

‘Independence is we nature...’: Growing up in a postcolonial Caribbean country¹

Cecille DePass

University of Calgary

E-mail: depassc@ezpost.com

Abstract

By incorporating oral and narrative history from personal and family stories, this article draws on Caribbean idioms and cultural characteristics as a form of ‘decolonizing one’s mind’ (Pieterse and Parekh, 1995; Lamming, 1960; Ngugi wa Thiong’o, 1986). Divided into three related parts, Part One portrays the Eurofeminist adage that the personal is political. Family history and memory become the focus for retelling stories of the severe restrictions for education and mobility in a former Crown colony. Part Two highlights a few personal non-formal learning activities which acted as sites for learning compliance and resistance in playful and non-threatening ways. Part Three moves to the world of the large working class population, a historical site of resistance to oppression. By concentrating on women’s lives, it reveals some of the social tensions between women and men and, as important, illustrates the efforts of women through a collective to achieve self-sufficiency for themselves and their families.

Prologue

Place: Kingston, Jamaica. Time: Early 1960s. Snapshot 1: Sitting with my family in the bleachers at the new National Stadium, surrounded by thousands of excited people, on an August evening... A historical event is unfolding, one replete with all of the colonial pomp, ceremony, and music played by the military band. We watch with intensity as the English Lieutenant Governor General hands over the reigns of government to the Jamaican representatives. I remember seeing the Union Jack being lowered, singing “God Save Our Gracious Queen” for the last time; seeing the National flag unfurled and, for the first time, singing the new Anthem, “Eternal Father Bless Our Land”. The presence of the Queen’s sister and her entourage at the ceremony represents the end of an era of empire, begun in 1655, when English troops captured the island from the Spanish in order to save face because they had failed to seize Havana, Cuba.

Place: Gunboat Beach, Palisadoes, Jamaica. Snapshot 2: Organizing a spontaneous field trip for a day at the beach with my school friends -- yet none of us could swim properly! (In my album, I still have a small faded black and white photograph of the four of us: Carmen Cheong, Ruth Payton, her cousin, and I; young, bright pre-teenage girls from different racial/ethnic groups).

Introduction

This article compliments a chapter entitled “Rockstone under river bottom: memories of a Caribbean childhood” (DePass, 2006b). It incorporates oral and narrative history, a non-formal educational tradition well known to Indigenous and Third world peoples from time immemorial (Brown, Y., 2005; Manley, 1997, 2000; Spence, 2003). The paper is set within larger historical, social and theoretical contexts, and weaves together a few extracts (local traditions, idioms, poems, and events) in an innovative manner. Several personal and family stories are highlighted in order to illustrate the movement from Crown colony dependency to political independence. In many ways, the story is autobiographical (hooks, 1988), yet knowing the dilemmas of revisiting events after more than forty years (Jung, 1989; Brown, Y., 2005), the article is perhaps better seen as a narrative of lived experiences which have had positive and negative effects on my attitudes to education and to the development of a sense of place and belonging in a postcolonial society undergoing rapid changes. Unlike the sister chapter “Rockstone...” which concentrates more on formal schooling, final high school examinations and early teaching experiences, this article dwells more on some non-formal educational learnings. It implicitly and, at other times, explicitly presents a discussion of neocolonialism and decolonization in terms of everyday patterns of compliance and resistance learned from my family and peers. Theoretical frameworks of critical and postcolonial theories embedded within the narrative have been influenced by ideas from Caribbean writers such as C.L.R. James (1963), Augier, Gordon, Hall, Reckford (1983), King (1999), Mordecai (1989); and, more recently critical authors such as Freire (1978, 1982, 1987), hooks (2003) and West (1999); and stories from family members. To some extent, aspects of these perspectives are held quite lightly and, as a result real events are humorously portrayed, in keeping with a Jamaican tradition ‘to tek serious ting mek joke,’ probably learned as a strategy for survival during the brutality of slavery and the grim economic times associated with periods of the twentieth century.

The article is divided into three related parts. In the first part, Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffins (1995, p. 2) and Le Sueur (2003) act as a starting point for a brief exploration of the environment of opportunity of the 1960s that was experienced by myself as a youth when compared with the environment of severe restrictions for mobility in a Crown colony government which was lived by my family (Moore & Johnson, 2004; King, 1999; London, 1996). The second part of the paper, incorporating memory (Jung, 1989), includes a brief section on the enduring effects of non-formal education. Although this article’s voice is quite personal, it supports the Eurofeminist adage that the personal is political. The intent of using personal and family stories is to ground the often abstract academic discourse of critical theory, and hopefully at the same time, to present the self as fully present but without ego and without arrogance (Brathwaite in Morris, 1999, p. 149). The intent is not to glorify or set apart my childhood experiences from significant events in the larger society. Accordingly, Part Three provides a balance to earlier stories of youth and family by identifying central conditions of working class women’s and men’s lives who represent the majority of the population (Sistren, 1987) and for whom secondary education was not an option (Miller, 1996).

Written in a bi-dialectical manner, Part Three blends English and Creole to demonstrate the ways in which most Caribbean people move between the two languages (Pamela Mordecai, personal communication, Spring 1997). Keeping in mind, that as part of assimilationist processes, the use of Creole and Indigenous languages has been severely stigmatized and that students were once severely punished for its use in schools (London, 1996; Wright, 1993; Morris, 1996; Rahera Douglas, personal communication, 2006), the paper incorporates, as a

small act of reclamation, snippets of Creole. In so doing, it supports George Lamming's view, that "no artifice of technique; no sophisticated gimmicks leading to the mutilation of form, can achieve its specific taste and smell" (as cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 1999). Lamming makes specific reference to the contributions of Sam Selvon, international Trinidadian author, who was a writer-in-residence at the University of Calgary, and one of the first to publish in Creole in England (Morris, 1996, p. 148-149). Further, Ngugi wa Thiong'o has urged the use of Indigenous languages, in his case Kikuyu (in Le Sueur, 2003, p. 3). Perhaps, as importantly, the use of Creole in this article honours generations of black peasant and working class women who constitute the backbone of Caribbean society.

This article thus weaves together personal and family history, selected extracts from transcripts, and academic sources to present small pictures of the important links between schools and social class in a former Caribbean colony. It concentrates on very specific moments in time when the country and people moved on circuitous paths into the postcolonial era. Its representatives participated in the international arena, for the first time, as independent equals with their sisters and brothers from countries in Africa, Asia, North and South America, as well as metropolitan Europe.

*Part 1. Learning one's place in a colonial/post colonial society: 'Show me your motion, Tra la la la la...'*²

In a comprehensive analysis of postcolonial (settler/invader) societies, Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin (1995, p. 2) argue that within such societies, forms of neocolonialism are inevitable. Further, the development of new elites who assume power at the centre of the periphery (Galtung, 1976) have tended to maintain, indeed re-inscribe, traditional colonial structures and also develop and enforce new patterns of dominance [and subordination] based mainly on discrimination (racial, linguistic, religious) and unequal treatment of Indigenous peoples. As importantly, they remind us that the acquisition of political independence does not signal the end of colonialism. Instead, postcolonialism is typified by continuing forms of colonial traditions, interlaced with resistance, reconstruction and transformation. Historically, in former Caribbean slave colonies, even types of compliance were often covert forms of resistance (Bush, 1990; Mathurin Mair, 1975; Massiah, 1993).

Working within a historical perspective, Le Sueur (2003) suggests that, ideally, discussions of colonialism and decolonization should be framed within a context of dialogical processes in which metropolitan and Indigenous voices have equal weight (p. 2); (See too Freire, 1978, 1982, 1987; DePass, 2006a) Le Sueur further describes:

...The trauma and the burdens of colonial relations between the colonizer and colonized as well as the after-effects of anti-colonial violence continue to echo in contemporary debates (academic and otherwise) over language, ethnicity, immigration, gender relations, race, political ideology and religion in former colonies and in metropolitan Europe (p. 4).

Accordingly, contemporary issues which dominate academic and public debates at national and international levels in the north and south are attributable to the continuing asymmetrical patterns of relations between the colonizers and colonized. Admittedly, the historiography of imperium (Le Sueur, 2003, p. 3) has been replaced by newer equally effective patterns of domination.

Education for whom and for what purpose? Living in a province which celebrated its centennial in 2005 and teaching at a university which is forty years old, it is useful to remember that in parts of the Caribbean a well established educational system is a legacy of colonialism. As of the mid nineteenth century, three colonial educational systems existed concurrently in Jamaica; primary schools and teachers' colleges; preparatory and high schools; and preparatory education linked with high schools in Britain (Miller, 1996, p. 49-51). With a well established tradition of public elementary education (since 1834), public teacher education (since 1836), public secondary education (since 1879), and a public university education (since 1948, Miller, 1996, p. 49-51), the framework for maintenance of British educational institutions was quite secure (London, 1996). Except for some modifications, this educational system largely remained intact when I attended school. The nearest government funded primary school was situated in a large, dilapidated building on one of the major roads approximately fifteen minutes walk from our home. However, I did not attend the noisy primary school which I passed on my way to afternoon extra curricular activities across the street.

With my parents' determination to provide their children with the best education possible, I, like my siblings, attended a small private kindergarten whose headmistress had been trained in Canada. Afterwards, I spent many happy years at a Jamaican preparatory school owned by an older woman whose Jamaican husband was identified as the chief of a Scottish clan. (These small examples made me realize that the histories of Britain, the Caribbean and Canada had deep connections).

My grandaunts' legacy: Four matriarchs, the teacher grandaunts, educated generations of students in primary and secondary schools in Kingston and rural areas. They encouraged, in some of their students, notions that education opened doors to a brighter future, and, furthermore, that if one was privileged to acquire a university education then one had a duty to serve the public. In the late 1980s, while visiting friends in Toronto, I met a young woman who said, with admiration, that my grandaunts had instilled in her the belief that, with a sound education, she could become anything she wanted to be. This young woman's warm words brought back some of the stories heard concerning my grandaunts. One of the aunts, Dorothy, when writing the family history, described their education at a teacher's college during the 1920's mentioned that her older sister, Gladys, was the only student graduating from training colleges to receive an honours certificate in 1923. Gladys taught for eighteen years before going on to complete a Masters degree from Drake and Columbia Universities. Written for the family, Dorothy's narrative does not explicate the links between teacher's colleges, the working class, and the larger society: indeed, the teacher's college was "the black or poor man's secondary school" (Gordon in Miller, 1996, p. 50).

I heard of difficulties Gladys encountered when she applied for teaching positions at a teacher's college. I also heard of the grandaunts' political and protest activities. On one occasion, although Gladys was enumerated for a forthcoming national election, her name was not published on the voters' list so she took the government to court. She probably had memories of the period when only the wealthy, propertied classes were allowed to vote. I remember when Aunt Dor returned to university in her fifties to complete a Bachelor of Arts degree. Signs of her

determination were recently demonstrated when she received a government award for lifetime service (2004). On the day of the ceremony, despite being assigned to a wheelchair, and informed that she was too weak to walk up to the platform, Aunt Dor kept silent. When her name was announced, she rose from the wheelchair and walked slowly towards the platform to receive her award. On seeing this, the Governor General descended the steps. The audience rose giving her a standing ovation (Dor, personal communication, Fall 2004). I grew up hearing stories of quiet resistance often discussed during the preparing of meals for the family. These stories taught that, with dedication, hard work and sheer perseverance, one could lead a productive and rewarding adult life without conforming blindly to authorities. On the other hand, I also grew up hearing that self-aggrandizement was frowned on.

Pre-independence: “If you are white, You are all right, If you are brown, Stick around, If you are black, Stay at the back” (Childhood taunt, Memory or Myth). In the late 1950s, however, things were markedly different. The structural divisions of race and color identified in the preceding rhyme were visible, to a large extent, in most walks of life. Exceptions to the highly stratified social and economic order along colour lines being the wealthy, well established black/Creole families who created niches for themselves (Brown, Y., 2005; Moore & Johnson, 2004; Manley, 1997, 2000; Brown, W., 1975). One morning, for example, in accompanying my mother to the bank, I learned an important lesson. She asked me to observe the types of people who worked in a suburban branch of the largest colonial bank. When asked for my impressions, I replied that I saw only very fair skinned people (Euro-Jamaicans) working as tellers. She smiled and replied that I could not be employed even as a teller in that branch. Yvonne Brown (2005), interestingly enough, corroborates my mother’s pronouncement. In the early 1960s, even though she had earned excellent grades in the final Senior Cambridge examinations, she was employed, for a short time, at a rural branch of the same bank. Brown worked behind the scenes, literally, in the massive old vault and was not allowed to interact with the customers face-to-face because she was black. Yvonne Brown’s experiences are a harsh reminder that, for the most part, black working class people, especially women, were denied access to the privileges associated with a colonial commercial bank (e.g. denial of access to loans and financial services). Not surprisingly, within a short time, Brown left the bank and entered the senior teacher’s college. Quite fittingly, it was the year of independence; the first year in which a very traditional men’s college accepted women students. This chapter of Brown’s thesis graphically presents men’s responses to the women students and speaks to her ability to excel in a male dominated academic hierarchy (Sistren, 1987; Beckles & Stoddart, 1993).

There were many mixed messages: one was encouraged to become the best that one could be but to accept that, in practice, there were constraints to occupational and social mobility within a colony. In later years, while working in Canada and reflecting on my parents stories concerning their paid employment paths, I realized that they had been quite frustrated in their respective jobs for most of their working lives. My father, a former school principal, and a senior social work officer for approximately twenty years, and my mother, a senior secretary in the civil service and, later, with the private sector and university, both chafed under the colonial limits imposed upon each of them. Ironically, their opportunities to become more self-directed and autonomous in the workplace did not occur until the late 1960s when they were hired as the first Jamaican publishing representatives for, at that time, the largest British based international consortia which produced university and popular texts for Commonwealth countries. (My parents’ influence on the younger representatives in the publishing field was publicly commended by several colleagues at their respective funerals in 1992 and 2000).

As a child, for my part, I was determined to acquire the best education possible to win a free place, and to attend one of the 'good' secondary schools, knowing well that secondary schools varied considerably in terms of the quality of educational opportunities and teaching/learning environments. I was expected to achieve excellent grades, complete high school and to study at the University of the West Indies. Admittedly, as a young high school student and despite parental encouragement, given the cost of a university education, the possibility of completing successfully the Cambridge Examinations (Ordinary and Advanced) and to one day attend university seemed like a remote dream (Davies, 1986).

Part 2. Learning one's sense of place at school

After approximately three hundred years of British rule, the island of Jamaica achieved political independence within the British Commonwealth. In doing so, the country realized dreams laid long ago by freedom fighters such as Nanny (a Maroon guerilla); Paul Bogle and George William Gordon (who led the peasant rebellion to protest severe social and economic hardships in mid nineteenth century); and the dreams continued by Marcus Garvey, Norman and Michael Manley, and Alexander Bustamante (twentieth century, see Augier, Gordon, Hall & Reckford, 1983; Brown, W., 1975; Manley, 1997, 2000).

In order to increase the catchments pool and range of skills of the educated human capital, the government expanded access to secondary schools for a larger cross section of students by introducing the standardized common entrance examination and scholarships (late 1950s). As the recipient of 'a free place' or of one of the thousands of scholarships offered by the government, my family did not pay the expensive tuition fees (Sistren, 1987). Supporting Errol Miller's (1996) claims of class based connections between preparatory and secondary schools, most girls in the "A" stream of first form (equivalent of Canadian grade 7) had previously attended either the school's affiliated preparatory or other preparatory schools. Very few girls in the "A" stream had attended primary schools. At the girls' school, we learned through the formal and hidden curriculae the existing social and economic stratification of a society deeply steeped in British colonial traditions (DePass, 2006b; Sistren, 1987; Gordon, 1963; Craig, 1989; Figueroa, 1971; Kincaid, 1999; Cumper, 1998; Dlamini, 2001).³

In my eyes, entering high school meant that I was almost grown up. Between 1958 to 1968, the period comparable to my high school attendance, the total population of high school students was quite small (12,824, 1958, 56.8% female and 21,819, 1968; 56.9% female) (Miller 1996, p. 55). This trend of somewhat higher percentages of girls than boys attending high school is an anomaly amongst economically developing postcolonial countries. Yet as mentioned earlier, high schools were not the domain of the working classes (Miller, 1996). By the 1990s, however, the pattern of dominance of women in high schools progressed to postsecondary education, where percentages of women completing university degrees in law and natural sciences far outstripped that of men (CIDA, personal communication, 2006, University of the West Indies, personal communication, 1999). See Miller (1991) for explanation of the colonial/postcolonial processes which liberated women and at the same time oppressed men.)

Every day, we secondary school girls wore compulsory school uniforms, sat in alphabetical order by family name, and followed a rigid curriculum based on the British public school model. By observation, we learned in 'a taken for granted' manner that girls placed in parallel streams were not given equal opportunities as the ones placed in scholarship forms. This

is a good example that access is not synonymous with outcome (See DePass, 2006b, for a fuller discussion of streaming and final examinations). The balance of this section highlights a few non-formal learnings which took place at school through guiding activities.

My high school, unlike many of the older secondary schools (Miller, 1996), did not have strong historical school traditions to uphold or to disrupt. Many of us, possibly influenced by the ongoing debate concerning the meaning of independence (Nettleford, 1966), demonstrated a strong sense of optimism in the future. I joined the school's first guide company established by a young woman, 'a Queen's Guide', then in her first year at university. In my memory bank are stored several stories/incidents. Through guiding, we learned non-formal activities which promoted self-reliance and a strong community spirit (Morris, 1999).

As one of the youngest patrol leaders elected by my peers, we went on several supervised camps to areas which bordered the city or hiked in the foothills of the mountains. The pitching of tents, sleeping on 'ground-covers', making fires, and cooking of meals on communal fires in the open, are among fond memories still treasured. In the memory bank are also stored examples of high-spirited teenage girls' pranks. Memories after 'lights out' of laughing and singing; as we shared stories, gleefully tying other guides to their bedding in neighbouring tents, putting toothpaste on sleeping faces, and flying 'unmentionables' (underwear) from the flagpole. We took an active part in parades and guide jamborees in which members from our company played musical instruments, made crafts, jams and pickles for competitions, and sang popular songs such as "by the rivers of Babylon" while other guides sang folk songs from the British canon. We enjoyed guiding and learned through serious play, without fully realizing, how to lead, how to follow, and how to resist rigid rules. Every time we participated, placed highly, or dared to win high school swimming, netball, lawn hockey, guiding or debating competitions, as teenagers, we thought that we were busy creating our own traditions. Little did we know that even on occasions in which we went in new directions not usually displayed by students at that time, such as when we performed reggae/popular songs and quoted from Louise Bennett's poems, that we were being carefully trained to become part of the emerging new neocolonial elite. Accordingly, the sense of freedom was perhaps an illusion (Morris, 1999, p. 150).

Living with a family in which education was highly valued, and growing up at a time in which educational and employment opportunities formerly denied were opening for Jamaicans, I believed that education was the route to social mobility. In reality, when I walked along city roads passing very poor homes, or accompanied by my father, the social worker, to some of the poorer rural areas, I knew that I was sheltered from the harsh material conditions lived by most Jamaican students and their families. The refrain of my grandaunts and family, "there for the grace of God go I" taught me humility and, further, that there was neither inevitability nor predestination governing one's conditions of birth. The Sistren (1987) extracts presented in Part Three, represent the other side of the coin. Miller (1996) argues that education had inspirational and ripple effects even on people who never progressed very far through its ranks.

Part 3. Honouring Caribbean Mothers

The paper turns now to a short discussion, not of the lives of the more privileged high school students, but to that of the majority of parents and students who could acquire, at best, a few years of public primary schooling (Ellis, 1986). Jocelyn Massiah (1995, p. 2-3) explains that Barbadian and, by implication, Caribbean women have historically maintained the right to

determine, whether and where they will enter the labour force and types of roles/functions to be performed in the workplace. Using a historical perspective, she tells of the ability of literate slave women who challenged the authority of slave managers and negotiated freedom for their families and themselves (p. 4). From the sixteen to mid nineteenth century, slave women were hired out to other owners (men and women) who included free blacks, coloureds and whites. The women's labour provided a range of invaluable social and economic functions such as general labourers, nannies, nurses, washerwomen, and seamstresses (Massiah, 1995). After abolition of slavery, in Jamaica for example, sizeable numbers of the freed women and men established the peasant villages (Augier, Gordon, Hall & Reckford, 1983). To a large extent, the early roles and functions of black/coloured women included that of domestic labour and the production, distribution, and marketing of agricultural products that continue to be vital.

It is within a nineteenth century historical context of black women's resistance that extracts selected from the *Sistren* (1987) collective should be examined. A close reading of the *Sistren* text indicates that despite the passage of time, unfortunately, in a poor country in which there are major social and economic disparities between the rich and poor, the lives of the majority of women have remained one of material poverty. Yet there is hope provided by small self-help initiatives such as the women's community development activities associated with the Jamaica Welfare Society (1950s-1960s) and more recently, *Sistren* (1970s). *Sistren* was designed to provide basic literacy skills to thousands of working class women employed at subsistence levels in urban centres. The Collective was perhaps best known for its use of interactive popular theatre and action research to portray harsh social and economic realities. Scenarios presented to the public for collective problem posing/solving strategies usually concentrated on women's lived history, work, family violence and sexuality (Sistren, 1987; Pieterse & Parekh, 1995). What follows are a few examples of women's lived experiences presented in Creole or patois/dialect with minimal editing (Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Le Sueur, 2003; Lamming, 1960; Morris, 1999; Brown, Y., 2005).

In describing previous working conditions, a member tells of her experiences working in a small bar and restaurant at night for a Mrs. Yew (*Sistren*, 1987, p. 231):

...Den Zwip! She [Mrs. Yew] clap me wid a night work... [She has a session/party]... after me and di chef ...cook curry goat, mannish water and [clean] up di kitchen. [She instructs us] to change our clothes and to go home... Me work di night and after dat, every evening di woman say me fi work at night... Me no know Saturday night different from Sunday night 'cause she open di bar [and restaurant] every night...

The exploitation and poor working conditions are made explicit in additional extracts. However, the Collective member explains that despite major problems (periodic unemployment, lack of housing and poverty) with the Collective and government assistance, she has provided basic necessities for herself and family. Moreover, her partner has remained with her. Unlike many Jamaican men, her partner does not use violence and verbal abuse as forms of control (*Sistren*, 1987, p. 238). This is a small part of the graphic stories of struggle and survival as told by Jamaican women.

Honor Ford Smith, founder of the Collective, includes several extracts concerning her life as a teacher, union activist and single parent in order to demonstrate that tensions between men and women are by no means restricted to the working classes. Ford Smith challenges the predominantly male teacher's union for its "colonial preoccupations," and eventually runs for

union president on a progressive democratic platform (Sistren, p. 253). Ford Smith's experiences with the male teacher's union, written some fifteen years after Brown's experiences at college (mentioned earlier) demonstrate that official institutions of governance maintained the colonial hierarchical structure well after the abolition of the empire (London, 1996). Ava, another member of the Collective, speaks of her life struggles and concludes by recommending that the school curriculum of young women should be expanded to teach about life: "Dem should have a process [to] help girls to know what to expect when dem turn woman. Me never get no teaching 'bout work and man and family life. ...dem need to teach about relationships between man and woman." [Finally Ava states that she is not 'into any relationships' where words like 'control' and 'ownership' are used. In her words these are code terms for violent domestic relationships in which the community and police are usually reluctant to intervene].

The Sistren stories of family and life crises, domestic violence, and rejection by their mothers and grandmothers, offer a different reality to that depicted in the school curriculum, school texts and in non-formal activities such as guiding. With the severe class and economic disparities between the lives of most of the students and that portrayed in schools, it is little wonder that many students practice resistance to the formal and hidden middle class curriculum in explicit and covert ways (DePass, 2006b). Yet there are signs of hope, for girl children and teenagers who accept the dominant educational structures. Statistical information demonstrates strong evidence of upward mobility for women with peasant ancestry; in contrast to the picture for men, which appears to be far more pessimistic (Miller, 1991, p. 191-193).⁴

Conclusion

The period of the 1960s to 1970s was an exciting time to grow up in the Caribbean. No longer were the former British West Indies dependent on Britain. Yet, independence was Janus faced. It meant significantly different things to different people. For the established and emerging elite and their children, it meant business as usual as long as their socio-economic interests either remained intact or improved. During the movement to post-colonialism, undeniably, several inherited colonial institutions were changing. Social and economic structures had opened up, by the mid to late twentieth century, men and women with Jewish and Lebanese origins, brown/black, and Chinese people, occupied positions of economic power at the country's centre (Galtung, 1976). New employment opportunities largely outside of established economic structures were thriving in music, tourism, and, manufacturing. The labour intensive assembly and food processing industries which employed mainly women and, as a result of the increasing importation of consumer goods including foods, the informal sector occupied by women vendors was flourishing. Yet, in reality, there has been the continuing, if not increasing, economic dependency in the Caribbean (Levitt, 2005), largely as a result of changes to international economic, trade and aid policies.

For a small country hardly identifiable on a world map, despite the national motto, 'out of many, one people;' the international popularity of reggae music; the nostalgic posters of a simple life created by the tourist board and establishment of 'all inclusive resorts', some owned by Jamaican businessmen; internally, the benefits of economic and social changes have been unevenly distributed. In education, the pace of change as measured by equitable access to education for all youth has been slow. The statement is particularly applicable to people with peasant and working class origins who have relied on government schools (Sistren, 1987). Surprisingly, despite the inherited structures which have continued to give rise to a wide range of

types of systemic violence as identified by Sistren (1987) and Le Sueur (2003) earlier in this paper; yet, the indomitable spirit of resilience of most women, men and children has not been broken:

Still we wake as on each day
Pull out the treasures of our life
To bank them in school.
One steady act of hope. One heart,
One love, safe in the mother faith.
(Craig, 1989, p. 54).

Endnotes

- ¹ Dedicated to Louise Bennett (Deceased, 2006). The article's title is based on Bennett's poem, "Independence", which presents a satirical view of the meaning of the concept (1966, p. 169).
- ² A well known childhood ring game, "Brown girl in a ring" was sung by us, admittedly to a different beat than that popularized, many years later, by Boney M.
- ³ Honor Ford Smith in describing her schooling in the 1960s, states that at her high school "seating was neatly divided -- blacks to one side, whites and clear skinned children to another" (Sistren, p. 244). Ford Smith also describes the class tensions that existed in the workplace between brown and black people (1970s), ten years after independence when the country was under going systemic political, social, and economic changes. Ford Smith indicates that perceptions of race/skin colour are not rigid but situational and fluid. In England, where she was a university student (late 1960s), because she came from the Caribbean, she was labelled black (p. 249).
- ⁴ Miller (1991) develops a controversial explanation for women's educational successes based on research by Caribbean sociologists, and anthropologists.

References

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, & G., Tiffin, H. (1999). *The Post Colonial Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Augier, F.R.; Gordon, S.C.; Hall, D.; & Reckford, M. (1983). *The Making of the West Indies*. Burnt Mill: Longman Group Ltd.
- Beckles, H. & Stoddart, B. (1993). *Liberation Cricket: West Indies Cricket Culture*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Bennett, L. (1966). *Jamaica Labrish*. Kingston: Sangster's Bookstores, p. 169.
- Brown, W. (1975). *Edna Manley: The Private Years, 1900-1938*. London: Andre Deutsch.
- Brown, Y. (2005). *Bodies, Memory, Empire*. Unpublished Dissertation, University of British Columbia, Canada.
- Bush, B. (1990). *Slave Women in the Caribbean Society 1650-1638*. Kingston: Ian Randle Press.
- Craig, C. (1989). All Things Bright In Mordecai, P. (Ed.), *From Our Yard: Jamaican Poetry Since Independence*. Kingston: Institute of Jamaica Publications Limited. p. 54.
- Craig, D. (Ed.) (1996). *Education in the West Indies: Developments and Perspectives, 1948-1988*. Kingston: University of the West Indies, The Institute of Social and Economic Research.
- Cumper, P. (1998). *One Bright Child*. London: Black Amber Books.
- Davies, D. (1986). *Maximizing Examination Performance: A Psychological Approach*. London: Kogan Page Ltd.
- DePass, C. (2006a). Presidential Address, Comparative Education in Changing Times: A View with a Southern Exposure. *Canadian and International Education*, 35(2), 1-18.
- DePass, C. (2006b). Rockstone under river bottom: Memories of a Caribbean Childhood (Working title).
- Dlamini, N. (2001). Can the Empire's Tools ever Dismantle the Empire's House? Teacher Education and the Practice of Identifications. *Canadian and International Education*, 30(2), 65-89.
- Ellis, P. (Ed.) (1986). *Women of the Caribbean*. London: Zed Books.
- Figueroa, J. (1971). *Society Schools and Progress in the West Indies*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Freire, P. (1978). *Pedagogy in Process*. London: Writers and Readers Publishing Corporation.
- Freire, P. (1982). *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Continuum Publishing Corporation.
- Freire, P. (1987). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Galtung, J. (1976). A Structural Theory of Imperialism. In Barclay W., Kumar, K. and Simms, R. (Eds.), *Racial Conflict, Discrimination and Power: Historical and Contemporary Studies*. New York: AMS Press, p. 391-418.
- Gordon, S. (1963). *A Century of West Indian Education*. London: Longman.
- hooks, b. (2003). Confronting Class in the Classroom. In Darder, A., Battodono, M., Torres, R. (Eds.), *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*. New York: Routledge Falmer, p. 142-150.
- hooks, b. (1988). *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
- James, C.L.R. (1963). *Beyond a Boundary*. London: Hutchinson.
- Jung, C.J. (1989). *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Kincaid, J. (1999). A Small Place. In Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H. *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, p. 92-94.

- Lamming, G. (1960). The Occasion for Speaking: The Pleasure of Exile. In Ashcroft, B. Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H. *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, p. 17.
- King, R. (1999). Education in the British Caribbean. In Miller, E. (Ed.), *Educational Reform in the Commonwealth Caribbean*. Washington, DC: Organization of American States.
- Le Sueur, J. (2003). *The Decolonization Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Levitt, K. (2005). *Reclaiming Development: Independent Thought and Caribbean Community*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
- London, N. (1996). Quality Control in a Colonial School Setting: How it Worked and for What Purpose? *Canadian and International Education*, 25(1), 43-61.
- Manley, R. (1997). *DrumBlair: Memories of a Jamaican Childhood*. Toronto: Vintage Canada.
- Manley, R. (2000). *Slipstream: A Daughter Remembers*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Marshall, W. (Ed.). (1993). *Emancipation IV: A series of lectures to commemorate the 150th anniversary of emancipation*. Kingston: Canoe Press.
- Massiah, J. (1993). Living with dignity: Barbadian Women in the Workforce. In Marshall, W. (Ed.), *Emancipation IV: A series of lectures to commemorate the 150th anniversary of emancipation*. Kingston: Canoe Press, p. 1-28.
- Mathurin Mair, L. (1975). *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies During Slavery*. Kingston.: The African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica.
- Meighan, R. (1986). *A Sociology of Educating*. London: Cassell.
- Miller, E. (1996). Literacy, Gender and High Schooling. In Craig, D. (Ed.), *Education in the West Indies: Developments and Perspectives 1948-1988*. Kingston: University of the West Indies, p. 47-74.
- Miller, E. (1991). *Men at risk*. Kingston: Jamaica Publishing House.
- Moore, B. & Johnson, M.A. (2004). *Neither Led nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism, 1865-1920*. Mona: University of the West Indies Press.
- Mordecai, P. (Ed.) (1989). *From Our Yard: Jamaican Poetry Since Independence*. Kingston: Institute of Jamaica Publications Limited.
- Morris, M. (1999). *Is English We Speaking*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Nettleford, R. (1966). Commentary. In Bennett, L. (1966), *Jamaica Labrish*. Kingston: Sangster's Bookstores, p. 169.
- Pieterse, J.N. and Parekh, B. (1995). *The Decolonization of the Imagination: Culture, Knowledge and Power*. London: Zed Books.
- Poonwassie, D. (1995). Tolerance. *Canadian and International Education*, 24(2), 1-13.
- Sistren with Ford Smith, H. (1987). *Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women*. Toronto: Sister Vision Press.
- Spence, D. et al (2003). *Sharing Our Vision*. Presentation by Cree and Tsu Tina Elders. Cultural Diversity Institute, University of Calgary.
- UNESCO (1994). *A Culture of Peace*. Draft Report. Paris: UNESCO.
- West, C. (1999). *The Cornel West Reader*. New York: Basic Civitas Books.
- Wright, H.K. (1993). What is Shakespeare Doing in My Hut? 'A' level literature and the Sierra Leonean student. *Canadian and International Education*, 22(1), 66-85.