

## CHAPTER NINE

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### “English Brother or Not”: British State-National Critiques and the Moment of *Pressure*

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One reason for a lack of critical attention to *Pressure* (1975) from scholars of Samuel Selvon, despite its significance as a foundational black British film text, is the relative difficulty in classifying the work as part of a Selvon canon. Written during one of the more febrile moments of race consciousness in British history and the product of a collaboration with filmmaker and Black Power activist Horace Ové, *Pressure* is clearly not a single-authored text. Nor can it be considered fully in isolation. The story of *Pressure* is the story of two progenitor figures and three interrelated outputs, the film itself one of two texts emergent from an initial script, *The Immigrant*, co-authored by Selvon and Ové. The genesis of these *Pressure* texts are outlined in Selvon’s handwritten note on the cover of the manuscript of *The Immigrant* held at the University of the West Indies:

This is the original script of the feature film PRESSURE. The work was officially intended for a BBC TV drama-documentary. The TV project collapsed. Horace Ové (who works with films) went on to make the film PRESSURE. I used my research material to write an original drama for radio, MILK IN THE COFFEE, which was broadcast by the BBC. (Selvon and Ové, 1)

Selvon’s moderate disavowal here, reaffirmed later in conversation with Peter Nazareth, where he acknowledges that “I collaborated on the script [but] did not have a great deal to do with the actual shooting of the film” (434), further disrupts an easy assignation of the full film text of *Pressure* to Selvon’s body of work. Analyzing *Pressure* as part of a critical response to Selvon therefore requires a methodological manoeuvre: examining the whole quasi-triptych that constitutes its moment while deploying other Selvon works in comparative focus. In this way, Selvon the author can function as an organizing principle for interpreting the triptych as social text. The *Pressure* texts provide a political critique of Britain that is consanguine with Selvon’s individual pieces from that period and earlier, and resist the priority the British state has in preserving a certain political status quo. By exploring modes of experience and social relations that expose or counter state-national priorities, these works disrupt the principles behind the state’s management of race, represented by a narrative of crisis and a process of cultural classification that is a precondition for political multiculturalism.

I refer to Britain as a “state-nation” above because of the role the state plays in establishing and managing British national values, coherence, and stability, while neglecting, or actively curtailing, actual national experience in the form of civic participation, popular sovereignty, and representative democracy. Selvon has recently been highlighted as reimagining an English nation in counter-British terms. For Elizabeth Maslen, his novel *The Lonely Londoners* “offered subversive readings” of the national condition of England, and “call[ed] for a conscious act of revision” for a moribund Englishness yoked to the declining post-imperial British state (45). Echoing Maslen, Michael Gardiner argues that the novel emphasizes a rebellious democracy amongst those marginalized within the state-nation, where the characters [...] often-exaggerated civility [...] reiterates Englishness in a familiar-yet-unfamiliar experiential form” (90), while as black immigrants they occupy “the place of civic collectivists who find themselves to be a state-national scapegoat” (91). *The Lonely Londoners* thus advances the project of reclaiming England from the national narratives of the state, which, for the sake of British state-national stability and continuity, consign England to either a pastoral, elegiac “pastness” or reject Englishness as white-supremacist and/or ethno-cultural. The *Pressure* texts extend this, directly dramatizing the conflict described by Gardiner between civic participation and a state politics of race; this is played out in the opposition between meaningful social relations, solidarity, and grassroots political organization, and the institutional power of the state form most readily evoked through the police. The texts critique the role of state management in the discursive production of race, with respect to both the incipient classifying practice of political multiculturalism and the narratives of crisis and moral panic prevalent around blackness in the 1970s.

*The Immigrant* and *Pressure* revolve around the changing political consciousness of Anthony, the son of Trinidadian migrant parents who begins the narrative as a subdued representative of colonial mimicry and ends it as a radical and informed political actor. The spur for this transformation is his inability to find a job despite his credible school-leaving qualifications: he is rejected at interview, where racial profiling is insinuated; he enviously regards the wage-enabled freedom of his white friends; he is caught up in the small-scale criminal enterprises of his disenfranchised black peers. Anthony’s older brother Colin organizes a group dedicated to black political consciousness and solidarity. Eventually Colin’s persistent agitation of his brother bears fruit and Anthony attends a Black Power meeting, which is violently broken up by the police. The closing scenes of both the film and screenplay track the aftermath of the meeting, where Anthony’s increasingly vocal opposition to racism is channelled through greater involvement in the protest movement, and which triggers a familial and intergenerational reckoning in his household over the migrant experience. *Milk in the Coffee*, Selvon’s single-authored radio

play, dispenses with Colin and the explicit Black Power motif, but retains the race politics of the 1970s approached through unemployment, demands for integration, and police racism experienced by the protagonist – now “Andrew”, but in other respects similar to *Pressure*’s Anthony.

The historical frame for the triptych is contemporaneous with Selvon’s *Moses Ascending*, published in 1975, a critical period in Britain’s post-war narrative of race, where the reconfiguration of race from biological to cultural classification was providing firm foundations for subsequent strategies in the state definition and management of culture. The immediate background to this transition can be seen in the 1968 Race Relations Act, which not only codified the framework through which discrimination could be prosecuted, but also validated the existence of categories of “racial origin” to empower that framework. Subsequently, both the Commonwealth Immigration Act (1968) and its successor, the Immigration Act (1971), saw a renegotiation of the criteria and basis for British citizenship, or more accurately, subjecthood, as rights were withdrawn from previously entitled Commonwealth citizens; these measures are an indication of exactly how, in the words of Ben Pitcher, “the state [is] the single most important social actor in the politics of race” (4). This new phase in race politics not only effectively legislated for the division of the UK population into racial-cultural groups, but also nourished a developing post-war British nationalism based on culturalism and ethno-cultural homogeneity – the so-called “new racism” (Barker). Nowhere is an ethnicized vision of Britishness more starkly displayed than in Enoch Powell’s infamous April 1968 speech in Birmingham, the racialized “Rivers of Blood”. This oration led to Powell’s symbolic ejection from the Conservative shadow cabinet, as his successors went about simultaneously castigating and implementing his vision. Powell’s centrality to British discourses of race can hardly be overstated, but it is important to recognize the role of his ethnicizing vision in propping up the state-national vision of Britain in the 1970s, maintaining a compliant Englishness and warding off the dangers of devolutionary fragmentation in the post-imperial void. As Tom Nairn describes, writing in 1977, the political career of Powell was determined most acutely by one project:

Powell’s basic concern is with England and the – as he sees it – half-submerged nationalism of the English. His real aspiration is to redefine this national identity in terms appropriate to the times – and in particular, appropriate to the end of empire. England’s destiny was once an imperial one; now it has to be something else. (258)

Powell’s ideological programme was on the surface incoherent and reactionary, an “incredible patchwork of nostrums”, stretching to “economic laissez-faire, Little England, social discipline, trade before aid, loyalty to Ulster, and racism” (260). It was the final nostrum that bore the greatest weight in Powell’s mission to restore

England, one that he perceived as integral to the continuation of a “great nation” ideal, but importantly one that presented no challenge to the integrity and continuity of the British state and establishment. In that moment, as Nairn points out, “England need[ed] another war” and Powell’s state-national scapegoats were already lined up as the opposing combatants:

The only *new* experience, going sharply counter to tradition, [had] been that of the coloured immigration of the 1950s and 60s. Hence, as Powell realized, it [had] become possible to define Englishness vis-à-vis this internal “enemy”, this “foreign body” in our own streets”. (274)

The racism of the 1970s, the backdrop to the dramatic sequences that occur in *Pressure*, is thus intrinsically linked to the crisis of English nationhood caused by the negation of imperial destiny and the associated threat to British state-national legitimacy posed by the prospective development of an alternative English national consciousness.

Discourses of race underwritten by state actors such as politicians, the police and the BBC, and pertaining to black criminality and law and order, are central to *Pressure*; as Kobena Mercer argues in a rare critical response to the film, its narrative arc and characterization constitute “a counterreply to the criminalizing stereotypes generated and amplified by media-led moral panics on race and crime in the seventies” (57). In this respect, *Pressure* substantially anticipates the comprehensive racial critique presented by Birmingham’s Centre for Comparative Cultural Studies in *Policing the Crisis* (1978) (Hall et al). In its analysis of the racialization of street crime and the concomitant invention of a moral panic around mugging, *Policing the Crisis* diagnosed the state’s discursive management, which was already shaping a British public understanding of race in the 1970s. This managerial strategy is enmeshed with the rise of a British politics of multiculturalism, a system that Pitcher describes as “a form of state practice” (4) in which the assertion of pluralism “actually conceals a highly prescriptive agenda which imposes the state’s own definition of community and sets out the terms of legitimate belief and behavior that may occur within it” (8–9). This description is particularly apposite in the context of the British state-nation, where multiculturalism can be seen as the natural extension of cultural management established by the race legislation of the preceding decades.

State-institutional attitudes to culture and race are unavoidable features of *Pressure*, resulting not only from a narrative focus on various manifestations of racism in its historical moment, but from the conditions of its production and release. Publicly funded through the British Film Institute (BFI) and completed in 1975, the film was mothballed for three years on account of “scenes showing police brutality” (Ward). Despite this, the film was released to US audiences in 1976, suggesting different priorities in film censorship at work. For Mercer,

the BFI's original decision to fund *Pressure* resulted from the context of racial discontentment, where "political expediency—the need to be seen to be doing something—was a major aspect of the benevolent gestures of many public institutions, now hurriedly redistributing funding to black projects" (77); the banning of what must have been an unpalatable final result suggests a further level of state sanction, maintaining control over a narrative of race. This is particularly important in a period of racialized moral panic, where only certain expressions of dissent were permissible, especially where the police were concerned. The modern BFI position on *Pressure*, outlined by Julia Toppin on the organization's *Screenonline*, makes no reference to the temporary ban, but acknowledges "how forthright and critical the film is of the British system, in what were very sensitive times", and that "*Pressure* remains a key Black British film, which helps to demonstrate how modern multi-cultural Britain was shaped". The tone of Toppin's writing encapsulates how the energies of a strident political critique of state power and institutional privilege such as *Pressure* can be diverted into reinforcing a certain vision of Britishness, where criticism is tolerated – even encouraged – before being subverted and absorbed into resolved, unitary, "modern multi-cultural Britain". Toppin's reference to "Black British" is also inflected with a sense of disempowerment: this is the black Britain of equal opportunities declarations, classification and measurement, where *Pressure* can be safely quarantined within a narrow band of ethnicized concerns. The deeper political and social implications of the film – for collective action, citizenship, institutional racism, and a state politics of ethnicization – are diminished when equated with sectionalism in this manner.

Of course, blackness as objectification and as a rallying point for anti-racist political action is a key element in *Pressure*. An indicative irony of the screenplay *The Immigrant* is that the protagonist, Anthony, is not an immigrant at all; contrarily, in the odd formulation of Toppin, he is "born in Britain and is British". Anthony's experience mirrors the immigrant in his progressive, Fanonian realization of the "fact of blackness", illustrated using a series of contrasts between his overtly Anglo-British cultural choices and his experiences of racism. He prefers fish and chips to patty and his mother's Trinidadian cooking, and bacon and eggs to avocado; to the chagrin of his brother, he is a patron of mainstream nightclubs; his initial panicked reaction to the possibility of trouble with the police – "Oh God, oh God ... the Police ... the Police! They coming? They coming? Are they here?" (54) – speaks of a bourgeois sensibility, reminiscent of Harris from *The Lonely Londoners*, that valorizes respectability and order. His older brother Colin bemoans that "I just can't get him to think black" (38). Before the intervention of the police, Anthony's slow-burning politicization takes place initially through the casual racism he finds in the employment market. While his lesser-qualified

white friends are employed, Anthony finds himself profiled as fit only for manual labour, sent to the welding yard to be greeted with “Bloody hell! Those geezers up at the Exchange always doing the same thing. I ain’t got no jobs here for anybody with ‘O’ levels. They bloody well know that” (48). This exchange with the welding yard foreman is part of a succession of encounters in which Anthony’s education and intellect are mismatched or rejected by potential employers, and his gradual disenchantment accompanies a realization of the material conditions and political decisions that underpin them, contextualizing the film’s later introduction of the British Black Power movement. Paul Gilroy observes that the 1971–72 sitting of the Home Affairs Select Committee, part of the remit of which was to examine the rise of Black Power movements in Britain, made “no direct connection between the rise of Black Power and unemployment” (*There Ain’t* 113). This constitutes a delinking of social unrest, political organization, underlying economic conditions, and the racism that amplified those conditions. Anthony is presented as a willing volunteer for assimilation as a British state-cultural citizen who gradually turns to alternative forms of political expression and participation, and whose struggles not only reintroduce but amplify those links.

The emphasis on colour in the scripting of on-screen characters in *The Immigrant* gives an indication of the importance of racial signposting to *Pressure’s* political counter-narrative, and makes clear the implications of the visual depictions. Anthony encounters “one of his old BLACK SCHOOLMATES, who is standing around with a WHITE GIRLFRIEND” (22); a “BLACK WELDER with torch in hand” is juxtaposed with “a WHITE WOMAN TYPIST and a WHITE CLERICAL WORKER” (48); later, there are “YOUNG CHILDREN both WHITE and BLACK playing without any hang-ups” (59). The dialogue presents a similar emphasis, where capitalization draws out the racialized conflicts in the narrative. This is epiphanic in the moment of Anthony’s outrage in the closing scenes of *The Immigrant*, where police intimidation of his family forces a reconsideration of his own political position:

God is a WHITE MAN, and it is the WHITE MAN who has done this to us.... and they ain’t the only people in the world ... They ain’t no fucking LORDS AND MASTERS ... We are human. BLACK PEOPLE are fucking human beings too! (75)

On the surface, Anthony’s angry denunciation of white superiority, echoing the recurrent binary of black and white, seems at odds with Selvon’s moderate stance on an explicit black politics. Nevertheless, these elements in *The Immigrant* can be traced elsewhere in contemporaneous and earlier Selvon works; in *Moses Ascending*, for example, Mervyn Morris has argued that “[r]acial discrimination is assaulted in passage after passage” (“Introduction” ix). The racial segregation of work into black/heavy labour and white/administrative labour is reminiscent of Cap’s visit

to the railway in *The Lonely Londoners* (examined perceptively by Lisa Kabesh in “Mapping Freedom”). The power of sexual desire and romantic involvement to both transgress and entrench racial classification, the black boy/white girl motif referenced here and acted out by Anthony himself, echoes in numerous other Selvon works, not least *Milk in the Coffee*. The emphasis in dialogue conveyed by the capitalization of “BLACK PEOPLE” in the script recalls a stylistic tactic in *The Housing Lark* (1965), where “OUR PEOPLE”, capitalized, is used to refer to Caribbean migrants in London by the characters Poor (107), Teena (113, 133), and also by the narrator (110, 115, 128, 152). The treatment of racialized experience in *The Immigrant* is thus, throughout, expressed in a mode consonant with Selvon’s other writing, reflecting his influence on the collaborative work.

Establishing Selvon in the thematic concerns of *Pressure* is less clear-cut when considering the most pressing political articulation of race in the film, which comes through conflict between a repressive police force and an incipient Black Power movement. Here, it seems more credible to find the hand of Ové, active in the Black Power efforts of the late 1960s and early 1970s. *Pressure* dramatizes the history of encounter between Black Power and the police in Britain, drawing on examples of civic organization such as the Mangrove Demonstration of August 1970. This march was in opposition to repeated police raids, conducted under the pretence of targeting the sale of drugs, on the Mangrove restaurant in Notting Hill, popular with the area’s black community and political activists. Ové was involved in documenting the protest through photography, and later the Mangrove restaurant itself would play a cameo role in *Pressure*. Robin Bunce and Paul Field’s biography of Darcus Howe extensively details the moment of the demonstration as marking a watershed in the state’s awareness of black political activism:

The Mangrove Demonstration sent shockwaves through the British polity. Black Power, which had been such a potent force in the United States and the Caribbean, was finally flexing its muscles in Britain. The press were horrified, ministers demanded immediate briefings and the Metropolitan Police, determined to stamp out black radicalism, took it as a cue to launch a series of raids on the leaders responsible for the protest. (105)

This account indicates the way racialized policing was part of a reaction to political agency that not only threatened a racial status quo, but seemed to provide a template for action against the larger political structures that enabled it. This culminated in the trial of the Mangrove Nine, where several of the defendants, including Howe, opted to represent themselves in court; their subsequent acquittal not only a triumph for solidarity in the face of institutional police racism – recognized in closing remarks by the judge – but also a distinctive act of self-determination in the face of British sovereignty massed in the courts, the police force, and the media.

In contrast to Ové’s direct participation in this phase of British Black Power, Selvon’s London novels treat black consciousness and political organization with a degree of ambivalence or scepticism that can also be traced in the substance of the *Pressure* texts. Moses’s laughing dismissal of Galahad’s Fanonian turn in *The Lonely Londoners* – “that is a sharp theory, why don’t you write about it” (89) – is the first indication, and in the inconsistent Galahad of *Moses Ascending*, as Susheila Nasta describes, “the political activist is ridiculed by the narrator’s wider vision which penetrates beneath his Black Power ‘glad rags’ and the use of the latest political jargon to expose a still profoundly vulnerable awareness of self” (“Setting up Home” 93). This sceptical position surfaces in *The Immigrant*, where amidst the preparations for the final protest, there is a glimpse of the same humor as Galahad’s posturing in the misjudged outrage of Junior’s placard:

JUDGEMENT HAS COME  
 MERCY IS GONE  
 BLOOD! BLOOD! BLOOD!  
 ALL WE WANT IS DEATH  
 TO ALL WHITE PEOPLE! (83, original emphasis)

Out of place among banners impeaching the police and calling for solidarity, the Old Testament exaggeration of the message is rendered doubly ridiculous in the closing visuals of *Pressure*, where the placard is carried solemnly by a white man.

Despite this ambivalence, Morris provides a useful corrective when he points out that “[r]esistant to Black Power, Moses nevertheless allows us several indications of the white racism to which Black Power is one response” (“Introduction” ix). This more moderate position is an effective barometer for *The Immigrant*, where the narrative is ambivalent towards racial-political radicalism, but occurrences of white racism informed by the ethno-cultural imperatives of the state abound. While pretensions and violent binaries are satirized, solidarity remains a key resource in the struggle against racism. Anthony’s scepticism towards the ameliorative potential of Black Power in relation to poverty and unemployment prompts an angry response from Colin, his activist brother:

You don’t see Black Power feeding them, eh? That’s why I just come from the pig’s house trying to get Jacko out... Cha! I’m trying to get a lawyer to go down and arrange some kind of bail [...] that’s what Black Power is all about! Something constructive! Not going around thieving tins of cornbeef! (62)

Colin’s speech argues for effective collectivist action, which Gardiner diagnoses as characteristic of the boys’ lifestyle in *The Lonely Londoners*, and which challenges the divide-and-rule priorities of the state, symbolized by the “pig’s house”. The ambivalence towards Black Power in Selvon and elsewhere is indicative of the paradox this generates, where solidarity produces a democratic collective that

draws its coherence from the racial-ethnic dividing lines prescribed by the managerial state.

Continuing with his identification of a subtle shift towards the political in Selvon's work, Morris notes that "[t]he police, a negligible element in *The Lonely Londoners*, are a particular focus in *Moses Ascending*" ("Introduction" ix), a focus which is paralleled in *The Immigrant*. In advance of *Policing the Crisis*, the police are the chief antagonists who manufacture crisis around street encounters and political mobilization. The notorious "suspected person" or "sus" laws are aired, where "TWO POLICEMEN have a BLACK YOUTH against the wall, with his hands above his head. One of them is briskly frisking the YOUTH" (31). The break-up of the Black Power meeting, the catalyzing event in Anthony's radicalization, involves a particularly violent police intervention, featuring "TWO YOUNG GIRLS [being] savaged by the dogs" (70), the arrest of an "ELDERLY BLACK WOMAN [...] (in great fright and distress)" (70), and the interrogation of suspects to a soundtrack of "[s]houts and screams and blows as if people are being beaten" (72). In the aftermath of consecutive raids on the meeting and a subsequent "drugs" raid on Colin and Anthony's parents' house, the imbrication between state-media reports and police interests is brought home by the drifting sound from the television set, where "the raid is mentioned very briefly stating that TEN Police were beaten up at a Ladbroke Grove Black Power Benefit, and five have been detained in hospital" (87, original emphasis). The racial character attached to the conflict ties this particular state narrative to Pitcher's description of a multiculturalism that is both "prescriptive" and allows for the literal policing of "legitimate beliefs and behaviour" (9). Here, the Black Power Benefit is repurposed as an example by the state, its collectivism and political agitation positioned outside the parameters of permissible dissent through an equivalence drawn between black political organization and violence against benevolent order.

The dream sequence near the conclusion of *Pressure* alludes to a fantasy of violent retribution against the police, where Anthony imagines himself knifing a squealing shape beneath a blanket which is then revealed as a pig. The scene itself provoked consternation: David Wilson's review described it as the film's "only serious miscalculation", though he inaccurately describes Anthony as "stabbing a white man who metamorphoses into a pig" (141) which is, as Stewart Home points out, "a fantasy of the critic's own making". Although a directly retributive reading of this scene is persuasive, this "pig" is more convincing as "[t]he Big White Brother PIG [that] tells everybody what to do!" (85), the ultimate object of Anthony's maturing ire: an established ruling elite that is representative of an Orwellian pig-state (two years later, Pink Floyd's *Animals* would depict pigs in the same way). This reading is backed up by the surroundings in which Anthony perpetrates the pig-stabbing – a dim but opulent bedroom inside a country house, the grounds of which he has symbolically broken into and wandered among,

in an enactment of the 1970s “crisis” of the threatening black male figure. His transgressive penetration into aristocratic splendour, and into the sanctity of the white domestic space, is strongly contrasted to the spatial reality of his own home – a small flat above his father’s shop – and the decrepit accommodation of his black friends. This transgression is representative of a challenge to prescriptive state-national modes of experience which are regulated spatially, explored elsewhere in *The Immigrant’s* spatial construction of London. For Gardiner, the boys’ exploration of London – Charing Cross, Piccadilly Circus, Marble Arch, Bayswater – provides some of the most important civic aspects of *The Lonely Londoners*: appropriating imperial spaces, tramping and contravening state-delimited boundaries, celebrating lived experience, and laying a claim to place (90–91). *The Immigrant* continues this fictional engagement with the London cityscape in its naming of London locations: the youth club situated in “the Metro in Ladbroke Grove” (14); the exploratory perspective as “[w]e follow them in the Portobello road” (35); protestors encroaching on the sacred institutional authority of the Old Bailey (89). Home describes the influence of Godard and Buñuel in the Portobello Road scenes in *Pressure*, “with passers-by deliberately stepping into frame and leering towards the camera”; acts of traverse and transgression in a spatial sense – cruising, loitering, fleeing the police, roaming in areas of white privilege – are underscored by a cinematic style that approximates the unpredictable, and unmanageable, everyday of London street life.

Just like navigating the space of the street, negotiating the domestic sphere of the house is a recognizable trope in Selvon’s writing. Drawing on the Moses novels and *The Housing Lark*, Roydon Salick notes that “worrying about rent and accommodation were critical elements in Selvon’s metropolitan immigrant experience” (*The Novels* 113), while for James Procter, migrant living space in *The Lonely Londoners* provided both an “exclusionary environment” and “a site of congregation and public change”, an “important repository for group consciousness” (45, 46). The focus on the quality and availability of housing for migrants in post-war black British writing is itself a reflection of certain state priorities. Ové has pointed out that governmental “active” indifference towards the rapacious practices of “slumlords” such as Peter Rachman “had created a huge avenue for Rachman to move into. Because nobody wanted to house all these black workers that they’d brought over from the Caribbean to do the dirty work for them” (Green 344). The quasi-collectivist home spaces of *The Lonely Londoners* decay generationally to a new level of dereliction in *The Immigrant*, where Jacko and the boys live in two rooms, a “dirty, dingy basement in a dilapidated derelict of a house [...] [The other room] is in even worse condition, cluttered with rubbish and rubble of all kinds” (52). The set directions make clear the poverty, impermanence and marginality of young black life in London:

the shabby, dirty room in which there is only an old rusty paraffin heater, two single beds with dirty sheets, a wobbly table, two old chairs. The only window is barred off with pieces of box wood as there is no glass....A naked bulb hanging from a limp electric cord....The wallpaper is hanging off the walls. The ceiling is cracked and flaking, etc. (54).

The bare language of the scene-setting in the script directly evokes the destitution of the boys. This is the story of housing policy from the other side of Powell's emotive "white flight" neighbourhood in the Birmingham speech. In one sense, there is an upwards trajectory to the question of housing traceable through the London novels: the difficulty in securing, maintaining, and heating rented properties in *The Lonely Londoners* progressing through the perils of acquisition in *The Housing Lark*, to tentative ownership in *Moses Ascending*. Considering the return to impoverished living conditions in *Pressure*, seen in the experience of Jacko and his new generation of "boys", the corrosive effects of the government's management strategy of "active indifference", effectively leading to segregated slum-formation, are starkly illustrated.

Despite its urgent demand for "waking up" and mobilization, *Pressure* ends with a resonant scene of bedraggled and thwarted protest in the rain outside the Old Bailey. Arranged against the full institutional power of the British legal system, encapsulated in the Central Criminal Court of England and Wales, the tone of the final lines is unmistakable in *The Immigrant*, where the protestors are described as walking "In circles... and circles... and circles..." (89), a heavy-handed suggestion of the "circularity" of black experience in Britain that Nasta has identified in the London novels and the plays of *Eldorado West One* ("Introduction", *Eldorado* 7–8). These images provide a particularly stark illustration of frustrated activism when compared to pictures taken by Ové at the Mangrove Demonstration, which capture some of the scale and energy of the Black Power movement earlier in the decade. The most explicit articulation of the political inertia of Britain is left to Anthony, newly politicized and, through the immediacy of personal experience, now aware of the state's responsibility for the promulgation of racialized thinking through institutional and discursive power:

If you look at it this way, who runs the country? Who has the Power? Who has the Army? and the Police Stations? Who runs the Schools ... and the Educational System? Who controls all the jobs??? Just a handful of people ... just a handful of people have all this power and they tell everybody what to do! (85, original emphasis)

Where *The Immigrant* ends on a note of frustrated pathos, the closing moments of *Pressure* include a slight but indicative variation on the script. Rather than closing with the protest, the camera angle rises from street level before resting on the imposing dome of the Old Bailey, surmounted by a gilded statue of Justice.

The shot lingers and fades, leaving the protestors, and the film, presenting an unanswered question to the literal and figurative architecture of the British justice system. This final scene appropriately extends the disproportionate, criminalizing response to “constructive” civic collectivism; although the ideological force of Black Power in the film remains caught between political empowerment and racial re-inscription, the focus on the institutional quality of British racism and its common purpose alongside state-national priorities is maintained.

The differences between *Pressure* and *Milk in the Coffee* are more pronounced than the differences between the former and *The Immigrant*. Selvon chose radio as the medium for his own interpretation of the material that had constituted *The Immigrant*, and justified it to Peter Nazareth by favourably, and pointedly, comparing radio plays to visual performance: “I like writing radio plays. I think drama for radio is much more imaginative, and I can do that much better” (Nazareth 433). As one of the first writers to make contact with Henry Swanzy and *Caribbean Voices* at the BBC in London, Selvon’s literary career in Britain had been launched from a platform provided by his stories for radio; during his time in Britain, over 20 of his plays were broadcast by the BBC (Nasta “Introduction” *Eldorado* 4). Describing “Caribbean Voices” as “the greatest thing that ever happened”, Selvon said his experience with radio plays cemented a relationship with the oral and aural in his experiments with nation language, and he described his novels as an attempt “to convert this oral impression into a visual one, so that the page becomes a tape recorder as it were” (Thieme and Dotti 117, 119).

Unlike *The Immigrant*, *Milk in the Coffee* successfully navigated the censors and was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in June 1975. Although the BBC has a non-partisan remit, as a state broadcaster it has historically been unwilling to go beyond low-level engagement with British politics to present a critique of the state-form of which it is a part. With *Pressure* languishing in the archives of the BFI, *Milk in the Coffee* presented a sufficiently tolerable vision of British society to be optioned by the corporation. That is not to say that the play is politically anodyne or apolitical. The narrative shares many features which could demarcate Selvon’s influence on the original screenplay: a *bildungsroman* set out according to a generational divide between migrant father and “native” son, with “sus” searches and implied police brutality, prejudiced working environments, and the recurring juxtaposition of Trinidad and England. The play communicates an acute awareness of the wider background of British politics at the time, particularly the incipience of Thatcherite politics. Andrew’s father Ralph, “bitter and bigoted” according to the abstract (1), seems to adopt a post-consensus conservative position where he announces that “I don’t believe in all this welfare and culture thing, that’s the truth. Maybe if I had wallop him and give him a few thumps when he was growing up, I would of knock all that Englishified stupidity out

of him” (54, original emphasis). Ralph is a parody, railing against “Englishified stupidity” at exactly the moment that the British post-war political consensus is aligning with his suspicion of welfare. The generational schism recurs elsewhere, as the black teenager Charlo, describing his relationship with his parents before he “cut out”, explains that “I tell them it’s all their bloody fault [...]. Right? They just left the children to their own resources, and fend for themselves” (20). Charlo’s words presciently indicate the changing shape of British political consensus, the betrayal of post-imperial promises to Commonwealth migrants, and the development of a Thatcherite ideology of individualism. The breakdown of familial and intergenerational bonds and obligations are here suggestive of the neglect of social relations – the absence of meaningful, civic participation and communality – within the state-national reality of Britain. Charlo and Andrew, second-generation Caribbean migrants with denuded cultural-historical resources to fall back on, are in a unique position to perceive the extent of this national disintegration.

The politics of race that is channelled through the Black Power movement in *Pressure* is invested in *Milk in the Coffee* in the drama surrounding a gollywog doll. The presence – and destruction – of the doll stands in for many of the explicit representations of race and racism in the film. The gollywog is initially introduced through Gran, who keeps her childhood toy as a memento of Trinidad. Its discovery in the household precipitates an angry exchange between Andrew and his father. For Ralph, the gollywog is “blighting [his] luck” and “bringing trouble in [his] household” (23), an “evil voodoo thing” (24) which represents “how the white people who educate you see all of we” (23, original emphasis). Consequently, he hacks it to pieces with a kitchen knife. This violence towards the doll crystallizes a number of Ralph’s anxieties and frustrations: resentment of his mother-in-law’s naivety, and her imposition on him; impotence in the face of racism; and anger at the memory of Trinidad and his experience of migration. Ralph’s destruction of the doll is clearly mirrored in Andrew’s subsequent encounter with the police, where he is profiled, stopped and searched. They find a second gollywog doll, bought as a replacement for his grandmother’s, which is then similarly cut apart, “[slashed] to shreds” (34), by a penknife-wielding police officer searching for drugs. Here, the tearing of the doll *is* suggestive of a voodoo-like metaphorical function, where the violence visited on the crudely realized black body encapsulates the dynamic of the racialized stop-and-search and “law and order” panics, and prefigures the assault Andrew suffers at the hands of the same police officers. Despite the different valences of the respective gollywog incidents, they are consciously aligned by Andrew, who laments “the hate, man, the hate [...]. My dad, when he slashed it up [...] and that fuzz did the same thing [...]. They both had that hate in their eyes” (44). In the eyes of Andrew,

for whom the gollywog is “only a rag doll” (23), the slashing evidences the “hate” of an entrenched and oppositional race consciousness, tending towards violence, which admits no progressive resolution.

The gollywog is also the subject of an impending government ban on the grounds of racial sensitivity: Ralph flatly states that “black people don’t like the idea and the government should eradicate them” (23). The credibility of Ralph’s sentiments is diminished by the social and economic conditions faced by Andrew over the course of the play, victimized by the police and proscribed from certain forms of employment. Indeed, as Andrew points out in response to the gollywog debate, “I’d have thought the government could attend to some more pressing problems. Like employment, for instance. I’m not the only black boy looking around for something decent to do” (23). Recalling the extensive narrative interrogation of employment, socio-economics and unrest in *Pressure*, Andrew’s words juxtapose the management of the British state-national brand, symbolized in the gollywog ban, against substantive political action. This “legislating for sensitivity” also chimes with Mercer’s diagnosis of a kind of racial-political expediency in the actions of the state in the 1970s. A prototypically British state-multicultural position, such a policy masks the material conditions and state practices that underpin the continuation of racial typographies under a veneer of attentiveness to cultural difference – one that maintains division even as it presents an inadequate attempt at resolution.

The conclusion to *Milk in the Coffee* sees Andrew and his white girlfriend Brenda symbolically entering a new nightclub together, connoting a future of new experience and resolution in the face of racism. However, the contrasting conclusion of *Pressure* seems to capture institutional failures and state-national management in Britain in the mid-1970s more accurately. During the time the film spent in limbo, Selvon moved to Scotland to take up a creative writing fellowship at the University of Dundee. This period, a first step away from England, is equated by Kenneth Ramchand with “a growing dissatisfaction with life in the mother country [that] prompted him to leave, never to return”, culminating in another migration to Canada in 1978 (“Selvon, Samuel Dickson”). Selvon’s departure from Scotland came immediately before one of the strongest illustrations of British state intervention in democratic process: the 1979 referendum on the introduction of a devolved Scottish Assembly, which was defeated on a government-introduced technicality that required support from an arbitrary 40 percent of the electorate rather than a simple majority. The temporary suspension of normal first-past-the-post practice marked another chapter in the state’s continued shoring-up of the British-nation concept in the post-war period. Like the civic and democratic claim for self-determination from Scotland, the collectivist politics and social critique of *Pressure* represent a challenge to a state-national ideal of integrity, unity, and

perpetuation. The moment of *Pressure* thus threatens not only a state-sanctioned narrative of race, but also the state-sanctioned definition of civic belonging and national experience permissible in the context of England during the post-war and post-imperial decline of the British state form.