

# Hybridization in Political Civilization in Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and *Moses Ascending*

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**Abstract**—Samuel Selvon (1923-1994) is a great pioneer in Creole literature. His writing in the Moses trilogy is very representative because of his preoccupation with issues of identity and culture. *The Lonely Londoners*, published in 1956, and *Moses Ascending*, published in 1975, are two of them. These two books telling Creole immigrants' story have been recognized as a great masterpiece in Caribbean literature, which have a far-reaching influence on postcolonial literature. This thesis attempts to employ Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity to illustrate the Creoles' struggle against colonization and the construction of political hybridity. The thesis consists of three parts. Part One is Introduction, which presents a short introduction to the author Samuel Selvon, his two works, the theoretical framework. Part Two depicts the process of the Creoles' struggle against colonization in political civilization. In the aspect of politics, the Creoles experience the process from unawareness of politics to pursuing their political dream. They attempt to construct their own political system on the basis of the British mode. Part Three is Conclusion. Based on the above analyses, the thesis draws the conclusion that different cultures can influence each other. The effective way to realize decolonization is the construction of political hybridity.

**Index Terms**—Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*, *Moses Ascending*, hybridization

## I. INTRODUCTION

In 1994, Homi Bhabha put forwards the famous theory of Hybridity in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). From his point of view, it is inadequate to use center or margin to define the relationship between the colonists and the colonized because they are mutually exclusive and depend on each other. He notes that "Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal..." (Bhabha, 1994, p.159) Bhabha defines hybridity as "the name of this displacement of value from symbol to sign that causes the dominant discourse to split along the axis of its power to be representative, authoritative." (Bhabha, 1994, p.159) And he stresses on the ambivalence of hybridity. It is not a third term to settle down the tension between two cultures.

Homi Bhabha's theory of Hybridity is an important tool to conduct his postcolonial criticism, widely applied in some English texts featured in the postcolonial characteristics like works of Conrad and Naipaul. Through reading and analysis, we can find Hybridity located in postcolonial scenario. Hybridity adapts to this global trend. It can help colonized countries rebuild their culture. Nowadays, the theory of Hybridity has more and more realistic significance especially for those ethnic groups. They still keep in touch with their cultural tradition but have to adapt in their new residential culture. The theory of Hybridity can make us pay more attention to the conflict and exchange of different cultures in the context of globalization.

Politics is a fundamental aspect of any cultural process, and must automatically emerge in any authentic representation of a society's experience. This thesis seeks to make a contribution to describing their process in the hybridization in political civilization by observing the particular Creole migrant community from *The Lonely Londoners* to *Moses Ascending*. While most of the texts of *Moses Ascending* deals with the life of Moses, *The Lonely Londoners* depicts a vivid picture of Creole immigrants life. From the perspective of politics, the Creole immigrants have experienced the "blank period": the stage of having no consciousness of politics and the "primary stage": the stage of organizing small-scale political activities. And then they have actually experienced the hybridization in political civilization. During this period, they have raised the real awareness of pursuing democracy and positively taken active part in different kinds of political activities. They put what they have observed and learned during these years in London into real practice. The theory of Hybridity is an important part in Homi Bhabha's postcolonial criticism. It is also indispensable of the whole theory of postcolonial criticism. Along with the trend of globalization and more attention towards "Identity", Bhabha's theory of Hybridity becomes increasingly important. It represents the latest stage of contemporary postcolonial criticism.

## II. HYBRIDIZATION IN POLITICAL CIVILIZATION

### A. *Unconsciousness of Politics—The Lonely Londoners*

This part explores Selvon's portrayal in *The Lonely Londoners* of Moses and his fellows' fight against difficulties in London society. Although images of the larger society pervade, Londoners is chosen as the point as it characterizes an entire community. This period is very important in that it forms the basis for their next stage. Here, the West Indian people in Selvon's London are cast adrift in a situation where is particularly arduous. They are circumscribed by the structure of London society but they are not part of this structure. They all face a dilemma both materially and psychologically. That dilemma is the reason why they are not aware of political life. It is in the conflation of civilization and modernity that the city is defined as an object of colonial desire. The dream-city and dream-life could be seen as a life of desire, an escape from colonialism. In this aspect, London in the two novels can be seen as the land of plenty and of privilege, of subjects of colonialism, imperialism, sovereignty and also modernity. "Exclusive ethnic identification is treated ironically or with ridicule in Selvon's work. In his Moses trilogy, mostly set in London, Black Power activism is portrayed as self-seeking and opportunistic, while the carnivalesque comedy of Moses's enactment of Britannia ridicules the colonial mentality and renders colonial history as farce". (Thorpe, 1995, p.87) The Creole immigrants have spent much time in adapting to this unfamiliar and unfriendly society. And they have changed gradually both mentally and psychologically. Selvon's immigrants are given the lowest life, are offered the worst job suffering all kinds of difficulties. They pay high prices for insecure tenancy in the most undesirable houses, and indulge in sexual exploits that never include anything other than sex. They have suffered from rain, snow wind and frog. And they have to combine on the fringes of this host society that regards them with indifference or hostility. But after living in London for a period, they have unconsciously been involved in some small political activities and for the first time touch the word "politics".

After the Creole immigrants have conquered the basic living difficulties in *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses and his fellows begin to get in touch with politics for the first time. In *Moses Ascending*, Moses begins to live in a big house and is served by a white servant. Since he becomes the landlord of the house, he has begun to put a distance between himself and the Creole fellows. At that time, some black immigrants have organized some small-scale political activities and many immigrants fervently take part in. At the beginning, Moses is reluctant to get involved in this kind of political activities. When Galahad first comes to his house to visit him, he suspects that Galahad has some other purposes for coming.

"Not that struggle," he wave my words away. "I mean *the* struggle. It is only right that you should contribute to the cause. We need financiers. Without the black gentry and nobility on our side, it is a losing battle." (Selvon, 2008, p.14)

Galahad's purpose is as evident as Moses expected. And in Galahad's opinions, Moses has changed. He begins to deny the fact that he was a black and wants to live a peaceful life, enjoy his richness and get rid of his fellows. So he turns a blind eye to their struggle. But what Moses has in mind is much. Firstly as the first generation of immigrants, he has fulfilled his responsibility. He has taught them how to live in London and now he retires, they have to be dependent on their own. Secondly, he doesn't want to get restricted in the black circle for his whole life. He wants to flee from his past. So he moves to get rid of those fellows and enjoy the peaceful life and change his lifestyle into a real Londoner. "Moses's resolve is also evident in his rise of his tenants to choose rooms in the apartment building, while Moses, the landlord, finally settles in the basement, unable to cross the Jordon and do battle with the Phillistines". (Rothfork, 1991, p. 9-22) So after he has experienced the hardest time in London, he doesn't want to get involved in these things. So he adopts an adverse attitude towards political activities.

In conclusion, the immigrants' first period in London is a period when they are unaware of Politics. Some of them are even against all kinds of political activities strongly. Moses's transition of attitude towards political activities of black power has experienced a long time. His consciousness shows apparently that how a black person who has already been much influenced by Capitalism and even approve of this kind of social system gradually begins to reassess all this and change his mind. At first, a series of persuasion from Galahad and Brenda hasn't have any effects upon him. But Brenda's sexual attraction and her outstanding personality attracted Moses so he let her live in his house. But unexpectedly, Brenda uses his basement as their party's meeting spot. Then unfortunately, when Moses goes to find them, he is regarded as a member of the party and sent to the jail by London police. Until then he keeps his negative attitude against the party and has been opposed to what Brenda and Galahad did. From Moses' experience above, we can conclude that until he tacitly consents to Brenda's behaviors and promise to support her on material, he still hasn't raised the awareness of politics. In his opinion, politics is irrelevant to him. What he has done to help the political organization is actually because of his affection towards Brenda. Moses' attitude towards politics obviously represents a big group of immigrants. They all share the common sense: politics has nothing to do with them. It's not difficult to analyze the reasons. The most important reason is that economic base determines the superstructure. Most of the immigrants are below the poverty line. The only thing that has haunted in their minds is bread-and-butter issue. They have to consider the food, the job, the family and so on. They are under a lot of pressure. "Black individuals were, therefore, marginalized not only from mainstream white culture but also from the primary bodies of political opposition to dominant power frameworks". (Bentley, 2003, p.44) Another important reason is that they generally don't have a high level of education. Some of them are totally not educated. Politics is an area beyond the scope of their understanding. "The lack of equivalence between the marginalized discourses of class and race is thereby projected by the text as indicative of the lack of political articulation amongst black subcultural groups". (Bentley, 2003, p.44)

### B. *The Hybridized Political Activities—Moses Ascending*

The representative one is Brenda and Galahad. They are among the first group to have the awareness of independence, equality and democracy. A typical example is their raising funds for launching political activities. The normal operation of any organization calls for a lot of money. In capitalist country, there are many financial groups financially supporting the political organizations. There are no such financial groups in the immigrant circle. They have to ask for their rich fellows just like Moses for help. Moses himself sees this method as a capitalist method. "Funds, donations, contribution-- those are only words for money. You are as diplomatic as the English." (Selvon, 1985, p.24) Here Moses's words reflect that their behavior is hybridized. They are actually imitating the local Londoners.

Moses is another one whose experience is representative during the process of political hybridization. Moses's attitude towards political activities begins to change after his house is "occupied" by Pakis—in order to make money, he agrees to make room for those illegal immigrants. He thinks it is an easy affair but it then turns out to be uncontrollable. That night Bob and he have no place to sleep so they have to look for Galahad for help. That night is an important turning point. After that, his attitude towards political community and black people's movement changes. Firstly, when he stays in that filthy place he once lives, he remembers the days when he first comes to London, poor and difficult. He knows he could not stand that kind of life but he is yearning for that feeling of belonging when so many Creoles live together. But now he gets nobody to talk to and be in accompanying with. He finds himself alone except a white man Bob. He finds that Galahad may be the only Creole he has connections with. He is afraid to lose these connections and desperately wants to find back that feeling of belonging. Secondly, Galahad's attitude towards his memoirs, house and money makes him uncomfortable. Galahad makes him feel unhappy with his hard-earned money just like some rich people feel guilty with their wealth and always donate something to charity. He feels torturing when he experiences that most of his black fellows still live in that severe environment while he owns a big house and he even keeps illegal immigrants to make money. Thirdly, his sense of superiority forces him to raise the awareness of leadership. He reminds himself of the days when he organizes the every-week gathering. At that time, he is the core person among the Creole immigrants. People all respect him and view him as the authority in every aspect. He cherishes the memory of those days. And now he wants to be their leader again.

Moses begins to get involved in political activities after that. When Brenda organizes these activities, Moses keeps observing her. He finds that most of her assistants are doing these things without payment. "Those who work do so because they are aware of the Winds of change, and Third World potentialities.' Apathy is our greatest enemy. If you don't stand up and be counted, you will be swept away.'" (Selvon, 1985, p.106) Moses finds himself in an awkward situation shuttling between Pakis and blacks. He doesn't intend to but finally gets involved into the Pakis' affairs. So he made up his mind to choose his camp. Finally, Moses chooses to return to his camp and supports the immigrants' political activities. When the Pakis leave his house, he thinks that taking part in political activities is just sitting at home assisting Brenda's work from time to time. In his opinion, his memoir is still in the first place. He wants to have a lot of spare time to write his memoir. But he often criticizes Galahad and Brenda's work. He thinks that their speech is not encouraging. Although he doesn't actually attend to the political activities in person, he regards himself as a leader. So far as he is concerned, these political gatherings are just like those political gatherings by London people. The only difference lies in that they represent different communities. But this point of view changes after he goes to the site of their actual gathering and sees with his own eyes how London police suppress the gathering and treat his fellows badly. When they come out to parade, the London Police comes to suppress. The team loses its control and all of the members are dashing about to find safe places. Moses runs away at once. But when he strays away from the team, he suddenly realizes something.

"Was all of we in the hall criminals that we had to jump up and flee for our very lives? There we was, sitting down, and I was just writing down the words of the Party anthem, when we was so rudely interrupted. My blood begin to boil. I had half a mind to get back there and ask the Inspector himself what was the meaning of this outrage?" "How dare you intrude on this peaceful gathering," I would say, "and strike terror into the hearts of these innocent people?" And I would ask him for his name, number and rank, and report him to the Chief of Scotland Yard. (Selvon, 1985, p.126)

This is a critical event which signifies that the immigrants' power will be united from now on. This is the time when Moses' awareness of politics comes to the zenith. He thinks those black people are his fellows. When he sees that they are driven and shot, he becomes angry and hopeless. But he could do nothing. After the police arrest some of them, he thinks it is injustice. He even takes his saved money to release them on bail. After this event, Moses becomes a big hero in the black circle. Brenda and Galahad make the advantage of this opportunity and decide to make a detailed report on him. But this event increases his sense of politics. But this event also makes Moses realize that it is more difficult for all the immigrants to take part in political activities. And there must be a long way to go.

### III. CONCLUSION

"West Indian writers have always been an important part of migrant populations. It is not surprising then to find them preoccupied with the subject of exile, identity, gender and so on. Among the distinguished writers, Braithwaite's concern with the loss of tradition, Naipaul's with the idea of exile as hopeless, Lamming with paradox of the colonized people". (Forbes, 1997, p.47) However, concerning of these brilliant writers, their texts have many things in common: a privilege of the concern for gender, identity and other cultural activities but turning a blind eye to their political status.

They always deliberately or indeliberately evade discussing the inferior political situation and inhibit the local political life.

But Samuel Selvon has broken the shackles. As mentioned above, Selvon is not only a writer. He is more like a social activist. "Lacking the critical apparatus to deal with him effectively, critics have opted either to ignore him or to kidnap certain sections of his work and force them into ill-fitting analytical frameworks aligned with particular political projects." (MacLeod, 2005, p.157) That is the reason why he has paid more attention to politics than other postcolonial writers. His works are dressed in strong political color, unveiling the mysterious veil of the effects from western political ideology. During the process of reading, we can find that the Creole migrant community has been struggling for democracy and political freedom in London society. And their ultimate goal is to build up an intact political system.

Politics is an important manifestation, which proves that the Creole immigrants have adapted to the life in London and begun to learn something advanced from the capitalist society. The real adventure is these people who come hoping to find out in which direction they can go, or are just following the example of London. During the process of political hybridization, they have achieved great progress.

First of all, the immigrants have realized the importance of politics and have formed a set of political ideas. Although the very existence of politics is never systematically posed, they have been already aware that the problem of politics is urgently placed before their eyes. Their personal equities, the guarantees of their rights, the welfare are all included in their political ideas. Their pursuit of democracy and their appeal to equity are as passionate as the local Londoners. Once they settle in London, they are influenced by this overwhelming political power. They begin to learn from the local Londoners asking for their political rights. They are eager to build up their own system of politics. They have realized that it is necessary for them to build their own political party. This is a big step for them. Living in London, they find there are different political parties representing each part's interests. No party is on behalf of them in public. No party really cares their surviving conditions, welfare, and medical treatment. So they decide to build up their own party, on behalf of themselves, speaking for themselves. The matter of building up an independent party is a sign that their political activities will be organized, managed and supported.

The second aspect is that they have carried out a series of political activities, putting their political ideas into practice. Their political behaviors are all hybridized behaviors. Their building of political parties, their launch of a newspaper agency, their endeavor to raise funds to support is all hybridized. They have an independent political party; they have their newspaper agency; they passionately participate in democracy activities; they positively ask for their equal rights with local Londoners; they know clearly what rights they have since they were born.

The third aspect is that the immigrants know how to make advantage of their united power to reinforce their party. After they build the party, they go hither and thither to publicize and promote, attracting more fellows to join in. They also devote manpower and material resources to educate the newly-joined fellows and those uncivilized fellows, in order to organize this loose team. Besides, they have developed a series of political activities such as some small-scale demonstration march against discrimination or unjust. Their team meets at fixed time and spot. The leader makes an encouraging speech before the activities. And they begin to build a publicity agency. In capitalist country, publicity agency is supported by financial group and served for political purpose. They build an agency to publicize their political ideas in want of encouraging more black people to join them. Most black people live in the lowest level of the society, the newspaper is a direct medium to enlighten them and educate them, fostering their awareness of politics and encouraging them to take part in the political activities. They realize publicity agency is a powerful tool for politics. And Moses even finds that it is also practicable to unite the white people's power. He thinks it will be more influential if they could unite the power of the white people to fight for the democracy. So he passionately introduces Bob's story in the meeting and suggests that they could use a white man's portrait on the front page of the newspaper. The white people's support will be more impressive and persuasive both to the immigrants and the mainstream of the London society.

But this process of hybridization also has some shortcomings. They don't have much finance to support them. The inside people in the team are not as united as they expect. They don't have many intellects to write reports for their newspaper. But the biggest problem is that their politics is not based on their own political system or rooted on their own political idea but indiscriminately imitate the London system, that is to say, they have been trying to build a political system of a capitalist country. In order to get real success, they must have their own political idea and build their own political system, forming the real political hybridity.

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