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## (Not) Knowing the Difference: Calypso Overseas and the Sound of Belonging in Selected Narratives of Migration

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Culture is an embodied phenomenon. This implies that one's cultural location is not fixed to any one geographical space. Cultures, in other words, are not inherently provincial by nature. They move and evolve with the bodies that create and live them. The Caribbean civilization understands the logic of traveling cultures given that the dual forces of rooted-ness and itinerancy shape its diasporic ethos. Travel is how we "do" culture. Indeed, the Caribbean's literary tradition is marked by a preoccupation with identity constructs that display allegiances to particular island locations and nationalisms, on the one hand, and transnational sensibilities that are regional and metropolitan on the other. This paper is interested in the function of the calypso as a sign of cultural identity and belonging in selected narratives that focus on the experiences of West Indian immigrants to the metropolitan centers of England and the United States. It discusses Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and his short stories "Calypso in London" and "Basement Lullaby" from the collection *Ways of Sunlight* (1957), Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), and Lawrence Scott's *Aelred's Sin* (1998).

No circumstance tests the relevance of a local or regional cultural form better than that of migration. Such has been the case of the calypso. The aesthetic and thematic use made of the art form in these West Indian narratives of migration is evidence of the persistent ability of its expressive modes to supply meaning, signify identity, shape consciousness, and create community. The issue of belonging is never without its intense politics of recognition, made so by the timeless difficulty of dealing with difference, primarily because difference is also what it means to be human. In this regard, the common thread that unites these texts is the calypso's function as an axis of instability around which the shifting status of cultural identity, communal and individual identification rotates. In all cases, issues of belonging, cultural "authenticity," and reinvention are contingent upon a series of variables that include nationality, race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. These inherently restless signifiers make the terrain of identity and identification rough going given culture's radically uncontainable nature. Further, the texts are all shaped by a transnational ethic. As such, they reveal a socio-psychic cartography marked by the often-turbulent crosscurrents of relations with homes left behind and new spaces of dwelling.

### **Calypso and the Emigrant Community**

Popular cultural forms, like music, can be powerful tools for externalizing a community's collective consciousness, communicating its sensibilities and consolidating its codes of belonging. The representational authority of popular culture, though never complete, is partly facilitated by its associative link with elements that signify the "traditional," the "indigenous" and the "people." In the case of immigration, the value of cultural markers associated with originating homelands may indeed increase to serve the need to remain connected and to maintain a distinct identity from the host country. This is partly the logic that facilitates what Paul Gilroy notes as the emergence of Jamaican reggae as a unifying catalyst for Caribbean immigrants to London. He argues that reggae "ceased, in Britain, to signify an exclusively

ethnic, Jamaican style and derived a different kind of cultural legitimacy both from a new global status and from its expression of what might be termed a pan-Caribbean culture” (82). A similar case can be made for the Trinidadian calypso, which would have predated reggae in this capacity. For the characters depicted in Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* and relevant short stories collected in *Ways of Sunlight*, calypso music operates as an important indicator of identity and as a means of bridging the gap with home. The narrator of *The Lonely Londoners* reveals that inquiries about the “latest calypso number” (10) are among the first questions that more seasoned emigrants put to new arrivals at Waterloo station.

Indeed, Selvon’s narratives supply moving and humorous accounts of West Indians attempting to insert themselves in an unwelcoming British environment. The music is depicted as offering a means to more aggressively assert a collective, regional identity across ethnicities and nationalisms as a front against British discriminatory practices. Homesick and socially displaced West Indians in metropolitan London turn to calypso music for a much-needed sense of community. Cultural anchoring and connectivity become increasingly necessary as they confront the traumatic reality that their race and island origins take on greater or differently politicized meanings, which keep them on the margins of the British social order. Selvon depicts calypso fetes as sites where islanders, disadvantaged by race, origin, and economic deprivation find strength in community and affirm their resilience in spite of the exclusionary status quo. The parties are not only occasions for cultural celebration; they are contexts for engineering strategies for survival and for performing subversive counter-cultural behavior. The latter is evident, for instance, in the habit of the Barbadian Five of “jocking waist” during the playing of the British national anthem, “God Save the Queen” (*Londoners* 106).

Furthermore, the art form is a vital source of income for emigrants who seem to be forever dodging the prospect of starvation and homelessness. These include characters like Mangohead and Hotboy from “Calypso in London,” Bar 20 and Fred from “Basement Lullaby.” For those with the talent, whatever the measure, to produce the music and songs, London provides opportunities for globalization of the music, and for the possible escape from poverty and anonymity. These narratives, in particular, give useful insights into the precarious lifestyles and creative processes of struggling practitioners. In fact, the informal contexts for artistic consultation and creation, such as those provided by Rahamut’s tailor shop in “Calypso in London,” corroborate, to a certain degree, Gordon Rohlehr’s note with regard to the camaraderie forged by calypso artistes in metropolitan centers, where they establish the practice of meeting to exchange ideas (“Calypso and Caribbean Identity” 56). The intensified sense of community that engenders closely knit relations among Caribbean peoples in “exile,” prompts Rohlehr to suggest the possibility of understanding this particular cultural phenomenon from the perspective of an “unacknowledged, Caribbean federation” (56).

What happens when cultural expression is deployed as transgression in contexts of discrimination and marginalization? What happens when traditional or “native” cultural practices are evoked as signifiers of “authenticity” in places distant from home? What is the role of

cultural expression in conditioning modes of belonging? Questions like these focus attention on the ambivalences and paradoxes inherent in cultural performance, an arena of activity where identification practices are defined by the interplay between processes of recognition and disavowal, resistance and transformation. On this shifting terrain, it is imperative, as Stuart Hall suggests, to remember that identities are “subject to radical historization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation” (4), which means that culture, where identities are lodged and defines, is always about relations of power, on the one hand, and temporality of expression, on the other. As such, cultural hegemonies are constantly affected by the very margins they create. Additionally, these marginal sites are troubled by their own internal “wars” of belonging. Insider/outsider designations are in this way simultaneously contingent on affiliations to hegemonic codes from both locations. This is certainly the problem of the emigrants in the narratives under consideration as they seek acceptance in the British metropolis and, at the same time, struggle to maintain their West Indian identities.

The presence of Selvon’s West Indians in London, for instance, operates as an important critique of British authority and civility, which have been erected as *the* measure of “high” humanity and culture. Therefore, the Barbadian Five claims that Londoners are “too quiet” (*Londoners* 95). He then proceeds to condemn the unforgivable “slackness” of city authorities for not having more street fetes as when the Lord Mayor drove through London, with “steel band beating,” and “jumping up as if it is a West Indian carnival” (*Londoners* 94-95). Whether or not the choice of the calypso to accompany the parade of British state authority is read as nothing more than the deployment of minority culture to gain political points, its appearance doubles with the emigrants’ use of the music as an anti-establishment tool. The stubborn politics of unequal difference may remain in tact; however, this duality signals the subtle disintegration of the rigid cultural divide established between Britain and its “Others,” a disruption already encoded in the book’s title.

Certainly, the emigrants are generally persistent in devising strategies that undermine the cultural hegemony of the unwelcoming, “mother” country. These include the boys’ strategic romancing of British girls, their boisterousness behavior and blatant refusal to behave like “proper gentlemen,” English style, at Harris’ parties (*Londoners* 96). In addition, there is Tanty’s gyrating, dance-floor performance to the calypso number, “Fan Me Saga Boy Fan Me,” in defiance of English ladylikeness. These counter-establishment performances signal the transgressive presence of West Indians bent on claiming the center on their own terms. In this regard, the calypso fete functions as a theater of crossroads, where complex cultural performances oriented towards several interdependent ends are played out. In Fanonian terms, the fete is a virtual “zone of occult instability” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 183), that is, the ground where the new conditions of the present open a dialogue with the expressive forms of the customary past and, in so doing, the process of reconstruction and redefinition is initiated.

The emigrants’ excitable performances to the rhythm of calypso also hint at a certain degree of anxiety around the preservation of their West Indian identity in the host country,

especially in the face of open prejudice and the ever-widening gulf that separates them from their originating homelands. The counterpoint of Moses' narrative distance, his tempering refrain, "Take it easy" (*Londoners* 20), his pensive aloofness, and his skepticism about the enactments of West Indian identification point to the arbitrary and temporal nature of cultural signification as it relates to either notions of "authenticity," or to insider status. As the text's introspective consciousness and authorial mouthpiece, Moses' perspective unmask the excessiveness and potentially counter-productive behavioral modes of the "boys," which reveal a deeper experience of displacement. Anxiety about social integration and belonging is sometimes characterized by a contradictory oscillation between forces of recognition and disavowal in relation to both Britishness and West Indianness. The character of Harris is of particular interest in this regard.

Harris is the Jamaican-born, Trinidad-raised businessman whose assimilation of Britishness doubles as a product of his fear of rejection and as a survivalist strategy. He is associated with the daffodil, that infamous metaphor of English, cultural indoctrination, which Moses catches him purchasing as a gift for an influential lady-friend (*Londoners* 95). The association sets him up as a representative of the schizophrenic subjectivity or uncomfortable hybridity sometimes symptomatic of postcolonial identities. His insecurity is evident in his repeated caution to the "boys" that they should act like "proper gentlemen" and not turn the fete into a "brawl" (*Londoners* 96). However, to read Harris' assimilation of English dress, deportment and language as a one-sided accommodation is to minimize the complexity of his yet to be attained cultural confidence in his new identity-space that is both West Indian and British.

Harris' core mission is to make his way, as best he can, in his adopted home, which means he has to contrive methods to infiltrate the rigidly guarded status quo. Mimicry and the organization of tourist-friendly versions of the West Indian fete are his primary means of negotiating his social and economic insertion. Harris, therefore, simultaneously functions as a kind of Naipaulian mimic-man and as an ambassador for the very West Indian culture that is the source of his insecurity. Interestingly, Moses describes him as being attracted to "English customs and thing," and liking to "play ladedda" (*Londoners* 95). The word "play" suggests the interdependence of his apparent crisis of identity and his deliberate performance of "Englishness" as an expedient social mask to keep his white customers happy. The use-value nature of this self-construction is made all the more evident when the mask is inadvertently stripped, such as during his occasional linguistic slips into the Creole when he is in the company of other West Indians.

Seen from this perspective of the gap between hegemonic cultural assimilation and the indelible mark of his West Indian difference, the personality of Harris approaches the subversive mimicry of the "white masked Black man" described in Homi Bhabha's reading of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (*Location* 121). It is an image that speaks to the political agency available to the marginalized when the social constructions of race, ethnicity and nationality are manipulated to their advantage. Harris' pretence at being a "proper gentleman" is a compensatory tactic to "penetrate" London's exclusionary status quo, and is therefore not

unlike Five's strategy of "closehauling" the English girl to the upbeat rhythm of a calypso number as though it were a "sentimental fox" (*Londoners* 101). Although they are apparent opposites, the men are not very different. Their excessive identity performances, on either side of a tenuous West Indian/British binary, reveal them to be conflicted threshold-characters in search of a comfortable social fit.

The often times uncomfortable effects of initial cultural change are the subtext of Selvon's "Basement Lullaby," which is a painfully humorous story about two Trinidadian club musicians living in a dilapidated basement in London. During a strained, early-morning conversation, the insomniac Bar 20 accuses Fred of not getting the "melody right" to a new calypso ("Basement Lullaby" 176), an error he apparently repeats. Fred, however, retaliates for being kept awake by pointing out to Bar 20 that his "drums not keeping up with the rest of the band these nights" (179). From one perspective, the musicians' struggle to keep the calypso rhythm is a result of the physical and mental exhaustion of managing a lifestyle that is offbeat in a number of ways. They are exhausted by the unnatural hours they keep. They literally live a death-in-life existence below the ground where their very sense of the real is distorted and blurred, like the unhealthy, London smog that veils vision. Further, their basement apartment is described in almost hellish, Dantesque terms consonant with their underclass status in London. Bar 20's nostalgia for Trinidad and Fred's willed amnesia, along with his fugitive avoidance of domestic responsibility, establish them as "exiles" in every sense of the word.

Yet, their failure to get the calypso-beat right is perhaps the influence of a "foreign" environment that demands a different rhythm, adjustments to the tempo to suit the audience, just as the calypsos composed for the London market, according to the Trinidadian composer, Hotboy, have to transcend local/island concerns to address more international, "topical subject[s]" ("Calypso in London" 128). "Basement Lullaby" provides insights into the processes of change that impact on form and content, as well as on cultural sensibility, in the fledgling stages of calypso's globalization. Notions of the calypso's rhythmic "authenticity," therefore, mediates between the musicians' alterations in its performance, whether mistakes or not, and the ignorance of "English people" who enjoy the music, although they don't "know the difference" ("Basement Lullaby" 176). The symbolic reversal of rhythmic associations suggested in the story's ironic title, "Basement Lullaby," one that is literally performed in Fred's vengeful piano rendition of a song to deny Bar 20 sleep, interplays with the slippage between the right and wrong beat, the known and the emergent in the enunciation of cultural performance and identification. Like the unstable "play" of signification/enunciation of Derridean "differance," this instability signals culture's temporality and openness to the changing conditions of historical time and place.

Homi Bhabha argues that in the case of subordinate peoples/cultures, like emigrants in dominant hegemonies, the "issue of cultural difference emerges at points of social crises," either from a "position of marginality or in an attempt at gaining the centre" (*The Location of Culture* 177). He concludes that appeals to the "authority of customary" and "traditional

practices” are in fact “anchoring moments” that are revalued as a form of anteriority ... whose causality is effective because it returns to displace the present, to make it disjunctive” (177). This necessary relocation of past or native cultural practices in the present is a means of ensuring historical continuity, and of erecting a political front against the marginalization of difference. However, it is possible to read this disjuncture of the totalizing logic of the dominant culture by the incommensurability of the marginal as having the dual effect of producing resistant forms of communal coherence that at the same time disrupt their own terms of representation or enunciation in light of the new conditions of the present. Therefore, when calypso and its associative behavioral patterns are evoked in the ritualized performances of West Indian cultural “authenticity,” those very “anchoring moments” are destabilized as old and emerging identities vie for space. The challenge of Selvon’s characters, for instance, is to negotiate their way to a place of comfort with the “newness” they are becoming, even as they appeal to “customary” identity markers out of necessity for survival in conditions of threat, become institutionalized as “authentic” signs of West Indianness.

In Paule Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, the ambivalent relationship between cultural belonging and change induced by immigration is also a powerful theme. The novel deals with the experience of first-generation Barbadians in New York City and focuses on the conflicts of integration and survival experienced by the Boyce family. In Marshall’s narrative, the calypso operates as a surveillance tool, deployed by the American-Barbadian community to punish nonconformists and the rebellious. In the novel’s key scene, that is, the wedding reception of ‘Gatha Steed’s daughter, the renegade Deighton Boyce is ostracized by the community for his rebellious stance on its materialistic identity-code. Significantly, it is during the band’s playing of the 1943 calypso, “Small island go back where you come from,” by the Trinidadian Invader, that Deighton enters the dance hall. According to Paula Morgan, the song was originally composed to criticize the large-scale migrations of West Indians to wartime Trinidad (“A Cross-cultural Study of the Black Female-authored Novel” 141). However, Marshall’s redeployment of the song transcends its original intention to generate several trajectories of overlapping meanings. For instance, the wedding guests affirm their Barbadian/West Indian identity and form a community frontline against North American politics of exclusion. The performance, however, is split along competing lines of differentiation consonant with the recognition of a generic West Indian identity, and its simultaneous disavowal in order to assert a distinctive, Barbadian nationality, now reconstructed in the capitalist terms of a transnational, Barbadian-American self-understanding.

Deighton’s appearance on the dance floor demonstrates his insider-outsider status. An antagonistic terrain of inter-group discrimination is unveiled, with the calypso used as a weapon of exclusion. Following the lead of his wife Silla, the dancers form a virtual wall that blocks Deighton out of their circle. Sexuality and nationality intersect as his rejection is charted via his unfulfilled desire for Silla’s body during her dance with Seon Braithwaite. Silla deliberately denies him access to its pleasure when she refuses to beckon him from the margins of the dance

floor, and so claim him on behalf of the community. Instead, her laughter, which is stimulated by her seeing him and then disavowing his presence, coincides with the chorus of Lord Invader's "Small Island" (1943): "Small island, go back where you come from" (150). Deighton's unforgivable crime is that he is and is not a "real-real Bajan Man" (173). Further, in addition to being considered a delinquent in his Barbadian-American community, his womanizing, easy-going nature, and lack of productivity sets him up as a "kind of Trinidadian," an identity that is reinforced by the fact that he is taunted and expelled during the singing of a Trinidadian calypso.

Interestingly, in this instance, Trinidadian identity emerges as the fetishized Other of Barbadian identity. The notion of a regional, West Indian identity is evidently fractured along territorial lines, where differentiation is based on popular stereotypes. For instance, when dancing begins at the reception, Bajan identity is distinguished from a truancy that is manifestly Trinidadian. So that on observing the dancers take to the floor, Florrie Trotman comments, "Wha'lah, look at them. Their guts full now and they getting on worse than Trinidadians" (144). The association of Trinidadians with bad behavior or laissez-faire temperaments also appears in Selvon's narratives, and when performed by non-Trinidadians like the Barbadian Five, there is possibly a "Trini" connection. Five grew up in Trinidad, the place where one apparently learns how to "misbehave" in a number of ways. Similarly, in Selvon's "Calypso In London," the composer Hotboy, a name that incidentally reinforces an associated licentiousness with the practitioners of the art form, is an opportunistic loafer who lives by mysterious means. Having no fixed employment, he spends most of his time loitering at Rahamut's tailor-shop, which serves as an improvised music studio when the need arises. Clearly, there is some kind of consensus about Trinidadians and slackness, a stereotype that concurs with Rohlehr's commentary on the origins of Atilla's 1944 calypso, "Reply to Englishman." The calypso was composed as a response to a letter written to the *Guardian* newspaper in which the writer whose penname was Englishman, accused Trinidad of "having the greatest percentage of slackers in the Empire" (Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society* 351).

At the same time, however, this very capacity for enjoyment and spontaneity doubles as counter-hegemonic resistance in environments that marginalize West Indian emigrants and attempt to undermine their joy of life, making them, like Silla, insensitive, mechanized pawns in the capitalist race for survival. At the wedding, therefore, the older Brathwaite dismisses Silla's objection to dancing by recalling her youthful days in Barbados when, on Saturday nights, he would see her "wucking up" herself to the Bajan Brumlee Band until, on one occasion, he witnessed her collapse from pure exhaustion on the grass (144). Silla's physical energy, sexual vibrancy, and affinity with the earth are in direct contrast to her robotic, sexually frigid and joyless life in New York. For the emigrants, the island exists in memory as a pastoral paradise lost, whose past can only be reproduced in the ritualized performances of associated, often stereotypical, cultural practices. Brathwaite's rationale for having a good time is therefore as follows: "we's in death. So le'we drink our little rum and have our little spree till it come" (145). His philosophy captures both the temporality of human existence and the death-like, exilic

condition that immigration represents. These conditions intensify the need to reclaim, in whatever measure, the culture of home. This accounts for his repeated use of the possessive pronoun “our” with reference to “rum” and “spree,” icons of a romanticized version of West Indian belonging, encoded in one of Lord Invader’s calypsos to which they dance, “Don’t Stop the Carnival” (1939): “All the West Indian love their carnival / Lord, don stop the carnival” (147).

A national Barbadian and transnational Barbadian-American binary is constructed with the former representing backwardness, poverty and failure. The latter serves almost cannibalistically to nourish the myth of immigration as a narrative of progress to be consumed in at least two ways. On the one hand, the myth functions as a placebo for emigrants in the throes of hardship and disillusionment in their new homelands. On the other, it offers inspiration to those left behind, who fuel its regeneration by buying into its promises. One can therefore understand, though not easily forgive, Silla’s decisive act of rejection following Deighton’s retreat into spiritualism and non-profit service. She reports his illegal status to the immigration authorities, which results in his deportation to Barbados. Her betrayal is consonant with her construction of the island as trapped in a state of stasis, or absence, evident in her reaction to Selina’s consideration of the family’s possible return to Barbados. Silla angrily asks her daughter, “Live where! Barbados is a place to live too?” (43).

Deighton is irredeemably the small-islander, that is, Barbadian and not the transcendent Barbadian-American because he is the one who fails the community the battle for survival in North America. He is therefore dishonorably discharged to his native homeland. His death by possible suicide before he actually reaches Barbados symbolizes his absolute displacement. He belongs nowhere since the island is largely his imaginary homeland, a paradise of dreams. The complexly combined national, regional and metropolitan features that circumscribe concepts of transnationality expose the tense relations that regulate identification. The nation and expressions of nationalism, however imagined or politicized, remain key players in the construction of transnational identities. As such, the theorizing of the Caribbean trans-nation should guard against its constitution in ways that either romantically privilege, perhaps inadvertently, the promises afforded by the prefix “trans,” or that suppress the presence and influence of the “national” in the reinvention of identities in the new spaces of dwelling. This is so because, like its embattled root nationalism, the construction of the nation beyond fixed boundaries is a modality that is equally troubled and challenged by its own problems of differentiation and consolidation.

## The Calypso and Sexual Citizenship

If it is accepted that the calypso, like reggae, has functioned with a certain degree of success as a barometer of social consciousness, an expression of collective identity, and a vehicle for anti-establishment critique, then the art form very much resembles a version of Glissant's notion of a "natural poetics," which he argues expresses a community's "shared attitude," facilitating the most "daring or the most artificial of experiences" (*Caribbean Discourse* 120). In other words, a social group's "natural poetics" is potentially revolutionary or anti-establishment, even as it is also a stabilizing or consolidating representation of the everyday existence of the social body. The problem, of course, with any collective cultural paradigm is its tendency to enforce a reductive, homologous logic that usually compresses and blurs a series of variables that include race, ethnicity, age, class, and sexuality in the interest of promoting a notion of the whole. Similarly, with respect to a national or regional music, the unspoken presumption is its unproblematic symbiotic tie with a collective identity. In other words, a popular expressive mode like the calypso can, voluntarily or not, emerge as a signifier for a particular brand of cultural nationalism. This accounts for the production and dissemination of associations like calypso is to Trinidadian and reggae is to Jamaican.

The arena of sexuality, however, is one of the spaces where the antinomies inherent in any essentialist cultural paradigm, which may include a national or regional culture, will reveal the accommodative limits of its frame, or will "disturb" what Bhabha calls "its anointed horizons of territory and tradition" ("Culture's In-Between" 54). In all the texts under consideration, for instance, the calypso, as it relates to transnational identities, surfaces as a regulator of social fit in the tumultuous terrain of sexuality. Unlike Glissant's "natural poetics," the music works to reinforce, rather than challenge the exclusionary politics of the status quo on the issue of sexual citizenship. The general rule seems to be that the music functions as a crusader against the legitimacy of nonheterosexual identities, operating as a disciplinary panoptic eye (Foucault, III. Discipline 3) that sanctions "right" sexual pairing and "appropriate" reproductions of gender behavioral modes.

Like its Jamaican relative dancehall, calypso serves as a disseminator of anti-gay propaganda, feeding off the most derogatory stereotypes of homosexual identities. Timothy Chin's "Bullers and Battymen: Contesting Homophobia in Black Popular Culture and Contemporary Caribbean Literature," for instance, raises the issue of Jamaican dancehall as a regulatory medium for a prescriptive heterosexuality. He particularly references the controversy surrounding the "deeply rooted homophobia" evident in Buju Banton's song, "Boom Bye Bye" (128-9). Moreover, Chin identifies an intellectual strain that displays an aggressive territorial protectionism of "indigenous" culture, one that is willing to skirt the issue of homophobia in the Caribbean in an effort to valorize its cultural productions. He therefore calls for a "cultural politics that can critique as well as affirm – a politics that recognises, in other words, the heterogeneous and contradictory ... nature of all cultural forms" (128).

In relation to the calypso's role as moral adjudicator of sexuality and sexual practice, Rohlehr's findings in his essay, "The Construction of Masculinity in the Trinidad & Tobago Calypso," are particularly pertinent. Rohlehr admits the corpus of songs that target homosexuality is relatively small; however, he notes that the "homotextuality of calypso" reveals, among other things, "a possible connection between rigid constructions of masculinity, male fear of effeminization and homophobia" (264-5), with a significant number of popular performers including General Grant, Buju Banton and Shabba Ranks, who have "called for the murder of homosexual males" (272). Homosexuality, Rohlehr argues, is selected as "one of the worse signs of masculinity gone off-track" (272), and points to an inherent double standard that infects the moral surveillance of sexuality as "antigay paranoia has on occasion masked itself as moral righteousness, with calypsonians assuming the patriarchal roles of prophets, warners and spokesmen for the same 'straight' society that they more normally un-mask and demolish with their reductive laughter" (272).

In both Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and Marshall's *Brown Girl Brownstones*, the dance-floor of the calypso fete is a microcosmic social stage where heterosexuality or heterosexual performances to the music of calypso signify "West Indianness." Marshall's text tentatively approaches a questioning of a presumed or prescribed relationship between "compulsory heterosexuality" and West Indian trans/national identity in the calypso-dance between the pre-adolescent friends, Selina Boyce and Beryl Challenor. This occurs prior to the community's ostracism of Selina's father, Deighton, to the music of Invader's calypso, "Small Island, Go Back Where You Really Come From." After a tense exchange between the friends about the implications of dancing together, Selina's defiantly reacts to Beryl's caution that they were "kinda of old for that" as follows: "I don't give one damn, d'ya hear? Not one damn in hell about anything" (146). The exchange signals the girls' awareness of the inappropriateness of the act given that their ages apparently places them the zone of accommodation for such behavior.

Despite the unspoken heterosexual code they know they will transgress by dancing together, the young friends still take to the dance-floor in the full presence of the community, and after a brief period of awkwardness, find their "rhythm" (146). However, with the appearance of Selina's father, the subliminal force of social norms triggers her anxious command to Beryl, "My father's here. Lemme go" (149), as the metatext of their inappropriate paring, momentarily transgressed, is reintroduced. Selina's desire to be free of Beryl oscillates between her desire to go to her father and substitute for her mother's refusal to partner him, and the fear of his disapproval. Neither materializes as Deighton signals to her "to remain where she was" (149), a command that is an obvious contradiction of the tacit gender compatibility codes at work in the larger group. Father and daughter, are therefore ideologically positioned outside the consensual frame of the community's gender and sexuality behavioral modes at that seminal "moment" of communal anchoring.

The adolescents, however, do not reap the rejection of the community as does Deighton for his failure to be a "real," Bajan man. Their age apparently places them in a safety zone of

indeterminacy, an intermediary position where meanings about a possible different orientation are as yet unclear, or not fully formed, given that this knowledge mediates between the girls' shared awareness of the inappropriateness of their pairing and the community's latent rejection of it. Suspicion is therefore suspended in the unknown territory of the girls being simultaneously still young enough and too old to dance together, that is, the play between knowing and not knowing the difference. Nevertheless, the heterosexual destination of Marshall's bildungsroman safely lodges Selina's adolescent sexual confusion as a symptom of maturation. This is all well and good, except that the plot's sub-textual engagement with sexual ambiguity interrupts any comfortable foreclosure regardless of an authorial design that seeks to "right" the girls' dance and displaces, if not corrects, its appearance as a legitimate identity text within the West Indian literary canon and the wider trans/national cultural field.

Ambivalences around making a place for sexual difference within Caribbean literary and social culture are also evident even in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*. Ian Smith's insightful essay in "Critics in the Dark," for instance, makes a convincing argument for the presence of a repressed homoerotic subtext in the novel. According to Smith, the homoerotic evoked and then disavowed by "meta-narrative effects," through which writer and text are realigned to a literary canon that has "no place" for nonheterosexual subjectivities in its discourse (4) and, by extension, as members of its national and diasporic citizenry. Selvon's text ends as follows: "It was a summer night: laughter fell softly: it was the sort of night that if you wasn't making love to a woman you feel you was the only person in the world like that" (*Londoners* 126). Smith argues the "homoerotic *double-entendre*" of the closing lines" implies the difference of an unspoken *other* type of sexual union, which disrupts the heterosexual stability that the book's "writerly consciousness," filtered through Moses, seeks to regain at the end (3). This corrective drive is propelled by the very "ballads" or texts of life the narrative tells. Tales such as Cap's strange encounter with the transvestite and its subsequent regulation by hasty marriage reveal knowledge of the homoerotic, even if this is managed as sub-textual knowledge.

But even before the closing lines of *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses' largely non-participatory status at Harris' fete provides an obvious contrast to the womanizing, hyper-masculinity that figures as the West Indian, male prototype. If the fete is the space where ritualized gender performances are consolidated, Moses' posture of standing in a corner, telling Galahad "ballads" while the fete is in full swing, is odd enough to draw the notice, if not suspicion, of Five who asks him why he is not dancing (105). The question, of course, is weighted because it is also an unvoiced query about his not being seen dancing with a woman. Offering his age as an excuse further undermines Moses' defensive counter that he had danced "one or two" sets: "But you know the old man always taking things easy" (105). His rationale, however, inadvertently associates youth with able, heterosexual partnering and relative old-age with resigned celibacy or its alternative, but not enunciated text of male partnering, albeit platonic, suggested by his standing in a corner with Galahad on the margins of the calypso fete (103). That "ballad," however, is merely sublimated, half-told within a script sanctioned by the

normalcy of male camaraderie and Moses' bachelor status, lest it fractures the narrative's already self-conscious effort to keep its homosociality "straight."

Narratives of migration, whether real or fictive, that feature escape as an option from small-island homophobia have gained increasing visibility in the Caribbean literary canon and discourses on sexual identity over the last decade or so. On the whole, the known beneficiaries of these "exits" include third generation writers like Dionne Brand, Patricia Powell, Shani Mootoo and Michelle Cliff. It seems that a combination of factors such as geographical distance, spatial largeness, and the ideological liberalism of Northern metropolises allow for greater sexual and creative freedom. Evelyn O'Callaghan, for instance, notes that immigration has allowed Jamaican writers like Powell and Cliff the space to act as ventriloquists for male homosexuality, coming as they do from an island where its "virulent homophobia ... is almost exclusively directed in its most violent form at gay men" ("Homosexuality and Textual/Sexual Alternatives" 309-310).

However, is immigration the resolution to small-island discrimination against sexual difference? Shani Mootoo's lesbian lovers, Lavinia and Sarah, from *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), for instance, disappear into the uncertain sunset of the "Shivering Northern Wetlands" (29), to realize a love the island perhaps could not contain, albeit at the expense of Sarah's daughters. After a botched escape plan the children are left behind to suffer the consequences of living with an alcoholic, incestuous father. While there is ample evidence to establish a connection between immigration and creative freedom to "write" homosexuality into the literary and social landscape of the Caribbean and its extended diaspora, there is a need to historicize and interrogate the myths that paint the "North" as a haven of sexual freedom and acceptance, one that may well demystify the binary of "foreign" liberalism as opposed to "small island" homophobia. The already noted Janus-faced construction of immigration as narratives of socio-economic "progress" that at the same time conceal experiences of social exclusion and hardship may also mark the stories of immigration as escapes from small-island homophobia. Additionally, transnational reinventions of sexual identity undoubtedly continue to exist in a strained relationship with the very national/regional hegemonies emigrants may seek to escape, but to which they literally or imaginatively return.

In this context, it is interesting that calypso music surfaces at the end of Lawrence Scott's *Aelred's Sin*. The novel intricately reconstructs the life of Jean Marc de la Borde, a white Creole who, sometime in the sixties, travels from his Caribbean island, Les Deux Isles, to become a Benedictine monk in an English monastery. The decision comes on the heels of an adolescent, same-sex relationship that ends tragically in public victimization and the "accidental" death of his partner, Ted. After a brief experience of monastic life, Jean Marc/Aelred leaves to be with his lover, and ex-monk Edward. Both men later die of AIDS in the eighties. The novel's epilogue, among other things, reveals the layered "ironies" of Jean Marc's "coming out" excursion with Edward, and their mutual friend, Joe in 1968, a period of radical sexual liberalism in Europe and North America. Several incidents converge in a critical scene when the men are

walking along the seafront at Barmouth. The conflicting trajectories of Jean Marc's white, Caribbean identity, which include his Catholicism, homosexual orientation, and emigrant status, are consolidated in that symbolic borderline space, with the sea forming the bridge connecting Jean Marc's adopted English home to his Caribbean home, Les Deux Isles.

At the center of these incidents is Jean Marc's discovery of a "black guy playing a steel tenor pan" at the funfair (441). The moment of recognition and connection is so powerful he exclaims: "Calypso, man! Hear that calypso music!" (441) Reconnection with his island past via its music is actually preceded by a series of interconnected heterosexual metatexts that reinforce his condition of multiple "exile." Important in this regard is Joe's earlier sighting of the word QUEER written on the seawall. The discriminatory sign intersects with Jean Marc's disillusioned remark that the world outside the monastery is "not much different" (440-41), in terms of its negating surveillance of homosexuality. The inherent irony of the three men singing in unison The Drifters' song of carefree, even illicit love, "Under the broadwalk ..." is thereby reinforced as it excludes the men from the romantic conventions inscribed in its text. While the theme of concealment is normalized as a metaphor for heterosexual adventure, the scenario directly opposes the misadventure of the trios' defiance of the closet as private and public space remain demarcated as illegitimate territories for their "different" desire.

Further, several intersecting colonial and postcolonial histories that feature homosexual desire, both sadistically forced and consensual are uncovered in a palimpsest-like manner when Edward suggests, possibly in jest, that the pan player's name must be "Jordan," Jean Marc's invented name for the slave-boy in the portrait of the eighteenth century owner of Ashton Hall, the site of the Benedictine monastery he leaves. In the text's central mirroring scene, the narrator writes: "Aelred stared and wondered. Then he saw his own face reflected in the glass of the portrait. His face was superimposed upon that of the boy whose face shone from beneath, so that the black face seemed to be his own" (78-9). Jean Marc's/Aelred's identity therefore dovetails with the African slave in the portrait, with Mungo, the runaway slave whose story he learns from his childhood nanny Toinette, and with his adolescent mixed race lover, Ted, whose shoes he literally wears as a junior monk. He particularly comes to recognize Jordan as his sexual and racial Other, whose history reflects his own experiences of sexual violation by his homophobic schoolmates and the racialized construction of his body by his fellow English monks, one of whom seduces him in the chapel.

Significantly, the player's nationality remains unknown at the end of the "encounter." In spite of Edward's prompting, Jean Marc is unable to overcome his "shyness" to ask the man where he is from. How does one read this timidity? The preference for anonymity rather than open conversation with a man possibly from his island, or one like his own, is undoubtedly entangled in Jean Marc's larger personal and collective history of displacement and rejection because of his ancestral connection with the white plantocracy and sexual orientation. First, Jean Marc is aware that the black panman represents a culture and race he has been taught to fear, echoing Kenneth Ramchand's designation of the phrase "terrified consciousness" to describe the

insecurity of the white, Creole elite in the context of burgeoning black postcolonial populations and cultures (Ramchand 223-4). Second, in his case this terror takes on an additional dimension at the level of the exclusionary politics surrounding his sexual orientation, which he knows can prompt violent homophobic disapproval in his homeland. Scripts of sadistic sexual abuse by colonial masters, consensual same-sex love and homophobic violence therefore crisscross, corrupt, and interrupt each other as Lawrence attempts to undo narratives of homosexual negation in order to create a redemptive construct of Jean Marc's life. Ultimately, his recognition of the music of home doubles as a misrecognition of belonging to the island that cannot accommodate him, a religion that condemns him, and a "mother country" that identifies him as "QUEER." Neither "coming out" into the secular world, nor leaving his homophobic homeland, offers a space for real acceptance as his life is consistently policed by the same heterosexist codes, histories and laws that collude to outlaw and negate him.

While self-acceptance and reciprocated same-sex love seem to be the most treasured gifts of Jean Marc's rebellion against the moral codes of his faith and the legal surveillance of civic society, the disease AIDS brings an almost retributive closure to a life that loses, by the errors of its reactionary choices, that which it sought so hard to welcome and save. What Jean Marc finds irreconcilable as a Catholic monk is the moral grille that discriminates between his homosexual identity and his homosexual practice. For him, the recommendations of spiritual friendship in the tradition of his patron St. Aelred, and the vow of celibacy central to his religious vocation and tradition represent an intolerable compromise and hypocrisy. His rebellion against the teachings of his faith consolidates his rejection of a host of religious, psychological and civic epistemologies that result in demonizing, pathologizing, and criminalizing his sexual orientation. What he misguidedly seeks to redeem from a history of denigration is the equal "right" of homoerotic pleasure. However, what he also tragically discovers, as an active homosexual, are the deadly consequences of the practice.

The roots of *Aelred's Sin* certainly run too deep for oversimplification. Bolder experiments with "homotextuality" in current Caribbean literature undoubtedly disturb the clearly demarcated boundaries around the "anointed territory" of sexuality in their attempts to claim space for nonheterosexual identities on the terrain of human experience and knowledge. At the same time, however, they put on the table serious ethical and moral debates, often skirted by cultural theory and critical practice that are perhaps ill-equipped to address them. These issues must be the business of every human being and society: the acceptance of the complex nature of sexuality, the call to responsibility in relation to sexual practice, and the discovery of the particular sacrifices that "desire" demands, whatever the name of its identity. The challenge remains to bravely engage the justice issues that attend claims for inclusion without compromising the very thing that legitimizes such claims, that is, the dignity of the human person.

## Conclusion

The inherently fluid nature of culture and cultural identities does not change the fact that they are also territorially based and traditionalist in their behavior and allegiances. These sample references to the calypso in the Caribbean's literary imagination point to its function as an agent of recognition, even "authenticity" in relation to nationalist and transnationalist identity-frames, and to the changing constructions of these identities with time and travel. They also raise questions about the role of cultural artifacts or forms in the construction of discriminatory boundaries that circumscribe belonging, given their propensity to operate as signifiers of sameness that not only occlude differences, but also govern the dance-floor by exclusory means or unequal terms. West Indian belonging, indeed any identity space, is troubled by consensual and differentiation forces at the individual and collective levels. These constantly demand the re-negotiation of the terms that circumscribe insider/outsider positions. Further, the simultaneously changing and fixed dynamics of identification imply that the criteria for belonging or acceptance must also be left open to reformulations based on the differences that will always require a serious questioning of the implications of remaking codes and attitudes about belonging in order to better humanize the trans/nation dance.

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