



## WRITING THE CARIBBEAN: COLONIAL EDUCATION AND RESISTANCE IN MERLE HODGES' 'CRICK CRACK, MONKEY' AND THE MIGHTY SPARROW'S 'DAN IS THE MAN (IN THE VAN)'

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### Abstract:

This paper analyses the depiction of colonial education in Caribbean literature and song. When read in dialogue, Merle Hodge's text and the Mighty Sparrow's calypso, communicate how indoctrinated de-valuation of the creole culture, instils feelings of shame within the colonial subject. Subjugation and adherence to institutional eurocentrism within each text, however, differs. I argue that although education becomes a means of continued colonial oppression, Sparrow avails enforced Eurocentric authority whereby he is able to exert resistance in the form of the calypso, whilst in Hodge's text the possibility of colonial usurpation remains unachievable for the character of Tee.

**Keywords:** Colonial Education, Caribbean Literature, Calypso, Resistance, J.O. Cutteridge, Colonialism, Cultural Appropriation and Creole

Colonial education is an "*ideological state apparatus*" that consolidates foreign colonial rule over its subjects using institutional indoctrination [Althusser, 1, 85]. In this paper, I will argue that whilst colonial education psychologically disempowers and injures the Trinidadian subject in '*Crick Crack, Monkey*' (Hodge, 1970), in '*Dan is the Man (in the Van)*' (Sparrow, 1965), it empowers Sparrow to reclaim indigenous cultural identity through an act of resistance. Hodge's novel is a "*national allegory*" where "*the private individual destiny*" represents "*the embattled situation of the public world-culture*" [Jameson, 2, 69]. Tee's cultural alienation is metonymic of the wider residual feeling of cultural displacement explored in Caribbean postcolonial scholarship. For Hook, the "*psychopolitical condition*" in society is the analysis from which "*the field of postcolonial theory*" derives [3, 251]. Written and performed by Slinger Francisco, under the stage name of the Mighty Sparrow, the calypso '*Dan is The Man (in The Van)*' addresses the miseducation of Trinidadian subjects. In employing the "*cultural weapon*" of the calypso, Sparrow subverts and resists indoctrination by satirizing the syllabus's irrelevance to the West-Indian child [Warner, 4, 4]. In doing so, Sparrow exposes its

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ideological underpinnings as a “*means through which the values and interests of the colonizers [...] would be internalized by the colonized and perceived as their own*” [Reddock, 5, 217]. Therefore, colonial education is an insidious presence in Hodge’s text but an object of ridicule in Sparrow’s calypso. I will show that in assuring a certain form of assimilation, colonial education becomes a form of re-enslavement.

Although Hodge and Sparrow’s texts were published after Trinidad and Tobago gained its independence from the British Empire in 1962, both interrogate colonial education in a pre-independent Trinidad society. Colonial education is evident in Hodge’s text when Tee uses a “*Caribbean Reader Primer One*” [6, 28]. Sparrow addresses the author of these ‘*Reader[s]*’, “*Captain [...] Cutteridge*” [7]. J.O. Cutteridge was the British colonial Director of Education whose ‘*Reader[s]*’, published alongside Thomas Nelson, were used in the Caribbean from the beginning of the twentieth century until the late 1960s [Arnold, 8].

In Hodges’ text, the expectation of school differs from its material reality. Tee expects, what she calls the “*bastion of learning*”, to lead to a sense of agency [6, 48]. For instance, Tee explains: “*I looked forward to school, I looked forward to the day when I pass my hand swiftly from side to side on a blank piece of paper leaving meaningful marks*” [6, 22]. Literacy enables agency: “*Literacy is an instrument of empowerment*” [9]. According to The Adult Literacy Tutors Association the ability to read and write “*empowers people economically and socially*”, ensuring improved “*income, employment opportunities and the quality of life*” [9]. The repeated personal pronoun ‘I’ demonstrates how Tee expects to gain autonomy. Alliteration seen through the repeated ‘m’ sound in ‘*meaningful marks*’ suggests that her anticipated educational maturation will become “*a gesture pregnant with importance*” [6, 22]. The further alliteration evident in the ‘p’ sound of ‘*pregnant*’ and ‘*importance*’ connotes a sense of interconnectivity and causality. The opportunity afforded by her metaphorical new beginning and transformative training at school will be as Hodge asserts, a “*proud prospect*” [6, 42].

Similarly, for Sparrow, schooling is synonymous with advancement. He sings, that the “*the education you get when you small*” suggests “*you will grow up with true ambition*” as well as “*respect form one and all*” [7]. Colonial Education is totalising in the implied betterment and access to social mobility it produces. Lord Harris’, whose governance established The Board of Education within the Caribbean, stated “*that a race has been freed, but a society has not been formed*” [Besson, 10]. This implies that Education would further the colonies development post-slavery. Thus education was promoted as being symbolic of the Caribbean slave’s liberation. In India, the beginnings of colonial education in 1835 however exposed a rather more insidious element to imperial sanctioned learning. Macaulay’s ‘*Minute Upon Indian Education*’ rebutted the major educational reforms that insisted upon the retention of Sanskrit and Arabic within the classroom, alongside teaching the English language. In doing away with “*the whole native literature of India and Arabia*”, Macaulay’s aims would reinforce and ensure that the “*superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable*” [11, 394]. The colonial education system could produce a class of Indians who were Indian in blood but English in manners. For Macaulay, education’s main concern should not be that of enriching the colonial subject, as instead it could produce “*a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern*” [11, 359]. As such, for Rajan, Macaulay’s ‘*Minute*’ was an

example of a “*deliberate policy of an imperial power to redirect a subject people’s education in an attempt to influence their thought and self-understanding*” [12].

In a Caribbean context, Reddock argues that “*colonial education was not meant to liberate the colonized*” [5]. Similar to Macaulay’s visions, for Reddock the Caribbean colonial education also became a means of continued colonial oppression. Tantie forewarns Tee: “*remember you going there to learn [...] do’ let them put no blasted shit in yu head*” [6, 23]. This imperative and the verb ‘remember’, anticipates change and the forthcoming indoctrination. The separatist pronoun ‘them’ creates a division between colonial masters and colonial subjects. Taught colonial information differs from valid knowledge. Enforced nonsensical mental manipulation will thwart Tee’s expectation of ‘learning’ as a form of ‘resource development’.

Within the Caribbean colonial education system, social conditioning of colonial subjects replaces physical enslavement. Katrak claims that “*British colonial aggression consolidated itself with the chalk and the blackboard*” [13, 62]. Post-abolition colonial education continues domination and economic exploitation of the colony. Sparrow offers a corrective to the expectations of his “*days in school*” by exposing the ‘true’ nature of colonial education [7]. For instance, the adverb “*according*” and the conjunction “*but*” destabilise the perceived ‘respect’ provided by schooling. The simile “*they teach me like a fool*” and the metaphor “*ah should be ah block-headed mule*” implies that colonial education oppresses. He exclaims that “*Cutteridge wanted to keep us in ignorance!*” [7]. For Sparrow, the education system is a continued despotism of the British Empire as it seeks to “*keep me down*” in a way that is not so dissimilar to the colonized’s mistreatment during legalised slavery [7]. Dabydeen claims that colonial masters enacted their power through the assertion that “*blacks were ignorant*” [14, 29]. Sparrow’s ‘mule’-like status references the colonial “*war on black humanity*” [14, 6]. Quallen argues that slaves and animals were assigned the same “*natural order*” whereby the “*human-cattle comparison*” became the structuring metaphor of chattel slavery [15, 6 and 53]. In sustaining the ‘black’ Caribbean’s ‘ignorance’, colonial education becomes a mental form of re-enslavement.

Hodge’s militaristic language demonstrates the pupil’s inability to resist the rigid conformity colonial education dictates. Mr Hind is an analogue for ‘colonial aggression’. He considers his class his “*regiment*” [6, 28]. Hind is continually “*shouting*” imperatives such as “*orderly*” and “*threatening*” punishments when pupils are “*not standing properly at attention*” [6, 25 and 28]. As a colonial ruler, Mr Hinds indoctrinates using Eurocentric values that Sparrow’s calypso likewise receives in the form of “*lessons dey [...] sen’ from England*” [7]. Pupils become submissive to Mr Hind’s worshipful devotion to ensuring the children’s assimilation and immersion into the metropole. In particular, Mr Hinds enforces a “*daily endeavour to bring [pupils] to a state of reverence*” in “*sight of the greatest Englishman*”: Winston Churchill [6, 28]. Consequently, Tantie’s warning fails when Tee learns to privilege the English language and the coloniser’s values.

Tee’s unquestioning obedience means she appropriates the colonizer’s culture. In particular, she abandons her indigenous culture through language. Prior to school, whilst living with her “*loud*” creole aunt Tantie, Tee also uses her nation language [6, 4]. For

instance, in the same 'loud' manner of Tantie, Tee explains how "*then I heard my voice: 'Marche-Shoo!' I was hissing wildly*" [6, 17]. However, in reading English literature "books" at school, Tee begins to regard the colonial standards by which the world is measured [6, 67]. She states: "*my reading career [...] began with A for Apple, the exotic fruit*" [6, 27]. The adjective 'exotic' demonstrates how eurocentric logic disregards other cultures. Similarly, Tee derides the creole language when she learns about the "*Reality and Rightness, which were to be found Abroad*" [6, 67]. In learning that English provides the "*proper names*" and by extension linguistic framework, Tee demonstrates what Dale identifies as the effect of colonial literacy [6, 67]. Dale argues that when "*England is constructed as text and [...] therefore ultimately inviolable*", the colony becomes "*context*" and thus "*irrelevant*" [16, 131]. Consequently, Tee asserts to no longer say "*'washicong' for plimsoll*", and seeks only to move closer to the "*enviable normality*" of the Standard English language [6, 67].

The extent of Tee's indoctrination is evident when she communicates how literature "*transported you always into the familiar*" with its landscapes full of "*apple trees*" [6, 67]. The once unfamiliar 'apple' has become an ironic internalized reality. Tiffin claims that "*direct transfer of English material to the Caribbean context*" reduces the West Indian Child to "*a shameful aberration of that imperial norm*" [17, 46]. Tee's desire to "*catch up*" with the 'correct' cultural ideals and become distant from her "*niggeryness*", creates an imaginary friend [6, 105]. Her adopted double-consciousness embodies this 'imperial norm'. She explains; "*it must have been about in Third Standard that Helen came into existence*" [6, 67]. Valiant, defines the imagery friend as a "*defence mechanism*" for "*trauma*" involving a "*projection [of] subjective order to a disordered brain*" [18, 370]. Tee's 'disorder' derives from her internalised prejudices inherent in eurocentrism. She goes from deeming Helen "*my double*", to "*the Proper me*". Tee becomes the "*enviable*" Helen's "*shadow [,] hovering about in incompleteness*" [6, 67].

Eurocentrism as a "*superstructure*" of hegemony creates binary opposition [Martineau, 19, 331], establishing "*a rightside and a wrongside*" [6, 68]. For the West to be "*superior*", the East must remain inferior [Morris Blaut, 20, 7]. The noun 'shadow' connotes darkness and reveals Tee's implied subordination. Deemed "*too dark*", by her Aunt Beatrice, and told she must "*try harder*" to mimic the "*fair girls*" at school, Tee exists in an anglophile creole society who reinforce the legitimacy of the coloniser's views [6, 73]. Thus Helen is metonymic of the "*surrogate self*" Saakana claims that Britain created in the Caribbean "*personality*" [21, 10]. For Saakana, adopting colonial "*tastes*" leads to an "*artificial crisis*", where ethnic and cultural reality becomes replaced by the prescribed "*false sense of consciousness*" [21, 81]. Helen is "*the valid*" self [6, 68]. As such, Tee no longer identifies with "*those*" of her creole family in their "*unmistakable niggeryness*", nor with the 'Reality' of the imperialists [6, 105]. Colonial education, therefore, creates disturbing psychological liminality for its subjects. Mental exile occurs within their own culture, as well as continued marginalisation from the desired culture.

Fanon claims, "*to speak a language is to take on a world*" [22, 25]. However, Sparrow rebels against the assimilated "*unrecognizable*" reality colonial education instil in Tee [6, 99]. The calypso form to allow him to enact the assertion: "*dey wanted to keep me down [...] but didn't succeed*" [7]. The calypso is a "*subversive*" song providing "*a profound analysis of society*"

[Mulrain, 23, 167] and originates from the Picong slave song ridiculing colonial masters and their values. Singing becomes 'subversive' when Sparrow challenges the authority of the colonial education system. The first line whereby Sparrow shouts "*Captain!*" reflects the calypsonian trope Paquet calls the disruption of the "*status quo*" [24, xix]. The exclamative mode of address disrespects Cutteridge's position. Sparrow sings; "*there's a traitor on board*" [7]. Satire occurs through the nautical metaphor of 'on board'. Cutteridge is an Imperial Captain, not a sea Captain. Discourse control and imperatives such as "*examine the horn*", with its double entendre, render the colonial Cutteridge passive. Here, Sparrow is gate-keeper. Sparrow silences the 'colonial aggression' of those who historically dominate territorially and linguistically. Deeming himself a 'traitor', Sparrow's calypso becomes an oral counter-discourse. Acquiring language of the coloniser is a form of implied suppression. Bhabha argues that the colonial's "*desire for a reformed, recognizable other*" limits the extent of assimilation through language [25, 126]. Cutteridge's selection of "*poems*" seek to make "*dunce[s]*" out of the colonial pupils [7]. Teaching lessons from 'England' allow colonials to 'keep' their enforced 'superiority'.

Sparrow uses enforced colonial discourse to foreground the inadequacies of the English language syllabus. Lorde claims "*the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*" [26, 1]. However, Achebe contends Lorde's implied impossibility of using colonially imposed linguistic frameworks to counter colonial authority. Achebe asserts: "*I have been given the [English] language and I intend to use it*" [27, 62]. Sparrow belongs to the same subject position as Achebe when he mocks the colonial education's irrelevance. The non-referential creole expression "*an-ting*" connotes uselessness [7]. Learning though nursery-rhymes about "*Humpty-Dumpty*" and "*Tom de piper's son*" is inane [7]. In the same way that Naipaul's protagonist Mr Biswas considers English literature to be "*irrelevant to his situation*" [28,175], rhetorical questions such as "*who cares about [...] Gulliver?*" renders "*wey dey teach yuh*", extraneous [7]. Colonial education "*cultivate[s] comedians*"; not the informed pupil [7]. Therefore colonial education is miseducation.

Retention of creole expression is an example of cultural reclamation. In hybridising the learnt colonizer's language with nation language, Sparrow resists being made 'context'. Sparrow makes Caribbean linguistic frameworks relevant through utterances such as "*an*", "*de*" and "*dis*" [7]. The disorientating and nonsensical (to the non-creole speaker), "*wepsee mama!*" foregrounds the survival of Caribbean oral culture. In enforcing Eurocentric norms, the coloniser dehistoricizes the culture of their subjects; concluding that they have "*no literature*" [4, 32]. Singing ridicules the coloniser's ignorance of how "*oral tradition [...] survived the ravages of man [and] the Middle passage*" [4, 32]. Singing derides Cutteridge by highlighting his folly. The so-called "*plenty [...] advanced*" Cutteridge overlooks how the Afro-Caribbean tradition of the calypso is still relevant [7]. Thus, colonial justification of enforced cultural norms derives from error and "*stupidness*". Sparrow is able to lyrically "*write back*" [Ashcroft, 29, 6] to the empire's "*lie [...] of having successfully wiped out Afro-Caribbean cultures from their roots in Africa*" [24, xix]. The calypso is a 'cultural weapon' that Sparrow uses to counter and diminish the values that colonial education instils.

To conclude, colonial education ultimately seeks to oppress the colonial subject in each text. Institutionalised indoctrination is an extension of colonial dominance; denying colonial subjects autonomy by replacing aggression during slavery with manipulative devaluation. Tee succumbs to the 'shame' Caribbean postcolonial critics argue that colonial education places upon non-European identity. Sparrow remains insubordinate. The calypso becomes his counter-discourse. Reclaiming afro-Caribbean oral culture deconstructs the foundational basis for colonial education. Tee suffers from a psychologically trauma Sparrow identifies as the Eurocentric folly that defines European ideals are the only relevant centre of cultural value.

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