

George Lamming and Paule Marshall : Two contrastive views on the west indian exilic experience

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Introduction

The issue of exile is a general phenomenon in the Caribbean islands. Admittedly, in one way or the other, Caribbean people were/are always confronted with this crucial problem of exile in the region. Exile was, and still is a key component of the West Indian experience. For instance, it is a well established fact that three of the most prominent and charismatic Caribbeans were/are all exiles: Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, and Frantz Fanon. Without any doubt, it was in order to find solutions to this acute problem of exile in the West Indies that many conferences have been held. One of the most important conferences of this kind occurred in the fall of 1967, at Sir George Williams University in Montreal, Canada (Gendzier, 1973:18).

No wonder therefore that one key issue addressed by a number of West Indian novelists is the theme of exile. The West Indian people we meet in West Indian novels are often characterized by their propensity to emigrate. This is true of the fiction of George Lamming and Paule Marshall. However, these writers' treatment of this subject highlights a number of similarities as well as differences.

It is the purpose of this article to establish some of these similarities and differences; and this study means to focus on George Lamming's **The Emigrants** and Paule Marshall's **Brown Girl, Brownstones**. First, however, it seems useful and important to give this topic a little context with some introductory background information before reaching the heart of the matter.

Exile : a recurring theme in Caribbean literature

The term exile is generally defined as a forced removal from one's native country. It means expulsion from home, or "banishment". A voluntary separation or absence from one's home or country is another connotation suggested by this term. Yet, whether one is evicted *from* one's country by a legal authority or whether one leaves willingly because one feels driven away from one's home by conditions prevailing there, both interpretations of the concept have essentially the same meaning : the absence of the exile from his native country is a forced one. It is also very important to stress the point that the concept of exile means at least two things : that one is running away from one place and going to another. As is often the case, what

one runs away from is shaped by one's perception of what one wants to run to. Consequently, exile is not only getting away from something; it is also getting to something else.

After they had closely scrutinized the attitudes adopted by protagonists in the West Indian novel, Radhika Mohanram and Gita Rajan made a fundamental observation regarding the place of exile in Caribbean literature and its significance in the area; and this is worth recalling here. Both postcolonial critics make the point that the phenomenon of exile is the most striking pattern which dominates the plot of Caribbean fiction, including novels by both male and female authors. They suggest that the trope of exile in Caribbean literature reflects the instability of the region :

Like the heroes of Lamming and Naipaul, the heroines of Rhys, and Hodge, and Kincaid bring their life story to a

closure by embarking upon a journey that takes them away from their island homes. Journeys, in fact, crisscross the varying fabric of West Indian fiction. The journey motif, it can be said, signifies the instability of existence in the West Indies, whose humanity, haunted by dreams of a better future, must drift toward Europe, the old colonizer, or toward North America, the new equalizer. (Mohanram & Rajan, 1996:4)

In the same vein, worth remembering is a similar observation made by P. S. Chauhan on the West Indian novel. According to this critic West Indian novelists, irrespective of gender, share a number of tendencies. This postcolonial critic, too, argues that the plots of the West Indian novel are often shaped by "a journey [that] takes them away from their island home." More importantly, Chauhan makes the point that :

The arrivals and the departures, with which the lives of the characters of the West Indian novel are punctuated, indicate an inescapable desire to flee not only an oppressive past or present but also an oppressing psyche, the need to break out of a choking self that is urgent in most protagonists. (Chauhan, 1996:50)

As can be surmised from the above quotes, the problem of exile is not only the concern of ordinary people that one can visibly meet in daily life in the Caribbean area. It is also the business of novelists. It is the concern of many characters we meet in reading novels in general; but particularly, as one reads fiction produced by Caribbean writers, one quickly comes to the conclusion that characters in West Indian novels are determined by their compulsion to emigrate. Generally speaking, the characters that inhabit the West Indian novel express the feeling that they have to go abroad in order "to make the *first* leap to their free and full development" (Gendzier, 1973:18).

As the quotations above would indicate, it is clear that exile is a recurrent theme in Caribbean literature and that it has been addressed in a number of critical studies by postcolonial critics. It has been discussed by many eminent literary critics of African and black diasporan literature in general (Griffiths, 1978; Gurr, 1981; Matthews, 1962; Ngugi, 1972). They all seem to agree on a common fact : exile is a recurrent structural and formal pattern of the postcolonial text, and of the Caribbean novel, in particular.

Heavy emphasis is laid on the issue of travel in the writings of many West Indian novelists. For instance,

apart from the two writers that are of primary interest to this paper, one can mention other Caribbean novelists who have addressed the theme of exile in their fiction: V. S. Naipaul in **The Mimic Men** (1967); Merle Hodge in **Crick Crack, Monkey** (1970); Jamaica Kincaid in **A Small Place** (1988) and Jean Rhys in **Wide Sargasso** (1968). Emigration also constitutes the theme of Samuel Selvon's **The Lonely Londoners** (1956) and **Moses Ascending** (1975). To add a piece of specific information to this list, one can recall that in Claude McKay's **Banana Bottom**, many West Indians have emigrated to Panama as cheap labor force during the building of its canal (McKay, 1961:35).

George Lamming and Paule Marshall, the foci of this paper, have also extensively dealt with exile in their novels. At different levels, both are equally preoccupied with the issue of exile in their fiction.

For instance, in **Brown Girl, Brownstones**, Paule Marshall has portrayed the members of the Bajan community who have emigrated to New York City in order to escape the brutal colonial exploitation at home. In another of her novels, **The Chosen Place, the Timeless People**, Vere's move to the United States is motivated by the same economic preoccupation (Marshall, 1969:16). Similarly, in **Soul Clap Hands and Sing** the problem of emigration is touched upon with regard to Mr. Watford, the main character of "Barbados". He is presented by the writer as someone who has recently returned to his native Barbados after spending fifty years in Boston. Furthermore, Mr. Watford's suggestion that a young boy should go to England instead of spreeing around with a political button is not only illustrative of the mentality of the majority of the West Indian people, but it also displays evidence of the deep conviction and hope West Indian people generally nurture for exile:

Look that half-foolish boy you does send her to pick the coconut. *Instead of him learning a trade and going to England where he might find work he's walking about with a political button. He and all in politics now! But that's the way with these down there. They'll do some of everything but work. They don't want work! ... they too busy spreeing.* (Marshall, 1985:58)¹

George Lamming's writings reveal the same preoccupation with the theme of emigration. He sets the tone of his dealings with the theme of exile in the last lines of his first novel, **In the Castle of My Skin** when the reader becomes an eye witness to the young boy G.'s departure for Trinidad : "The earth where I walked was a marvel of blackness and I knew in a sense more deep than simple departure I had said farewell, farewell

¹ *My Italics.*

to the land" (Lamming, 1953:295). Moreover, the writer recalls in the framework of this novel that the issue of emigration is as much the concern of the old generation as of the younger one. This is what he wants the reader to grasp when he evokes the case of the old man Pa who "had been comfortable years ago" with what he had earned in Panama (Lamming, 1953:244) and when Trumper ends up emigrating to the United States. In addition and with insistence, in his fourth novel, this Caribbean critic and creative writer emphasizes the importance of exodus in the Caribbean region when we see in **Season of Adventure** that Chiki, the painter, and the others had left for America in order to earn money to purchase the "Forest Reserve" so as to make the drums alive :

The Forest was on Crown lands which would be put up for sale. Where could Gort and the remnants of the Boys collect that money? [...] This was how America happened : a miracle, ordinary and yet eternal as man's need of bread. (Lamming, 1979:62)

Emigration is also the subject-matter of **The Emigrants** and **Water With Berries**. In both novels, Lamming enables the reader to clearly see and understand the effect and importance of exile in the character of the West Indian person.

After this brief overview of the issue of exile in the West Indian novel, I would now like to consider the different motivations behind the trend of exile peculiar to this region.

Causes of and Reasons for exile

The Emigrants and **Brown Girl, Brownstones** are set in almost the same historical time. The **Emigrants** deals with the massive West Indian emigration to England after the second world war whereas **Brown Girl, Brownstones** focuses on the lives of the West Indians, especially the Barbadians who have emigrated to New York City in 1939 (Marshall, 1981:4). It is in the spirit of stressing the importance of this trend that Gordon Lewis once used the phrase "a colonialism in reverse" to refer to this influx of large numbers of people from the Caribbean Islands who literally invaded the imperial centers in the 1930s and '40s (Lewis, 1978:304).

Two key points must be borne in mind when addressing the motivations for exile in Lamming and Marshall. First, although both writers are preoccupied with this social sickness, it nevertheless remains a fact that the former is deeply concerned with various motives, including the

economic ones, whereas the latter lays a heavy emphasis on the economic level. Secondly, it is obvious that both writers have used different techniques in conveying their messages. In this connection it is useful to point out that one important strategy used by Lamming to efficiently convey his message resides in the technique of dialogue. In **The Emigrants**, for the example, the close proximity in which the passengers live on board the ship, the *Golden Age*, enables the participants in the narrative to exchange views on issues affecting them as a group. As a result, in their conversation, the characters themselves reveal the deep motives of their flight. As for Marshall's literary devices, apart from some brief comments made by characters, the reader is informed of motives primarily by means of narrative comment.

Lamming's keen interest in the phenomenon of exile affecting the Caribbean area is clearly demonstrated by the fact that he speaks of this issue in many voices. Lamming was at once particularly "embittered, resigned, militant, critical, and angry," when addressing the issue of exile in his book of essays, **The Pleasures of Exile** (Nair, 1996:125). His preoccupation with this issue caused him to put the following question :

How has it come about that [...] a group of men, different in years and temperament and social origins, should leave the respective islands they know best, even exchange life there for circumstances which are almost wholly foreign to them? (Lamming, 1992:23)

In **The Emigrants**, exile is presented as a general phenomenon, or a daily activity, as people regularly flee from the region : "And every month they leave the right way, paying a passage in search of what : a better break. That's what the others say. Every man wants a better break" (Lamming, 1997:50). The novel lays a heavy emphasis on the fact that desertion from the region happens everyday and all means are used to leave the place, regardless of the risks involved. As one character observes in the novel : "Sloop, barge, canoe, call it what you like, ol' man, they scoot off at all hours o' de night for the Venezuela coast" (Lamming, 1997:34).

As it were, although the emigrants profess they are not criminals, they are all running away from their respective countries. To mention but a few nationalities, the emigrants come from Martinique, Guadeloupe, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago ...and Jamaica. When **The Emigrants** opens, every candidate for emigration is anxious to leave the West Indian coast as soon as possible, without delay. The repetition of sentences such as "We are all waiting for something to happen" (Lamming, 1997:5, 10-12) evidences their dread

and impatience to see the ship in its movement toward the "mother-country." Why are they fleeing their region? What are the basic reasons which explain the desire to emigrate at all cost that is characteristic of the West Indian person?

A scrutiny of the emigrants' thoughts reveals that enjoying a "better break" remains the basic reason which is vaguely but frequently stated by all of them to justify their massive exodus from the region. The narrator elaborates a little on this general motivation of the group as a whole when he declares in an authoritative voice that the emigrants "were all in search of the same thing which in a way they couldn't define: a better break. Broadly speaking it was little more than a desire to survive with a greater assurance of safety. They wanted to be happy in the pleasure they had chosen" (Lamming, 1997:86). This quote underlines the ambiguous attitude of the characters who are confronted with their own emigration. The concept of "better break" which is always evoked by all characters covers a multitude of elements within its scope.

Of course, the most obvious reason for the emigrants to undertake a flight from their region is *economic conditions* in the islands. In **Brown Girl, Brownstones** Boyce Deighton portrays the West Indies as a poverty stricken area: "Barbados is poor-poor" (Marshall, 1981:11). Though brief, this comment accurately describes what it means to be living in the West Indies. Economic exploitation dominates their lives at home. Silla Boyce sheds light on this aspect of West Indian life in her discussion with another character:

Iris, you know what it is to work hard and still never make a head-way? That's Bimshire. One crop. People having to work for next skin to nothing. The white people treating we like slave still and we taking it. The rum shop and the church join together to keep we pacify and in ignorance. That is Barbados. It is a terrible thing to know that you gon be poor all yuh life, no matter how hard you work. (Marshall, 1981:70)

George Lamming also makes the point that many West Indians "have been forced by economic necessity to undertake this risk of migration" (Lamming, 1992:23).

As is obvious from the comments of both writers, poverty dominates the Caribbean zone; as a result, the emigrants want to improve upon their plights. In **Brown Girl, Brownstones**, Marshall depicts the way many Barbadian immigrants who were poor at home have become ambitious in their struggle to buy brownstone houses in New York City:

The West Indians slowly edged their way in. Like a dark

sea nudging its way onto a white beach and staining the sand, they came. the West Indians, especially the Barbadians who never owned anything perhaps but a few poor acres in a poor land, loved the houses with the same fierce idolatry as they had the land on their obscure islands. (Marshall, 1981:4)

Along the same lines of thought, the possibility of *getting jobs* remains an important reason offered by the emigrants for their drift toward Europe, or toward North America. In **The Emigrants** the character who was engaged in a conversation with Higgins can be used to illustrate this point. When asked to explain what he plans to do in England, for one "got to want to do something, or there ain't no use going to England," his reply was without detour: "I just looking for a work" (Lamming, 1997:85). This trend is more pronounced, and the picture more accurately drawn in Marshall's novel. Most of the transplanted Barbadians came to "this man country," as they call it, in order to work and Silla and her fellow West Indians did really toil: "The mother worked overtime at the plant and come home each night, charging with head-like some wary animal, her eyes inflamed with fatigue" (Marshall, 1981:161). As Dorothy Hamer Denniston sees it, emigration to England or the United States for the purpose of securing gainful employment constitutes a reference to the poor economic conditions of the islands (Denniston, 1995:41).

Many scholars, including Ambalavaner Sivinandan, have been interested in the contrasting picture between life in the metropolis and life in the colony. In this connection, Sivinandan argues that the former "was a well-fed world, free, healthy, full of good things, of laughter, of children growing straight and strong", while the latter was "stricken with hunger, and disease, and [its] children wizened at birth" (Sivinandan, 1982:64-5). It goes without saying that with these images in mind, it becomes absolutely true that emigration remains the only source of salvation for the emigrants. It is evident that economic reasons sustain their flight, in the first place.

A close analysis of the emigrants' thought reveals, however, that some of them have been driven away by *political and philosophical reasons*. A case in point is Roger, a character in **Water with Berries** who rebels against his father's upper class mentality. Describing his father as "a comparatively wealthy man, whose ambition was to build his name into a monument of statues and impressive family tombs" (Lamming, 1971:72), Roger afterwards abuses his father on the basis of their ideological differences (Lamming, 1971:92). The narrator's statement that under such circumstances his move to the anonymous haven of England seems

inevitable is quite justified. For his part, Teeton is said to have been involved in an aborted revolutionary plot in San Cristobal. To save his life, exile remains his unique option.

It is also worth mentioning that many people have invaded the imperial centers because of the *educational possibilities* they offered. For instance, in **The Emigrants**, Philips, the law student on scholarship, is traveling to England for educational reasons (Lamming, 1997:85). Equally, in **Brown Girl, Brownstones**, the tough community of first generation West Indian immigrants in New York City are working "two and three jobs" so that their children could attend the most renowned American colleges and universities. In this respect, it is significant to know that in addition to the political ambition of the Association of Barbadian Homeowners and Businessmen, its other target remains how to secure a bright future for the young generation. Cecil Osborne, the President of this Association, expresses this view :

Tell me why we start this Association now when most of us gon soon be giving business to the undertaker? [...] It is because of the young people. Most of us did come to this man country with only the strength in we hand and a little learning in we head and had to make our way, but the young people have the opportunity to be professional and get out there and give these people big word for big word. Thus, they are our hope. (Marshall, 1981:221)

To fulfill their dream, these immigrants plan to give scholarships to their young people (Marshall, 1981:272). Of course, as is obvious from their determination, these parents are firmly convinced that the diplomas and certificates conferred on their offspring will ensure for them not only good jobs in the United States, but certain status and prestige should they return to the West Indies one day.

Routine in the Caribbean milieu has certainly played a major role in its people's determination to take flight from the region. Of course, as painted in both **The Emigrants** and **Brown Girl, Brownstones**, the Caribbean Islands could not meet to any degree the desires and expectations of the emigrants. As described, the place renders life very sour and offers no challenge to the emigrants who are all eager to prove something,

to taste something new and different from their day to day experience. In short, life in the West Indies, as is described in **The Emigrants**, is quite boring. Apart from the carnival, which brings life to the place once a year, there is no activity outside drinking and chasing women :

This Christmas is no different from the one that gone. An' de only thing bring a little life in de place is dat carnival. 'Cause if you take it serious you got to make yuh jump-up look like something. You see me here on dis boat leavin' Trinidad. Well, 'tis simply because ah little tired. Ah sick, bored. Ah doan' care w'at ah do next, but ah can't stan' in Trinidad no more 'cause ah know w'at rum taste like, an' ah know w'at woman taste like, an' if you know dose two you know Trinidad. (Lamming, 1997:62)

Exile, in other words, is an alternative to the iterative and boring conditions offered by home.

For the sake of *personal freedom*, many emigrants have undertaken such a long journey. The narrator in **The Emigrants** highlights this aspect when he states that upon his arrival in the ship he experiences a kind of freedom he never felt before on the island: "I feel my freedom fresh and precious. It was a child's freedom, the freedom too of some lately emancipated colonials" (Lamming, 1997:9). Therefore, it must be argued that unlike home, the ship provides the kind of freedom they were looking for.

But above all, it must be pointed out that the driving forces behind this general exodus characteristic of the area have to do with their condition of formerly colonized people. Indeed, *psychological motivations* that have their roots in *colonialism* best explain the type of exile characteristic of West Indians. Due to their common history, and through schooling, almost all the emigrants have been shaped into colonial subjects. Colonial schooling has had a profound impact on the character of the colonial subject. Perhaps it is worth saying that colonial education is not simply content with imposing alienation and deracination on colonial subjects but it also causes them to consider the imperial center and its history as genuine parts of themselves. It can be reasonably argued that the purpose of the colonial school of Little England² is to drum into the heads of schoolchildren that anything related to England is important in their own existence:

Celebrating the Empire Day with gusto, saluting

² In *the Castle of My Skin* is set in fictional Barbados, known as Little England. The title "Little England" which is attributed to Barbados sums up the kind of intimate colonial relationship which links Big England, the mother country and Little England, the colony.

the British flag, reading more British history than local history, and being told that a scholarship to a British university or a job in England is the apex of scholastic and economic achievement--all these experiences not surprisingly influence these children. (Nair, 1996:61)

Under these circumstances, the reader is not surprised when the narrator in **Water with Berries** makes the point that "From the earliest discovery of ambition," the West Indian emigrants "had realised that their future would have to be found elsewhere. Childhood was a warning; and school was a further proof. *From the beginning they had been educated for escape*" (Lamming, 1971:69).³

Likewise, basing his evaluation of colonial schooling in the Caribbean on George Lamming's fiction, Ambroise Kom considers the educational system as fundamental grounds from which the idea of emigration originates. He accuses the system of being responsible for training schoolboys and schoolgirls ready for commercial exportation :

Les enfants fréquentent une école qui ne fait guère cas de leur personnalité propre qui en somme, se garde bien d'attirer leur attention sur les réalités les plus cruciales du milieu ambiant. On verra qu'une telle interprétation explique l'exode massif des Antillais vers Londres. (Kom, 1986: 85)

No wonder in her critical analysis of the theme of exile in *The Emigrants*, Sandra Pouchet Paquet makes a connection between alienation and emigration. For the West Indian emigrant, exile stems from his colonial status, because his journey away from self begins at home under the colonial framework portrayed in *In the Castle of My Skin* where colonial education and religion are powerfully put into service so as to reinforce a crippling legacy of cultural and economic dependence (Paquet, 1982:19-20). Moreover, as Kom observes, colonial school inevitably leads to self-destruction :

Elle mène irrémédiablement les individus à l'auto-destruction. Le départ vers la métropole est une ultime tentative pour échapper à la néantisation qui guette le colonisé. Pour le narrateur-omniscient de **The Emigrants**, l'émigration est une façon de fuir la mort spirituelle qu'aurait constitué pour lui une carrière au sein de la fonction publique locale. (Kom, 1986:85)

It is by now obvious that colonial education is a process by which colonial subjects are alienated, disfigured, and literally readied for exportation from their villages

after their graduation. It is also clearly evident that having been taught all through school that England was the greatest nation through its domination of world history, and that it was the only country whose culture was worthy of the name, the next logical step for its victims would be to visit the place in order to "test" these ideas. As a consequence of their colonial education, they have developed a particular and fixed stand in their consideration of the metropolis:

...on the ship and even in the hostel, there was a feeling, more conscious in some than others, that England was not only a place, but a heritage. Some of us might have expressed a certain hostility to that heritage, but it remained, nevertheless, a hostility to something that was already a part of us. (Lamming, 1997:237)

As can be surmised from this quote, for the protagonists of **The Emigrants**, England stands in their minds as the big friend, the educator, the helper. England is their rightful heritage.

Thus, it can definitely be argued that the causes which sustain the phenomenon of exile that affects the whole area in so large a proportion are, in some way, connected to the colonial past of the place.

Stating similarities and differences

The foregoing development suggests that Paule Marshall and George Lamming have much in common regarding the issue of exile of West Indians in their fiction. However, despite the existence of some striking similarities between their writings as regards this theme, it remains however true that both writers' treatment of the issue evidences some differences as well.

There is a certain similarity in their views as regards the image of the United States. For both, the United States is generally associated with economic success or improvement of one's social status. This image is promoted in Lamming's **Season of Adventure**. Chiki's move to the United States has enabled him to purchase the Forest Reserve (Lamming, 1979:62). Likewise, **Brown Girl, Brownstones** portrays the economic success of the Bajan people in the United States. This tough community of West Indians in the States has staked out a claim to power with a carefully conceived plan which consists of working day and night to buy

³ My italics.

brownstone houses, and then renting out every room. In the States, "every Bajan is saving if it's only a dollar a week and buying house" (Marshall, 1981:24).

However, it is important to make the point that Marshall's depiction of Bajan success in this novel (as in her others) clearly indicates that it is usually bought at high price. To a large extent their "sellout" to American values, the sacrifice of an important part of one's psyche —one's cultural values — explains the Bajans' achievements in the United States. For instance, should the necessity arise, they are prepared to overcharge and sacrifice every cent to maintain property. Once one brownstone is paid for, they move to the next desirable area :

Every West Indian out here taking a lesson from the Jew landlord and converting these old houses into rooming houses -- and pulling down plenty-plenty money by the week. And now that the place is near overrun with roomers the Bajans getting out. They going! Every jack-man buying a swell house in dicky Crown Hights. (Marshall, 1981:173)

Along the same lines of thought, the wedding of Gatha Steed's daughter offers the reader an opportunity to appraise the Bajan community's total immersion in the American mainstream. Their wearing of imperial plumes and the huge and elaborate extravaganza of satin dresses displays the community's successful imitation of white America: "People home cun afford no big wedding, so when they come to New York and make little money you can't blame for doing things like the white people" (Marshall, 1981:140).

Besides economic success in the "Country of the Almighty Dollar," the Bajans are also striving for political power. They have formed an Association of Barbadian Homeowners and Businessmen, a lobbying group, the by-words of this Association being: "IT IS NOT THE DEPTHS FROM WHICH WE COME BUT THE HEIGHTS TO WHICH WE ASCEND" (Marshall, 1981:220), its members are firmly convinced that their interest group is "going to be the biggest thing since Marcus Garvey" (Marshall, 1981:196). Consequently, banded together in a spirit of self-help, the Bajan community in New York City seems to become a single voice, "sure of its goal and driving toward it". With power and passion they declare their political ambition to have a voice at the City Hall, to build a credit union and bank so that their presence will be heard and acknowledged. By joining together like the brownstones they inhabit, they are resolved to destroy the "picture of the poor colored with his hand always long out to the rich white one, begging". In so doing they

have shown an enterprising spirit (Marshall, 1981: 220-222) .

A sojourn in the United States can also bring increased awareness of historical and cultural realities. In **In the Castle of My Skin**, for example, Trumper's temporary exile to the United States has shed more light on what it means to be Black (Lamming, 1953: 286-290); and in **The Chosen Place, the Timeless People** Vere has come back from the United States with a completely different vision of modernity (Marshall, 1969: 198-201).

All in all, it can be said that America generally carries a positive meaning for both writers. Even if there are plenty of suggestions that the United States can also be painful and difficult, the ultimate result of emigration there is seen in many respects to be positive.

George Lamming's descriptions of the West Indian emigration to London evidence the corrosive effects of the exilic experience. While en route to England, the Strange Man (in **The Emigrants**) drives the rest of the group to anger when he questions the likelihood of their success and achievement there. Being more aware of the political structures that function to perpetuate their disadvantage in a colonial arrangement, the Strange Man predicts untold woes and sufferings the emigrants may face in London. He rightly foresees and foretells the fate of the group by asserting that all of them are going to bargain for their own death in London : "All you like men goin' to dig you own grave" (Lamming, 1997:63)

The emigrants do experience total bewilderment and dismay following their arrival in the "mother country" as predicted by the Strange Man. They are completely rejected, unacknowledged, and unneeded in the city of London. Lamming lays a heavy emphasis on the most disagreeable and unpleasant sides of their new lives. In London, the emigrants are confronted with unemployment, housing shortages, racism and the hypocrisy of the Londoners.

As is revealed, the emigrants face frequent dismissals from jobs in the metropolis. Colli's regular sacking from jobs is a symbolic instance which best illustrates their common experience (Lamming, 1997:206). Likewise, the three artists in **Water with Berries**, who were expecting fame in London, are angrily deceived and disappointed. All three give up their artistic dreams. Teeton has decided to stop painting (Lamming, 1971:59). As for Derek, the actor, he is left with no alternative than playing a corpse to earn his living : "Death is my bank. It brings what little grub I get" (Lamming, 1971:67). In short, as far as getting a job in England is concerned,

Jeremy best sums it all up when he says that there is no service for people like Teeton and the rest of the artists in London (Lamming, 1971:110). Indeed, their talents are "severely jeopardized by the terms of a colonial relationship to the metropolis" (Paquet, 1982:97).

Another element which shows Lamming's pessimistic stand on the issue remains his strong emphasis on the shortage of housing that has marked the existence of the emigrants in England. Through the newspaper, they were informed about that delicate problem in England in the course of their voyage. Once in London, they were all confronted with housing problems. Teeton's situation during his first year there is just one example :

... that year of vagrancy when he walked the streets in search of shelter. It felt like an eternity away : that slow, interminable routine of days when living alternated between nervous enquiry and the apologetic reply that he had arrived too late. He was out of luck. He had been exhausted by those journeys. He had often had that curious experience that his feet had gone ahead; his feet would be waiting outside before some door until he arrived. (Lamming, 1971:34-35)

Moreover, the reader feels the total insecurity linked to housing conditions in the metropolis when the writer offers a "repetition" of their earlier housing conditions in their final year, the seventh year. I contend here that this similarity in the first and seventh years suggests the perpetual instability one is confronted with in the metropolis. In that seventh year of stay, all the artists found themselves homeless after they had lost all their belongings in the burning down of their rooming house. It goes without any further comment that they became completely demoralized after this event. Consequently, homelessness dominates their conversation as a central topic of discussion:

When Roger and Derek spoke again, it was the calamity of homelessness which brought them together. Four nights after Nicole disappeared, their rooming house was burnt down. They had been plunged back into the roots of their previous feeling. Moreover, it seemed that Roger had suddenly lost the capacity to survive. (Lamming, 1971:207)

Apart from lack of job opportunities and good housing conditions in London, the emigrés also experienced another harsh reality that has left a stamp upon their hearts and minds, i. e. the xenophobia of the British people. The kind of English people one meets in **The Emigrants** are distinguished for and by their racial prejudice toward their visitors; they are presented as hostile people vis-a-vis their subjects :

Those limey English people ain't got no good min'. They

intention is to squeeze a man like me any day they see him, an' you'll find that they doan' like you in they country at all at all. First thing the limey bastards ask you is when you goin' back home, as though they ever stay where they live. An' if you look the sort a person to make good in they country they make a point o' pushin' a spoke in yuh wheel... You in the land o' the enemy, an' if you doan' keep yuh eye open for when they ready to stab you in the back you'll end up bad for so. You chaps got to keep the right friends, an' doan' get fool with any sweet talk, an' the way they smile at you. Behin' that smile, boy, the teeth they show does bite. An' they won' live you till they get rid o' you, chase you out of the country, or suck yuh blood like a blasted jumbie. (Lamming, 1997:67)

To give an official seal to hatred in England in the framework of **The Emigrants**, one learns that hatred is not only a private affair, but is also an institutional one. Instead of protecting the entire population, state institutions make a sharp distinction between "pure" and "colored" people. The British police usually carry out this part of the business through forged and false charges that it regularly brings against the emigrants in London. Among the suspected people in **The Emigrants** are Dickson and Azi; the latter is believed to be a drug dealer, which in fact he is not (Lamming, 1997:242). Huggins also is tracked down by the police. As he says himself, "Since the day I set foot on this soil they follow me without end" (Lamming, 1997:242). Likewise, in **Water with Berries**, all the artists in London are imprisoned on charges ranging from murder to arson and rape. Certainly, this is the situation to which Errol Francis refers when he suggests that in England, black people have more to fear than the white population, because apart from the daily racism, they also have to cope with the harassment from institutions designed to protect and serve the Republic from its colored invaders (Francis, 1993:179-205).

Failure is what one senses when it comes to considering the emigrants' achievement in England. Their disillusionment is complete and the reader is offered a total image of their disappointment and despair. Contrary to their expectation that England can do something to remedy their sense of inferior status and self-worth, they rather become fully aware themselves of their second class citizen status (Lamming, 1997:191). Tornado's complete disappointment in the promise of England is without limit. Although he is ambitious to get education, after difficult months of struggle in poverty to acquire it, Tornado gives up hope in the emigrant experience and sees their quest as an unattainable one. His public and proud announcement that he is going to marry Lilian, go back home, and live as they used to live before, is

very indicative of his deep disbelief, despair, and disappointment. In the same vein, the Caribbean women in **The Emigrants** succeed no better than the men in London. The dominant images of their conversation are the dungeon and the womb. These images allude to their feelings of desperation, confinement and isolation (Paquet, 1982:39).

The situation remains the same in **Water with Berries**. Here, Lamming's fullest fictional exploration of the West Indian artist in exile portrays the talented artists of San Cristobal as bondsmen struggling hopelessly to be free. Here, too, the disillusionment that naturally follows their early hope in England is exemplified in Derek's attitude toward the city of London. By the end, he, who used to love that city which he admiringly and lovingly called "a jewel in the night," was so disgusted that "he had lost all interest in the promises" of London (Lamming, 1971:219).

All in all, Lamming succeeds in arousing in the reader the feeling that all the emigrants are unanimously disappointed in the situation they are offered in England. All things considered, England is presented as a white land that offers no welcome to the emigrants (Lamming, 1961:27). Therefore, it is not surprising that Edward Kamau Brathwaite, referring to this situation, ironically expresses the view that "it is wonderful to be British — until one comes to Britain" (in Nair, 1996:55).

Conclusion

It must be borne in mind that the theme of exile, to a large extent, is given preeminence in Caribbean literature; and that the phenomenon of exile which affects this area is sustained by many motives ranging from the economic to the colonial. It is obvious from the development of this paper that both George Lamming and Paule Marshall have some similar views but that their outlooks differ in some significant respects.

George Lamming's presentation of the phenomenon of emigration is more pessimistic than Marshall's. Lamming's emigrants face frequent dismissals from jobs and racial discrimination in England. In short, a careful consideration of Lamming's exploration of this theme, as presented in **The Emigrants** (and **Water with Berries**) suggests that exile — at least to England — is no pleasure. As Wilfred Cartey has noted, in Lamming's novels, "exile leads to disillusionment, degradation and solitude" (Cartey, 1966:124-125). Consequently, Lamming's emigrants usually go back to their homeland with little to show for their pain.

This pessimistic image promoted in Lamming's works as regards emigration to England is different from Marshall's depiction. Paule Marshall's presentation of the Bajan community in New York City in **Brown Girl, Brownstones** explicitly offers a more optimistic vision of the same phenomenon. She describes the economic success of a people who have fled economic oppression at home but hints that this success has spiritual and cultural costs. The social and economic successes of the Bajan community in the United States are demonstrated in their ownership of brownstone houses and their formidable organization as a lobbying group. In the final analysis, I wholeheartedly concur with Mary Helen Washington that the first-generation of West Indian immigrants, these transplanted Barbadians who "are an employed, literate, ambitious, property-owning, upwardly mobile [people] came to the United States, on purpose, as willfully as many white immigrants; and they exercise their collective force to get what they need and want" (Washington, 1981:312). As a result, Marshall's emigrants do make home in the United States.

Definitely, the *destination* of emigration makes a difference in its result. There is more opportunity for success (in some respects at least) in the United States than in the "mother country". It must be noted that even in the United States, success comes at great cultural/psychological cost for the emigré. In the last analysis, it can be argued that the relationship between England and its former subjects which is entirely shaped by colonial inheritance accounts for the fundamental difference between emigration to England versus emigration to the United States. □

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Abstract One key issue addressed by a number of West Indian novelists is the theme of exile. Many of the West Indian people we meet in West Indian novels are characterized by their propensity to emigrate. This is the case with the fiction of George Lamming and Paule Marshall. However, the treatment of this subject by these writers sheds interesting lights on a number of similarities as well as differences. This article aims to establish some of their similarities and differences.

Résumé En partant du constat que, en dehors des problèmes liés au genre, le thème de l'exode constitue la préoccupation principale de la majorité des romanciers des Caraïbes, cet article recense dans **The Emigrants** de George Lamming et **Brown Girl, Brownstones** de Paule Marshall les différentes raisons qui expliquent ce phénomène. Il relève ensuite les points de similitude et de divergence eu égard aux différents développements de ce thème dans la fiction de George Lamming et Paule Marshall.