

Multiculturalism as an Alternative to Nihilism in Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* and Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes how internal oppression, or nihilism, has emerged amongst many of the Caricom community. It focuses on the history of colonialism and the psychological destruction it has left across the Caribbean. The author suggests that multicultural texts are the first step in eliminating this type of nihilism, with the focus on two novels *The Autobiography of My Mother* and *The Lonely Londoners*.

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My Mother and Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*

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Introduction: Multicultural Literature as an Answer to Nihilism in the Caribbean Community

Over the last hundred years, marginalized communities across the globe have waged a war against internal oppression, battling the damaging after-effects of colonialism. In the United States the black community has suffered greatly from the lingering aftermath of colonialism, slavery, Jim Crow laws, and segregation. In South Africa blacks, who have only been equal to whites in the eyes of the law since the early 1990s, are still recovering from the psychologically damaging era of colonialism and Apartheid. America has been the forefront of colonial exploitation and genocide. The American Indian, a problematic label given by colonizers who believed they had landed in India, as a group has been nearly eliminated through genocide and disease. The few that remained were either enslaved or pushed to the outskirts of society and labeled as outcasts. The destructive results of oppression both internal and external continue to be an issue in many native societies today.

It is true that Europe's expansion over the last few centuries has brought many positive outcomes such as education, technology, modern agricultural practices, geography, and the widespread use of modern medicine, just to name a few. Unfortunately the stark consequences of this imperial rule have left several communities internally stagnant. Cornel West, author of *Race Matters*, refers to this type of oppression as nihilism. He explains, "Nihilism is to be understood here not as a philosophic doctrine that there are no rational grounds for legitimate standards of authority; it is, far more, the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and lovelessness" (14). West goes on to describe nihilism as a "disease of the soul" and similar to addiction, it is "chronic" and "incurable" (18). This sickness has resulted in crime, poverty, and illiteracy across the world. It can be argued that the many nations of the Caribbean, after centuries of colonial rule with its severe exploitation of relegated

communities, has one of the most destructive forms of “chronic” internal oppression. The repercussions of colonialism have enslaved countless minds to believe that progression is hopeless.

The Caribbean is made up of several states, with a variety of different ethnicities, dialects, cultures, and languages. With the multitude of cultures and nations that make up the Caribbean, finding the right terminology that specifies the groups this thesis plans discuss has been challenging. Historically the colonized of the Caribbean have been labeled with several names. In the early 1500s when the Caribbean was first inhabited the natives were referred to as Amerindians. Little is known of that native culture, considering that it was nearly wiped off the planet by enslavement, disease, or genocide (Palmer 797). Between the years of the 1500 to 1600, millions of Africans were displaced through the profitable buying and trading of humans called the Triangular Trade. Several millions were enslaved in the Caribbean, immersing the nation with an entirely new culture. As colonialism evolved and the white elite remained in power, even well after the emancipation of the slaves, the colonized were referred to West Indian, Carib, and even Caricom. All these labels are problematic for various reasons. Columbus coined the term “West Indian,” because when he arrived in the Caribbean in the late 1400’s, he was convinced he had discovered the islands of the West Indies. The name eventually stuck, and for years those deemed native to the Caribbean were considered West Indian (Palmer 798). One can see how problematic it is to refer to the colonized as West Indians, considering the name derived from a mistake in geography. The word Carib originally comes from The Island of Carib, a place located off the coast of South America. This island’s inhabitants are now extinct, but they were aggressive warlords who were allegedly cannibalistic in nature. In fact the word Carib stems from the word cannibal (“Carib people”). Carib is a common name for

members in the marginalized communities of the Caribbean, but considering that cannibalism is extremely uncommon amongst these individuals, this name proves problematic as well. The word Caricom originated in 1974 and is an acronym for the Caribbean Common Market. It is considered an organization that was founded to promote cooperation between Caribbean nations ("Definition of Caribbean Community and Common Market in English."). So for the purposes of this thesis, the relegated groups of people that will be the topic of focus are those Caribbean members regarded as English-speaking Caricom.

Several Caribbean states are suffering from high crime rates, illiteracy, corrupt governments, and poverty. The CARICOM was created to hopefully begin to address such issues. According to West, none of these issues can be tackled without facing the underlying problem of it all, nihilism.

To talk about the depressing statistics of unemployment infant mortality, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, and violent crime is one thing. But to face up to the monumental eclipse of hope, the unprecedented collapse of meaning, the incredible disregard for human (especially black) life and property in much of black America is something else. (West 12)

Numerous questions and philosophies have been raised on how members of marginalized communities can recover from such self-destructive problems. What possibly can one do to begin to repair this colossal "eclipse of hope," amongst these individuals? West suggests that this type of nihilism can only be "tamed by love and care" (18). So where does one find such love? Governments have decided to throw money at the problem that face so many relegated communities today, hoping that it will resolve itself. Is this love? No, in fact this practice, although well intended, has allowed marginalized cultures to remain stagnant, which in a sense is another form of victimization. So how does one immerse individuals with love, and more

importantly with self-love? This thesis will explore that question, and how love takes the form of multicultural literature.

The United States has seen first-hand, how influential multicultural literature has been for minority communities. Sarah Hughes-Hassell, who wrote “Multicultural Young Adult Literature as a Form of Counter-Storytelling,” refers to these types of texts as counter-stories, a way of rewriting the prejudices and stereotypes of relegated cultures. Hughes-Hassell explains that once these individuals read such narratives they are able to, “gain healing from becoming familiar with their own historic oppression and victimization; realize they are not alone that others have the same thoughts and experiences; stop blaming themselves for their marginal position; and construct additional counter-stories to challenge the dominant story” (215). In the United States multicultural literature has made quite a difference in schools across the country, with its implementation since the 1970’s there has been a dramatic increase in literacy and graduation rates amongst marginalized groups. As one student explained,

When my eighth grade teacher..... shared Mildred Taylor’s *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry* with the class and added several pieces of black literature to the classroom, it was a pivotal moment for me, for the first time in my life, I realized that I was not alone in the world. There were other black girls having experiences similar to mine, and some had grown up and written them down. (Hughes Hassell 214)

Is this not love in action? Educators who chose to add these types of texts in their classrooms are creating a compassionate and caring environment for all students. And it is also a learning environment that strives to breakdown the rigid walls of nihilism. The success of multicultural literature in the United States has been pivotal, and an important weapon in the fight against internal oppression. In recent years parts of the Caribbean has implemented multicultural literature, but the practice has not been widespread amongst all nations. Caribbean writers have

gone above and beyond to create Caribbean counter-stories, that both rewrite history and demolishing long withstanding stereotypes. The application of these texts in all Caribbean classrooms would be extremely beneficial to members of the Caricom community. This thesis will explore how multicultural literature attempts to resolve the nihilistic viewpoints held by several members of the Caricom group. Focusing on two novels as examples of this idea, *The Autobiography of My Mother* and *The Lonely Londoners*, this thesis will illustrate how these narratives through their various themes and messages deconstruct the pessimistic ideals that have developed in the wake of colonialism.

Chapter 1: Nihilism: Affecting Certain Members of the Caricom Community

It is no secret that colonialism has left many negative effects on many members of the Caricom community. Enduring over 550 years of native enslavement followed by the several years of colonial indentured servitude, the aftermath of this era has been a chaotic attempt at recovery (Deena 1). A. J. Christopher, who wrote the article, “Decolonization without Independence,” outlined that “Since 1945 a total of 96 new states have been created.... However, in the same period, 32 colonial dependencies, which were decolonized, failed to achieve the status of independency (213). When one observes the current situation, it is clear that after centuries of imperial European rule, several of the native Caribbean states’ are struggling to maintain a secure economy and/or stable government, as well as coping with appalling violence amongst the community. The journalist George Yancey, believes that years of “constricted living has led people to self-impulsive behaviors” (7-A). In fact, one of the most significant consequences of colonialism is the psychological damage instilled on this society that still persists today, which has left behind in some, a belief of no worth and hopelessness. Yancey feels, “there is a fundamental link between colonial oppression, crime, addiction, and internal oppression. (7-A). But how did this “link” between colonialism and this nihilistic mindset form. The answer is embedded within history, pointing to evidence that outlines how colonialism has systematically taught several members of the Caricom community to accept the oppression of their rulers.

Although various parts of Europe throughout history such as, Spain, France, and Italy, have colonized many parts of the Caribbean, this thesis focuses specifically on the British imperial rule, because it has had the most influence on the English-speaking nations of the Caricom. This thesis will concentrate on these states and how the British history of colonialism

in the Caribbean has negatively impacted the native community, perpetuating a system of nihilism amongst its members that still exists today.

Colonial history began as early as 1492 when Christopher Columbus first discovered the Caribbean. Columbus and his comrades stumbled not only onto a tropical island, but a land inhabited by natives, later named Amerindians by their rulers. At the time, these people were the only inhabitants; their history, culture and society were the hub of Caribbean life. In a short time the Europeans took over, enslaving or murdering whole populations of Amerindian communities. Over 20,000 million natives were murdered, and essentially an entire culture was eliminated. Great Britain eventually laid its claim on much of the Caribbean, benefiting from agricultural profits and the lucrative business of the Triangular Trade, a system that brought an influx of black slaves to the islands (Palmer 797). The British began to force their culture, history, and policies on the native inhabitants; imposing upon them new religions, governmental policies, and a British system of education.

After the American Revolutionary War, there was a flood of British loyalists who settled in the Caribbean. Catherine Palmer, who has written about the negative effects of tourism and colonialism, explains that settlers from the United States “supported slavery” setting up the parameters of “racial division” early on (797). Palmer observes that in the Caribbean, “The black population consisted of slaves with no rights at all who could be bought and sold at their owner’s discretion, and free blacks, who because of a rigid color bar were restricted from fully participating in the society and economy of the islands” (797). Racial discrimination was rampant, continuing on after emancipation in the late 1830s. Former slaves were banned from prominent positions in the British colonial society and from profitable business ventures. They were refused full rights as citizens, and exploitation of this community was common-place for

white bureaucrats. It is obvious to see how British Imperialism set the groundwork for nihilism amongst members of the Caricom community.

After the abolition of slavery, the British arranged a colonial indoctrination that fostered hatred and self-loathing amongst the native Caribbean's. As Palmer explains, "...the British laid the foundation for much of the island's political, legal, and educational systems" (798). The British education perpetuated the feeling of otherness amongst the natives. The white elite remained in power controlling all aspects of the Caribbean world. It became increasingly difficult for many in the Caribbean community to establish an identity because from birth Caribbeans were deemed as outsiders. Internal oppression, a psychological mindset that takes place when a marginalized group of people begin to hold an oppressive view toward themselves, penetrated the native community. After years of persecution, this psychological outlook festered like a disease. Luis Mendez, a psychologist who specializes in internal oppression explains,

We don't realize how deep society's prejudices affect our guts... 'internalized oppression is nothing but our chemical reaction to external oppression with the vile feelings of worthlessness, shame, and dependency on others. Not until we defeat the external oppression can we begin to deal with our internal demons. (1)

Early on in the colonial era, the Caribbean community had little hope of eliminating "external oppression," since this persecution was present in all facets of the Caribbean life. Mark Tappan, an expert on internal oppression, illustrates specific evidences that caused such nihilistic outlooks. He suggests that agents of oppression utilized "socio-cultural tools" to exert their persecution of a marginalized community. "These tools... come from a variety of sources, including parents, teachers, friends, and the media. They take a variety of forms, from words, phrases, jokes, and books, to pictures, images, television shows and films" (Tappan 2127). The sociocultural tools were ever-present in the lives of the Caribbean community both during and

after colonialism. Caribbean roads were given British names and the established government reflected British regulations/policies. Although slavery was abolished, it was rare that any native Caribbean would hold a position of prominence within society. The white elite controlled all lucrative businesses, media, literature, and film. Caribbean children received British education, where they were taught British culture and history. Seodial Deena, a professor of Caribbean literature explains that the educational approach, "...left natives... in a state of emptiness and powerlessness." The Caricom community lacked an identity because they were forced to learn to revere the "Mother Country." Britain taught the natives that their own history and cultures were insignificant, laying a strong foundation for nihilism amongst members of this group.

As the natives' internal oppression became more and more deep-rooted in their psyche, they began to accept their so-called fate. They found themselves blaming and persecuting each other, rather than focusing on where the oppression came from. Tappan suggests that often the oppressed become oppressors. This notion is referred to as *horizontal violence*. He clarifies that *horizontal violence* takes place when, "... members of the oppressed group engage in violence against their own comrades" (Tappan 2118). This type of violence has two different levels, physical and internal. Physical violence takes the form of rape, torture, physical abuse, and murder. West believes that soaring crime rates amongst marginalized communities is evidence of internal oppression. "But it must be recognized that the nihilistic threat contributes to criminal behavior. It is a threat that feeds on poverty and shattered cultural institutions and grows more powerful as the armors to ward against the weakened" (18). With one of the highest crime rates in the world, the Caribbean has become a place that breeds nihilism and horizontal violence. Cameron Sanchez, a journalist for the TN Global Travel Industry News, reported in 2010 that the Caribbean is leading the world in crime. He explains that, "...the English-

speaking Caribbean, which extends from the Bahamas in the north to Trinidad & Tobago in the south, averages 30 murders per 100,000 inhabitants per year, one of the highest rates in the world” (1). Peter Richards, who wrote the article in 2012 called “Violent Crime Surge in the Caribbean Takes Heavy Toll,” believes that “social inequality” is the issue, and the reason behind the extremely high crime rates in the Caribbean. Richards reported on a study completed by the University of the West Indies that focuses on the actions that need to be taken in regards to the appalling violence that is widespread across the Caribbean. The study showed that most acts of violence were rarely against visitors or tourists. In fact the majority of the hostility was amongst the locals. Not only was violence the problem, but the amount of money spent per state to try and quell the issue has been astronomical. On average each state spends per year about 2.8% of the 4% gross domestic product (Richards 1). This catastrophic loss of revenue leaves Caribbean states completely unstable, and takes away from other important developmental programs such as education, welfare, and healthcare. Such programs are in most cases the only hope in eliminating the nihilistic mindsets of so many. Without adequate funds, many of these programs have or will fail, and internal oppression will grow exponentially. The report also suggested that there is a vital need in “social interventions” in order to combat the problem of crime. Suggesting that these nations begin, “...investing more in education, with 87.1 percent support; programmes for young people (91.7 percent); job creation (92.5 percent); in poor communities (87.7 percent) and in reducing poverty (88.8 percent)” (Richards 3). As violence plagues many nations in the Caribbean, it would be naïve of one to not give some credit to horizontal violence as one of the determining catalysts.

Along with the physical violence that plagues the Caricom community, the dark shadow of internal violence looms as well. This is evident in the intense crime that has led to horizontal

violence, low literacy rates, and poverty. Physical violence and internal violence go hand and hand. Communities, whose internal oppression is at a low, find these issues of crime, illiteracy, and poverty at a much lower rate. This type of nihilism has left many individuals without a purpose, and as West explains, “Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a coldhearted outlook that destroys both individual and others” (14). This hopelessness is a sickness that continues to be passed down to each new generation, creating a generational cancer. Without what Richards referred to as “social interventions,” this cancer will worsen and continue to grow, poisoning many of these nations. With such a volatile atmosphere it is no wonder how challenging it has been for some members of Caricom community to move towards progression. Seodial Deena suggests that the Caribbean, in recent years, is undergoing a sense of “neo-colonialism” that continues to “silence” them (4). So how does one give a voice to the silenced? How can one begin to eliminate these nihilist outlooks? This thesis attempts to answer these questions with a thorough study of the emancipation narrative or what is most commonly known as the multicultural discourse. Nobel Prize Caribbean writer Derek Walcott illustrated in his speech an important metaphor of the state of the Caribbean community. He said, “Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars” (1). Colonialism has broken and even shattered the psyche of this community, and it will be a long time before the vase can ever become whole. Fortunately though, multicultural literature has been, and continues to be, the “glue” that Walcott speaks of. This glue is an important tool in repairing the destruction that has taken place. These freedom narratives discuss the subjects that the rest of the world would like to forget. It is a literature of

rebellion, and it serves not only as a fight against oppression, but also the first step in healing these nihilistic mindsets.

Chapter 2: An Overview of Multiculturalism and how it Combats Nihilism

Multiculturalism is a political philosophy with the belief that many different communities and cultures can peacefully coexist. The push for multiculturalism began with the various Civil Rights Movements that have taken place around the world. Similar to the Caribbean, in the United States the black community had similar problems of nihilism from the damaging effects left over from slavery, segregation, and the ideology of the Jim Crow laws. During the 1960s as civil rights progressed in this country, an educator named Nancy Larrick began questioning what was being taught in classrooms across the country. Her article, “The All-White World of Children’s Books,” was a turning point for both the education and publishing worlds. Larrick claimed her studies were spurred on by a five-year old black girl, who while reading a book, asked her, “Why are they always white children?”(Larrick 63). Struck by the uncanny wisdom spoken by such a young child, Larrick began a study of 5,026 children’s books, finding that only a few (less than 7%) of these stories mentioned any characters with ethnic backgrounds. America, and other countries started to take a serious look at the curriculum of the everyday classroom. Questions were raised: should students learn about other cultures? Why is this important? Where does one find appropriate texts? Eventually, the multicultural discourse was formed, and 50 years later there have been a multitude of studies, articles, and books, that has turned this genre into a vital part of the literary world. As globalization reached an all-time high in the 1990s with the launch of the internet, multiculturalism became the blueprint for people across the globe; never before has the world been given such an unlimited interconnection with each other. As a result, understanding cultural diversity and learning to coexist peacefully through multiculturalism, have become a priority for many communities.

Now that peaceful coexistence is a proven academic goal, how does one go about teaching such a concept to children? The answer is through multicultural literature. Such texts provide not only a means for children to learn acceptance of others, but it is also a way for people from marginalized communities to understand their own culture and identity. All humans go through a period of “identity formation” (Hughes-Hassell 219). It is a vital part of human development, and this process usually takes place during the formidable adolescent years. Sara Hughes-Hassell, a scholar of multicultural literature and its effects, explains,

Although identity formation is a critical task for all adolescents, researchers have found that adolescents of color and indigenous teens are more likely to be actively engaged in exploring their racial and ethnic identity than are white adolescents....teens of color, indigenous teens, and biracial teens think of themselves in terms of race or ethnicity because that is how the rest of the world sees them. (218)

Every day these teenagers become immersed in the principles of the dominant white society (Hughes-Hassell 219). As Hughes Hassell describes it, “stereotypes, omissions, and distortions, combined with an image of white superiority, to some degree socialized children of color.... to value the role models, lifestyles, and images of beauty of white culture over those of their own cultural group” (219). This process creates a disjointed identity for adolescents from marginalized communities. They feel differently and generally unaccepted by society. This is where multicultural literature steps in and really empowers individuals. These stories provide a safe place for marginalized people to reflect on uncomfortable social issues such as racism, prejudice, self-acceptance, and discrimination. Multicultural literature creates what specialists Ernest and Jodene Morrell call a “social awareness” (11). When multicultural texts are a part of a curriculum, two significant events take place. First the child from the marginalized community becomes more self-aware. Reading such selections allows the child to reflect on characters that

have similar experiences as themselves. In turn, the child is able to assimilate his/her own story, and feel relief that there are people out there who understand him/her.

The next event that occurs is the “social awareness” of those around them (Morrell 12). The underlying theme of almost all multicultural texts is the acceptance and tolerance of others. Students from all cultures, whether it is dominant or not, benefit from such texts. These stories not only teach tolerance, but they also permit the reader to empathize with why co-existence is so important in today’s world. Hughes-Hassell reasons that literature then becomes a “window” for individuals, allowing them to see the experiences of others. More importantly it provides those members of the dominant culture to have compassion for others who are “different” from them.

It is clear that when multicultural literature is a part of a curriculum, students from marginalized communities have a much better chance of creating a positive self-image. These individuals begin to understand that they are not alone in their struggle. In this way students identify with a community that is “like” themselves. They begin to realize that feelings of otherness are not their fault, but in fact a flaw that lies within the very institutions in which they reside. Multicultural literature is one of the only forums where these subjects/ideas are acknowledged, and that is why it is the primary solution to such nihilistic mindsets.

Now imagine if such texts were an integral part of the Caribbean education for the last 100 years. Unfortunately this has not been the case. As of March 23, 2011, 67% of Caribbean students have decided it is best to drop out of school (Mills 9-A). Oliver Mills, who wrote the article, “The Recurring Dilemma in Caribbean Education,” explains that historically education is

an “instrument” that ultimately reflected the society’s “social hierarchy” suggesting that the infrastructure of Caribbean education is set up for many of the less privileged class to fail;

Primary education was designed for the lower classes, while a secondary or high school education, was for an elite. The private primary and high schools fostered an elite clientele, based on the ability to pay, and better teachers and resources, while the primary or public school system catered for the masses of the population, with comparably less resources, and teachers who were not well paid.
(9-A)

Kenneth Ramchand, who wrote *The West Indian Novel and its Background*, explains that in the 19th century education was primarily elementary. There were very few funds to support it and the curriculum was not extensive enough to even create a community that had the ability to read or write (3). Ramchand observes that, “The recently freed population, was enthusiastic in the first few years, the apathetic, then skeptical of ‘this great Education.’ They were suspicious of practical instruction as being a planter-shaped design which would restrict them to lower stations in life” (4). The “freed population” had every right to be cautious, because clearly the former colonizers wanted to keep the public ignorant, so they could be easily controlled. It is important to point out that education and curriculum has come a long way since the 19th century. It is no longer considered “elementary.” But the fact of the matter is that high drop-out rates amongst individuals of the Caricom community continue. This illuminates a deeper problem taking root. With a society that has been historically immersed in the racist philosophy of the white elite, it is no surprise that so many leave school early. There is little hope of academic progress for those who come from marginalized or under-developed communities. So how does one begin to address this societal discrepancy? There are numerous opinions and various studies that are dedicated to solving this problem. One immediate action that would show long-term progress is the focused decision to implement multiculturalism into the early education of Caribbean students. Recently this has been an important topic of discussion amongst the academic elites

within Caribbean society (Harris 8). There are opinions from both sides of the spectrum, some pushing for a more mono-cultural ideology, while others are more concentrated on teaching about all the diverse cultures that make up the Caribbean society. There has been some multicultural implementation in various educational programs, but most schools are instructing with the same methods that have been proven to fail the majority of students (Harris 7). Teaching students the importance of tolerance, self-acceptance, and coexistence, would ensure that children would see the value in graduating from their program of studies. It will also create a culture of students who will begin to value each other's differences. Clearly the positive effects of this implementation would not be seen for quite some time. Multiculturalism has been a part of the United States' curriculum since the early to mid-70s, and students of marginalized communities still struggle with self-worth, racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Changing the ideology of a society continues to be a work in progress. But for now, the only true solution to eliminating the nihilism that so many people face is to ensure they are influenced by multicultural literature.

Chapter 3: Kincaid's Emancipation Narrative *The Autobiography of My Mother*

As multicultural literature became an important factor in education over the last 40 years, various Caribbean authors have emerged, creating awareness of the state of people within the Caribbean community. These writers' talents have been unprecedented, with two from the community, V.S. Naipaul and Derek Walcott, recently receiving the Nobel Prize. One of the most significant themes that these authors have focused on is the psychological damage that has come about as a result of colonialism. In fact, one could say that Caribbean writers have declared a war on internal oppression. Jamaica Kincaid, is such an author, and she has become an invaluable weapon in the battle against internal oppression. Her narratives shed light on the plight of the marginalized, and force the reader to empathize. As writer Veronica Marie Gregg explains, Kincaid is "angry" and she embodies, "an anger directed toward Europe's role in the West Indies and the Eurocentric construction of the history of the West Indies" (Gregg 1). Her anger is focused and purposeful, and as a postcolonial writer she is determined to reconstruct the perception of history. Kincaid's formula has been successful; she writes stories that challenge any narrow-minded ideals of race, colonialism, and the people who inhabit the Caribbean. Her literary works begin the progress towards emancipation for those who seem trapped in a prison of internal oppression.

In her novel, *The Autobiography of My Mother*, Kincaid brilliantly paints a portrait of how colonialism has psychologically damaged the characters. The story follows the protagonist, Xuela, an unloved woman who does her best to survive the cruel world of the island of Dominica. Throughout the novel Xuela displays feelings of nihilism, "When we were alone we spoke to each other in French patois, the language of the captive, the illegitimate" (Kincaid 74). One can see how deeply Xuela believes in her own oppression, referring to her native tongue as

the language of the “captive” and the “illegitimate.” Gregg explains that, “Produced by the destructive history of the West Indies, Xuela rages within and against the language that contains this history” (Gregg 15). For Xuela, language of her captors is just another form of oppression. These notions are a learned behavior, and from an early age Xuela is taught to recognize otherness. In school she is condemned by her teacher and her peers for looking less African and more Caribbean. But Xuela recognizes their own self-hatred for their African descent. She describes her teacher as,

.....of the African people that I could see, and she found in this a source of humiliation and self-loathing, and she wore despair like an article of clothing, like a mantle, or a staff on which she leaned constantly, a birthright which she would pass on to us. (Kincaid 15)

Members of the Dominica have been consistently presented with these sociocultural tools as a direct result of colonialism. It is the colonizer’s way of keeping the native inferior. The continuous images are passed on from generation to generation. But Xuela is a fighter, and although she may be a member of a “captive” community, she refuses to let that deter her own self-love.

Some would suggest that Xuela’s unshakeable self-love goes against the very notion of nihilism. But this is not the case; Xuela’s inherent oppression is so ingrained that it is what leads to her corruption. She makes the conscious choice to love herself in spite of the several believed reasons why she should not. “I came to love myself in defiance, out of despair because there was nothing else. Such a love will do, but it will only do, it is not the best kind it has the taste of something left out on the shelf too long that has turned rancid, and when eaten makes the stomach turn” (Kincaid 57). She does not “recommend” this love because she perceives it as a love for the undeserving. Xuela goes to great lengths to love herself when all she observes is

signs of why she should not. This self-love grows despite her internal oppression. Luis Simon in his article entitled, “Triumph of Ambivalence” commends Xuela’s honesty. “Complete and utter honesty like Xuela’s, the text suggests, entails isolation, loneliness, and nihilism. Self-love and self-assertion require not only unblinking independence, but also require accepting the world as a place filled with horror, pain, hate, shame, violence, and destruction” (Simon 33).

Independence is exactly what Xuela strives for, but her journey is long, packed with several obstacles along the way. These obstacles take the shape of oppressive sociocultural tools.

Deena, in his critical essay that focuses on oppressive colonial institutions, explains,

The institutions responsible for these forms of oppression and exploitation are what I call colonial apparatuses, which undermine the colony and colonized to a status of disorder and mimicry. These apparatuses become agents of power and subjectification reducing the colonized to the powerless objects whose futile acts result in betrayal, playacting, corruption, and failure. (90)

The institutions found on Dominica further validate the internal oppression found within the characters. Xuela is bombarded with these repressive tools not only from her father, but her education, step-mother, sexual partners, siblings, peers, and society.

Xuela’s father is her first encounter with repression; early on he emotionally abandons her, teaching her to “mistrust’ her peers. She explains, “...that this insistence on mistrust of others- that people who looked so very much like each other, who shared a common history of suffering and humiliation and enslavement, should be taught to mistrust each other, even as children is no longer a mystery to me” (Kincaid 48). Xuela understands that “mistrust” is a tool that has been engrained in her society, to keep the community inferior. Impressively, Xuela acknowledges that those who should be mistrusted were “beyond our influence” (Kincaid 48). In this instance she is referring to the imperial rule of the colonizers. Xuela understands that to

impact them was outside her community's control. So instead they are trained to turn on each other.

Xuela's stepmother is a prime example of this type of disloyalty. She embodies what Tappan refers to as *horizontal violence*. She saw Xuela as a threat and feared that her husband may love his daughter more than herself. So she treats her step-daughter with disdain, claiming that she could not be her father's daughter because she does not resemble him physically. After her children are born, she even attempts to kill her, giving her a poisonous necklace.

Xuela's stepmother serves as a sociocultural tool of oppression. Yet Xuela is observant enough to realize that her stepmother is also a victim of circumstances. The woman's own self-hatred is vividly characterized by Xuela when she describes the relationship between her stepmother and her children.

She bore a boy first, than she had a girl. This had two predictable outcomes: she left me alone and she valued her son more than her daughter. That she did not think very much of the person who was most like her, a daughter, a female, was so normal that it would have been noticed only if it had been otherwise: to people like us, despising anything that was most like ourselves was almost a law of nature. (Kincaid 52)

The stepmother's favoring the son over her daughter, strikes to the very heart of nihilism. She "despised" her daughter because she "despised" herself. How could the stepmother favor a child that was most like her, when she did not have any love for herself? This type of self-loathing is only a "law of nature" because the stepmother believes in her own oppression. Kincaid's message is clear here, although Xuela's stepmother displays behaviors of *horizontal violence*, she is still very much a victim of colonial tyranny. She is in a prison of her own nihilism, internalizing the prejudicial ideals of her oppressors. The real tragedy is that her pessimistic mindset is inevitably passed down to her children. Her daughter, Elizabeth, grows up to be

literally and figuratively beaten by her own inherent pessimism. Lacking any respect for herself, she allows a man to use her like a dirty rag until she is physically and psychologically broken.

Xuela's step-brother, the pride and joy of his parent's eye, dies suddenly of a strange illness. Xuela describes that, "Before he died his body became a river of pus. Just as he died, a large brown worm crawled out of his left leg; it lay there, above the ankle as if waiting to be found by a wanderer one morning." (Kincaid 111). Why did this boy die so tragically? The son embodies the hope and ideals of his corrupt parents. His mother favors him, and his father sees him as his legacy. His death puts an end to their fleeting happiness. The way in which he dies is curious as well. The pus that seems to overtake his body, becomes a metaphor for the nihilistic distortion that has crept up inside the natives of the Dominica. Kincaid's message is that this internal oppression will be the natives' ruin. The worm invades the boy, and this worm is a representation Colonialism. It is what has made the boy sick, just as it makes the villagers sick.

Xuela's father is yet another significant character in the novel who displays nihilistic behaviors through *horizontal violence*. By all accounts, he is perceived as successful, but he deviantly makes his fortune on the exploitation of others. He validates his actions with religion, and the idea that members of his community deserved it.

My father had become a Methodist, he attended Church every Sunday; he taught Sunday school. The more he robbed, the more money he had, the more he went to church; it is not an unheard-of-linking. And the richer he became, the more fixed the mask of his face grew, so that now I no longer remember what he really looked like. (Kincaid 41)

Xuela's father mimicked the actions of his oppressors; not only does he exploit the villagers he also takes on the persecutor's religion. She questions how one could attend church and teach Sunday school, and still rationalize actions of exploitation. Gregg explains that, "For Xuela,

when the conquered accept the gods of the conqueror, they help to build the system that relies on their defeat and their dehumanization” (Gregg 13). The European Christian religion becomes yet another institution that feeds on the natives’ nihilism. Xuela sees a dogma that has been used to rationalize superiority and persecution. Her father’s mimicry of his oppressors allows him to rationalize his neglect and maltreatment of others. The colonizers came, conquered, and essentially robbed everything. Xuela’s father is *horizontally violent* to his peers because that is what he has been taught. The institution of colonialism serves as his education. Exploitation is the only way he knows how to find success.

Kincaid essentially paints a picture of characters who are deeply affected by an internal disease. Albert Memmi explains that a “colonized society is a diseased society in which internal dynamics no longer succeed in creating new structures. Its century-hardened face has become nothing more than a mask under which it slowly smothers and dies” (Deena 90). This illness of oppression affects every outlook, decision, and behavior of each character, and this affliction is a direct result of colonialism. The very institutions set up by the colonizers are the sociocultural tools that perpetuate these characters’ nihilism. Tappan explains, “Imagine therefore, the power that these cultural tools amass over the course of many years and many generations....Imagine also the challenge that this poses to critical educators seeking to change both oppression and domination” (Tappan 2133-2134). It is the educator’s hope that this “change” will take place in the near future but the truth is progression may take years. Fortunately, multicultural literature is the weapon educators desperately need to fight this nihilistic war. Kincaid’s motives in writing this novel are clearly to uplift those whose internal oppression limits their potential. By shining a light on the utter depravation left behind by colonialism, Kincaid opens up the door that leads to the path of healing.

As Xuela grows into a woman, she is still confronted with obstacles of oppression everywhere she turns. At age 14 she is sent to live with the LaBattes, a married couple. In this house she is sexually exploited by the husband, guided by the encouragement of Mrs. LaBatte, who is no longer desirable to her spouse. Such abuse would be enough to break most young girls, but not Xuela. As reviewer Andrea Stuart describes, she remains, “An act of will” (45). Xuela takes control of her sexuality refusing to let the intended exploitation defeat her. When she becomes pregnant she precedes with an abortion; seeing motherhood, and all that it entails, as another way for someone to rule her. Simon explains that, “Xuela’s defiant self-assertion encompasses control over her body.” He goes on to describe the abortion as a life changing incident. “After this pivotal and physically torturous event, Xuela feels permanently altered-she learns that she is capable of carrying her life in her own hands (Simon 34). Here Xuela is making a conscious decision to take charge of her life. Kincaid is clearly developing a character that is the antithesis of colonization. In a world where so many are controlled by the imperial rule of the British, Xuela decides to try and take back the power. She refuses to be afflicted with the generational cancer that has plagued her community.

Patrick Taylor describes in his critical article that focuses on the concept of “decolonization” in Caribbean literature that,

As an emancipatory narrative, the anticolonial story provides possibilities for reconstructing distorted communicative processes by enabling subjects to decipher their own historical trajectories and recreate them as incessant movement towards reciprocal human understanding. (Taylor 81)

Kincaid accomplishes this recreation to history with her protagonist, Xuela. She is an iconic hero of the “anticolonial” story. Unfortunately this triumph of independence and self-love does come with stark consequences. Xuela encounters love for the first time with a man named

Roland. She falls deeply for him, but only succumbs to him physically. Ultimately she lets him go because Xuela perceives love as a weakness, another way to be controlled. On page 216 she explains, “Romance is the refuge of the defeated; the defeated need songs to soothe themselves, they need a sweet tune to soothe themselves, for their whole being is a wound; they need a soft bed to sleep on, for when they are awake it is a nightmare, the dream of sleep is their reality” (Kincaid 216). The “nightmare” Xuela is referring to is the powerlessness of love. It is incomprehensible for Xuela to surrender to love because she would be unable to maintain control. Instead Xuela makes the mindful decision to advance her social and financial status by marrying an English doctor. She sees this action as a triumph. “And this man I married was of the victors, and so much a part of him was this situation, the situation of the conqueror, that only through a book of history could he be reminded of a time when he might have been something other...” (Kincaid 217). Xuela’s final step towards realizing her personal identity, her “great revenge” is to marry a man of high-class, and a subsequent colonizer (Kincaid 216). This marriage is the definitive act of nihilism. Xuela’s internal oppression runs so deep that it pushes her to sacrifice a life filled with love for a life of security.

No one can really blame her for making such a decision. Her life has been one of displacement and disorder, stability was never part of the equation. Xuela is a very complex character, but when one observes closely the tragedy in her triumph is easily seen. Xuela’s plight can be directly linked to the victimization of colonialism. Kincaid constructs a narrative that vividly illustrates this link, giving a voice to the oppressed. As Taylor describes it, “...the main thrust of Caribbean writing has been directed towards reconstructing and emancipatory counter-narrative in opposition to the dominant European discourse” (Taylor 79). *The Autobiography of My Mother* does just that; it opposes and breaks down stereotypes; it turns the

major ideals on its heel, and shines a light on the struggle of a marginalized society that is slowly recovering from centuries of persecution. Xuela's independence does create a rebellion against Colonial tyranny. Her will to control her life, instead of allowing it to be controlled, is an attempt to free herself from oppression. Unfortunately her nihilism is so ingrained that she can only free herself socially, financially, and/or materialistically. She remains psychologically "captive" (Kincaid 74). Xuela's choices and behaviors indicate the deep repressive corruption that lies within. Her inherent pessimism with regard to her language, culture, race, and heritage is the real devastation. Such a complex character can only lead the reader to feel a deep sense of compassion. Her plight guides the audience in understanding the psychological upheaval these communities live in. It is an upheaval that will take several years to mend, considering the centuries that it took to create. Multicultural literature has been the first attempt to analyze this problem of internal oppression, and bring to light the utter plague it creates during this decolonization period. Such literature helps to free those who are afflicted with this disease, or at least speed the healing of such nihilistic mindsets.

Chapter 4: Selvon's Emancipation Narrative; *The Lonely Londoners*

Published in 1956 *The Lonely Londoners*, by Sam Selvon, is a novel before its time. It is filled with events that brought about discussion of racial barriers, social, political, and economic injustices, and many other obstacles for Caribbean immigrants who were attempting assimilation into the British society. At the time of the novel's publication, Britain was experiencing a wave of immigration of about 25,000. Many of these immigrants came from Caribbean nations. The city of London became a smorgasbord of different cultures. And although many travelled to the Motherland for a better way of life, they found that their pursuit of happiness was barred by cultural and racial prejudices of the dominant white culture.

The Lonely Londoners is an eye-opening account that vividly portrays the hardships of assimilation for many West Indians during the 1940s and 1950s. It is important to note that these struggles are not only external but internal. The cast of characters are a group of very different individuals who are trying to find their place in a world dominated by oppression. As each individual is met with obstacles, most of the characters begin to internalize their struggles, and rather than faulting the institution that is responsible, they blame themselves. Selvon's efforts to discuss unpopular topics were not only courageous but important for multicultural literature. Lisa Kabesh, who wrote "Mapping Freedom, or its Limits: The Politics of Movement in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*," sees the novel, "... as a work of imaginative or discursive reverse colonization, (it) is an important one, for it recognizes that the text performs the very act of resistance that it documents" (3). Selvon's novel is an "act of resistance" against colonization, racism, and oppression both internally and externally. Like Kincaid, Selvon has joined the fight to not only rewrite history, but to eliminate nihilism in the Caribbean community.

As the story begins, Moses, the protagonist of the novel, is picking up Henry Oliver. Henry, like many immigrants, has travelled thousands of miles from Trinidad in pursuit of a better life in Great Britain. Without a stitch of luggage, or even a coat for the cold winter, Henry Oliver valiantly stepped onto the London dock beaming with optimism. His positive outlook on life annoys Moses, who knows full well the realities of London society. When Henry refuses to listen to Moses' advice on the social hierarchy of London, Moses's renames Henry, Galahad, a satiric spin-off of Henry's gallant attitude towards his new world. This outlook is short-lived for Galahad. Two days in the new city and Galahad begins to understand the prejudicial barriers that exist between himself and the dominant white culture. When Galahad proclaims that he is a skilled electrician, and believes he will have no problem finding a job in his field, Moses does his best to warn the newcomer of how the employment office works. "They don't tell you outright that they don't want coloured fellas, they just say sorry, the vacancy get filled" (Selvon 46). Galahad is turned away from any skilled work and told, at best, he can only perform menial labor. Kabesh explains that,

The key point in Selvon's depiction of the welfare office is not only that he reveals the artificial origins of popular racisms- that immigrants are lazy, for example, or that nonwhites are best suited for manual labor- but that 1950's was also a periods of race formation of the internalization of racist exclusions and racial hierarchies previously externalized in Britain's system of colonial rule. (7)

Selvon brings these notions to light to not only reveal the injustice, but to emancipate members of the Caribbean community. This illustrates to the reader that the immigrant is not the issue, the responsibility lies with the corrupt institution of London society. Unfortunately, for Galahad and several other characters in the novel, this corruption is never recognized. Instead the characters choose to internalize the oppression that surrounds them.

Galahad, a once positive man becomes downtrodden and begins to buy into the discrimination of the British society. His internal oppression is overwhelming, one night he stares at the color of his skin and expresses his feelings, “ ‘Colour, is you that causing all this, you know. Why the hell you can’t be blue, or red, or green, if you can’t be white? You know is you that cause a lot of misery in the world. Is not me, you know is you. Look at you, you so black and innocent, and this time you causing misery all over the world!’ “ (Selvon 88). This is a heart-breaking example of Galahad’s nihilism. Instead of acknowledging the injustice of discrimination based on his skin color, he internalizes the discrimination believing in its validity.

Nihilistic mindsets are prevalent throughout the novel. Harris, an immigrant from Barbados, not only displays this internal oppression, but he also commits horizontal violence towards other members of his community. Unlike other characters in the stories, Harris completely transforms into an Englishman, or at least he tries to. As the narrator explains,

...he like English customs and things, he does be polite and say thank you and he does get up in the bus and the tube to let woman sit down, which is a thing even them Englishmen don’t do. And when he dress, you think is some Englishman going to work in the city, bowler and umbrella, and briefcase tuck under the arm, with The Times fold up in the pocket so the name would show, and he walking upright like it is he alone who alive in the world. Only thing, Harris face black. (Selvon 111)

Harris believes in total assimilation, and so he does his best to rid himself of everything that is Caribbean. He gets rid of his Caribbean clothes, mannerisms, customs, and he even changes his dialect. This complete transformation hits at the very heart of Harris’s internal oppression. He does not change to better his life, but more out of desperation. Harris believes in the prejudice and stereotypes placed upon his culture, and he is ashamed of it. This is clear in the scene where he throws a lavish party; Harris drives himself insane with worry that his Caribbean friends will embarrass him in front of other English people. He tries his hardest to explain his concerns to

his friends, “Now it have decent people here tonight, and if you don’t get on respectable it will be a bad reflection not only on me but on all the boys, and you know how things hard already in Brit’n. The English people wills say we are still uncivilized and don’t know how to behavior properly...” (Selvon 122). The “decent people” Harris is referring to is the Englishmen, because he does not associate anything decent with the Caribbean culture. Sadly, Harris’s shame is an act of horizontal violence. He has turned on his comrades because his internal oppression runs so deep. It is Harris’ belief that to behave English is to be better, and for him, this validates the strong humiliation he carries towards his fellow immigrants. Selvon cleverly captures Harris’ embarrassment in a somewhat comedic form, but it is difficult to laugh at how much nihilism has affected this character.

Internal oppression makes characters behave in ways that is probably uncharacteristic of how they would act in their native lands. This is definitely the case for Bartholomew, or Bart as “the boys” refer to him. Born with a lighter skin tone, once Bart took residence in London he began telling everyone that he was Latin, and from South America. In his mind, if he could disassociate himself from his blackness, then maybe he would be more accepted by society. Bart’s nihilism is so strong, that he worries constantly about the influx of immigrants into Britain, and how it will affect his position in London. “ ‘If a fellar too black, Bart not companying him much, and he don’t like to be found in the company of the boys, he always have an embarrass air when he with them in public, he does look around as much as to say: ‘I here with these boys, but I not one of them, look at the colour of my skin’” (Selvon 63). Bart’s attitude and disdain for his Caribbean counterparts is not only another sign of his internal oppression but also an example of horizontal violence. Bart’s denial of his cultural heritage to strangers belittles his friends. Bart feels justified in his actions because his skin tone is lighter

so he believes he has the right to demean his friends. He openly participates in the racial prejudice of members of his own community. And to finalize the complete rejection of his own Caribbean heritage, Bart marries a white girl, hoping his association with her will bring him true acceptance with the dominant white culture. Sadly, he finds this notion to be completely false once he meets his new father-in-law, who greets Bart with utter hostility. “ ‘Get out! Get out! I say!’ the father wanted to throw Bart out the house, because he don’t want curly-haired children in the family” (Selvon 65). Bart finds, like several others in the novel, that acceptance by the English is inconceivable and this realization drives him deeper into nihilism.

The father-in-law’s abhorrence towards Bart is characteristic of what Tappan calls “internal dominance” (2120). Internalized dominance is a deep-seeded belief in one’s own superiority or dominance over groups of people. Persons who suffer from internal dominance are almost always members of the prominent mainstream group within a society. Tappan explains, “Internalized domination is likely to consist of feelings of superiority, normalcy, and self-righteousness....” (2120). Based on Tappan’s definition Bart’s father-in-law felt so justified in the belief of his own superiority that he refused to accept his daughter’s decision to marry a Caribbean immigrant. This type of behavior perpetuates the validity of the immigrants’ internal oppression; an unending cycle where each event justifies the other. Selvon ingeniously illustrates this internal phenomenon, shining a light on the uncomfortable reality of London’s metropolitan society. These descriptions deconstruct prejudices and stereotypes, providing the reader with compassionate knowledge that all is not right in this world.

Bart is not the first character of the novel to pursue a white woman. In fact, it is a reoccurring goal for almost all of the boys. One could interpret this as yet another example of internal oppression. Frantz Fanon, an expert psychologist who wrote *Black Skin. White Masks*,

suggests that, “By loving me (the white woman) proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization. I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine” (63). As the men continue to pursue white women the protagonist explains that once they find one they “hold on tight,” parading her around so everyone can see (Selvon 65). Selvon even touches on interracial marriages, and how most couples go back to the Caribbean with their white wives, believing the relationship will last. “They go back with English wife and what happen? As soon as they get there, the places where their white wife could go, they can’t go. Next thing you hear, the wife horning them and the marriage gone puff “(Selvon 133). The message sent to the reader is that biracial relationships are doomed to fail whether it is in London or in the Caribbean, but not as a result as a lack of love, but because the institutions, under which these relationships are supposed to be nurtured, are working against them. When society has put in place cultural barriers, these become unshakeable walls between interracial couples. Combined with internal oppression and dominance that each partner inevitably has, what are the odds that a biracial marriage would last during this time and place? It is astoundingly clear how much damage internal oppression and dominance creates for individuals from both sides of the spectrum.

Selvon’s illustrations of London’s residences and the differences between the ghetto, Notting Hill and Harrow Road, and the upper-class housing called Belgravia and Knightsbridge, is a poignant moment in the story.

It divide up in the little worlds, and you stay in the world you belong to and you don’t know anything about what happening in the other one except what you read in the papers....To stop one of them rich tests when they are going to a show in Leicester Square and ask them for a bob, they might give you, but if you want to talk about the conditions under which you living, they haven’t time for that. They

know all about that already. People get tired after a time with who poor and who rich and who catching arse and who well off, they don't care anymore. (Selvon 74)

These problems are issues of complacency, and this complacency derives from internal domination and oppression. Kalpaki a scholar of multicultural literature, suggests that the immigrants of London, understand that the streets "...are not paved in gold, and they adapt" (250). Opening up the discussion of complacency through literature forces everyone to face their demons, and this is the first step in eliminating them. But not all characters are complacent with their surroundings. Tanty, the female relative of Tolroy, is a character who defies all nihilist mindsets. Kabesh explains that Tanty is the "most effective agent for change in *The Lonely Londoners*" (12). She goes on to suggest that, "While Moses the 'welfare officer' disperses blacks across the city to counter white fears surrounding immigration and miscegenation, Tanty refuses to be separated from her family and her community" (32). Tanty represents unity in the Caribbean community. She emphasizes the importance of unity. This notion is clear in one of the first scenes of the novel on the docks. Tanty and her family had just arrived from Jamaica and a reporter asks her what will she do in London? Tanty answers, "Why. I come to look after the family" (Selvon 31). When the reporter asks if he could take her picture she refuses to let him, unless he will take a photograph of the entire family. This scene sets a certain tone for Tanty's character. Everything she does in London is focused on helping her family. Tanty is Selvon's symbol of strength against a world of nihilism. She takes on her fears with courage, unlike many of her Caribbean counterparts. She valiantly travels through the city of London, even though she is deathly afraid of the buses and the tube. She stands up for herself and others as she did with Lewis when he confronted her about his missing wife, whom he frequently abused. "I don't know,' Tanty say. She didn't come here at all. But if she left you she have a right to'" (Selvon 70). Tanty has self-worth and pride in her heritage. Selvon sends a message

through Tanty, that Caribbeans need to stick together, and remember that they should not settle for complacency. It seems Selvon's answer to nihilism is embodied in Tanty. Through his characterization of her, it is clear how a different attitude can change one's entire outlook on life.

The Lonely Londoners was clearly a ground-breaking novel. Through the stories of the various characters, readers become emancipated. With each individual story stereotypes are broken and social injustices are revealed. The reader is inundated with compassionate knowledge of how psychologically damaging certain institutions can be even after the prevailing years of colonialism. The issue of internal oppression is extremely prevalent throughout the novel, but Selvon's illustration of this allows the reader to identify the problem and face it head on. This is the first step in eliminating the demons that plague so many within the Caribbean society.

Conclusion: The Impact of Multicultural Literature on Nihilism

The Autobiography of My Mother and *The Lonely Londoners*, are two examples of how multicultural literature deconstructs stereotypes, preconceived notions, and allows the reader to either relate or have a compassionate understanding of the extreme damages left behind by colonialism. These novels bring the uncomfortable issues of internal oppression and its effects, to the fore-front of the public's mind. Each story not only guides, but forces the reader to face the destruction created by colonial rule. This generational cancer of internal oppression has taken hundreds of years to slowly infect so many people of the Caribbean, and it may take just as long to repair these destructive mindsets. West explains that this affliction, although "incurable" does have a chance for recovery. He suggests that there is,

...a chance for people to believe that there is hope for the future and meaning to struggle...Nihilism is not overcome by arguments or analyses; it is tamed by love and care. Any disease of the soul must be conquered by a turning of one's soul. This turning is done through one's own affirmation of one's worth- an affirmation fueled by the concern of others. A love ethic must be at the center of a politics of conversion. (18-19)

This compassion or "love," for now takes the form of multicultural literature. It is the only forum where discussions of internal oppression are extensive. Governments are concerned with the external problems and do not seem to understand the external cannot be fixed unless the internal is dealt with. These "social interventions," must be strategic, and not just a plan to give handouts to the poor and the weary. Politicians and leaders need to focus on what specifically is being taught in school with concentrations in character education and social skills. West observes that people who suffer from nihilism "...hunger for identity, meaning and self-worth" (12-13). This is why so many have lashed out, committing unspeakable crimes against one another. Nihilism breeds a cold heart and a dismal outlook on life. Those who are afflicted care little for themselves or others. Relief, it seems, for these members of the Caricom community

who suffer from internal oppression is through multicultural literature. And the only means for this literature to influence the masses is by implementing such lessons and texts in Caricom schools. According to Harris, the education policies have a long way to go before that goal can be reached. Harris explains that,

An examination of what education is for, the objectives of curriculum, the context of the Caribbean (social, economic and political) and the psychology of learning reveals a great need for and relevance of multicultural education in the curriculum policy and practice of the Caribbean, as it seems quite facilitative of these ideals. This however, suggests a revamping of teacher training programs. Teachers may need to take courses in or attend several seminars on multicultural education. Also, this will require teachers who can train teachers in multicultural competence across professions. This raises questions though on the extent to which teachers are prepared and willing to facilitate this process of change. (14)

This “revamping” of this system must be done, before multiculturalism can truly be a part of the education in Caricom schools. Unfortunately even after this implementation, it will be years before we see a significant rise of success for students who suffer from internal oppression. Everyone must take ownership in not only the teaching but the learning of these philosophies.

For now, the most important step in this process of healing is to continue to have an open discussion about the problem. Selvon and Kincaid have successfully accomplished this. They, along with others, show how multicultural literature can provide a forum for that discussion, guiding the public in understanding the issues of nihilism, and how deeply it impacts members of the Caricom community. It is important for Caribbean writers to keep on writing, and to shine a light on all of the negative effects of colonialism. Continued open discussions of these issues are the only way for marginalized individuals to eventually find the road of recovery.

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