

AFRO-CARIBBEAN WOMEN WRITERS AND THE LITERARY EXPERIENCE: OTHERING AS SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE IN MERLE HODGE'S CRICK CRACK MONKEY

Norma Diana Hamilton*¹

Cristina Stevens*²

RESUMO: *Este artigo discute a questão da violência simbólica contra o sujeito feminino negro devido ao posicionamento como 'Outro' na cultura europeia dominante, conforme representado no romance Crick Crack Monkey (1970) de Merle Hodge. Os assuntos abordados – não necessariamente nessa ordem –, incluem: a maneira como as escritoras afro-caribenhas utilizam a literatura como contra-discurso para expor e denunciar a violência psicológica que sofrem as meninas negras pobres; a forma em que elas empregam esse dispositivo para resgatar identidades positivas das mulheres afro-caribenhas, tendo em vista que, na literatura tradicional, estas mulheres foram estereotipadas como inferiores, e estigmatizadas como um todo homogêneo, ignorando a diversidade e complexidade dos inúmeros grupos e indivíduos que compõem este todo; e, por último, o modo em que a produção literária feminina afro-caribenha se distingue das concepções normativas do literário, para articular as culturas e experiências híbridas das mulheres negras na diáspora caribenha.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Othering, Violência Simbólica, Narrativa Feminina Afro-Caribenha, Diáspora Caribenha, A Língua Inglesa*

ABSTRACT: *The aim of this essay is to discuss the issue of symbolic violence against the black feminine subject, resulting from the process of 'Othering' in the European dominant culture as represented in Merle Hodge's Crick Crack Monkey. We seek to deal with topics such as: the mode by which Black Caribbean writers use literature as a counter-discursive device for exposing and speaking out against the abusive psychological experiences suffered by black girls; the manner whereby literature is used by them to recuperate positive identities of Black Caribbean women, given that it was a tool for inscribing these women as the subordinate 'Other' in traditional literature; the ways in which the post-colonial narrative of Black Caribbean women writers distinguish itself from the normative conceptions of the literary aesthetics, to articulate the diverse hybrid experiences and cultures of black women in the Caribbean diaspora.*

KEY-WORDS: *Othering, Symbolic Violence, Caribbean Female Post-colonial Narrative, Black Diaspora, the English Language*

¹ Doutoranda em Teoria Literária e Literaturas na Universidade de Brasília (UnB).

² Professora de Teoria Literária e Literaturas na Universidade de Brasília (UnB).

This article contributes to the ongoing discussion on the representation of symbolic violence against black girls, due to the process of Othering by the European dominant culture, as presented in the Afro-Caribbean female narrative. The core questions it deals with are: how do Black Caribbean writers use literature as a counter-discursive practice for exposing and speaking out against the abusive psychological experiences suffered by black girls? How is literature used by them to recuperate positive identities of Black Caribbean women, given that it was a tool for inscribing these women as the subordinate Other in traditional literature? How does the post-colonial narrative of Black Caribbean women writers distinguish itself from the normative conceptions of the literary aesthetics to articulate the diverse hybrid experiences and cultures of black women in the Caribbean diaspora?

Afro-Caribbean scholar Sylvia Wynter (1990) addresses the question of race/racial difference, explaining that with Western Europe's expansion into the New World, and with its phenomenal transformation from political, economic, cultural and religious systems of legitimation, the colonization of the New World peoples was to be grounded on the secular concept of the "non-rational" inferior "nature" of the peoples to be ruled over. For the first time, humans were not only classified in male/female gender groups as previously done in the symbolic sphere of traditional orders, but also by the principle of difference now based on "humans" and their physiognomic "other", the "natives" – and in the most "primal" forms, "niggers" (WYNTER, 1990, p. 359). This physiognomic model, which is based primarily on color, and which appeared with the advent of slavery, is still in place today. It describes analogical behavioral relations of dominance/subordination, activity/passivity, human populations/geographical races, cultures and so forth.

Post-colonial scholars such as Gayatri Spivak (1987) and Homi Bhabha (1984b) also contend that Othering involves the positioning of the colonized subject as different and subordinate to the colonizer, and that it is a complex process as it is based on the principle of sameness and difference. In order to maintain its authority, the dominant discourse seeks to construct the Other as extremely different from itself. However, at the same time, it has to maintain an identity that is sufficiently similar with the Other, in order to validate control over it. The Other can only be constructed from the *self* – yet the self must also express the Other as contrastingly different – in an ungoing process of repetition and displacement (BHABHA, 1984b).

Stuart Hall points out that in the Caribbean colonial experience, black people and their experiences were positioned as Other in the dominant regimes of representation through a critical exercise of European cultural power and normalization. Not only were they defined as different within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes, the colonizer had the power to make them see and experience their lives as Other. The

subjecting of the colonial subaltern to subordination, or, in other words, making him/her reproduce the sentiment of inferiority, relates to the way in which he/she will react towards the colonizer and to their subaltern counterparts. Having the colonizer's gaze inscribed into his/her mind, it is difficult for the colonized to construct his/her 'true' self. This can be seen as a form of symbolic violence, as it constitutes the imposition of the values of the colonizer on the colonized, which may result in a renunciation of the self and of one's cultural identity – believed to be of less value –, and the aspiration to become similar to the 'superior' other.

However, as Hall highlights, "it is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that 'knowledge', not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, by the power of inner compulsion and subjective con-formation to the norm" (2006, p. 436). In other words, while the colonizer may think he has the power to construct a colonized people as Other, and to submit them to diverse forms of oppression, a certain kind of resistance on the part of these people has always existed. This nature of resistance was evident among Caribbean slaves in general, and especially among black female slaves – such as Nanny of the Maroons³ –, who never gave in to the physical and psychological violence imposed by the colonizer.

Caribbean feminist epistemology has shown that in traditional historical texts and literary representations, the black female subject was represented in inferior, homogeneous and stereotypical terms. According to the Jamaican feminist historian Verene Shepherd (1995; p. xiii), historical and literary texts published in the 18th and 19th century, generally recorded black female slaves as unattractive, vulgar, lazy, and in need of the 'civilizing process' of slavery. This form of representation was a powerful way in which black females were Othered in relation to white European women and men. Shepherd explains that such discourse worked in favor of the ideology of slavery with the objective of discouraging the struggle for emancipation.

It is convenient to point out here, that while both male and female black people were constructed as different and inferior, as a consequence of the brutality of slavery, black women have faced a kind of dual oppression: not only were they subordinated by the colonizer, but also by black men. As we discuss elsewhere, due to their position at the lowest level on the social hierarchy, black women's reality in relation to violence was, and may still be, more critical than that of any other social group. This is depicted in Toni Morrison's novel *Bluest Eye*, where Pecola – a young black girl that is on the verge of entering puberty – suffers all sorts of physical and psychological violence, because of the racist and patriarchal society in which she lives. The suffering she faces is further aggravated by her father, a black man, who rapes her and forces her into silence. It is

³ Jamaican run-away slaves who negotiated their freedom with slave masters.

worth it to highlight that the story is far from stereotyping or homogenizing the American black family, as specific events in Pecola's father's life, which lead up to the cruel act against his daughter are carefully delineated.

Post-colonial Caribbean women writers have sought to re-present black females, inscribing them as heterogeneous subjects with diverse and complex experiences. One significant early Caribbean female voice is that of Trinidadian-born Merle Hodge, who has generated important discussions about the Black female context and conditions in the Caribbean diaspora. Hodge is considered as part of the first new generation of Caribbean women writers, who expanded the work of pioneers such as Jean Rhys and Paule Marshall, to begin a new phase in Caribbean women's literature in the 1970s and 1980s. Hodge's first novel *Crick Crack Monkey* (1970), a *bildungsroman* that not only marks the coming-of-age of the protagonist – Tee, but also of post-war Trinidad and Tobago, on the move towards independence. The story is set in the 1950s in a colonial hybrid social context, where there is the presence and interaction of not only the European planter and African slave cultures, but also that of the Indo-Caribbean peoples who had immigrated as indentured workers, as of the end of the 19th century.

In the novel, Tee, an afro-indo-Caribbean teenager, is caught at the crossroads of all three cultures and as a result, develops a feeling of unbelonging, estrangement and ambivalence towards them. The term “ambivalence” is used by Bhabha (1984b) to refer to the sentiment of “unhomeliness” felt by a colonized subject who, inserted into a mix of different cultures – that of the colonizer and the colonized –, develops an uncertainty as to which culture he/she belongs to. He/she experiences a fluctuating feeling between desiring the culture of the colonizer and, at the same time, repudiating it. In other words, there is a complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, as it is characterized by a mixture of attraction and repulsion. Ambivalence does not propose that some colonized subjects are accomplices of the culture of the colonizer while others are resistant to it. Instead, the term suggests that complicity and resistance are imbedded within each colonized subject in a wavering relationship (BHABHA, 1984b). This is the case of Tee, who displays both desire and repulsion towards the European planter culture. Seeming to develop a feeling of inferiority and seeing herself as Other, it is difficult for her to define a self and a ‘uniformed’ hybrid identity. In spite of that, however, she demonstrates an attitude of critical analysis towards her oppressive social context, an attitude that helps her to resist – in her own way – the psychological colonization imposed, as will be discussed further.

Black Caribbean female narrative strategies as resistance

Caribbean literary critics Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Fido (1990) state that afro-Caribbean female writers have sought to move away from the linear phallogentric European form of the male text to engage in the process of radical re-vision and re-definition of the female literary narrative. This can be seen as an act of resistance, as it constitutes a move away from normative conceptions of the literary aesthetics. As the Jamaican-American writer Michelle Cliff points out in her essay “A Journey into Speech”,

To write as a complete Caribbean woman, or man for that matter, demands of us retracing the African part of ourselves, reclaiming as our own, and as our subject, a history sunk under the sea, or scattered as potash in the canefields, or gone to bush, or trapped in a class system notable for its rigidity and absolute dependence on our colour stratification. On a past bleached from our minds. It means finding the art forms of these of our ancestors and speaking in the patois forbidden us. It means realizing our knowledge will always be wanting. It means also I think, mixing in the forms taught us by the oppressor, undermining his language and co-opting his style, and turning it to our purpose (1985, p.14).

Brazilian feminist literary critics have used the term “anthropophagy” or “cannibalism” in reference to the discursive strategy found in Brazilian female fiction. This concept, seen as a cultural metaphor for answering back – or resisting and reformulating – the European normative conceptions of the literary aesthetics, was revisited by Brazilian modernist writers at the beginning of the twentieth century. As the term itself suggests, it involves the “devouring” of parts or categories of the European narrative mode to form a new, mixed, critical narrative discourse (FEREIRA DE ALMEIDA, 2002). This strategy has enabled Brazilian female writers to articulate the perspective from which they write, speaking out against the various forms of gender oppression in that society.

This “cannibalistic” form of writing is also evident among Afro-Caribbean women writers. They have experimented with the eclectic, fragmented mode of narration in which prose, poetry, letters, and female history compose the narrative voice. For instance, Michelle Cliff’s prose-poetry *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* (1980) is an example of this form, in which she displays a “cataloguing of experience, a selection of images; a setting down of memories as they flow into the consciousness, all with the female self as center” (DAVIES; FIDO, 1990; 5). It explores landscape, history, family, events, places, as well as the feelings of displacement and confusion of a light-skinned Jamaican girl, Clare, who struggles to define her identity in a hybrid social context. The text converges personal history, family history and a people’s history, in which the

Jamaican nature and landscape commune with the self. As Clare asserts, “Airplane shadows moved across the mountains, leaving me to clear rivers, dancing birds, sweet fruits. Sitting on a river rock my legs dangle in the water. I am twelve and solitary” (CLIFF, 1980, p. 24).

The fragmented narrative mode allows for an articulation of the diverse hybrid experiences and cultures of black peoples, and specifically, black women in the Caribbean diaspora. The expression of the hybrid experience brings with it the potential for contesting and resisting the dominant discourse as it makes possible the development of plural identities, thus fostering the development of cultural models for change. In the novel *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), also by Michelle Cliff, we now see Clare as a young woman who is both white and black, a scholar and a farmer, fighting to reclaim her cultural heritage and identity: “She is the woman who has reclaimed her grandmother’s land. She is white. Black. Female. Lover. Beloved. Daughter. Traveler. Friend. Scholar. Terrorist. Farmer” (CLIFF, 1987, p. 91).

Other narrative modes used by Caribbean female writers are the “quilted” and the “storytelling” forms. The narrative quilting relates to the construction of a text through the weaving of selected bits of narrative – song, conversation, slogan, proverb, canonical text, and so on. The American literary scholar and feminist Nancy Miller uses the term “Arachnology” in her essay “Arachnologies: The Woman, The Text and the Critic”, to refer to the interpretation of women’s stories that “deploy[s] the interwoven structures of power, gender, and identity inherent in the production of mimetic art” (1986, p. 272). It is her view that the weaving narrative structure represents the collaboration of women who are united by the suffering they face. Quilting proposes that there is an individuality in each experience, but at the same time, that there is unity among these women.

Like the fragmented mode of narration, the narrative quilting in Afro-Caribbean women’s writing allows for the articulation of hybrid experiences. In *Crick Crack Monkey*, Hodge makes use of songs and proverbs in the English Creole⁴ inserted in traditional forms of narration, as a way of illustrating a hybrid culture that is characteristic of the Caribbean. This is evident in the flow of the narration below, in which Eudora, Tee’s aunt’s maid sings, as a way of expressing her pain:

Eudora always looked as though she was on the point of crying. She went about singing in a mournful voice the chorus

Do’ pass dey
do’ pass dey
yu go get big-belly (p. 35).

⁴ Hybrid dialects originated from the mixing of African languages of the slaves, Indian languages of the Indo-Caribbean people and the European languages of the plantation owners.

It can be said that the quilting strategy in this novel is representative of Tee's attempt to construct the self – a construction that leads to disintegration, as will be seen further.

In the storytelling narrative strategy, the text becomes a collective story, as well as a central metaphor, which makes it possible to tell oral history through generations (DAVIES; FIDO, 1990; 6). This is also seen in *Crick Crack Monkey*, where Tee's grandmother tells her grandchildren – other than *nancy*⁵ tales – stories about black women, specifically about Tee's great-great-grandmother. In the following excerpt from the novel, Tee asserts that her grandmother, whom she calls “Ma”, says that she is becoming like her great-great-grandmother:

Ma said that I was her grandmother come back again. She said her grandmother was a tall straight proud woman who lived to an old age and her eyes were still bright like water and her back straight like bamboo, for all the heavy-load she had carried on her head all her life (HODGE, 1970, p.19).

It is convenient to point out here that the narrative voice in this novel is multiple. Even though Tee is the main narrator, her feelings and thoughts are further described at times by an omniscient narrator. The inclusion of a third person omniscient narrator is important for the enhancement of the narrative points of view (MORAES LEITE, 1997). In continuation to the previous excerpt about Tee becoming like her great-great-grandmother, the omniscient narrator adds that,

Tee was growing into [Ma's] grandmother again [...]. They'd never bent down her spirit and she would come back and come back and come back; if only [Ma] could live to see Tee grow into her tall proud straight grandmother (p. 19).

An exploration of a matrifocal ancestry by the storytelling mode is recurrent in the afro-Caribbean female narrative. It enables an inscribing of stories in history about powerful and resilient Black women – like Tee's “straight proud great-great-grandmother” –, and functions as a way of recuperating their positive identities, given that in traditional narratives, they are neglected or stigmatized. It is used as a way of giving value to the strength of these women and of showing that their perseverance will survive through generations of Black women, who will continuously struggle against the oppression they face in patriarchal racist societies.

⁵ African stories surrounding a spider called “Anancy”, stories which normally have a message.

The Brazilian researchers Cristina Stevens and Vânia Vasconcelos highlight the importance of the oral tradition in African diasporic cultures. They state that in the Brazilian context, it is a means by which afro-Brazilians have been able to recuperate and make visible – in the Brazilian culture – a little of what was lost in the process of silencing and neglecting of the African contribution in Brazilian history. “Recapturing memory through oral tradition brings hidden narratives to the surface, as well as new critical approaches to the present. It is as such that narratives fulfill the role of recuperating the self-esteem of a people” (STEVENS;VASCONCELOS, 2011, p. 82).

Similar to the afro-Brazilian context, the oral tradition among afro-Caribbean peoples has played a major role in recuperating positive cultural identities. This is especially evident in black female narratives that seek to recover the memory of Black women.

Finally, Afro-Caribbean female writers have experimented with the textual emplotment, which is the arrangement of a series of historical events in one narrative plot, merging the use of the fragmented, quilted and storytelling narrative strategies. Michelle Cliff’s novel *Abeng* (1985) is an example of this kind of exploration into history, place and self. The young girl Clare is caught between two worlds, that of her mother’s afro-Caribbean history and cultural heritage, and that of her father’s identification with the European colonizer culture. Clare’s story is intertwined with historical accounts of the Maroon warrior Nanny – and that of other persevering Black women –, family history and colonial history, as she attempts to define a self and an identity that is in the process of becoming. Thus, the emplotment strategy also allows for the exploration of hybrid experiences and cultures of Black women in the Caribbean diaspora, as well as the inscribing of these women into history by telling their stories. In the following extract from *Abeng*, Cliff shows how history is told to serve the colonizer’s purpose. She seeks to interrupt this official narrative of history and reveal a little of what is neglected, regarding resilient slaves, such as Nanny and the Maroons. The third person narrator states that at school, Clare is taught history from the point of view of the Commonwealth:

Clare had been taught at St. Catherine School for Girls that Jamaica had been a slave society. The white mistresses hastened to say that England was the first country to free its slaves. [...] She knew that there had been Maroons, and that many of them still existed in the towns of the Cockpit Country. But she learned that these towns had been a gift from England in compensation for slavery. Slaves mixed with pirates. Revolution in reward. And a sense of history was lost in romance. This history was slight compared to history of the Empire. The politics of freed-men paled beside the politics of commonwealth (1985, p. 30).

The phrases “a sense of history was lost in romance”, “This history was slight compared to history of the Empire” and “The politics of freed-men paled” emphasize the neglecting of Black people’s contribution in history in Western hegemonic discourses.

Language as a deconstructive strategy in Black Caribbean women’s narrative

Apart from the use of alternative narrative strategies, Black Caribbean women writers have constructed a resistance to normative conceptions of the literary aesthetics through their usage of language.

In former British West Indian colonies such as Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, Standard English was, and continues to be, the language of education and of all official transactions. Even though fewer people adapt it, in the sense that new “Englishes” are spoken in India, Africa, the Caribbean, etc., it is still imposed as a normative language. In the revolutionary years, Caribbean slaves were prohibited from writing in other languages or dialects. In fact, only in recent decades, *literature* – which was synonymous with English/British literature in the Caribbean context – came to mean literatures also written in other languages or dialects.

Caribbean writers in general use their dual linguistic heritage – that is, Standard English and Creoles – in their novels as a strategy of deconstruction and decolonization. As Ashcroft et al (2002) point out, in general post-colonial writing, there are two specific processes that involve the use of the language of the colonizer: abrogation and appropriation. The first refers to the rejection of the ‘authority’ of the colonizer over the means of communication. It is the refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetics, and its supposition of the correct use of normative grammar, as well as fixed meanings. The second term relates to the process of recapturing and reformulating the uses of the language of the colonizer to express diverse and different cultural experiences. Thus, abrogation and appropriation can be understood as means of decolonizing and deconstructing traditional ways of thinking about the English language, and its usage.

Language has been an important tool used by Black Caribbean female writers as a form of resistance. It can be said that there is an ambiguous relationship between the English language and Black women from the Anglophone Caribbean because, while it is the language they are taught at school as their official language, it is also the language through which they have been subordinated and Othered by the colonizer. However, Caribbean female writers have sought to transform the use of this language for the struggle against the oppression and silencing of black women. The use of English and its dialectic counterpart in their narratives negotiates the gap between the culture of the colonizer and that of the colonized to construct difference and separation from the

metropolitan norm, finding grounds on the negation of essentialist suppositions. The dual linguistic heritage has been used by these writers to criticize and reverse the silence of the colonized subject, as well as to express a cross-cultural heterogeneous diasporic identity.

In *Crick Crack Monkey* for instance, there is a continuous juxtaposition of Standard English and Creole. This not only occurs within character dialogues but also within the narration:

Tantie raged all evening. An' she had a mind not to give us anything to eat because allyu belly must be done full wid that bitch ice-cream and sweetie. She raged and rampaged with no indication of subsiding, [...] She reiterated for the hundredth time what could have happened to us: we had jus' nearly get we arse kidnap' (HODGE, 1970, p. 12).

The mixture of Standard English and Creole, as used here, depicts Tantie's emotional state of mind. She is anxious and hurt that the children had had a good time with their Aunt Beatrice, from who she tries to protect them. Beatrice is a mixed race woman from the upper middle class, who has rejected and belittles her afro-Indian cultural heritage. She wishes to instill the European cultural values in Tee and her brother Toddan, the reason for which Tantie seeks to keep them apart.

The juxtaposition of Standard English and Creole also represents an overlap of identities, which is characteristic of the Caribbean social environment, where Standard English is often associated with the upper and middle classes, and Creoles are said to be the language of the subordinate lower classes, the Other. Tantie uses only Creole and this can be understood as an affirmation of her African cultural heritage. She represents the voice of resistance to the psychological colonization imposed by the European culture. Aunt Beatrice on the other hand, desires to speak only Standard English, and she is mocked at times when she pronounces some words incorrectly due to her exaggeration, ends up sounding ridiculous. Beatrice encourages Tee to speak only Standard English, "remember to speak nicely" (HODGE, 1970, p. 74), as she is aware that their usage of language portrays a certain identity, that of the colonizer nation, which she intends to maintain, since she considers it superior.

Violence and othering in *Crick Crack Monkey*

In *Crick Crack Monkey*, Hodge seeks to illustrate the psychological damage done to a colonized people who must face the imposition of the colonizer's culture and values, which seek to subordinate them as Other. Inserted into this context, Tee – a child who is in the process of becoming a young adult, is greatly affected. In the first few chapters of

the novel, the reader is introduced to the rural life in Tee's village, Santa Clara, where 'coolies⁶ and niggers' live in harmony. In this diasporic hybrid culture, people dress simply, speak the English Creole, have Indian cultural food such as *polorie*, *anchar* and *roti*, adults tell children *nancy-stories*, and so on. Tee's early years are filled with moments of amusement, aggression and warmth, growing up in her Aunt Rosa's (whom she calls Tantie) world.

Initially, Tantie is presented as vulgar and raucous by Tee the narrator. She says: "Tantie's company was loud and hilarious and the intermittent squawk and flurry of mirth made me think of the fowl-run when something fell into the midst of the fat hens" (HODGE, 1970, p. 4). As the story unfolds, the reader realizes that Tantie is the cornerstone in her family, who goes the extra mile to protect Tee and her brother, keeps everybody together and in line, and who is respected by others. She represents the image of the positive matriarch. Despite her stern and rigid personality, she is loving and affectionate with the children under her care.

Tantie is an important character in the novel because she seems to be the only one who is aware of, and willing to fight against the oppression suffered due to class, racial and cultural distinctions that exist in their world. She is conscious of the power and influence of the European culture in making one resent their cultural origin and heritage. Thus, while the other characters idealize England as the "Land of Hope and Glory" (idem, p. 30), she is skeptical about sending Tee and her brother there to live with their father. In her view, "abroad" is no better than her country: "[...] it ain' have no blasted Heaven here but it ain' have that no-whe' [...] any damn place yu is you does have to haul yu arse out the bed when the mornin' come; [...]"⁷ (idem, p. 64).

Tantie worries that as the children grow up, they may learn to resent their roots and upbringing, due to the psychological influence of the colonizer's values. For this reason, she fights to keep them under her custody, instead of turning them over to their Aunt Beatrice, whose lifestyle can be described as an imitation of the colonizer's culture, as will be discussed further.

When Tee goes off to school for the first time, Tantie warns her not to become manipulated by the knowledge given: "[...] jus' you remember you going there to learn *book* do' let them put no blasted shit in yu head" (HODGE, 1970, p. 23). At this stage, Tee is too young to understand the weight of her aunt's words. Tantie's perspective reminds us of Bourdieu's and Passeron's (2009) conception of symbolic violence, which indicates that the dominated other may generate his/her own destruction by accepting,

⁶ Common word used for Indo-Caribbean peoples. It may be considered offensive when used in certain situations.

⁷ "There is no blasted Heaven here, but Heaven does not exist anywhere [...] anywhere you are, you have to get up out of bed when morning comes".

internalizing and reproducing the dominant social practices that suggest that the values of the white subject are naturally superior.

According to Tantie's prediction, at school, the students are bombarded with diverse ideological images that are representative of England, the "Mother country". There is a portrait of Winston Churchill⁸ at the front of Tee's classroom, which teachers point at to bring the students to "a state of reverence" (HODGE, 1970, p. 24). The cultural knowledge they are exposed to in the didactic material such as the "Caribbean Reader", does not relate to their reality. They are taught words like "haystack"; told stories about "little Miss Muffet"; and they must say "'A' for Apple" (idem, p. 25). They have to recite the pledge "Children of the Empire Ye are Brothers All", or sing "God Save the King" and "Land of Hope and Glory", without "batting an eyelid or twitching a finger when they honor" and pay allegiance to the "Mother Country" (idem, p. 26).

Due to the kind of books Tee is exposed to at her tender age, she appears to develop the belief that they contain the real world, while her world seems inferior. This is seen in chapter 13, where she says,

Books transported you always into the familiar solidity of chimneys and apple trees, the enviable normality of real Girls and Boys who went sleighing and built snowmen, ate potatoes not rice, went about in socks and shoes from morning until night and called things by their proper names, [...] Books transported you always into Reality and Rightness, which were to be found Abroad (idem, p. 61).

The expressions "normality of real Girls" and "shadow hovering" suggest – at first glance – that Tee appears to consider herself and her world as counterfeit, inauthentic, that is, an imitation of the colonizer's world, the 'Real' world. It seems that she begins to see herself as Other, reproducing a kind of psychological subordination, which she is exposed to at school and by the books she reads. Further on in the narrative, she compares herself to a white girl Helen, whom she had read about, stating that "She [Helen] was the Proper Me. And me, I was her shadow hovering about in incompleteness" (idem, p. 62).

Nevertheless, by taking a closer look at the extract, we realize that Tee is being critical, as she contemplates on the way that her world is positioned as Other and inferior by the culture she discovers in books, the colonizer's culture. This critical attitude is more evident in the continuation of her reflection, as seen below:

For doubleness, or this particular kind of doubleness, was a thing to be taken for granted. [...] Just as there was a way you spoke and a way you wrote, so there was the daily existence which you led, which of course amounted only to marking time and makeshift, for there was the Proper daily round, not necessarily more agreeable, simply the valid one, the

⁸ Churchill was an officer in the British Army, who became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1940-1955.

course of which encompassed things like warming yourself before a fire and having tea at four o' clock; there were the human types who were your neighbors and guardians and playmates – but you were all marginal together, for their were the beings whose validity loomed at you out of every book, every picture [...], the beings whose exemplary aspect it was that shone forth to recommend at you every commodity proposed to your daily preference, from macaroni to the Kingdom of Heaven (HODGE, 1970, p. 62).

The words “doubleness”, “Proper”, “valid”, “types”, “marginal” show us that Tee is weighing the differences between both worlds, and the way in which her world is devalued and marginalized. The phrase “loomed at you” suggests that there is an ever present gaze of the colonizer, which dictates the choices to be made by the colonized, from decisions relating to their finances and economy (“commodity”), food (“macaroni”) to their religion (“Kingdom of heaven”). In contemplating on these issues, Tee seeks to understand her feelings towards the ideas imposed on her that cause her to see her world as inferior. This process of reflection can be understood as an important part of her psychological growth and maturation. By critically analyzing the “doubleness” that her reality offers, she is starting the process of defining her *self* and an identity.

At the end of chapter 13, she says, “Helen was outgrown and discarded somewhere, in the way that a baby ceases to be taken up with his fingers and toes” (idem, p. 62). The words “outgrown” and “discarded somewhere” means that Tee has overcome – at least for now – the negative feelings of seeing her world as inferior and inauthentic, feelings that were brought about by the imposing force of the colonizer’s culture. The metaphor from the extract, “the way that a baby ceases to be taken up with his fingers and toes”, suggests that Tee now sees Helen and her world as the artificial and unreal one, which is restricted to the reality of books.

However, Tee’s dilemma is not resolved for good here. She is further bombarded with the culture and values of the colonizer when she goes to live with her Aunt Beatrice. Beatrice dictates that she must learn new habits such as speaking ‘proper’ English, using appropriate utensils at meals, participating in Catholic mass, taking extracurricular activities such as ballet, and so on. At the same time, she is expected to renounce her old customs and habits such as eating “coolie food” (idem, p. 107), wearing “niggery – looking dress[es]” (idem, p. 77), and “all manner of *ordinry* nastiness” (idem, p. 106). Aunt Beatrice is determined to turn her into a lady, what she termed as “hauling” Tee out of her “ordinaryness” and her “niggeryness” (idem, p. 95). Naturally, Tee’s sentiment of being Other is heightened, as her former way of life and customs, the things she felt nostalgia for, were now turned into something – not only inferior, but also grotesque and repudiable. When she accompanies Aunt Beatrice to mass, she feels out of place: “[...] the whole atmosphere seemed to be one of reproof, of trial; it was as if the whole church,

people and building, were coldly regarding me, waiting to pull me up when I fell out of line” (idem, p. 78). Tee’s comment here does not suggest defeat, but that she maintains a critical attitude, as she seeks to analyze her situation. Her use of the words “reproof”, “trial” and “fell out of line” indicates that she sees this as a psychological test that she must undergo.

Her “trial” is heightened daily because, apart from Aunt Beatrice’s condescending behavior towards her, Tee must face the despise and disrespect of her daughters, Carol, Bernadette and Jessica, who introduce Tee to their friends as “some lil relative Mommer found up in the country” (idem, p. 81). They ignore and avoid her both at home and at school, not allowing Tee to become part of their social groups.

To make matters worse, Tee also faces the color and class prejudice of her teacher Mrs. Wattman, who pays more attention to the lighter skin girls from the upper middle class. Without ever really attempting to get to know Tee, she tells her, “You are one of those who will not get very far” (idem, p. 98).

Tee also faces discrimination against her skin color at home. Aunt Beatrice tells her that she got her dark skin tone and facial features from her father – a black man – and not from her mother Elizabeth, which is Beatrice’s mixed race sister. In Tee’s narration about the matter, she articulates Beatrice’s remorse regarding Tee’s physical features:

“If it hadn’t been for him”, she reflected mournfully, “you might have looked like her”.

“It was the Grandparents’ fault, too, they were low-class people and had no idea about anything. Elizabeth was such a beautiful little girl [...]” (HODGE, 1970, p. 81).

The reader is able to perceive a tone of sarcasm in Tee’s voice as she relates Beatrice’s “mournful” regret about her outcome. This sarcasm is further noted when Tee says, “I began to have the impression that I should be thoroughly ashamed; for it seemed to me that my person must represent the rock-bottom of the family’s fall from grace” (idem, p. 82). Tee’s sarcasm shows that she is aware that all the oppressive events in her life make up a trial of a psychological test of resistance that she must face, even though she might not understand this process in these terms as yet, since she is still a child.

It is also important to point out that this test is not at all easy for Tee and that she does not rise from each trial unaffected. For instance, at one moment, she reaches a point where she is overcome by the psychological violence faced and desires to be transformed:

“I wanted to shrink, to disappear. [...] I felt that the very sight of me was an affront to common decency. I wished that my body could shrivel up and fall away, that I could step out new and acceptable” (idem, p. 97). At this point, she feels reduced in the colonizer’s gaze, and is aware that if she were different, she would be treated differently

by Aunt Beatrice, by her teacher and classmates. Her life would be easier if she became acceptable in the colonizer's culture. She says that,

At times I resented Tantie bitterly for not having let Auntie Beatrice get us in the first place and bring us up properly. [...] how could a woman with no sense of right and wrong take it upon herself to bring up children [...]. And I was ashamed and distressed to find myself thinking of Tantie in this way (idem, p. 97).

Her last sentence in the extract shows the reader that she does not completely reject Tantie and her upbringing, because she expresses a certain remorse in relation to her negative feelings. The words "ashamed" and "distressed" refer to Tee's profound reflection over her situation. She now feels embarrassed about her local culture and habits, such as eating "greasy" Indian food, seeing her grandmother sell jam and other home-made products in the market, going to carnival in an old truck with Tantie, and so on: "All this I was seeing again through a kind of haze of shame; and I reflected that even now Tantie and Toddan must be packed into that ridiculous truck with all those common raucous niggery people and all those coolies" (idem, p. 86). Here it is evident that Tee has acquired the lens of the European culture, through which she now criticizes her local culture. However, the term "haze of shame" gives the idea that Tee's new point of view is not at all complete or permanent.

When Tee's move to England is confirmed, she perceives an immediate change in the way she is treated at home and at school. Beatrice throws a go-away party for her; Bernadette introduces her to friends for the first time as "a first cousin" (idem, p. 109); her teacher Mrs. Wattman greets her for the first time, telling her, "What a lucky girl you are [...]" (HODGE, 1970, p. 110), and so on. The reaction Tee receives confirms her suspicion of their hypocritical way of life, which is quite different from that of Tantie's world.

It should be noted then, that even though Tee questions her upbringing with Tantie, she certainly does not fully embrace the culture that Aunt Beatrice tries to impose on her. In fact, she displays a strong critical and analytical voice towards Beatrice's way of life, as we have seen so far. Accordingly, it can be said that she develops a sentiment of ambivalence, as she demonstrates a certain desire, and at the same time, a loathing for both Tantie's and Beatrice's world. This points to her unresolved feelings about the self, which is now fragmented, as she is unable at this moment to define and affirm a "unified" hybrid personality.

In the final chapter, Tee dreams of going home to her grand-mother, which is representative of her desire to return to her roots. She says, "Ma would surely welcome me with bursting joy" (idem, p. 109). But she realizes that such a return to her childhood innocence is impossible.

When Tee visits Tantie just before leaving for England, she feels regretful about not coming earlier, especially to see her grand-mother, who had passed away during this time. She states that she felt “a ton of bricks on my head, that Ma had been asking for Tee, Tee [...]” (idem, p. 110). She is conscious of the fact that she has changed a lot, as she is no longer the innocent little girl who lived in Santa Clara. She knows that being exposed to the colonizer’s culture has cast new lens over her eyes, through which she now sees her childhood home. She asserts, “Everything was changing, unrecognizable, pushing me out. This was as it should be, since I had moved up and no longer had any place here. But it was painful, and I longed all the more to be on my way” (idem, p. 111). The word “painful” refers to the loss of her childhood days when she was protected by Tantie and Ma from the conflicting world she now lives in. She knows she has a new future ahead, in which she will have to maintain an attitude of resilience and perseverance in a society where Black people, and specifically, poor Black women, are continually oppressed. This attitude reminds us of Tee’s great-great grand-mother, who – as Ma asserted – lives on in Tee and will come back, and come back, and come back. This points to a more positive future for Tee, and also for the generations of Black women to come, whose strength will continuously arise through their ancestors.

Conclusion

Although *Crick Crack Monkey* was published more than four decades ago, it is still relevant for the discussion on the current issue of Othering and symbolic violence against Black women in diasporic contexts. Black women’s experiences in relation to discrimination based on gender, race and class distinctions are constant and repetitive in the Caribbean diaspora. Nevertheless, a challenge and resistance on the part of Black women such as Tantie, who will teach other women – as depicted in the novel, have been, and will continue to be persistent and unwavering.

In their literary experience, Merle Hodge and other afro-Caribbean female writers have provided a necessary disruption of hegemonic discourses, to re-present and re-inscribe in history stories of strong, preserving Black women. Through their re-vision and re-definition of normative literary aesthetics, they have answered back to the colonizer’s discourse, producing new and creative ways to express the perspective and culturally hybrid experiences of Black Caribbean women.

REFERÊNCIAS

- ASHCROFT, BILL et al (Org.). *The empire writes back: theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. London; New York: Routledge, 2002.
- BHABHA, Homi. *Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse*. October, 28 (Spring).
- BOURDIEU, Pierre; PASSERON, Jean Claude. *A reprodução: elementos para uma teoria do sistema do ensino*. Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 2009.
- BOYCE, Carole; FIDO, Elaine. *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean women and literature*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990.
- CLIFF, Michelle. *Abeng*. New York: The Crossing Press, 1984.
- _____. *Claiming an identity they taught me to despise*. Massachusetts: Persephone Press, 1980.
- _____. *A Journey into speech*. In: *Land of look behind*. New York: Firebrand Books, 1985.
- _____. *No telephone to heaven*. New York. E.P. Dutton. 1987.
- FERREIRA DE ALMEIDA, Maria Cândida. *Tornar-se o Outro: o Topos Canibal na Literatura Brasileira*. São Paulo: Annablume, 2002.
- GAYATRI, Spivak. *In other worlds : essays in cultural politics*. New York: Methuen, 1987.
- HALL, Stuart. *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*. In: ASHCROFT, BILL et al (Org.). *The post-colonial studies reader*. London ; New York : Routledge, 2006. p.430-446.
- HODGE, Merle. *Crick crack, monkey*. London : Heinemann, 1970.
- LEITE, Ligia Chiappini Moraes. *O foco narrativo*. São Paulo: Ática, 1997.
- MILLER, Nancy. 1986: *Arachnologies: The Woman, The Text, and the Critic*. In: MILLER, Nancy (Org). *The Poetics of Gender*. New York: Columbia UP. 270-95.
- SHEPHERD, Verene et al (Org.). *Engendering history: Caribbean women in historical perspective*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.
- STEVENS, Cristina M. T.; VASCONCELOS, Vânia. *Mães de outras cores: matrifocalidade na literatura afro-brasileira de autoria feminina = Mother in other colors: matrifocality in african-brazilian literature female authorship*. *Cerrados : revista do curso de pós-graduação em literatura, Brasília*, v.20, n.32 , p., 2011.
- WYNTER, Sylvia. *Afterword: Beyond Miranda's meanings: Un/silencing the demonic ground of Caliban's woman*. In: BOYCE, Carole; FIDO, Elaine. *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean women and literature*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990. p. 355-366.