

George lamming's in
the castle of my skin



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

What is exile? For some, exile may be equivalent to eviction. For some, it may be equivalent to shunning. The dictionary definitions of exile are “absence from own country,” “somebody living outside own country,” and “banishment.” These definitions are examples of a physical exile, or in other words, a physical removal or dislocation of a person or people. The idea of exile does not necessarily have to be a physical displacement, though. Exile can be personal, mental, or cultural. Exile can be emotional or social. This type of exile is one that many people can associate with.

Anyone who longs to belong somewhere, with a group of people, or in a community dreads social and cultural exile. It is worthy of note that these exiles may be separate from each other, but they may go hand in hand.

When asking this question, it is helpful to look to George Lamming, author of *In the Castle of my Skin*. Lamming presents exile as a complex idea. He uses the main character, G., to portray a layered definition of exile. Through G.'s interactions with his family, friends, and community, there is a constant sense that G. is an outsider.

Exile is complex, and cultural and personal exile is likely to lead to inevitable physical exile, as illustrated by the character G. and his consciousness in Lamming's novel, *In the Castle of My Skin*. G. lives in a small village in the Barbados. In this village, there is a clear split between colonial powers and their colonies. The inhabitants of these colonies get the brunt of all power exertions, and G.'s story shows how colonial power exertion was not necessarily physical, as in force or militancy, but cultural, which led to psychological troubles.

Especially in G. S. education, it is shown that the colonial powers devalue the culture and all that is associated with Africans, and instead drive into the boys' brains the superiority of the English, white culture. It is apparent that with colonialism came the idea that darker-skinned people were inferior and primitive. This notion of primitivism underestimated the abilities of the black people, seeing them as a negative piece of the community of the Barbados. G. and his group of friends are seen as uneducated and ignorant, when in reality, they are not given equal opportunities to succeed.

Furthermore, this assumption that they are uneducated leads to the discrimination of their language. In the colonies, the colonizer's language is taught. If students do not use this language, they will be punished. This gives blacks, namely G. , who never does very well at school, a disadvantage. It takes school as a social occurrence away, which leads G. and the other students to be seen as inferior socially as well as academically. This type of exile is cultural, because G. 's own cultural is forced away from him and hidden, and another " superior" culture is thrust upon him.

However, those doing the thrusting determine this superiority, so it is out of G. 's hands, and leads to him feeling like an outsider in his own community. Furthermore, although the Barbados is filled with Africans and blacks, they are not the powerful race. So everyone aims to become " more white. " This separates the whites from the blacks, but also separates the blacks from other blacks. In other words, blacks that try to become " more white" see themselves as better than other blacks, who are just villagers trying to get by.

There is a social dividing line within the same culture that separates the black overseers from regular villagers. Perhaps if all black villagers would join in power, there would not be such a barrier between them and the white people, but instead the blacks are separated, making race the line between negativity and positivity in the whole community. G. and his friends fall into the negative piece of the race. Culturally, even people of their own skin color look down upon them. They are seen as inferior, which forces them to question whether or not this is actually true.

G. 's perspective shows many times that villagers look down upon the villagers, especially the young ones, and it alters his state of mind. For example, when G. and his friends are outside watching and talking about the party that is taking place, they hear a noise, and discover Mr. Creighton's daughter and a young man making love. When Mr. Creighton learns that his daughter has been violated, he instantly tags this violation to the "vagabonds" from the island, leaving the sailor that was making love to his daughter free of any responsibility (Lamming, 16).

When thinking of a father dealing with his daughter making love to a young man, it is more likely that the father would target the young man in the situation. However, in this example, there was no question but to target the village boys, because of their inferiority and carelessness. While the landlord is weighed down by the changes in the village and the violation of his daughter, G. is weighed down by the accusations of him being a violation. His consciousness of the treatment he gets at this point is becoming more and more. G. is aware that he is not welcome throughout the culture.

As G. gets older, circumstances in his life continue to make him feel like an outsider, but these circumstances are no longer solely the act of the colonial powers around him and the culture. These circumstances present themselves to him, and he faces a more mental, personal exile. About halfway through the novel, after the last huge issue that occurred with G., his violation of Mr. Creighton's daughter, years pass in the village. While years pass, nothing actually changes, which leads readers to realize that the culture is the same, and G. is probably older, but not very different. Once G. becomes the narrator again, he expresses that there are differences, but slight differences in his life, rather than differences in his consciousness or in the community's culture as a whole.

These differences mostly present themselves when he moves on to high school. Although G. never did well in the village school, he moved on to high school. G. alludes to the differences between the village school and the high school, and while he focuses on these differences, it is apparent that the one connection he used to have, that with his village friends who went to village school with him, is now starting to break (Lamming, 215).

Since he is in the high school, G. is alienated from his friends that are presented throughout the novel, so he begins to literally become an outsider. We especially know this because of G.'s feelings coming out in the text. Throughout the novel, there is little insight into how he is really feeling or thinking, and this is ironic since he is the main character. G.'s concern with high school shows that he is getting older and perhaps becoming more and more aware of the alienation he has been subject to culturally, and how that alienation has followed him into his personal life in school.

Also while he is in high school, G. learns more and more about history. He has never learned this much about the past prior to high school, so it continues to invade on his consciousness. It is evident that G. does not realize the impact of the history he is learning about on the people and community around him, until a shocking event actually happens. G. had learned about the war going on, but he viewed this war as a far away place, and it did not have much affect on his mind. Then when France fell to the Germans, and a lot of the students left to enlist, G. realized the impact this event had on the community.

He, however, was still stuck at high school, where nothing was changing, and he was without support or friendships. As G. is finishing high school, readers get some hope that he would begin to fit in and that the alienation he was faced with would fade, since he gained a new friend while his other friends got jobs and went off to America. G. 's new friend encourages him intellectually, but G. has never done so well in school and this seems like an unlikely situation. G. does not really have a choice but to begin growing up, since he will soon move on from high school.

Despite his lack of performance in high school, he is offered a teaching job at a boarding school in Trinidad. While he is given this job, he receives letters from his old friend, Trumper, who tells him of experiences in America. Trumper makes it seem like G. is capable of moving there to escape the Carribean, but G. still does not see the light leading him to leave the life he is caught up in presently. The way this is presented in the novel shows that G. longs to leave, but does not see it as an option. This weighs on his mental consciousness, and his personal exile finally becomes clear to him.

The extra push from the stories of Trumper lead G. to realize that he has been an outsider and has been stuck in the same bad situations that do not give him positivity. In the final chapter of the book, G. and his mother speak of his low performance in high school and quarrel about the possibility of him accepting the job in Trinidad. Even while quarreling and hoping to move on to Trinidad, G. has second thoughts, mentioning how he would miss her cooking, and this shows that his consciousness is skewed (Lamming, 273). At this point, G. s personally exiling himself, because he is making himself believe that he must stay in an unfavorable position because he does not know any other way.

However, this quickly changes as Trumper returns, and G. realizes that if Trumper could leave and make a new life, so can he. G. prepares to leave for his new job in Trinidad, and says farewell to the land he has grown up in. This farewell is his indication that he must physically leave this land to escape the cultural and personal exile he has been subject to since his youth. As shown by Lamming's portrayal of G. exile is more than just physical. However, when one is exiled throughout their lives mentally, culturally, emotionally, or personally, one's only choice may be to physically exile themselves from a land to escape the alienation that has been present throughout one's life. Exile is complex in that there is a complexity behind people's consciousness when they feel exiled or when they are exiling themselves, there is complexity within the types of exile one can be subject to, and there is complexity in the idea of escaping exile in one way or another.

In G. 's case, he had to leave behind his prior awareness that he was an outsider, to move on physically to start anew and be a part of something. He had to say goodbye to his prior life in order to recover from the alienation he was always subject to. It was apparent at the end of the novel that his consciousness was skewed all the way until he packed up and left, showing that physical exile is inevitable if one is exiled all one's life, especially if one is trying to escape this exile.