travelled to Britain in two waves. The main post-war wave of migrants arrived in Britain after the introduction of the Nationality Act of 1948 which extended the boundaries of British citizenship. Caribbean writers of this period, including V. S. Naipaul, Edgar Mittelholzer, George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, Andrew Salkey, or John Hearne, gained recognition and respect as individuals and also as a whole group in early 1950s.

In the second wave, there were writers who joined the final influx of immigrants from the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties. In 1962, several legal restrictions were introduced, such as the Immigrants Act, which limited further migration. The second wave of writers relied on the first wave of the Caribbean literary scene. These authors include, for example, Michael Anthony, Orlando Patterson or Wilson Harris. Authors of the first wave wrote about Caribbean people which they transferred to the metropolitan settings. The second group is notable for the ways in which they proceeded and complemented the ways of their ancestors from the first wave.<sup>78</sup>

The early 1950s were a unique opportunity for Caribbean writers because they were perceived as the representatives of people of their region. Their books were considered a true description of the Caribbean situation and were based on the desire of metropolitan readers to understand new migrants. From the ranks of the Trinidadians, V. S. Naipaul and Samuel Selvon played the role of speakers, and from Barbados it was George Lamming. Over time, their specific position in the field of literature has changed, as have the expectations of their readers. However, the books of these writers are still considered as the mouth of the Caribbean nation.<sup>79</sup>

Despite this later success, Lamming, Naipaul and Selvon had great limitations in British literary production as Caribbean immigrants in Britain. The audience of these writers gave them a subordinate position—readers did not see their works in comparison with other literary English writings. They were evaluated based on a comparison with writings from other colonies. Subsequently, readers rated writers as good or bad based on the presumed truth of the story.

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<sup>78</sup> Baytop, "The Emergence of Caribbean English Literature."

<sup>79</sup> McIntosh, *Emigration and Caribbean literature*, 49-50.

Thus, authors were enticed by the market and their own emigrant experience to introduce themselves as spokesmen for the Caribbeans.<sup>80</sup>

George Lamming is currently the most celebrated Caribbean author from the post-war period. His work *In the Castle of My Skin* is considered by British critics to be the most successful Caribbean work. Naipaul received similar treatment to Lamming for his *The Mystic Masseur*. These works were mainly appreciated by literary critics for their description of true Trinidadian life.<sup>81</sup>

The first reviews of Selvon's work are a little different. Samuel Selvon was the first of the three authors of the Caribbean post-war wave to publish in Britain. Therefore, his work created a space for his contemporaries and Selvon's first novel *A Brighter Sun* served as an example of quality Caribbean work. Selvon's reviewers noted his innovations in the field of dialogues and also praised what they saw as his portrayal of Caribbean reality. In reviews of his work, the mastery of the truthful depiction which was evidently important is stressed. However, literary critics saw his ethnic identity as an issue which delayed the beginning of his successful literary career:

A preoccupation with Selvon's ethnicity would be sustained into considerations of his later novels, its expression here underscoring the ways in which a fixation on the insights into the Caribbean contained within these writers' works led to misrepresentations. Selvon ... was detached from Indo-Trinidadian culture.<sup>82</sup>

Selvon did not doubt his ability to represent the Caribbean people. In an interview and in several essays, he presents himself as the one who writes the truth. Selvon even described himself as: "A naive Caribbean writer, I had just sat down and written about an aspect of Trinidad life as I remembered it, with no revisions, with no hesitation, without any knowledge of what a novel was."<sup>83</sup> He also admits that: "I paid very little respect to the rules, purely because I'm

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<sup>80</sup> McIntosh, *Emigration and Caribbean literature*, 50-53.

<sup>81</sup> Baytop, "The Emergence of Caribbean English Literature."

<sup>82</sup> McIntosh, *Emigration and Caribbean literature*, 53.

<sup>83</sup> Selwyn Cudjoe, *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (London: Ohio University Press, 1980), 67.

ignorant of them.” This makes a contrast to the writings of Naipaul and Lamming. Selvon describes Caribbean experience as it really was without any embellishments. Regarding his style of writing, Selvon states in his essay “A Note on Dialect” that:

I was the first Caribbean writer to explore and employ dialect in a full-length novel ... I was boldfaced enough to write a complete chapter in a stream-of-consciousness style (I think that is what it is called) without punctuation and seemingly disconnected, a style difficult enough for the average reader with “straight” English.<sup>84</sup>

Subsequently, Selvon confesses that “I became a bit fed-up of being taken for the mouthpiece of the coloured community. It wasn’t that I didn’t feel concerned, but the circumstances of my own personal life were far removed from that of the hustling immigrant in a factory.”<sup>85</sup> This shows that he was aware of the gap between himself being in Britain and the Caribbean in Trinidad. Nonetheless, Selvon considers himself to write authentically with a goal “to enlighten the ignorant”<sup>86</sup> and to “mak[e] his country and his people known accurately to the rest of the world.”<sup>87</sup> Therefore, we can say that Samuel Selvon had a desire to preserve Caribbean identity in his writings which would also help to enlighten his non-Caribbean audience.

### 3.3. Contribution to Caribbean literature

Selvon’s writings, such as “Cane is Bitter,” *A Brighter Sun* (1951), *Turn Again Tiger* (1958) and *The Plains of Caroni* (1972) give a powerful voice to Indians expressing that they should not be regarded only as a minority. Characters of this books, for example Tiger from *A Brighter Sun*, seek experience but also their own identity. George Lamming, a Barbadian novelist, claims that Selvon was one of

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<sup>84</sup> David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 43.

<sup>85</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 141.

<sup>86</sup> McIntosh, *Emigration and Caribbean literature*, 58.

<sup>87</sup> Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 15.

the strangest of all West Indian writers who was furiously tied to the island in his novels even though he never returned from exile until the 1970s.<sup>88</sup>

Even though Samuel Selvon is a poet and a playwright, he is the most popular for his short stories and novels which reconstruct identity and pride of the descendants of enslaved Indians. These characters become heroes in Selvon's novels, seeking their true self and happiness. Selvon sees literature as a medium for amelioration of the Caribbean situation. He hopes that Caribbean writers will improve the perception of Caribbean people and will promote the culture by writing about it. The new generation represents hope to their nation:

This island is my shadow and I carry it with me whenever I go. I hope above all, that the inspiration will come to the new generation, and will supply the impetus we sorely need in these times to put our house in order to work together for the benefit of the people of the Caribbean.<sup>89</sup>

Selvon feels that Caribbean people need reinforcement for their identity which is also linked to the perception others have about them.

Selvon's novels address not only identity issues, but they also describe relations among Africans and Indians. The first wave of Indians migrating to London is depicted in *The Housing Lark* (1965), *Ways of Sunlight* and most importantly in *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *Moses Ascending* (1975) and *Moses Migrating* (1983). In these novels, Selvon captures Trinidadian dialect being a kind of a bard of the Trinidadian nation:

narrative structure and tone openly proclaim the symbiotic relationship between popular and literary, folktale and fiction, oral and scribal, that makes Selvon an original, the country's calypsonian in prose.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Stefano Harney, *Nationalism and identity: culture and the imagination in a Caribbean diaspora* (Kingston: University of the West Indies, 1996), 93.

<sup>89</sup> Donnell, "Three into one can't go—East Indian, Trinidadian or West Indian? Samuel Selvon Discusses the question of an East Indian identity."

<sup>90</sup> Ramchand, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 730.

As an emigrant writer, Selvon's was partly separated him from Caribbean people "by class and distance, yet forced to assert an alignment and insight because of social pressures and the demands of the market."<sup>91</sup> Lamming considers Selvon to be a peasant speaker of Caribbean people who has a unique language: "The peasant tongue has its own rhythms ... and no artifice of technique, no sophisticated gimmicks ... Can achieve the specific taste and sound of Selvon's prose."<sup>92</sup> Selvon relied on his authentic language and is best known for it. As an evidence may serve the fact that Selvon's novels where these features do not appear are mostly unknown. Samuel Selvon is thus still read in accordance with Lamming's view of his work.

Because of Selvon's emigrant experience, there are two readings of his novels. Firstly, we can read his writings as representing Caribbean people. Or secondly, it is possible "to read them as isolated, uniquely challenged, or heedlessly mendacious."<sup>93</sup> With the second reading, we are able to see the influence of his emigrant experience in hostile Britain. According to Sudha Rai, emigrants have a sensitivity that is marked by dissatisfaction with both cultures and a desire for balance. This problem is expressed in fiction as characters who never find a satisfactory solution to their problems. This theory corresponds not only to Lamming, Naipaul, but also to Selvon. Furthermore, Rai claims the emigrant writer has issues with the language and also struggles to depict the truth of his own country due to the fact that the emigrant experience changed his point of view which results in building his own kind of sensitivity.<sup>94</sup> Together with Lamming and Naipaul, Selvon is connected to the Caribbean but also to Britain. Their work thus promotes the truth about Caribbean people; however, these truths are "contradictory 'truths' that highlight a distinct sensibility, a unique conceptual locus born of their actual rather than their asserted places in the world."<sup>95</sup> Emigrant writers did not aim to lie or to manipulate their audience; however, "by virtue of their origins ... and the pressures of their literary

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<sup>91</sup> McIntosh, *Emigration and Caribbean literature*, 62.

<sup>92</sup> Timothy Weiss, "Translational Identities and the Émigré Experience," *Diasporic Subjectivity and Cultural Brokering in Contemporary Post-Colonial Literatures* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009), 46.

<sup>93</sup> McIntosh, *Emigration and Caribbean literature*, 63.

<sup>94</sup> Sudha Rai, *Homeless by Choice: Naipaul, Jhabvala, Rushdie, and India* (Jaipur: Printwell, 1992), 4.

<sup>95</sup> McIntosh, *Emigration and Caribbean literature*, 64.



context—[they] foregrounded only certain aspects of their selves in order to be heard, to gain and maintain places in the literary field.”<sup>96</sup>

The political situation in England during Samuel Selvon's period was not very favourable. But Selvon's stories show that political disharmony does not necessarily mean cultural weakness. Selvon, like thousands of Trinidadians, felt the power and strength of resistance in literary culture and he wanted to present his audience the true Trinidadian reality. Selvon demonstrates that the power of Trinidadian cultural identity is in the heart of the West Indian diaspora. In his novels, Selvon highlights reality which is affected by his own experience and sensibility. However, the truth he strives to depict has changed from the true reality of people in Trinidad. The migrant experience has its affects which manifest themselves whether it is the writer's intention or not.

### 3.4. Literary criticism of Selvon's work

Selvon is well known for novels *A Brighter Sun* and *The Lonely Londoners* which were also the main objects of criticism. *A Brighter Sun* is often considered the first novel of the West Indian literary renaissance. Unlike most of the great West Indian novels that followed, *A Brighter Sun* came out while Selvon was still living in Trinidad. This marks Selvon's early literary success.<sup>97</sup> Literary critics were occupied with themes appearing in Selvon's novels such as race, identity, creolization or gender. Moreover, they focused on interrelations within his work.

Samuel Selvon wrote mainly for non-Trinidadian audience. He even made it clear that he was not writing for Trinidadian readers but for a wider audience who most likely did not know Trinidadian customs or culture: “What I try to do with my work is universalize it. . . . I never wrote for Caribbean people, I wrote to show Caribbean people to other parts of the world and to let people look and identify.”<sup>98</sup> For some literary critics, Selvon's desire to write for non-Trinidadian audience instead of reaching out to Caribbean readers exposes his work to

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<sup>96</sup> McIntosh, *Emigration and Caribbean literature*, 186.

<sup>97</sup> Harney, *Nationalism and identity*, 93.

<sup>98</sup> Austin Clarke, *A Passage Back Home: A Personal Reminiscence of Sam Selvon* (Toronto: Exile, 1994), 76.

criticism. Michel Fabre argues that in Selvon's work, there also is a problem of "the narrator's tone in contradistinction to the characters' dialect" thus novels are adjusted for British readers.<sup>99</sup>

In *A Brighter Sun*, Fabre criticises the narrator in the novel who speaks Standard English. It is in a contradiction with the language of other characters who speak variations creolized English which can be more associated with Trinidadian culture. Fabre sees the narrator of this novel "as an ethnographer who explains native customs and flora and fauna to a non-local reading audience in that audience's own language."<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the novel's narrator is connected to "colonial authority via the Standard English he/she shares with British and American readers that, at the time, drove the marketplace within which Selvon wrote."<sup>101</sup> Therefore, *A Brighter Sun* cannot demonstrate Trinidad as an independent country. It rather deteriorates the perception of Trinidadians. According to some literary critics, Selvon's work thus "concedes to imperial authority as it works to appease a non-Trinidadian reading audience."<sup>102</sup>

Despite the criticism, Selvon's work "demonstrates that the text's representation of space and its narration encourage the immersion of nonlocal readers in a localized world determined by Trinidadian creolization."<sup>103</sup> His novels can be read as "a national allegory celebrating cultural and political independence and a document designed specifically for a reading audience affiliated with imperial power."<sup>104</sup>

Selvon's work mirrors independence of Trinidad and the pressure of British publishers; nonetheless, he is committed to end the colonial authority. Selvon creates

deep links between space, dialect, and experience in his text, so that reading the novel involves transportation to a local understanding of what it is like for his characters to live in and understand Trinidad. For Selvon, immersing readers into his

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<sup>99</sup> Clarke, *A Passage Back Home: A Personal Reminiscence of Sam Selvon*, 214.

<sup>100</sup> James Erin, *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2015), 44.

<sup>101</sup> Erin, *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives*, 46.

<sup>102</sup> Erin, *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives*, 46.

<sup>103</sup> Erin, *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives*, 46.

<sup>104</sup> Erin, *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives*, 46.

version of Trinidad places his country and its culture within an international consciousness and encourages an alternative environmental imagination of his home island based upon an emerging creolized national identity.<sup>105</sup>

Samuel Selvon was one of the most important Trinidadian authors in the post-war era. An expert on Selvon's works, Susheila Nasta, notes that he was a "natural philosopher' at heart and subtle alchemist of style."<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, she adds that Selvon was "one of the leading pioneers of contemporary Trinidadian prose fiction or, for his series of Moses novels and London short stories, as a 'father' of 'black writing' in Britain."<sup>107</sup> Critics focused only on his major writings; however, his poems or short stories got little attention. Selvon experimented with styles and genres—he used standard English in works such as *An Island is a World* (1955) and in collections of writings and poems written in Trinidad and London. Selvon's significance for Trinidadian literature remained after his death, yet there is absence of popularity for some of his writings or those of other Trinidadian writers. Caryl Phillips confirmed this perception by arguing that:

If I were to point a student towards writing which captures the rhythm, texture, and tone of London ... I would not send them to the plays of John Osborne or Arnold Wesker, or to the prose of David Storey or John Braine. For acuity of vision, intellectual rigour, and sheer beauty of language they would have to be supplicants at the pages of Selvon and Lamming.<sup>108</sup>

Selvon's writing style does not seem to suit some literary critics very well. Despite his contribution to the Trinidadian literature, Selvon's novels lack to be included in several studies of Caribbean literature. He is an underappreciated author who; however, is a devoted pioneer of West Indian literature. Selvon

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<sup>105</sup> Erin, *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives*, 46.

<sup>106</sup> Susheila Nasta, "An Unexpected Encounter with Sam Selvon at the National Portrait Gallery," *Wasafiri* 28, no. 2 (2013): 33-35, doi: 10.1080/02690055.2013.758978.

<sup>107</sup> Nasta, "An Unexpected Encounter with Sam Selvon at the National Portrait Gallery."

<sup>108</sup> Caryl Phillips, "Following On: The Legacy of Sam Selvon and George Lamming," *Wasafiri* 29, no. 2 (1999): 34-36.

received much less critical attention than many of his contemporaries, despite the constant production of novels. Jean-Paul Durix, editor of *Commonwealth* magazine, said it was surprising to him “that Samuel Selvon, one of the founding fathers of Caribbean literature in the 1950s, had not been the object of any full-length critical survey ... his present stature in the literary canon does not correspond to what he has achieved in terms of innovation and artistic sophistication.”<sup>109</sup> Durix notes that the problem is probably that Selvon's work does not attract the reader because of the national dialect and emphasis on folk tradition.<sup>110</sup>

Reasons why Samuel Selvon lacks the attention of some critics “are closely connected to the vision of the island he carries with him in his travels from Trinidad to England, and now to Canada.”<sup>111</sup> It is the identity crisis of his characters who struggle with past identities, but also try to identify with the new identities of the multicultural environment. As immigrants, they lack the feeling of belonging somewhere and strive not to feel confused. Selvon thus “presents problems ... difficulty for critics committed to more solemn and pessimistic assessments of the region, bound up with economic and cultural dependency theories and their counter-theories of resistance and de-linkage.”<sup>112</sup>

Even though the journey of Selvon's writing career had to overcome a considerable extent of criticism and he remains to be an underappreciated writer in comparison to his Trinidadian peers, his works show extraordinary literary features. The negative side of his work which many critics reported to be the identity struggle is exactly what many readers appreciate the most. Together with the usage of the Caribbean dialect, it is what makes his Moses trilogy, on which my thesis will be further focused in the following analytical part, an exceptional literary work.

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<sup>109</sup> Jean-Pierre Durix, “Review of Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon,” *Commonwealth* 13, no. 2 (1989): 125-6.

<sup>110</sup> Harney, *Nationalism and Identity*, 93.

<sup>111</sup> Harney, *Nationalism and Identity*, 94.

<sup>112</sup> Harney, *Nationalism and Identity*, 94.

## 4. ANALYSIS OF SELECTED FICTION BY SELVON

Selvon describes the immigrant experience by means of focusing on immigrant community and telling their stories. Throughout the trilogy we get a picture of the situation in London and in Trinidad which is portrayed by Moses, his friends and people he meets. The trilogy consists of three novels, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), *Moses Ascending* (1975) and *Moses Migrating* (1983). My analysis will firstly focus on a brief summary. Subsequently, it will deal with the development of identity in all three novels.

### 4.1. Identity in *The Lonely Londoners*

Some critics do not consider the three novels to be a trilogy due to the fact that the first book, *The Lonely Londoners*, differs from the last two in many ways. Firstly, the setting of the first novel is London, whereas the last two novels set in Trinidad. The next argument why the novels are not a trilogy is that not all characters from the first book appear in the other two novels. For example, Moses and Henry appear in the three novels; however, Tolroy and Big City are present only in the first and second book. Characters Brenda and Jeannie appear in the last two novels. Even Samuel Selvon admits that creating a trilogy was not his intention:

The difference between the [first] two books is a question of time really ... I don't consider *Moses Ascending* to be a sequel. I just felt that I would use some of the same characters, that I would use Moses and Galahad and some of the other and update the situation of what was happening with the black communities in London. So really there is a big time gap between the time and the events of *The Lonely Londoners* to the later periods when I wrote *Moses Ascending*.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> John Thieme, "Oldtalk: Two Interviews with Sam Selvon," *Caribana* 1, no. 2 (1990): 77.

Nonetheless, only if we read the three novels as a whole, we get the entire story about an immigrant life.<sup>114</sup>

The first book from the Moses trilogy, *The Lonely Londoners*, tells a story of a Trinidadian, Moses Aloetta, and other young members of the immigrant group in London in 1950s. In the novel, Selvon narrates a series of stories about misfortunes of new immigrants in London with Moses being a central character. The story begins when Moses has already spent ten years in London. The narrator depicts the character of Moses as a guide of immigrant newcomers who tries to help them in every way. The story shows tight relations among immigrant community and reflects feelings of the immigrants about the hostile city.

#### 4.1.1. Alienation

One of the recurrent feelings of the immigrants is alienation. Every immigrant character has to deal with this emotion, including Moses. On one winter evening, Moses Aloetta goes to Waterloo station to meet Henry Oliver, a Trinidadian immigrant, to whom Moses is supposed to help to settle in London. Even though Moses regrets from time to time that he has “heart so soft that he always doing something for somebody and nobody ever doing anything for him,”<sup>115</sup> he always promises his help because he knows that settling in London is not easy for an immigrant. Even though Moses lives in London already for some time, he does not have much money. He soon becomes worried that incoming new immigrants may negatively influence his life. He even tries to reduce the number of West Indians in his own neighbourhood. Nonetheless, it seems that Moses feels duty to help.

While waiting for Henry in the station, Moses feels strong homesickness when seeing families “crying goodbye and kissing welcome.”<sup>116</sup> This situation reminds Moses that he does not have people who would care for him. That is also why he wants the new immigrants to feel comfortable in London with his help. In the station, Moses encounters Tolroy, his Jamaican friend, who is waiting for his mother’s arrival. Tolroy managed to save enough money to pay a ticket to London

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<sup>114</sup> Susheila Nasta, introduction to *Moses Migrating*, by Samuel Selvon, (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2009), 9.

<sup>115</sup> Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 27.

<sup>116</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 31.

for his mother; however, he is surprised when the mother unexpectedly brings other relatives together with his aunt, Tanty. It is clear that Tolroy's mother does not consider the consequences of leaving Jamaica and taking the whole family. New incomers usually do not realize that having money is everything when it comes to settling in London. It is one of the first immigrants' disillusion in the new environment.

When seeing Tolroy meeting his family, Moses regrets that he is not able to save any money to get a better living or to bring his family to London because he is too kind to refuse new immigrants. Moreover, he occasionally provides them financial help. As a contrast, the narrator tells us about a character opposite to Moses, a Jamaican, who managed to buy several houses and opened a club due to the fact that he made the immigrants pay full price for accommodation. By making this contrast of the two characters, Selvon suggests that it takes indifference and coldness to refuse to help fellow immigrants who are in need and to make money on their desperation.

The next interesting scene in the station is when a reporter asks for Moses' opinion about the immigrant situation in London with a belief that Moses has just migrated to London from Jamaica. Moses lies about being Trinidadian and he starts sharing his experience: "Let me give you my view of the situation in this country ... We can't get no place to live, and we only getting the worse jobs it have."<sup>117</sup> When hearing the truth, the reporter immediately ends the interview and he quickly leaves. This situation illustrates the disinterest of white Londoners about racial issues immigrants have to face. The next Moses' story connected to alienation and issue of racism is when Moses' boss fires him under an excuse that he has to reduce the number of staff when the truth was that he was firing him because of the colour. By this situation Selvon suggests that the many white Londoners expressed the racial prejudice indirectly in order to protect themselves from the confrontation of the true reason for their behaviour. Such indifference of white inhabitants underlines the overall feeling of alienation of the immigrants.

When Moses finally meets Henry (also called Galahad), he is surprised that Henry wears only an old T-shirt when it is winter. Henry does not even have any luggage with a plan in mind that he will buy better and new clothes when he

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<sup>117</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 36.

finds a job. Clearly, Henry has very naïve expectations about immigrant life by which Moses is shocked. It is an interesting contrast between Henry's unpreparedness and Moses when we know that Moses did not have anyone to look after him when he arrived to London. Moses invites Henry to his apartment and he offers his guidance when exploring the city and finding a job because he is sure that London will be a big surprise for Henry. Moses gives Henry advices about the life and people in London. Moses warns him that the British have a different behaviour than the Americans: "in America they don't like you, and they tell you so straight, so that you know how you stand. Over here is the old English diplomacy: 'thank you sir,' and 'how do you do' and that sort of thing."<sup>118</sup> Moses' points out that British cover their racist sentiment in politeness whereas in America, the racism is not masked. According to Moses, the second attitude is preferable.

Moses tries to help Henry by telling his experiences but Henry does not want to listen: "I know you mean well telling me all these things, but papa, I want to find out for myself."<sup>119</sup> However, Henry soon feels lost in the new city despite the initial courage. He is stopped by a policeman and he is told "[not to] block the pavement"<sup>120</sup> as if Henry was a burden. Henry is happy when he sees Moses who has been following him and he accepts getting help for the second time. Finally, Henry realizes that London is not what he expected.

Moses knows the struggles immigrants have to face in the new environment because he experienced them himself, including alienation. Moses lived in a hostel and felt extremely lonely. It is no wonder that he decides to be a companion for the new arriving immigrants. Thanks to his own experience, Moses understands how having someone in a new country is important. During Moses' arrival, the number of immigrants was not that high; thus, social ties were almost none. During his stay in the hostel, he met Captain, an immigrant from Nigeria. Captain spent all his father's money for university by living a consuming life. Instead of being a law student, Captain was taking advantage of flirting with white women in order to get their money and shelter. Even though he did not work, he managed to live a profligate life thanks to frauds. Captain even lies to his

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<sup>118</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 57.

<sup>119</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 60.

<sup>120</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 62.



girlfriend about having a job while he flirts with other women. The narrator remarks that there will be always some men who

don't do nothing at all, and you feel that they would dead from starvation, but day after day you meeting them and they looking hale, ... and in truth it look as if they would not only live longer than you but they would dead happier.<sup>121</sup>

This indeed a case of Captain who abuses the social bonds of the community only to get rewards. The landlord throws Captain out of his accommodation; however, Moses offers his apartment for him to stay in. Captain is the one who “[muddies] the water”<sup>122</sup> of fellow immigrants while Moses is the absolute opposite. If we compare Moses to Captain, Moses seems to be a fool who imprudently helps everyone he meets at his own expense. Finally, Moses has problems getting Captain to go away.

On the contrary, the next person which is depicted in Moses' story is an immigrant Bart who refuses to lend money to fellow migrants and he even convinces his friends that he has no money by acting having nothing to eat. Bart values his job of a clerk because it is unexpectedly well paid for a West Indian. Even though Bart is not poor, he frequently comes to Moses' apartment to eat his food about which Moses knows. However, when Bart is ill, Moses does not hesitate to check him which demonstrates Moses' soft heart and he continues in his attitude of a carer. Compared to Moses, Bart tries to avoid immigrant community as well as helping its members even if he is one of few who actually has financial resources. He distances himself from the community, claiming he has a different origin by which he contributes to racism. Bart is “lucky” that he has a lighter skin tone which he uses in his advantage and he denies his origin—he tries to persuade people that he is Latino coming from South America. Thus, he creates a new identity in order to have a better life. He does not like the way many immigrants exploit Britain and he even worries of the arrival of new immigrants who may make it harder for him to keep his gained status. In order to differentiate himself, he does not want to be seen with people who are black. He even dates

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<sup>121</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 74.

<sup>122</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 59.

a white woman Beatrice by whom he is obsessed. When he cannot marry her because of the racist father, he is worried that he will not be able to date a white woman again. He even sacrifices his job in order to find her after she disappeared.

The alienation in the new environment is also portrayed by the character of Lewis who is Tolroy's relative. After the arrival to London, Lewis constantly asks Moses questions about London life when they are at work. Moses once jokes that women in London cheat on their husbands while they are working nightshifts which evolves in serious causes. Tolroy takes Moses' words seriously and he is driven mad by the fact that he does not know if his wife cheats on him or not. Lewis vents his feelings of insecurity on his wife by beating her for no reason. Lewis' behaviour results in Agnes' leaving. Lewis soon forgets his old woman and he finds a new one. Such a fast abandonment of love is common in characters in *The Lonely Londoners*. Lewis quickly abandons the past and creates a new life in London.

The next interesting character whose behaviour is an example of a form of alienation is Tanty. Her character shows how some immigrants do not want to accommodate to the new life and they rather create a small world in order to be intentionally excluded from the bigger hostile world. She lives in small suburb Working Class and she avoids going beyond its borders. Tanty shops within her area and she even manages to persuade a conservative British vendor of negotiating the price as she uses from Jamaica. She treats her London area as if she never left her home land. The novel *The Lonely Londoners* does not usually depict characters who need to step out of the comfort zone. Nonetheless, there is one time when Tanty is forced to accommodate herself to the new world when she has to take the tube and double-decker bus.

Tanty's character demonstrates how the new place tests one's limits. The narrator points out that Tanty lives a life of a small town in the large city, refusing to adapt to the life of a Londoner. She is not the only one, in her area, people live in their "little worlds, and you stay in the world you belong to and you don't know anything about what happening in the other ones except what you read in the papers."<sup>123</sup> By this picture Selvon describes how some immigrants do not cooperate in order to ease the situation. Each of them has their own life and they

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<sup>123</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 101.

do not care about other immigrants. This is the opposite example to the community with tight relationships to which Moses belongs. The only thing which reunites this suburb Working Class is the poverty which is shared by the inhabitants.

Separation of London inhabitants is not displayed only among immigrants but also among Londoners of white and black skin. To depict this social division, the narrator tells us about black men singing under white and rich women's windows. White women throw money without even looking or listening to them. This image suggests the ignorance of white Londoners who do not even bother to interact with black inhabitants. The only thing which seems to cross the borders between white and black Londoners are sexual relationships. Otherwise, white women "don't know what happening in the room next to them, far more the street, or how other people living."<sup>124</sup>

The novel is humorous; however, full of sad incidents of the characters. In *The Lonely Londoners*, the Caribbean immigrants are not integrated to the community of white Londoners. Contrarily, they are pushed to the minority of British Blacks. Selvon's depiction of immigrants' difficulties incorporates material and psychological realms. They struggle to find a place to live, well paid jobs, good social connections, love as well as feeling of belonging somewhere which makes the feeling of alienation inevitable:

coming together for old talk, to find out the latest gen, what happening, when is the next fete, Bart asking if anybody see his girl anywhere, Cap recounting a episode he had with a woman by the tube station the night before, Big City want to know why the arse he can't win a pool, Galahad recounting a clash with the colour problem in a restaurant in Piccadilly ...<sup>125</sup>

According to literary critics, the novel *The Lonely Londoners* makes Caribbean culture seen as unmaturred and hopeless in many ways due to the comparison with

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<sup>124</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 101.

<sup>125</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 199.

the developed British culture.<sup>126</sup> However, Samuel Selvon and other Caribbean authors evolve a sense of their own culture by writing not only about immigrants in England but also about their home land.<sup>127</sup> This makes the character of Moses “the father of resistance culture, or of mobility studies, or of anti-racist education.”<sup>128</sup> Writing about Caribbean history is thus the beginning of the progressiveness of Caribbean culture.

#### 4.1.2. Consciousness of Caribbean identity

Among the feelings which accompany the immigrants in the new environment is also racial consciousness. In *The Lonely Londoners*, the immigrants one by one realize that their race is an obstacle. Stuart Hall describes this racial consciousness as unavoidable in a new environment: “Everyone in the Caribbean, of whatever ethnic background, must sooner or later come to terms with this African presence.”<sup>129</sup> A literary critic Kenneth Ramchand sees that this birth of consciousness is the cause of the colonialist history when displaced Caribbeans searched for their identity.<sup>130</sup> The British supremacy does not allow the Caribbean immigrants to fully develop their own culture neither in colonialist Trinidad nor in London.

The struggles of the main protagonists are described also by the means of pointing out the differences of the two cultures which result in consciousness of their Caribbean identity. These cultural differences are visible for example when looking for a job. When Moses is with Henry at the employment office, he sees there only immigrants waiting only for financial aid. Moses explains Henry that these men “[mud] the water”<sup>131</sup> of immigrants who actually want to work. Indeed, people tend to make assumptions based on few negative cases. Moses asks Henry if he plans to get paid without working but Henry is persuaded to work in order to get money: “Boy, I don’t know about you, but I new in this country and I don’t

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<sup>126</sup> Kenneth Ramchand, “Song of Innocence, Song of Experience: Samuel Selvon’s *Lonely Londoners* as a Literary Work,” *World Literature Written in English* 21, no. 3 (1982): 654.

<sup>127</sup> Harney, *Nationalism and Identity*, 104.

<sup>128</sup> Harney, *Nationalism and Identity*, 104.

<sup>129</sup> Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.”

<sup>130</sup> Ramchand, “Song of Innocence, Song of Experience: Samuel Selvon’s *Lonely Londoners* as a Literary Work.”

<sup>131</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 50.

want to start antsing on the State unless I have to. Me, I am a born hustler.”<sup>132</sup> Henry realizes that he will have to work hard and that he does not have much space for making errors because he is new in the country.

Unfortunately, hard work does not guarantee success, as Moses’ case proves. The employment office also illustrates the competition of immigrants by the fact that there were only few good posts, the narrator aptly notes that London is a place “where everyone is your enemy and your friend.” On the other hand, Moses’s help proves that support among the members of the community remains. Moses teaches Henry how to correctly fill in a form for the employer, suggesting that it is necessary to state beforehand that he is black: “[Employers] don’t tell you outright that they don’t want coloured fellars, they just say sorry the vacancy get filled.”<sup>133</sup> The importance of the colour of the skin is thus on the same level as the name. The mandatory statement of the colour also serves the British employers to be “polite” as they do not have to personally refuse a black worker and admit the real reasons. Henry is a character whose realization of the London reality is visible the most clearly. At first, he is thrilled from London. He even loves to talk about famous London places and streets; however, these places already mean nothing to Moses. The thrill gets weaker when Henry works nightshifts after which he barely greets people he meets on his way home. This visible shift of the perception of the environment mirrors the increasing consciousness of the Caribbean identity.

#### 4.1.3. Crisis of Caribbean identity

The conflict of the Caribbean and British culture results in a cultural shock of the migrants. The Caribbean identity is marked by the colour of their skin which affects their social status as well as their Trinidadian culture. Even if they strive to preserve their Caribbean identity, the pressure of the British culture is persistent. The dreams and ambitions of the immigrants are replaced by racial discrimination and cultural clash. The alienation and realization of the Trinidadian identity leads

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<sup>132</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 50.

<sup>133</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 59.

to the identity crisis. The dominant British culture overshadows the Trinidadian identity.

The interesting illustration of the crisis of Caribbean identity are Selvon's means of using symbolic names. Moses renames Henry as Sir Galahad by which he compares him to a knight of the Arthurian legend who seeks the Holy Grail, in other words, prosperity in London. We can consider the change of the name as a symbol of the loss of the old identity of an immigrant who arrived to the new city. The new name for Henry, Galahad, is thus a representation of the detachment from the past. Selvon admits that he used the names of the characters for symbolic reasons.<sup>134</sup> The character of Moses could be therefore compared to the biblical prophet who lead people to the promised land.

Selvon describes the identity dilemma mainly on the character of Galahad and his encounter with a white woman and her little girl who is staring at Henry, saying: "Mummy, look at that black man!"<sup>135</sup> The mother replies: "You mustn't say that, dear!"<sup>136</sup> Henry's reaction to this situation is that he gives the small child a pat on the cheek which causes the child to cry and the mother to feel embarrassed:

... the child mother uneasy as they stand up there on the pavement with so many white people around: if they was alone she might have talked a little, and ask Galahad what part of the world he come from, but instead she pull the child along and she look at Galahad and give a sickly sort of smile, and the old Galahad, knowing how it is, smile back and walk on.<sup>137</sup>

Since this encounter, Henry starts to feel that his Caribbean identity is reduced to the colour of his skin. I would not say that the little girl insulted Henry because she only noticed the fact that his colour of the skin is different. The mother objected to her child's statement as if the black colour was a shame or if it had

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<sup>134</sup> Susheila Nasta, *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1988), 66.

<sup>135</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 122.

<sup>136</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 122.

<sup>137</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 122.

a negative connotation. The mother even rejects to talk to Henry and she leaves in fear. After this unpleasant situation, Henry smiles and goes his way. The narrator aptly concludes that “If that episode did happen around the first time when he land up in London, oh Lord! he would have run to the boys, telling them he have a big ballad.”<sup>138</sup> Henry feels that the colour is an obstacle to the life he imagined in London: “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. ... I ain’t do anything to infuriate the people and them, is you!”<sup>139</sup> Henry is aware that the racism of the British is not justified because the colour should not define who he is. This may be the reason why he manages simply to smile when the mother leaves in a hurry. He does not even bother to tell this story to his friends because it would not be surprising to them as they experience similar situations.

Nonetheless, the more experiences in London Henry has, the more he realizes that his race is a decisive factor of how his identity is perceived. He finds out that he cannot be perceived as a Londoner, he can only be an immigrant—a black man which entails stereotypes such as being lazy and uncivilized. Moses is aware of this issue as well and he even warns his friends about it:

Listen, I will give you the name of a place. I call Ipswich. There it have a restaurant rub by a Pole call the Rendezvous Restaurant. Go there and see if they will serve you. And you know the hurtful part of it? The Pole who have the restaurant, he ain’t have no more right in this country than we. In fact, we is British subjects and he is only a foreigner, we have more right than any people from the damn continent to live and work in this country, and enjoy what this country have, because is we who bleed to make this country prosperous.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 122.

<sup>139</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 123.

<sup>140</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 49.

Selvon deals with the issue of colour with irony and humour. When talking about racist behaviour of the white Londoners, he calls it “diplomacy” whereas approach of the Americans is just being honest:

In America you see a sign telling you to keep off, but over here you don't see any, but when you go in the hotel or the restaurant they will politely tell you to haul—or else give you the cold treatment.<sup>141</sup>

The feeling of being punished for the Caribbean identity experiences also Moses' friend Five Past Six whose nickname is based on the colour of his skin. This is one of many images where Selvon illustrates how the identity of immigrants was defined by the colour. The racism comes not only from the British but also from the immigrant community itself. Five Past Six is discriminated because the colour of his skin is very dark; on the other hand, Bart's skin is lighter which makes him privileged even if they are both immigrants. Five Past Six comes from Barbados and he knows how racism can ruin one's life. He was once dating a white woman, when walking with her on a street he was asked by strangers to leave her alone. When Five refused to do so, the strangers poured him with oil and wanted to set the fire. This was Five's moment of realization that life in London will never be as he imagined. From that point on, Five spent his evenings drinking.

How to deal with identity in the new environment shows also the character of Harris. He tries to blend to the dominant British society by behaving as one of them. He is “a fellar who like to play ladedda, and he like English customs and thing, he does be polite and say thank you and he does get up in the bus and the tube to let woman sit down, which is a thing even them Englishmen don't do.”<sup>142</sup> Harris even throws parties for white Londoners in order to integrate himself. However, Harris' immigrant friends are an obstacle on his way to be more British. When Five Past Six appears at Harris' party, Harris tells him to behave himself. Five Past Six replies: “Man, sometimes you get on like if we didn't grow up together. ... You forget I know you from back home. Is only since you hit Brit'n

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<sup>141</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 49.

<sup>142</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 157.



that you getting on so English.”<sup>143</sup> Indeed, Harris behaviour changes. He even denies his past—that he slept with a black woman. Harris distances himself from the immigrant community and his only wish becomes to be a part of the white British society. He even stops speaking the vernacular English and adopts the British accent in order to appear more British. Five Past Six’s comment on the fact that they have mutual roots reminds that one cannot delete the past, cultural identity, to become a different person. Harris’ wish to abandon the cultural identity is an insult to many immigrants who try not to lose their identity in the new hostile environment. During Harris’ party, Tanty ruins his illusion of being an Englishman when she starts screaming on him and saying how he has grown since she saw him the last time. However, Harris ignores her comments and he seems to be embarrassed when he has to dance with her. Selvon demonstrates how creating a new identity does not help when trying to merge into a new environment—the past will always catch up. Harris tries to control the behaviour of his friends in order not to embarrass himself in the British society. He warns his friends about being respectful and not dancing to the song God Save the Queen: “Now it have decent people here tonight, and if you don’t get on respectable ... the English people will say we are still uncivilized and don’t know how to behave properly.”<sup>144</sup> Harris’ point is similar to what Moses thinks by the non-working immigrants “muddying the water” for the good behaving immigrants.

The crisis also appears in the characters’ relationships with women. The denial of the integration of the immigrants to the white community includes love of white women. They hardly ever date the immigrants; however, there is one time of the year when this changes. The narrator describes summer evening in Hyde Park as almost magical times when the white women seek sexual experience with the black inhabitants of London. The magical time is described on nine-page-long description of Hyde Park summer encounters of black and white people. Nonetheless, the depiction is not romantic at all, the narrator tells us that Moses is offered money by a stranger to go have sex with a woman because the stranger likes to watch. The interesting thing is the incorporation of stream of consciousness, without any punctuation, which Selvon uses in this passage. Selvon’s narration merges the dialogue into description of Hyde Park which

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<sup>143</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 160.

<sup>144</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 175.

symbolises the freedom of interracial connections which are out of Hyde Park back in the racist and conservative track. The narrator reveals that white women love to sleep with black men for joy. Women want them to behave primitively and “live up to the films and stories they hear about black people living ... in the jungles of the world.”<sup>145</sup> White men also get this kind of thrill when they meet black men, that is why they invite them to parties to amuse them. The black men usually do not complain about this behaviour which is also the case of Moses. When he is on a party, he gets five pounds for the entertainment he provided. The narrator however tells us a story about a black man who did not have such a forbearance. He came home with a white woman who called him “a black bastard,”<sup>146</sup> having fetish for black men. This resulted in her serious injury by the man. The narrator utters that such situations happen during summer. Selvon illustrates that immigrant’s life is a constant tension between thrill and suffering.

Other characters in the novel do not cope with the identity crisis that easily—they mostly stick to their Caribbean identity. However, they are pushed by the circumstances to the limit. One day, Henry loses his job. In order to have something to eat, he decides to catch a pigeon. He observes its moves and successfully catches one. Unfortunately, he is seen by a white woman who is screaming at him and she calls him a killer and a monster. Henry manages to take the pigeon and leave before the woman calls the police. This scene illustrates how the two environments, London and Trinidad, are different. Moreover, this situation demonstrates that keeping the Caribbean identity in such an environment is almost impossible and that change is inevitable. Henry catches the pigeon in order to survive. This experience makes Henry realize the same thing about which Moses is thinking for a longer period of time—that London does not offer many benefits anymore.

Henry goes straight to Moses’ apartment and tells him that he bought the bird. Moses asks himself how Henry managed to do so but Henry finally tells him the truth because he feels guilty. In fact, he is not the only immigrant who feeds himself with pigeons. Moses replies to Henry’s confession that he has to realize the fact that London is not Trinidad: “The people over here will kill you if you

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<sup>145</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 154.

<sup>146</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 155.

touch a fly.”<sup>147</sup> By this statement, Moses illustrates how the British tend to exaggerate any kind of violation committed by an immigrant. The behaviour of the British makes Moses to rethink over his stay in London. He knows that he is not making any progress in the socioeconomic ladder and that he has nothing what he expected to have in London: “I just lay there on the bed thinking about my life, how after all these years I ain’t get no place at all, I still the same way, neither forward nor backward.”<sup>148</sup> Moses advises Henry to go back to Trinidad because he has not invested that much in the life of a Londoner.

Due to the mentioned circumstances, Moses thinks of Trinidad as a “[life] in Paradise”<sup>149</sup> and of London as “a lonely miserable city”<sup>150</sup> where he is suffering. Henry, coming from Trinidad not so long ago, reminds Moses that Trinidad does not offer much benefits too. Nevertheless, Moses does not listen. The only thing that is keeping Moses in London is the immigrant community he has there. However, his former optimism has changed. Moses hates the behaviour of the British towards the immigrants: “They tolerate you, yes, but you can’t go in their house and eat or sit down and talk.”<sup>151</sup> Moses’ realization that the British only tolerate the immigrant community (without accepting it) is crucial. Henry does not feel it the same way, he likes when white women kissed him on New Year in order to have a good luck. Moses reminds him that this is foolish. It seems that Moses’ role of the prophet who shows immigrants the way in London has changed to the saviour who wants to help Galahad to escape the disappointment and return back to Trinidad.

Selvon illustrates how immigrant community deals with the British environment not only by describing the struggles but also by emphasizing the close community. One of the things which helps the immigrants in difficult times are Sunday meetings in Moses’ apartment. The narrator compares these appointments to church attendances. It is an opportunity for the immigrant community to tell stories of what happened in their lives and to emotionally support each other. In fact, the meetings have the same value for the community

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<sup>147</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 180.

<sup>148</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 185.

<sup>149</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 187.

<sup>150</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 187.

<sup>151</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 188.

as if they went to church. The community is indeed of a great value for the immigrants:

Sometimes, listening to them, look in each face, and [Moses] feel a great compassion for every one of them, as if he live each of their lives, one by one, and all the strain and stress come to rest on his own shoulders ... sometimes tears come to his eyes and he don't know why really, if is home-sickness or if is just that life in general beginning to get too hard.<sup>152</sup>

By hosting the Sunday meetings, Moses helps his friends to ease their situation, he understands their complaints and he guides them how to overcome the issues.

#### 4.1.4. Reinforcing Caribbean identity

To reinforce the Caribbean identity in the novel, Selvon uses Trinidadian dialect as a language of the immigrants. He was the first Caribbean writer who used West Indian dialect in the narrative and in the dialogues of the characters.<sup>153</sup>

Samuel Selvon was neglected by literary critics for his experiments with language in his novels; however, he became famous for the same reason. The language Selvon uses in his Moses trilogy is not Standard English nor Creole. It is an artificially created form of the two languages. Selvon depicts humorous situations of lives of West Indian characters; nonetheless, he critiques superiority of the white society as well as of the white literature. Selvon challenges colonialist thoughts by using his non-standard form of creolized English, creating a fundamental West Indian literary work. Selvon is conscious of the predominance of the European literature and he merges it with the Creole language. He thus forms a literary work combining both West Indian and European culture.

For the Caribbeans, the English was the language of colonialism. Moreover, the creolized form of English was disregarded in the literature for many years. Creole language was considered as the lower form spoken by the

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<sup>152</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 202.

<sup>153</sup> Nasta, *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, 63.

colonized West Indians whereas English was the language of colonizers. Caribbean writers were thus “torn between two languages.”<sup>154</sup> However, Selvon decided for a compromise between the two. He created an artificial creolized form of English which is accessible to both English and West Indian audience: “I could [not] have said what I wanted to say without modifying the dialect... the pure dialect would have been obscure and difficult to understand.”<sup>155</sup> As an example may serve an extract from *Moses Ascending* where Selvon writes: “Who you think wait there a poor-me-one till seven O’clock, then had was to catch the tube and come home in a fiery mood of destruction?”<sup>156</sup> The phrase “poor-me-one” is an example of Caribbean dialect which is also understandable to the English audience.<sup>157</sup> I will also mention another example from the first novel, *The Lonely Londoners*, where the narrator incorporates West Indian terms such as “rab”<sup>158</sup> together with Standard English grammar:

And this sort of thing was happening at a time when the English people starting to make rab about how too much West Indians coming to the country: this was a time, when any corner you turn, is ten to one you bound to bounce up a spade.<sup>159</sup>

By incorporating the creolized language, Selvon’s shows the Caribbean identity in an original form:

Language is a fundamental site of struggle for post-colonial discourse because the colonial process itself begins in language. The control over language by the imperial centre—whether achieved by displacing native languages, by installing itself as a “standard” against other variants which are constituted as

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<sup>154</sup> Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.”

<sup>155</sup> Ismail Talib, *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2002), 126.

<sup>156</sup> Samuel Selvon, *Moses Ascending* (London: Penguin Press, 2008), 62.

<sup>157</sup> Richard Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 449.

<sup>158</sup> Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, 462.

<sup>159</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 24.

“impurities” or by planting the language of Empire in a new place—remains the most potent instrument of cultural control.<sup>160</sup>

Selvon highlights that Creole language is not a peripheral form of English. Moreover, Selvon’s mix of Creolized language and Standard English represents the origin of the characters which gives the story a sense of authenticity. The dialect emphasizes the Caribbean identity as well as it shows that Creole has its place in the literature: “I longed to get back of my philosophizing and my analyzing and my rhapsodizing, decorating my thoughts with grace notes and showing the white people that me, too, could write a book.”<sup>161</sup> This “dialect part of the consciousness of the narrator”<sup>162</sup> is for what is Selvon admired even by other Caribbean writers such as Wilson Harris or Roy Heath.<sup>163</sup>

Furthermore, Selvon’s decision to write in the Creole form was a liberation for him:

... when I started to work on my novel *The Lonely Londoners* I had this great problem with it that I began to write it in Standard English and it would just not move along ... It occurred to me that perhaps I should try to do both the narrative and the dialogue in this form [Trinidadian form of the language] I started to experiment with it and the book just went very rapidly along... With this particular book I just felt that the language that I used worked and expressed exactly what I wanted it to express.<sup>164</sup>

Selvon admits that he wanted to depict the Caribbean identity and he wanted to narrate stories for which Standard English was not suitable.<sup>165</sup> This is why Selvon chose to use West Indian dialect even though it is only a modified form—it is neither London dialect nor Trinidadian speech. Selvon argues that he used this constructed form because he felt that he writes the stories for non-West Indian

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<sup>160</sup> Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.”

<sup>161</sup> Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 100-101.

<sup>162</sup> Talib, *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures*, 139.

<sup>163</sup> Talib, *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures*, 139.

<sup>164</sup> Nazareth, “Interview with Sam Selvon.”

<sup>165</sup> Nasta, *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, 66.

audience. Even if the stories were not meant for the Trinidadian audience, Selvon declares that he wanted to express his experience, feelings and Caribbean identity through the language. Hence, when using a language which is close to the characters, he easily managed to communicate the message he wanted to convey in the novel.<sup>166</sup>

#### 4.2. Identity in *Moses Ascending*

The novel *Moses Ascending* was published in 1975 which is nineteen years later after the publication of the first Moses novel. The setting of *Moses Ascending* is again London and even some of the characters remain the same, for example Galahad. It is set in the 1960s during the Black Power movement. Contrarily to *The Lonely Londoners*, *Moses Ascending* is a first-person narrative. The main protagonist is the same—Moses.

The attitude of Moses has changed. He is no longer determined to go straight back to Trinidad. He decided that he will give London another try. At the beginning, Moses tells the reader about his accomplishments. He became a landlord in Shepherd's Bush. He finally "ascends" and fulfils his dream by becoming a landlord and not a tenant. He lives in the highest floor and he writes his memoirs. Moses is determined to lead a better life and he wants to cut off the past. He does not want to be included in the new Black Power movement or any kind of resistance. Moses simply wants to be an Englishman and maintain his mansion. He manages to find tenants and he even has a servant named Bob, a white man. Unfortunately, Moses gets involved in an illegal business because his basement becomes a centre of the Black Power movement lead by a West Indian tenant Brenda. Moses's generosity does not pay off as he loses money when he pays bail for a member of the movement. Moses gets in trouble also by having a sexual relationship with Bob's girlfriend Jeannie. Bob finds out about their relationship because of which Moses lets him move to the top floor and Moses moves back to the basement.

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<sup>166</sup> Nasta, *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, 67.

#### 4.2.1. Hybrid identity

After the identity crisis described in the analysis of *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses and his friends realize that keeping the Caribbean identity in hostile environment is impossible. Thus the assimilation of the Caribbean identity towards the British culture is necessary. The character of Moses gives a clear example of creating the hybrid identity.

When Moses gets caught for being involved in an illegal business, he feels that black immigrants will always suffer in London and that Caribbean identity is a burden. He starts to lose hope and he is convinced that there is no way for any of the immigrants to get a better life. It seems that the only way how to survive is to become an Englishman. Moses even admits that this is what he was told back in Trinidad: “When I was a little boy in Trinidad, the old ones use to tell the children to try and live and behave like white people, and I used to imagine that white people live in Paradise.”<sup>167</sup> After living there for years, Moses realizes that London is far from being a paradise and the only thing that is left is to deny his Caribbean identity and act like a white. He changes his opinion about maintaining West Indian and other communities as a resistance.

Galahad goes through the same change of attitude: “We are all in the same boat. You can buy a house or a limousine, and eat caviar and best end of lamb, but you can’t get a white skin if you beg, borrow or steal. Things not like the old days, Moses.”<sup>168</sup> Moses knows that he cannot buy a white skin; however, he can at least simulate being white by climbing the socioeconomic ladder. By becoming a landlord and a writer, Moses feels this kind of accomplishment. However, it turns out that Moses cannot escape—he will always be perceived as a black immigrant in London. At the end, Moses is forced to move to the basement and the white man Bob keeps Moses’ former apartment.

In *Moses Ascending*, Moses’ hybridization can be examined by two means. Firstly, by describing a personal change. Secondly, hybrid identity can appear in the form of language change because language determines identity.<sup>169</sup> By spending more years in London, Moses’ personality starts to change. At the

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<sup>167</sup> Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 106.

<sup>168</sup> Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 15.

<sup>169</sup> Celia Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 41.



beginning, Moses was like the prophet who leads the newcomers and helps them in London. The immigrant community was important to him. However, as years go by, Moses becomes more detached from the immigrant community. He wants to improve his socioeconomic status, that is also why he moves to the new house. Moses used to warn his immigrant friends about British hostility and now he feels as one of the British—the hybridization of his identity takes place.

As for the second aspect, the hybridization of identity shows as a language change in Moses' speech.<sup>170</sup> The character of Moses speaks less creolized form of English than he spoke in *The Lonely Londoners*. Moses' higher position in the society thus mirrors the language change—he even uses formal words in his speech. Moses ameliorates his speech because it will make him more white.<sup>171</sup> Right away from the beginning, the reader finds out that Moses is trying not to use his West Indian dialect in his speech as if he wanted to get rid of his Caribbean identity which is keeping him behind. He uses Standard English instead, using even formal words:

It was Sir Galahad who drew my attention to the property. He was reading Dalton's Weekly, as was his wont, looking for new jobs; roaming though bed sitter land; picking out secondhand miscellany he need and could afford; musing on the lonely hearts column to see if any desperate riche white woman seeks black companion with a view to matrimony.<sup>172</sup>

If we compare this paragraph to the beginning of *The Lonely Londoners* where Moses speaks with Trinidadian dialect, the change of the language is clearly visible. The sentence of *The Lonely Londoners* incorporates the word “fellar” which is a Trinidadian spelling for “fellow”:<sup>173</sup>

One grim winter evening, Moses Aloetta jumps on a number 46 bus at the corner of Chepstow Road and Westbourne Grove to go

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<sup>170</sup> Samuel Selvon, “Samuel Selvon Talking: A Conversation with Kenneth Ramchand” *Canadian Literature* 95, no. 2 (Winter, 1982): 56-64.

<sup>171</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 111.

<sup>172</sup> Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 1.

<sup>173</sup> Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, 228.

to Waterloo to meet a fellar who was coming from Trinidad on the boat-train.<sup>174</sup>

The change of Moses' speech in *Moses Ascending* is also visible on his usage of foreign words such as French *oui*. Despite his attempts, Moses does not manage to speak the proper Standard English and he remains to be connected to his past. Even though he does not stop trying, Moses does not become part of the white society even when trying to speak grammatically correct: "I will knock them in the Old Kent Road with my language alone, I boast. My very usage of English will have them rolling in the aisles. Mark my words, Galahad."<sup>175</sup> Even when Moses speaks with his friends of the black community, he tries to sound more English and even corrects errors in the speech: "I don't know, maybe you was. Were."<sup>176</sup> Another interesting fact about the development of the character of Moses is how he tries to almost copy literary works of white writers, ignoring literature of the black writers:

"I know Accles and Pollock, but not Lamming and Salkey."

"You see what I mean? Man Moses, you are still living in the Dark Ages! You don't even know that we have created a Black Literature, that it have writers who write some powerful books what making the whole world realize our existence and our struggle."<sup>177</sup>

Even though Brenda and Henry suggest Moses to write a literary work which would support their culture, Moses refuses. Moreover, Brenda criticises Moses' English and advises him to "stick to oral communication."<sup>178</sup> However, Moses feels that writing about cultural conflicts will not make him a good name among white writers and their audience: "I longed to get back to my philosophizing and

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<sup>174</sup> Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, 6.

<sup>175</sup> Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 103.

<sup>176</sup> Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 1.

<sup>177</sup> Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 56-57.

<sup>178</sup> Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 137.

my analysing and my rhapsodizing, decorating my thoughts with little grace-notes and showing the white people that we, too, could write book.”<sup>179</sup>

In order to achieve a sense of belonging to the environment, Moses adjusts to the British culture. That is why the connection to the Creole culture gets weaker and the hybrid identity forms. This is a prove of the fact that identity is not fixed and that it can evolve: “we should think ... of identity as a ‘production,’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.”<sup>180</sup> Even though the immigrants want to stick to the Caribbean identity at first, they found out that it is impossible to keep it. According to Stuart Hall, this discontinuity is part of the Caribbean identity:

We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about “one experience, one identity,” without acknowledging its other side—the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean's “uniqueness.” Cultural identity ... is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being.” It belongs to the future as much as to the past.<sup>181</sup>

Moses realizes that a complete denial of his Caribbean identity is impossible. He sees the assimilation towards the London culture as a way how to save himself.

#### 4.3. Identity in *Moses Migrating*

The story in *Moses Migrating* continues with Moses’ failure in ameliorating his socioeconomic position. Moses did not manage to integrate himself into the white London society and he is dissatisfied with his current life in London. Therefore, he is persuaded to go back to Trinidad. Moses’ gained position in society is completely lost and he even becomes a servant of Bob to whom he used to be a master.

After Moses decision to return to his homeland, Bob and his girlfriend Jeannie go with him to see the Trinidadian carnival. Moses travels in the third

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<sup>179</sup> Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 133.

<sup>180</sup> Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.”

<sup>181</sup> Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.”

class whereas Bob and Jeannie have first class tickets. The journey is narrated in the first part of the book, covering also the fact that Moses continues in the sexual relationship with Jeannie. It seems that Moses uses sleeping with Jeannie as a revenge on Bob because he ruined Moses socioeconomic progress. After the arrival to Moses' homeland–Trinidad, he lives there in a hotel as a tourist. During the visit of Tanty Flora who brought Moses up, he meets Doris. She is Tanty's foster child and Moses falls in love with her. The two women help Moses to prepare his costume for the traditional carnival. Moses wants to have a costume representing Great Britain. Moses costume wins even if the result is very comic–Moses represents Britannia and his white friends have a costume of his slaves. Moses is thinking about staying in Trinidad because of Doris but his friends do not believe Moses would be capable of it. Finally, Moses feels that Trinidad is no longer his home and he feels rootless. The story ends with Moses going back to London.

#### 4.3.1. Rootlessness

The character of Moses shows the identity struggle immigrants have to experience—they gave up their past with a vision that they will have a better future. However, this expectation, as it turns out, is very naïve. When Moses finally decides to go to his homeland after many years of feeling alienated and lonely, he finds out that he no longer has any home. This realization is very painful because Moses finds out that he does not belong anywhere and that he no longer knows who he truly is—a Trinidadian or a Londoner. Moses' identity did not become white as he used to think, but it is a hybrid identity of an immigrant which makes him feel like a stranger. According to Roldan-Santiago, such identity development is natural; moreover, to develop several identities is the only solution to immigrant's struggle.<sup>182</sup>

Moses' stay in his homeland does seem to be exhilarating for him. Many years living in London seem to have changed him more than he could admit. At first, it seems that Moses does not want to leave London. When he is about to

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<sup>182</sup> Serafin Roldan-Santiago, "Samuel Selvon's Moses Trilogy: The Concoction of Hybrid Identities," *The Atlantic Critical Review* 3, no. 1 (2004): 160.

leave, Moses doubts about his decision:

I grunted. The drinks was wearing off, and I was back in the dumps as I find myself in the line of departing blacks. As I shuffled up the queue I thought of several things to tell the Officer to prevent my departure, like I was chief instigator of a race riot in Notting Hill, or that I was responsible for that bomb what explode in Oxford Street, and not the Irish terrorists. I even thought of fainting: it occur to me I should of learnt some of them Paki tricks like going into a trance so everybody believe you dead. With each inexorable step forward, I counted the inches that was taking me away from Brit'n.<sup>183</sup>

Moreover, it seems that part of Moses thinks that the return to Trinidad will not be forever due to the fact that before the journey to Trinidad, Moses does not cut ties with Britain completely. He keeps the house he owns having Galahad to supervise his belongings.

Moses' change of identity is apparent from his change of perception of the environment. In the first novel *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses calls London as alien whereas in the third novel *Moses Migrating*, Moses speaks about Trinidadian people as "alien culture."<sup>184</sup> The feeling of alienation catches Moses after the arrival to Trinidad as it did the first time he came to Great Britain. Literary critics Kenneth Ramchand and Rohlehr confirm "that an ill-suited colonial mentality and unformed national identity"<sup>185</sup> is even stronger when the immigrants come back to their homeland. The Caribbean identity is underdeveloped. That is why the feeling of rootlessness is common—Moses feels like he does not belong anywhere.

Trinidad has changed over the thirty years Moses was abroad and he feels displaced. The feeling of rootlessness is emphasized by the fact that Moses lives

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<sup>183</sup> Samuel Selvon, *Moses Migrating* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2009), 49.

<sup>184</sup> Selvon, *Moses Migrating*, 90.

<sup>185</sup> Harney, *Nationalism and Identity*, 104.

in his home country in a hotel. Even when meeting Tanty Flora, he feels estranged:

I began to rue my impulsive dash from the hotel. Not that I wasn't please to see Tanty, but it was as if you our here by the Savannah I lose my identity and became prey to incidents and accidents: you remember that sanctuary thing I tell you about in London when I went for my passport, well, I feel the same way about de-Hilton. I wish Bob and Jeannie was either me, they would of sustain me with their presence, even make light of the encounter and push on something else.<sup>186</sup>

Moses feels as a stranger in his homeland. The love to Doris might be the only thing which would make him stay in Trinidad. It may be his only way how to get closer to his old Caribbean identity; however, Moses lets this opportunity to slip away and he chooses to return to London. Moses' case adds another dimension to a famous Czech saying "As many languages you know, as many times you are a human being." Moses finds out that speaking two languages, Creolized English and Standard English, created a hybrid identity due to which he will never feel he belongs anywhere.

Moses' change is also visible when he is interviewed by a Trinidadian journalist asking about his experience in London. Moses acts as a defender of the British:

It struck to me then that I was being a fool and taking the wrong attitude. Was this not a golden opportunity for me to defend the old country from all the calumniations and rumours of doom and disaster? Had I not honorarily delegated myself to the mission of correcting all the false reports and hearsays, that the children of Brit'n did not play spoon-and-potato races no more because potatoes was expensive?<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Selvon, *Moses Migrating*, 88.

<sup>187</sup> Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 92.

Moses defends Britain even with his costume of Britannia at the carnival. He wants to show Britain in the best light, having Jeannie and Bob playing the servants. Nonetheless, Selvon makes from this representation a comic image, representing Moses, a Trinidadian with black skin, as Britannia. Whereas Bob and Jeannie, white British, play the servants. It seems that Moses wants to show British as a tolerant nation. However, the representation gets out of Moses' hand because the costume is perceived by locals as a colonialism in reverse, showing Great Britain as conquered by a Trinidadian. Through this image, Selvon portrays the ambivalence of Moses' identity.

Each stage of the identity process, ranging from a feeling of alienation through to hybrid identity and rootlessness, corresponds to a unique form of language which shows the immigrant's adaptation to the environment.<sup>188</sup> The third novel covers Moses' linguistic change as did the two previous novels. In *Moses Migrating*, Selvon adjusts Moses' language as well as his thoughts and moves.<sup>189</sup> As an evidence may serve the fact that Moses speaks Standard English when he is leaving. When Moses speaks with Dominica, a man with whom he shares a cabin, the difference of Moses' Standard English and Dominica's dialect is clearly visible:

“Aye man! What you want here? This is my cabin”

“Aren't you ashamed of yourself?” I cried.

“Eh?” He peep to see if all his things was intact. “You belong to this cabin?”<sup>190</sup>

Moses uses Standard English with correct grammar whereas Dominica speaks the Creole. After the arrival to Trinidad, Moses adapts his language to the new environment and he uses vernacular speech when talking to Tanty Flora:

“I did nothing to upset her, Tanty,” I say. “She just resents the fact that I went away to England to better myself.”

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<sup>188</sup> Nasta, *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, 89.

<sup>189</sup> Nasta, *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, 82.

<sup>190</sup> Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 51.

“Listen how he talk, Doris!” Tanty exclaim. “Just like white people! Keep on talking, Moses, I love to hear you!”

“I could talk like we when I want to. It’s just that I am a man of many parts. I suppose even that she vex about.”<sup>191</sup>

Moses’ vernacular speech is visible in the last sentence of the dialogue where Moses shifts to the incorrect grammatical form of verbs. Samuel Selvon incorporated this style of writing knowing that native language enables people to fully express their experience: “I feel that a nation that can always keep using words and not controlled by the words, as I think the English are in their literature, has some hope of widening communication and understanding of other people.”<sup>192</sup> Selvon depicts Caribbean identity by the means of language—Moses’ change of speech mirrors his identity change. By incorporating the Trinidadian dialect, Moses expresses his Trinidadian identity. On the other hand, when Moses wants to be more “white,” he speaks Standard English.

Even though Moses manages to communicate with people in both environments, he does not feel at home in any of them. Moses created multiple identities. He is a man without a home, he is alienated from his cultural background as well as from his friends and family. He is an immigrant in every way. Moses is a stranger in his home country, living in a hotel. He is rejected in London and not welcomed in Trinidad. He does not have parents, not even Tanty Flora knows about his planned arrival to Trinidad. The story aptly ends in the Heathrow airport when an officer is checking Moses documents whether he is even allowed to go back to Great Britain. Again, it is visible that nobody awaits nowhere with open arms to welcome Moses.

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<sup>191</sup> Selvon, *Moses Ascending*, 111.

<sup>192</sup> Nasta, *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, 86.



## CONCLUSION

The Caribbean history gives an evidence that the Caribbean nation was bounded by an outer force for many years during colonialism. This oppression set the foundations for the hybrid Caribbean identity.

Social context is an important aspect of Trinidadian literature. The first Trinidadian novels had a strong political voice. The early role of Trinidadian literature was to express strong disagreement with slavery. Later works support freedom from colonialism. After the first immigrant wave during the 1950s, the novels of West Indian writers focused mainly on immigrant issues. Samuel Selvon explored the immigrant experience in his Moses trilogy where he deals with Trinidadian and hybrid identity in alien environment. The identity struggle was widely criticised as was the usage of the Caribbean dialect. However, it is exactly what many readers appreciate the most.

Selvon's Moses trilogy explores the life of West Indian immigrants in London and their identity development. The characters in the alien environment become aware of their West Indian or Caribbean identity and they try to adapt to the new society which causes their identity to change. Among the described stages of the identity development of the immigrants are alienation, consciousness of Caribbean identity, identity crisis, hybrid identity and feeling of rootlessness.

After the arrival to London, the immigrants form a tight community in order to maintain their Caribbean identity. That is also why Moses' identity in the first novel seems more West Indian than British. Moses knows the feeling of alienation and he wants to help the other immigrants in order to feel more comfortable in the new environment. The immigrants experience racial discrimination—they do not manage to be fully integrated to the society with their Caribbean identity. Moses is hopeful that the future will be better and that he will be able to climb the socioeconomic ladder. To put it simply, he is persuaded that the full integration is possible. In *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses speaks Creolized form of English which enables to fully express the West Indian identity of the character.

The second novel *Moses Ascending* presents Moses' achievements of becoming a landlord and a writer. In order to feel less alienated, Moses adjusts to the British culture. He even changes his speech to Standard English with the aim

to fit in. The effort to imitate the British suppresses his Caribbean identity. When it seems that he is on a good way to the integration by being a landlord, a writer and a speaker of Standard English, the British remind him that he will never be fully accepted. By the end of the second novel, Moses is back in the basement and a white man Bob lives in Moses' former apartment. Even though the transformation of identity is inevitable, Moses cannot deny the past. That is why the hybrid identity is formed. Moses' identities are thus a product of the two environments—London and Trinidad.

*Moses Migrating* presents Moses in a stage when he has given up his dreams in London and he goes back to Trinidad. He soon finds out that he is a changed man and that Trinidad has nothing to offer him. Moses feels rootless, he has accommodated himself to the British society more than he could imagine. His identity has changed and he feels as an alien in Trinidad. Even though it seems that Doris could help him to get his Caribbean identity back, he finally decided to go back to London where he feels rootless as well. Moses is trapped in the two peripheries, not knowing where he truly belongs.

Besides the identity change, Samuel Selvon's trilogy shows the struggles of cultural diversity. The cultural intolerance is still an ongoing issue even in the current times when the migration continues. Thus, Selvon's novels are still relevant in this regard and they could be applied to the current world. Selvon portrays immigrants in the white society which treats coloured people as inferior. The immigrants try to adapt to the white society, feeling that the only solution is to act more "white" which results in alienation and hybridization of their identity.

The thesis' analysis showed that the identity development is depicted by the means of language and behavioural change of the main character. By incorporating the Caribbean dialect, Selvon gives the immigrant community an opportunity to express its identity. The last part of the thesis is followed by a conclusion and Czech summary of the thesis.

## RÉSUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá identitou v dílech spisovatele trinidadského původu Samuela Selvona *The Lonely Londoners*, *Moses Ascending* a *Moses Migrating*. Cílem je analyzovat každé dílo a prozkoumat, jak se v těchto románech projevuje identita. V diplomové práci chci zjistit, jakým způsobem je identita v díle vyobrazena a jak se vyvíjí. Moje hypotéza zní, že používání Trinidadského dialektu přispívá k uvědomění si a vyjádření karibského „já“. Důvodem, proč jsem se rozhodla pro toto téma, byla přednáška doc. Mgr. Flajšarové, Ph.D. o anglofonní literatuře karibské diaspory ve Velké Británii po roce 1945, která mě přivedla k dílu Samuela Selvona.

Práce se skládá z teoretické a analytické části. Teoretická část je tvořena třemi hlavními kapitolami. Analytická část obsahuje tři podkapitoly, ve kterých se zabývám analýzou Selvonovy trilogie. V první kapitole jsou vymezeny pojmy „identita“ a trinidadská identita. Výraz „identita“ má několik významů v mnoha oblastech. Autorem definice, která vyřešila problematičnost tohoto komplikovaného pojmu, je James Fearon. Podle Fearona se identita vztahuje buď k sociální kategorii, kterou může být například etnická skupina či národ, nebo k sociálně rozlišujícím rysům, na které je člověk hrdý. „Identita“ v tomto smyslu tedy znamená hrdost nebo pocit náležitosti. Fearonova definice nejvíce vystihuje význam identity, který je pro tuto práci klíčový.

Druhá kapitola diplomové práce se zabývá společenským a historickým kontextem trinidadské literatury anglofonních trinidadských autorů a změnou role této literatury. První romány vyjadřují silný nesouhlas s otroctvím v době, kdy bylo na Trinidadu nezákonné, ale ve Spojených státech stále aktuální. V pozdějších dílech se objevuje podpora osvobození od kolonialismu a s tím spojené nesnáze. Mnozí autoři tak píšou o chaosu ve společnosti nebo o své identitě. Co se týče historického pozadí Trinidadu, jeho historie je rozmanitá. Původní obyvatelé byli v šestnáctém století kolonizováni Španěly. V důsledku toho byli nuceni emigrovat nebo se asimilovat. Později se stal Trinidad britskou kolonií. Zrušení otroctví na Trinidadu vedlo k poptávce po pracovních silách, což mělo za následek vyšší počet přistěhovalců pocházejících z Afriky, Venezuely, Číny, Madeiry a karibských ostrovů. Obyvatelstvo se tak stalo multikulturním.

Trinidadským jazykem zůstala francouzská kreolština, ale mnoho obyvatel používalo také anglickou kreolštinu, která se rozšířila v devatenáctém století. Anglická kreolština se poté stala dominantním jazykem.

Třetí kapitola diplomové práce se zabývá biografií a literárním pozadím autora výše uvedených děl, Samuela Selvona. V této kapitole je také popsáno jeho postavení v kontextu dalších trinidadských spisovatelů. Selvon pocházel z trinidadské kulturně smíšené rodiny a přišel do Londýna během hlavní poválečné vlny, stejně jako například V. S. Naipaul, Edgar Mittelholzer nebo George Lamming. Tito spisovatelé si počátkem 50. let získali uznání a respekt jako jednotlivci i jako celá skupina. Samuel Selvon patřil k prvním autorům, kteří publikovali ve Velké Británii. Jeho dílo tak vytvořilo prostor pro jeho následovníky. Selvonův význam pro trinidadskou literaturu zůstal zachován i po jeho smrti, některá jeho díla však nejsou příliš populární. Zdá se, že Selvonův styl psaní některým literárním kritikům nevyhovuje. Jeho psaní o boji s identitou bylo hojně kritizováno, stejně jako používání karibského dialektu v dialogích. Je to nedoceněný autor, který je však oddaným průkopníkem karibské literatury. Selvonovi se dostalo mnohem méně kritické pozornosti než mnoha jeho současníkům, a to navzdory jeho soustavné produkci románů.

Analytická část práce zahrnuje analýzu Selvonovy trilogie, která vypráví o životě trinidadských přistěhovalců v Londýně. Postavy si v cizím prostředí uvědomují svou karibskou identitu a snaží se přizpůsobit nové společnosti, což způsobuje změnu jejich identity. Analýza klade důraz na vývoj identity a zahrnuje fázi odcizení, uvědomění si trinidadské identity, krizi identity, hybridní identitu a pocit vykořenění. Analýza poukazuje na skutečnost, že použití karibského dialektu slouží jako nástroj, který zdůrazňuje karibskou identitu.

Po příjezdu do Londýna si imigranti vytvářejí úzkou komunitu, aby si udrželi svou karibskou identitu. Proto se také Mojžíšova identita v prvním románu jeví spíše jako karibská než britská. Mojžíš již zná pocit odcizení a chce pomoci ostatním přistěhovalcům, aby se v novém prostředí cítili lépe. V novém prostředí zažívají přistěhovalci rasovou diskriminaci a nedaří se jim plně začlenit do společnosti se svou identitou. Mojžíš však věří v lepší budoucnost. Je stále přesvědčen, že integrace do britské společnosti je možná. V románu *The Lonely Londoners* mluví Mojžíš kreolizovanou formou angličtiny, která umožňuje plně

vyjádřit karibskou identitu jeho postavy.

Druhý román *Moses Ascending* vypráví o úspěchu, kdy se Mojžíš stal majitelem domu a také spisovatelem. Aby se Mojžíš necítil tak odcizený, přizpůsobuje se britské kultuře. Dokonce mění svou řeč na standardní angličtinu s cílem zapadnout do společnosti. Jeho snaha napodobit Brity však potlačuje jeho karibskou identitu. Když už se zdá, že je Mojžíš na dobré cestě k integraci a dokonce i mluví standardní angličtinou, Britové mu připomínají, že nikdy nebude plně přijat. Proměna identity je nevyhnutelná, ale Mojžíš nemůže zapřít minulost. To je také důvod proč vzniká hybridní identita, která je produktem dvou prostředí, a to Londýna a Trinidadu.

*Moses Migrating* ukazuje Mojžíše ve fázi, kdy se již vzdal svých snů a vrací se z Londýna zpět do Trinidadu. Brzy však zjišťuje, že se změnil a že mu Trinidad nemá co nabídnout. Mojžíš se cítí vykořeněný, britské společnosti se přizpůsobil víc, než si dokázal představit. Jeho identita se změnila a na Trinidadu, který býval jeho domovem, se cítí jako cizinec. Jedinou nadějí, kvůli které by Mojžíš mohl zůstat na Trinidadu a znovu tak nalézt svou identitu, představuje Doris. Nakonec se však rozhodne vrátit do Londýna, i když zde pocit vykořenění přetrvává. Mojžíš je uvězněn mezi těmito dvěma periferiemi a neví, kam skutečně patří.

Selvon zobrazuje karibskou identitu pomocí jazyka. Změna Mojžíšovy identity se odráží na změně jeho řeči. Začleněním trinidadského dialektu vyjadřuje Mojžíš svou trinidadskou identitu. Když mluví s obyvateli Trinidadu, používá svou rodnou řeč. Když se chce Mojžíš naopak přiblížit Britům, přizpůsobí svou řeč a mluví standardní angličtinou. Přestože se mu daří komunikovat s lidmi v obou prostředích, ani v jednom z nich se necítí doma. Mojžíš si vytvořil více identit. Je člověkem bez domova, je odcizen svému kulturnímu zázemí i svým přátelům a rodině. Kromě změny identity ukazuje Selvonova trilogie i boj s kulturní diverzitou. Kulturní nesnášenlivost je stále aktuálním problémem i v současné době, kdy migrace pokračuje. Selvonovy romány jsou tedy v tomto ohledu stále aktuální a lze je aplikovat na současné dění. Selvon zobrazuje přistěhovalce ve společnosti, která se k migrantům chová jako k méněcenným. Přistěhovalci se snaží přizpůsobit nové společnosti, což vede k odcizení a hybridizaci jejich identity. Analýza práce ukázala, že vývoj identity

je zobrazen pomocí jazykových prostředků a změny chování hlavní postavy. Začleněním karibského dialektu dává Selvon přistěhovalecké komunitě možnost vyjádřit svou identitu.

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## ANOTACE

Příjmení a jméno: Šímová Barbora

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Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Pavlína Flajšarová, Ph.D.

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Anotace:

Diplomová práce analyzuje identitu ve třech prozaických dílech Samuela Selvona. Cílem je analyzovat každý román a prozkoumat, jak se identita projevuje v knihách *The Lonely Londoners*, *Moses Ascending* a *Moses Migrating*. V první kapitole je definován pojem „identita.“ Dále je zde představena definice trinidadské identity. Druhá kapitola pojednává o společenských a historických souvislostech trinidadské literatury a zahrnuje i problémy karibských spisovatelů. Třetí kapitola obsahuje Selvonovu biografii a představuje jej v kontextu britského literárního pole. Tato kapitola také uvádí Selvonův přínos karibské literatuře a obsahuje literární kritiku jeho díla. Čtvrtá kapitola se zabývá analýzou Selvonových tří prozaických děl se zaměřením na identitu a její vývoj.

## ANNOTATION

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### Annotation:

This diploma thesis analyses identity in three novels written by Samuel Selvon. The objective is to analyse each novel and to explore how identity is involved in *The Lonely Londoners*, *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating*. In the first chapter, the term “identity” is defined. Furthermore, it includes the definition of Caribbean identity. The second chapter covers social and historical context of Trinidadian literature as well as challenges of Caribbean writers. The third chapter contains Selvon’s biography and it presents him in the context of British literary field. Further, this chapter introduces Selvon’s contribution to Caribbean literature and it also provides literary criticism of his work. The fourth chapter deals with analysis of the three novels. In this part of the thesis, each novel is analysed with a focus on identity and its development.