'Is Who Send We Up In This Place?' Threshold Paralysis and Postponed Arrivals in Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* and George Lamming's *The Emigrants*

Emily Zobel Marshall
(Leeds Beckett University, UK)

Abstract: The article demonstrates how arrival in London is depicted in Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954) as elusive or postponed. Using spatial theories put forward by Jacques Derrida, Michel de Certeau and the 1960s radical thinkers the Situationists, the article focuses on the concept of *dérive* and the threshold in both texts. It demonstrates that initially, as the English controlled the conditions of hospitality, Lamming and Selvon's protagonists are unable to traverse spatial and cultural thresholds and embrace their citizenship in London, which leads to a profound sense of loss. Using the central concept of *dérive*, or drifting, as defined by Derrida and the Situationists, the article then traces the divergent trajectories of Selvon and Lamming's protagonists, arguing that in *The Lonely Londoners* we see a movement away from this state of paralysis at the threshold towards limited but creative, playful and subversive movement, while in Lamming's text the emigrants struggle to find ways of redefining the dominant order.

'It was a punishing wind that drove us from looking at the landscape', wrote George Lamming, describing his first glimpse of the grey shores of Southampton in 1950. His fellow passenger, Sam Selvon, turned to him on the deck and asked: 'Is who send we up in this place?' (Lamming 2005: 212).

Postwar migrants travelling from the Caribbean to Europe in the 1950s expressed the anticipation and anguish of exile through the development of unique new genres of literature and poetry. Narrative portrayals of moments of arrival

capture conflicting emotions of excitement, expectation, fear and disillusionment with immediacy and rawness. For this is the moment in which, after a long journey by boat, as the port of destination comes into view, the migrants face the physical embodiment of a momentous decision. The journey by sea, which gives the voyagers time to reflect on their transitional, liminal state, their origins, history and destination, intensifies the experience of migration, and it is the thrill of anticipation and the trauma of disillusionment that gives this body of writing such potency.

This article demonstrates how arrival to London is depicted in Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954) as elusive or postponed. Selvon and Lamming, who travelled from Trinidad and Barbados to Britain together in 1950, depict their protagonists as initially haunted and trapped by a sense of non-arrival and feelings of profound uncertainty. The analysis builds on readings of *The Lonely Londoners* by critics Lisa Kabesh (2011), James Proctor (2000; 2003) and Rebecca Dyer (2002) and of *The Emigrants* by Sandra Pouchet Paquet (1983), James Proctor (2003) and Maria Guarducci (2010). Kabesh, Proctor and Dyer have paid attention to how, through their navigation of London's city spaces, Selvon's migrants redefined the city both linguistically and spatially, while Pouchet Paquet, Guarducci and Proctor have examined the themes of disillusionment and 'dwellings' in *The Emigrants* (Proctor 2003).

Using spatial theories put forward by Jacques Derrida (2000), Michel de Certeau (1984) and the 1960s radical thinkers the Situationists, this article focuses on the concept of *dérive* and the threshold in both texts. It demonstrates that initially, as the English controlled the conditions of hospitality, the migrants are depicted as unable to traverse the cultural and social threshold and embrace their citizenship, which leads to a profound sense of loss. Incapable of properly arriving or returning home, they are stranded in a city that drifts just beyond their reach (Lamming 1960: 237). Using the central concept of *dérive*, or drifting, as defined by Derrida and the Situationists, the article then traces the divergent trajectories of Selvon and Lamming's migrants. In Selvon we see a movement away from this state of paralysis at the threshold towards limited but creative, playful and subversive movement through the physical and linguistic spaces of the London as the 'boys' appropriate the conditions of hospitality and belonging. Selvon's migrants are more successful than Lamming's emigrants in their redefinition of their environment; although Lamming's emigrants insert themselves into the city through their occupation of hidden spaces, they are unable to redefine the city spatially and linguistically in same way. As Guarducci points out, the tile of Selvon's novel immediately demonstrates the sense of ownership and belonging the 'boys' develop in their new environment; they are defined as *Londoners*, and while they may be lonely, they eventually settle into a city space which becomes familiar and, in a restricted way, their own (Guarducci 2010: 350; Procter 2003: 46). Lamming's protagonists, on the other hand, are *emigrants*, not migrants. They are trapped in the process of leaving and incapable of achieving arrival or breaking their umbilical link with the myth of home. As such, unable to function properly or move forward, they exist in a state of paralysis at the threshold.

The Emigrants: Postponed Arrivals

Kamau Brathwaïte, who travelled from Barbados in 1953 to Britain to study for a degree at Cambridge University, captures both the sense of hope and hopelessness fuelling the wave of 1950s Caribbean migration in his poem 'The Emigrants'. He describes the emigrants' sense of uncertainty and tentative excitement as they journey from the Caribbean to different parts of the globe. They naïvely believe, Brathwaite tells us, that they are in possession of the enchanted keys they need to unlock the doors to a better, golden future in their host countries (Brathwaite 1973: 51).

The vision of Britain as a place of welcome and possibility, which in part fuelled the 1950s wave of Caribbean migration, was based on familiar colonial myths (52). After a diet of colonial schooling the dream of Britain, and especially London, and all it promised loomed large in the minds of its colonial subjects. Lamming recalls in an interview in 2002 that when he sailed to England in 1950, he felt he was going to a place which had been 'painted [in his] childhood consciousness as a heritage and place of welcome' (Schwarz 2002: 53).

According to Lamming, the 'seed' of a West Indian's colonisation had been 'subtly and richly infused with myth' and was 'extremely difficult to dislodge', which in turn had a profound effect on the psyche of the colonised (26). Lamming emphasises that the English novel was central to the myth that convinced him and his peers to leave the Caribbean. He and his school friends had faith in 'England's supremacy in taste and judgment' because of their reading; their 'whole introduction to something called culture, all of it, in the form of words, came from the outside: Dickens, Jane Austen, Kipling and that sacred gang' (Lamming 1960: 27). Budding writers, Lamming explains, felt they had to leave if they wanted to establish themselves, as books were not written by 'natives' (27).

The reoccurring theme in these colonial migrant narratives is postwar London as a profound disappointment. Shabby, grim and unwelcoming, this was a very different city to the one imagined in the island classroom. John McLeod notes that the war-ravaged capital in the 1950s was inhabited by a diverse, transient population of Irish and Commonwealth migrants, European refugees, soldiers and army personnel, which added to the sense of a fragmented, divided city—a London which 'seemed disconcertingly lacking in substance in colonial eyes' (McLeod 2004: 61).

The Emigrants traces the fates of a group of migrants from Trinidad, Barbados, Jamaica and Grenada from the port in Guadeloupe through to their thwarted attempts to settle into their host country. There is no hero in this story; the emphasis is on the experiences of a fragmented collective. Through oscillations between first and third person narrator and streams of consciousness, we follow the intertwined fates of a fragile grouping, once found 'scattered in different islands' (101), as they experience an increasing sense of alienation from British society and from one other. The novel is divided into three sections; 'A Voyage'*,* 'Rooms and Residents' and 'Another Time'. The first section, 'A Voyage', which describes the sea journey and the journey to London, makes up nearly half the text, demonstrating the protracted and unresolved state of arrival in which the emigrants are marooned.

It is not the first glimpses of the grey English shoreline which begins the process of disconnection for Lamming's emigrants, but the sea voyage itself, for the weeks at sea trap them in a state of inertia. This is an inverse journey; there is no sense of movement towards a final destination, but stasis. Lamming was a committed socialist dedicated to the idea of a successful West Indian Federation, and *The Emigrants*, despite its portrayal of the interaction between West Indians from a diversity of class and social backgrounds from across the Caribbean, seems to pre-empt the Federation's inability to gain any sense of cohesion, which eventually led to its dissolution in 1962 (Ball 2006: 216). The line 'we were all waiting for something to happen' is repeated throughout the first pages of the text, as the ship prepares to leave the islands, creating a desperate atmosphere of claustrophobia; imprisoned on the water between continents, the passengers are forced to questions their decision to leave their origins (Lamming 1994: 3–15). When Higgins, a Grenadian who dreams of becoming a professional chef, first sees 'England rising from beneath her anonymous surface of grey' it compounds his sense of desperate loss (107). He begins to walk the deck 'blindly', and, in a state of panic, longs for a return home. As the ship approaches the shore, England is likened to the stifling atmosphere of the ship's living quarters; it is 'a cage like the dormitory vastly expanded' (106). Higgins craves something intangible—an action, an event, for 'something in the land before him, something that would justify his existence' (107). 'It mattered to be in England. Didn't it?' he asks himself:

> 'Did it matter?' [...] 'There was life, the life of men and women […]. It mattered to be in England. Yes. It did matter. Wherever there was life there was something, something other than no-THING. There was also unemployment, a housing shortage. These were not important. Or were they? Starvation. Death. Yes. Even death. These were not important, for what mattered supremely was to be there, in England. To be in England'. (Lamming 1994: 107)

While Higgins pre-empts the grim reality of postwar England that awaits the emigrants, he still tries to convince himself that being in England will combat his terrible sense of displacement—the vast 'no-THING' the emigrants have grappled with during their boat journey. His first moments on British soil are predictably supremely unsatisfactory, a 'tragic farce' (108).

Once in London, any on-board sense of fragile security through collective experience is ruptured. Lamming's exiles exist in a state of paralysis; they are paralysed as they have lost the ability to move forward and as a result are unable to make inroads into their host community. This paralysis is both physical and emotional and the experience of immobility, powerlessness and numbness is highlighted by Lamming's dense phraseology and stifling prose which threaten to confine both reader and emigrants as they anxiously seek some form of clarity and meaning. Vision remains obscured; they are continually blinded by mist, smoke and lack of light: 'The men couldn't see each other in the dark', Lamming writes, 'but they took it for granted that they were not in the wrong place' (129). The emigrants begin to realise that the arrival they seek remains intangible: 'England was simply a world which we

had moved about at random, and on occasions encountered by chance. It was just there like nature, drifting beyond our reach' (237).

The Conditions of Hospitality and the Impossibility of Return

The sense of non-arrival which underpins the initial migrant experience in Lamming's text is rooted in the rejection by a community the emigrants believed would welcome them—indeed, as I will outline using Derrida's lectures on 'Hospitality' (2000) and his discussions on the concept of arrival in *Counterpath: Travelling with Jacques Derrida* (Derrida and Malabou 2004), one cannot properly *arrive* without being accepted by one's country of destination.

Lamming utilises one of the most prolific tropes in narratives of arrival, the weather, to symbolise this experience of rejection. For Higgins the landscape and the sky, as he arrives into port, are full of menace:

> [The] dull metallic greyness that stretched to meet the sky in the distance, and it seemed so alien to his feelings, Higgins couldn't bear to look at it another moment [...]. The wind was keen and the morning seemed to change its aspect. The clouds darkened as though it were going to rain and the passengers tried to crouch further into their garments. (Lamming 1994: 106–107)

The ever-present mist which obscures clarity in *The Emigrants* renders London 'unreal' in *The Lonely Londoners*, as if it is 'not London at all but some strange place on another planet' (Selvon 2007: 23). Like Lamming, Selvon takes up the trope of weather to underline the experience of estrangement and haunting isolation; the newly arrived Galahad is amazed at the sight of his own breath and tells the old-timer Moses 'I find when I talk smoke coming out of my mouth' (23). 'It so it is in this country,' Moses replies, 'Sometimes the words freeze and you have to melt it to hear the talk' (Selvon 2007: 35). Here the theme of immobility is revisited in the image of words frozen as they leave the mouth of the speaker. When a brave and defiant Galahad insists on leaving Moses to find the Labour Exchange alone, a decision he quickly regrets, his sense of dislocation and confusion is again epitomised by the weather:

> The sun shining, but Galahad never see the sun how it looking now. No heat from it, it just there in the sky like a force-ripe orange. When he look up, the colour of the sky so desolate it make him more frighten. (Selvon 2007: 42)

The weather, the frozen words and cold, alien sun become symbolic of English social and cultural landscapes and synonymous with the coldness of the English people. The English are 'othered' in these narratives. The officials Lamming's protagonists encounter on their arrival are described as monstrous: 'Caged within their white collars like healthy watchdogs, they studied the emigrants as though they were to be written off as lunatics […] their noses stuck out like solid sticks of coal lost in its flames […] the redness was almost transparent with the sudden spurts of vapour issuing from within' (Lamming 1994: 108–109). Selvon's Galahad experiences the depths of English hypocrisy and covert racism whilst in a public toilet: 'two white fellas

come in and say how these black bastards have the lavatory dirty, and they didn't know that he was there, and when he come out they say hello mate have a cigarette' (Selvon 2007: 88).

The eccentricities of the English are highlighted and their social customs and habits made strange. Particular attention is paid to unfamiliar domestic rituals such as afternoon tea and the meticulous care of gardens. In a pivotal scene, Lamming evokes the seemingly unbridgeable cultural gap between emigrant and native in Collis's visit to the English couple, Mr. and Mrs. Pearson. The profoundly awkward visit is heavy with 'silent pressure' (142). Conversation is stilted, the atmosphere suffocating and Mr. and Mrs. Pearson remain inscrutable. Mr. Pearson is cold and calculated, yet 'work[s] up an insane enthusiasm for the garden' (144). The bemused Collis feels like he 'would have liked to kick him in the stomach, not in anger, but as a way of evoking some genuine emotion' (Lamming 1994, 147).

Derrida's lecture on the concept of 'hospitality' (2000) outlines the ways in which the relationship between the 'host' and 'guest' are defined by certain laws and permissions, and allows us to further examine the complex relationship between Selvon and Lamming's migrants and the English. Derrida determines that while hospitality is a human right—in an ideal cosmopolitan community all humans should be welcomed by a host country or community as a guest—paradoxically the 'master of the house' governs the laws of hospitality. The host has the power to decide who may enter his or her home and who is barred, just as a nation governs its borders with passport controls and policing.

As the host defines the conditions of hospitality welcome is never unconditional. Derrida, typically, deconstructs the etymology and symbolism of the term 'hospitality'. If the host is 'at home' and the guest a visitor, the fact that there is a door to the house, a threshold that the guest/stranger or 'other' must pass in order to become a guest, undermines the very principle of universal hospitality. Furthermore, on the terrain of the host, the guest must submit to the power of the host and is subordinate to them—they are not equals (Derrida 2000 4). As the guest must be authorised to enter by the host, embedded within the very concept of hospitality is the right of the host to be inhospitable, to be hostile. So true hospitality, for Derrida does not exist— here Derrida turns to Kant: 'we do not know what hospitality is' (Derrida 2000 7). The laws of hospitality are therefore 'marked by this contradiction' as the guest must have the 'right' to enter, and therefore hospitality is always limited (9):

> To take up the figure of the door, for there to be hospitality, there must be a
> door. But if there is a door, there is no longer hospitality. There is no
> hospitable house. There is no house without doors and windows. But as soon as
there are a door and windows, it means that someone has the key to them   and
consequently controls the conditions of hospitality. (Derrida 2000 14)

Lamming and Selvon's migrants are not in possession of the enchanted keys needed to unlock England's golden doors that Brathwaite imagines in his poem (Brathwaite 1973: 51). While they should enjoy 'at-home' status as citizens of the British Empire, who were encouraged to seek employment Britain, they are initially trapped 'on the threshold' in a state of non-arrival as they have been rejected by a

host who has the key to, and therefore controls, the conditions of hospitality, Moses complains to Galahad that even the Polish owner of the 'Rendezvous' restaurant won't serve them, even though they have more rights to live and work in the country: 'we is British subjects and he is only a foreigner' (Selvon 2007: 40). Indeed, in her study of *Postcolonial Hospitality* (2001), which examines how European countries have redefined the ideals of hospitality to suit their own agendas in the postcolonial context, Rosello argues that European countries who 'invited' migrants for recruitment reasons after the Second World War were not properly performing the role of host: 'if a nation invites immigrants because they are valuable assets, because it needs them for an economic or demographic purpose, that country is not being hospitable' (Rosello 2001: 9,12). If we re-examine Collis's visit to Mr. Pearson's home in *The Emigrants* alongside Derrida's theory, the inroad into the so-called host culture made by Collis is clearly strained by the power dynamics of *conditional* hospitality. Collis visits Mr. Pearson as he has been given his address by Mrs. Pearson's brother, a welfare officer in Trinidad who felt compelled to try and help Collis find work. The tone of the visit to the Pearsons' changes dramatically after Mr. Pearson receives a phone call from his factory informing him of the misconduct of one of his new West Indian employees: 'Why do so many of your people come here?', Mr. Pearson asks Collis abruptly after the phone call (Lamming 1994: 141). The call creates a gulf between them, and while Collis is initially invited across the threshold, after the phone call he finds himself rejected from the home, a stranger in an inhospitable environment.

Mr. Pearson is described by Collis as being so completely 'at home' in the house that he does not just 'sit' in a chair, he 'belonged to it' (140). The Pearsons move around their home and respond to one another 'according the laws of their environment', laws which Collis cannot comprehend (140). Mr. Pearson then bars Collis from his hospitality and, in doing so, profoundly changes Collis's sense of self and belonging in England; he becomes aware of his 'otherness' under the hostile gaze of his potential host: 'The man had an uncanny way of producing this enormous distance between himself and the other', Collis notes, which leaves him feeling completely 'trapped' (Lamming 1994: 146). Collis is physically shut out by Mr. Pearson when he abruptly leaves Collis's company and closes the door: 'The door was shut, and it looked as though it had always been shut' (146). Collis, now acutely aware of his status as a stranger, rightly reads Mr. Pearson's disappearance as a 'danger signal' (146). As Derrida explains, being born 'elsewhere' will always define the migrant as a stranger:

> In general, it is the birthplace which will always have underpinned the definition of the stranger as non-autochthonous, non-indigenous […]. The stranger is, first of all, he who is born elsewhere. (Derrida 2000 14–15)

Yet while Lamming's and Selvon's narratives of arrival focus on the estrangement of migration, the desire to return to their place of origin is firmly juxtaposed with the impossibility of ever being able to leave. Their characters are haunted by the possibility of return, but fear that migration has changed them beyond recognition. They become, as Stuart Hall (1996) describes, 'familiar strangers' existing simultaneously inside and outside of life and society. In this sense the journey changes both the travellers, their perceptions of origins and their ability to return—

were the migrants to return, home would seem changed, unfamiliar, unreal. For the migrants who never return, home becomes mythologised and takes residence in the realms of fantasy and imagination, just as England once did.

Selvon's Moses, nicknamed 'mister London' by Galahad, is weary of London life, a fragmented city divided up into separate 'little worlds' (39, 74). The landmarks of London fail to excite him: 'you say to yourself, 'Lord them places must be sharp.' Then you get a chance and you see them for yourself, and is like nothing' (85). In Selvon's text Waterloo becomes a threshold space, described by Guarducci (2010) as a 'frontier between two worlds' (350). The lonely migrants can't break the habit of going to Waterloo to greet the boat train arriving with passengers from the Caribbean to be amongst the faces and voices of their countrymen and women. This is where Moses finds himself pondering return: 'Perhaps he was thinking is time to go back to the tropics, that's why he feeling sort of lonely and miserable' (26). 'Why is it', the narrator asks, 'that in the end, everyone cagey about saying outright that if the chance come they will go back to them green islands in the sun?' (Selvon 2007: 138).

For the migrant, Salman Rushdie (1991) explains, home becomes a fictive destination. Looking back gives rise to 'profound uncertainties', for the 'physical alienation' of exile, which means that the migrant is incapable 'of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost' (10). The migrant writer will therefore 'create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands' (10). While Moses is all too aware that the 'kiff kiff' laughter and the empty stories, the 'ballad and the episode', exchanged between his struggling friends inadequately mask tears of sorrow and homesickness, he lets the seasons roll by and does not return, getting 'so accustomed to the pattern he can't do anything about it' (141).

'Coast a Lime': From Threshold Paralysis to *'Dériver'*

In *Counterpath: Travelling with Jacques Derrida* (2004) Derrida and Catherine Malabou enjoy deconstructing the French word *dériver*. It is from the Latin 'rivus' stream or 'tipa' bank, and literally means 'to leave the bank or shore', but in two opposing senses. In the first instance the word characterises a 'continuous and ordered trajectory from origin to end'—for example, the derivations of words, but it also means 'drifting,' which signifies a loss of control. A boat that is 'à la dérive' is drifting off course, losing its way (1). In their examination of the idea of 'arrival' Derrida and Malabou point out that the French *arriver* means not only to reach one's destination but also what befalls one, as in: 'ques'qui t'arrive?' [what has happened?]. This highlights the erroneous idea that 'there is no true voyage without an event, no arrival without [arriver]', no journey without a 'destination', 'truth' or happening (8). Malabou writes:

> A voyage ordinarily implies that one leaves a familiar shore to confront the unknown. The traveller derives or even drifts from a fixed and assignable origin in order to arrive somewhere, always maintaining the possibility of returning home, of again reaching the shore of departure. (Derrida and Malabou 2004: 2)

The myth of arrival, Derrida argues, hinges on the flawed belief that 'away from the shore, one [...] is always assured of indivisible boarders. Always capable of being reminded or compensated by a return', yet one must come to the realisation that 'travel takes origin with it' (Derrida and Malabou 2004, 12). It is precisely the dual desire to be compensated by a return and an 'event' to signify arrival that haunts Lamming and Selvon's protagonists. The sense of loss in the migrants' experiences of London is comparable to what Stuart Hall (1996) has termed the nature of the Disaporic experience. Hall describes the migrants' relationship with their homelands as 'far away enough to experience the sense of exile and loss, close enough to understand the enigma of an always-postponed 'arrival'' (492).

This idea of the perpetually postponed arrival is echoed in Naipaul's semi-autobiographical *The Enigma of Arrival* (1988), a narrative that cuts short any hope of transcending the limbo of exile. Naipaul (1988) describes a painting entitled the 'Enigma of Arrival and the Afternoon' (1911–12) by the Greek-born Italian surrealist Giorgio de Chirico, from which the novel takes its name. The scene shows two figures at a deserted quayside and in the distance is the mast and sail of a ship. Naipaul describes the painting as 'a scene full of desolation and mystery. It speaks to him of the mystery of arrival' and he describes how it epitomises his experiences as an exile in Britain (Naipaul 1988: 91). He imagines that he will write a story inspired by the painting: the protagonist would arrive on a ship and leave the silence and desolation of the wharf through a gateway into a busy, bustling world, but then 'he would lose his sense of mission; he would begin to know only that he was lost' (91). Panicking, he would open a door and, to his relief, find himself back at the quayside, only to realise that there was no mast, no ship: 'The traveller had lived out his life'—he had never properly arrived, nor could he depart (91–92).

While the enigma of a postponed arrival initially defines the experiences of Selvon's migrants they start to carve themselves a space within the confines of British culture. His migrants are not invited into the host territory, but they claim it without invitation. Towards the end of the novel, Moses states to Galahad, 'nobody in London does really accept you. They tolerate you, yes, but you can't go in their house and eat or sit down and talk', yet the migrants find a way to Creolise the spaces of London as they refuse to adhere to the economic, linguistic or spatial laws of the city (Selvon 2007: 130). Tanty enforces a credit system at the local 'white people shop' (79), Big City has no work, 'yet he always have money' (98), and Cap, who 'won't do no work' has a 'finger in everything' (49, 55). Lamming's Collis observes that the Pearsons move around their home 'according the laws of their environment', laws which Collis cannot grasp (Lamming 1994: 140), yet the laws of the environment in *The Lonely Londoners* begin to be redefined by the migrants. We see a movement away from stasis and immobility towards movement and creativity as through a series of stubborn and subtle resistances and subversions the migrants establish themselves in London. For Lamming's emigrants, however, this movement is thwarted, as they remain unable to reconfigure the spaces of the city to suit their needs.

The Emigrants ends with a showdown between the Governor, a self-interested former RAF man whose questionable financial dealings elevate his status, and his wife at the Governor's nightclub 'Mombasa', where the atmosphere is as claustrophobic as

on board the ship and as opaque as in the city; it is 'uncomfortably crowded' and thick with cigarette smoke (280). Conversation is stilted and people find it difficult to recognise one another. After Collis declares, 'I have no people,' a peripheral character, The Strange Man, arrives arm-in-arm with the Governor's wife. In a state of blind fury, the Governor kicks his wife, who howls 'like a sick animal' and is left lying in a pool of blood on the floor (281). In the aftermath of the incident, everyone remains frozen by uncertainty—even the stars in the sky look down at the scene with a profound sense of 'discomfort' (281). The omniscient narrator takes the reader back, full circle, to the paralysing atmosphere of inaction on board the ship: 'something was bound to happen' (281–2). An event has taken place, but the type of 'happening', which, according to Derrida and Malabou all travellers seek—the one that will signify arrival—never takes place. The novel ends with Collis returning to the window to passively watch 'the night slip by between the light and the trees' (282).

By contrast, for Selvon's protagonists it is the *spatial* and *linguistic* reclaiming of the city spaces, as James Proctor (2003) and Rebecca Dyer (2002) both argue, which open the golden doors of possibility and allow the migrants to cross the threshold (Brathwaite 1973: 51). The migrants begin to make inroads into the spaces of their host culture, and in doing so rewrite social and cultural codes. As they move through the city spaces, Selvon's protagonists challenge its authoritarian structures and subvert its systems of power.

Michel de Certeau (1984) argues that opportunities for the subversion of socio-political systems are continually seized in the everyday lives of people operating within a system of domination. For Selvon's migrants, the limits of the urban space are transformed through their refusal to adhere to its parameters. As they grow in confidence and self-awareness, the movement of Selvon's 'boys' through the city spaces changes from disoriented Derridean drifting and non-arrival towards the type of playful, subversive *dérive* enacted by the 1960s radical European Marxist libertarian group, the Situationists. '*Dérive*,' was one of the Situationists' key principles, defined by its founder Guy Debord as a 'technique of locomotion without a goal', in which:

> One or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. (Debord qtd in Plant 1992, 58)

To *dérive,* for the Situationists, was to find ways of travelling through the urban environment on foot in new and subversive ways whilst responding to the city emotionally and intellectually. It was a playful practice aimed at awakening one from the slumber of the dictates of consumer capitalism and the authoritarian state. To *dérive* meant moving across the city using routes which refused to adhere to the designs of city planners and state prohibitions and crossing boundaries which forbade entry into, or enjoyment of, certain spaces (Plant 1992: 59).

Selvon's migrants frequently take part in this type of drifting and remapping of city spaces. Marginalised by mainstream society and often jobless, sometimes homeless, they exist outside the system—they are not bound by the dictates of consumer capitalism in the same way as the other Londoners around them. The

migrants do not experience their environment through a lens dulled by habit, routine and familiarity; like the Situationists, they walk and watch without fixed agendas or goals and their routes through the city are random and often playful. Forced to make their way through an often-unknown terrain, their experience of the urban space is constantly shaped and reshaped by their awareness of potential threat, their sensitivity to the magnificence of the capital and their desire to receive the city's offerings.

The migrants respond to the city with the type of emotional awareness and intellectual depth that the Situationists sought in their own urban wanderings. They *dérive* or in Selvon's words, 'coast a lime' and 'cruise' the streets and parks of London, examining its inhabitants and buildings, its seedy underbelly, its forgotten places, renaming and reclaiming it as they go. Galahad is at first mesmerised by the power imbued in famous buildings and sights of London:

> Jesus Christ, when he say 'Charing Cross', when he realise that is he, Sir Galahad, who going there, near that place that everybody in the world know about (it even have the name in the dictionary) he feel like a new man. It didn't matter about woman he going to meet, just to say he was going there made him feel big and important, *and even if he was just going to coast a lime, to stand up and watch white people, still, it would have been somethin*g. (Selvon 2007: 84; my emphasis)

Galahad feels renewed; through the process of inserting himself, a man from a marginal position, into the centre of a famous space, without invitation, he breaks the laws of hospitality and shares the historical and cultural power imbued in both the place and word 'Charing Cross', found in 'official' dictionaries worldwide. He subverts and lays claim to the power of the centre by using the space to *dérive* and spectate, 'to coast a lime, to stand up and watch white people' (84) rather than in a purposeful way as prescribed by the 'laws of the environment' (Lamming 1994: 140).

As well as making inroads into the spaces of the city, the migrants lay claim to the city linguistically. Soon Notting Hill Gate becomes 'the Gate', Bayswater 'the Water' and Marble Arch 'The Arch' as they glibly transform and claim ownership of the icons of British empire through Caribbean patois, melting the 'frozen' words to 'hear the talk' (Selvon 2007, 35). As Proctor rightly points out that, 'it is by naming the city that London is effectively "settled" by the boys' (Proctor 2003: 53).

The Situationists, through the tactics of the *dérive,* sought to reclaim a sense of individual autonomy from the alienating, controlling contemporary city and foster an 'individual attachment to the street' (Thompson 2015: 15). Political in nature, the idea of *dérive* is therefore rooted in a faith in the possibility of change. Indeed, through his detailing of the migrant's appropriation of the cityscape and developing sense of 'attachment to the street', Selvon allows a subtle undertone of optimism to creep into his text, although the tone is still speculative. In the closing pages of *The Lonely Londoners*, during his poetic epiphany on the banks of the Thames, Moses realises that he has forsaken his homeland for 'experience', perhaps one full of 'misery and pathos', but an experience which has perhaps made him a better man, and potentially, gives him something to write about (Selvon 2007: 142). While movement

forward is still restricted, for the 'restless, swaying movement' is still 'leaving you standing in the same spot' (141), Moses feels a 'greatness and vastness' for the first time, that there was 'something solid' after 'feeling everything give way' (142). Unlike Naipaul's Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men* (2002), who is perpetually haunted by past failures, the suggestion here is that, like Selvon himself, Moses will transcend his state of limbo through storytelling, which gives the novel a sense of hopeful momentum absent in both Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (2002) and Lamming's *The Emigrants.*

Redefining the City: Freedoms and Limitations

Rebecca Dyer (2002) has successfully applied de Certeau's ideas of tactics of resistance in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) to the *Lonely Londoners* to demonstrate how the migrants remapped London through the use of the everyday resistance tactics of walking and talking to challenge and undermine strategies of power. Dyer argues that 'the migrant characters' everyday lives—the trajectories of their walks, their gatherings in small rented rooms, their manipulation of "proper" English—are political acts' (Dyer 2002: 112-3). Indeed, according to Dyer, Selvon's generation of Caribbean writers in London 'became both the chroniclers and practitioners of everyday life in the city' (Dyer 2002: 110).

However, while this hypotheses is entirely convincing, Lisa Kabesh points out that the connections made between freedom of movement and political freedoms are at times problematic, as in certain places Selvon's text actually seeks to 'challenge the conflation of freedom with mobility' (Kabesh 2011: 8). She argues that while the novel is punctuated by movement, which critics such as Ashley Dawson (2007) and Kenneth Ramchand (2001), alongside Dyer, recognise as a site of resistance, spatial movement in *The Lonely Londoners* has a more complex relationship with political freedom than one might first assume (3). To demonstrate these levels of complexity Kabesh focuses on the limitations and restrictions the 'boys' face by documenting the 'numerous barriers'—social, physical and economic—that they encounter on their journeys across the city. She does this by using Big City's car crash with a bus as symbolic of the boys curtailed mobility and through highlighting the struggles they face in gaining employment (10,5).

A keen insight offered by Kabesh is a reading of the ways in which the tactics the 'boys' employ to rename and reclaim the city, and feel a sense of their own empowerment, are inextricability linked to their objectification and ill-treatment of women. While they experience greater freedoms through their sexual exploits, these exploits further limit the freedoms of the women—both Caribbean and white working class—that they encounter; the former are treated at possessions and the latter as conquests enjoyed because they undermine the power of white men. In this sense, Kabesh argues, racial and sexual hierarchies are not simply overturned by the 'boys', but 're-inscribed in new forms' (Kabesh 2011: 10). She therefore calls for an examination of the 'multivocality' of political action and insists that the novel 'asks what forms of political movement the segregated space of post-war London *denies* and *demands*' (14; my emphasis). However, Kabesh is keen to point out that Selvon's text does 'not cast aside the possibility of building a meaningful social movement

amongst West Indians in London' (8). She claims that she is not intent on demonstrating that 'the boys walking of the city is not political in nature—that it does not offer a means by which they can come to own and appropriate London' (Kabesh 2011: 8). The everyday tactics described by de Certeau are clearly implemented by the protagonists, yet they 'speak' to systems of power in a variety of ways and at times limit the possibility of real freedoms for all.

In his influential chapter 'Walking in the City' in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) de Certeau argues that 'spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities by a place in which one can move and interdictions by a wall that prevents one from going further' (89). Selvon's migrants do clearly challenge these interdictions and bring to life various possibilities in their negotiation of the city spaces, a creative process which, although limited, redefines their environment and their relationship to the city. Like the Situationists *à la dérive*, in de Certeau's words they 'increase the possibilities' of the 'fixed' and 'constructed order' by 'creating shortcuts and detours' and refusing to take 'paths generally considered accessible or even obligatory' (89). One of the pivotal moments in *The Lonely Londoners* in which the 'boys' move from paralysis to action is in the long Modernist stream of consciousness ode to Hyde Park in the summer time. Here the winter that clutches the boys in its numbing grip releases its hold as they begin to stroll the park in the sunshine. They soak up its sights and sounds whilst beginning to feel a sense of possession over their environment. However, as highlighted by Kabesh (2011), the ownership of space here is once again viewed through the male gaze and linked to the desire to posses the bodies of white women:

> Oh what a time it is when summer come to the city and all them girls throw away heavy winter coat and wearing light summer frocks so you could see the legs and shapes that was hiding away from the cold blasts and you could coast a lime in the park and negotiate ten shillings or a pound with the sports… (101)

The boys take the girls to a bench near Hyde Park corner which they rename the 'Play Around Section' (102). The omniscient narrator follows their trajectories through the city into gardens where they see the sun burn away the tiredness and strain of winter on English faces. Moses 'coast[s] a walk' with a girl to a pub, hops on and off the buses, cruises the road from the 'arch' to the 'gate', eyeing up prostitutes. Here the city becomes the site of the *dérive*, the playful exploration of the city that abandons the usual habits and constraints of a planned journey. Debord sets out instructions for *dérive* in his 'Théorie de la dérive' (1958), and asserts that the practice of *dérive* allows one to examine the city's 'principal axes of passage', 'exits' and 'defenses' (Gieseking et al. 2014: 67). For Selvon's migrants Hyde Park in the summer becomes a space in which, for men, the city's 'defenses' are down and social rules and hierarchies are overturned; 'don't ever be surprised', the narrator tells us, 'as who you meet up cruising and reclining in the park it might be your boss or it might be some big professional feller because it ain't have no discrimination when it come to that in the park in the summer…' (Selvon 2007: 104).

While Selvon's migrants visibly start to redefine the spatial and linguistic landscapes of London, Lamming's emigrants remain largely hidden from the city, yet

they do partake in certain circumscribed freedoms in unauthorised city spaces. The section 'Rooms and Residents' describes how, through detours that thwart the dominant order, the emigrants create social spaces away from its watchful gaze. The men meet at the Barbers located in Fred Hill's basement, 'dingy and damp, a hole which has lost its way in the earth', and the women congregate at the hairdresser Miss Dorkin's in her 'low and narrow' work room (Lamming 1994: 129). Miss Dorkin tells her customers that they must keep her space and her trade a secret from the authorities; 'you know how it is in England with the landladies. If the landlady knows that I do this, although it is only for my friends, she would make me give up this place' (166). The badly lit workroom is not simply a place to have a haircut, but a migrant refuge away from the hostile city:

> This was a womb which the world (meaning those other than you) was not aware of. The world passed by on the outside, intent or callous, but ignorant of the intimacy and the warmth of this house, in this corner… (Lamming 1994: 148)

The migrants also congregate at their club, Mombasa, which despite its depiction as a stifling space at the end of the novel, it is also portrayed as a protective, womb-like, hidden space: 'there was nothing outside to suggest the warmth of the low room' (Lamming 1994: 269). And Tornado's basement room is often crowded with migrants seeking warmth and company away from the dictates of the unyielding city. In his skilful analysis of basement locations in *Rooms and Residents*, Proctor (2003) demonstrates that, unlike Selvon's migrant's 'more optimistic' (Proctor 2003: 46) movements beyond the 'dwelling place' or 'domestic interior' into the outdoor city spaces (Proctor 2003: 32), Lamming's emigrants experience migration as 'sedentary' and are perpetually confined to an interior 'underworld' (Proctor 2003: 45).

Reconfiguring the Literary Space

Paradoxically, it is these physically cramped underground spaces that offer the migrants freedom of thought. Although Lamming's emigrants recognise 'action is the only escape', their 'action' is 'limited to the labour of a casual hand in a London factory' (Lamming 1994: 192). Yet as they disperse into their own smaller and smaller rooms, 'alone, circumscribed by the night and the neutral staring walls', they realise the one action they can take within the confines of their restricted spaces is 'to think' […] for that too was a kind of action' (192). Similarly, Moses's bedsit becomes a type of sacred space where the migrants can think and talk freely. Moses lies on his bed watching them and pondering the meaning of their existence:

> Nearly every Sunday morning, like they are going to church, the boys liming in Moses room, coming together for a oldtalk […], like if is confession, sitting down on the bed, on the floor, on the chairs, asking everybody what happening but nobody like they know what happening… (Selvon 2007, 138)

Although Selvon and Lamming's complex narrative styles resist any easy conflation between author and narrator, like their protagonists they opened up new cultural spaces within the dominant order. Through their work they engendered

discussions—literary, poetic, intellectual—and created a 'city of words' which helped develop a growing sense of a Caribbean consciousness and community within what Bhabha has termed the 'cramped conditions of cultural creativity' (Nasta 1995: 85–6; Bhabha 2000: 139). Their writing reconfigured the literary space, disseminating the experiences of a generation of Caribbean migrants in fusions of Creole and 'standard' English and experimental Modernist prose which challenged the control of the traditional English literary canon. As this analysis has demonstrated, as the migrants lay claim to subterranean unauthorised city spaces or wander without purpose above ground, *a la dérive*, through the city's streets and parks, they negotiated, in the words of E. P. Thompson the 'spaces and gaps' within the dominate order, 'warrening it from within' (Thompson 1965: 311–62).

Notably, the politics of walking are observed in Lamming's account of his journey to England with Selvon in 1950. After detailing their arrival in Southampton by boat and train journey to Waterloo, Lamming describes the naive enthusiasm of an 'amateur' migrant in their group, who is keen to 'make a move' (for he 'must see' the city and his old friends) and declares that he wants to 'walk by Camden town' and then 'track back 'pon the place where you say the Gate High' (Lamming 2005: 219). His suggestion is sharply knocked back by the 'veteran' migrant who explains that 'distances are not quite like the gully hill tracks back home' (219). The 'amateur' responds with a 'damaging accusation': 'Only two years ago you leave home, and now you are talking tourist talk 'bout how it don't have no walking habits in this town. Tell me Sphinx, is how come you drop your 'ol walking habits?' (219). This, Lamming tells us, is 'the amateur's lesson in size' (219). However, I would also suggest this highlights the point at which Lamming's and Selvon's depiction of migration parts ways. The limited movement of Lamming's protagonists through hidden underground spaces echoes the prohibition of movement enacted upon the 'amateur' by the 'veteran'. Selvon's migrants, in contrast, achieve veteran status and continue their 'ol' walking habits' which forge new 'tracks' through the city of London.

Yet as Lamming and Selvon established themselves as seminal writers in England, in many ways, theirs were migrant success stories. As novelists, they did transcend any early 'paralysis' at the threshold of British culture, and in their writing this was rooted in their ability to renegotiate, or transcend, the rules of hospitality altogether, moving *beyond* hospitality (Derrida 2000: 17). If, as Lamming notes, the Caribbean writer in England initially fought to win the approval of the 'Headquarters', it was by transcending the need for approval and welcome, to be greeted by a host, and by redefining the literary canon through new forms of writing, that they broke free from the restrictive laws of a hostile nation-state (Lamming 1996: 253).

Works Cited

Ball, C. 2006. *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press)

Bhabha, H. 2000. 'The Vernacular Cosmopolitan', in *Voices of the Crossing: The Impact of Britain on Writers from Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa*, ed. by F. Dennis and N. Khan (London: Serpent's Tail), pp. 133–42

Brathwaite, E. K. 1973. 'The Emigrants', in *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

De Certeau, M. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press)

Debord, G. 1958. 'Théorie de la dérive', *Internationale Situationniste #2* (December) in Situationist International Online. Available at:[Accessed April 2016]

Dawson, A. 2007. *Mongrel Nation: Diasporic Culture and the Making of Post-Colonial Britain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press)

Dennis, F. and N. Khan. 2000. *Voices of the Crossing: The Impact of Britain on Writers from Asia, The Caribbean and Africa* (London: Serpents Tail)

Derrida, J. and C. Malabou. 2004. *Counterpath: Travelling with Jacques Derrida* (Stanford: Stanford University Press)

Derrida, J. 2000. 'Hospitality', *Angeliki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 5, (3), 3–18.

Dyer, R. 2002. 'Immigration, Postwar London, and the Politics of Everyday Life in Sam Selvon's Fiction', *Cultural Critique* 52 (Fall), 108–44

Gieseking, J., Mangold, W., Katz, C., Setha, L. & Saegert, S. (eds.) 2014. *The People, Place, and Space Reader* (London: Routledge)

Guarducci, M. P. 2010. 'Only the ship remained': The Sea Journey in George Lamming's *The Emigrants' Textus*, 23(2), 339–54

Hall, S. 1996. 'The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual: An Interview with Stuart Hall', in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. by D. Morley and K. Chen (London: Routledge), pp. 484–501

Kabesh, L. M. 2011. 'Mapping Freedom, or Its Limits: The Politics of Movement in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners' Postcolonial Text* 6(3), 2–17

Lamming, G. 1994. *The Emigrants* (Ann Arbour: The University of Michigan Press)

Lamming, G. 1996. 'The Occasion for Speaking' (1996), in *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, ed. by S. Lawson-Welsh and A. Donnell (London: Routledge)

Lamming, G. 2005. *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: Pluto Press)

McLeod, J. 2004. *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (London: Routledge)

Naipaul, V. S. 1988. *The Enigma of Arrival* (London: Penguin Books)

Naipaul, V. S. 2002. *The Mimic Men* (London: Picador)

Nasta, S. 1995. 'Setting Up Home in a City of Words: Sam Selvon's London Novels,' in *Other Britain, Other British: Contemporary Multicultural Fiction*, ed. by R. Lee (London: Pluto Press), pp. 48–69

Plant, S. 1992. *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge)

Pouchet Paquet, S. 1983. *The Novels of George Lamming*. London: Heinemann.

Proctor, J. ed. 2000. *Writing Black Britain, 1948–98: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press)

Proctor, J. 2003. *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press)

Schwarz, Bill. 2002. 'Sea of Stories: Interview with George Lamming', in *The Guardian* 24 October, p. 53

Schwarz B. (ed.) 2007. *The Locations of George Lamming* (Macmillan: Oxford)

Selvon, S. 2007. *The Lonely Londoners* (New York: Longman)

Ramchand, K. 2001. 'Introduction' in *The Lonely Londoners*, by S. Selvon (New York: Longman), pp. 3–21

Rosello, M. 2001. *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (Stanford: Stanford University Press)

Rushdie, S. 1991. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (London: Granta)

Selvon, S. 1975. *Moses Ascending* (London: Davis Poynter)

Thompson, E. 1965. 'The Peculiarities of the English', in *The Socialist Register*, ed. by R. Milliband and J. Saville (London: Merlin), pp. 311–62

Thompson, Z. 2015. *Urban Constellations: Spaces of Cultural Regeneration in Post-Industrial Britain* (London: Ashgate)

Note on Contributor

Emily Zobel Marshall is Course Leader for English Literature and Senior Lecturer in Postcolonial Literature at the School of Cultural Studies at Leeds Beckett University. She teaches courses on African-American, Caribbean, African and Black British literature. Emily is particularly interested in forms of cultural resistance and cross-cultural fertilisation in the face of colonialism. Her research specialisms are literary tricksters, Caribbean carnival cultures and Caribbean literature and folklore and she has published widely in these fields. Her book, *Anansi's Journey: A Story of Jamaican Cultural Resistance* (2012) was published by the University of the West Indies Press and she is currently researching her forthcoming book, *American Tricksters: Trauma, Tradition and Brer Rabbit,* to be published by Rowman and Littlefield.

To Cite this Article