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The Society for Caribbean Studies Annual Conference Papers
edited by Sandra Courtman
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Vol. 11 2010 ISSN 1471-2024
<http://www.caribbeanstudies.org>

**Calypso, Gender and Caribbean Identity
in Selvon's Immigration Narratives**

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In one of the central incidents of 'You Right in the Smoke', a radio play broadcast on the BBC in 1968, a young woman who is in conflict with her father refuses to follow her boyfriend to London, arguing that she wishes to make life decisions for herself rather than be influenced by the men in her life. Many readers would be surprised that these words, uttered by a young Caribbean British woman, should occur in a work by Samuel Selvon.¹ The Trinidadian writer is better known for novels about West Indians in Britain whose gender politics have prompted hostile reactions from some readers: *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and *Moses Ascending* (1975).² Literary critics usually mention that this sexist tone is problematic, but most avoid examining the issue in detail in favour of focusing on the novels' stylistic innovation and treatment of the immigrant experience. The dynamic aesthetic arising from the use of Caribbean cultural forms and language is the basis for the avoidance of victimhood and the affirmation of agency in the novels' critique of the situation of West Indians in Britain. But the apparently unreconstructed misogyny of the narrators and characters is felt to be incompatible with such a progressive aim. It seems that this aspect of the novels must be ignored, minimised, or neutralised through social or psychological explanations, in order to enable the critic to praise the novels.³

This approach relies on the strategic choice to view the two – sexism and stylistic innovation – as separate. I want to show here that such a position is untenable. The sexist tone is inseparable from the terms and tools of the innovation Selvon engages in, so that we as critics must confront it far more closely and consciously. In addition, reluctance to engage in detail with the gender politics of Selvon’s writings on immigration has prevented most critics from adequately accounting for the evolution of gender representations in his works on the migrant experience. It is my intention here to demonstrate that the gender regimes in these novels and Selvon’s attitude to them are more complex than most of the available criticism suggests. In this endeavour, I will build on Curdella Forbes’s complex and nuanced analysis of Selvon’s representation of gender.⁴

Selvon wrote a number of radio plays for the BBC in the 1960s and 1970s, most of which are adaptations of the novels and short stories. But in two plays based on different research, the conjunction of a realist mode and a depiction of gender relations not characterized by the objectification of women is significant in highlighting calypso and Caribbean popular culture as a source for the sexist vision of the novels.⁵ This link with the music of Carnival touches upon important aspects of the construction of Caribbean cultural identity in the period of independence. I do not wish to argue here for seeing Selvon as a proponent of “progressive black masculinities”, but I hope to show that he interrogated gender configurations current in the Caribbean popular cultural traditions on which he drew.⁶ Analyses focusing on the novels, in particular the *Moses* novels, give only a partial view of Selvon’s writings on the experience of migration. In fact, the chronology of his novels and radio plays in the 1960s and 1970s shows that he struggled with the potentialities for a different gender paradigm in the context of the adaptation of Caribbean migrants population in Britain.

II

The expression of a chauvinist masculinity predicated on the glorification of sexual prowess, the frequent denigration of women, and a firm belief in the sexual and domestic double standard, is a well-known feature of calypso music from the 1930s to the 1970s and has been described in detail.⁷ The critics who examine the aesthetics of Selvon’s London novels and their relation to calypso usually acknowledge this component of the musical form but rarely give it sustained attention in relation to the gender politics of the novels. Yet even when considered in terms of cultural politics, the use of calypso has significant implications for

gender. Hope Munro-Smith and Patricia Mohammed both demonstrate that the expression of Afro-Caribbean working-class masculinities and their contests with other masculinities in Trinidad were an integral component of calypso music, a music that played a significant role in the construction of Trinidad national and cultural identity in the period of independence.⁸ Government involvement in the institutions of calypso after independence helped foster the centrality of a male, working-class, Afro-Caribbean core in the national culture that was being constructed.⁹ This establishment of maleness at the core of Caribbean cultural identity in the independence period was also felt in literature. Belinda Edmondson has shown in a seminal study that the affirmation of the folk as central to a specifically Caribbean aesthetic was founded on the simultaneous affirmation of manhood or masculinity, and calypso music is an important element of the practices forming this distinctively Caribbean ethos and aesthetic.¹⁰

Selvon's reputation as a writer rests in large part on his successful infusion of folk and popular practices from the Caribbean into the form of the European novel. Critical discussions of the role of calypso in the technique of Selvon's London novels importantly establish that this distancing from European literary forms was deliberate.¹¹ Selvon's appropriation and subversion of English linguistic and literary forms based on traditions long devalued in colonial ideology epitomizes a major strategy available to writers in producing counter-discourses challenging imperialist and Eurocentric world views. Helen Tiffin has noted this in relation to Selvon's use of the Crusoe/Friday paradigm in *Moses Ascending*, but the calypso aesthetic also has a privileged place in this manoeuvre, and has been analysed as such.¹² Selvon's use of calypso in his London novels is also seen as foundational in the development of non-white identities grounded in Britain. It is at the heart of the positive elements through which *The Lonely Londoners* conveys a degree of agency, appropriation, and the establishment of a Caribbean identity in London.¹³ Nasta has highlighted the importance of Selvon's hybrid Caribbean language in providing "a corporate West Indian identity in the face of an alien and rejecting metropolis".¹⁴ The characters' circulation in and renaming of the city are everyday acts by which they claim a space in the imperial city, and both can be related to calypso practices.¹⁵ Selvon's novel exemplifies and celebrates these strategies while also showing their limits through the increasing stasis created by repetition and the partial vision that is offered of the city.¹⁶ The calypso aesthetic is therefore identified as instrumental to the culturally and politically progressive character of Selvon's fiction. This being the case, close attention should be paid to the implications of its anti-progressive

components.

III

Given the now widespread recognition that the form of Selvon's London novels is the result of deliberate and subtle literary and linguistic play, critics' unease regarding the gender politics of Selvon's characters is puzzling. It seems to rest on the notion that Selvon was unselfconscious in representing this aspect of Caribbean popular culture and of the experience of West Indian workers in London, on which he drew as he "strove for verisimilitude".¹⁷ Selvon's attitude to Caribbean masculinities and femininities is in fact neither acquiescent nor static. His novels, in particular *The Housing Lark*, exhibit a nagging anxiety about the implications of the Caribbean cultural forms he uses for Caribbean identity and the status of a Caribbean community in Britain. This may explain why his next two original works on immigration, the radio plays 'You Right in the Smoke' and 'Milk in the Coffee', attempt to explore the Caribbean experience in Britain, and the role of Caribbean cultural identity within this, outside of the calypso aesthetic. I would now like to trace the evolution of Selvon's engagement with calypso and the way it relates to his treatment of gender in writing about immigration in the 1960s and 1970s.

Nasta and Thieme, among others, have identified some ways in which Selvon shows in *The Lonely Londoners* that the carnival ethos and the language of calypso are not completely equal to the task of coping with life in Britain.¹⁸ In *The Housing Lark*, Selvon continues this interrogation of one of the principal elements accepted as representing Caribbean culture in the period of independence. Through the narrator, the novel still taps into the subversive power of the calypsonian's linguistic dexterity when put into the service of humour and irony. But this narrator is no longer exactly one of the boys.¹⁹ He is more intrusive, alerting us to his manipulations of the story and addressing the reader directly.²⁰ More importantly, he explicitly doubts the possibilities offered by the boys' attitudes when it comes to establishing a Caribbean presence in Britain.

In *The Housing Lark*, the gap between the boys' performance of a calypso-inflected Caribbean identity and the reality of their lives is exposed time and again, revealing their inability to preserve either a decent living situation in Britain, or the dominance over women required by their mode of masculinity. The masquerades the boys engage in to acquire

housing turn against them: Syl poses as an Asian in order to secure a room despite an ethnically fastidious landlord, but is exposed as a West Indian and thrown out, while Nobby's affectation of a very English love of dogs to ingratiate himself to his landlady means he is saddled with a puppy he cannot afford to feed. The boys' tendency to settle for fantasy without result is called out at various points in the novel, as when Jean complains about the lack of ambition of her brother and his friends; it is also highlighted by the narrator, including in the opening words of the novel: "But is no use dreaming".²¹ Harry's unrealistic daydreams about musical success connect this tendency to the calypso ethos, but it is common to all the boys, including Battersby and Gallows, who both hope to participate in the scheme to pool savings in order to buy a house (the 'housing lark' of the title) without in fact contributing money themselves. The narrator presents this propensity to privilege dream over action as the main obstacle to the achievement of a more secure position in Britain. Salick argues that "Selvon overrides the narrator's fatalism" in allowing the housing scheme to succeed, but I would suggest that the narrator's scepticism of the boys and the eventual success of *the women* in securing a house are in fact related.²²

The gap between performance and actual social relations in *The Housing Lark* is repeatedly highlighted specifically in relation to the boys' masculinity. The calypso aesthetic in the novels, with its emphasis on verbal wit, goes hand in hand with a practice of masculinity emphasizing sexual prowess and dominance over women, but it is also a rejection of the provider role of respectable, hegemonic masculinity. A carefree lifestyle revolving around drinking, smoking, card games and a dominant and objectifying attitude towards women is privileged in these boys' world. But Fitz and Syl, the most vocal proponents of a hypersexual and dominating brand of masculinity, are both exposed as frauds. Syl, who boasts of numerous sexual conquests, is revealed never to have seen a naked woman. During card games, Fitz expounds on his very conservative view of marriage, in which the man's authority is uncontested: "If I had a wife here, now, and she nudging me [telling him to go home] you know what I do? I only look at her, that's all, just look." (42). Yet once he has married the outspoken Teena, he is to be found "either scrubbing or washing or sweeping" instead of joining the boys for a game of cards, while Teena "ain't saying a word, just rocking in a rocking chair and keeping an eye on Fitz" (45).

This repeated exposure of the men's masculine posturing as empty grandstanding can be related to Rohlehr's important observation of the occasional moments in calypso where the

performative character of the calypsonian's masculinity comes into focus. Rohlehr explains that "phallus worship [...] is largely a mask worn by calypsonians because of tradition, but equally mocked by them because of its disconnection from reality."²³ In *The Housing Lark*, the boys – who like Battersby and Syl refuse to acknowledge a reality outside their performance, and cling to their performances as honest man or stud even after the situation has eluded their control – do not reach this level of awareness. It is the narrator's jibes and the juxtaposition of anecdotes that provoke this awareness of a gap in the reader, and turns the "mechanically performative" actions of the boys into a meta-fictional "theatrical performativity" which is the source of the novel's ironic vision.²⁴

Selvon's second novel of the working-class Caribbean experience in London therefore offers a somewhat more detached perspective on the configuration of masculinity that dominated his earlier novel, while exploring the female side of this experience to a greater degree. *The Housing Lark* offers several female characters whose inner lives and motivations are presented with far less flippancy than most of Selvon's other black Londoners. Their goal-oriented discipline is contrasted with the boys' hedonistic improvidence, and their capacity to achieve material results is emphasised. The women's distance from the men's ethos is no accident, as Selvon explores the possibilities provided by alternative Caribbean traditions in his quest for a balanced mode of establishment and accommodation of the Caribbean presence in Britain: the matador woman.

In the same way that the ostensible policy of cultural inclusiveness in post-independence Trinidad did not immediately succeed in foregrounding Indo-Caribbean and other traditions alongside cultural forms centring on Afro-Caribbean folk, the privileging of Selvon's important use of the calypso aesthetic in his novels seems to leave place for only one cluster of Caribbean cultural traits in the reception of Selvon's novels.²⁵ A crude articulation of this notion appears in Rothfork's throwaway remarks arguing that to refuse the boys' lackadaisical attitude amounts to a loss of Caribbean identity.²⁶ This idea also slips into Forbes's reading of gender in Selvon's London fiction, nuanced though it is. Although she briefly and speculatively identifies a Caribbean origin to the association of men with an oblique attitude seeking marginality and of women with a forceful attitude bound up with tradition, her suggestion that "the women's alignment with masculinity" is "akin to the orthodox modes of Europeanist prescription" still disallows this performance of femaleness. Forbes' analysis focuses on tracing the fluidity of gender roles and practices in Caribbean life

and incorporates the dominant paradigm of Caribbean identity privileging the verbal play and trickster-like attitude of the calypsonian, as indicated in her final judgement that the women of *The Housing Lark* usher in an “attenuation of the calypsonian’s register”.²⁷

Assertive and capable black women such as those portrayed by Selvon have a long history in the New World, in particular in the regions with a history of plantation slavery. Despite this, they have seldom been portrayed in a positive light or formed the basis of public figures of leadership or constructions of nationhood. Hazel Carby explains that independent black women have never become a legitimated figure in the USA because “the cult of true womanhood [in the South] drew its ideological boundaries to **exclude** [...] black women from ‘woman.’”²⁸ Brodber has shown that the cultural prescription for women in the West Indies, as established in the norms for elite white women, tended overall towards domestic life and economic dependence on a man. Because black women did not or could not conform to this model, the logic whereby black women were excluded from the category of proper womanhood also applied in the West Indies.²⁹ Social theories emphasizing the victimization of black men since the 1960s have further stigmatized black women in the United States and the Caribbean.³⁰ Although women could and did participate in the popular cultural life of the islands until the twentieth century, we have seen that their presence was gradually eclipsed, and the nationalist discourses made only occasional references to female figures.³¹

Merle Hodge and Edmondson also suggest that the absence of legitimation of the black woman originates in the loss of patriarchal status of black men under slavery and the consequent dominant position of women in slave families, leading Caribbean men to consider Caribbean women as threats to their masculinity.³² This is bound up with the history of sexuality between blacks and whites, which was perceived to give black women an advantage over black men, so that the sexually active black woman in particular is construed as a threat.³³ As a result, the figure of the verbally dextrous, linguistically powerful woman who is a repository of culture is an older and maternal rather than a sexual figure, as Denise de Caires Narain has shown; and the strong and resourceful black woman is treated with ambivalence, as Bonnie Thomas’s study of the matador woman in French Caribbean literature demonstrates.³⁴ Forbes’s reading of Jean and Teena as more threatening to the boys than Tanty was in *The Lonely Londoners* because they, unlike her, are sexual beings, seems to suggest that Selvon reproduces the non-authorization of the assertive and independent

younger black woman in Caribbean culture. But it is significant that Selvon, in presenting female characters who successfully make a cultural imprint on Britain, moves from Tanty as a matriarch figure in *The Lonely Londoners* in 1956 to younger women in *The Housing Lark* in 1965 whose presence is more sustained.

The notion that women are a privileged conduit for the transmission and grounding of culture is not new; its use in nationalist discourse, which often results in renewed restrictions for women, has been analysed.³⁵ Selvon's foregrounding of women, as we shall see, has a different outcome. The more prominent role of women in *The Housing Lark*, alongside this novel's more overt questioning of the calypso-inflected masculine ethos, indicates that the novelist engages with the matador woman as an alternative, neglected strand of Caribbean culture in his search for modes of settlement in Britain. That *the boys* find them threatening is not in doubt, and Forbes conveys this very well. This is because these women's model for advancement involves conformity with respectable, middle-class life and, therefore, with the hegemonic masculinity that the men reject. But Forbes's account gives insufficient acknowledgement to the fact that the men's perspective does not go unquestioned in the novel, and that the women's strength is ultimately condoned. By criticising these characters for deviating from the calypso's cultural matrix, Forbes comes close to reproducing the frequent de-legitimation of the matador woman in Caribbean discourse.

V

In his radio plays of the 1960s and 1970s, Selvon would continue his exploration of the role of various Caribbean cultural modes in the British context. 'You Right in the Smoke' and 'Milk in the Coffee' may not employ the calypso aesthetic, but they explore the complexities of constructing a Caribbean identity when Britain is the only possible context. The young protagonists Eloisa and Andrew clash with their parents over their anglicised ways (conveyed through food preferences and accent) and their romantic relationships with white peers are nothing like the instrumental and short-lived encounters depicted in the novels, seeming to take place within a colour-blind context. But the plays dramatize the realisation of their position of "unbelonging" in Britain.³⁶ Selvon takes gender into account in these representations, as Andrew is harassed by police and Eloisa struggles with her position in relation to the men in her life. In both plays, the protagonists are led to a renewed engagement with their Caribbean cultural roots, opening the way for a more constructive

establishment of their position in Britain. Eloisa is important among Selvon's female characters in that she interrogates her position and her relationships in terms of cultural belonging *and* in terms of gender. The events of the play, in which she is caught between the alternatives of an undesired "return" to a Caribbean she has never seen, and her boyfriend Jim's idealistic and unrealistic pretence of colour-blind Englishness, prompt her to seek an escape from this double bind.

Eloisa's gendered strength and capacity for resistance arises from the two strands of her makeup, the Caribbean and the British. Her resistance to her father arises from her identification with Britain. But she has also inherited her strong-mindedness from her mother, whose wilfulness (we are told somewhat implausibly) drove her husband to send her back to Jamaica. This locates Eloisa in the lineage of the matador woman and of the women of *The Housing Lark*. Similarly, her resistance to Jim relates to her Caribbean identity, as awareness of employment discrimination highlights the underlying assumption that the black presence in Britain is abnormal, and she realises she will have to confront this. Eloisa's engagement with her ambiguous position as black British or Caribbean-British is the springboard for her demand for independence as a woman. Jim and her father represent two exclusive identifications, both impossible to inhabit for Eloisa. Her refusal to compromise on her right to work out her situation for herself before committing to any man leads to their separation. Eloisa's strength is therefore distinct from that of the women in *The Housing Lark*: while the latter resist their men's particular brand of masculinity, they nevertheless all aspire to marriage. Crucially, Eloisa's refusal to pass from the authority of one man to that of another, is bound up with a re-connection with her position as Caribbean-British rather than simply British or Caribbean and her realisation that her belonging in Britain is a "dwelling (differently)".³⁷

VI

Eloisa represents an important transition from Jean and Teena in *The Housing Lark* to Brenda in *Moses Ascending*. This novel and its characters exemplify a diasporic 'dwelling differently' in several ways, including through certain adaptations of the calypso aesthetic. Moses, the veteran immigrant from *The Lonely Londoners*, is the narrator and this necessitates a return to the masculine and masculinist perspective that had been somewhat de-centred in *The Housing Lark* and in the radio plays. But the novel's significance lies in its

performance of a cultural hybridity that is most evident in the relentless and unapologetic eclecticism and dexterity of its language and cultural references. The novel is no longer dominated by the calypso aesthetic, which becomes one literary-cultural model among many others, including the classics of English literature. The equality posited between these cultural traditions, as between the different registers of English, form part of the radical character of the novel.³⁸

The novel also presents an adaptation of the calypso aesthetic in terms of gender. Forbes has analysed the distinctiveness of the character of Brenda, a young black British woman who deploys similar techniques of performativity as the Caribbean men, but whose stronger sense of purpose allows her to achieve her ends more securely than they do. In combining the calypso ethos associated with the male characters and the determination associated with the female characters, Brenda conforms to the fluid gender practices which Forbes argues are a recurring and characteristic feature of Caribbean life, but the formulation of her analysis remains problematic. By discussing *The Housing Lark* after *Moses Ascending*, she suggests a movement from this desirable combination in Brenda to a crippling earnestness in Teena and Jean, whose negative influence is further worsened by the faint suggestion of their un-Caribbean character. If we consider the chronology of all of Selvon's writings on the immigrant experience, it shows that Jean and Teena represent the foundations of the Brenda figure, not its decline.

Forbes argues that Brenda is more threatening to the male character than Tanty was because she is a young woman rather than a matriarchal figure and, as such, is seen as a sexual being. I would add that Brenda is more threatening than either Tanty or Jean and Teena principally because she refuses to be tied to any man. Unlike the women of *The Housing Lark*, whose desire for social mobility leads them to subscribe to the model of middle-class marriage even if they wear the trousers, Brenda asserts not only her power over men but her independence from them. She wields authority over the hypermasculine brothers of her Black Power party, and her sexual relations with Moses and his white manservant Bob are either instrumental or based on her pleasure alone. The suggestion that she is also sexually involved with the Asian tenants is even more threatening. Not only does it deny the familiar frameworks of either a monogamous relationship or a love triangle between Brenda, Moses and Bob, but it also opens up to the complexity inherent in Caribbean life, and life in late twentieth-century Britain, by moving beyond white and black as the exclusive binary framework for

relationships. Eloisa is a clear precursor for this independence of spirit, even though she does not wield sexual independence. *Moses Ascending* thus represents the culmination of the hybridization not only of Caribbean and English models but also of the Caribbean models of the calypsonian and the matador woman initiated in *The Housing Lark* and refined in 'You Right in the Smoke'. The genealogy runs from the use of a familiar and unthreatening figure of Caribbean culture, Tanty, to the authorization of the more threatening figures of the matador woman in Teena, Eloisa and Brenda.

In *Moses Ascending*, the influence of the gendered configuration of the calypso aesthetic as it existed in the post-independence period is still felt in Moses's point of view. Calypsonians usually claimed the position of the trickster as a valued stance for themselves while using that same notion as an insult for women who refused to conform to the reductive model of femininity entailed by the calypsonian's masculinity.³⁹ Brenda's mastery of the calypso ethos and the fact that she is in a dominant position at the end of the novel may suggest that Selvon breaks with this double standard and grants the woman an equal right to the trickster's power. But Moses's plans of revenge indicate that the relations between the sexes return to an adversarial model in which each side vies for power, reminiscent of Rohlehr's characterization of Trinidadian life.⁴⁰ Caribbean women writers have been exploring the role of strong women in Caribbean life for decades. Selvon's engagement with such figures in this work is not completely progressive – the narrators of his novels continue to objectify them – but his treatment of gender is more complex than had so far been acknowledged.

¹Samuel Selvon, 'You Right In the Smoke', University of the West Indies (Saint Augustine, Trinidad), Samuel Selvon papers, Item 236 and BBC Written Archives Centre (Reading).

²For audience reactions, see Susheila Nasta, 'An Afterword on Moses's Preface', *Kunapipi*, 17 (1995), 128–129. Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (Harlow: Longman, 1985); *Moses Ascending* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1984).

³See for example Michel Fabre 'From Trinidad to London: Tone and Language in Samuel Selvon's novels', in *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, ed. by Susheila Nasta (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988), pp. 213–222; Harold Barratt, 'Sam Selvon, May 20, 1923 – April 16, 1994', in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 125: Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers, Second Series*, ed. by Bernth Lindfors, and Reinhard Sander (Detroit: Gale Research, 1993), pp. 281–290. Available: *Gale Literature Resource Center*. [accessed 18 November 2009]; Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (London: Palgrave, 2002); Nick Bentley, 'Black London: The Politics of Representation in Sam Selvon's Fifties Fiction', *Wasafiri* 39 (2003): 41–45.

⁴Curdella Forbes, *From Nation to Diaspora: Sam Selvon, George Lamming, and the Cultural Performance of Gender* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2005).

⁵'You Right In the Smoke'. This play was first broadcast on BBC Radio 2 on 17th April 1968. It draws on the research Selvon undertook for a series of articles commissioned by a Sunday newspaper in the aftermath of the 1958 racist riots. During his investigations, Selvon found that many West Indians were commercially and professionally successful, and that many had settled outside London. The Midlands bakery which is the setting of the play seems modelled on one of his respondents for this research (Selvon's notes for these articles are in the 'Gyral notebook', Samuel Selvon papers, Item 52).

'Afternoon Theatre: Milk in the Coffee', Samuel Selvon papers, Item 169 and BBC Written Archives Centre (Reading). This play was first broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 18th June 1975. It grows out of the research Selvon carried out with Horace Ové in preparation for the latter's film, *Pressure* (1975), for which Selvon co-authored the scenario.

⁶*Progressive Black Masculinities*, ed. by Athena D. Mutua (New York & London: Routledge, 2006).

⁷Carole Boyce Davies, '“Woman is a Nation...”: Women in Caribbean Oral Literature', in *Out of the Kumbula: Caribbean Women and Literature*, ed. by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990), pp. 165–194; Patricia Mohammed, 'A Blueprint for Gender in Creole Trinidad: Exploring Gender Mythology through Calypsos of the 1920s and 1930s', in *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, ed. by Linden Lewis (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2003), pp. 129–168; Hope Munro-Smith, 'Performing Gender in the Trinidad Calypso', *Latin American Music Review*, 25 (2004), 32–55; Gordon Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad* (Port-of-Spain: Gordon Rohlehr, 1990); 'I Lawa: The Construction of Masculinity in Trinidad and Tobago Calypso', in *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities*, ed. by Rhoda Reddock (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), pp. 326–403; Keith Warner, *The Trinidad Calypso: A Study of Calypso as Oral Literature*, 2nd ed. (Pueblo, Colorado: Passaggiata Press, 1999).

⁸Munro-Smith, p. 34–37; Mohammed, 'Blueprint', pp. 138, 141, 162. On the role of Carnival in national ideology, see Bridget Brereton, 'National narratives in Post-Independence Trinidad and Tobago', paper delivered to the Society for Caribbean Studies UK Annual Conference, 2010; Reddock, 'Contestations over National Culture in Trinidad and Tobago: Considerations of ethnicity, class and gender' in *Caribbean Portraits: Essays on gender ideologies and identities*, ed. by Christine Barrow (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 1998), pp. 414–435; Munro-Smith, p. 39; and Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society*.

⁹Jocelyne Guilbault, 'Audible Entanglements: Nation and Diasporas in Trinidad's Calypso Music Scene', *Small Axe*, 17 (2005), 40–63 (pp. 48–55). See also Hollis Liverpool, 'Dr. Eric Williams' Vision for the Development of Carnival', *Anthurium*, 3 (2005), http://anthurium.miami.edu/volume_3/issue_2/liverpool-dreeric.htm [accessed 23rd July 2010].

¹⁰*Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority and Women's Writing in Caribbean Narrative* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999).

¹¹Fabre, 'From Trinidad to London' and 'The Queen's Calypso: Samuel Selvon and the Queen's English', *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies*, 3 (1977), 69–76; Warner, *Trinidad Calypso*; Nasta, *Home Truths*; and Nick Bentley, 'Form and Language in Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners*', *ARIEL*, 36 (2005): 67–84.

¹²Helen Tiffin, 'Post-colonial literatures and counter-discourse', *Kunapipi*, 9 (1987), 17–33. See also Margaret Joseph, *Caliban in Exile: The Outsider in Caribbean Fiction* (New York: Greenwood, 1992); Stefano Harney, *Nationalism and Identity: Culture and the Imagination in the Caribbean Diaspora* (London: Zed Books, 1996); John Thieme, '“The World Turn Upside-Down”: Carnival Patterns in *The Lonely Londoners*', in *Something Rich and Strange, Selected Essays on Sam Selvon*, ed. by Mark Zehnder (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2003), pp. 51–64 among others.

¹³Jennifer Rahim, '(Not) Knowing the Difference: Calypso Overseas and the Sound of Belonging in Selected Narratives of Migration', *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*, 3 (2005). Available: http://scholar.library.miami.edu/anthurium/volume_3/issue_2/rahim [accessed 3rd September 2007].

¹⁴'Introduction', in Selvon, *Eldorado West One* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1988), p. 8.

¹⁵James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Post-war black British writing* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003) and John McLeod, *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁶Susheila Nasta, 'Setting Up Home in a City of Words: Sam Selvon's London Novels', *Kunapipi*, 17 (1995), 78–95 (p. 86) and *Home Truths*; Thieme, 'Carnival Patterns'; and John C. Ball, *Imagining London: Postcolonial fiction and the transnational metropolis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

¹⁷Fabre, 'Samuel Selvon: Interviews and Conversations', in *Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Nasta, pp. 64–76 (p. 66).

¹⁸Nasta, *Home Truths*; Thieme, 'Carnival Patterns'.

¹⁹Thieme and Ramchand both make a strong case that this is the case in the earlier novel: Thieme, 'Carnival Patterns'; Kenneth Ramchand, 'Introduction', in Selvon, *Lonely Londoners*, pp. 3–21 (pp. 10–18).

²⁰See Mark Looker, *Atlantic Passages: History, Community and Language in the Fiction of Sam Selvon* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996) pp. 120–123.

²¹*The Housing Lark*, p. 7. Further quotations from this novel will be signalled in the text. See also Roydon Salick, *The Novels of Samuel Selvon: A Critical Study* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 108–109.

²²Salick, p. 108.

²³Gordon Rohlehr, 'I Lawa', pp. 333, 346.

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- ²⁴Caroline Rooney sets out the distinction between these two modes of the performative in *Decolonising Gender: Literature and a poetics of the real* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 9.
- ²⁵Guilbault, pp. 47–48, 50; Brereton.
- ²⁶‘Race and Community in Sam Selvon’s Fiction’, *Caribbean Quarterly*, 37, (1991), 9–22 (p. 11).
- ²⁷Forbes, p. 103.
- ²⁸*Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 38–39. See also Barbara Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (New York & London: Teachers College Press, 1997), p. 2.
- ²⁹Erna Brodber, *Perceptions of Caribbean Women: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes* (Cave Hill, Barbados: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1982).
- ³⁰See the discussion of the Moynihan report in Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (London: Women’s Press, 1982) and the discussion of theories of male marginality by Eudine V. Barriteau, *Examining the issues of men, male marginalisation and masculinity in the Caribbean* (Cave Hill, Barbados: Centre for Gender and Development Studies, 2000).
- ³¹Forbes cites for instance Michael Manley’s elevation of the Maroon Nanny (p. 58).
- ³²Merle Hodge, ‘The Shadow of the Whip: A comment on the male-female relations in the Caribbean’, in *Is Massa Day Dead? Black Moods in the Caribbean*, ed. by Orde Coombs (Garden City, NJ: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1974); Edmondson, p. 107–108.
- ³³Davis, *Women, Race and Class*; bell hooks, *Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics* (London: Turnaround, 1991).
- ³⁴*Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Writing: Making Style* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 70–72; Bonnie Thomas, ‘Reflections on the French Caribbean: The Femme Matador in Fact and Fiction’, *Kunapipi*, 26 (2004), 98–110.
- ³⁵Nira Yuval-Davis, ‘Gender and Nation’, in *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: The politics of transition*, ed. by Rick Wilford and Robert L. Miller (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 23–35.
- ³⁶I borrow this term from Joan Riley’s novel of the same title, *The Unbelonging* (London: Women’s Press, 1985).
- ³⁷James Clifford, ‘Diasporas’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 9 (1994), 302–338 (p. 321).
- ³⁸Selvon insisted that his use in *Moses Ascending* of a mixture of registers reflects the radical equality between so-called dialects and so-called standard language: ‘Autobiographical essay 2’, Samuel Selvon papers, Item 89, pp. 2, 9.
- ³⁹See Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society* and ‘I Lawa’, as well as Warner and Mohammed.
- ⁴⁰Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society*.