

CONCEPTUALIZING THE CARIBBEAN:  
REEXPORTATION AND ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN CULTURAL PRODUCTS

by  
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This dissertation examines the relationship between British and American conceptualizations of the Anglophone Caribbean and the way that Anglophone Caribbean fiction writers and filmmakers tend to represent the region. Central to my project is the process of reexportation, whereby Caribbean artists attain success at home by first achieving renown abroad. I argue that the primary implication of reexportation is that British and American conceptualizations of the Anglophone Caribbean have had a determining effect upon attempts by Anglophone Caribbean fiction writers and filmmakers to represent the region. Chapter I introduces the dissertation. Chapter II, “The ‘Double Audience’ of Samuel Selvon and *The Lonely Londoners*,” concerns Trinidadian author Samuel Selvon, who—along with George Lamming, Derek Walcott, and V.S. Naipaul—is cited as being among the most important and influential of the West Indian authors who began publishing in the 1950s. Although I consider all of Selvon’s ten novels in that

chapter, my main concern is *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), Selvon's best known and perhaps most pivotal and misread novel. Chapter III, "Contrapuntally Re-reading Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come*," features a reevaluation of the Jamaican filmmaker's 1972 motion picture, which in many complex ways remains *the* Caribbean film. Chapter IV, "*Pressure* and the Caribbean," focuses on Trinidadian filmmaker Horace Ove's *Pressure* (1975), which I deliberately treat as a Caribbean film although it is still best known as Britain's first feature-length dramatic movie with a "black" director. Vital secondary texts include selected works by Edward Said, Mikhail Bahktin, and Richard Dyer, as well as Kenneth Ramchand, Keith Warner, and D. Elliott Parris. The three existing book-length analyses of Selvon's fiction are the main voices with which the Selvon chapter is in discourse. David Bordwell's work in cinematic narrative theory and Marcia Landy's contribution to the study of British genres are essential to the frameworks through which I read the cinematic primary texts.

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“Brown Owl” and Newcy, as always.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

"At what point," wonders Mimi Sheller, in *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*, "do transatlantic consuming publics take responsibility for the effects of their consuming practices—including cultural consumption—on distant others?" (13). Like Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and others before her, Sheller means to further destabilize the "easy conceptual separation" inherent to the examination of relations between the Caribbean and its various metropolises in terms of "core" and "periphery"; the stated goal of her contribution to that continuing push within the field of postcolonial studies is to locate "persistent continuities—as well as crucial fields of resistance and unintended consequences—in the complex flows of material, cultural, and ethical relations between producer, consumer, and consumed in the transatlantic world." Central to *Consuming the Caribbean* is a theory of "travel" that deliberately compresses tourism, trade, cultural exchange (whether physical or electronic), and the multiform/polyvalent matter of migration. It is through that theory of travel that Sheller "explores the myriad ways in which Western European and North American publics have unceasingly consumed the natural environment commodities, human bodies, and cultures of the Caribbean over the past five hundred years" (3).

While not as sweeping as Sheller's study, this dissertation is also a contribution to the study of the Caribbean, its metropolises, and the relationships between them, as "deeply 'interpellated'" (Sheller 3). "Conceptualizing the Caribbean: Reexportation and Caribbean Cultural Products" focuses on three very different yet well-recognized, "canonical," and perhaps even foundational Anglophone Caribbean texts: Samuel Selvon's novel *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), which was written and published in London a few years after its Trinidadian author had moved to Britain; Perry Henzell's internationally successful major motion picture *The Harder They Come* (1972), which was made on location in the ghettos of Jamaica by a native of the island; and Horace Ové's *Pressure* (1975), an iconic "black" British film that was co-written by Selvon and Ové, is set in London, and was first commercially exhibited in Britain in 1978. Focusing on the complex and ambivalent relationship between these texts, their "makers," their subject matter, and the audience(s) that their subject matter and stylistics intimate that those texts create or imagine, "Conceptualizing the Caribbean" is the beginning of an attempt to examine how British and American notions of the Anglophone Caribbean have informed the international popular *and* scholarly reception of Anglophone Caribbean fiction writing and filmmaking. Here I argue that this relationship, due in part to the historical and continuing process of reexportation, has influenced attempts by Anglophone Caribbean writers and filmmakers to represent the region, and has consequently moderated/continues to moderate the region's artistic formation of its own identity.

Just as Sheller's theory of "travel" is central to *Consuming the Caribbean*, reexportation is vital to this dissertation. As defined in D. Elliott Parris's "The Reexportation of the Caribbean Literary Artist," reexportation occurs when creative artists from a formerly colonized country, having difficulty achieving domestic success, leave their home country or export their work and hence "make a name" for themselves abroad, usually in the colonial power from which their country had gained its independence. In the final phase, the artist's international renown translates into real success at home. Basic to "Conceptualizing the Caribbean" is that at issue in these three selected primary texts is the notion of the success of one's work abroad having a measurable influence on the way those texts are perceived "at home." Also fundamental to this dissertation is the applicability of reexportation to more than one kind of Anglophone Caribbean cultural product. Parris's essay deliberately and somewhat provocatively "illuminates the application of the idea of reexportation in the field of culture" (Parris 95). That is, not unlike "travel," reexportation is fundamentally a structural perspective on cultural imperialism, which indicates the model's potential to be applied to cultural products that are as different in production and consumption as novel and films.

Reexportation directly concerns cultural imperialism, a phenomenon so basic to colonial domination that its tenets continue to appear almost without the strictures of time. Parris's main examples are the careers of Marcus Garvey and Claude McKay, two turn-of-the-century Anglophone Caribbean figures who achieved no real purchase in their endeavors until they migrated to the United States. Both achieved success back home

only after achieving success abroad. But their career paths were in no way isolated cases: "Indeed, what was true of Garvey and McKay in the 1920s is also true of the Caribbean literary movement as a whole that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century; it was a product of migration." To illustrate how reexportation remains a useful model, Parris refers to the sociological analysis that was his dissertation project in 1973, for which he conducted interviews with "the majority of the established writers from the region." The study matched that sample of established authors, the majority of whom came to prominence while living and writing abroad, with a selection of "emerging" authors, most of whom were currently living in the region. According to that study, "more than three quarters of the established writers were interviewed outside the Caribbean where they were residing," and all of those said that they believed their migration had been a necessary part of their success. This differed greatly for the emerging writers, who did *not* tend "to say that they felt they had to leave the Caribbean in order to succeed as writers" (103). Pulling the issue forward through time, Parris concludes:

Ironically, if the interviews were conducted today, almost 30 years after the original interviews, with the same sample, those that were "emerging" writers then who remained in the Caribbean still would be predominantly "emerging" writers. Time has hardly changed the conditions that require Caribbean success in the literary world to be sought first abroad. (103-04)

While that study and its conclusions together address whether reexportation ought to be described as "time bound," they also indicate how the model actually describes a

situation that has long concerned Caribbean critics and cultural producers. *Critical Issues in West Indian Literature* features papers from three conferences on West Indian literature, held each year from 1981-83, on the islands of St. Thomas, Jamaica, and Guyana respectively. In his introduction to the volume, Lloyd Brown very clearly addresses the mechanics of reexportation (albeit while never mentioning the concept or exploring its complexities in a detailed way). According to Brown, the conferences that the volume covers came about because the region's literary critics saw the work of the region's writers being overly determined by the way that it was being studied abroad; those critics sought to short-circuit that process by organizing conferences whose purpose was to put boundaries around the region, in order to have it more fully determine its own representation. At the same time, however, Brown makes it clear that those boundaries were always meant to be loose and permeable. Caribbean critics knew well the danger of parochialism, and the "need to respond to both local experience and to those external forces and influences which have always impinged upon or shaped local culture"; the only sufficient critical apparatuses would be those that did not encourage "literary and cultural perspectives which ignore the fundamentally syncretic nature of West Indian life and letters" (Brown 3-4). One key essay in the volume, Jeannette B. Allis's "West Indian Literature: A Case for Regional Criticism," is even more direct, asserting that "the struggle to establish an authoritative regional criticism is the inevitable corollary to the establishment of a regional literature" (8). For Allis, that the region's literary identity had for some time been determined from the outside—often by "outside" critics who remained curiously unaware of their own subject position—meant that the development



of a stronger, more realized regional criticism was now crucial for the region's own attempts at self-determination and representation.

The "Two Conferences Considered" section of Parris's essay features an evocative illustration of the sensitivity of Anglophone Caribbean cultural producers to the tenets and dynamics of reexportation. There Parris recounts the first official conference of the Caribbean Artist Movement (CAM) which was held in Canterbury England in 1967, and the inaugural CARIFESTA conference at Georgetown, Guyana, in 1972. According to Parris, chiefly occasioning the 1967 conference was how aware the authors and artists in attendance were of themselves as "Caribbean" cultural producers in a necessary exile, since exile was precisely what allowed them to ply their craft for a living. They were Caribbean by birth and allegiance, but to make a living meant leaving the region, or putting themselves into exile.

The first CAM conference largely concerned issues of exile and the development of a Caribbean audience upon which Caribbean artists could come to depend. That conference, which was the product of many private and public CAM meetings before it, closed with a resolution to "have a similar conference organized in the near future on Caribbean soil" (Parris 105). The 1972 CARIFESTA was a product of that resolution—the 1967 CAM conference's participants "floated [the idea] before various political leaders until then Guyanese Prime Minister Forbes Burnham embraced it and committed his government to making it possible" (105-06). Hence the first CARIFESTA, hosted by the Guyana government, was envisioned as "a cultural

exposition of performing and fine arts bringing together representatives of thirty-one Caribbean countries" (105).

The differences between the two conferences, and how those differences relate to reexportation, is as clear as the message of CARIFESTA's opening address, during which Prime Minister Burnham revealed that "he didn't want to hear about any overseas achievements, for any achievements worthy of recognition had to be attained within the Caribbean" (Parris 106). Of course the exiled writers and artists who had traveled to Guyana to attend the conference—many of whose works are now part of the modern "canon" of Caribbean literature—had expected something quite different of Prime Minister Burnham:

To them, Caribbean society had stood in the way of their achievement prior to their departure; they had succeeded abroad despite having exchanged a nonsupportive environment for one that was openly hostile to them as foreigners and nonwhites; they had expected to be embraced by the Caribbean on the basis of the reputations they had earned abroad.

Instead, there was the prime minister saying the opposite of what they had expected. (Parris 106)

The continuation of that "non-supportive environment," which includes practical considerations such island nations too small to yield an audience large enough for most artists to succeed, and that are just isolated enough from one another to prevent a writer or artist from one island to speak from within that island to audiences on more than one

island effectively, is vital for the continuation of reexportation—which continues, despite the stern admonitions of a prime minister.

Reexportation is based upon the notion that cultural imperialism continues to inform relations between dominant and weaker countries, or colonial powers and formerly colonized, newly independent nations. According to reexportation, the "self-worth" of formerly colonized, newly independent nations has been and is still very much bound up in and a reflection of outside or "externally oriented" assessment. Much less important than an indictment of imperial countries, however, is the identification of a dynamic that, once recognized, has significant consequences for those interested in how critical, scholarly, and lay audiences in imperial countries determine or influence the creative output or cultural product of "peripheral" countries.

In the section called "The Development of a Negative National Identity," Parris outlines the historical circumstances and developments that have led the Caribbean as a region to be prone to reexportation. The European domination of the Caribbean, which included slavery, also featured a marked, traceable attempt by those same Europeans to devalue the African aspect of Caribbean heritage and to make it as difficult as possible for the African slaves to form bonds and communicate effectively and efficiently with one another, particularly in ways that Europeans would find difficult or impossible to understand. Parris also observes how these efforts found legitimizing echoes in the world of the European intellectual; writings of Georg Hegel and Arthur de Gobineau contained references to the "inferiority" of Africa and Africans, and both "Enlightenment positivism

and Darwinian evolutionary theories were all recruited in European thought to justify the domination by colonial powers over their subject states" (96).

This dynamic is of course exploded in Frantz Fanon's classic *The Wretched of the Earth*, which "describes this devaluation/dehumanization as a systematic, calculated, institutional strategy used by the Europeans against the colonized, with debilitating consequences to the psyches of the dominated peoples." While the native can achieve a certain sense of self-worth within the colonial system, the process involves "denouncing his heritage and assuming European values," and culminates in "the loss of his identity and self-respect" (Parris 97). Furthermore, that loss often results in the native actually living the stereotypes that the European colonizers have maintained throughout; Parris describes this fundamentally impossible situation when he observes how those negative stereotypes "are promoted by the colonial value system and inculcated through the educational system," which also contributes to natives being "socialized into negative self-esteem" (97).

"Conceptualizing the Caribbean" shares Parris's conviction that Fanon's analysis in *The Wretched of the Earth*, which takes Algeria as its subject matter, also applies to the Anglophone Caribbean. While he spends the bulk of his time on Garvey and McKay, Parris lists several writers of the Anglophone Caribbean whose work "portray[s] this internalization of a negative identity" (97): Orlando Patterson's *An Absence of Ruins*, V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, Neville Dawes's *The Last Enchantment*, Andrew Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*, George Lamming's *The Emigrants*, and Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*. More important than the works themselves, however, is how

Parris and others evaluate or assess a given work's expression of that problem of negative identity:

What these various works have in common is an image of the Caribbean person embodying nonidentification [sic] and facelessness. The society of the Caribbean is seen as problematic, with a population possessing no true identity, having been drawn from elsewhere, having been founded on slavery (a source of shame), and being devoid of a glorious heritage. (97-98)

The absence of reference to how the same problem of negative identity—which is at the base of reexportation—might also influence the "how" of a given narrative, the stylistics employed in the telling of it, or the "mode" through which the narrative is told, suggests the work that remains to be done. By this I mean that Parris demonstrates the familiar tendency to assess theme through the "what" of the story, the narrative and the people, places, things, and situations that populate it. I mention this not to slight Parris or any others who might study the literature and film of the Anglophone Caribbean and, in the process, establish their understanding of the theme of a primary source through a close-reading of setting, characterization, symbol, motif, and other primarily plot- or content-level considerations—that kind of work is both difficult and important. Far less prevalent, however, are analyses that attempt to account for the ways in which those stories are being told, including elements of their narrative approach that may or may not have been completely within the author or filmmaker's conscious control. That is the "space" in which this dissertation seeks to operate.

Focusing on Anglophone Caribbean fiction and film, "Conceptualizing the Caribbean" engages film studies, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, and mass communication, and locates evidence of its thesis chiefly through analyses of the stylistic and formal aspects of the selected canonical primary texts, as well as the material conditions that went into producing them. The reasons for this strategy are twofold. First, there is the fundamental advice of Kenneth Ramchand to avoid approaches to Caribbean literature that are "implicitly committed to a view of literature as social document" ("Song of Innocence" 225). Second, there is the modern shift in film studies away from analysis focused exclusively on images and content and toward close reading strongly concerned with aesthetics and formal considerations. This is particularly true with criticism like that of James Snead, or most modern film scholars who aim to discover the less obvious, more insidious examples of racial and ethnic messaging in film. The primary texts were selected in part because they are canonical and in part because existing scholarship tends to examine them mostly as "Caribbean" or ("black"), and infrequently takes into consideration the role of "outside" audiences in determining not just the content that those texts deliver, but the way/stylistics of that delivery. Also, far from representing the simple application of a model or theory to an arbitrarily selected or "cherry-picked" set of primary sources, these chapters have been written and arranged to illustrate the complexities that arise when the relatively simple model of reexportation is kept at the front of the mind when close-reading Anglophone Caribbean fiction and film.

Chapter one, "The 'Double Audience' of Samuel Selvon and *The Lonely Londoners*," is conversant with the three existing book-length studies on the fiction of Selvon, as well as several briefer analyses by such Selvon scholars as Ramchand, Sandra Paquet, Michel Fabre, and Sushelia Nasta. I argue that close readings of the stylistics and formal considerations of the novel that foreground reexportation uncover new, more comprehensive and intriguing ways to consider how that episodic and elliptical narrative is being told. The third-person narrator of *The Lonely Londoners* speaks in a dialect that repeatedly slips in register between a modified Trinidadian dialect and the literary version of Standard English. I suggest that what is often described as a "Calypsonian" narrator in this novel is rather a manifestation on the level of narrative of the exilic author's constant and self-conscious awareness of his Caribbean *and* European audiences (i.e., what Fabre terms Selvon's "double audience"). That highly unusual narrative decision remains the most powerful illustration of Selvon's career-long engagement with the mechanics of reexportation, and his best attempt to subvert the process. Although my analysis spans the novel, a few specific moments receive closest attention. Among them are the novel's famously imagistic opening, Galahad's apostrophe to the color of his skin, and the stream-of-consciousness chapter in which the narrator "paints" a London summer. These examples are among the most frequently cited and analyzed passages in *The Lonely Londoners*. As such, they represent key moments through which to illustrate how taking reexportation into deeper consideration reveals more comprehensive ways to understand the relationship between the narrative and narrator of Selvon's novel.

"Contrapuntally Re-reading Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come*," the second chapter of this dissertation, moves the discussion to film and attempts to establish how even texts far less "pyrotechnically" stylistic than *The Lonely Londoners* can nevertheless demonstrate the dynamics of reexportation in both their content *and* their form. In that chapter, I assert that a Bordwellian analysis of the film's formal strategy reveals it to be a complex, ambivalent text whose success is due to its strategy of holding only part of the interior of Jamaica up for cinematic display. This allows the film to promote a positive viewing experience for its black Jamaican audience, who had never before seen themselves in central or starring roles onscreen. But that strategy also allows a positive viewing experience for the film's white, international audience. I argue that *The Harder They Come* achieves this by literally omitting its white, international audience from the text and obscuring the roles of race, international relations, and foreign economic policy in determining the course of Jamaica's modern history. Central to my argument are close readings of two sequences from the film. The first sequence begins at the moment Ivan first arrives in Kingston and ends shortly after he is robbed of all his belongings. The second sequence is a single, middling-length take that occurs shortly after Ivan avoids capture at the motel by gunning down three police officers. I argue that both sequences are representational because while both clearly indicate and exemplify the origin and direction of the film's gaze, the completely different ways in which they re-present the film's subject matter illustrate the ambivalence and complexity at the heart of the film.

"*Pressure and the Caribbean*," the third chapter, is this dissertation's broadest, most thorough attempt to assess how reexportation has affected both the production and



reception(s) of a given Anglophone Caribbean text. Alluding to Paul Gilroy's concept of "the black Atlantic," Vera M. Kutzinski, in her introduction to *A History of the Literature in the Caribbean, Volume 2: English- and Dutch-Speaking Regions*, makes the oft-echoed observation that "the Anglophone Caribbean (as an academic field) by now reaches far beyond that actual region" and its current "global diasporic proportions" include Britain and the United States" (10). "*Pressure and the Caribbean*" reflects that observation, as it features a deliberate attempt to revisit *Pressure*, long recognized as Britain's first "black" feature-length dramatic film, and establish it as a distinctively Caribbean text.

Surveying the critical and scholarly discourse of black British film, "*Pressure and the Caribbean*" posits that developments within the field have actually resulted in the need for precisely this kind of re-evaluation of Ové's first dramatic feature. I argue that Ové's biography and career trajectory, particularly up to the production of *Pressure*, together support the claim that the film's themes, story, and form consistently demonstrate an "in-between-ness" indicative of the postcolonial dynamics of reexportation. Chief among the ways in which reexportation is evident in *Pressure* is the telling of a distinctively Caribbean story through the generic conventions of the British social problem film. That strategy exposes *Pressure's* orientation to two different audiences—Caribbean and British—since it at once makes a Caribbean story "black British" and allows the film to subvert and challenge some of the more troubling aspects of the genre of the British social problem film, and in particular the subset of the British "race-relations" drama. *Pressure's* unusual post-production difficulties, as well as the

film's contemporaneous critical and popular reception, also indicate other ways that the film indeed *embodies* the dynamics of reexportation, as those difficulties and the *Pressure's* reception were clearly functions of the film's use of the "Windrush" experience to address British and Caribbean audiences simultaneously. Thus *Pressure* illustrates how deeply reexportation has informed, and will likely continue to inform, the production, content, stylistics, and aesthetics of Anglophone Caribbean cultural products—and as such, *Pressure* is a vital example of why there continues to be a need to address or include reexportation in scholarship concerning those products, quite possibly regardless of the approach, or the theoretical frameworks used, to examine them.

CHAPTER II  
REEXPORTATION AND THE "DOUBLE AUDIENCE"  
OF SAMUEL SELVON  
AND *THE LONELY LONDONERS*

Caribbean studies has long been concerned that success for the region's Anglophone writers often involves emigrating to cities such as New York and London, sometimes never to return. For Trinidadian Samuel Selvon, that reality meant leaving his job as a journalist in 1950 and boarding a boat for London, where he built his professional reputation over a thirty-year stay. Although a handful of Selvon's short fiction appeared in print before he left Trinidad, all but the last of his novels, including *The Lonely Londoners*, were published during his time in London. After London, Selvon moved to Calgary; in terms of published work, his sixteen years there yielded one new novel (*Moses Migrating*), a collection of prose spanning his career (*Foreday Morning: Selected Prose 1946-1986*), reprints of previous work, and very little else. Austin Clarke, in his personal reminiscence of Selvon, notes the silence, "thick as mud," that greeted the re-issue of *The Plains of Caroni*, and how that silence signified the Canadian literary establishment's treatment of Selvon "as if he was a beginning writer" (Clarke 130). Selvon's long slide into virtual obscurity would end only with his death while visiting Trinidad in 1994.

In *The Literary History of Alberta*, George Melnyk describes Selvon's stay in Calgary in terms exilic and spectral: "Alberta was not a comfort zone for him. He was fifty-five when he moved to Calgary—likely seeking a place to hide rather than a place to resurrect himself. [...] For Alberta writing, Selvon is a ghost who has yet to rattle his chains" (31). Yet in the years since Selvon's death, there has been a renewed focus on him as a critical, defining figure in Anglophone Caribbean literature.<sup>1</sup> Harold Barratt, in a bio-bibliographical entry on Selvon, describes him as "one of the important writers who contributed to the remarkable development of West Indian fiction in the 1950s and 1960s" (282). In his "Samuel Selvon" entry to Bruce King's *West Indian Literature*, Michel Fabre cites the fundamentality of the author's career and his first novel, *A Brighter Sun*, which was published in 1952 and which "introduced the great period of Trinidadian novels which continues to this day" ("Samuel Selvon" 152). In his book-length study of Selvon's use of language published three years before Selvon's death, Clement Wyke notes Selvon's international significance, which "has been recognized through a series of university appointments in the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, and in North America" and through the translation of his novels into a number of languages (*Dialectical Style/Fictional Strategy* ix). And Mark Looker, in *Atlantic Passages: History, Community, and Language in the Fiction of Sam Selvon*, reminds us how "writers from George Lamming to Earl Lovelace have acknowledged their debt to this artist whom Sushelia Nasta, in her obituary for *The Guardian*, described as the 'key figure' in the Caribbean literary renaissance" (ix).

Part of the challenge of this renewed focus on Selvon is determining how best to "make sense" of the hybrid approach to language demonstrated in his oeuvre, particularly in terms of the peripatetic nature of his career. This particular problem will be more fully explored and teased out below, but at the moment observe that a simple search of "Sam Selvon" on The Oxford Reference Online turns up a number of entries, the most significant of which occur in three distinct volumes: The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, The Oxford Companion to English Literature, and The Oxford Companion to British Literature. The issue might be said to be less a matter of where Selvon belongs than a matter of who can rightfully claim to be the audience that he addresses. Looker, whose assessment of Selvon's ethnicity as "of East Indian parents" (ix) is a slight misstatement,<sup>2</sup> touches upon the problem:

If Caribbean literature is hybrid in its mixture of African and Indian cultural traditions with elements of European and American culture, then its place in national literary histories is problematic: for those who want neat boundaries these writers don't fit into "English" literature, but for many of the early generation (including Lamming and Selvon) neither do they fit comfortably into a broad category called "American," still less to that shadowy land called "Commonwealth" literature. (18-19)

In the foreign cities where he spent the majority of his career, Selvon was continually in the position of writing chiefly of Caribbean concerns while living and producing abroad, among the strangers to those concerns who were his most immediate readership. That complex position, which was also familiar to a number of Selvon's

peers, constitutes what has been and often still is termed "the West Indian problem of audience." That "problem" was fundamental to both the origins of the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM), which was founded in 1966 in part to develop a West Indian audience in London, *and* the movement's first conference, which was held in Canterbury in 1967 and was largely attended by writers who were Caribbean by birth and allegiance but to whom writing for a living had meant leaving the Caribbean and producing for a foreign audience (Parris 104-05). Also reflective of those concerns was an essay that appeared the very same year, Jamaican poet Mervyn Morris's "Some West Indian Problems of Audience," which begins with the observation that, "One of the curious facts about our literature is that it is almost entirely by absentee West Indians" (127).

For Selvon, this engagement with "the West Indian problem of audience" was mostly a matter of his readership in London, in part because he began and spent the bulk of his career there, but also because his output slowed so greatly after moving to Calgary. This chapter focuses on Selvon's London period; of chief interest is how the migratory aspect of Selvon's career is connected to a palpable, measurable tension in his stories and novels. Among those who have most consistently made this kind of observation before are Looker and Fabre, who represent the tendency to comb the *content* of Selvon's narratives for proof of their address to a *double* audience, one constituted of both British and Caribbean readers.<sup>3</sup> More aligned with the formalist approach to *The Lonely Londoners* demonstrated in the work of James Kohn and Hélène Buzelin, this chapter will locate evidence of Selvon's double audience in the *aesthetics* of *The Lonely*

*Londoners*, including elements of it that may not have been entirely within the author's conscious control.

Originally published in London in 1956, *The Lonely Londoners* is an episodic and simple-seeming account of Caribbean emigration to London. Often cited for its similarity to Claude McKay's 1929 novel *Banjo*, *The Lonely Londoners* has proven, over time, to be Selvon's most successful, best-received publication. Prior to the appearance of *The Lonely Londoners*, Selvon produced two novels, *A Brighter Sun* (1952) and *An Island Is a World* (1955), and a number of short stories in which the narrative's location in terms of its double audience is clearest in the tension between its material and those recurrent passages whose purpose is to explain unfamiliar aspects of its material for the benefit of a British reader. Fabre concisely refers to this dynamic and its manifestation in the content of Selvon's narratives, avowing that from *A Brighter Sun* onward, Selvon was writing "to a double audience," composed of both the European public as well as Selvon's "fellow-Trinidadians." Fabre notes that Selvon "had to create a literary language suited to cultural particulars while creating a bond of sympathetic immediacy with foreign readers unacquainted with West Indian culture who sometimes required nearly anthropological information" ("Samuel Selvon" 153).

But with *The Lonely Londoners*, which includes few if any explanatory passages (terms such as "watchekong," "dasheen," and "ease me up," for instance, appear often and without explanation or context clues), that fundamental tension is wholly within the voice of the novel's third-person omniscient narrator. Strictly speaking, that narrator is ordinary; what "makes it strange" is that it narrates in what Selvon, on numerous

occasions, described as a Trinidadian Creole modified for the benefit of his British reader. In a 1982 interview with Kenneth Ramchand, Selvon stated that he felt he had to modify the dialect because he "had to consider being read by an audience outside of the Caribbean to whom a presentation of the pure dialect would have been obscure and difficult to understand" ("Sam Selvon Talking" 99). In an earlier interview, this one held with Fabre sometime between November 1977 and October 1978, Selvon claimed that his decision to make his modified Trinidadian dialect the novel's language of narration was due to indeterminate difficulties that he encountered in composition. Describing the problem only as feeling like he "could not really move," Selvon locates the seed of it in his original (and conservative) choice to write the novel's narrative passages in "straight English" and the dialogue in dialect. But then he "started both the narrative and dialogue in dialect and the novel just shot along" ("Interviews and Conversations" 66).

Despite these direct statements concerning the author's hybrid approach to the use of language, those who have written about *The Lonely Londoners* in the fifty years since it originally appeared have often characterized the narrator's voice in very different terms. Tendencies include designating it a "Caribbean dialect" or a "Trinidadian Creole English," sometimes ignoring the undeniable presence of standard English in the novel's narrative passages, at other times interpreting those stretches as evidence of decreolization ... or simply regarding their appearance (sometimes derisively) as stylistically *insignificant inconsistencies* in the narrative voice. Wyke's "literary analysis of Selvon's use of Trinidad Creole English as an important component of his style and method of fictional composition" (*Dialectical Style/Fictional Strategy* i) whose



"controlling focus [... is] that of the literary critic making selective and modified use of the descriptive language and research of the linguist" (*Dialectical Style/Fictional Strategy* viii), is perhaps the most significant and powerful attempt to theorize Selvon's use of language across his corpus in terms of decreolization.<sup>4</sup> In his recent *Race Riots: Comedy and Ethnicity in Modern British Fiction*, Michael L. Ross exemplifies the glibber, more derisive method of accounting for the presence of more than one linguistic register in *The Lonely Londoners*, when he chalks up the presence of standard English in the novel's narrative voice to little more than disjointed "tonal acrobatics" (189).

Yet there most certainly are two registers, or two languages, often present in the novel's narrative passages, and you can see that here, in the following passage, which features the first two sentences of the first two paragraphs of the novel's final section (separated by ellipses), and these *are* two contiguous paragraphs of pure narration:

"The changing of the seasons, the cold slicing winds, the falling leaves, sunlight on green grass, snow on the land, London particular. Oh what it is and where it is and why it is, no one knows, but to have said: "I walked on Waterloo Bridge," "I rendezvoused at Charing Cross," "Piccadilly Circus is my playground," to say these things, to have lived these things, to have lived in the great city of London, centre of the world. [...] What is it that a city have, that any place in the world have, that you get so much to like it you wouldn't leave it for anywhere else? What is it that would keep men although by and large, in truth and in fact, they catching their

royal to make a living, staying in a cramped room, where you have to do everything—sleep, eat, dress, wash, cook, live. (137)

Selvon's comments in the aforementioned interviews indicate that the two registers evident in this passage are likely a product of the novel's address to a double audience. Furthermore, that the back-and-forth between them is not consistent across the novel but rather appears at very specific moments *in the novel's purely narrative passages* suggests that the aesthetics of *The Lonely Londoners*, and not just its content, ought to be processed and interpreted in terms of Selvon's double audience.

If the explanatory passages in Selvon's fiction prior to *The Lonely Londoners* are there to help the British reader through a decidedly Caribbean milieu, then the back-and-forth between registers in the purely narrative passages of *The Lonely Londoners* performs a much more complex and interiorized version of that same function. And if third-person omniscient narrators are understood as external yet possessing highly privileged access into the thoughts and feelings of characters central or important to a given narrative, then that back-and-forth between registers in the purely narrative passages of *The Lonely Londoners* is an assertion, on the level of form and aesthetics, that the unitary language of "standard literary English" may no longer be the *sole* suitable register for third-person omniscient narrated Anglophone Caribbean stories and novels.

In this chapter, I argue that a dialogic reading of *The Lonely Londoners* identifying the two registers predominant in novel's purely narrative passages and accounting for the back-and-forth between them is vital because it helps set the novel's aesthetics, its hybrid approach to language, in the social context in which the novel was

produced. This is particularly important considering reexportation, or more specifically, Selvon's career-long engagement with "the West Indian problem of audience" and the many difficult implications of such a problem. Furthermore, I assert that perhaps the most efficient method of reading the aesthetics of *The Lonely Londoners* in terms of its "double audience" would be to derive a practical method of identifying in the novel's purely narrative passages the languages that imply such an audience, and to establish a critical and theoretical framework sufficient to contend with the complex issues of language and perspective, in order to assess the significance and importance of those moments when that back-and-forth is particularly intense or seems most at issue.

At this point in the development of Caribbean studies, it has become widely accepted to speak of the region in terms of plurality and hybridity, and to examine the literature of the Caribbean for exhibitions or examinations of the same. For decades now, studies from seemingly disparate fields, like Peter D. Fraser and Paul Hackett's *The Caribbean Economic Handbook*, which as a case study historicizes globalization through "an economic overview of [the Caribbean], its role in the world economy, [and] its prospects for the future" (Foreword), and Ewart C. Skinner's more recent "Empirical Research on Mass Communication and Cultural Domination in the Caribbean," which examines the region's traditionally underdeveloped telecommunications sector and how the recent push to develop it "has revealed substantial dependency relations between metropolitan and local institutions" (38), have been fundamental to critical analyses of the literature of the region. Part of the reason is doubtless that such studies consistently offer the kind of analyses that allow scholars of Caribbean literature to ground their

studies of the region's literature in theories that assess the Caribbean as an extraordinarily complex site of domination *and* exchange. Joyce Jonas's *Anancy in the Great House: Ways of Reading West Indian Fiction* exemplifies this. Published in the Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies series whose editor at the time was Henry Louis Gates, Jonas's book is an analysis of the novels of Wilson Harris and George Lamming that deliberately blends anthropology, feminist studies, and Bakhtinian discourse analysis to "discuss 'imperialist' habits of perceiving and naming the world and analyze the techniques employed by [Harris and Lamming] to demystify the imperialist 'text,' and thus transform a landscape formerly colonized by the world" (1).

Tacit to these kinds of approaches is the notion that hybrid literatures may well require hybrid critical apparatuses. Yet rare is the intense, extended discussion of whether the examination of hybrid literature is ethical or even possible through hybrid critical apparatuses that--through their constant and unmotivated reach into disparate fields--may well account for many different parts of the work in question, yet struggle to maintain the conceptual integrity necessary for the construction of a truly cogent, cohesive argument.

Fundamental to this chapter are a few concepts that, despite their differences, are just similar enough to "play well" together, particularly when unpacking Anglophone Caribbean novels like *The Lonely Londoners*. The first is the notion of reexportation as developed in D. Elliott Parris's "The Reexportation of the Caribbean Literary Artist." There Parris explicates the historical *and* continuing process of reexportation, whereby Caribbean writers and artists attain success at home by first achieving renown abroad.

More specifically, the process "involved the migration of talented persons from the Caribbean to Europe and North America, their emergence as acclaimed artists [...] and the return of those artists or their reputations to the Caribbean, where they were received with more recognition than before their departure" (95-96).

On one level, reexportation concerns the real *or* perceived need of Caribbean writers, particularly of Selvon's generation but by no means *specific* to it, to leave the region and write to (for instance) a British audience, and to succeed with that engagement, before achieving real success "at home." A corollary of the notion is that some writers might—consciously or subconsciously—negotiate the issue by writing to two audiences at once, a "double audience" that, in Selvon's case, would be composed of both British and Caribbean readers.

But on another level, beyond the industry-related concerns of readership and publication, the deeper, more disturbing implication of reexportation is that British- and American-held notions of the Anglophone Caribbean have had, and continue to have, a determining effect upon attempts by Anglophone Caribbean writers and artists to represent the region. While its chief concern may be the difficulties that writers and artists face when their home country is their smallest market, reexportation is much more than just another convenient way of conceptualizing cultural exchange. It is also a window into the elaborate machinery of cultural imperialism, which remains the most insidious aspect of colonial domination.<sup>5</sup> As such, reexportation is the rare idea that can be locally felt while globally understood; it can simultaneously determine whether a

novelist defines "dasheen" *and* be studied at an American university as a structural perspective on cultural domination and a model of intercultural conversation.

The second concept deeply informing this chapter is focalization, as developed by Gérard Genette in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. There Genette offers the notion of focalization to address what he sees as a predominant confusion between "mood" and "voice" in critical studies of "point of view"; Genette succinctly assesses the matter as a confusion between "the question *who sees?*" and the question *who speaks?*" (186). Genette argues for three types of narratives, as far as focalization is concerned. The first type is the nonfocalized narrative, in which the narrator is actually a character in the story. The second is the internally focalized narrative, where the narrator is external to the story but has access to the thoughts and feelings of one or more characters. Internal focalization is broken down further, into "fixed internal focalization," where the narrative is focalized through one character throughout; "variable internal focalization," where at different moments the narrative is focalized through a succession of different characters; and "multiple internal focalization," "where the same events may be evoked several times according to the point of view of several [characters]" (189-90). The third type of focalization is external focalization, which is akin to the "objective point of view" but for Genette can also include narratives or passages where the narrator is actually a character but one who only observes, and who does not participate in the events being recounted. Genette advises that "the commitment as to focalization is not necessarily steady over the whole length of a novel" (191). Yet the overall perspective-or

"mode"—of *The Lonely Londoners* can, with reasonable certainty, be termed "variable internal focalization."

Donald Ross Jr., in "Who's Talking Now? How Characters Become Narrators in Fiction," offers an assessment of why determining with great precision and then foregrounding the "mode" of a novel is important when attempting to account for narrative style. "Identifying the mode," Ross states, "is [...] a prior condition to our discussing narrative styles." Citing Lubomír Doležel's assertion, in *Narrative Modes in Czech Literature*, that "the study of narrative styles [...] will gain a firm theoretical base only when the idiosyncratic styles are related to the underlying systems of narrative modes," Ross notes the confusion (between authorial and narrator's intrusion, for instance) that can arise when a narrative mode is imprecisely or incorrectly identified (D. Ross, Jr. 1238). This is an especial danger with *The Lonely Londoners*, which like most novels is a heteroglot narrative, but in a manner more pronouncedly so since it is written in dialect. But *The Lonely Londoners* is also *not* the usual dialect novel; in fact, especially when compared to the more conventional Anglophone dialect novels in which the purely narrative passages are in something close to standard literary English while the novel's characters speak in dialect (Selvon's first two novels are written precisely this way), *The Lonely Londoners* is unique in that its narrator—who is *not* a character in the story, and whose free-ranging episodic storytelling indicates that it is *not* an observer narrating an event that it has observed—speaks with a voice that strategically vacillates between the language of the novel's characters and something like standard literary English. Hence, precisely assessing the novel's narrative mode is fundamental to

answering the chief, sweeping question that the novel's narrative strategy both generates *and* complicates—namely, "Who is speaking, and when?"

The unusual perspective of *The Lonely Londoners* also requires elements of discourse theory for its analysis. Those elements directly applicable here are best developed and unpacked in Mikhail Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel." Of broad importance is heteroglossia, as the fundamental means through which to determine the stylistics of a novel. But most germane are two notions best understood as dialogism expressed on the level of form, since each represents different ways that the languages in a heteroglot novel tend to interact. While these ideas are inclusive enough to apply to the narrative *and* dialogue passages of virtually any heteroglot text, given the emphasis here on how the aesthetics of *The Lonely Londoners* speak to the novel's orientation toward a *double* audience, I limit my application of these ideas solely to the *purely* narrative passages of Selvon's novel. My hope is that borrowing these notions of Bakhtin will permit a more structured analysis of the relationship and interaction between those languages than might otherwise be possible.

The first notion is "double-voiced discourse." While in readings of heteroglot narratives entire novels could be argued to be in double-voiced discourse, the kind of double-voiced discourse of interest here is what Bakhtin specifically describes as a "special type of double-voiced discourse," namely speech that "serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions," those of the author or narrator and those of a character (Bakhtin and Holquist 324).



The second notion is "hybridization." In post-colonial studies, "hybridization," or at least its usage, has evolved into a dense sprawl, with Homi Bhabha's invocation of "the Third Space of enunciation" (Bhabha 37) marking what may ultimately prove to be the highest point. In this chapter, hybridization refers solely to dynamic's occurrence on the level of form. In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin offers three deliberately/agonizingly permeable headings through which we can understand the different means of creating an image of language in a novel: "1) hybridization, 2) the dialogized interrelation of languages, and 3) pure dialogues." While the last two are treated broadly, hybridization he defines *specifically*, as "a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or some other factor" (Bakhtin and Holquist 358). However a close reading of *Discourse in the Novel* reveals that the difference between this definition and Bakhtin's notion of "the dialogized interrelation of languages" is not always so clear. Partly as a result, my use of hybridization to describe one important part of the aesthetics of *The Lonely Londoners* includes a sense of *both* headings.

Simon Dentith and Sue Vice are among the many Bakhtinians who have noted that a chief difficulty of studying the theorist is that his use of important ideas often shifts according to context. A further complication is how certain of his concepts also tend to overlap (although whether that is due to Bakhtin or the complexities of "the novel" is open to debate). While double-voiced discourse and hybridization are not entirely discrete ideas, the distinctions between them are vital here. Because I am limiting the application of these ideas to the novel's *narrative* passages, the most important difference is while

both can often occur on the level of narration, double-voiced discourse is more aligned with focalization; one could say that double-voiced discourse, at least this "special type of double-voiced discourse," refers to focalization as it is expressed on the page. While both double-voiced discourse *and* hybridization can describe moments in narration where more than one language is present and there is a dialogic relationship between them, hybridization emphasizes *not* focalization but rather the broader matter of how the languages in the narrative voice interrelate. Ultimately, that distinction is vital to my account of Selvon's novel, since I assert that *The Lonely Londoners* tends, in its narrative passages, to veer *away* from focalization and double-voiced discourse, and that most of the back-and-forth between registers in those passages instead are examples of hybridization.

Also vital to analyses of the unusual perspective of *The Lonely Londoners* is arriving at a specific, suitable approach to the novel's idiosyncratic narrator. The purpose of this would be to help check the "habeas corpus" hunt for a stable, easily identifiable narrating subject that, historically speaking, tends to busy critical analyses of Selvon's novel.

Sometimes, as in Ramchand's deeply influential "Song of Innocence, Song of Experience: Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* as a Literary Work," Selvon's free-ranging, third-person omniscient narrator, "the voice [that] becomes a person" ("Song of Innocence" 228), is linked most strongly to Moses Aloetta, the book's protagonist whose name indicates his role as the man who helps new emigrants acclimate to life in the "promised land" of London. For that approach, "It is [...] in the relationship between

Moses the central character and this narrating person, their gradual coming together as the book progresses, that the theme of *The Lonely Londoners* is elaborated" ("Song of Innocence" 229). At other times, as in Roydon Salick's treatment of the novel, its narrator is envisioned as a stand-in for either Selvon *or* Moses, ordinarily to facilitate a particular point that the critic is trying to make (Salick 124-25). Another propensity, exemplified in Fabre's early work on *The Lonely Londoners*, is to imagine its narrator as a Calypsonian with one voice and two dialects ("From Trinidad to London" 215-19).<sup>6</sup> Margaret Paul Joseph's treatment of the novel in *Caliban in Exile* also demonstrates the possibilities (and limitations) of reading the narrator of *The Lonely Londoners* as a Calypsonian (88-93).

Each of these approaches can be productive to or even found an interpretation or understanding the narrator of *The Lonely Londoners*. But considering heteroglossia as the fundamental means through which to determine the stylistics of a novel, the oscillation between linguistic registers evident in the novel's purely narrative passages, and Bakhtin's declaration that the speech of the narrator constitutes one of the "fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel" (Bakhtin and Holquist 263), perhaps the most efficient way into the aesthetic strategy of *The Lonely Londoners* might be to read in *between* these approaches. That is, it might do well to think of the novel's narrator not as one stable body but instead as an *ever-changing* body, one whose *instability* is foundational to the novel. Another way to work through this would be to treat the narrator less in terms of a *speaker* whose body needs to be identified, and more in terms of its *speech*. And since the speech of this narrator

features registers that differ so dramatically during passages of narration, we can push this notion further, and conceive of this narrator in terms of a *position*, one at times occupied by the *speech* of the author, who sometimes speaks in standard English out of concern with the novel's intelligibility to the British reader. But the majority of the time that position is instead occupied by the *speech* of the emigrant characters, who mostly speak collectively, and always in Selvon's "Trinidadian" dialect.

When close-reading *The Lonely Londoners*, it can be less productive to think of the narrative as coming from a stable, identifiable body than it is to conceive of it as originating from a position. This notion is important because it lends itself to an understanding of the back-and-forth between registers in the novel's narrative passages as an expression of the dialogic and dialectical relationship between social heteroglossia—which *The Lonely Londoners* argues is diversifying—and standard literary English, which Bakhtin (and others) term a "unitary language." There is a relationship between the aesthetics of *The Lonely Londoners* and the wave of West Indian emigration to Great Britain cresting during the novel's composition and publication. And while I do *not* suggest that *The Lonely Londoners* is a simple or precise "mirror" of its social context, I do assert that the novel's aesthetics were in part determined by that context, in ways both within *and* without Selvon's conscious control.

Assessing the unusual perspective of *The Lonely Londoners* also calls for a practical, replicable method of distinguishing between the two registers in the novel's passages of pure narration. The "Creoles and the Classroom in Britain" chapter in linguist Loreto Todd's *Modern Englishes: Pidgins and Creoles* offers a solution. Todd's

book includes assessments of a host of pidgins and creoles, but that particular chapter features an extensive account of the differences between "WIEB," or "West Indian English as spoken in Britain," and "SE," or "standard English" (219-29). According to Todd:

At the level of the sentence, there are eight main ways in which even acrolectal WIEB differs from SE. [...] [In WIEB], questions are distinguished from statements mainly by intonation [...] Double and multiple negatives are common [...] There are [also] marked differences between equative sentences in SE and WIEB. The 'be' verb is not required in the latter [...] [n]or is 'be' required before an adjective complement [in WIEB] [...] Serial verbs are more common in WIEB than in other British varieties [...] Often [...] there is no concordial agreement between subject and verb [...] There is [also, in WIEB] a marked tendency to use few or no transformations in the construction of complex sentences [...] Foregrounding of the verb occurs for emphasis [...] WIEB [also] avoids passive structures, although it can express passive meanings. (224-26)

Todd then breaks down the syntactical differences between WIEB and SE even further. First, he points out the differences per noun phrase:

As far as the Noun Phrase is concerned [...] there is a strong tendency in WIEB to overgeneralise the use of the unmarked noun [...] WIEB [also] uses two methods of indicating possession, both of them different from SE [...] WIEB has a smaller set of pronouns than SE and, often, especially in

colloquial speech, no distinction is made between subject, object and possessive pronouns. (226-28)

Finally, Todd also clearly outlines the differences between WIEB and SE according to their construction and usage of verb phrase:

The WIEB Verb Phrase differs in three main ways from its SE counterpart. There is a tendency to use the unmarked verb form to express the past. This is particularly true of dynamic verbs [...] Speakers of WIEB often use da/di/a to mark continuous actions [...] As in colloquial English, adjective forms often occur in adverb slots. (228-29)

Although *Modern Englishes* also examines a number of the Caribbean's twenty-eight different Creole Englishes (including Trinidad's) the focus in *The Lonely Londoners* on the Caribbean emigrant to Britain makes Todd's analysis of the differences between WIEB and standard English most pertinent. Selvon's own claims that he selected the Trinidadian dialect in part because he thought it homogenous enough for a novel emphasizing the *connections* among emigrant characters who come from many different islands (Fabre "Interviews and Conversations" 67) highlights the usefulness of Todd's account of the syntactical differences between WIEB and standard English.

There is a brief exchange one third through *The Lonely Londoners*, in the first few pages of the Captain/"Cap" ballad, that illustrates how this novel destabilizes the reader's sense of who is speaking, and when. By the novel's opening, Moses is already an established emigrant, a "veteran" who has his own rented apartment and is wise enough in the ways of London for his fellows to see him as a source of direction. Any narrative

accounts of his own adjustments to London are in flashback. One of these recounts his arrival in London and initial residence at a hostel.

At that hostel, Moses meets "Cap," a Nigerian who came to London to study law but instead blew the money that his family gave him on "woman and cigarette." Cap is the novel's most womanizing, constantly broke, and peripatetic character; the narrator ends its lengthy account of Cap's exploits with the first two sentences of this passage:

Week after week, as landlord and landlady catch up with him, the Captain moving, the wandering Nigerian, man of mystery. Nobody could contact Cap, is only by chance you bouncing him up here and there about London.

"Where you living now Cap?"

A kind of baby smile and "Victoria." (51)

Notice immediately after those two sentences appears a half-attributed exchange, with quotation marks around both question *and* answer isolating them from the voice of the narrator. But the interrogative's lack of attribution, as well as the absence of clues in the surrounding material, make it impossible to locate who Cap is responding to. In fact, outside of the amount of specific detail in Cap's ballad (which suggests but does not *definitively* indicate that Moses is *not* the point of view through which the ballad is being recounted), the only clues we get as to who asks that question are the quotation marks and the language in which the question is asked.

This moment of deliberate ambiguity in dialogue is especially suggestive because it is so easy to spot. But similarly tricky moments *abound* in the novel's narrative

passages, where it can be much tougher to pick them out. And we can see this most efficiently by going backward, to the beginning of the novel, and reviewing its opening section.

When *The Lonely Londoners* opens, Moses is headed to Waterloo harbor to fulfill a request from a friend to greet Henry Oliver, a new emigrant who Moses has never met and who soon picks up the moniker of Sir Galahad. The novel's first paragraph is a passage of pure narration that introduces that back-and-forth between registers. Here is that paragraph, with "SE" for "standard English" and "WIEB" for "West Indian English spoken in Britain," following the phrases and clauses to which those terms best apply:

One grim winter evening [SE], when it had a kind of unrealness [WIEB] about London, with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as if [SE] is not London at all but [WIEB] some strange place on another planet, Moses Aloetta [SE] hop on a number 46 bus at the corner of Chepstow Road and Westbourne Grove to go to Waterloo to meet a fellar [WIEB] who was coming from Trinidad on the boat-train [SE]. (23)

While this passage *introduces* us to the novel's inclusion of dual registers in the narrative voice, it is no simple task determining whether this is an example of double-voiced discourse (i.e., Bakhtin's "special type of double-voiced discourse") or hybridization. This is also the case a few pages later, where occurs yet *another* instance of this back-and-forth between registers, although this time matters are considerably more complex than before.



While waiting for Galahad to alight the "boat-train," Moses meets Tolroy, an established emigrant from Jamaica, who is waiting for his mother to arrive from "back home" and is shocked when she does so with many family members in tow. The following sentence narrates Tolroy's reaction:

Tolroy pull all the family out of the way, and they stand up there arguing, for Tolroy ain't catch himself yet, he can't realise that all these people on his hands, in London [WIEB], in the grim winter [SE], and no place to go stay [WIEB]. (30)

Shortly afterward, the British reporter who had been interviewing Moses decides to interview Tolroy's newly arrived family instead. This sentence narrates that reporter's decision, and note the absence here of any marks indicating a switch between registers:

The reporter fellar see this small crowd and he figure that it look like a family and he might get a good story from them why so much Jamaican coming to London, so he went up to Tanty and say: "Excuse me, lady, I'm from the *Echo*. Is this your first trip to England?" (30)

It is clear that here the narrator has temporarily aligned itself with the reporter. Yet the sentence remains WIEB throughout, up to the point that the reporter actually speaks—no focalization, no double-voiced discourse occurs in the sentence's purely narrative part (and this is the case *whenever* the narrator aligns itself with a non-emigrant character). So if the narrator is like a position at times occupied by the speech of the author, who tends toward standard English, but that is most often occupied by the speech of the novel's emigrant characters, who often speak collectively and in WIEB, then this

sentence is attributable to those emigrant characters—it is *their* point of view or vantage operant here. This means that the reporter's thoughts are being filtered through the novel's emigrant characters, a deliberate reversal of *his* attempt to filter, for *his* British readers, the thoughts and experiences of those emigrants to produce a news story that, in the end, bears little resemblance to their lived experience. Such are the complex and ambivalent ways that those two registers interrelate in the narrative passages of this short novel.

At the point that Galahad finally disembarks and for the first time makes contact with British soil, the back-and-forth between registers has made it difficult to align the novel's narrator chiefly with Moses. Because by then this back-and-forth has occurred in narrative passages where the narrator aligns itself with other emigrant characters as well. But in the novel's first few pages it also clear that the narrator's *base* register is WIEB (and this is the main reason that the phrases, clauses, and stretches of standard English stick out so vividly). Given that the novel's characters are almost all Caribbean emigrants, and that the register does *not* oscillate or shift from WIEB to standard English when British characters are featured, that back-and-forth between registers in the novel's passages of pure narration is then better described as mostly evidence of *not* double-voiced discourse, but hybridization.

Furthermore, in light of reexportation as a phenomenon and Selvon's own struggle with "the West Indian problem of audience," the main rationale for these instances of hybridization appears to be to facilitate the novel's British reader's ability to identify with the Caribbean emigrant characters who populate the novel. In an interview Selvon held

with Fabre, after an exchange concerning how Selvon modified aspects of *The Lonely Londoners* on the behalf of his British reader, Fabre asks whether Selvon "wanted the British reader to identify with Caribbean characters," to which Selvon answers, simply, "yes." These moments of hybridization in *The Lonely Londoners* signify when the text most clearly asks its British reader to identify with the novel's emigrant characters, and most particularly with the way that they *feel*. And Selvon's account of his difficulties initially drafting the novel, and his haste finishing it after changing compositional strategies (his own estimate was six months), suggest that although Selvon always displayed intense command of craft, this may have been one aspect of the aesthetics of novel that was well beyond the author's conscious control.

The earliest example of this kind of hybridization occurs seven pages into *The Lonely Londoners*, where Galahad, who has now moved in with Moses and spent a single night in London, decides to strike out and explore the city on his own. Of course Moses lets him make the error and learn from it. This passage narrates what Galahad experiences in the moments after leaving the flat:

On top of that, is [WIEB] one of those winter mornings when a kind of fog [SE] hovering around. The sun shining, but Galahad never see the sun look like how it looking now [WIEB]. No heat from it [SE], it just there in the sky like a force-ripe orange. When he look up [WIEB], the colour of the sky [SE] so desolate it make him more frighten. It have a kind of [WIEB] melancholy aspect about the morning [SE] that making him shiver. He have a feeling is about seven o'clock in the evening: when he

look at a clock on top a building he see is only half-past ten in the morning  
[WIEB]. (42)

Note that when the narrator aligns itself with Galahad, the back-and-forth between registers intensifies, and it tends to correspond with what Galahad is *feeling*.

Occurring just a few pages later is another example that provides an even stronger sense of how hybridization in the novel's narration can signal moments when the British reader's identification with the emotional consciousness of the emigrants is most at issue. This passage narrates some of the early experiences Moses had in the city:

When Moses did arrive fresh in London, he look around [WIEB] for a place where he wouldn't have to spend much money, where he could get [SE] plenty food [WIEB], and where he could meet the boys [SE] and coast a old talk [WIEB] to pass the time away [SE]—for this city powerfully lonely when you on your own [WIEB]. (47)

A similar kind of sentence appears slightly further down the very same page. There, although what is being described is the hostel where Moses first stayed, most central are the poignant feelings of the "fellars" living in the hostel:

This place had some genuine fellars who really studying profession, but it also had fellars who was only marking time [WIEB] and waiting to see what tomorrow would bring [SE]. (47)

This pattern of an intensifying back-and-forth between registers when the *emotional consciousness* of the emigrant characters are central continues in a refracted manner a few pages later. There, with the following two sentences, begins a

kaleidoscopic three-page passage of pure narration that mostly concerns and describes "the working class," with which the novel's emigrant characters are clearly considered aligned:

The place where Tolroy and the family living was off the Harrow Road, and the people in that area call the Working Class. Wherever in London that it have Working Class [WIEB], there you will find a lot of spades.

This is the real world, where men know what it is to hustle a pound to pay the rent [SE] when Friday come [WIEB]. (73)

A great deal of that back-and-forth between those two linguistic registers occurs in this section, all of it signifying *neither* focalization nor double-voiced discourse, but rather hybridization. There is a relationship between this section, which uses hybridization to draw connections between the struggles of the white British working class and the novel's emigrants, and the hybridization in those sections where the British reader's identification with how the emigrants characters feel is most at issue. Because *both* are about making *connections*, about ensuring that the British reader understands that the novel's emigrant population, and the region that they represent, are worth more than touristic consideration. Hence in those instances, *The Lonely Londoners* argues, to its British reader, for the validity of the novel's subject matter.

Roughly twenty-three pages after that "working-class" section of the novel occurs another suggestive example of hybridization, the first instance of it in terms of summer, which in this book has about the same pregnant significance that bodies of water often hold in film noir. Again this back-and-forth between registers, and how it intensifies

here, appears strongly connected to an overall strategy of bringing the emotional consciousness of the emigrant characters to the British reader:

On any Sunday in the summer, in the sweet, lazy summer [SE] when them days like they would never done, when all the fog and snow gone, and night stay long to come [WIEB], when you could put on a hot jitterbug shirt [SE] and wear a light sharkskin pants, when them white girls have on [WIEB] summer frocks and you could see legs and shapes that used to hide under winter coats [SE], when the sun shining and the sky blue and a warm wind blowing across the park [WIEB], on any such Sunday evening [SE], all the boys dressing up and coasting lime by the Arch, listening to all them reprobates and soapbox politicians [WIEB], looking around to see if they could pick up something in the crowd [SE]. (98)

Thirteen pages later, we encounter Harris, the emigrant character whose job in London is to organize parties and dances. Although Harris's name appears on the second page of the novel, where he is briefly described as a friend of Moses, this late stage in the narrative provides our first real sense of Harris as a character. His tendency to speak the Queen's English, combined with his inability to maintain the affectation in periods of stress, serves as the one of the novel's most vivid examples of the possibilities and improbabilities of assimilation. Harris thus anticipates the seemingly sharp turn in character development that Moses experiences between this novel and the second in the "Moses trilogy," *Moses Ascending*.

The narrator's introduction of Harris explicitly mentions his tendency to switch

between linguistic registers. But that tendency is actually performed for the first time some eleven pages later. There Harris loses his patience with the behavior of "the boys" (mostly Big City and Five Past Midnight) at a party that Harris is throwing where there are a few white British folks whom Harris wishes to impress. At that moment, Harris slips quickly out of the Queen's English and into WIEB.

But more pertinent to my argument is how the shifts that occur in Harris's language anticipate or parallel when the same occur in the voice of the novel's narrator. Note, for instance, how Harris at his own party serves the British guests as cultural translator; it is clear that at this particular fete where the emigrants are the majority in attendance, the British are tourists in their own country, and Harris is their guide. There is also the more general point that Harris usually speaks to his fellow emigrants in the Queen's English. The connection between this and the back-and-forth between registers in the novel's narrative passages is evident when one considers how strange it is that the third-person omniscient narrator of a novel whose concern is the Anglophone Caribbean (and which is more *of* than it is *about* the region, and more *of* than it is *about* its emigrants) would ever be expected to speak solely in standard English.

While reexportation in many ways *grounds* my argument, I should note how it actually assists with a Bakhtian formalist approach to Selvon's novel. First, the inclusion of reexportation here is *meant* to suggest that when unpacking the aesthetics of certain Anglophone Caribbean novels, it sometimes helps to read them from a position in *between* Bakhtinian formalism and Marxism (though *not* the Soviet version which Bakhtinian formalism most squarely opposes). While that may seem too bold, Ken

Hirschkop's observation that Bakhtin's own argument concerning heteroglossia relies on philosophy and empirical cultural analysis, two methodologies that are in conflict, indicates the room available to that kind of reading.

In "Baktin in African American Literary Theory," Dorothy Hale identifies an issue attendant to the widening use of Bakhtin's ideas and theories, particularly "the move to make Du Boisian 'double consciousness' synonymous with Bakhtinian 'double voice.'" Hale criticizes the "attempt to theorize social identity by way of literary formalism—a procedure" she terms "social formalism."

In *this* analysis of *The Lonely Londoners*, pairing reexportation with Bakhtinian formalism helps avoid analogous charges of "social formalism." Because while reexportation alone indicates the need to foreground the problem of audience when dealing with Anglophone Caribbean stories and novels, pairing it with Bakhtin illustrates how the social formulations and relations that reexportation describes are *inscribed*—that they might be refracted in or through novelistic discourse, instead of the other way around.

Reexportation matters, in a palpable way, to the aesthetics of *The Lonely Londoners*. That novel's aesthetics signify its double audience. But the tenets of cultural imperialism indicate that while Selvon's Caribbean audience would have little trouble with the novel's narration, his British readership would have a difficult time parsing those purely narrative stretches in the less-familiar register. Yet while the former suggests a primarily Caribbean readership, the latter, understood with the observation that hybridization in this novel's narration occurs most often when at issue is the British



reader's identification with the *feelings* of the novel's emigrant characters, illustrates the ways that the aesthetics of the novel manages and attenuates the attentions of its *British* reader, and argues to England for the validity of its subjects/subject matter.

I close with yet another, perhaps simpler way of thinking through this problem, by unpacking then abstracting the phrase "colonization in reverse." Perhaps best recognized as the title of the 1966 Louise Bennet poem whose topic is emigration from Jamaica to England, "colonization in reverse" is also descriptive enough of *The Lonely Londoners* that the phrase arises frequently in analyses and reviews of the novel. If the narrator of *The Lonely Londoners* is conceived of *not* as a body but as a position, then the oscillation between languages in the novel's narrative passages might be understood as a sort of "colonizing in reverse" of the third-person narrative position of the Anglophone Caribbean novel written with a British readership, or a British *and* Caribbean readership, in mind.

### Endnotes

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<sup>11</sup> Noting the May 1994 review of the re-issue of *An Island is a World* that appeared in *Books in Canada*, Clarke argues that "the neglect [Selvon] suffered at the hands of the literary establishments of two continents, ended the same week he died" (Clarke 140).

<sup>2</sup> Paquet, in "Samuel Dickson Selvon," states that "[Selvon's] mother was half-Indian and half-Scottish." Barratt, in "Sam Selvon," corroborates Paquet's assessment of Selvon's ethnic and racial heritage. And both appear to have gotten their assessment from Selvon himself, who at some point between 1977 and 1978 stated in an interview with Michel Fabre that his father was Indian while his mother was half-Indian, half-Scottish. But while the error appears to be Looker's, the problem is really less the error itself than how it is compounded. Pages 5-6 of Looker's introduction features an analysis that emphasizes the importance of the ethnic and racial plurality of the island and region of Selvon's origin, yet that analysis does not take into holistic consideration Selvon's own racial and ethnic plurality.

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<sup>3</sup> Worth noting is how the notion of a "double audience" runs counter to some writers *and* critics of West Indian literature, some of whose sentiments are well summarized by Joyce Jonas's assertion, in *Anancy and the Great House: Ways of Reading West Indian Fiction*, that, "The intended readership of West Indian fiction is primarily the West Indian himself" (8-9).

<sup>4</sup> An earlier essay of Wyke's, essentially his presentation at a 1981 meeting of the Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, argues that decreolization "had a perceivable influence on Selvon's artistic handling of such fictional elements as thematic vision, point of view and prose style" and cites the oscillation between linguistic registers in *The Lonely Londoners* as an important example ("Evolution of Language" 109).

<sup>5</sup> See Minabere Ibelema's "Perspectives on Mass Communication and Cultural Domination" for an extended discussion of the complex relationship between colonial domination and cultural imperialism. There Ibelema surveys the different currently prevalent perspectives on cultural domination, observing that they are separable into three "strains": the programmatic strain, the structural strain, and the synchronizational strain. Though Ibelema never explicitly mentions this, it is worth noting that reexportation as a concept best belongs to the structural strain; it is best described as a structural perspective on cultural domination.

<sup>6</sup> Worth noting, however, is that at some point between 1979 and 1995, Fabre appears to have abandoned this approach significantly. His "Samuel Selvon" entry for King's *West Indian Literature* (1995) anthology is very similar to 1979's "From Trinidad to London," except that absence of any attempt to read the narrator of *The Lonely Londoners* as a Calypsonian.

CHAPTER III  
WHITENESS, STRATEGIC OMISSION, AND A CONTRAPUNTAL READING  
OF PERRY HENZELL'S *THE HARDER THEY COME*

Released in Jamaican theaters in 1972, a decade after the island gained full independence within the British Commonwealth, *The Harder They Come* is a low-budget, locally cast film based loosely on the life of Ivanhoe "Rhygin" Martin, a violent 1950s-era Jamaican gunman turned folk hero.<sup>1</sup> Directed, produced, and co-written by Jamaican native Perry Henzell, the movie starred reggae icon Jimmy Cliff, was set mostly in the ghettos/intentionally shunned the well-known resorts of Jamaica, and was the first chance for the majority of Jamaicans<sup>2</sup> to see characters like themselves onscreen in central or starring roles. Stateside critics commonly attribute the film's international success to the combination of a storyline whose main theme is rebellion and a soundtrack that provided mainstream America with its first taste of reggae, the musical descendant of ska and rock steady, respectively.<sup>3</sup> For a host of reasons that arguably include the island's presentation of itself to the outside world, particularly foreign investors,<sup>4</sup> Jamaica, third largest island (after Cuba and Hispaniola) in a dappled and polyphonic region, continues to serve in the American popular imagination as a synecdoche for the Caribbean.<sup>5</sup> Viewed in light of the film's lasting status as cultural touchstone for a generation of Americans,<sup>6</sup> this suggests that more than thirty years after its original, domestic release,

*The Harder They Come* remains an open door into the complicated, sometimes convoluted relationship between Caribbean cultural products and the American reception and use of them.

The film's dependence upon reggae is one of a number of thematic elements suggesting rebellion and an attempt at an "authentic" representation of Jamaica in *The Harder They Come*. Reggae itself is shot through with rebellion, or resistance. In *The Rastafarians: The Dreadlocks of Jamaica*, Leonard Barrett defines reggae as "a cultic expression that is both entertaining, revolutionary, and filled with Rastafarian symbolism"(x); it is the music of Jamaicans who have "rejected most of what is considered Jamaican, even to the point of spurning Jamaican nationality"(xiii). The nationalistic fervor that seized the island around 1962, the year it achieved full independence within the Commonwealth, in part catalyzed the reactionary development of the sect's musical form, which ironically reworked Jamaica's own version of Caribbean resistance. Here I invoke "resistance" specifically according to Selwyn Cudjoe's use of the term and his classification of its different types in *Resistance and Caribbean Literature*.<sup>7</sup> Cudjoe identifies three categories of resistance--cultural, socioeconomic, and political--all of which are evident in *The Harder They Come*. Reggae itself is an ironic form of cultural resistance; the film follows a character whose actions occasionally qualify as socioeconomic resistance and always as political resistance. If as Cudjoe, Meeks, and others<sup>8</sup> argue resistance is central to the historical and cultural development of the Caribbean as a region (and, by extension, Jamaica as a country), then the placement and expression of this type of story within and through this particular musical

context, understood in conjunction with the decision to use local people and almost no professional actors in *The Harder They Come*, would seem to intimate an effort at an "authentically" Caribbean motion picture, while supporting the idea that resistance itself is perhaps the primary mark of the "authentically" Caribbean.

Yet there are elements of *The Harder They Come* that suggest the film may be about but not necessarily of, or even for, Jamaica. That is, there are moments in the film when it seems less *of* those it displays and more *for* those who would seek or desire a feature-length snapshot of, but not necessarily pungent insight into, the laborious struggles of a recently decolonized people. In short, while trafficking in images and sounds of "Jamaica" that, through the film's success, came to comprise or at least inflect a common perception of the country (and, by extension, the region), *The Harder They Come* lays flat beneath the pressure of the essentialism Stephen Slemon<sup>9</sup> and Jenny Sharpe<sup>10</sup> (among others) warn is the inevitable conclusion of the false binary basic to the notion of "resistance" as a cultural marker of a colonized people.

Whatever the film's theoretical or critical difficulties, they do not belie that Henzell as a Jamaican was aware that the lives of ordinary, poor, black Jamaicans had yet to be made central onscreen. In an interview conducted for the commentary track of the 2000 Criterion DVD edition of *The Harder They Come*, Henzell describes the mixture of release and delight he witnessed the night of the film's domestic premiere, at Jamaica's 1,500-seat Carib Theater:

There is no thrill in movie-dom like people seeing themselves on the screen for the first time. Jamaicans had

never ever seen themselves on the screen, their lives represented on the screen. The first time that it happens, it produces this unbelievable audience reaction, like nothing else ever could. You'd have to imagine that an American had seen nothing but [...] European movies, and had never seen themselves on the screen for the first time. They'd go mad, you know? (Henzell)

Clearly Henzell understood that his Jamaican audience yearned to see themselves at the center of a major motion picture. My claim that *The Harder They Come* is more *about* than it is *of* or *for* Jamaica is not meant to slight Henzell's ability as a Jamaican *or* a filmmaker to provide in his film artfully hewn avenues through which ordinary black Jamaicans could identify with the events and characters displayed onscreen. The film, after all, begins with an old bus careering down a coastal road, past blighted palm trees, bound from country to Kingston. Halfway through the opening credits, the bus stops hard on a bridge and nearly collides with a truck, a scenario that Henzell states, in the Criterion interview, that he realized would be familiar to the capacity crowd at the Carib Theater on opening night. In fact, he identifies this scene, which might be termed the film's first instance of suture, as the moment the audience "relaxed" for the film and started to "just enjoy it." "They just started screaming," he recounts. "And I never, tell you the truth, heard another word of dialogue that night"(Henzell).

Yet when Henzell's nationality and familiarity with the ways and means of the film's subject matter is put aside, it remains problematic, and perhaps even seductively

easy in light of even the colonial version of Jamaican history, to read the filmmaker's determination to foreground the lives and bodies of black Jamaicans as chiefly responsible for the nearly complete absence of whites from the diegesis of *The Harder They Come*. It is also difficult in this film to interpret that absence separately from either the presence of artifacts of the Metropole that suggest dominance without ascribing it *or* those disruptive formal elements that in this motion picture tend to make objects of what Henzell claims is his subject matter.

In this chapter, I argue that *The Harder They Come* is a complex, ambivalent text, one that demands but does not usually receive what Edward Said once described as a contrapuntal reading.<sup>11</sup> Such a reading would begin with the notion that the film itself may be a colonial, not a postcolonial, text. Because despite the film's "authenticating" trappings and "surface realness," *The Harder They Come* often supplies little more than an objectifying glimpse of the people who were then (and remain today) the human interior of Jamaica. In this sense, the film's "authentic" snapshot of Jamaica is not too dissimilar to an "authentic" colonial guide to the "insides" of a postcolonial state--a guide that surveys effects but not causes precisely because that is the pattern of observation best suited to the interests of the imagined reader. The result is a motion picture that, given the heightened attention paid in the Caribbean to Caribbean cultural product once it has achieved international renown, quite possibly owes much of its stateside *and* lasting domestic success to the film's strategy of holding only part of the interior of Jamaica--effects but not their causes, the debilitating poverty of ordinary black Jamaicans but not the reasons founding that poverty--up for cinematic display. So while the film permitted

a "positive" viewing experience for its black Jamaican audience, it also allowed a "positive" viewing experience for its predominantly white international audience by literally omitting them from the text and obscuring the roles of race, international relations, and foreign economic policy in determining the course of Jamaica's modern history, while situating the film's gaze so it clearly originates from a hidden position far outside its subject matter. To express the problem in terms of cultural studies, a field particularly useful here since it gracefully facilitates the alignment of the close reading of a film specialist with the reception of a mass audience, while certain aesthetic elements of the film permitted its poor, black Jamaican audience negotiated readings of the text, aspects of the film's formal approach read contrapuntally, in conjunction with the strategic omission of whites in the film's diegesis, reveal how *The Harder They Come* also promoted dominant readings by audiences outside Jamaica, particularly primarily white audiences in Britain and the United States. This chapter will first attempt to establish the non-inclusion of whites in this film as a strategic omission before moving on to a close, formal analysis of two sequences selected because while both clearly indicate and exemplify the origin and direction of the film's gaze, the very different ways in which the two re-present the film's subject matter illustrate the ambivalence and complexity that I argue form the heart of *The Harder They Come*.

Although *The Harder They Come* has historically garnered almost unanimous praise,<sup>12</sup> shades of my concern have appeared in both the popular press and scholarly journals, starting shortly after the film's international debut. The July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1974 edition of *The New York Times* includes Vincent Canby's "Those Films Which Refuse to Fade



Away," which surveys films (namely, *Harold and Maude*, *A Thousand Clowns*, *King of Hearts*, and *The Harder They Come*) whose cult followings had led to prolonged or second or third runs at theaters, despite those films sometimes having flopped badly during an initial run. The following appears near the end of Canby's glowingly positive recapitulation of Henzell's feature:

Although *The Harder They Come* takes place almost entirely in the Jamaican's Jamaica (there is only one short scene involving a resort hotel), and although it is very careful not to portray whites as the oppressors (we see only blacks ripping off blacks), it is a more revolutionary black film than any number of American efforts, including *Sweet Sweetback's Baadassss Song*. (235)

Published in a 1975 edition of *Jump Cut*, Julianne Burton's "*The Harder They Come: Cultural Colonialism and the American Dream*" provides a largely positive overview of the film, avowing that its criticism of postcolonial Jamaica lies in its depiction of "Ivan's separation from traditional life" and his community, as well as the role of American and European artifacts in his progression toward violence and materialism(5). Burton's point is a great one; it is quite possible to read the billboards, brands, and pricey objects that sometimes people the screen as signs and symbols of capitalist imperialism, particularly when those signs and symbols are held against a chart of Ivan's trajectory. Yet in her first footnote Burton is careful to point out that her

reading of the film is predicated upon Henzell's ability to speak or stand in for his subject matter:

The history of the filming, the intentions and background of the filmmakers, the sources of financial backing, the social contexts within which the film has been viewed and the audience response to it are all questions directly related to my interpretation of the film. Such information is, however, extremely difficult to find and may, in the short run, tend to substantiate a much more pessimistic and negative view of the film's content. Perry Henzell is after all a son of Jamaica's white ruling class, though he perceives himself as much more closely tied to the marginal milieu portrayed in the film. (7)

Published two years earlier, Ernest Callenbach's brief review of the film, in the "Short Notice" section of *Film Quarterly*, begins with an examination of how the motion picture brings to the forefront "the black Caribbean, which has previously only figured as a passive backdrop in James Bond pictures." Callenbach then matches attendant aspects of *The Harder They Come* to a summary of the "post"-colonial state of the region, a summary organized around the claim that Jamaica, "being a large island and more directly in touch with American black culture"(Callenbach 59), can serve as a model for the effects upon the region of both the replacement of one monoculture (sugar) with another (tourism) as well as the electronic importation (radio, television, etc.) of

American culture--especially the elements of American culture most closely representative of the tenets of capitalism.<sup>13</sup> This passage appears near the end of the review:

Because [*The Harder They Come's*] style is ordinary opaque naturalism [...] the film can hide behind its surface realness: the shanty towns, the lovely West Indian dialect [...] But it thus conceals the deeper realities of Jamaican life: economic control by foreign white corporations and managers, a classically neo-colonial pattern of extractive industries. Perhaps as a consequence, it speaks dramatically in terms that are fatalistic, romantic, and defeatist. (Callenbach 60)

A valid critique of this review is Callenbach offers little specific support for his assertion that the film is either short- or near-sighted in failing to include a narrative-based indictment of the effects of colonialism upon the region. But this may be due to said support being perhaps not too terribly difficult for the viewer to find. *The Harder They Come* features not a single white major or minor character; the only whites in the diegesis proper are the odd decorative tourists, who together populate conspicuously few frames.<sup>14</sup> The whites who last longest onscreen are notably (or perhaps ironically) filtered through the medium of film itself--namely, the actors in *Django*, the "Spaghetti Western" playing in the theater Ivan visits shortly after arriving in Kingston. Even more striking, despite the then-recent independence of Jamaica and the effects of a renewed emphasis on

tourism, "which brings in its train the identical social dislocations of the old plantation system"(59), *not one* conversation in this film--and for all its action, this is a dialogue-rich film--is specifically of or directly concerns whites. Visually, aurally, ideologically: Whites but not white artifacts, whiteness but not its signs, are strategically omitted from *The Harder They Come*. In fact, the most significant references in this film to race or colorist attitudes come through two characters: the lighter-skinned woman (played by Beverly Manley, whose husband, Michael, became Prime Minister of Jamaica at roughly the same time that the film opened domestically) who shoos Ivan from her upscale house while he is wandering Kingston, penniless and hungry; and Hilton, the record producer of light complexion who ultimately profits the most from Ivan's crime spree. But both are, again, effects not causes; both suggest that skin color is a factor in Ivan's social mobility, but neither indicates how skin color, in this particular (and particularly Jamaican) situation, came to be such a determining factor. According to *The Harder They Come*, which, with its "timeless beauty [...], early, powerful reggae score and grainy, flawed authenticity, captures a snapshot of a moment in Jamaica's history"(Meeks 83), whiteness has not and does not attenuate power and capital in Jamaican society, meaning that it is irrelevant to the violence and penury represented onscreen. Such is the supportive material that the film freely provides for Callenbach's assessment, as well as for my own.

That same evidence supports Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández's "Reggae, Ganja, and Black Bodies: Power, Meaning, and the Markings of Postcolonial Jamaica in Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come*." Appearing in a 2002 volume of *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, Gaztambide-Fernández's analysis establishes

the grounds on which the film could be called "subversive" (i.e., the white director who describes the island's "white wealthy dominant class" as a "'pompous elite' who are 'restricted by their wealth,' [yet] it is only through his membership in this social class that he gains access to the resources necessary to make this film, a medium that is in turn only available to him through access to a British education"), before providing the following assessment of Fernández's main assertion:

"The narratives that constitute this supposedly subversive representation of Jamaican society falls short of becoming what [Pierre] Bourdieu describes as 'heretical subversion.' Instead, I will argue that each of these narratives contributes to the misrecognition of the white Jamaican ruling class and its role in the relations of domination that the film portrays by presenting blacks as the exploiters of other blacks and by commodifying blackness as an object for consumption by an exnominated white audience. (356)

But a membrane divides that main assertion and my own, yet significant differences do exist between the arguments. Fernández, who refers to Henzell as "the author of *The Harder They Come*"(355), provides an image-based analysis ran through the old, largely supplanted sieve of the auteur theory. The argument in this chapter relies upon close formal readings of entire representative sequences, and leans heavily upon film studies, cultural studies, post-colonial studies, and theories and concepts specific to the critical study of mass communication for its development. An overt value assessment

is probably not required to cite the difference between the approaches; in fact, that both are possible and (this author hopes) fruitful may testify to the richness of the film.

It is important at this point to specify what I mean by "omission," "white," and "whiteness" in this and any other chapter where the terms appear. "Omission" I use in accordance with James Snead in *White Screens/Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side*, a posthumously assembled anthology of several of Snead's essays on race and film, edited by Cornel West and Colin MacCabe and published shortly after Snead's untimely death. In "Spectatorship and Capture in *King Kong*: The Guilty Look," Snead offers a largely semiotic, formal analysis of Ernest B. Schoedsack and Merian C. Cooper's 1933 motion picture to exemplify "the three most frequent devices whereby blacks have been consigned to minor significance onscreen [ ... ]: mythification, marking, and omission"(4). The latter Snead defines as "exclusion by reversal, distortion, or some other form of censorship," before admitting that, "Omission and exclusion are perhaps the most widespread tactics of racial stereotyping but are also the most difficult to prove because their manifestation is precisely absence itself"(6). In both the introduction and body of this essay, as well as in a later essay that dissects the star text of Shirley Temple, Snead clarifies that omission or exclusion in his thinking refers to the absence of black people or blackness from the screen; it also becomes evident, throughout the anthology, that Snead's main concern is Hollywood, not foreign, "second," or "third" cinema. Yet if, as Snead states, the hunt for omission and exclusion in film texts is meant to discover "ideologically motivated distortions under the mask of artistic economy or exigency"(7), then the skin color of those omitted or excluded is secondary to the distortions such

omissions or exclusions ultimately produce. In other words, omission and exclusion, as Snead defines and mobilizes the terms, can indeed apply to films that feature predominantly black casts and leave another race conspicuously absent; "omission" and "exclusion" are ideologically but not race-specific terminology. Furthermore, although Snead's area of study is Hollywood, the powerful and continuing influence of Hollywood upon narrative cinema across the globe (from determining the "grammar" of narrative film to setting in cement particular characters, styles, and stories) means Snead's ideas are indeed extendable to narrative films produced great distances from Hollywood. Hence, although the use of "omission" and "exclusion" here (and elsewhere) may seem a reversal or inversion of Snead's invocation, my use of both terms begins and ends in accordance with his own.

I begin my clarification of the use of "white" and "whiteness" in this chapter with a passage from Rastafarian leader Samuel Brown's 1965 "Treatise on the Rastafarian Movement," included in chapter 4 of Barrett's *The Rastafarians*:

Because of the stand we have taken against white oppression, and the enforcement of their way of life on black people, we have become the target of abuse and murder, perpetuated by the black mercenary policeman, white officered. Contrary to the opinion formed abroad that Jamaica is a black man's land, it is not true where power of rule is concerned, even though we outnumber all races combined. A mulatto bourgeois class holds the

balance of power under remote control, while the blacks are held as virtual slaves. (Barrett 116)

An interesting example of "guerilla logic," a rhetorical strategy Barrett notes is central to Rastafarianism as a (then) put-upon subculture, this passage is instructive because it skillfully plays the frequently nomadic boundary between the denotative and connotative values of both "white" and "whiteness." Here, "white" signifies both skin color and a certain connection to or expression of a system of dominance. The dependence of one upon the other is, however, deliberately left indeterminate. The "black mercenary officer," while black, is "white officered"; like the "mulatto bourgeois middle class," he derives his authority from his belief in and affiliation with a particular power structure, and it is against this officer and the mulatto middle class that Rastafarians are most materially engaged. Brown's point here is what Rastafarians fight against is simultaneously specific *and* neutral in terms of race--for Brown, "white" and "whiteness" operate in a shifting conflation of the literal and figurative.

Similarly, if I call attention to Henzell's "whiteness," I refer not to his eggshell complexion but to his status as a member of Jamaica's historically financially privileged class.<sup>15</sup> I use "white" and "whiteness" in this essay in line with their invocation in *White*, Richard Dyer's "study of images of white people"(1), or, more specifically, his determinedly white study of whiteness and its often nearly invisible, insidious effects upon white perceptions of the people and products of "non-white" cultures and ultimately, by extension, of whites themselves. Although Dyer's book-length self-trained gaze is an admittedly internal study of whiteness, and although his stated subject matter is



"how white people are represented--how we represent ourselves--images of white people, or the cultural construction of white people"(Dyer xiii), the far-flung and insidious reach of whiteness requires Dyer to formulate an argument and develop a theoretical framework for his project that leaves *White* often of unusual value to the examination of texts and phenomena that at least initially appear to fall outside the realm of whiteness proper.

Dyer's study of whiteness is significant to examinations of Caribbean cultural product because much of the Caribbean remains a postcolonial region, one whose history reflects efforts to either resist or negotiate the intercourse between constructs endemic to and instituted by European colonizers (language and systems of education, religion, and government) and the culture and beliefs more specific and relevant to the colonized. In his seminal *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820*, Edward Kamau Brathwaite invokes "creolization" partly in reference to the history of this interplay. Brathwaite defines creolization as a process that began at the moment of Caribbean colonization with the "stimulus/response of individuals to their environment and--as white/black, culturally discrete groups--to each other"(296) and continues through "the formation of a society which developed, or was developing, its own distinctive character or culture which, insofar as it was neither purely British nor West African, is called 'creole.'" He then argues "that this creole culture was part of a wider New World or American culture complex, itself the result of European settlement and exploitation of a new environment"(xii). If the state of the Caribbean region, as Brathwaite's argument indicates, is the result of creolization, then Dyer's study of whiteness is useful to the

examination of Caribbean cultural product because that study systematizes the way in which the dominant class perceives (and has perceived) itself and, through comparison, the members of the subordinate class. Dyer's study also helps clarify how these two considerations continue to meet to inform the self-conceptualization of members of the subordinate class. In this way, *White* is invaluable to a detailed, fleshed-out understanding of the process of creolization and the development of the Caribbean as a whole.

Another reason that Dyer's study is important here concerns reexportation, the dialogue (or echoing monologue) that has developed between the external and domestic receptions of Caribbean cultural product. Reexportation as a concept is vital to a number of the essays that form the chapters of *Culture and Mass Communication in the Caribbean: Domination, Dialogue, Dispersion*, the anthology assembled and edited by Humphrey A. Regis. "Culture" the editor defines (in a final, summary chapter) by gathering the treatment of the term across the anthologized essays, distilling those treatments to five common ideas, then locating all five within Ruth Mead's notion "that culture is personality writ large--the culture of a collective may be seen as its personality when its members are taken as a group"(216). In a similar manner, Regis arrives at the following definition of "mass communication":

[...] the process in which originators disseminate messages to audiences who receive these messages if they make the necessary investment in time, means, and effort. This mass communication may be realized through such media as

publicly displayed inscriptions or images, contemporary print media, traditional terrestrial broadcast media, satellite-assisted broadcast media, and computer-assisted media such as Web sites. (232)

Finally, while Regis in his final chapter points out the graphic and undeniable similarities between modern-day "reexportation" (which is cultural) and Europe's colonial economic domination of the region (the pattern of which could be easily termed "economic reexportation") (227), "reexportation" itself is perhaps most cleanly outlined in D. Elliott Parris's contribution, "The Reexportation of the Caribbean Literary Artist." There Parris explains that the process typically involves "the migration of talented persons from the Caribbean to Europe and North America, their emergence as acclaimed artists through being published abroad and positively reviewed by foreign critics, and the return of those artists or their reputations to the Caribbean, where they were received with more recognition than before their departure"(95-96). Parris focuses on literature, but the anthology's working definition of "mass communication," combined with the concept's importance to other of the anthology's essays that use visual and aural mass media as examples, establishes the potential for a wider application of the term.

In this process of reexportation, which Leroy L. Lashley,<sup>16</sup> Hollis Liverpool,<sup>17</sup> John A. Lent,<sup>18</sup> Parris, and others argue remains at the core of the region's attempts at cultural liberation in the wake of political independence, "whiteness" as defined in and explicated through the theoretical underpinnings of *White* is at issue in both the external reception of Caribbean cultural product *and* its eventual reception back home; a

systematic understanding of whiteness is integral to determining what America and Europe find appealing about Caribbean cultural product as well as how the Caribbean determines what it recognizes and celebrates about itself. I argue here for the applicability of the reexportation model to Henzell's *The Harder They Come* not because Henzell himself left the island to achieve success, but because his film "left" the island and achieved international renown--which consequently amplified the exuberance of its domestic reception. So although this chapter concerns whiteness in one instance of one type of Caribbean cultural product, my argument here depends upon a theoretical model fruitful for examinations of Caribbean cultural product as a whole, particularly concerning the relationship between its external and domestic receptions.

Dyer's introductory chapter, "The Matter of Whiteness," operates as a type of blueprint of whiteness and its effects as I see them on *The Harder They Come*, in terms of both what Dyer says and how he says it. One of the most striking aspects of that chapter is how quickly Dyer acknowledges his rather privileged position, a position somewhat analogous to Henzell's as a white man born and raised in a predominantly non-white island: that of a white person who, at a young age, felt a sort of affinity with non-whites, an affinity Dyer explains as bound up in his case with an early understanding of himself as a white homosexual, in light of his adolescent infatuation with a Jewish boy. While that personalizing rhetorical strategy is standard in cultural criticism, Dyer goes to fairly unusual lengths to show that he very early on identified himself with non-whites because he understood himself as different and hence, later in life, was capable of seeing whiteness at the required critical remove. This, Dyer suggests, means that he is able to

discuss and vivisection whiteness from a white point of view; put another way, early in this book, Dyer establishes a critical position that allows an "objective" observation of the effects of the self-imaging of his own, dominant race. This, which is the "how" in "how he says it," is useful to an analysis of *The Harder They Come* because the film's inability to establish the same remove seems directly connected to the absence of commentary on the effects of whiteness upon the Jamaicans depicted onscreen, as well as the objectification that occurs in the content and form of the film.

To return for a moment to *White*: What it turns out Dyer is after is a turning of the white gaze upon specific aspects of white ethnicity, those aspects that inform its perceptions of itself, those that whiteness then turns around and uses in an externally directed comparison whose purpose is to support and reinforce white supremacy--which is a turning inward then outward of the white gaze. But as illustrated in *The Harder They Come*, the white gaze can be just as easily turned out and then back in again.<sup>19</sup> The objectification of the non-white suggested in Dyer's chapter, that process which begins by establishing the reader or viewer in a privileged position, is basic to those formal decisions that appear most racially and ethnically problematic in *The Harder They Come*.

Part of the process of constructing narrative in film, regardless of whether that process occurs in production or reception, involves a matching of formal elements to content. Here I put forth that the orientation of *The Harder They Come* is evident in both the film's content and its form: that it is possible (and necessary) to examine the film for its racial messaging in both aspects. The current focus upon form in film's critical canon, particularly its role in the construction of film narrative, is at the center of David

Bordwell's constructivist account of film viewing, which Bordwell provides in his *Narration in the Fiction Film*. While other film scholars have outlined other, often radically different yet equally valid approaches to formal analysis, Bordwell's approach to narrative in film appears here because it is geared toward producing close readings based primarily upon the interaction of formal elements to produce meaning. Key to Bordwell's notion of what occurs when we view films are the different methods and patterns by which motion pictures cue, affirm, and deny spectator hypotheses.<sup>20</sup> These methods include the manipulation of gaps or disjunctions between the *syuzhet* (the story as it is told) and the *fabula* (the story as it is understood) as well as the affirmation or denial of causal relationships the viewer tends to establish usually due to both narrative arrangement and formal elements (such as sightline matches and the order of shots as they are presented). The analyses below, Bordwellian readings of the two selected sequences, are meant to help separate those formal elements that work solely to construct the film's narrative from those that more clearly indicate the racial messaging implicit in the form of *The Harder They Come*. While both sequences indicate the external orientation of this film (i.e., that the film may be about but not necessarily of, or even for, Jamaica), the first demonstrates how that orientation often serves the type of differentiation central to racial messaging, while the second demonstrates that an external orientation does not, *by definition or necessity*, lead to that particular kind of differentiation.

The first sequence (sequence A) begins immediately after the film's opening sequence, in which Ivan takes a bus from the country to Kingston. Here, Ivan arrives in

Kingston and is almost instantly the victim of a young, male thief, who gets away with all that Ivan has brought with him. Sequence A ends just as Ivan crosses a busy street in pursuit of his possessions. The following is a more specific account of the shots, actions, dialogue, formal patterns, and spectator hypotheses contained within sequence A.

Sequence A begins with a hard cut to a shot [shot 1 (figure 1)] of part of the front of a bus with red, white, and blue horizontal stripes. Overburdened with bags and packages, wearing clothing that immediately codes him as being from the country, Ivan walks around the front of the bus and the camera pans with him, past the figures of several male bystanders who stand in the foreground.

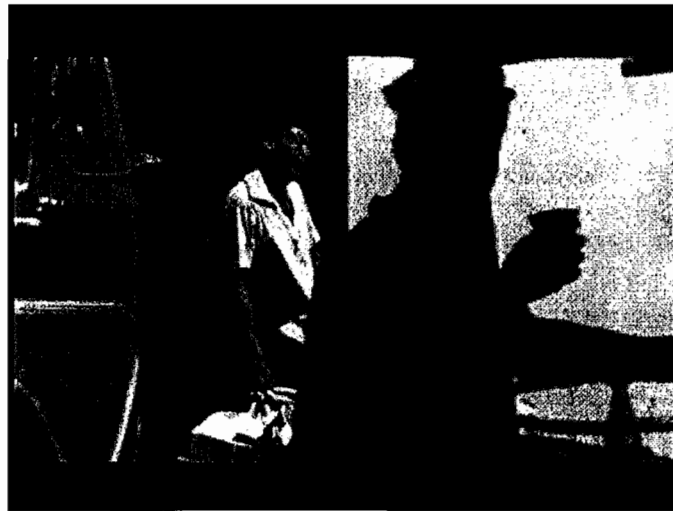


Figure 1: Sequence A, Shot 1

As the camera sweeps by the last of the men, Ivan looks around at his new surroundings but does not stop walking until one of his packages slips from his arms. At this point, he is in front of another bus with similar-colored horizontal stripes. The only

sound in this shot is diegetic street noise, continued from the previous shot and lasting through the sequence.

Another hard cut takes us to a close up [shot 2 (figure 2)] of the fallen package. As Ivan grabs the package and lifts it, we hear the sound of a bicycle horn, and the camera tilts up and pulls back to present a young man behind a multicolored pushcart, waving his arms at Ivan. Behind the young man are buses; further in the background stretch structures, trees, and sky.



Figure 2: Sequence A, Shot 2

Young Man: Hey country boy, get out of the way.

We then cut to a medium shot [shot 3 (figure 3)] of Ivan, who takes up the left side of the frame. The bus behind Ivan at the beginning of the sequence is also behind him here.





Figure 3: Sequence A, Shot 3

Ivan:                    You know the way to Milk Lane?

Yet another hard cut, this time to a shot [shot 4 (figure 4)] that both features a good deal of activity and is the reverse of its immediate predecessor. It begins with a close up, in which the young man, seen clearer here than before, is decidedly more sharply dressed and groomed than Ivan. Comparing the two figures cements Ivan's unsure, naïve fit in his new surroundings. The young man takes up most of the frame, and the shallow depth of field leaves the background largely out of focus.

Young Man:            If you have money you go anywhere. If you don't have money you  
fart, is better you stay home.

The shot continues with the camera drifting back, revealing the platform of the bus station, the people waiting beneath the roof of it, and eventually Ivan at the right side of the frame.

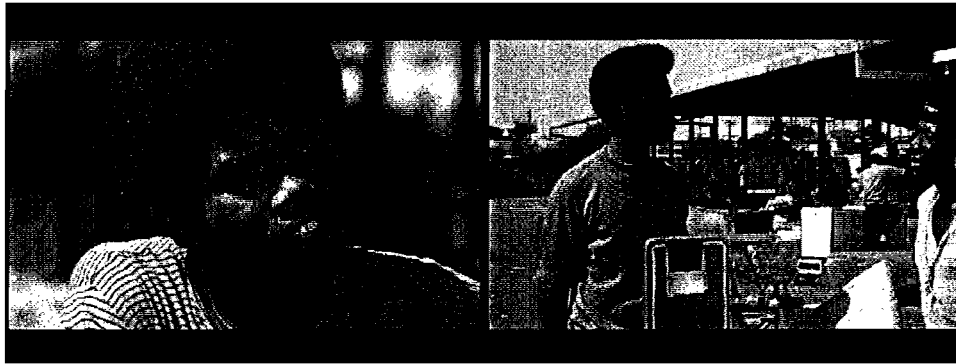


Figure 4: Sequence A, Shot 4a and 4b

Ivan: All right then, how much?

Young Man: Give me fifty cents and help me push.

Ivan lifts his packages and places them on the cart; as he does so, the street noise is interrupted by a blast of non-diegetic Dub Reggae that fades in and out through the rest of the sequence (rising and falling opposite the dialogue) and continues as a sound bridge just beyond the final shot of the sequence.

We then cut hard to a close up [shot 5 (figure 5)] of the front of the cart; car horns punctuate the non-diegetic music. The camera pulls back as the cart goes across the frame.



Figure 5: Sequence A, Shot 5

Cut again [shot 6 (figure 6)], this time to a medium, shallow shot of a man in a black shirt with a white and black decorative front, standing against a set of vertical steel bars.



Figure 6: Sequence A, Shots 6a and 6b

Behind him (and barely in focus) stretches a row of green hedges. The preceding shot combined with this figure's sightline suggest that he is watching Ivan and the young

man from across the busy street. Further evidence for this occurs when he reaches up with a level palm and shades his eyes against the sun.

We cut again, this time to a long shot [shot 7 (figure 7)] of Ivan and the young man pushing the heavy cart down the street and toward the camera. The two are surrounded by traffic, and the young man looks about, furtively. The camera pans to follow the pair as they near the lens and veer left.



Figure 7: Sequence A, Shot 7

Cut to a canted, extreme close up [shot 8 (figure 8)] of a traffic signal turning red, then again [shot 9 (figure 8)] to a medium shot of Ivan and the young man straining as they push the cart toward the camera.



Figure 8: Sequence A, Shots 8 and 9

The young man, who is to the right, suddenly pulls back while Ivan, who is to the left and steering the cart, does not.

Young Man:           That means stop you know.

And here [shot 10 (figure 9)] we cut to precisely the same image and canted angle present in shot 8, only now we begin with a close up that zooms in rapidly to an extreme close up just as the signal turns from yellow to red.



Figure 9: Sequence A, Shot 10

Now, while this may initially appear to be an innocuous, narrative-driven or formally required repetition of a previous image or shot (for foreshadowing, to establish shot/reverse shot, etc.), a stronger explanation in light of the rest of the sequence (and that the traffic light was already red in shot 8, which means that this shot marks the film's first significant disruption in the syzuhet of fabula time) is that this shot signifies the beginning of an identifiable but not necessarily narrative-driven or formally required pattern in this sequence. As will be apparent soon, while the initial occurrence of this pattern concerns an object, the later one concerns a person. And that this pattern begins with an object and ends with a person is perhaps as significant as that the pattern's initial image is, by definition, a warning light.

We cut hard here [shot 11 (figure 10)] back to roughly the same content, setup, and framing of shot 9 (suggesting that shot 11 is simply the continuation of shot 9).



Figure 10: Sequence A, Shot 11

This rather standard or classical example of shot/reverse shot, which relies on the sort of shot repetition just described, serves "to make even stranger" the relationship between shots 8 and 10.

Young Man:           That is why you country boy always come to town and get dead.

The young man looks off to the right of the frame, yells, and waves an arm.

Cut here to a shot [shot 12 (figure 11)] where the camera is positioned to the left and behind the young man, which allows us to see across the street that he is facing. The camera then pans quickly to the left and shows us that he is waving at the man in shot 6, who spreads his arms wide apart in a gesture indicating that he has no idea what the young man wants with him.



Figure 11: Sequence A, Shots 12a and 12b

With this begins an extensive, pronounced, nearly chaotic use of shot/reverse shot and reaction shots that continues until shot 25, which is the first shot of the second occurrence of the unusual pattern of repetition first observed with shots 8 and 10.

We cut again, this time to a shallow close up [shot 13 (figure 12)] of the young man's profile. The position of the camera is nearly the same as in shot 9, but the framing is now much tighter.



Figure 12: Sequence A, Shot 13



Young Man:            You know how long that bitch owe me money?

The young man looks to the left of the frame; his sightline suggests that he looks at Ivan while he speaks.

Young Man:            He won't dodge me today.

The young man then changes his sightline, which now suggests that he has gone back to looking at the man across the street.

Young Man:            Hey, give the man the money!

We then cut to a reverse shot [shot 14 (figure 13)], a close up of Ivan's face, his sightline indicating that he is looking at the young man; he then shortly looks off to the left of the frame, matching the sightline of the young man, who was just looking at the man across the street.



Figure 13: Sequence A, Shot 14

Cut again [shot 15 (figure 14)] to the continuation of shot 12; the man across the street continues to make the same gesture indicating that he cannot hear anything above the traffic. And we cut again [shot 16 (figure 14)] to the continuation of shot 14, as Ivan switches his sightline back to the young man.



Figure 14: Sequence A, Shots 15 and 16

We then cut to a reverse shot [shot 17 (figure 15)]--a continuation of shot 13--as the young man waves, indicating he wants Ivan to cross the street and retrieve the money.



Figure 15: Sequence A, Shot 17

Cut again [shot 18 (figure 16)], this time to the continuation of shot 15, as Ivan walks away from the camera and heads across the street. As Ivan nears the other side, the young man pushes his cart and goes past the left of the frame. A group of uniformed schoolchildren cross the frame from left to right as the camera zooms slightly and shrinks the frame, tightening on Ivan and the man across the street.



Figure 16: Sequence A, Shots 18a and 18b

Ivan:                   The guy there send me for his money.

The man waves his arms suggesting he has no idea what is going on; his mouth moves as if he is saying something, but what he says is either unrecorded or recorded too low to be intelligible. A bus (now with white and green horizontal stripes) zooms between the subjects and the camera.

Cut to a close up [shot 19 (figure 17)] of Ivan and the man from roughly the same angle as but a closer position than shot 18.



Figure 17: Sequence A, Shot 19

Ivan:                    Say you have the money, man.

This cut, the first jump cut of the sequence, is to a brief shot [shot 20 (figure 18)] taken from the same position as shot 19 but focused through the windows of bus as it speeds down the street. Here we see Ivan turn and look back across the street, attempting to scan the opposite side. The shot lasts only as long as the bus is in the frame.

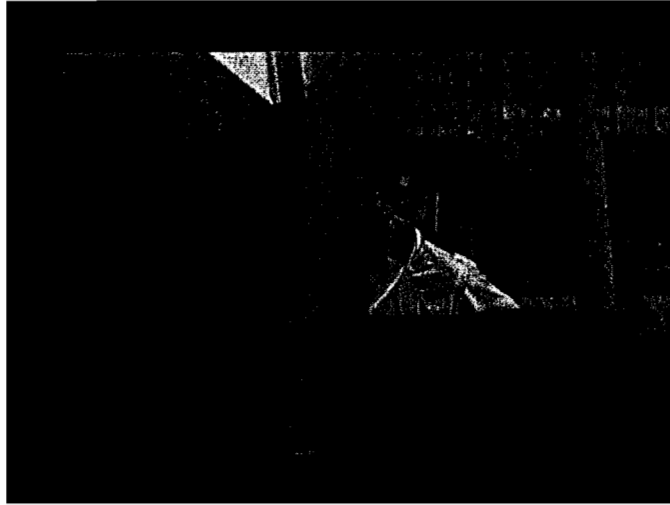


Figure 18: Sequence A, Shot 20

This shot disrupts the timeline of the film perhaps even more than the repetition in shots 8 and 10, since it literally anticipates Ivan's reaction at the end of the following shot.

We then cut [shot 21 (figure 19)] to the continuation of shot 19.

Ivan:                   Where's the guy, now?

As the man points back across the street, three things happen: another man crosses the frame between the camera and its main subjects; Ivan begins to turn around; and another green-and-white striped bus zooms across the frame, from left to right. The bus leaves the frame, revealing Ivan, who is looking left, then looks just to the right of the position of the camera. His sightline here suggests that he is actually looking back near the position from which he originally crossed the street.



Figure 19: Sequence A, Shots 21a and 21b

We then cut to a long point-of-view shot [shot 22 (figure 20)] of the young man off in the distance, pushing his cart hurriedly up the street.



Figure 20: Sequence A, Shot 22

The position of the camera compared to Ivan's sightline in the previous shot suggests this is a P.O.V. shot, although the sightlines, positions, and actions of all shots prior to shot 21 indicates that this is a debatable conclusion. Put another way, while Ivan's sightline

works with this shot to indicate that it is indeed from Ivan's point of view, the rest of the material in the sequence thus far would appear to argue otherwise.

We then cut [shot 23 (figure 21)] to the continuation of shot 21. Ivan waves frantically across the street.



Figure 21: Sequence A, Shot 23

Ivan: Hey, come back here, man.

While the man in the striped shirt observes from the left of the frame, and an unnamed figure behind and to the right of Ivan points directly at the camera, Ivan steps forward into the busy street then looks off to the right of the frame.

Cut here to an extreme close up [shot 24 (figure 22)] of the top half of a yet another warning sign, this time a pedestrian signal, with "Don't Walk" that in this shot erupts in red lettering.

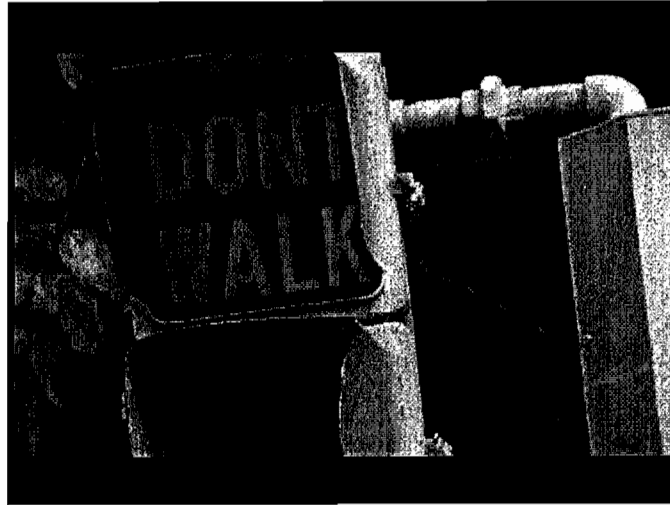


Figure 22: Sequence A, Shot 24

Cut again, this time to a close up [shot 25 (figure 23)] of an old, half-toothless man, who is apparently mouthing words to someone--or something--off to the left of the frame as Ivan speaks off-screen. What this man says is either unrecorded or recorded too low to be intelligible, making him the second character in this sequence who (quite literally) speaks without the benefit of a voice. In fact, when his mouth moves, it is Ivan's exhortation for the return of his material possessions that we hear. The old man's sightline is also notably left without reference, which makes him appear to be looking at both everything and nothing in particular.





Figure 23: Sequence A, Shot 25

Ivan:                    Hey, come back here, man!

Cut here [shot 26 (figure 24)] to the continuation of shot 23, as Ivan steps back onto the curb and a bus zooms in front of him. As the bus leaves the frame, Ivan checks the street and starts to jog across it. All of this occurs while the man in the stripped shirt observes from the left of the frame.



Figure 24: Sequence A, Shot 26

Ivan:                   Come back here, man!

Cut [shot 27 (figure 25)] to the continuation of shot 22, as the young man moves even further up the street, suddenly veers right, and vanishes.



Figure 25: Sequence A, Shot 27

We cut again [shot 28 (figure 26)], and this takes us back to the old, toothless man first revealed in shot 25; here, he moves left to right across the frame and again mouths something that we cannot hear. His sightline is once again without anchor. A car horn like the ones in shot 5 sounds as the old man's face jerks across the frame.

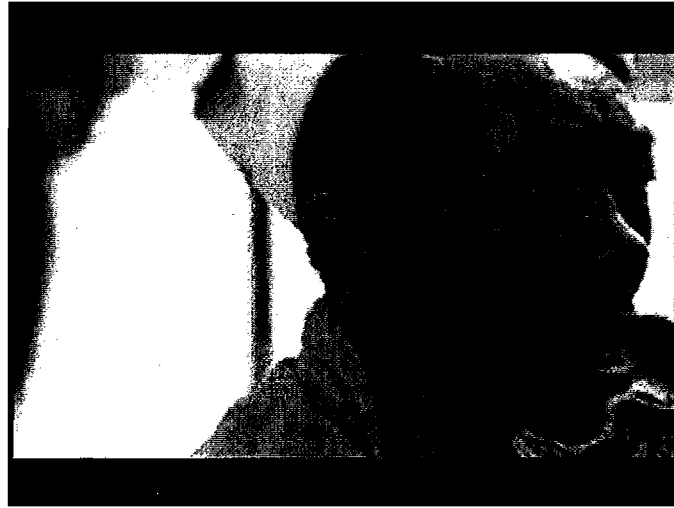


Figure 26: Sequence A, Shot 28

We cut again [shot 29 (figure 27)] to the continuation of shot 26, as Ivan jumps back again to avoid oncoming traffic. We then cut to a very brief close up [shot 30 (figure 27)] of the old, toothless man; this time he mouths something to someone (or something) at the right of the frame.



Figure 27: Sequence A, Shots 29 and 30

We cut to a very brief shot [shot 31 (figure 28)] with a camera position similar to that of shot 29; Ivan is still on the other side of the street looking for a gap through which to cross. The sequence then ends with a jump cut [shot 32 (figure 28)] to as Ivan finally starts to make it across the street, jogging toward the camera; this edit very clearly violates the timeline of the film.



Figure 28: Sequence A, Shots 31 and 32

The heavy use of shot/reverse shot and reaction shots in Sequence A, strategies used repeatedly in the most sequences in this film, is certainly evidence of *The Harder They Come's* basis in the Hollywood paradigm, but this pattern alters significantly by shot

ten, which in terms of raw footage is likely just an uncut or extended version of shot 8. Shot 10 begins a barrage of formal elements that make it increasingly difficult to assemble the story the shots are presenting--a hallmark, according to Bordwell, of Art-Cinema film. The film's content makes these formal elements justifiable, since the central motivation of this particular sequence appears to be to illustrate the hectic atmosphere of Kingston and to establish the ease with which Ivan can get taken advantage of early in his character development. In fact, most of the formal elements that call attention to themselves in this sequence (like the complex sightline matching that must occur beginning with shot 12 and lasting the entire sequence) and/or violate the timeline of the film (like shots 8 and 10, where what is made out to be two chronologically consecutive shots are presented in backward order, against continuous diegetic sound) would seem most immediately attributable to Kingston's chaos and Ivan's naïveté and bewilderment.

This tactic starts to breakdown most noticeably with shot 25, which features an unidentified character whose appearance could be argued as essentially incidental were it not for his reappearance in shots 28 and 30. These last two shots call attention to this character in a specific fashion, suggesting by their very inclusion--and the fact that they show the man speaking to someone we do not see, and looking at someone or something that we cannot identify--that he either will reappear later or currently figures into the narrative or theme of either the sequence or the entire film. Neither, however, is the case. Considered within the context of the sequence or the entire film, this man's appearance in these three shots is baseline for display. He is in this sequence, in other words, simply to

be looked at and nothing else. Furthermore, and perhaps most strangely, the formal "grammar" of this sequence makes it clear that this man who is here to be looked at is not here to be observed by those around him; it is clear by the end of the sequence that the old, black, toothless man in shots 25, 28, and 30 is included solely for the benefit of observers located outside of the diegesis. This is one of the most immediately locatable, visible, and striking examples of objectification through form in *The Harder They Come*; it is this use of this kind of formal element to which I hold the film's external orientation primarily accountable, and it is precisely the sort of occurrence that indicates the racial messaging in this film may be more complex and embedded than most criticism of *The Harder They Come* tends to suggest.

The second sequence (sequence B), which is in a way a counterpoint to the first, encompasses one middling length take and begins shortly after Ivan avoids capture at the motel by gunning down three police officers. As Ivan leaves the motel in that scene, he encounters a drunk on his way home. The drunk verbally expresses surprise at seeing Ivan running from the motel with a gun and no pants (so even before sequence B, the film provides the drunk with a voice). Two scenes later, we return for the second and last time to the drunk, who, in sequence B, is now home and in his underwear at the bottom of what is revealed to be a staircase.

We cut to close up [shot 1 (figure 29)] of the drunk wearing a hat and no shirt, his head propped on one arm. The drunk appears weary and dejected. He moves his mouth occasionally but says nothing audible; the impression is of a man too inebriated to say anything and too familiar with the words he hears to do aught but mock the abuse. A

woman's voice opens the sequence and is the only audible, non-ambient sound it features; she is never onscreen, but the first line she speaks, along with the camera's slow zoom out to reveal that the man sits at the bottom of a staircase, anchors her position as being somewhere upstairs.

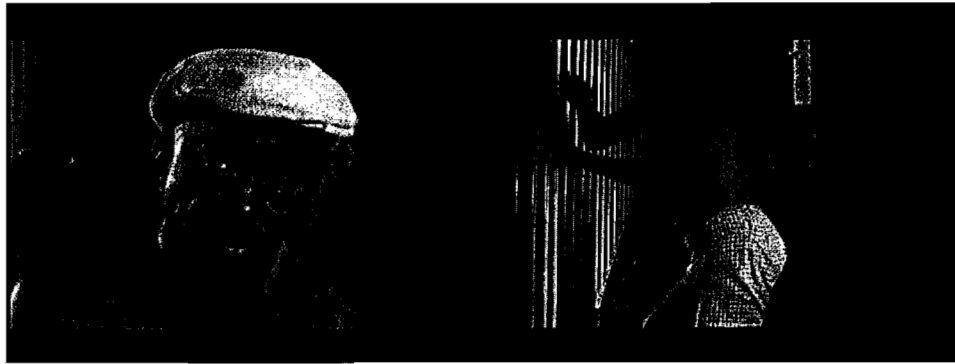


Figure 29: Sequence B (Long Take/Single Shot)

Woman:                   What you doing down there so long, you thinking? You mean you can't think of a story to fool me with tonight? You go and make up your story, man.

The man nods slowly, as if in silent agreement with the woman upstairs.

Woman:                   What a day when I catch you out and no story to help you.

As the man rises, the camera zooms out and shows he is sitting at the bottom of a staircase. He turns away from us, and as the woman delivers the following line, he walks upstairs.

Woman:                      That is the day I'm waiting for.

At first glance, sequence B, a single shot lasting roughly forty-five seconds, seems to support the assertion at the end of my analysis of sequence A. Sequence B shows a man in a hat and situation closely matching those of cartoonist Reg Smythe's "lovable" lush Andy Capp; this is a drunk coming home to a wife who has long since tired of him returning to her in such a state. The drunk's function within the film's narrative is similar to the function of that of the old, toothless man in sequence A: Both men are minor characters who appear more than once, a pattern suggesting to the viewer that they ought to be considered more than "passive backdrop." But sequence B features a scene that, though seemingly outside the narrative and themes of the film as a whole, works without objectifying the character onscreen because it presents a situation that does not necessarily depend upon cultural difference for its import; in fact, the scene's import *relies* upon the trans-cultural phenomenon of men returning home drunk to wives who are disgusted with their behavior. In other words, sequence B depends upon the viewer identifying in some way with the drunk onscreen, while sequence A presents little if anything at all that would catalyze or foster audience identification with the old, black, toothless man onscreen. So although both scenes feature extra-narrative characters who



function primarily as artifacts, the man in Sequence B is there to remind us all of what we are, while the man in Sequence A is there to remind some of us precisely of what we are not.

Perhaps the twentieth time I screened *The Harder They Come*, I did so with my mother, who swears she saw it as a kid, though she was twenty and teaching grammar school in the Commonwealth of Dominica when the film was first released in the Caribbean. For a good long while, I watched her watch the film, and I listened to her sing its soundtrack as if she had heard it only yesterday ... and it occurred to me how incredible it must have been to be in a theater in the Caribbean, watching this film in 1972. What a massive release it would have been, to see ordinary, black Caribbean characters featured as central in a major motion picture. How incredible it would have felt, to participate in the construction of a Caribbean narrative that seemingly did not require overt effort to form a negotiated reading. What Henzell did was extraordinary, and *The Harder They Come* is still *the* defining film of the Caribbean because of him. But the years that have passed since the film's release have brought with them more ways of seeing that what counts as "romantic" in the film's content translates to "voyeuristic" and "objectifying" in its formal aspects. Now, more than three decades after its release, *The Harder They Come* is an instructive film in more ways than one because it provides a partial glimpse of the Caribbean beyond the boundaries of the resorts, a glimpse whose very incompleteness illustrates the difficulties filmmakers face when their subject matter is another race. And that, at the least, is a lesson to the rest of the world for which Caribbean people can continue to thank both Henzell and *The Harder They Come*.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Meeks, in *Narratives of Resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad, the Caribbean*, identifies Rhygin as "the first of the notorious modern Jamaican gunmen"(83).

<sup>2</sup> Five years after the release of *The Harder They Come*, Leonard Barrett, in *The Rastafarians: The Dreadlocks of Jamaica* (1977), extrapolated from Jamaica's *Annual Abstract of Statistics* (1965) and arrived at a figure of two million for the population of the country, with roughly 90% of African origin.

<sup>3</sup> Reggae was rising to prominence in Jamaica at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s; by many accounts, the genre's continuing hold on international audiences appears to have begun with the international reception of the film. Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández, in "Reggae, Ganja, and Black Bodies: Power, Meaning, and the Markings of Postcolonial Jamaica in Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come*," posts in a footnote that, "Most reviews of the film after 1980 and almost all reviews of the recently released DVD credit the movie and its soundtrack with launching the international success of reggae" (370). Fernández then provides the bibliographic information for a host of those reviews, most of which ran in major American newspapers and magazines. Whether the minimum eight-year gap between the film's initial release and the publication date of the reviews afforded the reviewers the required critical remove, or an uncritical kind of nostalgia, is perhaps the subject of another paper. Most relevant here is how three decades does not seem to have mitigated or blunted the acknowledgement of the film's importance to the global popularity of reggae.

<sup>4</sup> The second chapter of Peter D. Fraser and Paul Hackett's *Caribbean Economic Handbook* provides an economic overview of the region that begins with the grouping of the countries within the archipelago according to "their main foreign exchange earner" (19), where it is not what the islands mean to one another but rather what they mean to the outside world that determines how they get categorized. The three groups or categories are agriculture, industry, and services (including tourism), with Jamaica mostly considered primarily in terms of industry but also in terms of tourism. Fraser and Hackett include fairly detailed discussions of each "group," paying particular attention to how the countries within the groups engage the extra-regional market and/or invite foreign investment. See Honor Ford-Smith's "Come to Jamaica and Feel All Right: Tourism, Colonial Discourse and Cultural Resistance" for a more recent and Jamaica-specific analysis of how "representational practices within tourism adapt and transmit old images of colonial domination and heterosexual relations to reproduce new forms of institutional and cultural racism" (379).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. footnote 11.

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<sup>6</sup> An October 22, 2003 broadcast of National Public Radio's "Morning Edition," hosted by Ashley Kahn, offers insight into the basis of the lasting effect of Henzell's film upon many Americans: "For a generation of Americans raised on rock yet hungry for new sounds, *The Harder They Come* was the primer for reggae music and the Jamaican experience. The movie exposed life in the ghettos of Trenchtown and in the dancehalls of Kingston"(NPR).

<sup>7</sup> Arguing that resistance is basic to the development of the Caribbean as a region, Cudjoe defines resistance "as any act or complex of acts designed to rid a people of its oppressors, be they slave masters or multinational corporations." For Cudjoe, "cultural resistance" includes moments when "the motive of resistance emanates from the beliefs, mores, or indigenous ways of life and is expressed in religion or the arts"; "socioeconomic resistance" occurs when "resistance is expressed by suicide, abortion, work sabotage, withholding labor, poisoning masters, etc." "Political resistance" occurs when "the motive of resistance emanates from an ideological framework in which the goal of the enslaved people is to control their destiny—be it full independence or some other form of government—and may be expressed in revolts, rebellions or revolutions"(19).

<sup>8</sup> See Ford-Smith's "Come to Jamaica and Feel All Right: Tourism, Colonial Discourse and Cultural Resistance"; also see Roman De La Campa's "Resistance and Globalization in Caribbean Discourse: Antonio Benitez-Rojo and Edouard Glissant," which features a streamlined account of Benitez-Rojo and Glissant's sense of how resistance informs the practices and discourses of the region.

<sup>9</sup> In Slemon's "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Third World."

<sup>10</sup> In Sharpe's "Figures of Colonial Discourse."

<sup>11</sup> See Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (59).

<sup>12</sup> A difficult form of praise paid Henzell and his film came eight years after its release, with the publication of Michael Thelwell's novel *The Harder They Come*. Thelwell claims his book, based upon the film's screenplay, is "the novel from which the film might have been derived were the process reversed"(8); Meeks, in *Narratives of Resistance*, summarizes the thrust of Thelwell's book, stating it "creates a past for the leading characters that is only hinted at in the screen version"(83). Both statements reflect Thelwell's objective of "blessing" the film's narrative with a literary origin, but the book itself (which, for instance, provides 108 pages of material before it reaches the point at which the film begins) also attempts to express the story of Rhygin within a far more detailed cultural context. In other words, the novel attempts to provide something that both Thelwell and Meeks seem to realize is missing from the film ... which is particularly ironic when read in conjunction with what appears to be an allusion in the

film's soundtrack to Orlando Patterson's 1964 novel, *The Children of Sisyphus*. Early in that canonical Jamaican text, Cyrus, angered and troubled by his discovery that Dinah, his common-law wife, has left him and their son behind on "the Dungle," receives these "words of wisdom" from Brother Solomon, on how a Black Jamaican can persevere in an inequitable, materialistic world: "And it hard, me Brother, it hard. You have to be a man of will, you have to read all the books of the great mystics of the East and if you try, if you try an' try an' try, you might succeed some day, some night"(35). While Patterson's passage and the isolated lyrics of Cliff's "You Can Get It If You Really Want" seem identical in meaning, the images accompanying Cliff's song in the film (specifically, Ivan smiling and waving at a well-to-do couple in the white convertible that passes him on his way to Kingston, then Ivan zooming through a field in a similar white convertible that he has just stolen) elicits a reading of the song that sets it in opposition with the passage that may be its origin.

<sup>13</sup> Thankfully, this claim of Jamaica's ability to stand in for the rest of the region would probably not make it past a modern editor. *Portrait of the Caribbean* offers insight into the historical development of the different islands of the region, based primarily on the impact of the colonizing countries, only one of which is America. Other than that, the reviewer's summary of the state of the region to this day remains accurate and useful.

<sup>14</sup> The Black Bodies/White Sexualities section of Gaztambide-Fernández's "Reggae, Ganja, and Black Bodies" provides an image-based analysis of the jail sequence that relies upon the identification of the disembodied voice in the vocal track as belonging to "Henzell himself" and representing white legal authority. Fernández also notes that, "Although it is the white legal authority that determines the punishment, it is a black man who carries out the sentence, giving the impression that the white judge is responsible for the pardon and the black correction officer is responsible for the whipping"(362). Even if the disembodied voice actually belongs to the film's white director, Fernández's analysis, in the end, supports my statement about the absence of white characters in the film's diegesis.

<sup>15</sup> The sections exploring Jamaica in the seven-hour 1992 video series *Portrait of the Caribbean*, narrated by Stuart Hall, make clear that even after the island achieved independence, many of the few whites either remaining in Jamaica or maintaining financial ties with the island continued to occupy positions of financial privilege.

<sup>16</sup> In "Decades of Change in Calypso Culture."

<sup>17</sup> In "Reexportation and Musical Traditions Surrounding the African Masquerade."

<sup>18</sup> In "Communication Technology in the Caribbean: The Ever-Increasing Dependency.

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<sup>19</sup> Though Dyer never explicitly uses the phrase in his chapter, this turning out then in of the white gaze is what he alludes to when he says, "We are often told we are living now in a world of multiple identities, of hybridity, of decentredness and fragmentation. The old illusory unified identities of class, gender, race, sexuality are breaking up [...] Yet we have not yet reached a situation in which white people and white cultural agendas are no longer in the ascendant. The media, politics, education are still in the hands of white people, still speak for whites while claiming—and sometimes sincerely aiming—to speak for humanity [...] Postmodern multiculturalism may have genuinely opened up a space for the voices of the other, challenging the authority of the white West (cf. Owens 1983), but it may also simultaneously function as a sideshow for white people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them" (3-4).

<sup>20</sup> Two things: First, while Bordwell has certainly drawn heat for this approach to reading film, clear echoes of it occur elsewhere. One example is cognitive theorist James Peterson's *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order*, in which Peterson relies upon heuristics to account for strategies viewers use while "making sense" of American avant-garde cinema. Second, a central part of Bordwell's strategy in *Narration in the Fiction Film* includes the categorization of films based upon method or mode of narration. Bordwell would likely see *The Harder They Come* as an Art-Cinema film, the genre in which "the viewer must [...] tolerate more permanent causal gaps than would be normal in a classical film"(206).

## CHAPTER IV

*PRESSURE AND THE CARIBBEAN*

Well-recognized and documented as Britain's first feature-length dramatic film with a black director, Trinidad-born British filmmaker's Horace Ové's *Pressure* was shot in 1974, premiered at the London Film Festival in 1975, and was first commercially exhibited at the Coronet, Notting Hill Gate in February of 1978. Set in Ladbrooke Grove, London, *Pressure* is on one level a character study meant to serve as a "corrective" entry in the long tradition of the British "social problem" film: Tony, the film's protagonist, is a black "school-leaver" experiencing much more difficulty than his white classmates finding work, despite his graduating near the top of his class. The film mostly charts Tony's development as he attempts to cope with the racism basic to his troubles by gravitating toward the black nationalist movement as it existed in London at the time. While the film's deliberate revision of the generic attributes and expectations attendant to the British genre of the social problem film arguably establishes *Pressure's* place within the pantheon of British national cinema, the tendency of film made in Britain by "black" filmmakers from the 1960s through the 1980s to re-present or re-cast Britain through a "realistic" reexamination of the country run through a different set of "eyes" makes it fairly easy to see why *Pressure* is still considered *the* iconic black British film.

On another level, however, Ové's first dramatic feature is more ambivalent and complex. For when the "black" in "black British film" is unpacked, the film becomes *less* a character study meant to represent a broad "black" British experience than an examination of a Trinidadian family's troubled attempts to acculturate to Britain, where they live in what might be termed "economic exile." This reading of *Pressure*, predicated on the notion that the themes, narrative, and "form" of *Pressure* identify it as a distinctively *Caribbean* film, might originate with the observation that *Pressure's* main "pressure points" exist within the tangled tensions that both compel and repel the Watsons, the Trinidadian family around which the movie revolves. "Bopsie" Watson, played by Lucita Lijertwood, is the screeching, commanding, wig-wearing, ever-suffering matriarch who originally pushed the family to emigrate to London. Bopsie's husband Lucas, played by Frank Singuineau, is the mostly stolid patriarch who quit a lucrative job in Trinidad for the move to London, and now the disappointed shopkeeper simmers silently. Colin, played by Oscar James, is the eldest of the two children; he was born in Trinidad and—equating acculturation in a white, racist country with the debilitating, dead-end trap of a black man "acting white"—engages with the black nationalist movement then developing in London. And his British-born brother Tony, played by Herbert Norville, is positioned between the worldview of his mother, who fully believes in the potential and possibilities of assimilation, and Colin, who equates that process with "becoming white" and hence considers it both a betrayal and an impossibility. Hence *Pressure's* themes and narrative thrust simultaneously inform the film's subversive relationship with the long tradition of the British "social problem"

film—in particular, the "totalizing" strategies of the "race-relations" drama subset of that genre. At the same time, *Pressure* challenges the similarly totalizing notion of a broadly "black" British experience, since it charts Tony's development as a movement within his own family—within a specifically Caribbean context—away from his mother and toward his brother, but then problematizes that coping strategy through its deliberately indeterminate final scene, in which Tony partakes in a black nationalist protest of Colin's arrest—a protest whose utter hopelessness is emphasized by its silent occurrence in the rain.

This chapter represents a deliberate attempt to revisit *Pressure* and establish it as a distinctively Caribbean text. Noting the history of and recent developments in the critical and scholarly discourse of black British film, I posit that developments within the field have opened and cleared the space required for precisely this kind of re-evaluation of *Pressure*, which at the moment occupies an unchallenged-yet-unstable pride of place in black British cinema. I argue that Ové's biography and his career arc, particularly up to the production of *Pressure*, together support the notion that *Pressure's* themes, narrative, and form consistently evince an "in-between-ness" indicative of the postcolonial dynamics of reexportation. Chief among the ways in which reexportation is manifest in Ové's film is the telling of a distinctively Caribbean story through the generic conventions of the British social problem film. That strategy reveals *Pressure's* orientation to two different audiences—Caribbean and British—since it at once makes a Caribbean story "black British" and allows *Pressure* to subvert the totalizing aspects of the British social problem film, and more specifically the "race-relations" drama. But



*Pressure*'s unique post-production difficulties, as well as the film's contemporaneous popular reception and critical treatment, also indicate other ways that *Pressure* exemplifies reexportation, as those difficulties and the film's reception were functions of the film's attempt to use "the immigrant experience" to speak to British *and* Caribbean audiences simultaneously. Hence while *Pressure* is an excellent illustration of how reexportation has informed, and will likely continue to inform, the production, content, stylistics, and aesthetics of Anglophone Caribbean cultural products, it is also a great example of why there continues to be a need to address or include reexportation in scholarship concerning those products.

In the chapter of this dissertation titled "Whiteness, Strategic Omission, and a Contrapuntal Reading of Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come*," I argue that *The Harder They Come* (1972), which features a predominantly black cast and is set in the slums and ghettos of Jamaica, is a complicated, ambivalent text that demands but rarely receives a contrapuntal reading. Among the difficulties of that argument is arriving at reasonably stable, critically useful definitions of the terms "whiteness" and "white." That the terms "blackness" and "black" require unpacking for this chapter's discussion of *Pressure* is as symptomatic of the scope of this dissertation as it is indicative of the wide-ranging, polyvalent concerns of Anglophone Caribbean fiction and film.

In "(Re)constructing Multiracial Blackness: Women's Activism, Difference, and Collective Identity in Britain," Julia Sudbury examines "the construction and negotiation of multiracial blackness as the basis for organizing by African, Asian and Caribbean women in Britain from the 1970s to the 1990s" (29). Observing the paucity of

"systematic attempts to analyse identity construction as a political project in the context of social movements for social justice" (29), Sudbury, a British woman of Afro-Caribbean descent, argues that "a collective identity approach can assist our understanding of the meanings and distinctive policies of 'blackness' in the British context and help us to move beyond the static debate about black versus ethnic identities" (30).

Sudbury's fairly recent study is certainly relevant for its clear signal that this particular debate has yet to be resolved. But even more vital is Sudbury's presentation of an historical overview of "the construction of blackness as an inclusive political category," as well as an assessment of "the attack on this usage of blackness by some activists and social scientists" (30). Sudbury observes that the British use of "black" as a "multiracial political category" that includes all immigrants of diverse Caribbean, African, and Asian origin began with "the post-war migration of colonial and former colonial subjects" (33). The term's deepest roots are in the tendency of "the popular white imagination" of the time to conceive of these immigrants as of a set: "They" were considered less in terms of their backgrounds or countries of origin and more as a "homogenous group of 'coloured commonwealth citizens'"; "they" were also "uniformly considered to be a potential threat to the British way of life and harmonious 'race relations'" (33).

Sudbury describes how that antipathy toward "colored immigration" resulted in the Commonwealth Immigrant Acts of 1962, 1968, and 1971, "which redefined black British passport holders as non-citizens and black women as dependants."

Unsurprisingly, shortly after "their" arrival, the great differences that existed between these immigrants—linguistic, religious, cultural—began to pale in comparison with their "common history of colonial oppression, common designation as 'Commonwealth immigrants' and similar discriminatory treatment as the victims of race hatred, housing discrimination and social and political exclusion" (33).

Visits to England by "leading African-American activists, including Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X and Angela Davis provided an 'identity narrative' with which to express these commonalities." This, Sudbury argues, worked in tandem with the appearance of images of "revolution and change" on inner-city television screens to lead "settler communities" to adopt "blackness" as well as "the oppositional consciousness of the Black Power movement." She also notes how the "openness of the signifier 'black,'" which African-Americans had newly been employing to replace "Negro" and "Colored," in part enabled Britain's "coloured commonwealth citizens" to reinvent the term "to fit a particularly British context where African, Caribbean and Asian communities had a history of joint struggles. It was in this context that South Asian, Chinese and Middle Eastern young people were able to rally with those of African descent to form the 'black struggle'" (33).

Sudbury observes that, "Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, 'black' was deployed as a forceful unifying term which projected an uncompromising demand for rights and an end to discrimination" (33-34). But by the end of the 1980s, the broad use "black" to describe Britain's diverse African, Caribbean, and Asian populations was clearly being contested, as if the category itself had begun to destabilize from within. Perhaps the

biggest surprise is that this destabilization does *not* appear to have been predicated by a review of the relationship between this particular British use of the term "black" and the totalizing, "they're-all-the-same" attribute of British racial discourse, as demonstrated by the reference to *all* non-white African, Caribbean and Asian immigrants as "coloured commonwealth citizens." Instead, there is the sense that this destabilization proceeded from the notion that the use of "black," which reflected but did not disable that totalizing tendency, had been forced and reactionary.

Sudbury describes how "some community activists and social scientists" challenged the notion of "black" as a "multiracial political category"; they considered it "little more than a 'coercive ideological fantasy' imposed on Asian communities by zealous anti-racist bureaucrats and leaders." One powerful example is Tariq Modood, who "argues that the term 'black' is centred on the African experience, from its origins in the Black Power movement to the current imposition of an African Caribbean political leadership." Modood and others, Sudbury points out, have also disagreed with the inclusion of Asians in the term "'black'" on the grounds that it "sits uneasily with the more 'natural' association of blackness with Africanity, which is in turn reinforced by the predominance of African-American cultural production equating black identity with African descent." For a telling manifestation of this, Sudbury recounts Modood's observation of those moments when "writers and politicians slip from 'black and Asian' to 'black' without acknowledging the inherent erasure of an Asian presence. For Modood," Sudbury observes, "the black political project cannot help but position Asians as

'secondary or ambiguous blacks,' thus creating a new hierarchy even as it seeks to depose the existing racist offering" (Sudbury 34).

Sudbury's explication of "black" and the evolution of its use in Britain as a "multiracial political category" simultaneously underscores the need to reevaluate *Pressure* and suggests that the "fundamental" relationship between that film and "black" British cinema may be more complicated than is often acknowledged. For the tension that exists between understanding *Pressure* as a "black" British or a Caribbean film is a product of *Pressure*'s lasting, politically loaded importance to black British cinema. But the need for that reevaluation, and the tension that it exposes, is also indicative of important and continuing changes in the production and criticism of black British film, which given the predominant tendency to cite Jamaican actor-turned-director Lionel Reckford's short film *Ten Bob in Winter* (1963) as the first black British movie, is—at the moment—only about four-and-a-half decades old.

Dominated in its early years by short films like Reckford's *Ten Bob* and South African emigrant Lionel Ngakane's (*Le Balloon Rouge*-inspired) *Jemima and Johnny* (1966), black British film was still in its infancy when Ové made his first film, *Baldwin's Nigger* (1968), a 46-minute documentary of James Baldwin's sprawling lecture at West Indian Students' Centre in London's Earl Court and the "Q&A" session that followed.

Almost from its inception, Ové figured heavily in "black" British cinema. In the roughly ten years between *Baldwin's Nigger* and *Pressure*, Ové produced three documentaries, *Reggae* (1970), *Coleherne Jazz and Keskidee Blues* (1972), and *King Carnival* (1973). Together these undoubtedly contributed to the developing sense that

what "made" a "black" British film was its ability to "tell it like it is." But that these "black" films were also "British" meant that the assessment of this quality was a function of the film's relationship to the British tradition of cinematic realism, as originated in the work of John Grierson but most prominently and consistently dramatized through the popular, long-running genre of the British "social problem" film.<sup>1</sup>

By the mid- to late-1980s, black British film was changing, and its critics and scholars were working hard to keep up. The "age" of black British cinema, combined with the "mid-life crisis" that it went through during this period, make Kobena Mercer's *Black Film British Cinema* (1988) a wonderfully positioned volume for those wishing to study black British cinema; it has been described as "the most influential essay collection [on black British cinema] of the 1980s" (Korte and Sternberg 26). One great strength of the volume is the pronounced diversity of its entries, and the frequent collision of the arguments, approaches, and observations represented collide; this is evidence, it turns out, of stylistic practices in a state of flux, and an "aesthetic" and critical apparatus attempting to formulate or adjust themselves accordingly.

Many of the changes that black British film saw in the 1980s were a function of recent developments in production practices. The founding of Channel 4 in 1982, for example, was clearly a watershed for both independent *and* black British film.<sup>2</sup> But the 1980s also saw the development of "black" filmmaking collectives such as Sankofa, Ceddo Film and Video Workshop, Black Audio Film Collective, and ReTake. And while these collectives sometimes financed their projects through such "authorizing" bodies as the Greater London Council and Channel 4, their collaborative approach to

production, as well as a general tendency toward narrative and visual experimentation, also signify deeply political changes in the way that black British films were being made.

The stylistic tension between what had been considered "black" British cinema and the films of these collectives primarily informed the critical and popular reception of the latter. But it also spoke, in complex ways, to the expectations attendant to the relationship between the British cinematic tradition of realism and black British film. One striking example is *Handsworth Songs* (1987), an experimental documentary produced by the Black Audio Film Collective and directed by Ghana-born John Akomfrah, which "reworks documentary conventions to explore the history of the contemporary British black experience" (Kuhn). *Handsworth Songs* won seven international prizes, including the BFI's own prestigious John Grierson Award. Yet Mercer recounts how "one reviewer in a black community newspaper, *The Voice*, received the film with the dismissive remark, 'Oh no, not another riot documentary' and in *The Guardian* the film was subject to a serious and fierce intellectual polemic from novelist Salman Rushdie," who found the filmmaker's unconventional approach lacking in its attempt to "'deconstruct the hegemonic voices of British news reels'" (Mercer 4).

While the reception of *Handsworth Songs* demonstrates how the shifting aesthetic of black British film presented unique challenges to both filmmaker and film viewer, *Black Film British Cinema* confirms that the decade's changes in production practices pushed more than that single debate to the fore. An analysis of the conflict between two of the volume's essays reveals how the concurrent destabilization of "black" as a "multiracial political category" informed many of those debates, and clarifies how that

destabilization, along with the changing aesthetic of "black" British film, suggests that 33 years after its commercial exhibition debut, *Pressure* is indeed due for further critical evaluation.

The first essay, Mercer's "Recoding Narratives of Race and Nation," is, broadly speaking, a survey of the history of the black British cinematic aesthetic up to the point of the essay's publication. Mercer presents "the institutional shifts that have contributed to the de-marginalisation of black film; the widening range of aesthetic strategies which has made this possible; and the reconstitution of audiences in relation to the increasingly local and global (rather than 'national') diversification of audiovisual culture" (5). In the course of that analysis, Mercer historicizes the aesthetic of black British film (charting its eventual movement away from the tradition of British cinematic realism), and unpacking the use of "black," particularly as it applies in the descriptor "black British film." In the section titled "Displacing the Burden of Representation," Mercer observes

[... the] problematic area of definition concerning the use of the term "black" as a political, rather than racial category. Throughout the 70's and 80's, the re-articulation of this term as an inclusive political identity based on alliances between Asian, African and Caribbean people in a shared struggle against racism, has helped to challenge and displace commonsense assumptions about blackness as a fixed or essential identity.

(8)

Pages later appears "Realism and the New Language," where black British filmmaker, film producer, and lecturer Julian Henriques calls for changes in the critical



assessment of black British film so its reception might more fully account for what Henriques avers are *recent* movements away from the uncritical engagement with the aesthetics of British cinematic realism in black British film.<sup>3</sup> His most prominent example is Stephen Frears's *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), which was critically lauded as a piece of "ethnic comedy" but was unpopular among blacks and Asians in Britain chiefly "because they refused to look at the film in any other way than as a piece of realism, that is to say, a film that has attempted an accurate representation of its subject" (19).

Henriques finds that the push to develop an aesthetic unique to black British film was being stymied by the tendency to evaluate those films based on how tightly they hold to the British cinematic realist tradition.<sup>4</sup> But more revealing is what Henriques proposed to spur the development of a more responsive and productive critical apparatus for "black" creative works (especially film) in Britain, and the conflict between that proposal and Mercer's description of the problematic yet political vital nature of the category "black." Note the careful couching/"double-hedge" of the leading phrase, indicative of the "radical" nature of what follows:

As an initial move to start the ball rolling, I think we should drop the term "black" when we are talking about art amongst ourselves. This might appear a shocking suggestion as the term has been hard fought for and has had, and will continue to have a tremendous polemic value when arguing against the racism of individuals and institutions that refuse to recognise the existences, never mind the value, of black artistic activity. [...] In my

view, the immediate effect of abandoning the label black is emancipatory. Instantly it raises the question: if what we are doing is not black art what is it? As soon as this point comes up we have to begin to make our own definitions. If we don't make this move the black arts Britain are likely to become as frozen in their saying-it-like-it-is realism as traditional art forms are in their own exoticism. That is exactly what the establishment would like. (20)

Thus roughly ten years after the commercial exhibition debut of *Pressure*, we see exhortations for the active, self-aware development of the approaches and apparatuses necessary to the criticism of black British film independent without simply judging films based on whether they "tells it like it is"—shorthand for whether a given film tells British stories from a "black" vantage, while faithfully employing the language of British cinematic "realism."<sup>5</sup> But at the same time, we see a developing resistance to the "totalizing" tendency to describe as "black" *all* British cinema produced or directed by non-white members of the Asian, African, or Caribbean diaspora.

This is evidence of a two-pronged debate then in its nascent stages; only later would it become clear just how fundamentally connected are the destabilization of the category/descriptor "black" and the continuing development of a "black" British cinematic aesthetic. In her retrospective analysis "Black British Cinema in the 90s: Going Going Gone," Karen Alexander describes how that very debate, now more compressed, continued to inform the production and study of later "black" British film. Alexander's survey includes a review of Onyekachi Wambu's *A Fuller Picture: The*

*Commercial Impact of Six British Films with Black Themes in the 1990s* (1999), a study "commissioned by the Film Policy Review Group to be presented at the *New Futures for Black British Film* conference held at the National Film Theatre in 1998" (Korte and Sternberg 29). Alexander criticizes Wambu's book as a deeply misguided attempt to study "black" British film by looking at "black-themed" works—meaning that the selections Wambu features (Mike Leigh's *Secrets and Lies* (1996) and Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992), for example) are not all the product of black filmmakers, and sometimes only tangentially concern the black British experience. Observing that Wambu's volume considers its disparate selection "a reflection of the diversity of product around that is called black," Alexander claims that "this points to a problem in how race is looked at in Britain. To quote [Isaac] Julien, 'being black isn't really good enough for me: I want to know what your cultural politics are'" (110). Thus while the conclusion of "Black British Cinema in the 90s" is undeniably nationalistic,<sup>6</sup> it also works with Alexander's assessment of the problems of *A Fuller Picture* to demonstrate how the destabilization of the category "black" continued to inform debates at the base of "black" British cinema.

Joel Karamath's 2007 article "Shooting Black Britain" advances the issue to the present day. Pointing to the British film industry's tendency to pursue U.S. audiences by occluding the cultural specificity of its own films, and how that approach is the main reason why foreign critics often "look down" on British cinema, Karamath asks what would those same critics "have made of the term Black-British cinema?" (143). The heft of "Shooting Black Britain" is essentially an extended answer to that question.

Positing *Pressure*, white director Franco Rosso's *Babylon* (1980) and Shabazz's *Burning an Illusion* as the fundamental black British dramatic feature-length films, Karamath reads the genre forward to current times, charting its development against the changing sociopolitical context of Britain as well as the ascendant drive for British films to appeal to American audiences. While "the evolution of a Black British screen voice has mirrored the fluctuating fortunes of the British industry at large, currently on something of an upturn" (145), the current drive in the British film industry to seize that lucrative American audience has also deeply changed the common notion of what "makes" a "black" British film. Karamath notes how the domestic critical and commercial success of Saul Dibbs's feature *Bullet Boy* (2004) "confirms that the undercurrent of Caribbean culture that defined Black Britain has slowly but surely given way to the pervasive aspects of US popular culture." He identifies two reasons for this change, which together indicate the "tied-together" fortunes of British cinema and black British film: First, "The impact of globalisation has, in recent years, tended to obscure the legacy of an indigenous black film production in Britain in favour of a more universal notion of 'Black Cinema' dictated by the US industry" (147)—an important and relevant observation since it attests to the current state of the destabilization of category "black," particularly as it is used to describe British film. But more vital in a way is Karamath's *second* reason, which briefly analyzes a long-present and lasting condition of the British film industry and directly identifies one practical reason why *Pressure* should be understood as simultaneously oriented toward two very different and separate audiences:

Audience demographics is a crucial issue when considering the 'crossover' appeal of any indigenous product. Unlike the situation in the US, any film released in the UK must appeal to a much broader audience than its immediate demographic group. [...] The 2 per cent Black British population of Caribbean descent does not have the financial clout or critical mass to turn the tide of the mainstream. (147)

These "shifts" and historical developments in the production and study of black British film have cleared the space required for the consideration of *Pressure* as a distinctively Caribbean text. But while they suggest the need for it, they provide neither the criteria nor the framework necessary for the thorough execution of that kind of reevaluation. Nor is it enough to simply note the material of *Pressure's* narrative and, based on that observation, term it a "Caribbean" film.

Basic to "Conceptualizing the Caribbean" is the process of reexportation, whereby Caribbean artists attain success at home by first achieving renown abroad. This dissertation argues that one of the most important implications of reexportation is that British and American conceptualizations of the Anglophone Caribbean have had, and will continue to have, a deeply determining effect upon attempts by Anglophone Caribbean writers and filmmakers to represent the region. This, combined with the potential for those writers or filmmakers, or the material that they produce, to be "reexported" back to the region, means reexportation has been, and in all likelihood will continue to be, an essential, *formative* dynamic to those who study Anglophone Caribbean cultural products and how they are produced and consumed.

Among the most significant effects of reexportation is a predictable and measurable ambivalence in the way that a given producer or text envisions or constructs its audience. The narrative content and stylistics of domestically produced reexported texts like *The Harder They Come*, or even those produced abroad like Samuel Selvon's novel *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), often demonstrate an "in-between-ness" evincing that text's orientation to a "double audience," one composed of both Caribbean and American/British/European audiences. But while that "in-between-ness" is often present in both the narrative content and stylistics of these texts, the number of ways in which it can manifest itself likely matches the number of Anglophone cultural products that have been and can be produced. In the case of *Pressure*, perhaps the most efficient to begin determining how it might envision or construct *its* "double audience" would be to read the film through its maker; Ové's biography and career arc, especially up to the point of *Pressure's* commercial debut, strongly support the notion that *Pressure's* narrative and form consistently evince that "in-between-ness" indicative of the postcolonial dynamics of reexportation.

Despite international recognition as Britain's first black director of a feature film, Ové is currently absent from the *International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers* (4<sup>th</sup> edition), David Thomson's *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film* (2002), and James Robert Parish and Kingsley Canham's *Film Directors Guide: Western Europe* (1976)—each of which are otherwise useful references to the film scholar. Short mentions and broad recapitulations of the director's life and professional accomplishments in film, television, and photography are available in scattered reference

works, such as the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures* (2000). But the lack of a single in-depth assessment means that comprehensive secondary accounts of the filmmaker's biography and achievements continue to be the product of meeting material from various sources,<sup>7</sup> including but not limited to direct interviews such as the one included in the BFI's 2005 DVD edition of the film.<sup>8</sup>

Born in Trinidad in 1939, Ové spent the first twenty-one years of his life there. He was born and grew up in the diverse area of Belmont, where he found his love of cinema in raucous exhibition houses like the Olympic Theater, where he consumed a steady diet of British, American, and continental film.<sup>9</sup> In "Belmont Olympic," a transcription of a talk that he gave at the Screening Identities conference in 2002, Ové describes his parents, Belmont, and Carnival:

[Belmont] was a very mixed-race area when I was growing up there in the 1950s. [...] I grew up in a mixed-race, crazy, mad, bohemian family. [...] My parents were free-lance traders, selling and buying all the time. They never respected colonialism and did not take racism on—although it was there. (Korte and Sternberg 219)

While Ové outlines the pronounced linguistic, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity of Trinidad and the conflicts such difference could sometimes engender, he also bows to Carnival and its broadly mitigating effect, stating that, "It comes every year, and everybody in society crosses those lines. People hang out, have a good time and people get to know each other" (Korte and Sternberg 220). But even more important is how

those "lines"—and what it took to cross them—likely inflected Ové's earliest experiences with cinema.

"Going to the movies" in Trinidad was clearly a formative experience for Ové, who has observed that "we had no television in Trinidad in the 1950s, but we had a lot of cinemas" (Korte and Sternberg 219), due chiefly to the American construction of several military bases in Trinidad at roughly the beginning of the Second World War. Trinidad's theaters at the time reflected both the divisions and interactions between the many types that composed its population. Ové recalls the classed-based "seating" arrangement of those movie houses:

You had balcony, house, and pit. Pit was for the guy on the block, house was for those who could not afford the balcony which means that you had richer whites and browns up there. But pit was great because that was where everybody reacted to the movie. [...] From that stage on, I have always wanted to get involved in filmmaking. (Korte and Sternberg 219-20)

The filmmaker fondly remembers the passion that Trinidadians had for the cinema. For him and for them, the Olympic Theater was where you "could discover the world outside. And not only America because in those days you got world news in the cinemas and continental films" (Korte and Sternberg 219). But within those pleasurable memories exists an ambivalence that is extremely important to observe.

In a 1996 interview with June Givanni, Ové observes, "From the age of nine I wanted to be a filmmaker, something that I never told anybody in Trinidad about because



they would have laughed at me" (16). A similar statement occurs in "Belmont Olympic," where Ové recalls that "wanting to be a filmmaker was a kind of dream I could not even speak about to my friends" (Korte and Sternberg 219). Thus while those many hours and plenitude of foreign film at the Olympic Theater were undeniably foundational to Ové's desire to be a filmmaker, they also informed his early, unspoken understanding that in order to achieve that dream of prompting and provoking moviegoers with images and stories of his own, it would be necessary for him to leave the region.

Ové describes the Trinidad of his youth as an energetic place where "although there was racism, there was also somehow a disrespect for its limitations" (Korte and Sternberg 221). Ultimately, those twenty-one consecutive years in the *mélange* of Trinidad would help propel the director through often trying early experiences in Europe and with filmmaking. That same background, however, would also combine with his "mixed-race" ethnic background to lend an occasional "racially transgressive" quality to the filmmaker's career path.

Ové left Trinidad for England at some point between 1959 and 1960. In "Belmont Olympic," he observes that in while he "never took racism on" in Trinidad, "when I went to England in 1959 with the intention to study film and art because I was a painter and I was also doing photography, I got into a lot of trouble for that" (Korte and Sternberg 220-21). That brief, initial stint in England was a succession of "several odd jobs like working in a trawler in the North Sea in winter with 17' waves coming over the boat while you had to gut fish." But then one day, "the opportunity came: They were

shooting *Cleopatra* in England with Elizabeth Taylor and were hiring lots of extras to be in the movie" (Korte and Sternberg 221).

Ové and his actor cousin were cast as extras playing Roman soldiers. Ové describes that bit of fortune as a function of complexion: Whoever was responsible for the extras decided that Ové and his cousin were a shade of brown that would resemble "bronzed Italians" onscreen. It would be interesting to note the frequency with which this particular anecdote appears,<sup>10</sup> since the observation that Ové began his career in the film industry by being cast as an Italian soldier, but was then "demoted to a slave" when *Cleopatra* moved to Rome, has yet to ironize the description of Ové as Britain's first "black" feature filmmaker.

So *Cleopatra* moved from London to Rome and Ové went with it, but while that significantly degraded Ové's onscreen status, Rome would prove an essential introduction for Ové into the film industry. His years there yielded a "hands-on" experience with Italian cinema at an especially vibrant time in its history. There he worked for and had informal exchanges with "Fellini, Antonioni, Pasolini. I discovered the realist cinema and then Buñuel and the surrealist cinema, and living there and becoming part of it was quite interesting" (Korte and Sternberg 221). But just as formative and important was Ové's observation of the raucous, enthusiastically responsive patrons that he encountered at Italian theaters. In fact, Ové directly connects those experiences and those times at the Olympic Theater in Trinidad, stating that "Italy also gave me something else that I never saw anywhere else but in my own country: going to the cinema and find[ing] everybody reacting, shouting and screaming" (Korte and Sternberg 222).<sup>11</sup>

While Rome was a positive experience, Ové did not know Italian well enough to attend film school there, and thus he returned to London to begin his formal education in cinema. Givanni's interview with Ové, in which the director recalls that this trip occurred in either 1965 or 1966, overlaps his account in "Belmont Olympic" of returning to London, where "a film school had just opened, the London School of Film Technique [now known as the London International Film School], and a few black guys, including Yemi Adebade, who is a Nigerian actor, and myself, ended up in this school" (Korte and Sternberg 222). While Ové saw this as a great opportunity, the experience was not without its difficulties. In "Belmont Olympic," he describes the raw condescension that he encountered when he would reveal his "surprising" knowledge of film or refer to exchanges he had had with such internationally renowned filmmakers as Antonioni, Pasolini, and Fellini.

That presaged the trouble that Ové had completing *Man Out*, the first movie that he tried to make. *Man Out* was a short film about "a West Indian novelist having a mental breakdown, the world around him and in his head, and the images he sees, coming to live in England and trying to be a novelist." Despite the connection between its subject matter and the surge of West Indian novels that had contributed to and revitalized British letters in the 1950s, *Man Out* was never completed. This, according to Ové, was the result of difficulties securing the funding he needed to finish it, and those difficulties he continues to attribute to the film's surrealist approach as well as its subject matter. "We started to shoot a lot of it," Ové remembers, "but nobody wanted to give me the money to finish the film. They thought: 'what are you trying to say, you should go off and make a

film in the Caribbean!" (Korte and Sternberg 222).<sup>12</sup> Thus Ové's first *completed* movie is *The Art of the Needle*. Not a picture that Ové "went off and made" in the Caribbean, *The Art of the Needle* is rather an industrial film commissioned by Britain's Acupuncture Association, intended for students of the practice.<sup>13</sup> Ové's next film was self-financed: *Baldwin's Nigger* (1968), a documentary which he both produced and directed.

With *Baldwin's Nigger*, Ové's first "proper" film, begins a specific and measurable tension (an "in-between-ness") in his films, as it is here that Ové's complex, ambivalent notion of "audience"—long gestating since those experiences at the Olympic Theater—suddenly begins to take shape. Shot at the West Indian Students' Centre in London's Earl Court, *Baldwin's Nigger* features expatriate American author James Baldwin accompanied by author and comedian Dick Gregory. The film's first half consists of Baldwin's lecture, in which he presents a broad assessment of the planet's "race problem" and connects that problem to colonialist impulse as represented by the war in Viet Nam. The second half consists of the discussion that the lecture generates; chiefly at issue in that "Q&A" are the differences between the situation for blacks in America and that of West Indians in Britain. Thus while Baldwin's lecture emphasizes the connections between American blacks and West Indians in Britain, the Q&A is dominated by questions from the West Indians in attendance, who often emphasize the uniqueness of their own experience, and often prompt Baldwin to admit the same.

Baldwin's visit occasioned the film; it was not the other way around. In the interview with Givanni, Ové describes meeting Baldwin beforehand and convincing him to agree to the documentary (17). Yet the climate in which *Baldwin's Nigger* arose,

understood in conjunction with the situation in which it was produced, indicate the extraordinary challenges that Ové faced determining the composition of his audience and establishing his authority to put *anything* onscreen. In *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television since 1936*, Ové recounts how the "race problem" as it appeared on British television in the 1960s "was looked at mainly from the British point of view. Black people themselves had a lot to say, but nobody was listening and everybody was making up their own minds. [...] At the same time, the black struggle in America was having a great impact on black people in England." But while Britain's racial discourse at the time seemed particularly needful of precisely this kind of entry, Ové vividly remembers "arriving at the Centre with my camera crew to shoot the film, and even West Indians were laughing—'What are you doing with that camera, boy? He's a film-maker!' It was obviously strange to them, at that time, to see a black man making films" (Pines *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television since 1936* 122).

*Baldwin's Nigger* was followed by another documentary, *Reggae* (1970), which attempted to politically and historically contextualize the genre of music just as it was gaining in popularity outside the Caribbean. But *Reggae*, which by two years preceded its Jamaican, dramatic cousin *The Harder They Come*, also serves as yet another early indication of how Ové's films signify a double audience and carefully manage the often difficult, nomadic line that exists between them. In fact, *Reggae* could easily be read alongside *Baldwin's Nigger* to illustrate how Ové gradually refined his management of that very dynamic.

In *Black and White in Colour*, Ové recalls how in late-1960s London, shubeens, or "blues dances as they were called at the time, where West Indians who were unemployed or who were working hard all day doing terrible dirty jobs would go at night to relax," were the primary places where reggae music was publicly played. But the musical form was also slowly making it to British radio; *Reggae* was actually the direct result of a derogatory comment about the genre that Ové heard while listening to reggae on British radio: "I remember at the time a famous disc jockey (Tony Blackburn) saying on the radio 'We have a new record from Jamaica and I don't know what to make of it. I think it was recorded in a toilet somewhere in the Caribbean.' That made me very, very angry" (Pines *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television since 1936* 122).

Ové describes *Reggae*, which is his second film but his first primarily about the Caribbean, as an attempt "to actually educate the British public about the music and about where it was coming from." Ové also states that "*Reggae* was really an independent West Indian film because another friend of mine—Junior Lincoln, who had just started producing reggae music here through his company, Bamboo Records—actually put up all the money for me to do the film" (Pines *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television since 1936* 122). Consequently, the film's production as a whole, as well as its content, attests to the "in-between-ness" of *Reggae*, a distinctively Caribbean text meant for British consumption, set deliberately against the ethnographic impulse embodied by such programs as the BBC's *The World About Us*, for which Ové would soon produce an intentionally "corrective" entry.

In *Black and White in Colour*, Ové notes that *Reggae* was shown in theaters and then was picked up by the BBC, shown on BBC2; "It really took off from there and traveled all over the world" (Pines *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television since 1936* 122). Shortly afterward began Ové's lengthy period making documentaries for the BBC. The first was *Coleherne Jazz and Keswidee Blues* (1972), which Jim Pines, in *Black and White in Colour*, describes as "about two generations of West Indians and their music" (*Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television since 1936* 120). The second was *King Carnival* (1973), which was directly inspired by *Reggae* but instead made Trinidad's Carnival its study. *King Carnival* also represents the first of Ové's two contributions to *The World About Us*, the BBC's "nature" series that has been running since 1967 and is now known as *Natural World*. In "Belmont Olympic," Ové makes a slightly confusing reference to his "first job" (apparently meaning his first *television* job) in an otherwise revealing account of his collaboration with the program that, like his casting in *Cleopatra*, indicates the "racially transgressive" declination of his career trajectory:

I remember going to the BBC programme *The World About Us* for my first job. I had written to the producer, and with a name like Ové he did not think it was going to be somebody like me coming to see him, and when I pushed his door open he was shocked. He did not know what to say. I told him my name was Horace Ové, and he got very embarrassed. I said: "Relax, don't worry about it. Next summer, if you go out in the sun,

you'll look as good as me!" He cracked up, and we made three films together eventually. (Korte and Sternberg 223-24)

While Ové states that *King Carnival* was made "simply because I had made *Reggae* before that," observing the connection between these two documentaries, on two different internationally celebrated forms of Caribbean music, is hardly simple. On the level of funding, the films plainly differ; while the BFI's Screenonline describes *Reggae* as "the first feature-length film financed by Black people in Britain" (Ward), *King Carnival* was finalized only *after* its sale to *The World About Us*. But the two films are similar in that they are very clearly positioned to serve as a kind of intermediary between British and Caribbean concerns—to speak, as it were, to two separate audiences simultaneously.

Regarding the responses that his film *Reggae* generated in the Caribbean community, Ové describes how "a lot of Trinidadians said how could I go off and make a film about Jamaican culture and music, and not deal with Carnival? And they were quite right. So I went back to Trinidad and looked at the Carnival." He then shot *King Carnival* in Trinidad on 8mm film, then returned to Britain and, on the basis of that footage, sold the idea to *The World About Us*, even while fully intending to "break away from the usual *World About Us* format [...] that sort of ethnographic film-making which, strangely enough, they seem to be going back to again" (Pines *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television since 1936* 123). In the end, the relationship between the conditions of production for both *Reggae* and *King Carnival* suggest a complex, developing tension in Ové's work, one foreshadowed by his early sense of the



migration necessary to his dream of becoming a filmmaker. And that "in between-ness," that tension foundational to so many of Ové's films, is most strikingly evident in *Pressure*, whose status as Britain's "first black feature film" is *precisely* the result of its being delicately positioned in between Caribbean and British audiences.

With a production date of 1974, a festival debut date of 1975, and a commercial exhibition debut date of 1978, *Pressure* and its production and distribution problems would occupy much of Ové's time and energy for that four-year span. While *Pressure* is the focus of this chapter, establishing the context of its director's biography and career arc is the emphasis of this particular section. A detailed analysis of *Pressure*, including the conditions of its production, immediately follows this biography.

Ové's first project after *Pressure* was *Skateboard Kings* (1978). Arguably the earliest detailed film documentary of the skateboarding culture in California, *Skateboard Kings* was Ové's second production for the BBC's *The World About Us*. In the (unfortunately titled) article "Ové Offers an Edge of Black Humour," Australian journalist Paul Byrnes observes that one result of *Pressure* was that it "established [Ové] firmly in people's minds as a 'black film-maker,' a responsibility he finds uncomfortable" (18). Then, in a passage suggestive of the British use of the term "black" as a "multiracial political category," Ové addresses his response to that added sense of responsibility:

I wanted to break away. A film-maker like me gets typecast as a black film-maker. People seem to think you are not qualified to do anything else, but a director is a director, regardless of colour. Some regarded me as a

kind of father of black film-making in England, but that is a terrible load. Just being a black film-maker is a heavy load anyway because somehow you have to answer to everybody every time you make a film. People meet you in the street or ring you up and say "Why didn't you do this, or that?" Sometimes it can be a drag. People want you to make films for them, but you can't. (18)

*Skateboard Kings* represents Ové's immediate reaction to *Pressure* and the response that it had generated. But *Skateboard Kings* also signifies an extremely complex moment in Ové's career, since while the film demonstrates a similar kind of "in-between-ness" as his previous non-industrial films, its focus on the Californian skateboarding craze indicates a deliberate, temporary attempt to set aside the political dimension of his status as Britain's first black director of a feature-length film through the selection and exploration of "lighter" subject matter.

The temporariness of that is clear considering that the year after *Skateboard Kings*, Ové co-wrote and directed *A Hole in Babylon*, a "docu-drama" based on the 1975 Spaghetti House siege in London. In *National Heroes: British Cinema in the Seventies and Eighties*, the late Alexander Walker presents an account of the Spaghetti House siege that helps contextualize the mixture of documentary and drama present in *A Hole in Babylon*. According to Walker, racial fears

[long] latent in the community and growing more and more visible in the harassment of "coloureds" and black by gangs of neo-Fascist whites, [...] became dramatically sharp-focused in the autumn of 1975, when three

black criminals, interrupted in an armed raid on a Knightsbridge pasta restaurant, took hostages and defied the police for several days. Blacks with guns: this was the alarming aspect of the Spaghetti House siege.

(240)

For Walker, the Spaghetti House siege signifies the racial climate of London in the 1970s. But he also observes that "no major [British film] company devoted a film to the subject [of race] in the Seventies," which left the exploration in British national cinema of "the growing tensions between the races" to the country's independent filmmakers (240). Thus, while Walker never mentions it, *A Hole in Babylon* qualifies as one of Ové's contributions to that particular strain.

At the same time, however, *A Hole in Babylon* represents an active, purposeful extension of a dynamic that Ové had already motioned toward, beginning with *Man Out*, whose surrealism kept it from being completed, and continuing through *Pressure*, which includes a heavily debated dream sequence in which an unclothed Tony wanders through a country mansion, creeps up to a bed, and stabs a pig. In "Belmont Olympic," after singling out the surreal narrative approach of *Man Out* as the main reason that he could not fund the film to its conclusion, Ové connects *Man Out* to the dream sequence in *Pressure* and offers this interpretation of that scene's relevance and inclusion:

Because this is what I wanted to say: Life is not just about what is happening here at the moment, life is about what is going on in your head and the images that are going through your head. That is what I was interested in, and that is what from a very early stage on I wanted to put in

my films. What was sad about those early films I made is that the critics just dealt with the politics based on the black struggle or the racism. They never really wrote about my approach, or the style, as they write about other European film-makers. They avoided this entirely. (Korte and Sternberg 222)

*A Hole in Babylon*—which weaves archival footage of the siege with a fictional, dramatic re-imagining and exploration of the motives of the "three black criminals"—deeply complicates the then-developing, soon-to-be common, currently challenged practice of assessing black British films based on their "telling it like it is," or their ability to recast elements of or moments in British public discourse through a "black lens" while adhering to the British tradition of cinematic realism. Hence, while *Man Out* and *Pressure* had begun the process, *A Hole in Babylon* is the moment in Ové's career where he most clearly makes the case that while his films had tended toward stories that examined characters and events clearly grounded in black British culture and life, the way(s) in which those stories were told suggest a hybrid approach elided by the understanding of Ové's films as nothing more than "black" contributions to tradition of British films with "race relations" as their primary thematic concern. If there is a "corrective" impulse to this chapter's reevaluation of *Pressure*, it would be to demonstrate how that method of interpreting Ové's films ultimately occludes the complex way in which much of his work—*Pressure* in particular—are *almost always* oriented toward different audiences with sometimes overlapping, often radically different concerns.

Over the next seven years, Ové would produce many documentaries and direct a number of dramas, all for television. His next feature-length dramatic picture was *Playing Away* (1986), written by Caryl Phillips and featuring Channel 4's "Desmond" star Norman Beaton (with whom Ové had worked before, during his 1978-1979 stint directing episodes for the BBC's television series *Empire Road*). The same year that *Playing Away* appeared, Ové received the BFI's Independent Film and Television Award and was nominated for the Grierson award "for documentary work which is innovative and socially relevant—for *Who Shall We Tell?*, his television documentary about the people of Bhopal" (Pines *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television since 1936* 121) and the Union Carbide Plant gas leak that occurred there in December 1984.

In her interview with Ové, Givanni points to *Dabbawallahs* (1985) and *Who Shall We Tell?* and asks Ové to address his occasional tendency to focus on concerns specific to India and its citizens, or to the nation's emigrants to the U.K.<sup>14</sup> Recounting how regional and national changes in India's government combined with shake-ups at Channel 4 to put a temporary halt to the project, Ové notes how that development resulted in his involvement with *The Orchid House*, a 1991 adaptation of the novel by Dominican novelist Phyllis Shand Allfrey. That project marked the beginning of Ové's staggered, physical return to the Caribbean (Givanni 19).

In a *Caribbean360.com* article dated October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007, Josanne Leonard reviews Ové's most recent project, *The Ghost of Hing King Estate* (2006); Leonard also interviews the director and in the process confirms his personal and professional

commitment to remaining in the region. Still, the most complete assessment of Ové's journey back to the Caribbean and what it means to him occurs in his 1992 interview for *Black and White in Colour*. While Leonard's interview indicates that Ové now lives in Trinidad (Leonard), his interview in *Black and White in Colour* establishes that his return to the Caribbean began with a move to Jamaica, *not* Trinidad. In *that* interview, Ové describes his decision as a function of Jamaica's "budding film and television industry" and the seriousness of those involved. The following passage, in which Ové compresses wistful memories of his early days making movies in England with more hopeful observations about the potential for a fertile film industry in the Caribbean, seems a fitting way to conclude this biography:

I remember when I started making films in the 60s in Britain, I could always talk about films, discuss new ideas with other film-makers, black and white, and play around with all kinds of ideas. But that atmosphere has gone. It is not anywhere in Britain now. You're more likely to find it in America, in Europe and especially in the Caribbean, where people are excited about film and television. (Pines *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television since 1936* 131)

#### *Pressure: In-Depth*

A self-avowed "highly personal," "partisan" account of British film and the British film in the 1970s and 1980s (10), Alexander Walker's *National Heroes* selects *Pressure* to begin its discussion of the state of black British film in the 1970s. Noting

that *Pressure* was "perhaps the earliest film to reflect the dangerous identity crisis of British-born blacks," Walker summarizes the film rather easily, as "about a well-educated black boy who fails to find a job and, disillusioned further by what he sees as the abject subservience of his parents to white values, drifts into militant politics" (241).<sup>15</sup> Yet Walker, like Pines, Mercer, and others, has difficulty managing the film's decidedly ambiguous ending. In fact, Walker's interpretation of that scene does little more than provide historical context for David Wilson's review of *Pressure* that originally appeared in a 1978 volume of the *Monthly Film Review*:

At the end, though, he [Tony] is undecided whether his plight is a specific black one or a symptom of general economic decay in Britain. As David Wilson wrote: "It is the measure of *Pressure*'s originality that, for all its rough edges, it foreshadows what has actually happened." This referred to the black leaders' welcome rejection of organized militancy in Britain during 1977. (241-42)<sup>16</sup>

Walker concludes by observing the nearly three years that elapsed between festival and commercial exhibition debuts; he finds it not "unduly cynical to suggest that the Notting Hill race riots on August Bank Holiday 1978 helped [the film] 'surface'" (242). But while this account of the problems that *Pressure* encountered corresponds in spirit with Ové's oft-cited statement that his film was for a time "banned,"<sup>17</sup> a more holistic assessment of that delay between festival and commercial exhibition debuts exposes Walker's reading as surprisingly myopic, given that it occurs in an assessment of British cinema that is as enveloped in historical and industrial concerns as *National*

*Heroes*. Because the debates that swirl through and around the different accounts of that delay suggest how even the industrial history of *Pressure* is a function of reexportation, since at the base of those debates are questions concerning the composition of the film's audience, as well as the film's potential to speak to more than one audience at a time. In the end, radically different conceptions of *Pressure*'s audience combined with the flow of funding to repeatedly intensify the very public battle between Ové (and *Pressure*-producer Rob Buckler) and *Pressure*'s main financier, the British Film's Institute's Production Board.

Of the numerous reviews and analyses of *Pressure* that ran in the British press between the film's production and commercial exhibition, Paul Taylor's "Ultimate Pressures," which appeared in a late-February 1978 edition of *Time Out*, offers perhaps the most neutral, useful overview, particularly to an attempt to revisit the conditions of the film's production, the way in which the film was received, and the problems that led to the four-year gap between its production and commercial exhibition debut. Taylor's primary focus is the industrial history of the film, including and especially its post-production and distribution problems. In the process of describing those problems, "Ultimate Pressures" presents what might be *the* most evenhanded account of the much-disputed chronology of the film's production and the difficulties that Ové and Buckler faced between the film's festival and commercial exhibition debuts.

Among the more compelling elements of Taylor's piece is his presentation of the film's blow-up and distribution problems as a conflation, one precipitated by Ové's going over budget, mostly "to secure copyrights on the carefully selected soundtrack music."



But Taylor finds that in the end, the real reason for the long delay was an amalgam of inopportune business decisions and contractual wrangling on the part of the British Film Institute, and the broader problem of what he calls "a crucial shift in the [BFI's] Production Board's perspective on its role in British 'film culture.'" While not discounting a reading of events that cites *Pressure's* subject matter and the ethnicity of its filmmaker as contributory factors, Taylor's main point here is that it was the aforementioned "shift," and not "the 'incompetence' with which the BFI has been charged," that was most responsible for the distribution and blow-up difficulties that led to that long, unfortunate span between festival and commercial debuts (10).

Taylor's evenhandedness is partly the result of his inclusion of and reliance upon some of the least debated aspects of *Pressure's* industrial history. His analysis of the film and its problems proceeds from a succinct account of *Pressure's* pre-production, production, and path to distribution. According to "Ultimate Pressures," *Pressure* started in 1974, as script co-written by Ové and Samuel Selvon that was "submitted to the Production Board, then headed by Barrie Gavin. Accepted, and budgeted at approximately £18,000, the film was shot on 16mm by a professional crew in October 1974, with Rob Buckler acting as producer" (10). Taylor also indicates that the principals were almost immediately aware of *Pressure's* commercial potential and knew that it would need to be blown-up to 35mm for that potential to be realized. At this point, Taylor wades into the muddy disputes and contrasting interpretations of the motivations and setbacks concerning *Pressure's* industrial history that even now have not been resolved. But while "Ultimate Pressures" includes claims that contribute to that

irresolution, it remains neutral enough throughout to be a framework for an analysis of the debates concerning *Pressure's* production and distribution related problems.

After pointing out how securing copyrights for *Pressure's* soundtrack had put the film over budget, Taylor notes that "the Production Board's chronically limited resources could not be stretched further without sabotaging someone else's film." But this impasse, he notes, most certainly did not keep *Pressure* out of art-houses or festivals. The film premiered at the BFI's very own London Film Festival in 1975 even *before* the blow-up problems had been resolved. According to "Ultimate Pressures," around the time of that festival, BFI was approached by two separate parties who saw commercial potential in *Pressure* and were interested in distributing it. One was Cinegate's David Stone, who "owns one of London's few first-run houses equipped with 16mm equipment, but [...] would only negotiate for the rights to *Pressure* if the BFI themselves would pay for the blow-up for subsequent release—which they could not afford to do." The other was Brian Samms of Crawford Films, who "was quite prepared to bear the blow-up costs provided he could take world rights to the film," a caveat made problematic by the BFI's previous decision to renew "a long-standing contract with Films Incorporated, signing away all US rights to all their films to a distributor almost exclusively engaged in non-theatrical distribution." But eventually, Buckler and BFI *were* able to free *Pressure's* US theatrical rights to renegotiation, and Crawford Films then signed contracts for 35mm distribution. It took a year to secure that agreement with Crawford; Taylor notes that yet another year elapsed between the agreement and the film's commercial debut: "The 12 month delay since [the deal with Crawford Films] has been accounted for by the eventual

blow-up of the prints, and the negotiations for a first-run cinema and subsequent selected circuit release" (10).

It is chiefly the issues foundational to this "narrative" that have preoccupied most of the lasting disputes and debates concerning *Pressure's* industrial history. What follows is an assessment of the disagreed-upon aspects of that very history, one that tries to account for, or include a strong sense of, those critical disputes and debates. My hope is that by the end of this assessment, it will be clear that the politics of representation—from "who is represented onscreen and how?" to "which audience has the biggest claim to that priceless vertical piece of real estate, and why?"—were fundamental to the problems in *Pressure's* industrial history.

Founded in 1933 by the British Board of Trade, the BFI has long had a broad, underlying mission of promoting, studying, and helping educate the public about British film. Throughout its lifetime, BFI has for the most part been publicly funded; combined with the institute's long tenure, this has helped shape the BFI's history as a series of achievements, challenges, crises, and criticisms. Among the institute's historical developments most relevant here are the 1952 establishment of the Experimental Film Fund, which was set up "to help launch new film-makers"; the revival of the Experimental Film Fund in 1966, as the BFI Production Board; the naming of Mamoun Hassan as the new Head of Production and his initiation of the production of low-budget feature film at the BFI; and the formation of advisory committees for each main area of the BFI's concerns, which occurred in 1973 and coincided with the institute's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary ("A Brief History of the BFI").

That the BFI Production Board funded *Pressure* suggests that a fairest way to begin an assessment of *Pressure's* funding difficulties is with the "official" narrative of that funding, as provided by the BFI. A recent e-mailed query to the BFI yielded a response from Christophe Dupin, a researcher for the BFI to whom that e-mail was forwarded due to his decade spent conducting research for a dissertation whose topic was the BFI Production Board. Dupin's dissertation includes a discussion of the Production Board's attempts in the mid-Seventies to manage both the production and distribution of its films, in which *Pressure* features as a prominent example. According to Dupin, the first agreement between Ové and the BFI Production Board occurred in December of 1973, when the Board, who "[found] Ové's script interesting but flawed," gave Ové £150 to improve it. In June of 1974, the Board provided Ové "£11,000 for the production of *Pressure* despite their reservations on the script." By November of 1974, "the budget for *Pressure* [had] increased to £14,909" and the Board agreed to cover the increase. The film premiered at the London Film Festival a year later, in November of 1975; Dupin states that at that point, "the film [had] again run over budget because of unforeseen costs of music copyright," and that "the Board agree[d] in principle to make a further allowance for completion of the film" (Dupin).

A *Films and Filming* review of *Pressure* that appeared in early 1978 states that *Pressure* was shot in 1974, had been screened at the 1975 London Film Festival "and is now having its initial commercial showing, following its premiere at the Coronet, Notting Hill Gate" ("*Pressure (Films and Filming)*" 49). Roy Blatchford's "Painting it Black in Babylon," which appeared in *The Times Educational Supplement* in 1977, also provides a

sense of the post-production, distribution-related problems but fills in the three-year gap that gets no mention at all in that later *Films and Filming* assessment. Underlying Blatchford's critique of a lead is the sense that while the occasion of the review is a recent screening of *Pressure*, the rarity of public exhibitions of the film attests to the challenges Ové and Buckler faced getting *Pressure* to a fair number of screens:

The British Film Institute's policy of supporting challenging and provocative films from new directors has met with problems from distributors and much speculative criticism from the press. One such victim, *Pressure*, recently received a rare screening at the National Film Theatre" (79).

"Painting it Black in Babylon" concludes by observing that *Pressure* still had yet to be blown up to 35mm, then citing political, self-censoring impulses as chiefly responsible for the blow-up and distribution problems that the film had encountered. Hence while "Ultimate Pressures" cites contractual problems and poor business decisions on the part of the BFI in its assessment of *Pressure*'s difficulty finding a distributor, Blatchford's analysis represents an alternative and justifiable tendency to read those problems as a function of the film's "overt polemic," since "the pressure on a white audience is as unrelenting as the prejudice Tony has to combat" (79).

Like "Painting it Black in Babylon," "Blow-Up Blow for Black Feature," a *Screen International* article that ran in 1976, is emblematic of the negative press that the BFI encountered due to the delay in *Pressure*'s commercial exhibition. Just as its title suggests, "Blow-Up" provides an overview of *Pressure*'s blow-up problems, one in line

with the version of events stating that the film ran over budget while being shot to 16mm, and that Ové and *Pressure's* producer Rob Buckler saw the commercial potential of the film and determined, *during production*, that *Pressure* should be blown up to 35mm for commercial exhibition.

"Blow-Up" opens with an accusatory summary: "*Pressure*, the film which has been described as 'Britain's first black feature' looks like [it is] being assigned to oblivion because its makers cannot afford the cost of a 35mm blow-up." The article's assessment proper, however, begins with the observation that *Pressure* had "aroused a good deal of interest from distributors, both in Britain and abroad," which "Blow-Up" states was unusual for a BFI film. Yet despite this unusual interest and "the BFI's recently avowed determination to improve the distribution of its product, the [Production] Board feels it is unable—in view of its limited budget—to come up with the extra £6,000 necessary to blow up the film from its present 16mm." Thus "Blow-Up" warns that since neither Ové nor Buckler had the money to pay for the process, and that by the time the article appeared, no individual distributor had proved willing to absorb the cost, "*Pressure's* future may lie in the 16mm circuit. 'And if that happens,' says Ové"—in a statement that directly attests to *Pressure's* "in-between-ness"—"it will be branded an "arty-crafty" film—even though the white and black people it would help can only be reached through the Ranks, ABCs and Classics'" (S.S. 14).

While *Pressure* may *nominally* be "Britain's first black feature," it is also *ironically* Britain's first black feature, since the conditions of its production clearly suggest a range of reasons why another "British black feature" had not yet been made.

"Blow-Up" provides a figure of £19,000 as the sum of the BFI's investment in *Pressure*. It also recounts Ové and Buckler's indignation at the BFI's decision not to pay for the blow-up—both men were certain that a commercial release would result in a profit. Furthermore, Ové also alludes here to an oral agreement, made *pre*-production, for BFI to absorb blow-up costs for his feature: "The film, says Ové, was made after former Production Board head Barrie Gavin, assured them that it would be blown up to 35mm at a later date. But when Gavin was replaced by Peter Sainsbury, Sainsbury shrugged off this commitment on the grounds that it had never been put on paper" (S.S. 14).<sup>18</sup>

Sometime prior to the publication of "Blow-Up," the relationship between Ové/Buckler and the BFI, at least as represented in the press, had dissolved into distrust and suspicion. In "Blow-Up," Ové and Buckler emphasize that their wish to blow up *Pressure* and release it commercially is chiefly so that they can return the Production Board's investment and wrest the film from its control. For its part, the Production Board downplays the notion that the issue was anything more than a simple matter of finances. After stating that "Peter Sainsbury, head of the production board denied this week that there was any hostility toward the film" (S.S. 14), "Blow-Up" quotes Sainsbury on his own "official" position:

"All our films are made on 16mm and they are made essentially, for a non-theatrical market [. ...] While one might well get one's money back if *Pressure* is distributed, the BFI's accounting system means we wouldn't get it for some time. If we'd paid for a blow-up it would have meant

taking the money away from this year's applicants—and we could only fund a tiny percentage of them anyway" (S.S. 14).

Sainsbury's statement is echoed in Dupin's (much) later assessment of the situation. Dupin's research into the BFI was the basis of his Ph.D. thesis, written for the Birkbeck College of the University of London in 2005.<sup>19</sup> In the passage from his thesis that he pasted into his e-mailed reply, Dupin observes that, "As soon as he was appointed Head of Production, Sainsbury made the improvement of the distribution system one of his highest priorities. In his interview with *Time Out* in February 1976, he openly accused the Production Board of having in the past focused on the production activity to the detriment of distribution." According to Dupin, the very example that Sainsbury provided to illustrate the problem was *Pressure*, "which in his opinion was made on 16mm despite its obvious commercial potential because this was never properly discussed or considered by the Board" (Dupin).

Unsurprisingly, Sainsbury's account—and that of the BFI—runs counter to many of Ové and Buckler statements and claims. In "Blow-Up" the pair recount maddening, frustrating difficulties that they claim to have faced with the BFI while attempting to send *Pressure* abroad to festivals. In one instance, the BFI's decision to screen the film in Bombay and their inability to "lay their hands on the second copy" kept Ové and Buckler from submitting *Pressure* to the February 1976 Filmex festival in Los Angeles. According to Ové and Buckler, "it was only after something of a battle that they are able to take the film to Carifesta in Jamaica next month—despite the fact that the Caribbean is clearly an important market for it" (S.S. 14), an observation that calls into question the



BFI's earlier decision to enter *Pressure* at a festival in Bombay. But it also suggests that beneath the relatively rudimentary matters of funding, deeply informing these particular problems between the Production Board and *Pressure*'s maker and producer was a conflicting sense of the film's international appeal.

It was, in other words, a matter of audience: while the BFI's Production Board imagined for *Pressure* one kind of audience, *Pressure* itself—whose script was written by two Trinidadian emigrants, whose primary concern is the assimilation of a Trinidadian family emigrated to London, and whose narrative and final scene together challenge the notion that Pan-Africanism as represented by the black nationalist movement could resolve the uniquely schizophrenic identity crisis faced by both members *and* children of the Windrush generation—makes the argument for an audience with a much more complex composition. And that issue of audience is basic to the amalgam of distrust and reassurance, desire and dampened expectations, potential and stagnation, represented by the discussions of *Pressure* that occurred in the British press in the period between the film's festival and commercial exhibition debuts.

In his thesis, Dupin describes the "long press campaign, led in particular by *The Sunday Times*' journalist Pilip Oakes and other occasional contributors such as Lindsay Anderson, [who] condemned the BFI's incompetence over the distribution of *Pressure*" (Dupin). While *Pressure*'s blow-up and distribution problems were still a suppurating wound in the British press, a review of the film appeared "across the pond," in Hollywood's *Daily Variety*. Among other things, that review, written by "Hege,"

suggests how an understanding of the film's production and distribution-related problems might complicate the assessment of its international reception.

One of the first issues that *Variety* review exposes is the current absence of a comprehensive history of *Pressure*'s exhibition. Dated November 26<sup>th</sup>, Hege's article describes the film it examines as "reviewed at Uptown Theatre, Chicago, Nov. 15 1976." While the review notes that *Pressure* is "Great Britain's first black feature film," it also criticizes the film as "about 10 years too late and 25 minutes too long," and finds that "heavy trimming of the film's dated rhetoric and throwaway scenes could have turned this item into a credible, and possibly important, document about racism in Great Britain" (38).

Mentions of *Pressure*'s initial screening at the 1975 London Film Festival are manifold, but there are far fewer accounts of festival and small-screen exhibitions that occurred between *Pressure*'s festival and commercial exhibition debuts. In *On Location: Cinema and Film in the Anglophone Caribbean* (2000), Keith Warner notes (without citation) that, "*Pressure* was shown at film festivals—notably the London Film Festival of 1975, and the Toronto [International] Film [Festival] of 1976—and in communities with a heavy Caribbean population" (126). "Ultimate Pressures" and Dupin's lengthy e-mailed response on the behalf of the BFI are just two of a great number of sources clearly establishing that when Hege's *Variety* review appeared, *Pressure* had yet to be commercially exhibited, and the financing of the film's blow-up was still enmeshed with a renegotiation of its stateside distribution rights. Hence, Hege's review *must* have been

for a screening of a 16mm print of *Pressure* at a festival that was taking place in Chicago.<sup>20</sup>

Ové's first feature film was roughly four years old when made its commercial exhibition debut. The most recent edition of Denis Gifford's *The British Film Catalogue* helps confirm this important detail in *Pressure*'s history.<sup>21</sup> Marjorie Bilbow's short review of *Pressure* appeared in the "New Films" section of the March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1978 issue of *Screen International*, just *after* that commercial debut. Describing *Pressure* as a "labour of love and dedication that makes its points with objectivity and considerable humour," Bilbow's review exposes its allegiance in the countervailing narratives of *Pressure*'s industrial history, particularly through this and similar "editorializing" assessments: "Shot in five weeks as an all-out team effort, *Pressure* is a totally professional production with many remarkable and moving performances" (21).

The real relevance of Bilbow's review is her pairing of a recapitulation and analysis of *Pressure*'s themes with an assessment of what kind of theaters the film should run well in, and why. Pointing to the four years between production and commercial exhibition, Bilbow argues that the change in times since then may actually have widened the film's audience:

"Although the pressure on Tony is all the greater because he is black, the scene has so changed since Horace Ové and Robert Buckler made the film in 1974 that many white school-leavers will be able to identify with the young hero as his hopes fade and he is forced into the life of a layabout on the fringes of crime and violent protest" (21).

Note the pronounced difference between this assessment of how the delay between *Pressure*'s production and commercial exhibition would affect viewing audiences—or how the film would be *consumed*—and Hege's description in *Variety*, two years earlier, of the film's "dated" quality. While a direct, extended contrast would be unfair, examining the reason for that unfairness is both important *and* fair: The difference in cultural and industrial specificity between the analyses is a clear indication of the importance of grounding any discussion of *Pressure*—perhaps even particularly one whose intention is to establish *Pressure* as a Caribbean film, through an examination of the film's ability to address two very different and separate audiences simultaneously—within the industrial and socio-cultural contexts of British cinema.

*Pressure: Caribbean in the British Frame*

Focusing on independent and non-commercial British cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, "Bad Days in Babylon," the penultimate chapter of Walker's *National Heroes*, opens with the following epigram, pulled from a 1979 National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC) report:

Appetite grows by what it feeds on: American films create the audience for other American films, but there are so few British films dealing with British life and manners that they are a largely unknown quantity to British audiences. Every British film has to create its own audience unaided. (Walker 216)

The initial clause of that first sentence is difficult to disagree with; the rest of it is as defensible an assessment as I have seen of how British cinema "endures" the hegemony of Hollywood. But that closing assertion—its appearance in a historical account of two decades of British national cinema suggests an irony that surprisingly, by the end of "Bad Days in Babylon," does not play out: *No* film can be said to create its own audience unaided. And if, as that sentence suggests, British national cinema is *not* composed of films that "communicate" with other films in its tradition, then it seems unlikely that it would be possible to speak, even back then, of "British film."

For though "Bad Days in Babylon" never states this, the epigram from the NFFC report actually addresses the *raison d'être* for *National Heroes*: In order to address questions concerning how a given British film might have addressed British audiences, it is necessary to examine how those audiences might have understood that movie in light of similar ones that came before it in British cinema. It is also necessary to establish how that same audience response might have been inflected by historical developments, as well as changes specifically attendant to the contemporaneous state of the British film industry. Those same basic principles—the former largely concerning genre, the latter chiefly a matter of historicizing—are at the base of this chapter's attempt to assess how *Pressure*, Britain's first black feature-length dramatic film, might have managed the needs, desires, and expectations of *actual* British audiences, and not just members of the British press.

Early in Charlotte Brunson's "Not Having It All: Women and Film in the 1990s" occurs a comparison of Meera Syal's *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and Ové's *Playing Away*

(1986), which identifies how both films "address" themselves "to [a] strand of British cinema heritage, Ealing Studios" (168). In that moment, Brunson reminds us of the continual need to observe the relationship that "black" British films often bear to films in other British cinematic traditions, and motions toward the productive possibilities available to studies open to such observations.

Among existing scholarship in British cinema, Marcia Landy's *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-1960* offers one efficient manner of determining, through an in-depth consideration of the relationships that exist between *Pressure* and previously established British cinematic genres, how *Pressure's* British audiences might have interpreted the film in light of its similarities to the British movies that had come before it, as well as how *Ové* might have played to and subverted that method of interpretation in order to produce a distinctively Caribbean film. *British Genres*, according to its introduction, "is a study of British cinema and its relationship to British society through an examination of feature films produced between 1930 and 1960" (3); the book is "predicated on the assumption that a study of British genres offers a rich and diverse view of British cinema and society" (14). Proceeding from the notion that British cinema is "an important part of cinema history that has been overlooked and misrepresented" (4), Landy focuses on that neglect as it specifically pertains to British genre film and finds that the neglect of British *genre* film "on the grounds of its formulaic quality, its unwillingness to challenge the spectator, and its encouragement of spurious pleasures must be ascribed to the refusal to confront the ways in which mass cultural texts harbor knowledge of unresolved conflicts and desires" (8).

Landy's introduction cites one fundamental reason why genre studies, perhaps the most dialectical approach available to those studying the production and consumption of popular film, remains so important:

The values exemplified in the cinema of genres are not mere reproductions of a single dominant ideology but the result of many cultural and economic factors, not the least of which is the commercial cinema's capacity to address the aspirations of their audiences, even if only in the interest of commerce. (5)

Carefully positioning her study in terms of Thomas Schatz's influential definition of genre, in *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System*, as a "coherent, value-laden system," in which "the system and its values are not ahistorical and unchanging but rather sensitive to social change," Landy establishes connections between the attributes of British film genres and the attitudes of the British audiences that consume them. This is what leads Landy to, throughout *British Genres*, "assume the films to be speaking in a language of conflicting attitudes and values that provide insights into British culture and ideologies" (5). But it is also what makes *British Genres* useful to understanding how *Pressure's* British audiences might have interpreted *Pressure* by assessing it in terms of the British films that had come before it, as well as how Ové's film might have played to or against that particular strategy of "understanding" it.

Summarizing the development of British cinema during the four decades that she studies, Landy asserts that "British commercial cinema from the 1930s to the 1960s can be characterized as working within the genre system" (10). She then presents a brief

chronology of the development of popular films in Britain in terms of their genre; most relevant here is the description of the rise of the British "social problem" film in the 1930s and 1940s to the genre's prominence in the 1950s and continuation through the 1960s, where it would be represented by such starkly neorealist pictures as Ken Loach's *Cathy Come Home* (1966).

Landy observes how World War II "was not only advantageous to the expansion of government services, but stimulated the growth of science, technology, and the social sciences and the extension of mass culture." The post-war period saw the continuation of the "Americanization of British culture" as well as the increasing integration of journalism, broadcasting, and cinema into British lives. But the war and its disastrous effect upon the male population of Britain also resulted in "challenges to family life as women moved into the workforce and assumed greater economic and social responsibilities in the public sphere" (12). Later, citing Arthur Marwick's *The Explosion of British Society, 1914-1970* (1971), Landy slides from an emphasis on the effects of the war on domestic concerns into an analysis of its effects on colonial affairs:

The war years also witnessed movements for independence on the part of "overseas territories acquired over the centuries by a fine mixture of naked aggression, commercial ambition, evangelical zeal, common-sense, hypocrisy, and sheer absence of mind," movements which were to acquire a sense of urgency during the 1950s and 1960s. (12)

Among the genres that Landy's study covers, the British "social problem" film, a subset of which is the "race-relations" drama, is the one most directly and consistently attuned to



these particular concerns. It is little surprise, then, that the social problem film is also the British genre with which *Pressure* is most conversant.

The introduction of *British Genres* features a summary of the British social problem genre, including an assessment of the characterization, plot lines, and strategies of narrative development typical of its films, through which it is almost immediately clear how *Pressure* both "speaks" to the genre and comments upon or reworks its tendencies and conventions. For instance, while a familiar narrative strategy of social problem films is to "present marginalized figures as objects of inspection, interrogation, and correction" (20), *Pressure* is a self-aware inversion of that approach, since it is the system itself, rather than the marginalized figure of Tony, that is in need of correction. Consider, too, what aspects of or influences upon the protagonist of the social problem film are usually held most culpable for his/her "deviant" comportment:

The offender's behavior is attributable to generalized sources: bad influences, an impoverished environment, poor family relations. But the real "offender" appears to be unruly desire, most often expressed in sexual terms, and the narrative trajectory moves in the direction of "civilizing" the offender, assimilating him or her into respectable society. (20-21)

Yet *Pressure* presents precisely that dynamic in its narrative trajectory and attempts to resolve it, by reorienting Tony's "unruly desire" so that it directed not toward respectability as represented by his early association with white friends and his mother's "white" wishes for his future, but rather toward *cultural alienation*, as represented by Tony's relationship with his brother as well as his later association with black friends and

the problematic consummation of his relationship with the black militant movement, symbolized by his ambiguous sexual liaison with Sister Louise (played by Sheila Scott-Wilkinson). This reading of *Pressure's* narrative trajectory actually squares with Landy's observation that while social problem films initially appear to be engaged in a middle-class discourse where deliberately emphasized positives include "the wholesomeness of family life, the respectability of work, and the need for mature guidance into these channels,"

[...] screening these films in the 1980s, the viewer can identify the now-stylized elements that are structured around the dramas of conversion. What the films now make clear is that the identification of a "social problem" is a dead giveaway of the presence of a disciplinary discourse. And, as John Hill suggests [in *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema, 1956-1963*], the texts reveal the power and threat of sexuality which they seek to contain. The representations of disruptive sexuality as embodied in the figures of socially marginalized figures [sic] unintentionally subverts the narrative itself, now eliciting more empathy for the offender than for the agents of correction. (21)

Thus *Pressure* could have been understood, and perhaps should be read now, as both a social problem film *and* a self-conscious attempt to challenge, reinvigorate, or redirect the strategies and attributes of the genre, and in particular the British race-relations drama.

"The Social Problem Film," the chapter of *British Genres* which most extensively examines the genre, also analyzes some of its most prominent filmmakers and films, and in the process provides tantalizing points of comparison for Ové's *Pressure*.

Unsurprisingly, the chapter opens with a definition of the genre;<sup>22</sup> observing that "the post-World War II era saw the development and popularity of the British social problem film," Landy avers that the genre "was directed toward the dramatization of topical social issues—capital punishment, prison life, juvenile delinquency, poverty, marital conflict, family tension, and, to a lesser degree, racism" (432). She then motions toward the genre's historical specificity and, citing Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy's *The Hollywood Social Problem Film: Madness, Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties*, thickens her assessment of the conventions of the genre:

Unlike the prewar genres [...] these films were eclectic in nature, fusing melodrama, docudrama, and social realism. According to [Roffman and Purdy], "The problem film combines social analysis and dramatic conflict within a coherent narrative structure. Social content is transformed into dramatic events and movie narrative adapted to accommodate social issues as story material through a particular set of movie conventions. These conventions distinguish the social problem film as a genre." (432)

*British Genres* sees the eclecticism of the British social problem film as it existed during the era under investigation as "a response to a variety of social and economic conditions that reveal the sensitivity of genre productions to change" (432). Following a brief review of the development of British documentary film and its importance to the

British social problem film—in particular the former's tacit ratification of the notion that certain conventions signify a film's engagement with "reality"—Landy mentions Italian neorealism as "among the many lines of influence that intersect in the rise of the social problem film" (436). She then historicizes the development of the preoccupations and "style" of the social problem film ... and here "style" is chiefly a matter of narrative tendency. Observing that British public discourse after the war changed from wartime-related concerns to methods of transforming the country to a peacetime society, Landy finds that

[t]he films' preoccupation with disrupted family life, law enforcement, generational relationships, juvenile delinquency, and poor "social adjustment" is consonant with concerns expressed by lawmakers, sociologists, and popular journalists. The style of these films bears the marks of the wartime documentary and of the feature films that strove to create a sense of common purpose and of attention to the problems of everyday existence. (436)

Landy then points out how often social problem films tended toward certain production practices, such as "location shooting and the foregrounding of ordinary protagonists" that were clearly oriented toward "locating [the film's] action in a 'real' context" (436).

Then—in a statement that could double as a description of *Pressure's* indeterminate final scene—Landy presents what she believes *truly* makes these social problems films unique:

What makes these texts different from their precursors is not only their overt sociological orientation, their striving for topicality, but the ways in

which their quest for realism only exacerbates tensions in the texts, revealing a disjunction between the ostensible sociological concerns of the films and the contradictory meanings generated. What is memorable about the films is not their dissection of a particular social problem so much as their exposure, mainly unconscious, of their failure to resolve the problems they pose. (437)

Observing that "the Hollywood social problem film of the 1940 and 1950s [...] provided models for the development of the British social problem film" (437), Landy then briefly compares and contrasts the forms. While both mix "melodrama, film noir, social topicality, and a concern with rehabilitation," Hollywood social films "place greater emphasis on melodrama and psychic malaise"; British social problems films Landy notes, "are more preoccupied with social rehabilitation," though she finds even *that* assessment too restrictive and clarifies it in a way that further harkens to Ové's *Pressure*:

[T]hough the films purport to examine the social landscape, the position of characters in various institutional structures, economic and class issues are submerged as the films concentrate on questions of adjustment. In their treatment of social issues, these social problem films display a tendency, direct in some instances, covert in others, to adopt a psychological treatment of the characters, linking their marginality and aggressive behavior to unresolved oedipal conflicts and to repressed sexuality. As in the family melodramas, the narratives see the causes of conflict in family

relationships, in disturbed relations to authority figures, and in conflicts over identity. (437-38)

This is followed by an exhaustive analysis of British social problem films, particularly those of the 1950s. There Landy identifies several thematic categories within the genre and examines each individually; among them, only "Youthful Rebellion: The Young Male" is relevant to this chapter's main concern. Landy's discussion of that category begins by making connections between youth-oriented 1960s British film and the social problem films that had so frequently populated British screens for the previous two decades. Criminality and crime detection, "in particular with young offenders," was a chief concern of those social problem films. Thus the emphasis on youth and "social deviance" prevalent in 1960s British cinema films "did not arise in a vacuum but had been preceded by a number of films that addressed the problems of youth and especially of working-class young people" (442).<sup>23</sup>

"High points" of Landy's "Youthful Rebellion: The Young Male" category include *Brighton Rock* (1947), *The Guinea Pig* (1948), *The Boys in Brown* (1949), *A Boy, a Girl and a Bike* (1949), and J. Lee Thompson's *The Yellow Balloon* (1952), the latter noteworthy as a near mirror-image of Ové's first feature-length dramatic film. Landy describes the protagonist of *The Yellow Balloon* as "a young child trapped between a mother who has upwardly mobile aspirations for her son, a father who is ineffectual in countering her strong will, and a criminal who exploits the boy for his own ends" (450). But her account of the film's narrative produces even more striking points of comparison between *Pressure* and this emblematic social problem film:

By making a young boy rather than a girl the protagonist, by presenting the male characters as either completely subordinated or completely rebellious, the film appears to be ascribing criminality to female repressiveness. In particular, Frankie's mother, obsessed as she is with respectability, seems to be the dominant agent of repression within the claustrophobic environment of the home, ruling her husband and son with an iron hand. (451)

The assessment of *Pressure*'s complex relationship with the British social problem film certainly suggests how regular British filmgoers might have responded to *Pressure*, as well as how the film or its maker might have managed or played against those expectations. But historicizing that same response, or establishing how it might have been inflected by historical developments as well as changes specific to the contemporaneous state of the British film industry, provides a more detailed, nuanced picture.

The value of this approach is evident in Walker's *National Heroes*, a classic examination of the British film industry in the 1970s and 1980s. While the book's introduction readily admits the study's drawbacks and limitations—"personal" and "partisan" are two descriptors that it offers—it also gestures toward the strengths of Walker's approach. *National Heroes* is simultaneously forward and backward looking; according to Walker, the structure of *National Heroes* is "roughly but not scrupulously chronological" and "use[s] the privilege of hindsight [...] to advance and retreat in time"

(10). Combined with the frequent appearance in the preface of terms like "story," "cast," and "characters," as well as their frequent use throughout, signifies a "history" in the modern narrative form.

"State of Change," the book's first chapter, begins with an overview of British cinema at the end of the 1960s. Walker observes that the first few years of the 1970s were portentous for the entire industry; while the 1960s had been an energized time for British cinema, "British cinema now, in contrast, looked like the country itself: it had a residual energy, but in the main was feeling dull, drained, debilitated, infected by a run-down feeling becoming characteristic of British life" (15).

By the beginning of the 1970s, Hollywood had sharply curtailed its production schedule for films made in Britain. There was also an increase in violence in British films, which Walker argues was precipitated by the Kray trial, which "lasted from 7 January to 5 March 1969 [and] worked its way deeply into public consciousness by saturating the media before and during it and for years afterwards" (23). The salacious case involved three brothers, Reggie, Ronnie, and Charles Kray, who with seven others "had been variously charged with murder or complicity to murder" Jack McVitie, "who was used as an 'errand boy' in the Kray twins' extortion racket" (22). There was a general feeling of "revulsion for the times" (23); according to Walker, the trial anticipated and symbolized this, just as it presaged the rise in crime that Britain faced in the 1970s.

Walker observes how the aesthetics of the "New Hollywood" films being exhibited in England combined with the Kray trial and the public interest that it generated to spur the production of films that featured a measurable increase in the amount of crime



and violence represented. An early, prominent example of this is *Get Carter* (1971), which was produced by Michael Klinger, whom Walker terms "a most capable and unsqueamish film-maker, well-equipped to emulate the realism that American films were now flaunting with the disappearance of the old 'Morality Code'" (25). Written and directed by Mike Hodges, *Get Carter* featured Michael Caine in the role of Jack Carter. Walker finds the roots of Caine's portrayal in Nicol Williamson's performance in Jack Gold's *The Reckoning* (1970). There Williamson is Michael Marler, "a back-street yob from Liverpool" who moves with remarkable speed up the ranks of a big London business. He is Caine's Carter's precursor as "a hard man compelled to return and seek his destiny back where his origins lie." More directly relevant, however, is the thematic connection that Walker draws between the two films: "Like *Get Carter*, [*The Reckoning*] took a breath-takingly cynical view of an entrepreneur acting out his imperatives in response to the tribal law of the fittest man's survival," which Walker states introduces the era's onscreen melding of criminal dynamics and business concerns. But it is also indicative of something more, as the public's desire or appetite for such narratives or narrative patterns in commercial cinema could just as easily suggest a general sense of feeling excluded from economic progress through legitimate means. This is what prompts Walker to follow his comparison of *Get Carter* and *The Reckoning* with the observation that, "Once again, the cinema was in tune with the predominant mood of British society" (26).

Focusing on independent and non-commercial British cinema during the period under consideration, Walker's ninth chapter, "Bad Days in Babylon," establishes that the

financial state of the British film industry in the 1970s meant that the industry as a whole was an unrewarding field to first-time filmmakers:

The absolute beginners were the truly poor of the Seventies: the film-makers possessing more aspirations than years of experience and next to no "credits." Their hopes of finding finance were piteously small. The National Film School which opened its doors in late 1970 (with twenty-five students) had neither the ambition nor means to launch its graduates into production. (216)

There was nothing like Channel 4 to "act as 'publisher' of the works of independent film-makers and give them exposure in the cinemas before transmitting them on the box." In fact, primarily because they were strapped and investment in films would not have qualified as chargeable against tax, "None of the major TV networks financed theatrical films to any extent in the Seventies" (216). Even the NFFC was facing difficult times. Walker describes the 1970s as the "harshest, leanest years" for the NFFC since its establishment in 1949 as a "State bank for independents." This was the result of the NFFC spending the decade "being financially harassed by a series of contradictory Government policies: one minute they seemed to assure its future, the next they indicated that film funding had no right to State subsidy at all" (217).

Of the more relevant sections of "Bad Days in Babylon" is a section composed of discussions, recaps, and analyses of specific British independent or non-commercial filmmakers and films of the 1970s and 1980s. There Walker observes that despite a difficult financial environment, there did appear some non-commercial films,

occasionally the product of established filmmakers but more often of "relative newcomers." But these films were clearly "made against the odds: some were 'one-offs'—and some were 'write-offs'" (220). Such "lack of continuity" greatly contributed to the crisis of identity that marked British national cinema from the 1970s through the resurgence of that tradition marked by the worldwide success of such films as *Chariots of Fire* (1981), solely British production, and *Gandhi* (1982), co-produced by British and Indian concerns.

Among these "one-off"/"write-off" filmmakers is Barney Platts-Mills, worth mentioning here for the relevance of *Bronco Bullfrog* (1970), the director's neo-realist feature-length debut that introduced east-end London's "suedehead" subculture to the British screen. Made in 1969 but first commercially exhibited in 1970, "shot for £17,000 over six weeks in London's East End using locals and young professionals" and distributed by the Boulting Brothers and writer-director team Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat, *Bronco Bullfrog*, which shares its name with one of its main characters, "is a film by which we can precisely date the onset of youthful disenchantment in the cinema once it was seen that the affluence of the Sixties wasn't going to stay around and let Bronco's generation share in it." Ultimately, Walker's assessment of *Bronco Bullfrog* in *National Heroes* finds that "from this film on, whenever the young are featured in British films it is with growing resentment against society and deepening individual despondency" (220), which suggests that *Bronco Bullfrog* can be read as either prefacing the development of that same theme in *Pressure*, or simply opening the space required for the cinematic explication of that theme in British public discourse.

According to "Bad Days in Bablyon," the BFI Production Board, led at the time by Mamoun Hassan, funded "one of the of the earliest—perhaps the first—of the films dedicated to the plight of Britain's displaced Asians." The film, *A Private Enterprise* (1974), "was directed by Peter K. Smith and co-authored by him and Dilip Hiro" (221). Walker's analysis of the film emphasizes its anti-polemical approach and, pursuant to that observation, includes statements that the director made during a 1975 interview with *The Guardian*: "In no way was the film a polemic on race relations. "My purpose is to speculate, not to impose my own view, which is where again I differ from someone working in Ken Loach's area." According to Walker, the film's director "consulted no community groups" when he came to the film, which Walker cites as responsible for the "refreshing freedom from any sense of victimization: the Indians in it saw themselves as movie stars, not representative casualties of a reluctantly multi-racial Britain. [...]" Humanity rather than dialectic marked the film: a rarity in the BFI context" (222), which is a debatable moment in Walker's analysis, since there he appears to equate "humanity" with the absence of a palpable sense of anger or resistance, or even the desire for redress. But beyond this, and beyond the observation that the approach of *A Private Enterprise* is in many ways antithetical to that of *Pressure*, is the more suggestive "problem" that if black British film includes both Asian-oriented film *and* films (like Rosso's *Babylon*) with white directors but with mostly black cast and "black" concerns, then *A Private Enterprise* would clearly predate *Pressure* as Britain's first "black" feature-length dramatic film, and hence would offer a prior "black" film against which British audiences might have read and understood Ové's contribution.

In a short review of *Pressure* that appeared in the "New Films" section of the March 4th, 1978 issue of *Screen International*, just after the film's commercial debut, Marjorie Bilbow argues for the film's appeal to a diverse audience, finding that the country's current economic state means that "many white school-leavers will be able to identify with the young hero as his hopes fade and he is forced into the life of a layabout on the fringes of crime and violent protest" (21). Walker's discussion of the work of Derek Jarman, and in particular *Jubilee* (1978), clarifies how that particular audience might have responded to *Pressure* in the way that Bilbow anticipated.

"Bad Days in Babylon" describes *Jubilee* as "the first full-length film to draw its looks and threats from the phenomenon of British punks." The film, which "did very well in Britain and on the continent" (238), "was a violent collage of everything Punk that was then around," eventually became a kind of "glossary of many even more violent phenomenon that were on the way as British society changed its nature and things got harder and more hopeless for the unwaged" (233). *Jubilee* imagines a stark, anarchic state of England, one marked by excessive violence and the wholesale application of the punk aesthetic. While the occasion of the film the 1977 Silver Jubilee celebration of Queen Elizabeth II, the frame of its narrative is 17th century England. *Jubilee* begins with Queen Elizabeth I asking her magician to summon an "angel" to entertain her with visions of the future, then presents Elizabeth and her court touring a chaotic, wildly damaged England. Teenagers roam the streets of London in marauding gangs, armed with semiautomatic weapons and a willingness to kill on a whim. And while Amyl Nitrate, the most prominent female character in the film, introduces herself to the viewer

through a speech on how this "current," anarchic state of England was achieved by those who finally learned how to make their desires reality ("Our school motto," she says, "is, 'Faites vos désirs réalité.' 'Make your desires reality'"), *Jubilee* itself demonstrates concern with everything *except* for the maintenance of the current state of affairs.

The ways in which Jarman's *Jubilee* clearly differs from Ové's *Pressure* are almost too many to count. Yet there is a connection between these films that runs deeper and is more suggestive than the simple observations that *Jubilee* began its commercial run only a month before *Pressure*, and that the two films exhibit a pungent sort of disgust for the current state of affairs. For both *Jubilee* and *Pressure* appeared within and were occasioned by the same economic environment and public dissatisfaction with the way things were; the two films taken together suggest how the tastes of British filmgoers across a broad spectrum might have been affected by or a function of the general downturn in the country's state of affairs. As "Bad Days in Babylon" observes:

"The Discreet Plight of the Bourgeoisie" was how *The Guardian* labeled a series on middle-class "hardship" in November 1976; while that same month Newsweek featured a cover story on "Britain's Battered Middle Class," squeezed by high double-figure inflation and a devalued pound sterling now worth \$1.65 as against \$2.32 two years earlier. [... I]n the first six months of 1967 there had been 71,060 unemployed youngsters under the age of twenty; in 1977 there were 252,328—no wonder the prevailing style of Pop was dubbed "Dole Queue Rock." (234)

Simultaneously surveying the youth-oriented and "black" films of the two decades under consideration in *National Heroes*, the "Rude Boys, Black Boys" section of the chapter "Bad Days in Babylon" further thickens the context in which British audiences, particularly the young, white British filmgoer, might have interpreted Ové's *Pressure*. Expressing a lack of surprise "that British mainstream cinema returned to the theme of youth at the end of the Seventies," Walker begins his study of those films with Franc Roddam's *Quadrophenia* (1979), which "felt as if it had been made not in a time-slip, but a ghetto." "Much superior" to *Quadrophenia* was *Rude Boy* (1980), financed by Michael White and produced by Clive Parsons and Davina Belling. Though the film starred seminal punk rock band The Clash, Walker finds its members the film's "nominal stars," as the film's real theme "was a Britain that was falling apart. [*Rude Boy*] opened with a white boy spitting at a Royal limousine and closed with a black boy in a prison cell being forced to sign a 'confession'" and a depiction of Margaret Thatcher's acceptance of the post of Prime Minister. "In between abrasive start and cynical finish," states Walker, "lay a frightening and squalid vision of the 'Two Englands'" (239).

Walker's reading of *Rude Boy* is emblematic of the strategy of the section of the chapter in which it appears: Through a comparison of independently produced youth-oriented and "black" films, "Rude Boys, Black Boys" in part argues that Britain's economic problems in the 1970s contributed to an uneasy compression of racial and class concerns, and tracks how that compression was felt and interpreted by the young, white British filmgoers of the time. Thus the historian shifts smoothly from his reading of *Rude Boy* into a more race-specific assessment of the decade's independent/non-commercial

film. Identifying the 1975 Spaghetti House siege as a watershed or synecdoche for the state of "black/white" relations in England at the time, he contrasts the relatively peaceful resolution of the siege with the lasting effects the siege had on "black" Britain:

The outcome was happy in the sense of lives saved [...] Otherwise, things were not so clear cut. Though the Law managed to prevent a political twist being given to a criminal act, the exhaustive investigation of black culture in Britain which took place as a result [...] ensured that black consciousness in Britain was effectively heightened. (241)

While Walker's assessment of *Pressure* is certainly not at odds with the overwhelming tendency to identify it as Britain's first black dramatic feature, *National Heroes* cites not *Pressure* but Anthony Simmons's *Black Joy* (1977) as "the first 'race' film to get fairly wide circulation." Independently produced by Elliott Kastner, *Black Joy* was based on playwright Jamal Ali's *Dark Days and Dark Nights*. Bringing the play to the screen involved transposing it "into seething Notting Hill"; Walker finds that Simmons "provided [the film] with the energy and salty dialogue of a Joan Littlewood production at Stratford East in the 1950s. [...] The characters were as Dickens might have drawn them, had he lived to see the New Commonwealth carrying its cardboard suitcases to Old London" (242).<sup>24</sup>

The second film that *National Heroes* sets *Pressure* in the context of is Franco Rosso's *Babylon* (1980). Despite *Pressure*'s commercial debut occurring in February of 1978, *National Heroes* argues that "the presentiment that a racial underclass was in the making had to wait a couple more years before finding its more frightening form in a



film." For Walker, *Babylon* was that film; in it, "no compromises were allowed to tone down the hue of black or the cry of despairing anger among a gang of Debtford youngsters who sometimes lapsed into such thick Jamaican patois that sub-titles were used to interpret what they said" (242), a clear indication that its combination of realism and exoticism may have been what made *Babylon* so appealing. In fact, Walker refers to that combination and how it produces an "integrity" that he finds "all the more commendable (and surprising) since the film was technically the work of whites—directors Franco Rosso and Martin Stellman, producer Gavrik Losey and photographer Chris Menges, with finance from the NFFC and a records company interested in exploiting the reggae soundtrack" (242-43).<sup>25</sup>

The underlying problem with this reading—what makes especially poignant its position here, at the conclusion of this long examination of Ové's best-recognized but perhaps most misread film—is one of deixis: Walker's interpretation of *Babylon* falters fundamentally because it is based on the belief that both he *and* the film itself occupy roughly the same position in terms of the discourse in which his assessment of *Babylon* participates and to which it contributes. That is, Walker's reading of *Babylon* is set squarely and irrevocably within a unilaterally "British" understanding of the context of British cinema; it does not interrogate the many ways in which Rosso's film may well be challenging or subverting the expectations that govern how the British audience consumes that very cinema.

Terming *Babylon* "not a meditation movie, but a red alert," Walker points to the whites in the film's diegesis, who

[...] were either threats or were themselves victims. For once, a film made no bones about how difficult it was for whites to enter this world: the white misfit caught in the undertow of the black gang's exoticism draws the recoil of anti-white prejudice on himself. (243)

Yet somehow these observations are not extended as a potential comment on the white British viewer, to whom films like *Babylon* and *Pressure* would had to have been oriented were they to make a profit. The film's depiction of whites "caught in the undertow of the black gang's exoticism" in a very real way mirrors the exoticism in which a white British viewer of *Babylon* or *Pressure* would likely engage.

To understand how important this is to an attempt to historicize the British audience's response to *Pressure*, one can consider what might have happened had *National Heroes* "thickened" its examination of that film by looking *without* British national cinema while remaining within the boundaries of the country—to, say, Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come* (1972), which preceded *Pressure* in terms of commercial exhibition in England.<sup>26</sup> Henzell's film was a readily available example to the British filmgoer of a "white" director who had made a film concerning the Caribbean, and who had proved perfectly capable of featuring "the exotic"—and at times even emphasizing it—in order to make a profit.

*The Harder They Come* departed from previous major, mainstream cinematic treatments of the Caribbean in that it actively attempted to relieve the region from its usual role as "passive backdrop"; the film made Jamaica and its poor, black people its subject matter. But in terms of execution and reception, that transposition would yield

something much more complex, as in the end the subject matter of *The Harder They Come* is as much Jamaica and its people as it is the relationship between the perceptions of the Caribbean and its people as held by the American and/or British viewers (who constituted the film's biggest potential viewing audience) and the self-perceptions of the people who were being represented onscreen. Thus *The Harder They Come* is recognized as Jamaica's first feature film in part because it is the first feature film from Jamaica that successfully situated itself "in between" Caribbean and American/British concerns.

And there is *Pressure* alongside it, waiting for its status as Britain's first black dramatic feature-length film to be challenged or unpacked in a similar style.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Prominent scholars of black British cinema, Mercer and Jim Pines among them, have observed that a direct influence on the "realist" leanings of early "black" British film was that Britain's "race problem," on the infrequent occasion when it was the chief focus of British mainstream movies, tended to be "ghettoized" to British "race relations" drama, that subset of the social problem film that featured narratives where "blacks" were portrayed either as "victim" or "problem." In both "British Cinema and Black Representation" and "The Cultural Context of Black British Cinema," Pines describes *Pressure* and Menelik Shabazz's *Burning an Illusion* (1981) (the latter groundbreaking for its focus on the experiences of a young black British woman) as "transitional" black British films in terms of how they both advance and critique the dominance of the realist aesthetic in early "black" British film.

<sup>2</sup> Mercer notes that while the channel "contributed significantly to the expansion of the independent film production sector [... it] was also mandated to provide for the unmet needs of various 'minority' audiences, and as a new model of public service broadcasting which explicitly recognised the diversity of audiences in a plural society" ("Recoding" 6).

<sup>3</sup> His main wish is for that criticism to more directly challenge "some of the realist assumptions we tend to take for granted in black art" (Henriques 19).

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<sup>4</sup> According to "Realism and the New Language," "the major stumbling block for the development of any black aesthetic or artistic perspective is a general unspoken reliance on a realist tradition" (18).

<sup>5</sup> A chronological examination of the critical response to *Pressure* up to then demonstrates the complexities of that development. Early treatments of the film simply assume a purely realist approach and, as such, evince a broad determination to establish *Pressure* as—to borrow a phrase from famed Caribbean literary critic Kenneth Ramchand—"social document" ("Song of Innocence" 225). Ové himself has often pointed directly to *Pressure*'s controversial penultimate scene, a dream sequence in which a nude Tony enters the bedroom of a country mansion and stabs a pig, and noted that despite how such surrealistic elements challenge the easy assumption of a realist approach, the critical reception of *Pressure* tended to focus on "the black struggle or the racism" and not on the film's style (Korte 222). In "The Cultural Context of Black British Cinema," which was published in 1988, Jim Pines notes the film's "documentary-like fictional narrative," but despite the sensitive observation that the film "highlighted from the Black perspective—perhaps for the first time in any British film—the contradictions and impossibilities inherent in the idea of 'Black British'" ("The Cultural Context of Black British Cinema" 31), Pines never addresses how the film's style might be connected to that understanding.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander concludes "Black British Cinema in the 90s" with the claim that "what differentiates black British culture from what goes on in the United States under the banner of black culture is the 'post-colonial hybridisation' of British culture [... which] makes Britain, and particularly London, the cultural capital of the world" (113).

<sup>7</sup> Foundational to the biography of Ové presented here are two separate works. The first is "Belmont Olympic," an autobiographical retrospective that Ové delivered for the Tübingen symposium at the *Screening Identities* conference in 2002; that talk was transcribed for Barbara Korte and Claudia Sternberg's *Bidding for the Mainstream? Black and Asian British Film since the 1990s*, which was published in 2004. The second is a biography/interview with Ové that appeared in the 1992 edited volume *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television Since 1936*. Edited by black British film scholar Jim Pines, *Black and White in Colour*, which is "based on interviews and other material which went into the making of the [1992] BFI documentaries *Black and White in Colour* for the BBC" (7), includes a short biography and an extended interview with Ové that, in concert with "Belmont Olympic," produce the necessary framework for an holistic, critically useful account of the filmmaker's life and accomplishments. That this is even possible is a testament to the sensitivity and comprehensiveness of *Black and White in Colour*'s "treatment" of Ové, as well as Ové's tendency, in "Belmont Olympic," to lend clarity to the many claims about his background and experiences that so frequently appear without citation. Other sources also inform the discussion of Ové's biography that appears below; most prominent among those is "Horace Ové: Reflections

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on a Thirty-Year Experience," June Givanni's 1995 interview that Ward paired with *Black and White in Colour's* treatment of Ové to generate the BFI's account of the director's background and accomplishments.

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that despite the access to Ové that the DVD suggests—and despite Ové's lengthy, complex involvement with the BFI—the institute's biography of filmmaker, as written by Paul Ward and available through Screenonline, never refers to the interview included on the DVD but instead cites two others, one with June Givanni and the other with Jim Pines.

<sup>9</sup> Both Ové's environment *and* heritage were racially and ethnically complex and inclusive, a fact that does not frequent accounts of his background and assessments of his importance to black British cinema. In fact, Ové's interview with Givanni is particularly striking in that it includes a moment where the director—still almost universally and simplistically labeled a "black filmmaker"—self-identifies as part-Indian and points directly to his "mixed-race" heritage as fundamental to the diversity of his subject matter ("Thirty-Year" 19).

<sup>10</sup> My research found two newspaper articles/reviews (Christian Patterson's 1987 article "Life is a Carnival (Sometimes)" that ran in *The Independent*, and Paul Byrnes' 2004 review "Ové Offers an Edge of Black Humour" that ran in Australia's *Sydney Morning Herald*) which open with that story.

<sup>11</sup> Apparently, this is what led him to claim—in 2002, at a symposium for a film scholar's conference in Germany—that "the greatest place to see a film is either Italy or the Caribbean" (Korte 222).

<sup>12</sup> That funding difficulty led Ové to shelve the project indefinitely; in his interview with Givanni, Ové states that he is "still trying to finish it with the same actors who have aged nearly thirty years" (17).

<sup>13</sup> In his interview with Givanni, Ové describes the film as the result of bumping into then persuading the head of the association at a party; "I convinced him that I could make the film for him and he gave me the money to do it" (17).

<sup>14</sup> The director's response includes details of his early involvement with a film on Indian folk heroine Phoolan Devi; Ové describes how that project, which included 3 years worth of research before Channel 4 shelved it, would eventually become Shekar Kapur's 1994 film *Bandit Queen*.

<sup>15</sup> Walker's interpretation of *Pressure* is certainly defensible, but it also elides many of the film's most important elements. These include that Tony's mother is the parent who most clearly ascribes to "white values" (his father nearly eviscerates her for this toward the end of the film), and that Colin—Tony's Trinidad-born brother who identifies with black

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nationalism in what the film, through its ending, appears to aver is a misguided and doomed attempt to hold on to his sense of who he is—is the pole that pulls Tony toward black militancy; Tony does not simply "drift" into those "politics."

<sup>16</sup> Again, while this is not an unjust reading, it simply does not take into consideration that the film presents its black militancy as on loan from America, and that it may be precisely this application of an American movement to a British concern—as if "black" is "black" regardless of context—that the film may be pointedly critiquing. Furthermore, it is not altogether coincidental that this particular theme would likely be easiest to detect for those who have read *Pressure* co-writer Samuel Selvon's novels, in particular *Moses Ascending* (1975), which lampoons the transposition of American-style black nationalism to Britain in a similar way.

<sup>17</sup> Ové's statements about that ban are probably best considered alongside the observation that were *Pressure* ever *officially* banned, it likely would have been reflected in *Pressure*'s official classification by the British Board of Film Censors, which in 1984 changed its name to the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC). An e-mailed query to the BBFC yielded a response by BBFC Education Officer John Dyer, who found the original BBFC "paper file" concerning the BBFC's classification of *Pressure* in 1976; according to that file, the film "was awarded an 'AA' certificate which is roughly equivalent to [the BBFC's] modern day '15' certificate or a low-end US 'R' rating"—hardly indicative of a film too controversial to be exhibited. Yet Dyer also states that the available information does not indicate whether the film suffered an actual ban *before* its classification by the BBFC. Also "muddying" those waters is that in Britain, despite a given film's classification, local authorities have the final legal right to decide whether it can be exhibited (and to whom) in their cinemas.

<sup>18</sup> "Blow-Up" is also notable for its claim that "*Pressure* would not even have been shown at the London Film Festival—as it was last year to considerable acclaim—if Ové had not organised it himself. The Production Board, he says, told him it was too late and too long" (14). This despite that the BFI having actually run the LFF since its inception in 1956.

<sup>19</sup> Dupin's thesis is titled *The British Film Institute as a Sponsor and Producer of Non-Commercial Film: A Contextualised Analysis of the Origins, Administration, Policy and Achievements of the BFI Experimental Film Fund (1952-1965) and Production Board (1966-1979)*.

<sup>20</sup> Hege never mentions a festival, Mimi Plauché, who is currently serving as the feature film programmer for the Chicago International Film Festival, verified in a recent e-mailed response that Ové's *Pressure* was indeed an entry at the 12th Chicago International Film Festival in 1976, which was screening films that November at the city's Uptown and Biograph Theaters. While certainly cannot expect details beyond a

certain point from a *Variety* review, the absence of these particular details in this particular review are telling—Hege's review of *Pressure* is actually surrounded by other reviews that more precisely indicate screening conditions. The inattention this evinces attests to the relative invisibility or inconsequence of British film-industry concerns to the way that those films are interpreted or consumed in the U.S. Underlying Hege's predominantly negative review is a lack of either concern with or awareness of the film's blow-up and distribution problems; Hege's unwillingness or inability to consider those particular issues and debates are foundational to his criticism of the film's "dated" feeling.

<sup>21</sup> Yet Gifford's comprehensive volume, which has become fundamental the study of British film, employs various methods to determine the first date of commercial exhibition of the films that it includes, and this speaks to the notorious vagaries and complexities of the British film industry. Gifford actually opens *The British Film Catalogue* by advising his readers that while the "films are listed chronologically by year and then by month in order of their initial exhibition (xi), precisely assessing the date of initial exhibition for British films is often no easy affair. Gifford groups his entries according to the month and date of exhibition, but those dates of exhibition are ascertained by mentions of the films in the press, first listings with trade shows, initial screenings to the British Board of Film Classification (formerly known as the British Board of Film Censors), date of registration with the Board of Trade, and "date of completion in the case of films unshown at the time this third edition of the catalogue was initially compiled (1995)." Furthermore, Gifford warns, "where several alternative dates exist, the earliest is used" (xi). He also notes that while it is fairly common to date films according to when they were released, that strategy is inappropriate when dating British film "as in the British cinema a release date can follow a first-show date by one, five, or, in one case, 14 years" (xi). Hence Gifford's careful warning to those attempting to "date" British film is a vivid illustration of how even the seemingly simple matter of "dating" of *Pressure* reveals the importance of considering the film's production and post-production problems. That warning also helps to explain the relationship between the film's difficult path to commercial exhibition and the tendency of treatments and reviews of *Pressure*—even scholarly analyses, and even the more recent assessments precipitated by the film's 2005 premiere on DVD—to provide a "year" for the film that falls between the range of 1974 and 1978.

<sup>22</sup> What is a bit surprising, especially at first, is that despite Landy's insistence of the cultural and historical specificity of the genres that she investigates, she employs the work of two theorists of Hollywood social problem films to flesh out her definition of the British version social problem films. Of course that move is in line with her observation, a few pages later on, that "The Hollywood social problem film of the 1940s and 1950s also provided models for the development of the British social problem film" (437).

<sup>23</sup> As Landy observes: "The representation of youthful discontents is a significant indication of changes in British postwar society, revealing a range of social concerns

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involving issues of authority, community, family, class, and gender. As one critic has described it, "'Youth was ... a powerful but concealed *metaphor* for social change'" (442).

<sup>24</sup> One of the more interesting aspects of Walker's interpretation of *Black Joy* is his statement that "race relations didn't come into the picture—much. For one thing, it was not about black and white, but black and black: not at all as inflammatory as the news stories" (242). That assessment is direct conflict with the observations of film critics and scholars in the vein of James Snead, who in *White Screens, Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side* argues that it is quite possible to read "race relations" in films even when one or the other race is absent, particularly if that absence is clearly a "structuring absence" or deliberate omission. Indeed, that may be what led Walker to paradoxically conclude his assessment of *Black Joy*, Britain's "first 'race' film to get fairly wide circulation," by asserting that in the film, "Racial tensions were played down in favour of showing how many ethnic elements were being stirred in the cracked old mixing-bowl of working-class (once white) London. *Black Joy* settled for saying that it takes all kinds to make a world. It cost under £300,000—with the NFFC coming in for about half of that—but it failed to find an audience. Its attempt to mediate between the communities was not reflected in a Gallup Poll taken in February 1978, which indicated that 49 percent of those Britons questioned thought that non-whites should be offered financial 'aid' to return home" (242). While the NFFC, the source of this film's "institutional" funding, clearly differs from the BFI Production Board, it is nevertheless deeply suggestive that *Black Joy*, a more "integrative," resolution-oriented film, qualified for a loan from the NFFC that was in size roughly *ten times* the entire budget of *Pressure*, which, according to Christophe Dupin, received a total of £17409 from the BFI (Dupin).

<sup>25</sup> Yet Walker does *not* draw a connection between the eagerness of a record company to finance *Babylon* and the world-wide success, earlier in the decade, of both the film and soundtrack of *The Harder They Come*.

<sup>26</sup> International Films distributed *The Harder They Come* in England in 1972.



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