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**SAM SELVON'UN YALNIZ LONDRALILAR ESERİNDE
YANSITILAN ALDATICI LONDRA KAVRAMI**

***THE CONCEPT OF ILLUSIONARY LONDON PORTRAYED IN
SAM SELVON'S LONELY LONDONERS***

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Öz

Sanayileşme sonrası, Britanya eşi benzeri görülmemiş bir şekilde gelişmeye başladı ve sadece ülkenin fiziksel yapısı değil toplumun kültürel öğeleri de değişti. Şehirler daha fazla büyüdü, yeni fabrikalar ortaya çıkmaya başladı ve eski evlerin yerini modern yapılar aldı. Hammaddeye olan ihtiyaç yeni toprakları keşfetme ve uzak bölgelere yolculuğa yol açtı. Uzak toprakların ilk ziyaretçileri farklı meslek gruplarından insanlar, din adamları ve tüccarlardı. Adım adım kolonileşme ortaya çıkmaya başladı, sömürgeci uzak ulusların kaynaklarını sömürmek için yerleşmeye başladı. Sömürgecilik o kadar etkiliydi ki sömürülen ülkeler değersizleştirildi ve o ülkelerin yerlileri köleleştirildiler. Sömürülen ülkelerin vatandaşları kendi ülkelerinde köle olarak çalıştırılmaya mahkum edildiler işgalciyle daha alt bir düzeyde

görüldüler. Kolonileşme sonrası dönemde, sömürülenler iş, daha iyi eğitim ve karınlarını doyuracakları yiyecek arayışına başladılar. Sömürülen ülkelerdeki bir çok yazar, kolonileşme sonrası dönemi romanlarında yansıtmaya yöneldiler. Trinidad'lı Sam Selvon, göçmenlerin İngiltere'de karşılaştıkları zorlukları ele alan yazarlardan biridir. Bu makalenin amacı, Sam Selvon' un *Yalnız Londralılar* romanında sömürülenlerin nasıl bir muameleye maruz kaldıklarını ve hayatta kalmak için nasıl tepki verdiklerini analiz etmektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sam Selvon, Yalnız Londralılar, Dekolonizasyon, Aldatıcı görüntü.

Abstract

After industrialization, Britain began to develop with an unprecedented speed and not only the physical structure of the country but also the cultural elements of its society changed. The cities grew bigger, new factories began to flourish and old houses were replaced by modern constructions. The need to raw materials increased which gave way to traveling to distant territories and discovering new lands. The first visitors of remote lands were people from different occupations, ranging from clergymen to traders. Step by step colonization began to emerge and in time, the exploiter settled down to exploit the sources of the Commonwealth. The exploitation was so influential that occupied countries were devalued and Indians of those countries were even enslaved. The habitants of the exploited countries were doomed to work as slaves in their own countries and were not considered inferior to their occupiers. After the decolonization period, the occupied searched for jobs, better education and more dramatically food to feed them. Many writers from Caribbean islands have tended to reflect the effects of decolonization in their novels. Sam Selvon, from Trinidad, is one of the authors dealing with the difficulties which migrants experience in Britain. The aim of this paper is to analyze how occupied are treated in 'mother country' and how they react in the occupier's country in order to survive in Sam Selvon's novel titled *Lonely Londoners*.

Keywords: Sam Selvon, Lonely Londoners, Decolonization, Illusionary vision.

Introduction

Born in San Fernando, Trinidad, in 1923 Samuel Selvon was a leading Caribbean writer having produced short stories and poetry after his graduation from the college in Trinidad. In 1950, he left the island, on which he spent his childhood, and migrated to London where he thought his art could develop and he could gain recognition. Since Selvon thought that it was impossible to make his literal voice heard in his country, exploited by the white man, he migrated to England where he did not consider a place of exile; on the contrary, a place enabling him to improve his authorship. In 1956, he wrote *The Lonely Londoners*, his best-known and commercially most successful novel, to

address migrant experience by employing London and as the main setting of his fiction. The novel successfully depicts the experiences of migrants from Caribbeans where they were exposed to systematic exploitation during the colonial period.

Migration as a colonial and postcolonial phenomenon has been one of the issues authors have concerned. Compulsorily or not, we come across mass migration of people from their own territories to different regions throughout history. For instance, before the 19th century many Africans were shipped to work in British colonies in the Caribbeans as slaves. They were exiled from their own lands and forced to work for the exploiters who did not value them as human beings. As a result of compulsory migration, most of the enslaved people lost their connections with their families which resulted in a lost generation. After the abolition of slavery, formerly enslaved people migrated to Britain where they were recruited in the army or worked as servants. Because of the labour shortage in Britain, the number of the Caribbean migrants arriving in Britain increased unprecedentedly after the second world war. The country of the invader was considered the country full of hopes like better jobs, qualified education paving the way for more humanistic living conditions. For these reasons, inmates of African countries caused a population boom in Britain. The rapid increase as Klanicova suggests was because ‘‘the citizens of the *Commonwealth* did not have any difficulties migrating to the ‘‘mother land’’ since they did not face any legal restrictions in coming and working in the United Kingdom and though Caribbean English was different from standard English, their mother tongue was still English’’. (2010:9) Seemingly, the ease of migrating to the ‘‘mother land’’ in terms of political and linguistic issues formed a sense of similarity between the oppressed and the oppressor but the situation was not as promising as it seemed.

It is a fact that through missionary activities, colonization and cultural exploitation, the image of Britain was inculcated into the minds of the colonized and it was the country of might prosperity and power for the oppressed. Britain was the place of employment, housing and the country to belong to; that’s why, many Caribbeans had to leave their own homelands to this country with a different socio-cultural structure and climate. Thinking that the streets of London are ‘‘paved with gold’’ various characters from *Commonwealth* migrate to England and through the characters he creates, Selvon describes their unending search for homes, jobs and money. Though the fictionalized individuals arrive in London hoping to establish new lives, they are not able to fulfill what they hope since the life in London is totally different from what they had imagined. The search for food, job and better educational

opportunities urge lots of migrants to leave their own territories and move to an illusionary world where they are considered other. Facing the difficulties in Britain, most of the migrants are doomed to live in harsh conditions and even starve. The migrants as portrayed in the novel are stuck between desperation and hope to go back to their own countries. On one hand, the oppressed endeavor to survive by working in factories for long hours on the other, dream of saving enough money to establish a future in their home lands. Dramatically, the occupied are displaced and unlike their imaginary visions, they do not feel to belong to a culture which alienates them. In addition to economic hopelessness, they lose their links with their own culture which results in a complete corruption.

Illusionary London portrayed in *The Lonely Londoners*.

The novel -rich in the characters- begins with Moses travel to Waterloo station to fetch one of the fellows coming from Trinidad. *The Lonely Londoners* defined by Çal ‘‘ is an extremely successful example of how skillful and author may be in the presentation of the whole community through the use of dialectal language by the third person’’. (2012:64) Based on the third person narrator, the novel just from the beginning provides the readers with class discrimination and racism as Eckstein states; ‘‘*The Lonely Londoners* astutely observes a city thoroughly segregated by the intersectional lines of class and race.’’ (2017:13) As the central figure, Moses is expected to meet the new comers coming from West Indies and if possible find them places to stay and jobs to work. On one hand, Selvon tends to present the hopeful arrival by voicing a new comer named Galahad as; ‘‘What luggage? I ain’t have any. I figure is no sense to load up myself with a set of things. When I start a work I will buy some things’’ (Selvon,1956: 6) on the other, displays the desperation Moses feels as he knows what to be a migrant is in London. ‘‘It was here that Moses did land when he come to London, and he have no doubt that when the time come, if it ever come, it would be here he would say good-bye to the big city. Perhaps he was thinking is time to go back to the tropics, that’s why he feeling sort of lonely and miserable’’ (Selvon,1956:26).

According to the Selvon’s description London is a city where people do not know what is happening in the next room adjacent to them, it divides its dwellers, creates little worlds and people stay in the world designated for them. Additionally, people are unaware of each other’s lives unless they read in the newspapers. In such a city, it is not easy to survive because the Caribbeans are exposed to racial discrimination though it is not explicitly shown. Eckstein highlights the

obvious discrimination as; ‘‘The Lonely Londoners observes a city thoroughly segregated by the intersectional lines of class and race’’ (2017:8). Harrow Road, described as the setting where working class belongs to, is so rudimental, the walls of the houses are cracked and they have neither hot water nor bath. It is a world full of spades whose rooms are separated by walls and the streets are clean only when it rains. The spades are convicted to live in that world since they do not have equal job opportunities as the white have. The Black have hard works despite the different talents they have and they are never paid the fees they deserve. Selvon through his character Lewis, underlines the disparity between the two races by saying; ‘‘Tolroy take Lewis to the factory and get a work for him. It wasn’t so hard to do that, for the work is a hard work and mostly is spades they have working in the factory, paying lower wages than they would have to pay white fellars’’ (Selvon,1956:67). Parallel to Selvon’s novel, in his work *Black Skin White Masks*, Frantz Fanon tries to display the attitudes of white community toward the Black in European countries. He claims that the colored are considered savages and even the small children get scared when they encounter a black person in a kind of setting. Like Fanon, Selvon presents the attitudes of white by the lenses of a small child. Galahad as one of the figures emigrating from Trinidad coincides with a woman and her small child. As soon as the child sees the colored man he shows his fear caused by the blackness of Galahad who bends down to pat his cheek. ‘‘Mummy, look at that black man! A little child, holding on to the mother hand, look up at Sir Galahad. But Galahad skin like rubber at this stage, he bend down and pat the child cheek, and the child cower and shrink and begin to cry’’ (Selvon,1956:87).

At the first glance, London- the capital of the occupier- fascinates people who were once exploited for the richness it provides. London is thought to be the city enabling the occupied to actualize their dreams. The dream-like portrayal of London changes as soon as a migrant arrives in London and faces the bitter reality. The Migrants, having hope to feed themselves and save money to send their families, consider London the city of desperation and loneliness since they are not accepted by the English to their flats to eat, drink and even talk. Selvon claims that they tolerate the West Indies but in reality, they never accept them. Although they marry white girls they are unable to rent flats from certain neighbourhoods and the children born are called ‘‘darkie’’ (Selvon,1956:131) by the white children at schools. West Indies are lonely in their so-called *mother land* and they are isolated. One of the two or three black women in the book- Tolroy’s mother- is obliged to work as a dish washer at a restaurant without seeing what is

happening outside the kitchen. She is so isolated from London that she is shocked by the number of people coming and going from the restaurant and Selvon portrays the isolation by saying; ‘‘only from the washing up Ma form a idea of population of London’’ (Selvon,1956:81).

As a part of isolation and alienation the emigrants experience, the language is not a link combining the two races. After the mass emigration from *Commonwealth* countries, the oppressed attempt to adapt to the new life they meet in the new country. Although they share the same language, they are not considered equal and the discrimination spreads in all the society. ‘‘Most worrying for them was, that it was not only a small community of active racists, such as members of the National Front, who demonstrated hostility or even hatred towards them. They knew that those feelings spread across practically the whole society’’. (Klanicova,2010:15) They know English but the dialectic differences emerge when they try to communicate with English. West Indian English, spoken in Britain, has dialectic differences and it hinders the communication between the two races. The emigrants, forced to lead miserable lives in the colonizer’s country, speak the same language with English citizens but the sharp distinction between the two dialects never disappear. For linguistic mimicry, Fanon exemplifies a negro’s situation in Europe by underlining his efforts to use bombastic words when he writes or speaks in order to reach an equality with the Europeans and their achievements (2008:43). In *Lonely Londoners*, however, West Indians in London may not be using bombastic words but the black characters featured in the novel are reflected to state hardships leading to communicational difficulties in the same city. Galahad as one of the figures in *Lonely Londoners* invites a British girl to his basement room. Just from the very first moment, he speaks English and asks questions to the white girl but Galahad, claiming that there is nothing wrong with the language he is talking, is concretized by the author to emphasize that there is not a mutual understanding between the colonized and the colonizer. ‘‘You get the raise the foreman was promising you? Galahad ask, for something to say. What did you say? You know it will take me some time to understand everything you say. The way you West Indians speak’’ (Selvon,1956:93). London defined as the city; where migrants can’t see where they are going and so cold that they have to light fire to keep warm’’ (Selvon,1956:80) forces the emigrants to develop some attitudes in order not to be excluded from the British community. As a result of inferiority complex, the black try to mimic the oppressor in terms of the ways they get dressed and the attitudes they have toward

the members of their own nations. The inferiority complex is so intensified among the figures that they attempt to form a new identity. Once the emigrants arrive in London, they adopt a new way of dressing which is not peculiar to their own national identity. Not only the illiterate but also educated ones from West Indies mimic Europeans expecting to seem European and to be a part of the occupier's land. Cap- the Nigerian student migrating to England- adorns his English with bombastic words and gets dressed like the British. Though he emigrated to England to study, he loses his individual goals and spends all his money on woman. He continues to wear the same clothes and most of the time remains hungry but he never gives up washing his clothes every day to appear like a gentleman. The mimicry of European clothes from rags to fashionable style is tackled in the novel and Selvon presents Galahad's useless effort to seem English. In addition to his mimicry of English way of dressing he develops an artificial way of behavior when saluting the English and he is not even interested in whether they answer or not "So, cool as a lord, the old Galahad walking out to the road, with plastic raincoat hanging on the arm, and the eyes not missing one sharp craft that pass, bowing his head in a polite 'Good evening'".... (Selvon,1956:87).

Mimicry- the exaggerated copying of culture and language- is the result of the imposition of the colonizer on the colonized. As a result of the asserted authority, the colonized are forced to be like colonizer and adopt its culture. One of the postcolonial terms- is concretized by Selvon through one more character named Harris. He mimics the English in that he organizes fetes, prefers English clothes and even gives priorities to women in public transportation which is an attitude rarely seen in England. Harris is so successful imitating the oppressor's culture that the only thing distinguishing him from the oppressor is the color of his skin. Harris' overrated mimicry does not go beyond an imitation of a culture that does not belong to him but an effort to persuade *others* that he is a talented person to mimic. Such an effort does not pave the way to eliminate the racial differences of two nations and it is described by Bhabha as "almost the same but not white" (1984:130). The color of black man is associated with being inferior and the efforts of the oppressed to be like their invader are just a struggle which is in vain because the result never changes.

Harris is a fellow who like to play ladedda, and he like English customs and thing, he does be polite and say thank you and he does get up in the bus and the tube to let woman sit down, which is a thing even them Englishmen don't do. And when he dress you think some Englishman going to work in the city... (Selvon,1956:111)

Along with mimicry, *Lonely Londoners* portrays the emigrants' problematic relations with white women. The black desire to whiten their race by dating or marrying the white women. The emigrant, assuming that he marries dignity and whiteness of the civilization, is not considered someone to be respected. The spade is not valued for his own being in the colonizer's country instead he is thought to bring luck to the white women when he is seen on the first day of the year. Though the emigrants make a great effort to survive by earning five or six pounds each week, they are portrayed to have relations with the white some of which result in unhappy marriages and even bloody incidents. Although they marry white women they are not allowed to go to the places where the white are permitted. Black man on one side tries to whiten himself and as Fanon explains "throw the burden of his malediction" (2008:129) by having relations with white women on the other, beats black women on the supposition that she betrays him. Lewis beats his wife Agnes continually thinking that she talks to men when he is working. The association of white woman with whiteness and spade's with blackness creates an irresistible temptation for black men. Black man is not attracted by the beauty of white woman but the meaning which is conveyed by her color. Whiteness is the dignity whereas blackness is inferiority according to the black man.

One of the issues handled in the novel is the problematic idea of home. The confrontation of the oppressed and the oppressor goes back to colonization period when the oppressed was exploited not only culturally but also territorially. In decolonization period; however, the occupied are forced to serve the invaders in the so-called mother land. Emigrants claiming that Europe owes its wealth to their countries, have to work in the factories for lower wages. As Moses expresses, in each summer their hopes are revived and they wish to earn money to go back to their countries. They spend many years trying to earn money to set up a life in West Indies but that dream is never actualized and they can neither go back nor feel as a part of the country where they are doomed to starve. Selvon voices Moses to display displacement as he is the most experienced person who has spent many years in England. He has a very strong desire to go back to Trinidad but in spite of the efforts he has made he has nothing in hand. "I talking serious, man. And I can't go back to sleep, I lay there on the bed thinking about my life, how after all the years I ain't get no place at all, I still the same way, neither forward nor backward. You take my advice, Galahad" (Selvon, 1956:129).

Conclusion

All in all, Samuel Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* portrays emigrants and the difficulties they confront during the period of decolonization and the psychological reactions they develop in the colonizer's country. After the dramatic period of colonization which resulted in a complete exploitation of the colonized nations, the oppressed are exposed to racism for their skin, and their inferiority causes them to mimic their oppressors when they endeavor to establish a new life in the colonizer's country during decolonization period. Every new comer has expectations but what they expect is never fulfilled and they are doomed to feel desperate and lonely. The search for better education, jobs and food force black people to migrate to England where they mimic white people in order to form a link with the community whose values are totally different from theirs. Mimicing the society and trying to survive in London are the attitudes the occupied display but expectaions of belonging is never actualized and people from Caribbean are pushed to isolation and desperation. For the sake of surviving in the so-called mother land, migrants are forced to work under severe conditions for longer hours than the British people. Although they work for longer hours they are paid less and they are unable to feed themselves. Frustrated by the real vision of London, The migrants have the dream of returning to their countries but the goals of buying a house and having enough money to feed themselves cause them to be exploited in London. Migrants from remote territories are squeezed between the two worlds are unable to decide what to do. On one side, they are still suppressed by their occupiers on the other they do not have any job opportunities and qualified education in their homelands. Being forced to live in London is a kind of exile referring to make full effort to survive in a community otherizing migrants of different cultures. Sam Selvon -as an African writer- displays the tendencies of oppressed people in Britain during the period of decolonization. This period, according to him, is still the continuation of colonization since the occupier is still exploiting the oppressed in his own country. During the colonization, the occupied nations were enslaved in their own territories by being forced to work under the authority of the occupier and during the decolonization period the setting is different but the way migrants are invaded is the same. People, who are uneducated and unqualified, are not provided with equal rights and devalued for their identities and colors. Taking into consideration how the oppressed try to survive and how deeply they are disappointed, Selvon exhibits disillusionment of migrants who lose not only their hopes for future but also cultural heritage. Sam Selvon draws the

attention of the readers to illusionary world of Britain where people from Caribbeans can not actualize what they dream.

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