

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: AD/MINISTERING EDUCATION: GENDER,  
COLONIALISM, AND CHRISTIANITY IN BELIZE AND  
THE ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN

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This dissertation looks at the relationship between educational achievement and power in the Anglophone Caribbean, with particular emphasis on Belize. Girls are outperforming boys at every level of education, but women still have higher unemployment rates and hold the lowest paying jobs, while men are in more decision-making positions in every sector of the economy. This project considers one major question: Why do women remain in less powerful positions even when they are better

educated? To explore this question I look at the role that missionary groups played in administering education under British colonialism. I focus on Belize where religious groups maintain a high level of control over education in the postcolonial era. I use twentieth-century Caribbean literature to suggest the effects of Christian ideology on the hidden curriculum and on women's social, economic, and political power. The literature I discuss includes George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* (Barbados), Austin Clarke's *Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack* (Barbados), Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* (Trinidad), Merle Collins's *Angel* (Grenada), Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and *Lucy* (Antigua), and Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* (Belize).

AD/MINISTERING EDUCATION: GENDER, COLONIALISM, AND  
CHRISTIANITY IN BELIZE AND THE ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN

by

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation looks at the relationship between educational achievement and power in the Anglophone Caribbean, especially Belize. Although for the past twenty to thirty years, region-wide, girls are outperforming boys at every level of education, women still have higher unemployment rates and hold the lowest paying jobs, while men are in more decision-making positions in every sector of the economy. This project considers one major question: Why do women remain in less powerful positions even when they are better educated? Further, in societies in need of human resources, why are women underutilized? Why is their economic worth not *valued*?

In order to answer these questions, we need to look at the culture of the society and the culture of the schools. I argue that the “hidden curriculum” embedded in education reinforces traditional gender roles, simultaneously devaluing “feminine” work and keeping women in “feminine” jobs. Furthermore, the hidden curriculum in the Anglophone Caribbean is a product of outside forces: Christian missionaries and British colonialism. Missionaries have been involved in administering education since the abolition of slavery in 1838. In fact, the colonization of the “new world,” was inextricably linked to the Christianizing of the “new world” and Christian morals were used to justify British/white rule while simultaneously presenting the indigenous peoples and African slaves as incapable of ruling themselves. In the postcolonial era, Christian schools retain a lot of power throughout the Caribbean and therefore, if we are to understand the disconnect between girls’ achievements in school and women’s power in



society, we must ask whether the hidden curriculum of these schools inculcates traditional gender roles. During the colonial era, properness and respectability were defined by adherence to Victorian gender roles and control of women's sexuality, and these constructions were legitimated and naturalized through the hidden curriculum of denominational schools. In this dissertation I expose and emphasize the role the hidden curriculum played in maintaining colonial hierarchies of race, class, gender and nation and I ask questions about the contents of the hidden curriculum in the postcolonial era.

In order to balance breadth and depth, I discuss the Anglophone Caribbean as a region in the first part of the dissertation and in the second part I focus on one country, Belize,<sup>1</sup> one of the most diverse countries in the region. Belize is a heterogeneous country in many ways, divided by race, ethnicity and language. Looking at race and ethnicity, Belizeans are segregated into what Nigel Bolland calls "the Creole and Mestizo complexes" (*Belize* 47). These categories are further sub-divided; the Creole community includes whites, Creoles,<sup>2</sup> and Garifuna,<sup>3</sup> while the Mestizos comprise Spanish, Mestizo,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Belize has had several names during its history from Mayan land, to Spanish colony, to British settlement, and finally to independent country. Anderson says, "At first it was called the 'English Settlement' at the mouth of the River Walix (variously spelt Waliz, Wallis, BALiz, Balix, Beleese and Bellese; the spelling Belize appears in a map of 1826). Later it was also called the 'Settlement of English Woodcutters in the Bay of Honduras'; this was abbreviated to the 'English Settlement of Honduras' and finally, when it was designated a Colony in 1862, to British Honduras" (34). In 1973, the name was changed to Belize. In the interest of clarity, I have chosen to use the current name, Belize, throughout.

<sup>2</sup> Creole can mean different things across the region. In Belize Creole refers to an ethnic group, the descendants of African slaves and European slave owners, but it can also refer to the non-Mestizo population which includes whites, ethnic Creoles, and Garinagus (the plural of Garifuna).

<sup>3</sup> The Garifuna are descendants of escaped African slaves and Carib Indians and are sometimes referred to as Black Caribs. Around 1635 two ships transporting slaves to the West Indies shipwrecked near St. Vincent. The slaves who survived the shipwreck swam ashore. They began new lives in St. Vincent, primarily settling and living amongst with the Carib Indians. For the next 150 years the two populations mixed. The Garifuna communities were destroyed when the British finally conquered them in 1795 after years of fighting (National Garifuna Council). The British killed hundreds of Garinagus and exiled the rest (National Garifuna Council). One of the places that the exiled Garinagu settled was Belize.

<sup>4</sup> Mestizos are descendants of the Spanish and Yucatan Maya Indians, but can also refer to Spanish speakers in general.

and Maya<sup>5</sup> (Bolland, *Belize*, 47). Religion cuts across these diverse groups.

Approximately 60 percent of Belizeans are Roman Catholic.

Through an interdisciplinary lens I combine the fields of history, anthropology, sociology, anthropology, education and literature in order to provide a fuller understanding of the education systems both in the region generally, and in Belize specifically. In addition to missionary histories, colonial reports, and post-independence government reports, I incorporate Anglophone Caribbean literature into my analysis. I argue that fiction can reveal what the histories and reports cannot – the hidden curriculum. Education reforms in the last fifty years have made significant changes in curriculum and pedagogy, but have done little to address the hidden curriculum. By understanding the ways in which denominational schools used Victorian gender norms and constructions of women's sexuality in the past, we can better understand the present. Recognizing the relationship between Christianity, patriarchy, and colonialism provides a foundation for an analysis of the contemporary school systems. If religion worked as a tool of colonialism, I think it is fair to ask if it can also work as a tool of neocolonialism.

### **Gender, Sexuality and Social Control**

*Annie John* is a coming-of-age story set in British colonial Antigua in the 1950s, written by Antiguan-born author Jamaica Kincaid. The novel traces Annie's developing identity and her gradual and painful independence from her mother, but it also consciously connects gender, conquest and Christianity. Because my dissertation brings together discourses on gender, colonialism, and religion, I think the following excerpt from *Annie John* provides a fitting introduction to my argument.

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<sup>5</sup> The Maya in Belize are mostly Kekchi and Mopan.

Walking down the street, Annie is approached by four boys “pretending to be grownup gentlemen living in Victorian times” (95). They greet her with the following phrases: “‘Hallo, Madame. How are you this afternoon?’ and ‘What a pleasant thing, our running into each other like this,’ and ‘We meet again after all this time,’ and ‘Ah, the sun, it shines and shines only on you.’” However, unlike the Victorian ladies for whom these lines were originally intended, these words are meant to humiliate Annie: “The words were no sooner out of their mouths than they would bend over laughing. Even though nothing like this had ever happened to [her] before, [Annie] knew instantly that it was malicious and that [she] had done nothing to deserve it” (95). One of the four boys, a boy named Mineu, was a childhood playmate of Annie’s. Seeing him, she is reminded of the times they played together as children. In retelling this story, Annie not only contextualizes her encounter with the four boys, but she dramatizes the intersection between patriarchy, imperialism and Christianity.

Annie’s mother and Mineu’s mother were friends, and Annie says that she “felt pleased that he, a boy older than [her] by three years, would play with [her]” (94). Here, Annie stresses not only the dynamics of age and gender, but also, her complicity in them – she “felt pleased” that he would play with her. Annie continues:

Of course, in all the games we played I was given the lesser part. If we played knight and dragon, I was the dragon; if we played discovering Africa, he discovered Africa; he was also the leader of the savage tribes that tried to get in the way of the discovery, and I played his servant, and a not very bright servant at that; if we played prodigal son, he was the prodigal son and the prodigal son’s father and the jealous brother, while I played a person who fetched things. (96)

The details of her games with Mineu make clear the role of Annie's identity as other: as a servant passed – quite literally in these games – from Africa to the father's house. But they also link militarism, colonialism and patriarchal Christianity. The myths of greatness, the “discovery” of Africa, and the parables of the Bible are stories about men. Women have no autonomous identity, but function, through their otherness, to mark men as warriors, masters, and patriarchs.

Women can also serve to mark other women as Mineu and his friends show in their treatment of Annie. The construction of Victorian femininity as chaste, modest, clean, and pious marked colonized women as sexually wanton, dirty, and heretical. These constructions of gender and sexuality were not limited to Antigua; they were ubiquitous throughout the British Empire. In her examination of colonial propaganda, Cynthia Enloe points to repetitive images of “the colonized woman” that appeared in British colonial postcards. She says, tongue in cheek, “Colonialism was good for the postcard business” (42). One such postcard, titled “The Beauty of the Kraal, Zululand,” exhibits a Zulu woman posed seductively on her side, her ankles placed together one on top of the other, an anklet on each leg, such that she appears bound. The layering of meanings seems clear: her sexuality is being controlled, *and* she is being controlled because of her sexuality. Specific constructions of femininity, here figured as the (“wanton”) sexuality of local women, were manipulated to legitimize colonization. The “natural” differences between Victorian ladies and colonized women were meant to predate and justify colonialism, but far from innate, these constructions required continual social policing.

A quote from James Mill, author of *History of India*, characterizes this ideology: “Among rude people the women are generally degraded, among civilized people they are exalted.” Therefore, the charge was, as Enloe argues, “If men’s sense of manliness was such that it didn’t include reverence toward women, then they couldn’t expect to be allowed to govern their own society.” The irony is apparent: if men couldn’t ‘exalt’ their women (as defined of course by European treatment of women, which was itself problematic), then these men would have to relinquish the control of their women so that the colonizer could degrade them. The status of local women signaled to local men their own disempowerment. As Enloe notes, “For a man, to be conquered is to have his women turned into fodder for imperialist postcards” (44).

In this process of demeaning local women, local men were also feminized. If part of the construction of masculinity entails protecting your women, then the dominating of local women provided a double marker, disempowering both local men and women. Once local men lost the power to protect their women, the essence of their “natural” power as men was necessarily questioned. This process of emasculation helped prevent local men, who were perhaps the biggest threat to the colonizer’s power, from successfully revolting. The questioning of their power as men simultaneously questioned the power of their people. As men are perceived as the powerful markers of a society, emasculated men delimit their nation, their community and their race as inferior. And thus, by feminizing colonized men, the imperial ideology designated colonized men as mere boys in need of strong colonial fathers to bring them into adulthood by the standards of European mores.

The fact that European women can also be understood as colonized, highlights both the interrelatedness of variables of difference, but also the importance of context. In relation to local women, European women marked civility and beauty, but in relation to European men, European women were still the second sex. Similarly, gendered dynamics created differing experiences of colonization for local men and women. Although colonized women and men both fared badly under colonization, women were doubly ousted from the political sphere, first as colonial subjects and second as women. Hence, even when nations achieved independence, local men were seen as the “natural” candidates for the political sphere. Even when racial hierarchies were questioned as part of the route to independence, gender hierarchies could and did remain in place leaving men superior to women. Therefore, problematically, nationalist movements often began the process of nation-building by replacing the “bad” father of the imperial metropolis with a “good” father of the local community. Enloe notes that, “nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope. Anger at being ‘emasculated’ – or turned into a nation of busboys – has been presumed to be the natural fuel for igniting a nationalist movement” (44). To emerge into independence, colonized masculinity must lick its wounds and in many cases this took the form of traditional performances of masculinity. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Anne McClintock argues:

The global militarization of masculinity and the feminization of poverty have ensued that women and men do not live postcoloniality in the same way.... The continuing weight of male economic self-interest and the varied undertows of patriarchal Christianity, Confucianism and Islamic fundamentalism continue to

legitimize women's barred access to the corridors of political and economic power, their persistent educational disadvantage, the domestic double workday, unequal childcare, gendered malnutrition, sexual violence, genital mutilation and domestic battery. The histories of these male policies, while deeply implicated in colonialism, are not reducible to colonialism and cannot be understood without distinct theories of gender power. (14)

Furthermore, for a burgeoning nation to enter into international politics and receive international recognition (and often debt relief and/or other aid), they must play by the rules as set by the U.S. and Europe. Colonized men are fighting to redeem themselves in the eyes of their nation and the world, and this need for redemption necessitates a deeply enmeshed male bravado.

In the last two decades a number of scholars have interrogated the relationships between gender, race, class, and empire. Texts like Mindie Lazarus-Black's *Legitimate Acts and Illegal Encounters: Law and Society in Antigua and Barbuda*, Eileen Suarez Findlay's *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico*, George Mosse's *Nationalism and Sexuality*, Nira Yuval-Davis' *Gender and Nation*, Antoinette Burton's *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* and Ann Stoler's *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* have made clear that recognizing the ways that gender is raced and the ways that race is gendered is essential for understanding colonialism and nationalism.

Patriarchal ideology has consistently worked to control women in both the colonial and postcolonial eras, but this does not destroy the agency of postcolonial

women. We can see this resistance in the finale of Kincaid's tale of Annie and Mineu.

Annie describes the last game she played with Mineu:

A man had recently killed his girlfriend and a man who was his best friend when he found them drinking together in a bar ... Mineu and I had overheard our parents talk so much about this event that it wasn't long before he made up a game about it. As usual, Mineu played all the big parts. He played the murdered man and the murderer, going back and forth; the girlfriend we left silent. When the case got to court, Mineu played judge, jury, prosecutor, and condemned man ... All of our playing together came to an end when something bad almost happened ... when we came to the part of the noose around the neck ... he lifted himself off the ground [and] the noose tightened. (98)

In this mock murder trial, Mineu plays all of the roles and the result is that he – quite literally, almost – hangs himself. Kincaid's message here is clear: the kind of oppression which these games act out – colonial tyranny and patriarchal oppression – threaten themselves. Mineu is powerful and functions to clearly subordinate Annie, but he also creates the space necessary to hang himself by his own proverbial rope.

Ideologies of colonialism and patriarchy define and delimit Annie and Mineu's play. These ideologies, which stratified the society in which Annie and Mineu lived, were made to appear natural and unquestioned. In the Anglophone Caribbean, one type of ideology that was, and continues to be influential in stratifying the society, is Christianity. Christian dogma naturalized both colonial and patriarchal hierarchies, and through Christianity's close connection to the schools, hierarchies of race, class, gender, and nation became part of the socialization of children in the British colonies.



## **Education and Colonialism**

In his book, *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire's End*, John Willinsky emphasizes the relationship between knowledge and imperialism. Building on theorist Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, Willinsky suggests that a shift in thought that occurred at the end of the sixteenth century had a symbiotic relationship to the emerging era of imperialism. Foucault suggests that during this time knowledge began to be constructed around the differences between things (as subjects), rather than their similarities. Willinsky argues that within imperial discourse this focus on difference emphasized primitive vs. civilized, and East vs. West. Therefore, the way of thinking changed to accommodate imperialism. Indeed, much of the research done during the imperial era focus on establishing differences between Europe and the "other." The production of this knowledge served a political and economic function. Furthermore, according to Willinsky, the focus on science and order helped rebuild the instability that resulted from Columbus's "discoveries." The results of Columbus's exploration overturned much of what had previously been "known" about the world. The measuring and marking of imperial discourse helped reinvest Europe with confidence in their own power to know.

It is important to keep this relationship between epistemology and power in mind in any analysis of education because schools have been used to legitimize certain types of knowledge as real and true, making invisible the ways in which knowledge is constructed and contested. National education systems, as methods of state socialization, have always contained the potential for political manipulation. Education systems, in as much

as they are centralized by the state and its apparatuses have, therefore, always played a central role in creating and maintaining the various ideologies of the state. Because the school environment has the capacity to systematically instruct and condition the children of the nation, the power to administer education is the power to craft the consciousness of the masses.

The education system, as it has been defined since the beginning of the twentieth century – as an organized, and somewhat centralized system that teaches the various skills that are valuable to its community – is inextricably tied to the historical development of the nation state. In his text *Education, Globalization and the Nation State*, Andy Green argues, “The national education system as a universal and public institution first emerged in post-revolutionary Europe as an instrument of state formation” (1). He further posits that this formalization of education was essential to the construction and integration of the developing nation state, and, that education became one of the most important support structures for the emerging nation. Since this time, the development of national identity, national cohesion and intra-state economics have always relied on education to promote and perpetuate specific ideologies. Further, international relations – particularly international relationships of domination – also depended for their success on the careful manipulation of the education system. Neo/post/colonizing countries maximize their positioning, while minimizing resistance, through controlled and controlling access to information. There are clear and certain connections, then, between the development of national education systems and imperial nation-building in various locations including Europe, Japan and North American from the nineteenth century to the present (Green 29). Prior to nationalized education systems,

nineteenth-century Europe, for example, was characterized more by fragmentation than national cohesion. Green notes, “When La Chalotais first advocated national education in France the country was still a disaggregated collection of communities speaking countless different languages” (27). Green therefore concludes that “the main reason for creating national education systems, as Durkheim later noted, was to foster social solidarity and national cohesion – or, to put it in a more Gramscian way, to promote a ‘national popular’ cultural hegemony defined predominantly by the dominant classes” (27).

During the post-WWII period, a period marked by the independence of many former colonies, education was defined as a universal human right. In Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the United Nations declared that every individual had the right to free and compulsory education, at least at the elementary stage. As numerous countries throughout the world came to independence, universal education was seen as a necessary condition for creating and sustaining new democratic governments. Education was seen as an essential building block in the spread of democracy and there has been a great belief in its ability to bring power to individuals, and by extension, their countries. However, for women in former colonies education has not always brought them the promised rewards. As I discuss below, girls are outachieving boys in terms of education throughout the Anglophone Caribbean, but these successes have not always translated into greater power in the society. In order to understand this disconnect we must examine the role of culture in establishing and maintaining gender roles. Can patriarchy trump education? That is to say, in patriarchal societies does the de facto secondary status of women stymie the increased power that is supposed to come from

education? Answering this question requires a close examination of all interests that influence the culture of a society and the culture of the classroom.

Missionary groups have had incredible influence throughout the schools in the Anglophone Caribbean. They were often the first groups to take an interest in the education of slaves and this interest continued in the post-emancipation era in the establishment of schools. In his article, "British Imperial Policy and the Mission Schools," Brian Holmes provides some statistics on the overwhelming influence of missionary schools under British colonialism:

In the Bahamas nearly 25 per cent of the primary schools in 1951 were denominational and were attended by over 20 per cent of the pupils. There was one Government high school enrolling little more than 12 per cent of the pupils. In 1949-50 of the 279,309 educational institutions in India over 100,000 were managed by private bodies. A fifth of the schools in Kerala were managed by Christian organizations. In Ceylon the privileged position of the mission schools had been questioned for a long time but as late as 1958, under a dual system of control, roughly 53 per cent of the 7,674 schools were owned by the Government and 47 per cent by the private bodies. The Dike Report on the educational system of Eastern Nigeria pointed out that in 1962 the voluntary agencies owned more than 80 per cent of the schools in the Region. Indeed nearly 50 per cent of all schools were owned and controlled by the Roman Catholics" (9).

While missionary schools were welcomed by many as a chance to provide the children of the colony with greater power in society, and later to create a local elite to run the country in the post-independence era, these benefits came with a price. Holmes suggests these

schools provided “a dual threat” in that the schools became an agency of religious conversion that seduced many children and their parents to convert to Christianity, but also in that they legitimized and naturalized colonial culture. Holmes says that “elements of British or English secular education including political ideals were inevitably taught, if incidentally (9). Schools also became important in the furtherance of Victorian gender ideology – particularly in the emphasis on the chastity of girls. Schools became important conduits of the cult of domesticity and the assimilation of girls into these roles became connected to the status of the family. Respectable families had chaste girls. The influence of missionaries on current gender ideology must be examined in this context.

If education is clearly an instrument for the construction and maintenance of the national citizen, the national character, the dominant class, and religious beliefs then the education system certainly contains the potential for oppression as I have noted above. However, and somewhat paradoxically, it is this same capacity to mobilize and unite that also creates the potential for empowerment through national independence movements. This seems particularly true in cases of postcolonial nations in that their national identity has been formed through both of these processes. Therefore, in the case of postcolonial nations especially, the education system must not only work as a channel for change, but it must also convince the masses that education – a tool that has been long associated with imperialism, classism, sexism and racism – can actually help them achieve independence and equality. How can the same classroom that conditioned its students to view Europe as the center of their world now give them the tools for liberation? Or, more to the point, can the master’s tools really dismantle the master’s house?

## **The Debates on Gender and Education in the Anglophone Caribbean**

In the second half of the twentieth century curriculum reforms were ubiquitous in the education systems of the Anglophone Caribbean. Syllabi and textbooks were changed to reflect the identity of the local country as opposed to that of the colonizer. Another major change was the replacement of the Cambridge exams (written and graded in the UK) with the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) exams (written and graded in the region). The CXC, established in 1972 to provide exams at the completion of secondary and post-secondary education, has allowed the education system of the Anglophone Caribbean to focus on and reward knowledge of local histories, literatures and culture. This reform emerged in conjunction with independence and nationalist movements that emphasized the need for a West Indian consciousness.

Most countries in the Anglophone Caribbean achieved independence during the second half of the twentieth century, and education reform became an important focus for many nationalist movements in the region. During debates over education reform the connection between race, class, and nation was generally accepted. However, the role of gender in stratification and, moreover, its relationship to race, class and nation was less visible. But, beginning slowly in the 1970s and gaining some institutional support by the 1990s, some Caribbean nations did institute curriculum reform projects emphasizing the role of sexism in the schools in producing gender-based inequalities. By 2000, the Centre for Gender and Development Studies published *Gender Issues in Caribbean Education: A Module for Teacher Education* for the CARICOM Secretariat.

However, beginning in the mid-1980s, and building up support in the last ten years, some researchers have argued that feminist efforts to reform the curriculum have

given girls an unfair advantage in the school system. They argue that according to most markers of educational success, female students throughout the Caribbean region have been outperforming their male counterparts. According to *Access Quality and Efficiency in Caribbean Education: A Regional Study*, “Across the Caribbean, girls achieve better educational results than boys particularly in the secondary schools. On CXC exams throughout the region, girls take more of the tests than do boys and they have a higher pass rate in most subjects. Similarly, women are outperforming men at the tertiary level. Enrollment at the University of the West Indies in 1994/5 was 61.3 percent female, 38.7 percent male. In that same year, 57 percent of undergraduate degrees from the University of the West Indies were awarded to females.

The concern over the underperformance of boys has led to an outbreak of research focused on the plight of males in the Caribbean, and in some countries, even reverse affirmative action policies which reserve certain spaces in secondary school for males. In some ways, the situation of the Anglophone Caribbean is not unique. In the U.S., for example, a number of scholars have looked at the underperformance of boys in school and reasoned that feminist reforms intended to help girls have in effect hurt boys.<sup>6</sup> However, the debate in the Anglophone Caribbean is different inasmuch as it is connected to a larger discussion of aberrant masculinity. In her article, “Caribbean Masculinity and Family: Revisiting ‘Marginality’ and ‘Reputation,’” Christine Barrow discusses the body of anthropological work on Caribbean family types. Looking at the second half of the twentieth century, Barrow contends that anthropologists used structural functionalist models of family to create the image of the absent male. Only nuclear families living in one patriarchal household were acceptable; other family types were

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<sup>6</sup> See David Sadker’s “An Educator’s Primer on the Gender War.”

aberrant. Barrow says, “In their anxiety to disassociate themselves from the theme of matrilineal African origin, functionalists searched for men as fathers and husbands and ignored their insertion into the kinship system as brothers and uncles” (341). Rather than interpret the families in the Caribbean as a different family type, the functionalists looked for reasons why the man was not fulfilling his role as patriarch. They reasoned that “within the conditions of job insecurity, high unemployment and migration along with low social and racial status, he could not fulfill this obligation” and he was consequently labeled “marginal” (342).

In the context of this larger debate around masculinity, the debate over boys’ underperformance in school in the Anglophone Caribbean has taken on greater meaning than the debates around gender and education in other countries like the U.S. One of the most influential discussions of male underperformance is Errol Miller’s 1986 book, *Marginalization of the Black Male: Insights from the Development of the Teaching Profession*, which makes clear connections between boys’ school performance and larger debate around the role of men in Caribbean society. In this analysis Miller articulates his “marginalization thesis”: “the interacting socializing influences of school, home and church reinforce each other and are increasingly socializing black boys to accept marginality as a way of life” (5). Miller begins with the premise that in the colonial period the ruling white male minority feared the power of black male rebellion – that it “could overthrow the power structure” (5-6). He says that to mitigate this threat, only a small group of black men were allowed to adopt positions of power in the society. This, Miller suggests, “benefits the black woman,” who will fill the remaining positions (6). Miller argues that



her greater mobility is a means by which the ruling minority can defend themselves of the charge of racism. It is also a useful means of neutralizing potential rebellion on the part of the black man. It suggests that the black man's failure to rise socioeconomically is his own fault. More importantly it also establishes an alliance between the black woman and the ruling minority. This is also true of the few black men who are coopted. This alliance creates division in the ranks of blacks and frustrates unity and mobilization to resist and oppose exploitation. (6)

Miller concludes that this process has given "the impression of liberating women but at the same time consigns them to the less privileged and powerful positions. While allowed greater access to upward mobility, women are often frustrated by not being rewarded with top positions commensurate with their ability and experience" (73). The result, according to Miller, is that power is maintained by the ruling minority elite.

While Miller says that black men are also marginalized in the home and at church, he focuses his argument on the school system looking primarily at the history of teacher education and how recruitment for teaching jobs has been used strategically to marginalize black men. He argues:

Primary school teaching and teacher education shifted from being male dominated to being female dominated as a result of the intention of the ruling class to release black men from service type occupations to make them available for agricultural and industrial labor, and to stifle the possible emergence of militant black educated men who could possibly overthrow the power structure. (73)

Looking at Jamaica, he notes that by the beginning of the twentieth century female students began to be recruited in higher numbers for spots in teacher's colleges. By 1985 females made up 82.3 percent of the students enrolled in teacher's colleges in Jamaica. He uses these figures as well as secondary and tertiary level education statistics to give quantitative evidence of his marginalization thesis and he maintains that the absence of male teachers is "an important consideration for the socialization of both boys and girls in a society in which effective male influence is often absent from the home" (74). To address the disparity between male and female achievement in education, and to work against the problematic socialization of a primarily female teaching force, Miller suggests a kind of reverse affirmative-action policy: "a restructuring of the institutional arrangements so as to ensure equity of access and fairness in promotion between men and women, of all ethnic groups, all social segments and geographic areas" (77).

Furthering Miller's concern about the underperformance of boys, an *Eastern Caribbean Education Reform Project: Student Attitude Survey*, administered in 1999, concluded that "the results confirm unequivocally that boys are disadvantaged in terms of their educational experiences in secondary school ... boys like school less, have lower self-esteem, perceived competence, and sense of purpose in attending school, exert less effort in school, and have more frequent behavior problems and poorer academic performance." Further, the results stated:

It was clear to all that specific efforts must be made to target boys and improve their psychological and behavioral outcomes.... [I]t was recommended that special enrichment programs for boys emphasize the importance of academic achievement, and that this be reinforced by employers. It was also recommended

that teaching methods be modified to provide more ‘hands on’ experience to cater to boys’ need for activity oriented learning. (Eastern Caribbean Education Reform Project: Student Attitude Survey, 1999)

Feminist researchers, troubled by the assumptions and ramifications of these arguments, have pointed to the dissonance between girls’ achievement in school and their career opportunities. They maintain that females in the Anglophone Caribbean require more education to access the same jobs as males, and that even though women are often better educated they are still relegated to the lowest paying jobs in the society. The “male marginalization thesis” seems to discount these facts. Further, while Miller does look at gender in connection with colonialism, his argument seems to rest on patriarchal assumptions about the role men *should* play in society. Barbara Bailey, a researcher on gender and education, argues:

In spite of their *overall* higher levels of educational participation and attainment, Caribbean women, as a group, continue to be predominately clustered in the lower paying sectors of the labour market; experience higher levels of unemployment; have less access to productive resources; are under-represented in all areas of governance including representational politics and decision-making positions and processes; and, experience high levels of gender-based violence and therefore lack full control over their sexual and reproductive rights. (“Search for Gender Equity” 110)

Across the region, unemployment has been a significant problem, but looking at Grenada as an example, unemployment rates are especially high for women. A recently completed Poverty Assessment Survey found that women, female-headed households and

children were most seriously affected by poverty. According to statistics from “Health Systems and Service Profile Grenada, Carriacou & Martinique,”<sup>7</sup> Grenada’s unemployment rate has been declining in recent years from highs of 25 percent in the early 1990s, but women are still disproportionately represented: in both 1998 and 1999 women’s level of unemployment was nearly twice that of men’s. Further, the types of jobs that men and women have differ. In 1999, only 3.4 percent of employed women were in professional or technical posts and 1.3 percent at administrative and management levels. A study in 1992 by the Grenadian Ministry of Education found that females tended to be interested in being trained for office work, secretarial work, teaching, or hospitality work, while males favored training in plumbing, electrical work, mechanics and technology. This shows that gendered stereotypes about appropriate male and female behavior are powerful, and most importantly, that they have economic effects. In attempting to refute the male marginalization thesis, feminist scholars in the Caribbean have pointed to these economic indicators.

Challenging the male marginalization thesis, Bailey says that the “feminization of secondary and tertiary education has been taken as a indication that men are the disadvantaged group in this respect, and that equality of educational opportunity for women is not an issue in Jamaica” (*Issues of Gender*, 15). She argues, however, that “the gender gap in favor of females at the higher levels of the education system ... merely points to the fact that, generally, males are able to enter the labour market with fewer years of schooling than are required by women” (*Issues of Gender*, 15). Noting research by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in 1995, Bailey concludes that

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<sup>7</sup> Published in October 2001.

women in the Caribbean and Latin America “need to have four more years of schooling in order to compete for jobs and salaries similar to those of men (*Issues of Gender*, 15).

Asking similar questions about the male marginalization thesis, Odette Parry reminds us in her book, *Male Underachievement in High School Education*, that while “examination results indicate that females are now performing overall at a higher level than previously, the statistics need to be treated with caution for a number of reasons” (7). She says that even though females are definitely making improvements, they are still focused in traditionally female subjects. Further, “although females seem to utilize education as an agent of social mobility more successfully than males, there remain glaring inequalities in the occupational structure once they leave school” (7). Bailey attributes this in part to the sexist patterns of formal and non-formal education patterns arguing that “access to education is only half the picture. Differentiated life chances for boys and girls are further determined by the curriculum options available to both sexes at the secondary level. Strong gender divisions are evident, which are encouraged and reinforced through both explicit and implicit practices in schools” (“Sexist Patterns,” 147). She maintains that “these factors ensure differential access to various subject areas based on gender stereotyping and biases that affect both sexes” (“Sexist Patterns,” 147).

The curriculum in single-sex schools often reveals traditional gender ideology. Girls’ schools do not offer technical skills and boys’ schools do not offer domestic work or office work (Bailey “Sexist Patterns,” 147 with reference to Bryne). Co-ed schools fare little better. Bailey notes that “although the co-educational schools offer a fuller range of subjects, explicit practices such as cross-timetabling, as well as implicit teacher and societal expectations and parental and peer pressure, ensure that the gender divisions

of the single-sex school are retained” (“Sexist Patters,” 147). Bailey adds that these gender divisions in the curriculum reflect and perpetuate the gender divisions in the labor force (“Sexist Patterns,” 149).

One of the problems with the literature on this topic is that it often analyzes gender in isolation, as opposed to understanding gender as always, necessarily, working symbiotically with race, class and nation. It is my argument that the system of traditional gender norms unfairly constrains both males and females, although in different ways involving the complex intersections of gender, race, class and nation and that these constraints are connected to issues of neo/post/colonialism. Some scholars, like Odette Parry, have argued that traditional constructions of masculinity are antithetical to the school environment and others like Barbara Bailey have suggested that males recognize that even with less education they can compete with women in the labor market. This, it is argued, leads to male underperformance. On the other hand, girls are unfairly rewarded for their success in school with low paying jobs and limited career opportunities. Barbara argues that “any concern about gender disparities in educational participation about performance must be pitted against a concomitant concern about the social value, to either group, of their educational certification and the fact that schooling contributes differently to the futures of the two sexes” (*Issues of Gender* 8).

While education in the Anglophone Caribbean has undergone serious reform in the post-independence era, and despite the fact that gender discrimination has been a consideration in these reforms, school atmosphere and ideology – which dictate the “hidden curriculum” – remains largely unchanged. Because there has been little research on this issue, the effect of the hidden curriculum on the lives of women and girls is not

known. “Although linkages between early childhood experiences and socialization and later adult behaviour have been identified,” Senior contends that “there has been little exploration of these links in Caribbean female consciousness” (4). Bailey calls for more in-depth research into the larger ideological issues that are affecting both boys and girls. Suggesting that boys’ dropout rates are higher due to the financial constraints of families, rather than the culture of the schools, Bailey notes that the role of social forces outside the school have not been addressed in much of the research because “the focus has been on the comparison between the sexes rather than on intragroup factors such as social class, family form, and place of residence” (*Issues of Gender* 23). Professor of Education, Elsa Leo-Rhynie echoes this assessment noting that while women in Jamaica “are not explicitly discriminated against at any level of the educational system,” there are “still forces operating in the school and the society which influence girls to perpetuate the stereotypes of women through the choices they make in terms of school subjects, vocational areas and occupational roles” (qtd. in Senior 59). V. Eudine Barrieteau from Barbados emphasizes that “correcting biases against women to ensure access to the market through public policy does not eliminate or reduce prejudices existing against women within domestic life or the extension of these biases into many areas of women’s public sector participation” (37). This dissertation builds on the arguments of Senior, Bailey, Leo-Rhynie, and Barrieteau by analyzing the role of the hidden curriculum in creating or hampering gender equality.

While feminist theorists have exposed the flaws in Miller’s argument, I think that consideration of his original premise is useful in understanding the dynamics between school and culture. Miller rightly points out that gender in education has been

manipulated to further colonial relationships. Barriteau also looks at the interrelationship of gender and colonialism. Noting the recent surge in conflict over gender and feminism in Barbados, Barriteau points to the gender ideology with its separate but unequal rights and roles. Barriteau blames the history of colonialism and the tenets of Liberalism for this conflict, noting that the legacy of the separate sphere ideology with its privileging of the public over the private has created the conflicts in the Caribbean. She says, “These conflicts exist because liberal ideology cannot accommodate women’s participation as equals in the arenas of the public” (37). She argues that “the state should acknowledge how ideological relations of gender in both the private and public spheres structure and complicate material relations of gender” (37). My dissertation contributes to this analysis by looking at the relationship between the hidden curriculum, gender equality, and neocolonialism.

## **Methodology**

*Administering Education* is an interdisciplinary project, drawing on methods from the disciplines of Education, English, History, and Sociology. Interdisciplinary work offers the freedom to move in and between disciplines, allowing one to use the best methods possible in working towards the goal of the project. Removing disciplinary constraints encourages new conversations, and with them, new perspectives. The various sub-topics of this dissertation have already been written about in disciplinary projects. There are histories of the Anglophone Caribbean and of Belize. There are histories of missionary work in the British Empire. There are large bodies of both feminist and literary criticism that focus on the Anglophone Caribbean and there is an increasing



amount of research on education. However, *Administering Education* is the first attempt to put these bodies of scholarship into an interdisciplinary conversation. I think that this conversation is essential to understanding the education of girls in the region. My hope is that this dissertation will lay the groundwork for further inquiries of this type.

While interdisciplinary work holds great promise for furthering the understanding of gender and education in the Caribbean, it also comes with some challenges. Like most disciplinary work, the biggest challenge of this dissertation was balancing depth and breadth. The value of breadth is at the heart of interdisciplinary work – looking at an issue from a variety of different perspectives can produce new insight. However, the persuasiveness of one’s work is based on the degree of authority an author exhibits over the topic. The question that I came to over and over in this dissertation was, “How can I work with a number of bodies of scholarship at the same time?” In practical terms this question surfaced during my literature review. If each discipline has its own cannon, how could I possibly read everything? And moreover, how could I reference all of these works in my dissertation while maintaining organization and focus in my writing? The answer, of course, is that I could not read or reference everything. While interdisciplinary work attempts to break down the borders of disciplines, I found that I had to erect other boundaries in order to make this project doable. These boundaries emerged slowly over the course of my work through decisions about which authors to reference, or which theoretical perspectives to include. These decisions were based on rhetorical strategy. I had to ask myself who was going to read this work and cater my references to them.

Because the overarching goal of this project is to make change – to help identify and alleviate the obstacles to female achievement – I decided to write for the audience that would be able to have a concrete effect on this issue: educators, writers of educational policy, and politicians. When I visited offices within Belize’s Ministry of Education I was told that there was little published on education in Belize, but that there were a number of theses and dissertations that had provided useful information. Based on this, I chose to define my audience as readers of the dissertation manuscript, as opposed to readers of a later book that might emerge from the project. While many dissertations are not read in the original manuscript form, I felt that mine would be. While I see this project as a part of feminist scholarship – specifically contributing to the body of Caribbean feminist work on education that I referenced above – I deemphasize feminist language because I do not believe my immediate audience (educators, writers of educational policy, and politicians) would identify with this label. Indeed, because feminism is sometimes seen as a Western import, I felt that defining my work in such a way was not rhetorically strategic.

The boundaries that I have drawn around my project surely come at a cost. The bodies of scholarship that I do not include may be seen by those in particular disciplines as a weakness of the dissertation and my project may therefore lose authority in their eyes. For example, although I write about literature, my focus is not on literary criticism. Therefore, I only sometimes make use of the close readings of this methodology. From the eyes of a literary critic, my discussion of literature may leave them wanting a more detailed analysis of literary conventions and themes. Because interdisciplinary work is a recent development in academia, most scholars are still disciplinarily trained. While

scholars are being encouraged to do interdisciplinary work, I believe we also need to encourage scholars to *read* in interdisciplinary ways where they are cognizant of the disciplinary perspectives and biases they bring to an interdisciplinary work. The balance of depth and breadth in interdisciplinary work is difficult, but I believe the fresh perspectives that it offers outweigh the challenges.

This interdisciplinary project began seven years ago when I took a research trip to Grenada. During my stay, I met with educators and members of the Ministry of Education, gathered curriculum and reports, and generally familiarized myself with the Grenadian education system. Inasmuch as the Grenadian education system shares characteristics with the other countries in the Anglophone Caribbean, this research laid the foundation for the history I write in Chapter 2. It also helped prepare me for my second research trip to Belize.

I did my fieldwork in Belize in August of 2005. I contacted well-known researchers and conducted informal interviews with members of the Ministry of Education. These meetings helped me to understand the church-state partnership that structures the education system in Belize. I collected current primary school curricula from the Quality Assurance and Development Service (QADS), that is tasked with developing and monitoring national standards for students, teachers, and schools. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) provided me with education statistics for the past 10 years.

My archival research was done at the Belize Archives in Belmopan. I focused on two primary bodies of information: records of missionary activities in Belize from the eighteenth century to the present, and documents relating to the development of a formal

education system in Belize. I supplemented my findings at the Archives by collecting newspapers articles and journals. Additionally I gathered court records for the case of *Maria Roches v. Clement Wade*, which I discuss in the last chapter.

To interpret the materials I collected during my fieldwork I read widely in the fields of history, sociology, anthropology, postcolonial theory, feminist theory, education theory and literary criticism in general and specifically concerning the Anglophone Caribbean.

In line with my analysis of *Beka Lamb* in Chapter 6, I interviewed Zee Edgell, the author of the novel.

## **Definitions**

Throughout this dissertation, a number of terms and phrases appear that require a discussion in relation to how they are used in this work. The following provides the details of pertinent ideas and terms.

### *Hidden Curriculum*

The term “hidden curriculum,” coined by Benson Snyder in his 1971 book by the same name, is used to discuss the informal knowledge that students learn in addition to the formal curriculum. The formal curriculum includes the skills and knowledge that the school is tasked with teaching students. Mathematical equations, historical events and the ability to organize a paragraph are part of the formal curriculum. The hidden curriculum, by contrast, includes the set of beliefs, values, and mores that are

extracurricular or paracurricular, implied, or tacitly conveyed.<sup>8</sup> For theorists like Bowles and Gintis, the hidden curriculum is linked to the reproduction of social classes:

The educational system helps integrate youth into the economic system, we believe through a structural correspondence between its social relations and those of production. The structure of social relations in education not only inures the student to the discipline of the workplace, but develops the types of personal demeanour, modes of self-presentation, self-image, and social-class identification which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy. (131)

Charles Rutheiser, who wrote his dissertation on education in Belize, argues that, “the hidden curriculum of schooling is ... primarily oriented towards hierarchical system of production. That is, academic students are encouraged to become managers or professionals, and commercial students are oriented to clerical or secretarial work, while technical-vocational students are relegated to low status manual trades” (Rutheiser 41). My dissertation builds on these understandings of the hidden curriculum by looking at gender in addition to class. I ask what roles the hidden curriculum encourages girls to accept.

### *Victorian Gender Roles*

Queen Victoria reigned over the British Empire from 1837 to 1901. During this period distinct gender roles emerged as a response to growing industrialization. Men increasingly began working outside of the home, while women – at least middle- and upper-class, white women – took greater control over work inside the home. This pattern

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<sup>8</sup> See David Hargreave’s “Power and the Paracurriculum,” for an analysis of the major research on the paracurriculum.

of divided labor emerged in response to changes in the economy, but it developed into a powerful and “biologically-based” ideology around the “natural” qualities of men and women. The separate sphere ideology, as it has come to be known, designates men’s world as the public sphere, which encompasses paid work, politics, and money. The women’s sphere is called the private sphere and includes things generally connected to the home or raising children.

During the nineteenth century, the ideal of women’s behavior revolved around four characteristics: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Welter). Women were seen as having a natural affinity for religion. They were seen as the society’s moral compass and their most important work was the inculcation of ethics in their children. The concept of purity attached morality to sex. Women who remained virginous, chaste, and modest were good women, and women who did not were publicly scorned. Because sex was connected to morality and morality in turn to parenting, a daughter’s wanton sexuality shamed her family, particularly her father who was seen as the unquestioned head of the family. Men’s innate power over women was based on men’s greater size and physical strength, but extended to all aspects of life. Women were to submit to men’s leadership and dominance first as daughters to their fathers, and second as wives to their husbands. The only place where women exercised some modicum of power was the home, the private or domestic sphere. Women’s lives were so unquestioningly restricted to the home that historians refer to this ideology as the “*Cult of Domesticity*.”

The separate sphere clearly established a hierarchy between men and women, but what is less obvious is that this ideology worked to elevate whites and support colonialism. As Gail Bederman points out in her text, *Manliness and Civilization*,

ideologies of race, gender, and civilization were intimately connected. Scientific theories of the time suggested that the roles of men and women became more differentiated as races moved up the evolutionary ladder with the most advanced societies having completely separate lives for men and women. She says, “In short, as civilized races gradually evolved toward perfection, they naturally perfected and deepened the sexual specialization of the Victorian doctrine of spheres” (28). Further, the segregation between male and female was positioned in a hierarchy with the man’s superior position naturalized and unquestioned. In this way, patriarchy became part of the marking of a civilized people. The female sphere rested on morality, spirituality, and sexual purity. Thus, any sexuality that veered from Victorian prudishness marked a woman, *and her people*, as less evolved. Civilization became a gendered discourse, and the religious education system became one of the most important sites for articulating this ideology and thus regulating women’s sexuality. In this dissertation I look at the role of denominational schools in encouraging Victorian gender roles and look at the possible consequences in terms of girls’ aspirations.

### *Respectability*

The term “respectability” has been the center of a long and complex discussion among scholars of the Anglophone Caribbean since Peter Wilson’s 1969 article, “Reputation and Respectability: A Suggestion for Caribbean Ethnography” and his 1973 book *Crab Antics: The Social Anthropology of English-Speaking Negro Societies of the Caribbean*. Wilson made the case for a male/female binary value system between “reputation” and “respectability.” In Wilson’s articulation, men’s status (reputation) is

connected to African traditions and communal interaction. “It is a response to colonial dependence and a solution to the scarcity of respectability” (Besson 16). According to Wilson, women’s status (respectability) is directly connected to a woman’s sexuality. Driven by the education system and Christian churches, respectability is tied to a colonial system of stratification based on class, color, culture and marriage.

In her article, “Reputation and Respectability Reconsidered: A New Perspective on Afro-Caribbean Peasant Women,” Jean Besson points to the flaws in Wilson’s argument. She says that the male value system of reputation is based on “unequal and exploitive gender relations” and that Wilson figures resistance against colonial culture as exclusively male “while Afro-Caribbean women are regarded as bearers and perpetuators of the Eurocentric colonial value system” (19). Carla Freeman, author of *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy*, makes a similar argument claiming that, “Wilson’s model of reputation and respectability tends to idealize the former as creative and even, in a sense, liberating, and to condemn the latter as a direct expression of ‘mental colonialism’ in which Caribbean people strive to imitate their white masters and mistresses in their conservative conventions (110).

Lynn Bolles provides another way of looking at the issue. Rather than interpreting women’s behavior within the narrow constructions of respectability and colonial mimicry, she suggests that we use Chela Sandoval’s theory of “oppositional consciousness.” Sandoval interprets resistance “as a theory and praxis exercised by those who refuse to assume or adhere to an ideology fixed by those in social and economic power in their society. The oppressed, by race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity or other forms of difference establish their own position, their own sense of power on their own



terms” (2-3). In this way what matters is not the outsider’s interpretation of a woman’s behavior – whether or not her decision to get married represents accommodation into a Eurocentric model of family – but the way that the woman manipulates the ideology to her own empowerment. In this dissertation I look at the ideology of respectability as a political tool, capable of both oppression and resistance. Although Christian ideology still retains a great amount of power in the region, this does not negate women’s agency.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I want to define what I will call “the ideology of respectability” as a belief system that uses aspects of women’s sexuality to establish and maintain the middle class. As I discussed above, during the colonial era, constructions of women’s sexuality were used to establish racial hierarchies that in turn legitimated the paternalism of the mother country towards colonized peoples. In the chapters that follow I will explain how missionary influence has entrenched the ideology of respectability in the culture of the schools throughout the Anglophone Caribbean. The ideology of respectability surfaces in school policies like the expulsion of pregnant students, which I discuss in Chapter 5; however, it is often part of the hidden curriculum, unstated but powerful. It is difficult for researchers to gain access to the hidden curriculum, but an understanding of the values and beliefs that schools instill in students is necessary to combating gender inequality. In chapters 2 and 5 I illustrate the role literature can play in revealing the hidden curriculum.

### **Organization of *Ad/ministering Education***

In order to set the parameters of this multifaceted study the following outlines the intent of each chapter. In Chapter 2, I provide a history of missionary evangelism and

British colonial education in the Anglophone Caribbean. In his introduction to *Missions and Empire*, Norman Etherington points to the seeming reluctance or inability of scholars to talk about the role of Christian missions in the history of the British Empire. J.A. Mangan makes the same point noting that while there are detailed studies of colonial regions and religious institutions, that this work has not been connected to the history of imperialism. Etherington suggests that the reason for this gap in scholarship is because the relationship between Christian evangelism and the British Empire is complex in that it varies across the different colonies of the Empire and within the colonies over time (1-3).

Susan Thorne echoes Etherington's point in her book *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England*. She asserts a strong and symbiotic connection between missionary evangelism and imperial control, but she cautions that missionary interests and imperial interests were not synonymous – missionaries pursued souls and converts rather than profits and trade. Thorne argues most missionaries believed that they were helping the people to whom they ministered and that they made great sacrifices out of this motivation: many died during their postings overseas, while others either endured long separations from their family, or risked the health of their wives and children by bringing their families with them on arduous journeys (8-9). At times missionaries even worked against imperial control (8-9). J.A. Mangan maintains that there needs to be much more work done to demonstrate the *connection* between education, evangelism, and imperialism in these histories (4).

I add to this effort in Chapter 2 by demonstrating the connections between colonial conquest, religious proselytizing, and the emergence of a formal education

system in the Anglophone Caribbean. Although there are obvious differences between the histories of individual countries in the Anglophone Caribbean, there are also similarities. These similarities can provide important insights into the role of education in the British Empire and the spread of Christianity. Further, I take up an important theme that even Mangan fails to emphasize in his critique of these histories – the role of the schools in establishing beliefs about gender that serve to structure hierarchies of race, class and nation. I return to this issue in chapters 6 and 7

Although Chapter 2 is useful in providing an historical outline of the education system in the Anglophone Caribbean, the mission histories and British colonial reports which inform the chapter do not provide insight into the hidden curriculum. In order to address the hidden curriculum of the present-day school systems in the region, we need to understand the way it has functioned in the past. I argue that twentieth-century Caribbean literature can provide us an important window into the hidden curriculum through literary memory. Therefore the purpose of Chapter 3 is not to contribute to the body of literary criticism on Caribbean literature or to do close readings of the texts. Rather, my intention is to use literature to contribute to the fields of history and education.

Looking at the body of well-known<sup>9</sup> Anglophone Caribbean literature, I selected texts based on three criteria. First, the narratives had to be autobiographical. Five of the texts are novels, one is a memoir, and one is a poem, but they all fall into a category that some critics have called a creolized genre. The second criteria was the inclusion of classroom scenes. I wanted the literature to illuminate the small-scale interactions

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<sup>9</sup> By “well-known” I mean literature that has high sales, has received critical attention, and/or has won awards.

between students, and between students and teachers. Finally, I chose narratives that included a presentation and critique of the hidden curriculum. With these criteria in mind, I chose the following texts: George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* (Barbados), Austin Clarke's *Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack* (Barbados), Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* (Trinidad), Merle Collins's *Angel* (Grenada), and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and *Lucy* (Antigua).<sup>10</sup>

George Lamming is one of the world's most well known Caribbean writers. He was born in Barbados in 1927, a time of tension between British colonialism and the emerging nationalist movement. Lamming was nine years old during the Bridgetown riots that protested the deportation of Clement Payne, a Trinidadian union organizer (Paquet 8). Lamming witnessed the growing trade union movement of the 1930s and 40s, and the rise of the independence movements in the 1950s, both of which influenced his novel, *In the Castle of My Skin*, which was published in 1953. *In the Castle of My Skin* tells the story of a poor black boy named G, who struggles to come of age against the backdrop of 1930s Barbados. I chose to use this novel for two reasons. First, *In the Castle of My Skin*, provides one of the earliest and most vivid accounts of colonial schooling in the Anglophone Caribbean. The schoolroom scenes Lamming richly describes provide an account of both the formal and hidden curriculums of Barbadian education in the 30s. Most importantly for this dissertation, the narrative traces the affects of the schooling on G and his friends. *In the Castle of My Skin* describes the process by which the mind is colonized and the effects of this socialization on a child's growing sense of self and his political worldview.

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<sup>10</sup> I considered using Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* but ultimately decided to omit it because even though it criticizes the hidden curriculum of colonial education, it does not have many useful classroom scenes or direct references to the formal curriculum.

The second reason I chose *In the Castle of My Skin* is the novel's conscious intervention into history. One of the themes that is central to all Lamming's work is the relationship of the past to the present. He says,

The colonial experience is a matter of historical record. What I'm saying is that the colonial experience is a *live* experience in the *consciousness* of these people. And just because the so-called colonial situation is over and its institutions may have been transferred into something else, it is a fallacy to think that the human-lived content of those situations are automatically transferred in to something else, too. The experience is a continuing psychic experience that has to be dealt with long after the actual colonial situation formally 'ends.' (Kent 92)

Lamming tasks the writer with the responsibility of shaping of a postcolonial national consciousness, which he emphasizes in his collection of essays, *The Pleasures of Exile*.

Austin Clarke, author of *Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack, A Memoir*, was born in Barbados in 1934. As a child he attended Cobermere School, the setting for much of *Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack*. He emigrated to Canada in 1955 to attend University of Toronto. Although not well-known in the U.S., Clarke is a celebrated writer in Canada who has received a number of awards including the 1980 Casa de las Americas Prize for Literature, the Dr. Martin Luther King Achievement Award, the Rogers Communication Writer's Trust Fiction Prize, the W.O. Mitchell Literary Prize and the Order of Canada. Inasmuch as the other stories I look at in this chapter are autobiographical fiction, Clarke's memoir is fictionalized autobiography. That is, having written nine novels (some autobiographical) and several collections of short stories, Clarke's narrative style in *Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack* is

indistinguishable from that of his novels. Indeed, all of the texts that I use are generically “creolized”; they exist between and among various genres, particularly literature, history, and autobiography. *Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack* is set in the same country (Barbados) and the same school (Cobermere) as *In the Castle of My Skin*. I consciously group Clarke’s memoir and Lamming’s novel to challenge the generic boundaries between fiction and autobiography – they are both histories, and like all histories, they are both subjective.

*Crick Crack, Monkey*, an autobiographical novel by Merle Hodge, plays with genre in the same ways as Lamming and Clarke, but Hodge’s work brings another contribution – an analysis of gender. Merle Hodge was born in Trinidad in 1944. In 1962 Hodge won the Trinidad and Tobago Girls Island Scholarship, which allowed her to attend University College in London. After earning her PhD in French, Hodge went to Grenada in 1979 to work as a director of curriculum development for Prime Minister Maurice Bishop. After the assassination of Bishop and the U.S. invasion in 1983 Hodge left Grenada, eventually returning to Trinidad to work for the University of the West Indies.

Hodge’s novel, published in 1970, marks a shift away from the mostly male writers that had characterized the previous 20 years of Caribbean literature. Kathleen Renk, author of *Caribbean Shadows and Victorian Ghosts: Women’s Writing and Decolonization*, argues that

even though [the earlier male] narratives react to colonial hierarchy and focus on Caribbean rather than English landscapes and culture, they retain characteristics of “imitative elite” narratives in that they do not overturn the basic assumptions of

English nationalist literature, which encode monolithic national and gender identities and hierarchical gender systems. (5)

Renk suggests that Hodge and the female Caribbean novelists that followed her challenged the “Victorian myth of family” to make visible the “close ties between the rhetoric of nationalism” and “consolidated identities based on discrete categories of sex-gender, race, color, and nation.” She contends that women writers overturned “the very basis of the discourse –the myth of the family that perpetuates hierarchical systems and hegemony, discrete limiting categories, and an inexorable colonialism that still pervades the Anglophone Caribbean” (Renk 7).

Like Hodge, Merle Collins worked for the Bishop government. Her novel, *Angel*, chronicles the years leading up to the Bishop government. Collins was born in 1950 and attended St. Joseph’s Convent, where she later returned to teach. She received her bachelor’s degree from the University of the West Indies, her master’s degree from Georgetown University, and her PhD from the University of London in 1990. Collins’s schooling was multidisciplinary including the study of English, Spanish, Latin American studies, and government. Throughout her years in higher education, she continued her creative writing publishing *Callaloo: A Grenada Anthology* and *Because the Dawn Breaks*. After leaving University of London Collins continued publishing novels, short stories and poetry including *Rain Darling* (1990), *Rotten Pomerack* (1992), and *The Colour of Forgetting* (1995). She currently teaches literature and creative writing at the University of Maryland.

*Angel* includes an account of Angel’s early schooling, but Collins’s novel is different from the other stories in that it follows the protagonist to the University of the

West Indies. At university, Angel experiences a completely different type of education than the one she was exposed to in primary and secondary school. She moves away from the “banking” style of education, being encouraged instead to think critically and ask questions, and she escapes the rigid gender norms which were a part of her life growing up. The description of Angel’s university education marks a moment of progress. As with *In the Castle of My Skin*, *Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack*, and *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Angel criticizes the system of British colonial education, but unlike the others, Angel follows the protagonist to a non-colonial school. The comparisons between Angel’s university education and her earlier education in Grenada provide a fuller critique of the hidden curriculum of colonial education.

The last author that I consider is Jamaica Kincaid, an Antiguan writer who has achieved both commercial and critical success. She has won a number of awards including the Anifield-Wolf book Award and The Lila-Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund Award. She was a finalist for the international Ritz Paris Hemingway Award, and was nominated for the 1997 National Book Award for *My Brother*. Kincaid was born Elaine Potter Richardson in 1949 and lived in Antigua until the age of 17 when she moved to New York to work as an au pair. She gained popularity by writing for *The Village Voice*, and later, *The New Yorker*, where she became a staff writer in 1976. In 1985 Kincaid published her first novel, *Annie John*, and in 1990 she published what many consider to be the sequel, *Lucy*.

*Annie John* tells the story of the coming-of-age of Annie, a smart and defiant girl who is pained by her gradual separation from her mother. At the end of the novel, Annie’s independence becomes complete. She has not only distanced herself from her



mother, and thus created her own unique identity, but she is preparing to leave colonial Antigua. *Lucy*, an au pair for a wealthy white couple in North America, picks up the story as a teenage girl struggling to fit in with the family she works for. Lucy still retains a strong, although conflicted, bond with her mother who remains in Antigua, but the novel focuses on her relationship with the woman she works for, Mariah. Mariah, who is meant to represent Western feminism, has good intentions, but is completely incapable of seeing past her privilege and so her relationship with Lucy ultimately falls apart.

*Annie John* and *Lucy* both engage with British colonial education, although in *Annie John* school is more of a focus. What I am most interested in, however, is the way these novels portray resistance. Both novels present and critique the colonial school's construction of the oppressed mind, but they also demonstrate the resistance to this process. For Annie, this resistance is figured as defacement of a textbook, while for Lucy it is in her rejection of Mariah's neocolonial relationship. In Chapter 3, therefore, I use Caribbean literature as a tool to understand the hidden curriculum of colonial schools *and* the resistance to it.

In her essay, "'Somebody Forgot to Tell Somebody Something': African-American Women's Historical Novels," Barbara Christian notes that literary memories surface at key moments. The literature that I look emerges in the period before and after independence in the Anglophone Caribbean. (I look at novels published between 1953 and 1990). Because these novels have, as one focus, the colonial education of their protagonist, I argue that these memories are therefore connected to nationalism. These authors recognize the power of education and their works emphasize the importance of these memories to postcolonial reforms and nation-building.

The first three chapters look at the Anglophone Caribbean as a region. In order to balance breadth and depth subsequent chapters (Chapters 4-7) focus on one country within the Anglophone Caribbean, Belize. Belize provides a particularly interesting case because of its unique history within the British Empire, which I explain in Chapter 4. Belize existed in an imperial no-man's-land until the middle of the nineteenth century. The British did not officially claim Belize as a crown colony until 1862 despite the fact that British settlers populated and colonized the area from the late seventeenth century. Even after Britain claimed Belize, it remained a "backwater" colony. Chapter 5 recounts how the forgotten status of Belize allowed missionary groups more influence and power than they had in other colonies. This influence has remained quite strong in the post-independence era and it can be seen clearly in the role of religious groups in the present-day education system. Missionary groups were important in all of the countries of the Anglophone Caribbean. They were the principal operators of, and investors in, the education system prior to independence. In most countries in the Anglophone Caribbean, the government has taken control of the education system and while religious groups still have great influence and often still run the most prestigious schools, their power has diminished as the governments have increased standardization, oversight, and centralized organization. This general pattern, however, has not been true of Belize. In Belize there is church-state partnership in the education system in which religious managements (each management represents a different sect of Christianity) control the day-to-day administration of the schools. The Belizean government pays 100 percent of primary school teacher's salaries and 70 percent of secondary school teacher's salaries, but the religious managements handle all personnel issues including the hiring and firing of

teachers. In the past ten years the Belizean government has taken a stronger role in developing curriculum for primary schools, but the religious managements are in charge of how this curriculum is taught. The codes of conduct for schools in Belize are based on Christian precepts, which creates problems for pregnant students and unwed teachers, which I discuss in Chapter 6 and 7 respectively.

The two chapters based on historical and archival evidence help to explain why Belize is one of only two countries<sup>11</sup> in the Anglophone Caribbean that use a church-state partnership to administer education (Miller 5). Further, in order to understand why religious groups have maintained so much power in Belize, it is necessary to look closely at Belize's past. In Chapter 4 I trace the history of Belize from the first European settlements to the mid-twentieth century nationalist movement explaining Belize's ambiguous status within the British Empire. This chapter also demonstrates the important ideological and symbolic roles women play in traditional histories of Belize. Specifically, Christian ideologies of properness and respectability have contained or erased the historical memories of Belizean women and constructions of respectable femininity have served political interests. This chapter provides an important historiography that exposes and challenges the construction and maintenance of patriarchy in Belize in both the colonial and postcolonial eras.

Belize's ambiguous legal status had important consequences for the development of the Belizean education system. Chapter 5 traces the interconnected histories of missionary work and formal schooling. Other than a handful of dissertations, there is little written about the education system in Belize. This chapter represents the first attempt to tell the history of Belizean education in tandem with the history of missionary

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<sup>11</sup> St. Lucia is the other.

groups by bringing together information scattered throughout traditional histories, and combining that with missionary accounts and colonial reports.

Charles Rutheiser notes that “few social scientists of either foreign or local birth have effectively described the complexity of just what exactly goes on in schools in postcolonial societies. Generally the richly-textured accounts of life in schools, and, by extension the societies in which they are embedded, are found in works of fiction, like Wole Soyinka’s *Ake: The Years of Childhood* (1983) or Zee Edgell’s *Beka Lamb* (1984)” (30). Building on Rutheiser’s suggestion, Chapter 6 uses Belizean author Zee Edgell’s novel, *Beka Lamb*, to expose the hidden curriculum in mid-twentieth century Belizean schools. *Beka Lamb* tells the story of Toyicie Qualo, a girl who gets pregnant shortly before graduating from secondary school. Toyicie is expelled from the Catholic school she attends and this sets in process a series of events that lead to her death. Beka, the protagonist and Toyicie’s best friend, is left to make sense of her friend’s demise. In fact, watching Toyicie’s fall from grace gives Beka the tools to succeed. Toyicie’s story is connected to what has become a controversial issue in Belize in the last three decades. Traditionally, pregnant students have been expelled from school and this issue has become a feminist rallying point for the Women’s Bureau and other Women’s NGO’s in Belize. I use Edgell’s novel to extend the conversation beyond the issue of expulsion, to the effect this practice has on women’s identity throughout Belize. Besides a textual reading of segments of the novel, I also include email correspondence with the author for further insights concerning gender equity, religion, and education.

Chapter 7 carries on with the issues of pregnancy that were part of *Beka Lamb*’s fictive commentary. However, in this chapter I focus on the real lived experience and

common practice of firing or suspending unwed teachers who become pregnant.

Although the government disapproves of this practice, the church-state partnership allows the religious managements complete discretion over personnel issues. In 2004 the legal system became involved. A teacher who had been fired after getting pregnant sued the Catholic management and the court found in her favor. Although this has been an important precedent in Belize, the courts cannot solve the larger problem. For female teachers, their sexuality – who they live with, their marital status, the number of children they have – has direct consequences on their employment. Chapter 7 considers the legal issues surrounding the case, but also the impact that this practice has on the identity of women in Belize. The surveillance of female teacher's sexuality remains an important issue in Belize and it evidences the power religious groups hold in the society.

## Chapter 2: “Bought by a New Master”: A History of Missionary Work and Education in the West Indies

*With the Bible in one hand, and the sword in the other,  
Columbus and those who succeeded him  
sought to convert the native peoples to Christianity  
by coercion while exploiting their human resources.*  
--Nathanial Samuel Murrell

*As cultural and emotional currency which is readily  
appropriated and manipulated, religion has  
always accompanied imperialistic expansion.*  
-- Patricia Rooke

Charles Rutheiser, author of “Culture, Schooling, and Neocolonialism in Belize,” argues that the causal connection between education and liberation has become axiomatic around the world. “Belief in the miraculous efficacy of schooling to effect social and individual changes has been one of the most widely accepted exports of the metropolitan industrialized nations to the rest of the world,” according to Rutheiser (26-27). However, the history of education in the Caribbean makes clear that education was not always intended to empower. To the contrary, education in missionary schools was seen by many imperialists as a tool for maintaining colonial hierarchies.

We also know that despite the importance of education in the postcolonial world, it is not a cure-all. In order to have true change and increased equality there needs to also be a shift in the thinking of the society. If empowerment is the goal, education is necessary, but not sufficient. Proof of this was presented in the last chapter: girls throughout the Caribbean are out-achieving boys and yet these successes are not

translating into more economic, political, or social power. To better understand the role of education in creating progressive change, the present-day system requires contextualization.

In his preface to *Educational Policy and the Mission School*, J. A. Lauwerys emphasizes the importance of understanding the history of education in addressing present problems and challenges:

[O]ften in education the problems of today cannot be understood without taking full account of the way in which they were generated: the historical dimension is essential to the analysis. This is particularly true in the evaluation of missionary effort: policy decisions were taken in the very early days and institutions created. The effects were permanent and persist.... [The history of the missionary school is important] but not for the sake of antiquarian devotion; mainly in order to illuminate present conflicts and disputes. (viii)

Therefore, this chapter provides a brief history of missionary work in the Caribbean, with particular attention paid to missionary involvement in the education system. At the end of the chapter I suggest lessons we might learn from this history and how those lessons might affect policy choices surrounding the pedagogy and administration of education in the Anglophone Caribbean.

### **Conversion and Conquest**

The history of the education system in the Anglophone Caribbean is inextricably linked to the history of proselytizing in the region. To understand the enduring power of the Christian churches in the Caribbean it is important to remember the context in which

the New World was discovered. From the 8<sup>th</sup> century to the 13<sup>th</sup> century Spain and Portugal were under the control of Arab and Moorish rulers. In his book, *The Shaping of the West Indian Church: 1492-1962*, Arthur Dayfoot explains the importance of the wars that Spain and Portugal fought to achieve their independence. Religion's unifying power and the papacy's support both played important roles for Iberian Christians during the *Reconquista*. The "Re-conquest" created a lasting legacy of religious intolerance in Spain and Portugal. "In a day when religion was so closely allied to government it was thought dangerous to have what the twentieth century would call a 'fifth column' within the country" (Dayfoot 1). Religious uniformity was seen as necessary for sovereignty. Thus, by the beginning of the 1490s, Jews and Muslims were expelled from Spain unless they converted to Catholicism, and the Spanish Inquisition, which persisted until the nineteenth century, tortured and executed Jews, Muslims, and Protestants accused of heresy. According to Dayfoot, Spain's use of religious conversion to achieve political control established a precedent that guided settler behavior in the New World. In dealing with the Amerindians and Africans, Spain relied on the same tactics they had used against Jews and Muslims. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when England and France established settlements in the New World, they followed Spain's lead, relying on religious belief and charges of heresy to establish sovereignty.

The relationship between conquest and conversion was formalized in the 1493 Papal Bull of Demarcation:

Almighty God conferred upon us in blessed Peter and of the vicarship of Jesus Christ, which we hold on earth, do by tenor of these presents, should any of said islands have been found by your envoys and captains, give, grant, and assign to



you and your heirs and successors, kings of Castile and Leon, forever, together with all their dominions, cities, camps, places, and villages, and all rights, jurisdictions, and appurtenances, all islands and main lands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered towards the west and south, by drawing and establishing a line from the Arctic pole, namely the north, to the Antarctic pole, namely the south, no matter whether the said main lands and islands are found and to be found in the direction of India or towards any other quarter, the said line to be distant one hundred leagues towards the west and south from any of the islands commonly known as the Azores and Cape Verde.

Papal bulls are usually considered in relation to their political consequences, but Dayfoot notes that they also established the symbiotic relationship between colonialism and evangelism, laying the foundation for centuries of missionary work. “The expressly stated rationale of the document is the assignment of missionary duties in new territories and only secondarily the matter of international arbitration” (Dayfoot 21). For Dayfoot, the significance of the papal bulls lies in their assertion that “faith could best be carried out to new lands in an orderly and effective way under the aegis of the political powers which had pioneered their ‘discovery’” (21). In other words, governments would need to control the church in order to Christianize their territories.

In his article, “Dangerous Memories, Underdevelopment, and the Bible in Colonial Caribbean Experience,” Nathaniel Samuel Murrell echoes Dayfoot’s argument, insisting that the Pope saw Christianizing and civilizing as two sides of the same coin:

The historical role that the Bible and Christianity played in the Caribbean

experience was not just happenstance; it was planned as an essential part of the European expansionist program to make the Amerindians and their lands an extension of Western Europe. Pope Alexander VI (Roderigo Bogia) as Vicar of Christ and head of the *republica Christiana* in Europe not only blessed Columbus's mission to the "Indies," but he commissioned the Genovese explorer to go and discover and claim lands, gold, and precious stones for the crown, spread the gospel, and convert the heathens to Christ and to the Christian Church . . . . Later, a series of five Papal Bulls gave half of the world to Spanish sovereigns and authorized the veritable Christianization and civilization of the so-called heathens of the Americas. (10)

When the Pope gave "monarchs the sole right to appoint bishops and other ecclesiastical authorities, it also enabled them to employ coercion in converting infidels and heathens to their religion at home and abroad" (Etherington "Introduction" 14). Etherington notes that even though the King was the head of the Church of England, Anglican missionaries, enjoined with similar precepts, never had a mandate as strong as the one given to the Spanish and Portuguese Empires by the Pope (14). Nevertheless, as Britain challenged Spain's monopoly on the New World, the British used religion strategically as a tool to establish and maintain political control.

England's earliest colonization efforts – guided somewhat more by mercantilism than evangelism, with the founding of "companies" chartered by the state – still embraced missionary work in the New World, at least rhetorically. King James I's 1606 Virginia charter reads, in part:

We would vouchsafe unto them our Licence, to make Habitation, Plantation, and to deduce a Colony of sundry of our People into that Part of America, commonly called VIRGINIA, and other Parts and Territories in America, either appertaining unto us, or which are not now actually possessed by any Christian Prince or People... We, greatly commending, and graciously accepting of, their Desires for the Furtherance of so noble a Work, which may, by the Providence of Almighty God, hereafter tend to the Glory of his Divine Majesty, in propagating of Christian Religion to such People, as yet live in Darkness and miserable Ignorance of the true Knowledge and Worship of God, and may in time bring the Infidels and Savages, living in those Parts, to human Civility, and to a settled and quiet Government; DO, by these our Letters Patents, graciously accept of, and agree to, their humble and well-intended Desires;

British officials frequently argued that missionary work was essential to continued imperial rule. William Knox, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1770-1782 and a member of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Lands (SPG) insisted that “the Prevalence of the Church of England in those Colonies is the best security that Great Britain can have for their Fidelity and attachment to her Constitution and Interests” (qtd. in Harlow 738).

Catholic missionaries initially enjoyed greater success in the Americas than their Protestant counterparts. As Michael Twaddle says in “Christian Missions and Third World States,” Protestant Christian leaders “were far too busy quarrelling among themselves and struggling to establish new national churches in Europe, or ones free from state control there, to concern themselves seriously with missionary work among non-

European peoples outside North America until comparatively late in the eighteenth century” (2). Protestant sects, though, made up ground quickly, with many blacks attracted to the churches’ advocacy for abolition and an end to slavery (Twaddle 2). The Established Church was present in the colonies from the beginning, but prior to emancipation, they catered mostly to white planters’ families.

By the 1840s missions were ubiquitous in British colonies around the world and missionary work had earned public appreciation and official support (Porter 47). By the early nineteenth century evangelical Christianity, commerce, and civilization had become explicitly linked (Porter 50).

### **Slavery and the Birth of Formal Education**

Throughout the British Empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the processes of Christianizing and civilizing became blurred. According to Murrell, “the evangelistic vision of Christianity that fueled the missionary enterprise was at the heart of the European expansionist explorations to the West, [consequently] from the very beginning a Eurocentric theology was concocted from biblical materials to defend and support European interests and domination at Africans’ expense” (Murrell 12). Christian leaders provided support for the institution of slavery in the West Indies for more than 375 years by choosing certain passages of the Bible, while overlooking others. Scripture was edited and interpreted in ways that justified the colonial system<sup>12</sup> and Christian precepts were used to justify punishment for slaves that resisted or disobeyed. In some cases planters supplemented the low salaries of the ministers in exchange for teaching

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<sup>12</sup> Murrell notes that scriptures including: Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 6:5-9; Phil. 2:5-8; Col.3:22-25; I Peter 2:5-25; Rom. 13:1-10; and 1Cor. 7:20 were used as justification for slavery and colonialism.

their slaves obedience (Murrell 14). Many missionaries owned slaves and used their Sunday sermons and homilies to support slavery (Murrell 14). But even missionaries who found slavery reprehensible were instructed by their home missions to keep their objections to themselves (Murrell 14). For example, instructions to Wesleyan missionaries made clear that their “only business [was] to promote the moral and religious improvement of the slaves to whom [they] may have access, without in the least degree, in public or private, interfering with their civil condition” (qtd. in Porter 86). Of course, this advice was difficult to follow for some missionaries, who witnessed first-hand the horrors of slavery, but by in large such instructions were adhered to.

Despite the fact that Christian precepts were used to justified slavery, slave owners generally opposed religious instruction for their slaves<sup>13</sup>. This created a level of animosity between planters and missionaries that varied greatly between colony and sect, but in many cases was severe. In Jamaica, for example, missionaries were harassed and in some cases imprisoned. The preamble to an 1802 act made clear the contempt that the plantocracy had for the missionaries:

[T]here now exists in this island an evil, which is daily increasing and threatens much danger to the peace and safety thereof, by reason of the preaching of ill-disposed, illiterate, or ignorant enthusiasts, to meetings of negroes and persons of colour, chiefly slaves, unlawfully assembled; whereby ... the minds of the hearers are perverted with fanatical notions. (qtd. in Porter 87)

There were three principal reasons the plantocracy opposed religious instruction for their slaves. First, Christianity teaches that God is the most powerful leader. Thus, Christian ideology threatened a shift in the master/slave relationship by creating a third player in

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<sup>13</sup> There were a few exceptions like Christopher Codrington in Barbados and the forestocracy in Belize.

this power hierarchy, God, and by teaching slaves that they were the spiritual equals of their masters – Heaven was open to everyone, slaves included (Rooke 27). Second, religious instruction taught some slaves leadership skills by allowing them to be leaders of Bible groups and in some cases preachers. The planters worried that these leadership roles might lead to organized revolts. In his book, *A Century of West Indian Education*, Shirley Gordon explains that some slave owners feared religious instruction because they believed that ignorance was key to maintaining subservience. Gordon reasons, “If [slaves] are not instructed in any arts or skills other than those required for their unpaid labor, they are less likely to contemplate alternatives and so resist their masters” (34). Third, slave owners resisted religious instruction for their slaves because slaves’ heresy provided theological underpinning for the master/slave relationship. If the rationalization for colonization and slavery was based, at least in part, on the idea of slaves as heathens, Christianizing them would eliminate that justification. In his 1657 *History of Barbados*, Richard Ligon explains how this concern prompted many slave owners to disallow religious instruction for their slaves: “Being once a Christian, he [the planter] could no more account him a slave, and so lose the hold they had of them as slaves, by making them Christians; and by that means should open such a gap, as all the planters in the island would curse him” (quoted in Gordon 9).

Despite the objections of many slave owners, religious instruction became available to a large number of slaves throughout the Anglophone Caribbean in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; these small-scale lessons in Christian doctrine became the precursor to formal academic education in the region. Lessons were

infrequent and often erratic, but they were generally administered as Sunday and night schools.

Government-sponsored education in the West Indies began only in 1833 with the resolution to emancipate British slaves. Prior to emancipation, there were few day schools in the Anglophone Caribbean. Whites living in the British colonies still overwhelmingly thought of England as “home” and so most children were sent back to England for their education. A relatively small number of schools did exist for “free coloured” children and for whites who could not afford to send their children to England. These schools were private, often run by Anglican or Catholic clergy, but sometimes by private individuals. Emancipation threatened the profit margins of the colonial industries – like sugar – that depended on slave labor. Many planters, though, felt that emancipation posed a more imminent danger; with the 1791 Haitian revolution a not-too-distant memory, many thought emancipation would threaten British control over the West Indies and encourage revolt. In his 1835 report, Reverend John Sterling argued, “[T]he stability of colonial society in the West Indies will be at stake once full freedom is attained.” With physical freedom granted, the need for thought control became more important than ever. Sterling argued:

It is plain therefore that something must be done and it must be done immediately. For although the Negroes are now under a system of limited control [apprenticeship] which secures to a certain extent their orderly and industrious conduct, in the short space of five years ... their performance of the functions of a labouring class in a civilised community will depend entirely on the power over their minds of the same prudential and moral motives which govern more or less

the mass of people here. If they are not so disposed as to fulfill these functions, property will perish in the colonies for lack of human impulsion.

From the perspective of the British colonial authority and the local planters, state education provided a key to maintaining “the power over their minds.”

### **The Rise of the Missionary School**

British intellectuals had long argued that slavery was inhumane and uncivilized, and the Haitian slave revolt of 1791 had inspired widespread fear of slave violence and revolt, but it was the petitioning of religious groups that brought about a widespread change in opinion regarding the morality of slavery. During the final decades of the eighteenth century religious movements like John Wesley’s Methodists and the Evangelical reformers of the Anglican Church mobilized thousands in support of abolition (Rogozinski 179). Jan Rogozinski argues that the religious revival of the eighteenth century “provided not only ideas but institutions that could bring pressure on the government. Methodists in Britain and North America – perhaps 300,000 strong by 1830 – formed a vocal and highly organized pressure group” (179). In addition to pressuring the British government, Methodists and Baptists increased abolitionist sentiment within their own congregations by sending missionaries to the colonies to convert increasing numbers of slaves, who were then seen as brothers and born-again members of their respective churches (179). Rogozinski suggests that the “extremely rapid spread of Christianity” in the beginning of the nineteenth century may have also furthered the abolitionist cause by encouraging slave rebellions (183). Indeed, slaves



trained as deacons and preachers led insurrections such as the Jamaican revolt of 1831-2, often referred to as the Baptist War.

Inasmuch as the missionary movement helped mobilize public opinion and bring about the end of slavery, religious institutions were instrumental in the transition to freedom. In June 1833, immediately prior to emancipation, the British government passed legislation providing for “the moral Education of the Negro.” For two years, the British government made no decision as to how this education should be administered. However, missionary groups – particularly Protestants – immediately set up schools in the West Indies with the help of financial contributions from British congregations. The British government decided in 1835 to officially sanction the efforts of these religious schools and began subsidizing their work with the Negro Education Grant. During the first two years of this program the British government paid two-thirds of the expenses for building schools, while religious bodies contributed the rest of the needed funding, including teachers’ salaries (Gordon 23). Thereafter, the colonial authorities allowed religious groups to use grant money to pay up to one-third of the teachers’ salaries (Gordon 23). However, the Negro Education Grant subsidies only lasted for ten years, after which the British government decided that the colonies should pay their own schooling expenses, devolving responsibility for colony education to the West Indian legislatures.

Publicly, the British government made a case for subsidizing missionary schools through the Negro Education Grant by noting that religious organizations had already established an infrastructure in the colonies, and by arguing the benefits of a Christian

education. An 1834 circular from Downing Street positions Christianity as central to West Indian education:

It is enough to say that His Majesty in accordance with Parliament and with the great body of the people of this Kingdom, recognizes in its full extent and force, the obligation of providing by all practicable and prudent means for the extension of Christianity among that large Body of Colonial Subjects, to whom our Holy Religion has not yet been, or has been imperfectly made known;--of imparting sound instruction on that subject to those who are yet governed by the prejudices and misconceptions arising out of the ignorance characteristic of their former servile state;--and of training up the Youth of the British Colonies in that early familiarity with the doctrines and the precepts of the Scriptures, which affords the soundest Basis of useful knowledge and of virtuous habits. (qtd. in Johnson 199)

Although publicly unacknowledged, it is likely the British government also realized the financial advantage working with of missionary educators. By providing clergy for teaching positions and using funds contributed by their congregants from home, missionary organizations deferred significant colonial government education expenses.

The end of the Negro Education Grant in 1845 coincided with a decline in sugar revenues for the West Indies. Beginning in 1846, the colonies lost their preferential treatment in the British sugar market. This loss of profits reduced the plantocracy-controlled West Indian legislatures' willingness to spend money on education. By contrast, missionary organizations remained willing to invest in schools because they saw a benefit for their cause – the spread of Christianity. The eighteenth century evangelical awakening among Protestants in Europe focused on individual conversions rather than

mass conversions, as was the case in the late period of the Roman Empire and the early period of colonialism under Portuguese or Spanish governments (Twaddle 11). Because of the focus on “individual conversion as well as (later) on the needs of European colonies for literate civil servants, education was an important part of the modern missionary movement’s work among Roman Catholics and Protestants alike” (11). Schools were important outposts in for the spread of Christianity because they effectively indoctrinated for their charges, and because of parents’ and community members’ veneration for missionaries who provided education, and consequently offered the possibility of social mobility. Such admiration often led to additional conversions.

Because most missionary groups saw the reading of the Bible as essential to the spreading of their faith, teaching literacy became an important step of proselytization. The belief that inspired the London Missionary Society’s 1825 training at Hoxton was that “Education and the [printing] press are the two great means, which in connection with preaching, will bring about the moral revolution of the world” (qtd. in Porter 104). Establishing missionary schools for former slaves thus served a strategic purpose for both church and state. Etherington says, “It was commonplace for nineteenth-century missionaries to point to the growth of the British Empire as specifically intended by Divine Providence as an instrument for the conversion of the world to Christianity, just as promoters of Empire spoke of missions as partners in the work of spreading commerce and civilization” (6).

After the ten-year period of the Negro Education Grant expired, religious bodies took greater control of education across the region. When the grant ended the expense of education officially transferred to the local level and education in the West Indies began

to operate under joint – although sometimes conflicting – control by the religious bodies and the West Indian legislatures, each with their own interests and agendas. There were significant differences in how each colony approached the administration of education, differences often connected to larger political issues. For example, even though the British government generally supported religious schools and promoted church-state partnerships, they encouraged *secular* schools in colonies that were largely Catholic, concerned that Catholics would bring with them foreign influence that might challenge imperial control (Gordon 43).

As the profits from sugar and other exports waned, local governments, and particularly the plantocracies that supported them, increasingly allowed religious groups to take on educational expenses. The long legacy of this partnership should not be underestimated. The first government primary school in Grenada, for example, was not established until 1884, while the first government secondary school in Grenada was not established until 1885. This first government secondary school remained the only one until the end of British rule (Brizan 456). Etherington asserts, “It is impossible to imagine what education under the British Empire might have been without the presence of Christian missions. They so dominated the provision of educational services for indigenous populations that in many lands the term ‘native elite’ was synonymous with ‘Christian-education’” (273). In 1945 Eric Williams wrote, “Secondary education is so severely restricted to the few that the English education that it provides becomes a sign of class distinction” (*Education* 31). Half a century later, the best schools in the region are still Christian schools and the graduates of those schools still, overwhelmingly, become the elites.

Later, when many of the West Indian legislatures were dissolved in the switch to Crown Colony governments (Belize in 1871, Jamaica in 1886, Grenada in 1887), the administration of education moved from the local West Indian legislatures back to the British colonial administration. This change in oversight had an important effect on the education systems in the colonies. The colonial authorities believed that introducing practices and procedures used in England would increase efficiency overseas. The ‘payment by results’ system, introduced in England in 1861, became established practice for elementary schools throughout the Caribbean region. The ‘payment by results’ system rewarded schools with grants based on their students’ performance in the ‘three Rs’, as well as attendance and sometimes teachers’ management and disciplinary abilities (Gordon 79). Teachers’ salaries became based on their students’ success. *A Report of the Inspector of Schools* in Trinidad in 1872 provides an example of how the ‘payment by results’ system operated: “The attendance fee is 50 cents (2s.1d.) for every child who has attended 30 days or upwards in the quarter. The results fees which constitute another part of the salaries of the Teachers and of the grants in aid, are paid on those children only who have attended the School 100 days in the year.”

The development of secondary schools between 1865 and 1885 was somewhat more laudable than the development of primary schools during that time, although progress varied considerably by area. In Jamaica and Barbados endowments left by wealthy planters and merchants, originally intended to provide education to poorer white children whose parents could not send them ‘home’ to England, were used to provide secondary schools for the middle class of all races (Gordon 80). However, Eric Williams, a Caribbean historian and former prime minister of Trinidad, argues that

despite the possibility of increased education for some, the development of secondary schooling in this era created serious problems. Secondary schooling in the Anglophone Caribbean copied European and U.S. models with a focus on preparing students for college, and later civil service or professional positions. “[F]amiliarly called ‘general’ education,” Williams says that secondary schooling is “the very reverse of general.” He argues:

The ideal of the graduates is government service ... [and because of this] people develop a contempt for manual labor, which already has to struggle against the stigma impressed on it by its long association in many colonies with slavery.

They become parasites rather than fill any but a “white collar” job. The result is the creation, first, of a vested interest in the colonies in favour of the alien system because of the opportunities it offers to a few educated colonials, and, secondly, white collar unemployment when the supply of secondary school graduates exceeds the openings in government and similar services.

Religious groups had an interest in creating secondary schools for proselytization , but also because they needed a middle class laity and local ministers (Gordon 80). The power of religious groups over education was resisted in many of the islands. In Trinidad and British Guiana, for example, the issue of religious education was continually debated.

### **Nineteenth-Century Criticism of the Missionary School**

The benefits to the British government and missionaries notwithstanding, there were many problems with missionary education during the nineteenth century. In the *Governor’s Message to the Legislative Council* in April of 1851, Lord Harris of Trinidad

argued the divisiveness of religious education, noting “We have a mixed community to deal with .... There are the members of various bodies of Christians, there are Mahomedans,<sup>14</sup> there are Gentoos,<sup>15</sup> and Heathens .... If doctrinal instructions ought to be given to all Christians, it should also be afforded to the Mahomedan, to the Gentoos, and to the worshippers of Mumbo Jumbo, and the believers in the Fetish.”

Other problems arose from the assessment that religious schools produced substandard results. Arthur Mayhew, a member of the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, reported that the foundation of the education system in the West Indies was weak because “[f]or several decades after emancipation inadequate measures were taken by the governments; the churches, which, from the start, were given the bulk of the work, were financially weak, divided, and jealous of one another” (259). Furthermore, according to Mayhew, expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century happened at “too rapid a rate for efficiency to be secured” and that, among other problems, “methods discredited at home, including the pupil-teacher system, found a haven in the West Indies” (259). Interestingly, despite Mayhew’s serious criticism of the education system in the Anglophone Caribbean, he assures his readers, “[t]he educationist may reasonably assume that there is no post or position to which those of African or Indian descent cannot hope to rise if they take advantage of the educational facilities which are offered” (252). Historian George Brizan of Grenada argues precisely the opposite point, that maintaining the education system did prevent the non-white population from advancing in the nineteenth century. Brizan says that from emancipation onwards, education in Grenada was “a conditioning process aimed at civilizing the children of the transplanted

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<sup>14</sup> Muslims

<sup>15</sup> Hindus

Africans, making them appendages of Anglo-Saxon culture, and teaching them their proper place in the social hierarchy” (161). In keeping with British imperial ideology, “the curriculum of the schools for the remainder of the [nineteenth] century was to be guided by instructions in the three Rs, acceptance of one’s social status and respect for the status quo” (162).

The pupil-teacher system, widely relied upon instead of teacher training colleges to produce educators, was criticized for turning out untrained teachers. Almost every commission that evaluated the West Indian education system – including the Keenan Report in 1869, the Mitchinson Report in 1875, the Lamb Report in 1899, and the Marriott-Mayhew Report in 1933 – identified the pupil-teacher system as a serious hurdle that needed to be overcome to improve West Indies education.

### **Riots and Reform**

During the 1930s protests and violence swept the region. The discrimination black soldiers faced while serving in the British military during World War I combined with the severe economic hardships of the 1930s resulted in the emergence of nationalist movements throughout the British colonies in the Caribbean. The British government sought to calm colonial unrest and stymie increasingly outspoken demands for self-rule and independence through a series of ameliorative reforms. The education system became one such focus for reform. These reforms were more realistic and practical than earlier more half-hearted attempts. Shirley Gordon suggests that this was “almost certainly because, for the first time in the century after emancipation, there were in fact



economic and social equivalents between the situation in Great Britain and the West Indies” (8-9).

Education systems throughout the Caribbean suffered from severe neglect in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Williams notes, “Allowing for the difference in the cost of living, the English expenditure per child remained about six times as large as the expenditure in the West Indies” (457-8). Illiteracy rates from the 1930s demonstrate the effect of this neglect: 80 percent in Haiti; 43 percent in Trinidad; 60 percent in British Guiana; and 35 percent in Puerto Rico (Williams 456). One of the reasons for this neglect was the power of the plantocracy and their belief that mass education threatened their economic interest. One planter made the case in 1926 to a committee of the Trinidad Legislative Council:

Give them some education in the way of reading and writing, but no more. Even then I would say educate only the bright ones; not the whole mass. If you do educate the whole mass of the agricultural population you will be deliberately ruining the country ... Give the bright ones a chance to win as many scholarships as they can; give the others three hours education a day ... but if you keep them longer you will never get them to work in the fields. If you want agricultural labourers and not dissatisfaction, you must not keep them longer. (qtd. in Williams 456)

However, the plantocracy’s self-interest was not the only problem. Gordon notes that poverty, unemployment, health, and race relations were also serious obstacles - problems that remained unaddressed by landowners and legislators (7). The affect of these obstacles on education was almost entirely absent from official debate. Not until the

1933 Marriott-Mayhew Report were social conditions outside school given serious consideration.

After the riots of 1938, British Colonial authorities established the West India Royal Commission to monitor the social and economic conditions in the Caribbean colonies.<sup>16</sup> In 1938, the Royal Commission called for:

An end of the illogical and wasteful system which permits the education of a community predominantly engaged in agriculture to be based upon a literary curriculum fitting pupils only for white-collar careers in which opportunities are comparatively limited ... Curricula are on the whole ill-adapted to the needs of the large mass of the population and adhere far too closely to models which have become out of date in British practice from which they have been blindly copied.  
(qtd. in Williams 461)

The British government listened to the recommendations of the Royal Commission and made efforts to move the curriculum away from literary studies to the study of science and technology, subjects with a practical value for agricultural societies. However, these reforms were often thwarted by a lack of funds, a direct result of the 1930s depression.

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<sup>16</sup> The West Indies Development and Welfare Organisation (WIDWO) and the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 grew out of this commission. WIDWO, headed by the Comptroller for Development and Welfare, was an advisory committee that sent regular reports to both the local West Indian governments and the colonial authorities in Britain. The Comptroller oversaw advisors on education, health, housing, economics and other issues important to the colonies. To facilitate greater cooperation between colonies in the West Indies, the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission (AACC) was also established during this time. The Comptroller of WIDWO also served as co-chair of AACC. In 1945 French and Dutch colonial authorities joined the AACC with the same mission of cooperation and the name of the organization changed to the Caribbean Commission. In conjunction with local governments the WIDWO suggested plans for long-term economic and social development, including reforms to the schools systems. The Colonial Development and Welfare Act funded these programs, as recommended by the Comptroller. These grants increased in 1945 and ended in 1958 with the creation of the Federation of the West Indies.

Jamaica was the first colony in the Anglophone Caribbean to make significant strides reforming education. In 1939, the Jamaican school system introduced a revised curriculum with a focus on life in the Caribbean. By the middle of the twentieth century most colonies in the Anglophone Caribbean had followed Jamaica's lead and were beginning to use readers, history books and geography books that represented the Caribbean experience in primary schools (Williams 30).

### **Post-Independence**

The Moyne Commission was a delegation sent by the British government to look into the causes of unrest in colonies in the 1930s. The 1940 Moyne Report recommended that Britain work toward self-government in the colonies and universal suffrage. It took a number of years and a second world war to bring about these goals, but the Moyne Report laid the foundation for independence. Problematically, British colonies in the Caribbean began to move toward independence right at the time when the regional economy began to suffer severely – certainly one reason the British government was willing to grant independence. This would have a lasting impact on the newly independent governments' ability to provide social services; education would suffer for decades.

Despite significant financial constraints, there were noteworthy reforms in the second half of the twentieth century. Postcolonial governments first focused on creating universal and compulsory primary education – making sure there were spots available for all children and that parents understood the value of education. Of course the economic need of some children's work in order to sustain their family was a significant part of the

problem that was connected to more overarching reforms intended to alleviate poverty. There was also a focus on teacher training, and raising teacher's salaries. Perhaps the most important reform throughout the region was the abandonment of the Oxford and Cambridge exams. These exams completely directed the curriculum, which was problematic because they focused exclusively on the British experience:

On one occasion British West Indian students were asked to write a composition on "a day in winter." The English examinations require a knowledge of Roman history rather than West Indian history, of the British monarchy rather than the crown colony system, of empire geography rather than West Indian geography. Furthermore, English examiners do not and cannot have a competent knowledge of West Indian conditions. British West Indian teachers, therefore, are not encouraged to study their environment, nor is there any incentive to provide text books with materials suited to the West Indian environment. (Williams 32-3)

The Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) was established in 1972 to address these issues. Currently, the CXC offers two types of exams taken at the end of secondary school: the Caribbean Secondary Education Certification (CSEC), sometimes referred to as simply the CXC exam; and the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Exam (CAPE). Either exam can be used for college admissions, but the CSEC (or CXC) is often used for employment purposes when education concludes at secondary school, while the CAPE is more frequently used to meet college entrance requirements.

Generally, as the various postcolonial West Indian governments move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a focus on centralizing their education systems, which usually results in less church control. The extent to which the church loses control, though, is

usually dependent on a country's economy and the consequent dependency on the financial contributions from religious groups. In the following sections of this chapter I look at the legacy of missionary schools. In the above history I demonstrated that Christian education helped produce a colonized mind. That is, denominational schools played an important part in establishing and maintaining British colonial power over the Anglophone Caribbean. In the following analysis I investigate the role denominational schools play in the postcolonial period

### **Religious Ideology vs. Education Reform**

In his book, *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire's End*, John Willinsky poses a provocative question: "What comes, we now have to ask, of having one's comprehension of the world so directly tied to one's conquest of it?" (3). He argues:

By the time the age of empire was all over, no branch of learning was left untouched. New academic disciplines of anthropology and orientalism were born and the old ones of geography, philology, and anatomy were recast in the ordering of the new world. Colonial rule gave rise to a new class of knowledge workers in universities, government offices, industry, and professions devoted to colonial conquest by classification and categorization. (26)

The connection between knowledge and conquest has shaped the methodology around the way we learn. Markers of this system include: binary and center/periphery thinking; hierarchy as a primary organizational tool; an emphasis on abstract concepts (academics) versus vocational preparation; and a focus on differences rather than similarities.

In this section, I suggest that Christian ideology is structured in a way similar to Willinksy's description of colonial knowledge and that that makes Christian-based schools inherently problematic for accomplishing postcolonial education reforms. I think that an understanding of the history of the churches' political interests in the region should provide a foundation for critically examining the churches political interests in the present day. Unfortunately, even with an acknowledgement of the symbiotic relationship between missionary evangelism and colonial control, scholars do not always interrogate the churches position in contemporary politics.

For example, in "Dangerous Memories, Underdevelopment, and the Bible in Colonial Caribbean Experience," Nathaniel Samuel Murrell provides a multifaceted critique of the collusion between missionaries, slavery, and colonialism in the pre-independence era, but he fails to ask the same questions about the role of religious groups in the present-day education system. He congratulates the church for its modern role in the education system, crediting the church with good works on behalf of the public, despite a somewhat murkier legacy from years gone by:

In Jamaica, Guyana, and the small islands the Church has an established record of cooperating with government to offer elementary public education to the masses and educating a small 'talented tenth' of the population at secondary school and college levels. So clearly the Church performed a dual role in Caribbean historical experiences: first as oppressor and later as advocate of public education and liberation. (Murrell 18)

He maintains that these efforts came "too little too late" and were not enough to reverse a long history of wrong-doing, yet he does not question the current influence of

Christianity in the Caribbean. Not considered is whether the same elements of Christianity that encouraged passivity and helped maintain social stratification during colonial rule still function today, encouraging underdevelopment, rigid social hierarchies around gender, class, and race, and the (re-)introduction of foreign influence. The historical relationship between conversion, conquest and education, and their interplay in the modern Caribbean, demands a closer look at Christian ideology and its functions in postcolonial societies.

### *Christianity and the “Banking” Concept of Education*

The missionary movement brought important benefits to West Indians. Before emancipation, missionaries offered something that governments could not – the promise of freedom. Christianity offered manumission in the afterlife, as well as a sense of belonging and acceptance into a community. As Rooke points out, “A nobody becomes somebody, and outsider and insider. Conversion was a revolt against invisibility and marginality” (31). The missionary movement was also, in large part, responsible for changing the image of slavery into something sinful and abhorrent, an argument that eventually led to abolition and emancipation.

It must be remembered though, that while Christianity might have offered escape from one social hierarchy, slavery, it did so through the induction into another. The title of this chapter, taken from a quotation by Rooke, is meant to suggest the problems with this transition. “Deprived of cultural terms of reference, it can be assumed that by being incorporated into the official religious framework of white society a major psychological transformation took place. Bought by a new master [Christ], the slave was redeemed by

that same master in a psychologically powerful compensation for the loss of social self' (33). She goes on to say that after slavery was abolished and missionary groups were given a grant from the colonial authority to provide education in the colonies, the missionary groups came into unrivaled social power, because they controlled access to social mobility.

Provision of such opportunities for social mobility *combined with the real power* of the missionary leadership meant that conformity could be exacted without either coercion or prolonged doses of socialisation. It was, after all, the white missionaries who could confer status, approve salaries and make appointments and promotions. In brief, their opinion mattered as this social and psychological reality proved powerful – as a form of social control, it was as potent as a whip. Imperialism succeeded not only by coercion, but also because of its system of rewards for its colonial elites of all colours....If during slavery the possibility of manumission proved to be a mechanism for social control and conformity, the same purpose was served later in the threat to status or by the promise of improved status. (Rooke 37)

Rook explains the role of evangelism in creating and maintaining the British Empire, but I want to take that argument further and suggest that the ideology of Christianity naturally facilitates any type of social hierarchy “in that it is a religion comprised of dichotomous notions of superiority and inferiority, for example, the elect/heathen, redeemed/damned, saints/sinners” (24). If binary structures (center/periphery, colonizer/colonized) were used as a tool of oppression by imperial overseers, and if one step of establishing a postcolonial identity is moving away from such imperialist binary thinking, it raises the



question: should schools be legitimating that model of thought by supporting continued Christian indoctrination?

To explore this question I want to invoke Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. There have been important critical debates around a number of the ideas that emerge from Freire's work, but for the purposes of this discussion I want to focus on the relationship between his "banking" concept of education and the dynamics of Christian ideology. A comprehensive analysis of Freire's pedagogy or the influence of liberation theology on his work is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but a brief description is necessary. Emerging in the 1960s, liberation theology was a reformative concept of Christianity that emphasized social justice and action. The church had been a tool in maintaining the status quo by encouraging believers to trust that God would solve their problems, or at least compensate them for their suffering on Earth with a better life in Heaven. Supporters of liberation theology wanted to invest individuals themselves with the power to fight their oppressors.

The paradigm of liberation in theology rejects conceptions of God that colonize the mind and spirit and perpetuate the political and economic status quo.

Liberation theology weaves together compelling God images: as in the example of the Israelite Exodus, God has historical agency in liberating the oppressed from their bondage in Egypt and God seeks justice through human prophecy and political action. (Lange 82)

Liberation theology also challenged church leaders by re-imagining their role in society.

"Liberation theologians determined that churches are called on not to take sides, but to

change sides: from siding with the ‘powers and principalities’ to siding with the poor” (82).

Freire blamed Christianity for encouraging the passivity of the oppressed, but he faults the role Christianity was playing in society, not the belief system itself. Indeed, Freire’s theories are based on the relationship between God and man. In her article, “Freire and Theology,” Gilliam Cooper says,

Christianity presents us with a picture of humanity created by God for relationship with God and with one another. Although human beings are imperfect, they are uniquely valuable in the created order, reflecting God’s very nature to the extent that God was able to be incarnated as a human being in Christ. Human beings have a destiny which is bound with God’s purposes for the world, and they have responsibility not only for their relationship to God, but for one another and for the world. Thus Freire’s ontology is firmly within the Christian traditions. (71)

Freire does not see progressive pedagogy and Christian ideology as incompatible in the context of a radicalized church. If not incompatible, I want to suggest that this relationship is at least challenging. I argue that a somewhat contrarian application of Freire’s banking concept of education can help us ask questions about this challenge.

The banking concept refers to a type of pedagogy where a teacher deposits knowledge into the minds of students. “Instead of communicating” the teacher “makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (Freire 53). The banking concept of education discourages critical thinking because it could lead to a challenge of the oppressor’s power. Moreover, it works in “conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus” to maintain social hierarchies (55).

I believe that the student/teacher relationship the banking concept describes is similar to the relationship between Christian ideology and its believers. Freire says, “[i]t follows logically from the banking notion of consciousness that the educator’s role is to regulate the way the world ‘enters into’ the students,” which is not unlike the role of the priest in interpreting scripture. Freire says that the teacher fills the student by “making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge” (56). Similarly, religious beliefs are, by definition, based on faith, and therefore unquestioningly true. “Translated into practice” the banking concept “is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created” (Freire 57). Correspondingly, biblical justifications prevent women from entering into the power structure of the Catholic Church. The feminist theologians who have questioned this practice have implicitly and explicitly challenged the patriarchal structure of the church. Therefore, the “tranquility” of the church leaders “rests on how well people” accept women’s second-class status. If we look at the role of Christian doctrine in maintaining social hierarchies – for example, between men and women – can we really say that this is a different process than what Freire describes? Is it fair to say that churches paternalistically “deposit” doctrine in the minds of believers?

The issue of sex education in schools is worth considering. In Belize, Christian groups oppose sex education unless it is an abstinence-only program. They believe that presenting knowledge on safe sex practices will encourage promiscuity and legitimate sex before marriage. Supporters of comprehensive sex education counter that students should understand both sides and make an informed decision for themselves. Restricting information about sex and preventing individuals from making their own decisions gives

the church a monopoly on knowledge, mirroring the relationship between teacher and students under the banking concept.

My criticism goes further than liberation theology, which questions the hierarchy of church leadership and/or their decisions, but does not see the hierarchical and binary structures of Christian belief as inherently challenging to their liberation.<sup>17</sup> By comparing Freire's concept of oppressive education to Christian beliefs I am suggesting that there are possible contradictions between Christian doctrine and a postcolonial pedagogy and that Christian ideology may conflict with the goals of the state. In his book *Ideology and Curriculum*, Michael Apple reminds us that if we do not make connections between schooling and "the distribution, quality, and control of work, power, ideology, and cultural knowledge outside of our educational institutions, educational theory and policy making may have less of an impact than we might hope" (14).

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<sup>17</sup> For example, leaders in the Catholic Church have publicly opposed some of the more "socialist" aspects of liberation theology.

### Chapter 3: “Learning is Next to Godliness”: Literature as Counter-Discourse

*The white myths, firmly planted by conquest and enslavement, have been internalized, and continue to work like litmus on the black rock whose history we have not yet summoned to our rescue*  
-- George Lamming

*Discourse, canon, texts, words as Latinate as the tradition from which they come, are quite familiar to me. Because I went to a Catholic Mission school in the West Indies I must confess that I cannot hear the word ‘canon’ without smelling incense, that the word ‘text’ immediately brings back agonizing memories of Biblical exegesis, that ‘discourse’ reeks for me of metaphysics forced down my throat in those courses that traced world philosophy from Aristotle through Thomas Aquinas to Heidegger.*  
--Barbara Christian

In his book, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Terry Eagleton traces the study of literature. He argues that English studies, as it has come to be known, emerged in the late nineteenth century as an ideological substitute for religion (20). Religion is a powerful vehicle for social control. Thus, when the potency of religious ideology waned in the second half of the nineteenth century due to new scientific theory and the social change inspired by the Industrial Revolution, another ideological vessel was needed to maintain the hierarchies of race, class, gender, and nation that were a dominant feature of the British Empire. Eagleton says, “As religion progressively ceases to provide the social ‘cement’, affective values and basic mythologies by which a socially turbulent class-society can be welded together, ‘English’ is constructed as a subject to carry this ideological burden from the Victorian period onwards” (21). Schools became the site of indoctrination; classrooms became the new church and literature the new gospel. British

literature impressed upon its readers (both at home and in the colonies) the importance of morality, patriotism, and class cohesion. Like religion, literature encouraged people to see themselves as part of a larger group and to sublimate their individual desires in deference to the more important national image and agenda. It is no surprise, then, that the study of literature was first designed for the British working class and women (24). Later it became an important tool in maintaining the hierarchy between England and her colonies.

Dipesh Chakrabarty makes a similar argument about the rise of History as an academic discipline. In his article, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History," he contends that the creation of academic history as a discourse is inextricably tied to imperialism and the nation state. As such, the generic structure of "history" works to maintain Europe's imperial status even when Europe is not the apparent subject. For Chakrabarty, even histories that focus on the story of Europe's "others" are at best examples of what Homi Bhabha calls 'mimetic'" (384). Chakrabarty acknowledges that "the rhetoric and the claims of (bourgeois) equality, of citizens' rights, of self-determination through a sovereign state have in many circumstances empowered marginal social groups in their struggles," but he maintains that "[w]hat effectively is played down ... in histories that either implicitly or explicitly celebrate the advent of the modern state and the idea of citizenship is the repression and violence that are as instrumental in the victory of the modern as is the persuasive power of its rhetorical strategies" (386-7). For example, Chakrabarty argues that "peasant/worker constructions of 'mythical' kingdoms and 'mythical' past/futures find a place in texts designated 'Indian' history precisely through a procedure that subordinates these narratives to the

rules of evidence and to the secular, linear calendar that the writing of ‘history’ must follow” (384).

In this chapter I am blending the disciplines of English and History. Therefore, I think it is important to recognize the socio-historical context out of which these disciplines emerged. Recognizing that these disciplines were constructed in specific and politically useful ways encourages us to ask questions not only about what stories were or were not remembered, but how these two genres have functioned to position certain stories as more or less “true” and therefore legitimate. Therefore, before I discuss the stories that are the focus of this chapter, I want to interrogate further the relationship between genre and power.

As Eagleton notes, literature has been used to create and maintain social hierarchies, but it is also true that literature has given a voice to women, people of color, and individuals in colonial and postcolonial countries. Indeed, disempowered groups have had more access to literature than to traditional histories or most other types of political speech. There are two seemingly contradictory reasons for this. First, disempowered groups have been given more access to literature because the very characteristics of the genre that made it apt for social control mitigate the power of the speech. Eighteenth-century sentimental novels, for example, could be covertly didactic: women may have read the stories for pleasure and recreation, but they were also being socialized into a set of rigid rules around sexuality and morality. This idea of literature functioning on multiple levels and having more than one meaning, however, has also marked these stories as undisciplined, unstable, and, consequently, the opposite of disciplined and stable histories.

Second, disempowered groups have chosen literature as a site of speech because it can offer a kind of narrative “cover.” That is to say, the author is more protected from the consequences of his or her political speech. By putting potentially incendiary speech into the mouths of fictional characters the author can achieve the effect of political speech without necessarily being held accountable for it. This has been an important tool for disempowered groups, particularly in hostile or repressive contexts. In her article, “The Race for Theory,” Barbara Christian points to literature as a site of political speech for oppressed and subordinated groups, and she makes connections between the structure of literature and particular characteristics of theory:

[P]eople of color have always theorized – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic ... our theorizing ... is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking .... And women, at least the women I grew up around, continuously speculated about the nature of their life through pithy language that unmasked the power relations of their world .... My folk, in other words, have always been in a race for theory – though in the form of the hieroglyph, a written figure which is both sensual and abstract, both beautiful and communicative. (457-8)

Thus, according to Christian, the generic differences between literature and history may have less to do with truth and fiction than with culture. Fiction can sometimes be the most powerful way to convey truth. George Lamming makes this point in reference to his writing of *In the Castle of My Skin*. He said that he took liberty with facts “in the interest of a more essential truth” (xl). Edward Said makes a similar point that stories are



“the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history” (qtd. in Guanahani).

A number of writers and scholars, including Kamau Brathwaite, Derek Walcott, and Marlene Nourbese Philip, have addressed the connections between literature and history in the Caribbean by invoking the idea of memory.<sup>18</sup> In *She Tries her Tongue*, Philip describes memory, as opposed to history, as a story invested with emotion and inheritance (Hollingsworth 2). There have been similar conversations in and around the work of African-American writers. In her article, “‘Somebody Forgot to Tell Somebody Something’: African-American Women’s Historical Novels,” Christian examines the particular ways that African American women have used literature as a space for negotiating history and memory. She says, “Language is not only an expression of one’s everyday experience but also of those deeper labyrinths of dream and memory” (332). While Christian is talking primarily about Black, female writers from the United States, I would like to build on her discussion of memory and shift the focus to the Anglophone Caribbean. Christian begins her argument by attaching memory to power. Slave owners recognized this connection, which is why they labored to eradicate both the communal memory of African culture and the individual familial memory. “Slave owners were aware of the power of memory, for they disrupted generational lines of slaves in such a way that many slaves did not *know* even their own parents or children” (333, emphasis original). Referencing Toni Morrison’s novel, *Beloved*, Christian argues that the story of all the beloveds was not “one that could be passed on in the records of historians or the slave narrators. And yet it remains in dream, in the ‘folk tale,’ ‘in the wind,’ in the

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<sup>18</sup> For an in-depth study of history and memory in the works of these authors see Joyce Tingle Hollingsworth’s 2000 dissertation, *The Empowering Re-Membering of History and Myth in the Poetry of Three African-Caribbean Writers: Walcott, Brathwaite, and Philip*.

imagination, in fiction. Paradoxically, only when history is explored and evaluated is memory free to flow” (340). Similarly, I maintain that the record of the hidden curriculum of colonial schooling, and in particular its effect on girls, exists in the literary memory of the region.

In her essay, “The Silence and the Song: Toward a Black Woman’s History through a Language of Her Own,” Barbara Omolade names the recorders of these memories “griot historians.” She says, “A ‘griot historian’ is a scholar in any discipline who connects, uses, and understands the methods and insights of both Western and African world-views and historical perspectives to further develop a synthesis – an African American woman’s social science with a unique methodology, sensibility, and language” (284). Omolade notes the way intellectual boundaries can stymie the work of the “griot historian”: “The Black woman scholar faces the index cards of facts and references as she sits down to write, and the voices of the academy come to haunt: ‘Bad history are those set of assertions which cannot be verified with primary sources.’ ... ‘Quote from authorized sources!’ ... ‘Your work is too rhetorical, too lyrical’” (290). She contrasts this experience with that of Black women novelists, poets, activists, dramatists, artists, singers and dancers who have used “a combination of historical voices, spiritual consciousness, liberation politics within creative mediums and works designed to empower and enlighten” (290). The methodology of this chapter takes its cue from Omolade. In this chapter I demonstrate the importance of literary memory to historical record and progress.

In the last chapter I traced a history of education in the Anglophone Caribbean using missionary and colonial reports and correspondence, and academic histories. I

privileged the master's narrative and the master's language. In this chapter I want to provide an important counter-discourse by bringing together literary accounts of colonial education. Primarily, I use novels, but also poetry and memoir, from Antigua, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, and Trinidad. In some cases the authors have intentionally made connections between the countries in the Anglophone Caribbean by setting their narrative in nameless places, or fictitious places. The effect is to suggest a common heritage within the West Indies. George Lamming, for example, said that he wanted the setting of *In the Castle of My Skin* to be "applicable to Barbados, to Jamaica, and to all of the other islands. [He] wanted to give the village that symbolic quality" (qtd. in Paquet 5). Sometimes authors make connections un/intentionally by participating in a discourse that circulates through the region. I do not want to conflate important differences between these countries, but I think because of their shared history of British colonial education, there are important similarities.

While these stories cut across genre, culture, and time period they each provide insight into the history of education in the Anglophone Caribbean in at least one of four ways. First, these texts provide a window into the colonial classroom that is completely absent from the histories of the last chapter. That is to say, we know that education has been used as a form of social control, but without regional literature we have little sense of what this process of control looked like. Images of student/teacher interaction, of classroom dynamics, and of the subtle conflation of color and class do not exist in missionary or colonial records. Second, while scholars like Frantz Fanon and Edward Said,<sup>19</sup> have given us theoretical models to understand the internalization of colonial hierarchies of race, class, and nation they do not give us micro-level accounts that can

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<sup>19</sup> See Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, and Said's *Orientalism*

trace the small-scale interactions that work to create the colonized mind. Third, while Christianity has been criticized for its role in slavery and colonialism, the historical records of the last chapter keep hidden the effects of Christian dogma. And lastly, women are all but absent from historical records from the colonial and even postcolonial eras.<sup>20</sup> This absence makes invisible the important ways in which constructions of gender, and particularly women's sexuality have been manipulated to establish hierarchies of race, class, and nation.

Shirley Gordon notes that while there is a large body of government documents and reports, missionary accounts and letters, and press reports, “the mass of people concerned have not left us their views; apart from a few precocious secondary school pupils who wrote to the newspapers, the children have not been in a position to have their say” (vii). Putting literature in dialogue with history helps to incorporate the voice of the “griot historian” and democratize the memory of British colonial education. As the process of decolonizing schools continues, it is imperative that these stories become “history” so that the legacy of colonial education can be fully and accurately understood. Indeed, the body of Anglophone Caribbean literature that I discuss leaves us with very useful questions to ask about the present-day system.

### **The Discourse of Civilization**

The last chapter demonstrates the power and pervasiveness of the discourse of civilization. Europeans justified colonization and slavery through the premise that Africans and the indigenous populations were uncivilized. They argued that it was their

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<sup>20</sup> See Bridget Brereton's article, “General Problems and Issues in Studying the History of Women,” in *Gender and Caribbean Development*.

duty to civilize the barbaric peoples who were consistently represented as immoral and perverse. Caribbean writers have challenged this discourse through narrative techniques including irony. Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* (Trinidad), George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (Barbados) and Austin Clarke's *Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack* (Barbados) all question the discourse of civilization by presenting classroom scenes that dramatize and subvert the tenets of the civilized/uncivilized binary.

The discourse of civilization used the apparent ignorance of the colonized people to demonstrate the racial superiority of whites. *Crick Crack, Monkey* uses a classroom scene to emphasize the self-serving constructedness of this definition of ignorance. The protagonist, Tee, remembers the anger of one of her teachers,

Sir ... used to suffer painful seizures, almost prancing up and down with offended awareness of the self-evident, the fundamental and the essential. Once in a dictation nearly the whole class had either spelt 'sleet' wrong or left an inglorious blank, and he had lined us up and given us each three with the tamarind-whip for not knowing how to spell it, and six more because none could offer any suggestion as to what 'sleet' might be. (67)

As we read the above text we see Sir's reaction as incongruous and unseemly. In order to make sense of the scene, the reader has to process and acknowledge the colonized mind. Sir, a black primary school teacher, has internalized Eurocentricism to a degree that borders on comical. Living in a warm climate, sleet is a foreign concept. Not surprisingly, it is difficult for the students to remember and the disproportionate amount of reprimand makes clear to the reader that there is something else going on. Sir, as an educated middle-class black Trinidadian, has learned – through *his* education that in

order to maintain his status he needs to mimic the white/colonizer's culture and repress any affinity he has for black/colonized culture.

These scenes of classroom violence are common in Caribbean literature and as *In the Castle of My Skin* and *Growing Stupid under the Union Jack* demonstrate, this violence was not mere corporal punishment, but rather manifestations of the insecurity of a middle class defined by its ability to mark themselves as different from the "other." Moreover, the use of violence by the "more civilized" teacher, challenges the civilization ideology that undergirds the paternalistic relationship between Britain and its colonies. In an interview, Jamaica Kincaid emphasizes the irony of the civilized/uncivilized binary. She says, "When I hear people talking about 'The Great Western Tradition,' I think, wait a minute, what are they talking about here? All I see is a tradition of incredible cruelty and suffering and injustice – not to mention murder, complete erasing of whole groups of people" (Kincaid, *Backtalk* 136).

In George Lamming's novel, *In the Castle of My Skin*, violence was an integral part of school life. When a student giggled during an assembly, the headmaster – like Tee's teacher – responded with disproportionate violence.

"I've never wanted it said that my boy are hooligans," he said, "grinning like jackasses when respectable people are around. I've always wanted it said that the boys at Groddeck's Boy School were gentlemen. But gentlemen don't grin and giggle like buffoons, and in the presences of respectable people, people of power and authority.... Who was it, I ask?" he shouted, taking the thick leather from his desk. It was the cured hide of the cow which had been soaked in resin and which he used to punish.... The terror mounted. The silence was heavy and terrible, like

the certainty of death... A boy got up.... trying to make some explanation.... He could not speak. Four boys were summoned, and they bound him hands and feet and stretched him flat over a bench. The teacher removed his jacket and gripped the leather. The first blow rent the pants and left the black buttocks exposed. The boy made a brief howl like an animal that had had its throat cut. No one could say how long he was beaten or how many strokes he had received....The knees tottered and filth slithered down his legs. (Lamming 43).

This violence in this scene is severe and unnecessary. We see a near identical scene in *Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack* set 10 years later, also in Barbados. Here again the headmaster is represented via the imagery of a slave driver. The violence here is triggered by insignificant breaches of conduct, causing the narrative to question the civilized/uncivilized binary. The narrator says,

The headmaster accepted no excuses. Once a boy told him, ‘Please, sir, I had to go ‘cross the road five times to bring water for my mother and for the sheeps, ‘cause my mother sick with badfeels.’ The headmaster listened carefully and patiently. In our hearts we cheered for the little boy. There could be no better excuse. But when the confession was over, the pee-soaked black snake<sup>21</sup> was wrapped six times across the boy’s back, like the Cross of St. Andrew. And when it was over, four of us had to carry the boy out like a casualty, to the pipe across the school yard, and wash the feces from his legs and pants. (Clarke 9-10).

What this incident teaches the young boys is not charity, morality, civility – the stated goals of education. Instead, they learned the association of power, masculinity, and violence: “We all swore then, as we stood under the pipe, in the frightened secrecy of our

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<sup>21</sup> The “pee-soaked black snake” was a whip the headmaster used to flog his students.

hearts, to soon become men, strong men, and come back for the headmaster with bull-pistle whip” (10).

### **Religion as Social Control**

One thing that Caribbean literature can tell us that the official histories cannot is the large- and small-scale ways that Christianity functioned as a method of control and containment within the British Empire. Furthermore, this literature helps us see the ways in which Christian ideology has become reified, and thus is usually beyond critique, despite the fact that elements of Christian dogma have a long history of being used to mark women, people of color, and people in colonial and postcolonial countries as “other.” Novels like *In the Castle of My Skin*, Merle Collins’s *Angel*, and Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy* do important historical work in recording the ways in which religious schools, and government schools – through their adherence to Christian-based concepts of morality – reinforce hierarchies of race, class, gender and nation.

Throughout Lamming’s novel, *In the Castle of My Skin*, Christianity is consistently associated with social control. The stories about Ma and Pa, the elders in the community, form the backdrop of G’s story. Ma and Pa are communal characters whose function in the story is primarily symbolic. Ma represents the product of, and the problems with, Christian indoctrination. When Ma and Pa talk about the landlord selling the land they live on, and the consequences, Ma says,

It ain’t in me to hurt my head ‘bout such things. I not goin’ to fly in God’s face ‘cause He knows best, an’ what He think right ain’t in my power to know. That’s



why I always says to you, pray, you just pray an' let the will o' the Lord have it's way.

In *The Novels of George Lamming*, Sandra Paquet argues, “[R]eligion fails the people [in the novel] by reinforcing their sense of inadequacy and helplessness, and by convincing them of their need of an alien master and guide. It directs the people away from their best interests, in favour of a system which makes it possible for a distant power to foster false loyalties and rule without incurring resentment” (21). Indeed, “the will o’ the Lord” fails Ma and Pa, leaving Pa to spend his final days in the Alms house, “the final stage in human degradation, the grave of those who though dead had been allowed to go on living, and the point at which no noble human attribute could be claimed by the victim” (Lamming 253).

The novel demonstrates the way the education system contributes to Ma’s blind acceptance of Christianity by emphasizing the way G’s school legitimates and reifies Christian ideology. G’s school and the local Presbyterian Church are part of the same compound. Paquet argues that

Lamming insists on their affinity as alien in orientation and emasculating in their effects on the village community. Christianity is seen as reinforcing the concept of empire which the educational system encourages and promotes. Hence the English school inspector can claim divine authority for British colonial rule in his address to the schoolboys.... This stance of hallowed paternalism draws confidently on Christianity for its authority and justification” (Paquet 20).

Lamming’s novel develops this theme by showing the ways in which Christianity gained legitimacy through association with schools. The narrator explains how the

internalization of racist ideas of white supremacy caused poor blacks to turn their anger and frustration against middle-class blacks, rather than against whites or British colonialism:

Even the better educated who had one way or another gone to the island's best schools and later held responsible posts in the Government service, even these were affected by this image of the enemy which had had its origin in a layer from which many had sprung and through accidents of time and experience forgotten. The image of the enemy, and the enemy was My People. My people are low-down nigger people. My people don't like to see their people get on. The language of the overseer. The language of the civil servant ... and later the language of the lawyers and doctors who had returned stamped like an envelope with what they called the culture of the Mother Country. (Lamming 26-7)

This image of the enemy surfaces in Miss Foster's account of meeting Mr. Creighton, the white landlord. When she gets to Mr. Creighton's house, she demands that the overseer let her see Mr. Creighton to tell him about the terrible flood that had destroyed her house. Worried that Miss Foster is going to get him in trouble, the overseer says that Mr. Creighton cannot do anything about the weather and refuses to let her see him. Mr. Creighton, who overhears the exchange, intervenes and lets Miss Foster in. Miss Foster tells the story to Bob's mother and G's mother,

[Mr. Creighton] gave me half a crown, sixty cents, believe it or not. I went down on my knees and I say, 'May the Almighty God bless you always, Mr. Creighton' .... I walk down the yard that mornin' with me head high in the air, an' not King George on the throne of England was greater than me. When I come out

and see the bad-minded black son-of-a-bitch we call the overseer, I shake my backside (God forgive me) at him, just to let ‘im know that I was people too.”

(Lamming 34)

The novel uses irony to expose both the construction and the consequences of the colonial discourse. Miss Foster grants Mr. Creighton God-like status for sixty cents and a cup of tea and is blinded to the larger dynamics of the situation.

While characters like Miss Foster have disdain for middle-class civil servants and the overseer, they show no contempt for teachers. Because the characters of the novel see education as the only means of social mobility, they confer on the teachers the God-status usually reserved for whites like Mr. Creighton. The position of teachers as gatekeepers to the limited number of middle-class jobs in the society protect them from the anger that G’s mother feels towards the other middle-class characters. However, it is the educators and not the overseer, the sanitary inspector, or the police officer who do the most harm to the villagers. The novel challenges the teachers’ privilege and impunity by paralleling the relationship between the head teacher and the school inspector to the relationship between the overseer and the landlord, and by scenes representing the head teacher with the iconic whip.

The novel presents the head teacher and Mr. Slime as classroom despots with no concern for their students and as ruthless businessmen who manipulate and then evict the villagers from their land. They replace Mr. Creighton, and take on all the symbolic meaning of the landlord. This use of irony – the men who are most revered are the betrayers – makes an important political point about the status of schooling in the Caribbean. Education is as capable of harm as it is of good.

Although Lamming's novel challenges hierarchies of race and nation, patriarchy seems to go unquestioned. The fact that the novel continually presents disempowerment in the language of emasculation has the effect of reifying patriarchy. The problem, according to the novel, is that certain men are being disempowered, not patriarchy itself. Although the novel contains women who are presented as strong, independent and powerful within the limits of the domestic sphere and sometimes romantic relationships, these characterizations are used primarily as tools to develop the male characters. So the story that the whipped boy tells the others, that the head teacher is cruel because his wife beats him, figures power as something a man loses and tries to regain. The woman functions as a tool of emasculation, but is never herself rightfully empowered.

### **Patriarchy and the Construction of Women's Sexuality as a Mechanism of Social Control**

In her book, *Making Men*, Belinda Edmondson argues that literature from the Anglophone Caribbean is preoccupied with Victorian literature. She points to the relationship between Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, V.S. Naipaul's and CLR James's references to Anthony Trollope and William Thackeray, Jean Rhys's retelling of *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and to Jamaica Kincaid's reference to Wordsworth's poem, "Daffodils," in *Lucy* (5). For Edmondson this preoccupation with Victorian literature is part of the Anglophone Caribbean's ongoing confrontation with "Englishness," and specifically Victorian constructions of manliness.

Merle Collins's novel, *Angel*, makes clear the connections between patriarchy, Christianity, colonialism and education. There is a sign hanging in Angel's house that reads, "Christ is the Head of the House," and a picture of Jesus with a globe in his hand. By introducing these images at key moments where the narrative focuses on the power struggles between Angel's parents, Doodsie and Allen, or the differences in the expected gender roles of Angel and her brother Simon, the novel demonstrates how Christian ideology creates and reinforces hierarchies of gender, race, and nation.

The image of Jesus, always "smiling down at" Angel (97, 98), provides the narrative backdrop for the discussion of Angel's education:

[Allen] agreed that if the worst came to the worst, he would have to find money to send Simon to high school.

'And Angel?' Doodsie asked.

'Huh! Look, that's a different thing, you know. We might have to choose. We mightn be able to send both of them, and Angel is a girl. They grow up and before you know it is confusion, the don even finish school or they finish, get married, their name not even yours again and somebody else get the praise.'

(99)

The novel narratively connects Angel's education to her sexuality. After Allen's discouragement, Doodsie thinks to herself, "She go get de bes if even ah have to scrub floor to give er" (101). Immediately following this thought, Doodsie lectures Angel about boys while they peel bluggoe. Simon is playing.

'Look, you big for ten years. You body develop arready and you look more than you age. I tell you arready be careful. Any day now you could expect that ting I

tell you about.... Anybody interfere with you on the street come an tell me. And study you head. Nobody does expec good out of little girl and all thos you tink is you frien just waitin to see you fall for them to laugh.... Ah want the best for Simon too, but he is man, so he start off.... Simon, now, because he is man, he start off as boss aready. You have to work for it. Study youself!’ (101-2)

Society wants to define Angel by her sexuality, as a future fallen woman, and education is presented as the (only) way to avoid this. Many of the female characters in the novel have children outside of marriage, and yet it is associated with shame and because it is presented as the opposite of education, it is associated with a lower social class. Doodsie tells Angel, “Tings easier for a man. Don shame yourself an me. Show dem dat nobody could pull you down” (103). The importance of Angel’s sexuality is further emphasized when Doodsie takes Angel to register at the Convent High School. Although the novel spends less than a page describing this event, the Virgin Mary is mentioned four times, overwhelming the short narrative.

Skipping ahead a year in time, the novel narratively links Doodsie’s lectures and Catholic ideology through their proximity in the story. During her second year at the Convent High School, Angel finds out “how serious things were with her soul” (106).

Indeed, Angel finds out that her whole family was living in sin:

[O]ne day, during the religious knowledge class in second form, Angel had a rude shock. Mother Superior said that not only was living together without being married a mortal sin but if a Catholic got married in a non-Catholic church, then that was no marriage and the person and the whole family was living in sin until there was a confession and repentance and a real marriage in a Catholic Church.

When Angel got home that day, Doodsie confirmed her fears. Angel went quietly to her room and wept her disappointment. (108)

Like *Angel*, Jamaica Kincaid's, *Annie John* emphasizes the connections between patriarchy, colonialism, religion and education. Annie's mother challenges the Victorian gender roles that define a woman by her sexual "purity" by defying her father's wishes for her to remain living at home, "respectably." The novel emphasizes the connections between the control of women through Christian ideology and the control of the "other" through colonial education by narratively linking this story of Annie's mother to Annie's rebellious defacement of her school textbook. Annie recounts,

Shortly after I first discovered [the picture of "Columbus in Chains"] in my history book, I heard my mother read out loud to my father a letter she had received from her sister, who still lived with her mother and father in the very same Dominica, which is where my mother came from. Ma Chess was fine, wrote my aunt, but Pa Chess was not well. Pa Chess was having a bit of trouble with his limbs; he was not able to go about as he pleased; often he had to depend on someone else to do one thing or another for him. My mother read the letter in quite a state, her voice rising to a higher pitch with each sentence. After she read the part about Pa Chess's stiff limbs, she turned to my father and laughed as she said, 'so the great man can no longer just get up and go. How I would love to see his face now!' When I next saw the picture of Columbus sitting there all locked up in his chains, I wrote under it the words "The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go." (78)

After Annie is caught vandalizing her textbook she is sentenced to copy John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. "For defaming one of the empire's great men, she is required to pay homage to another great man" (Simmons 113). *Paradise Lost* is highly symbolic in this scene because it was both a *product* of colonial discourse and an *instrument* in its perpetuation, but perhaps more importantly *Paradise Lost* is a retelling of Eve's fall from grace, the most powerful story in Christian ideology for justifying patriarchy and defining women's sexuality as dangerous and in need of control.

Despite the fact that *In the Castle of My Skin*, *Angel* and *Annie John* are all set in the past the critiques that these three novels offer are important for understanding the present-day education system in the Anglophone Caribbean. Even as Britain's colonial influence has lessened in the Anglophone Caribbean, Christianity has remained a powerful force, at least in part through religious schools. *In the Castle of My Skin*, *Angel* and *Annie John* demonstrate the possible consequences of internalizing certain Christian beliefs and the power that religious schools have to legitimize Christian ideology. In these novels we also see the ways in which religious groups often exist beyond critique. Although British colonial influence has been systematically deconstructed throughout the region, an examination of the role of Christianity in producing social hierarchies and introducing foreign influence has remained largely unquestioned.

### **Curriculum, Language, and Resistance**

In Kincaid's novel *Lucy*, Lucy remembers "an old poem [she] had been made to memorize when [she] was ten years old and a pupil at Queen Victoria Girls' School" (Kincaid 18). At her school, a bastion of cultural imperialism – note the appropriate



name<sup>22</sup> – Lucy had been required to memorize a poem about daffodils. This event becomes a significant marker in Lucy’s understanding of herself as a colonial subject. She was taught to give value to a poet, a content, and a context foreign to her own experience. Although there are numerous flowers and many talented writers native to the Caribbean, Lucy was forced to memorize a poem about a daffodil written by a British poet. This memory points to the importance of these colonial exercises and the specific problems that they create for the development of a Caribbean identity.

Lucy was praised for memorizing and reciting this poem. She recounts that she had “recited the whole poem to the auditorium full of parents, teachers, and my fellow pupils” and that after she was finished:

everybody stood up and applauded with an enthusiasm that surprised me, and later they told [her] how nicely [she] had pronounced every word and how [she] had placed just the right amount of special emphasis in places where that was needed, and how proud the poet, now long dead, would have been to hear his words ringing out of [her] mouth. (Kincaid 18)

Such praise was meant to encourage Lucy to define herself in relation to her ability to mimic an imperial artifact that in fact devalues her sense of self. Lucy understands this moment to be one of cultural colonialism, confessing, “I was then at the height of my two-facedness: that is, outside I seemed one way, inside I was another; outside false, inside true” (Kincaid 18). Lucy recognizes this event as a moment of self-betrayal: she was legitimating, with eagerness, the very value system responsible for her oppression. Paravisini-Gebert argues:

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<sup>22</sup> Queen Victoria was in power for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which for the British was the age of empire.

For children being schooled in the West Indies in the early part of the twentieth century, like George Lamming, Edward Brathwaite, Derek Walcott, and Kincaid herself, [Wordsworth's] poem glorifying flowers that were not found in the Caribbean has become emblematic of a colonial system that imposed its own values and cultural standards through a system of education that fell outside local control. (123)

The daffodil becomes a symbol of the process of the native interpellation of these values and with them the dismissal and erasure of a native identity. Lucy recognizes that in her recitation of this poem she has been unwitting agent in British cultural colonialism.

*Crick Crack, Monkey* also demonstrates the effect of curriculum and language in creating and maintaining colonial hierarchies. Like Lucy, Tee uses the language of doubleness to talk about the effect of her education. Tee says that she created an imaginary double, a British and "proper" girl named Helen that Tee created based on her desire to be part of the English world that books presented as "real" and "civilized." Tee says,

Books transported you always into the familiar solidity of chimneys and apple trees, the enviable normality of real Girls and Boys who went a-sleighbing and built snowmen ... and called things by their proper names, never saying 'washicong' for plimsoll or 'crapaud' when they meant a frog.... Why, the whole of life was like a piece of cloth, with a rightside and a wrongside. Just as there was a way you spoke and a way you wrote, so there was the daily existence which you led, wick of course amounted only to making time and makeshift, for there was the Proper daily round, not necessarily more agreeable, simply the valid one

... there were the human types who were your neighbors and guardians and playmates – but you were all marginal together, for there were the beings whose validity loomed at you out of every book, every picture. (62)

The binary language that Tee uses emphasizes the pressure of assimilation in pre-Independence Trinidad (Paravisini and Webb). In her article, “Crick Crack Monkey: A Picaresque Perspective,” Ena Thomas says that “[b]y the end of primary school, Tee has developed a schizophrenic personality characterized by self-hate and an admiration for all things foreign thanks to colonized teachers like Mr. Hinds and a British-oriented curriculum that symbolically starts with ‘A is for apple’” (213). Although Tee eventually discards Helen she “sees herself as lacking, inadequate, ‘incomplete’ – not because she is a girl but because she is not the ‘right’ kind of girl” (Paravisini and Webb).

Curriculum reform has made significant changes in who is represented as “right” and “proper,” by making sure that textbooks reflect the life and culture of the region. Although the curriculum has changed, the language of instruction has not. Schools throughout the Anglophone Caribbean still teach (in) standard English despite the fact that for a large part of the population Creole is the first language.

Language has been an essential tool in colonization throughout the world. In the British Empire, English was imposed as a method of social control. In the Anglophone Caribbean, forcing slaves to adopt English and forget their African languages was a strategy to prevent revolt and the use of English has continued to enforce hierarchies of race, class, and nation throughout the period of British colonialism and into the postcolonial era. Schools have been the first line of attack in the assault of the master’s language. Although peoples throughout the Anglophone Caribbean have resisted British

English in their everyday lives, the legitimation of English in the school systems has marked Creole as uneducated and backwards. Collins emphasizes the connection between language and oppression in *Angel*.

In particular, after the seven-year-old Angel wins a scholarship that allows her to pursue her education at a respected Catholic school, she finds that her working-class dialect is an object of mockery to the other students, who generally come from more affluent backgrounds. Angel, worried that she ‘caan speak proper,’ attempts to learn to speak in more standard English.... In this way, Collins indicates the class divisions of colonial Grenada, with the upper classes scrambling to imitate their British masters, whose cultural superiority they have uncritically accepted. (Booker and Juraga 173)

While the enforcement of British English has been one of the most obvious continuities from colonial to postcolonial education systems in the Anglophone Caribbean, language has also been an important site of resistance for Caribbean writers. Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Louise Bennet, and Merle Collins have brought legitimacy to Creole, Patois, or what Brathwaite calls “nation language” by using it in their writing. Because, as Tee says above, British literature was an important instrument in creating the hierarchy between “good” English and “bad” English, Caribbean literature has been a particularly useful site for challenging it.

If Tee showed us how language was used as a tool of subordination in British colonial education, the narrator of Merle Collins’s poem “The Lesson” shows us how it can work as resistance. “The Lesson” tells the story of the narrator’s great-grandmammy’s colonial education. The narrator says that her “great-grandmammy” was

“living proof of the power of the word” because she “Spoke knowingly of/William the Conqueror/Who was the fourth son/Of the Duke of Normandy” and “knew that William/Married Matilda/That his children were/Robert, Richard, Henry, William and/Adella,” but “didn’t remember no/Carib Chief/No Asante king or queen.”

But the poem makes clear that Collins also knows “the power of the word.” By telling the story of great-grandmammy’s “welltaught,” “carefully-learnt” lesson in Grenadian Creole, she simultaneously subverts the power of Tee’s dichotomy between “a way you spoke, and a way you wrote,” and demonstrates a history of resistance to British language. The fact that the narrator, three generations younger than her great-grandmammy, still speaks Grenadian Creole is a testament to the refusal of Grenadians to accept the master’s language.

## Chapter 4: A Political History of Belize

*If the world had any ends, British Honduras would surely be one of them. British Honduras is not on the way from anywhere to anywhere else, has no strategic value, is all but uninhabited.*  
--Alexander Huxley

*Guatemala claims Belize from Britain through rights inherited from Spain, and Spain got rights from the Pope, and who are we going to get rights from?*  
--Beka in Beka Lamb

In the Introduction I discuss the disconnect between girls' educational achievements and women's power in the Anglophone Caribbean. In Chapters 2 and 3, my focus stays on the Anglophone Caribbean as a region. Here I will focus on one country, Belize. This chapter is necessary to an understanding of Chapters 5, 6, and 7 for three reasons. First, Belize has a complicated history. As I discuss below the development of their colonial status in the region was unique. In the next chapter I argue that the British government's delayed recognition of Belize as a colony affected the development of the Belizean education system. An understanding of this argument depends on a basic knowledge of Belizean history. Second, because I focus on gender roles in Chapters 6 and 7, here I explain the larger historical context in which those roles developed. To understand the gender ideology of a society, one must analyze the stories that are told about women in that culture. Third, because this dissertation is ultimately

about female empowerment, it is important to make clear the important roles women have played in the history of the Belize.

In Belize, as in other parts of the Anglophone Caribbean, women are largely absent from traditional histories. Histories that do include women overwhelmingly figure them as behind-the-scenes supporters of men and when women are presented in leadership roles, it is within church and community groups – friendly societies with little political impact. Should it come as any surprise then that Belizean society expects women to adopt these positions in contemporary society? Belizean scholars such as Assad Shoman have emphasized the role of ideology in maintaining colonialism. He says, “The most coveted area of conquest is always the mind; empires can lose land, but if they control people’s minds their domination is assured” (*Thirteen Chapters* xvii). However, few scholars have looked at the way this same type of mind control has been used to maintain patriarchy in Belize or the way that gendered ideology was used to establish the racial hierarchies that were so central to British colonialism.

Recognizing the ways women contributed to the society in important ways may help change the gender norms that position women in less powerful roles. Certainly challenging traditional gender roles will add more currency to girls’ educational achievements by providing them with a wider set of occupational choices. Because the stories a culture tells about itself are always connected to power, we should also ask questions about who has benefited from the historical invisibility of women in Belize. Specifically, we should ask questions about how making women invisible helped maintain colonial, national, and patriarchal power. That is, how does the erasure of women in Belizean history work to further strategic interests in Belize?

In this chapter I look at the five stories central to Belizean identity: 1. the “discovery” of uninhabited land; 2. piracy and the establishment of the settlements; 3. the Battle of St. George’s Caye; 4. the history of benevolent slavery; and 5. the social protests of the first half of the twentieth century. It is my argument these stories have been used to maintain racial hierarchies and patriarchy during the colonial period and after independence. That is to say, these stories have been manufactured and “remembered” in politically useful ways.

### **The “Discovery” of Uninhabited Lands**

The land that is now Belize was part of the Maya empire and includes several important archeological sites that continue to provide information about the Maya people, how they lived, and their achievements. The earliest known Maya settlement, dated as early as 2500 B.C.E., existed close to Orange Walk in Belize (see map), and although the Maya empire declined during the tenth century, Nigel Bolland, one of the most well known historians of Belize, argues that there were still significant numbers of Maya in Belize when the Europeans arrived during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (*Colonialism and Resistance* 18). Like many peoples native to the Americas and the Caribbean, the lives of the Maya were forever changed with Columbus’s voyage to the “new world.” Columbus “discovered” Belize on his fourth and final voyage in 1502.





The Spanish never established settlements in Belize, but they did encounter the Maya in *entradas* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in places that are now part of Belize (Bolland, *Colonialism and Resistance* 18). Several Spanish explorers – including Hernan Cortés – landed in or sailed around the coastline of Belize. When Cortés “passed through the south-western corner of Belize in 1525, scattered

settlements of Manche Chol Maya were in that area. These Maya were later forcibly removed by the Spanish to the Guatemalan highlands when they ‘pacified’ the region in the seventeenth century” (Bolland, *A New Nation* 12). Indeed, the Spanish disrupted and regulated Maya communities during most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Shoman, *Thirteen Chapters* 5).

Bolland’s assertion that the Maya existed in Belize at the time of the first British settlements represents an important counter to the widespread claim that the Maya had deserted the land prior to the arrival of the Europeans. In fact, this argument has been so pervasive that in his 1994 text, *Thirteen Chapters of a History of Belize*, Shoman writes, “Almost all previous texts on Belizean history have tended to deny or downplay the existence or extent of both the Maya and Spanish presence in Belize before the British came and in subsequent years” (5). We can see this type of downplaying in George Henderson’s 1811 text, *An Account of the British Settlement of Honduras*. Henderson

makes repeated mention of “Indians” living in and around the settlement, but he describes the British as unobtrusive to the lives of the Maya: “The English settlers had established themselves, with the friendly approval of the Indians, their immediate neighbours, on the east coast of Yucatan” (2). Other accounts that mention the Maya often use the Mayan presence to justify colonization. Mission reports such as *The Wesleyan-Methodist Missions, in Jamaica and Honduras, Delineated*, for example, point to the need for a missionary presence. In this report Rev. Peter Samuel describes the population of Belize as consisting of “Europeans, Indians, Mosquito<sup>23</sup> men, and a mixture of others” and he characterizes the Maya as “a timid inoffensive set of creatures” noting that “the moral state of the whole, until the influence of the Gospel began to be felt, was very low” (313).

Bolland argues that the common assertion that the Maya in Belize left the land before the British settlers arrived is a myth created as part of British colonial propaganda (*Colonialism and Resistance* 18). By erasing the history of the Maya in Belize, the British settlers, who came to be known as the Baymen, are invested with origin and thus the lineage of Belize begins with white men. This creation story imbues white men with natural power to control the land because history begins with their ownership. There were few European women in the initial settlements, and so the real genesis of British communities in Belize is a product of the rape and the sexual enslavement of indigenous women. The origin myth, however, makes these women invisible, thus making the white male settlers the sole (pro)creator and giving them the exclusive power of birthing the first generation of the British settlement. The colonial narrative therefore creates a new social order that naturalizes both patriarchy and imperialism.

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<sup>23</sup>Indigenous people who lived on an area of coastline along present-day Nicaragua.

### **Piracy and the Establishment of the Settlements**

The first British settlers were pirates, themselves symbols of militant masculinity and imperial conquest. Hostility between England, France, the Netherlands, and Spain during the late 1500s and throughout the 1600s resulted in numerous battles over trade and land in the Caribbean and this hostility gave rise to piracy by men who were aligned with imperial interests, as well as men who were motivated only by personal gain. Narda Dobson, a historian of Belize, notes, “The buccaneers who roamed the Caribbean and the coast of the Spanish mainland from the late sixteenth century until the 1670s were French, Dutch and British privateers, sometimes acting on the authority of their sovereigns and sometimes without it” (54). Although Spain was the common enemy for French, Dutch and British pirates, Dobson says “there was little sense of community among these highwaymen of the seas as they raided the Spanish treasure fleets” (54).

Pirates were attracted to the coast of Belize because of the “scores of habitable islets, some with central lagoons in which vessels could be hidden or careened, the many river mouths and coastal lagoons suitable for lairs, the protection against surprise attack afforded by the reefs and tricky channels and the deserted nature of the coastal country” (Anderson 34). Walter Gadsby, a Methodist missionary who lived in Belize in the beginning of the twentieth century, provides a more dramatic description:

A nimbus of romance encircles the early history of the Colony, for in legendary lore referring to that period many a thrilling adventure and daring exploit are recorded as having taken place on the waters of the Caribbean Sea. It seems to have been part of the historic fishing ground where pirates, otherwise known as gentlemen with a roving commission, used to catch fish from the surface of the

waves in the shape of Spanish vessels laden with silver from the mines, and valuable dye-woods from the forests of Central America. (9)

After the European governments agreed to outlaw piracy in 1667, many buccaneers turned to the trade of logwood and Belize was one of the places these “gentlemen with a roving commission” settled. Although these early buccaneer settlements were close to the coast, it marked the beginning of the displacement of the Maya.

Most historians set 1638 as the date of the first British settlements in Belize, although it was not until piracy was outlawed that there was a strong incentive to develop communities there. By 1670, when the Godolphin Treaty was signed, British logwood settlements were scattered across Belize. Existing in Spanish-controlled Central America, these British communities were possible only because Spain had not invested any resources into settling the area. So while Belize was officially a colony of Spain, it was in name only. There was, in fact, no significant colonial presence from any imperial country until British ex-pirates and buccaneers began to harvest logwood.

The Godolphin Treaty is an important moment in the history of Belize because in this document Spain ceded all of her territories in the West Indies to England. Seeing themselves as part of the West Indies even though their settlement was on the mainland not an island, the Baymen argued that the Godolphin Treaty therefore legalized their settlements and made clear their status as a British colony. Further, they believed that because this document officially transitioned them into the British Empire they should start receiving the same resources as other British colonies. The treaty, in fact, never mentioned the settlements in Belize, and their status as part of the West Indies was questionable since the name ‘West Indies’ generally included only islands in the

Caribbean at that time. Therefore, the settlers' interpretation of the Godolphin Treaty hinged on *their* identification as part of the West Indies, which seemed to itself rest merely on the fact that they were British. This interpretation of the treaty was not entirely convincing to the British government, who remained indecisive about the settlements and offered little support to the settlers.

Inasmuch as England turned a blind eye to Belize, so too did Spain. While Catholic Spain was surely displeased at the idea of a Protestant outpost in Central America, the Spanish government neither officially condoned nor objected to the settlements at the time of the Godolphin treaty.<sup>24</sup> And so, Belize existed in uncertainty. Spain did not want to invest in the area to establish settlements, and England did not want to upset the delicate political relationship with Spain (Dobson 57). With no mother country, the origin myth takes on greater significance. Although the colonists clearly identified as British, the fact that they were a colony outside of the system, one with little support, lends symbolic weight to the origin story: The Baymen created the country by themselves. Without imperial power, the Baymen relied only on militant masculinity to maintain the settlements.

Although the Spanish government had previously ignored the British settlements in Belize, and therefore allowed the communities to grow, they did begin to object a few years after the Godolphin Treaty when they became aware of the value of logwood, which was used to make dye. Wanting to prevent the British from harvesting the lucrative logwood, even if they had no practical interest in harvesting it themselves, the

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<sup>24</sup> Ironically, though neither country officially took a stand regarding the settlements, and despite the fact that the Godolphin Treaty never mentioned Belize, this document is important to Belizean history in that it marks the beginning of the legal ambiguity that would eventually undergird Guatemala's attempts to usurp Belize.

Spanish government began to enforce their sovereignty in the area (Dobson 58). They ordered raids on British settlements and the seizure of British ships carrying logwood. In 1672, the Spanish declared that anyone trading in one of their ports without a license would be treated as a pirate (58). Raids on British logwood ships continued with 75 ships being attacked between 1671-4, and in 1680 Spain attacked the island of Trist, a logwood settlement just off the coast of Belize, and imprisoned the British settlers (58-9). These attacks increased over the next 20 years (58-9). The fact that Sir Thomas Lynch, the Governor of Jamaica, made several attempts on behalf of the British government to remove the settlers – despite the lucrative sales of logwood – demonstrates that the British saw the increasingly hostile situation in Belize as a real threat to their diplomatic relationship with Spain (59).

Spain and England were in almost constant battle during the eighteenth century and the Belize question surfaced in many of the resulting treaties. In the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, Spain refused to grant any rights to the Baymen (Dobson 61). Despite this, the trading of logwood increased and in 1717, in the Council of Trade, Britain asserted the rights of the Baymen to the land (62). This was the first time the British had taken an official stand regarding the settlements. However, despite British support for the Baymen, attacks by the Spanish continued, although according to Bolland, “even when the Spanish attacks were successful [the Spanish] did not attempt any subsequent resettlement, so the British would return and resume operations after they had left” (Bolland, *Colonialism and Resistance* 21).

It was not until the Treaty of Paris in 1763 that Spain officially accorded the Baymen limited rights to harvest logwood. Spain refused to give up dominion, however,

emphasizing that they would remain the sovereign ruler of Belize despite the British settlements (Dobson 66). According to the treaty, the Baymen were allowed to harvest logwood, but they could not set up any permanent settlements.

The profitability of logwood decreased in the second half of the eighteenth century when new methods for dyeing cloth arose. However, as the logwood trade waned, the market for another kind of Belizean timber, mahogany, expanded. British recognition of Europe's increasing desire for mahogany increased England's desire to maintain a stronghold in the area (Bolland, *Colonialism and Resistance* 102). The shift from logwood to mahogany also changed the relationship between the settlers and the Maya. Bolland argues that up until the 1770s "there would have been little cause for contact, the British obtaining most of their logwood near the coast, where it could be easily loaded on their ships, and the Maya probably preferring to retire and keep out of their way" (*Colonialism and Resistance* 102). However, mahogany is a tree that grows further inland. Thus, the shift from logwood to mahogany had a geographical consequence. It required the woodcutters to move from the coast into what is now central and northwest Belize. Bolland notes that this brought the settlers into increased, and often violent, contact with the Maya who, having already been displaced, were attempting to repulse any further encroachment of their land (103).

Ignoring the restrictions of the Treaty of Paris, the Baymen continued to establish and expand permanent settlements in Belize, with an increasing amount of recognition and support from Britain. Although the Spanish continued to attack the settlements, they never kept any permanent forces in the area, and so the settlements quickly returned. One important consequence of these attacks and the limits placed on the Baymen was that

there was no incentive for the settlers to establish social institutions, like an education system, for example. As Norman Ashcraft notes in his essay *Education and Economic Development in British Honduras*, the nature of timber extraction combined with the omnipresent threat of attack by the Spanish encouraged a focus on making money quickly and investing little into the community (10). “Intent on pursuing their main economic objective,” Ashcraft explains, “the settlers neglected other sectors of the economy and the social services in general. Because they controlled the government almost completely, the forest owners and timber merchants could protect their interests” (11). Thus, the Baymen exercised their power over public funds to ensure that money was channeled into the forest industry and not into social services. Ashcraft points to specific examples of the Baymen’s power:

Attempts to develop agriculture were frustrated and construction of roads was neglected since the forest industry relied on river transport. There was opposition to levying an income tax since the persons most immediately affected would be the forestry group. Welfare services were considered to be the responsibility of anyone except the forestry-controlled government. This was evident in the field of education. Although the government was able to provide adequate funds for education and other social services, its contribution was limited. (11)

The inability, or reluctance, to develop an education system would have long-reaching consequences for Belize, particularly after 1838 when slaves were emancipated.



### **Benevolent Slavery**

There is little historical record of slavery in Belize, so it has been difficult to reconstruct the Belizean slave system with any real specificity. There are a few letters and diaries of travelers to Belize but, because of the ambiguous legal status of Belize, there are few of the official reports produced by missionaries and British officials that have provided information in other parts of the West Indies. Dobson notes that the visitors that did come to Belize focused on the woodcutters and that “the lot of the ordinary domestic slaves” was often ignored (150). Thus, it is particularly difficult to understand the lives of female slaves in Belize, for the accounts that are available focus almost exclusively on male slaves.

According to Dobson, the earliest reference to slavery comes from a Spanish missionary who noted in 1724 that slaves were part of the population of the settlements (147). She argues that because the slave population made up 2,132 of the 2,915 people in Belize at the end of the eighteenth century, it is clear that “the economy, and indeed the very existence of the settlement, was dependent on slave labour” (147). Because there was no direct trade with Africa, slaves were usually purchased in Jamaica or other West Indian slave markets.

Slavery increased in Belize with the switch from logwood to mahogany. Logwood grew in concentrated patches close to the coast, while mahogany, a much larger tree, was spread out across the interior (Bolland, *Colonialism and Resistance* 204). The cutting and shipping of mahogany required greater amounts of laborers than were available, therefore, more slaves were needed. This explains the dramatic increase in the number of slaves during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (204).

Because Belize focused on the extraction of logwood and mahogany, and not sugar, Belize did not have the plantation system that was so ubiquitous in the West Indies. The extraction of timber was seasonal work, so male slaves would spend many months living in the forest and then return to Belize Town where their families were located. Markedly different from plantation organization, Belizean male slaves worked in small groups, without a lot of oversight. Henderson notes the small group structure that characterized the work of cutting mahogany: “The gang of negroes employed in this work consist of from ten to fifty each; few exceed the latter number” (47).

Because of the differences between the woodcutting in Belize and the plantations that existed throughout the Anglophone Caribbean, a myth has emerged that Belizean slavery was benevolent and that racial prejudice was all but absent. This myth has consistently surfaced throughout the history of Belize. It began with colonial reports that the woodcutters treated their slaves with “kindness, liberality and indulgent care” and that no other “labouring class of people” possessed “anything like the comforts of the Slave Population of Honduras” (qtd. in Grant 41). Henderson writes, “In no part of the world, where slavery prevails, can the condition of beings so circumstanced be found of milder or more indulgent form. The labour they undergo bears no proportion to that which they sustain throughout the islands: nor is it more to be compared with what they experience in the States of America” (59-60). This characterization of a benevolent slavery has continued throughout the twentieth century. In his 1981 book, *Formerly British Honduras: A Profile of the New Nation of Belize*, William Setzekorn says,

Being in a small isolated frontierland, living with daily threats from hostile neighbors and impending natural disasters, the Baymen had little time for racial

prejudice. There was no “plantation” economy to perpetuate the slavery institution as in the islands of the West Indies so these Negro immigrants, while technically slaves until emancipation in 1838, found a place alongside the European woodcutters as companions and willing allies against the challenges of their inhospitable land and soon outnumbered their “owners” three to one. (18)

Setzekorn’s description makes invisible the realities of slavery and its long-lasting consequences in stratifying the society, and by referring to Belizean slaves as “immigrants,” he completely dismisses the trans-Atlantic slave trade. While Bolland agrees with Setzekorn that “the whip-wielding drivers, who were ubiquitous on the plantations, were unknown in Belize,” Bolland points out that this does not mean that slaves did not face harsh treatment (Bolland, *Slavery in Belize* 16)

The evidence of slave uprisings and escape indicate that the relationship between the Baymen and their slaves was not as amicable as Setzekorn and others would have us believe. Bolland notes that there were three significant slave rebellions between 1765 and 1773, and that throughout the eighteenth century and up until 1838, the year of emancipation, there were continual complaints from the settlers that Spaniards in the adjoining territories were giving asylum to their runaway slaves in exchange for a conversion to Catholicism (“Colonialism and Resistance” 26-7). Further, Henderson reports that female slaves frequently aborted pregnancies although he does not seem to see this as a political act. He says, “A preparation from the root of [the Contrayerva] is known to produce abortion, and is much used for such purpose by negro females. This practice is extremely common with these people” (92). Evidence of rebellion, escape, and abortion “does not support the view that the slaves were content to be dominated or

that they felt ‘devotion’ towards their masters” (Bolland “Colonialism and Resistance” 25). Further, as C.H. Grant notes in his book, *The Making of Modern Belize: Politics, Society and British Colonialism in Central America*, “Physical cruelties were matched by the cultural. As elsewhere, slavery entailed the almost complete destruction of African institutions and customs. Of necessity, the slaves adopted the English language. Their religious beliefs and practices were suppressed” (43). Thus, as Bolland asserts, “The feelings of the slaves should be deduced not from the ideological statements of their masters, but from reports of the actions of the slaves themselves” (“Colonialism and Resistance” 25).

This having been said, there is evidence that *some* slaves in Belize did receive *milder* treatment than those in the rest of the West Indies. Dobson suggests several reasons that might account for this difference. First, she suggests that the Baymen saw Belize as their home, unlike a lot of plantation owners from other parts of the West Indies who were often absentee landlords. The Baymen, therefore, had more personal contact and longer relationships with their slaves. Second, Dobson notes the close proximity of the Spanish colonies and suggests that harsh treatment may have resulted in financial losses to the Baymen as escape was always an option for the slaves. A statement made in 1825 by a free coloured slave owner named George Hyde illustrates Dobson’s point: “As for punishments or ill-usage, you are aware (if ever so deserved) we dare not inflict it, so easy is their retreat to the Spaniards” (qtd. in Bolland, *Colonialism and Resistance*, 73). Third, the slaves were generally armed with machetes for clearing paths, axes for cutting trees, and guns for shooting prey. Henderson notes this unusual custom: “The whole of the slaves of Honduras are permitted to use arms, and possibly a more expert body of

marksmen could not where be found” (73). Lastly, Dobson notes that the nature of woodcutting simultaneously involved the Baymen in work with the slaves while making constant oversight and control of the lives of the slaves impossible. With escape much more achievable than in the sugar plantations, the Baymen had to balance their treatment of their slaves with the constant threat of escape (145-158).

Dobson’s account of milder treatment is accurate for most male slaves, but troublesome in that it generalizes the experience of Belizean slavery around the woodcutters – that is so say, the male slaves. Slavery in Belize was marked by a much stronger gender division than in the rest of the West Indies. Male slaves were used to extract timber outside of the city, working in the interior of the country for many months out of the year. Female slaves, however, were almost always domestic slaves and stayed in the settlement. As Shoman points out, this division of work had important consequences for the relative value and power of male and female slaves. Shoman says,

The fact that the amount of male slaves owned was used as an indicator of rights for the owner is a clear recognition on the part of the elite that the political economy was based not only on racial and class considerations but also on gender. Slave women had a different role in society, since they were not the direct producers of the wealth pursued by the cutters, but rather were regarded as necessary for the task of physical and social reproduction that would free up the men for production. (*Thirteen Chapters* 22)

Shoman also notes that messages about male power and female weakness were instilled through the gendered division of labor by including in the “women’s work” children and men who were too old or weak to work as woodcutters (32).

Many female slaves were forced into sexual slavery. Because the Baymen were unable, “like members of the ‘true’ upper classes, to import European wives,” female slaves were often forced into sexual relationships and cohabitation (Grant 45). This is significant in that many of the arguments for the somewhat milder treatment provided by Dobson and others do not take into consideration the differences between the lives of male and female slaves. For example, Dobson suggests that the fact that slaves could easily escape to the surrounding Spanish territories prevented cruel treatment. When we consider that female slaves would not have had the same ability to escape to the Spanish territories as male woodcutters, a new set of questions arise. If it was more difficult for female slaves to escape, was there less of a check on the cruelty of the masters towards them? Indeed, there is evidence that domestic slaves in Belize “were often subjected to ill-treatment and occasionally the most appalling torture” (Bolland, *Slavery in Belize* 15).

Belizean slaves could buy their freedom for a relatively small price and slaves were allowed to earn money. For example, male slaves cutting timber worked five days a week as slaves with the option to work on Saturdays for pay at the rate of 3/4d per day (Dobson 151). This information supports the argument that Belizean slaves had some advantage over slaves in the West Indies. Here again, though, we must keep in mind that female slaves worked principally as domestics, not woodcutters, and so would not have had the same options to work for pay.

Belize had high rates of manumission. Indeed, by the time of emancipation the number of slaves had dropped to less than half the population owing to a rise in free blacks (Bolland, *Slavery in Belize* 5). Using census information and reports, Bolland says that approximately 57 percent of slaves who were freed between 1808 and 1830 were

female (“Colonialism and Resistance” 65). This imbalance is even more disproportionate in light of the fact that the majority of slaves in Belize were male. Bolland accounts for this imbalance by suggesting that many slaveowners freed their concubines:

Adult white males outnumbered adult white females by at least two to one, so many of them took slave women as their concubines, subsequently freeing them and their offspring. The fact that the most common forms of manumission were by means of gift or bequest of the owner also suggests that many of these manumissions secured the freedom of mistresses and their children. (65)

I suggest that this high rate of female manumission might be misleading, though. In his discussion, Bolland seems to equate this path to manumission with the others, like buying one’s own freedom, or having one’s freedom bought by someone else. However, I think it is important to remember that concubines were forced into sexual slavery with their masters, and that their transition from slave to mistress, while certainly bringing about certain kinds of increased freedom and status, was not likely to end the sexual relationship. Further, these women would still have been financially dependent on their masters, for both themselves and their children, and so would not have had the physical, legal, and economic freedoms of other free blacks.

The myth of benevolent slavery or slavery in name only, has been significant to the development of a Belizean consciousness. Bolland says of this myth, “Such a colonially-oriented version of Belizean history is not an academic creation, but is a story which pervades and affects the thinking of many contemporary Belizeans about themselves. Some people who are aware of the mythical nature of the story are yet unwilling to dispel it” (“Colonialism and Resistance” 18). It is an understanding of

slavery that denies the cruelty of the slave system and makes invisible the lives of female slaves. Indeed, making the lives of female slaves invisible helps perpetuate the myth of benevolent slavery in that it silences the more restrictive treatment that a significant portion of the slaves received. In the next section I look at another story in which women are made invisible, the legendary the battle of St. George's Caye.

### **The Battle of St. George's Caye**

*Somewhere out there in 1798, the battle of St. George's Caye had been fought. A few British masters assisted by black slaves had beaten back a fleet of Spanish man-o-wars, and this event was celebrated throughout the colony on September Tenth each year. Granny Ivy said that Belize people liked to remember the battle, because it was one of the few things attempted in the country that hadn't broken down. The slavery part, what was known of it, Granny Ivy often commented, many liked to pretend hardly ever existed.*  
--Beka Lamb

The pattern of the Spanish attacking the settlements with the Baymen returning shortly after continued until Spain declared war on Britain in 1796. Shortly thereafter, the Baymen learned that Spain was planning a large-scale attack to *permanently* destroy the settlements. The Baymen began elaborate preparations to, as they saw it, defend their homeland. The Spanish wanted to wipe out the settlements once and for all, and thus reassert and emphasize their sovereignty over the area, but their efforts had the opposite effect. The battle, in fact, proved a decisive moment for the development of a Belizean consciousness and cohesiveness and marked an important milestone in the Baymen's attempt to remove themselves from Spanish control.



On September 10, 1798, in a David-versus-Goliath battle, the Baymen defeated a fleet of Spanish ships at St. George's Caye. The Spanish forces, including thirty-two ships with 500 sailors and 2,000 soldiers, were much greater than those of the Baymen, with barely 350 men (slaveowners and their male slaves) and 30 guns (Fernandez 12). However, despite the strength of the Spanish forces and likely aided by in-fighting and yellow fever, the Baymen were victorious (Fernandez 12).

While the victory did not change the legal status of the British settlements, it did stop further Spanish attacks. This relative stability allowed the settlements to develop and spread more rapidly. The battle also functioned to unify the Baymen because it inspired a deeper sense of community and a shared identity as a people both strong and unyielding. The legendary heroism that began to define the Baymen can be seen in this passage by Gadsby:

The early settlers, who were called Baymen, were of a hardy, resolute, intrepid type of Englishman, and cheerfully endured the most terrible of hardships and difficulties in their search for wealth. Despite the dangers of a trying climate, a fever-haunted country, myriads of microscopical bites by vicious flies, exposure to an open life in the bush and forest, danger from venomous reptiles, and sudden attacks from their cruel and inveterate enemies, the Spaniards, these pioneers of civilisation, laid the foundations of a British Colony in Central America. (11)

However, as Macpherson points out, the battle story as origin myth has important repercussions for the construction of race and gender relations in Belize. The idea of slave and slaveowner fighting side-by-side against the Spanish became the basis for the "slave owners' argument of harmonious race relations and slave loyalty" (Macpherson

30). Further, the story of this battle continues the tendency to make Belizean women invisible, thus naturalizing men's right to power:

The founding of the Creole people and their homeland came in a fraternal embrace across the vertical gulf between African slave and white master, an embrace that preserved hierarchy among men and entirely excluded women, particularly the historically real slave and freed women with whom the Baymen founded the racially hybrid families of the Creole middle class. As a public, political narrative of native origins, the Battle myth eschewed the intimately connected facts of miscegenation and a female role in the founding of the people.

(Macpherson 31)

Supporting Macpherson's argument, Dobson notes that while the battle of St. George's Caye was a "noteable achievement" for the settlers, it "has acquired an unjustified predominance in the history of the country" (78).

This origin myth has resurfaced during several contests for power in Belizean history when the idea of native unity was rhetorically useful. However, perhaps its most long-lasting effect was that of marking Belize's history as a contest between men. The lore of the Battle of St. George's Caye has been the foundation for the construction of Belizean masculinity and political power. Inasmuch as women are absent from the origin of the settlement, and the legendary battle to protect it, women's important role in the nationalist movement has been erased.

## **Protest and Social Reform**

Traditional histories of Belize credit the twentieth-century formation of the Belizean nationalist movement exclusively to men. They trace the birth of Belizean nationalism from returning male World War I veterans, to men rioting for labor reform, to male union leaders. Scholars have focused on the relationship of race, class, and nation, but have been all but silent on issues of gender. This silence is rendered more problematic in that it prevents an understanding of how power was gendered during this time period.

In his article, “The Growth of Black Consciousness in Belize, 1914-1919: The Background to the Ex-Servicemen’s Riot of 1919,” Peter Ashdown positions the riot of 1919 as the beginning of the nationalist movement in Belize. He argues that the riot was a result of the racist treatment Belizean soldiers received while serving in World War I. Motivated both by high unemployment rates and a desire to prove their loyalty to the empire, two contingents of Belizean men voluntarily served in the British West Indies Regiment during the war. Serving in Mesopotamia, the men were given substandard quarters and medical care, received smaller rations and less pay than white soldiers, and experienced “continual humiliation at the hands of white troops” (Ashdown 33). Not surprisingly, many returned “ill-disposed to white colonial authority” (13).

Ashdown contends that the returning soldiers caused the 1919 riot:

On July 22<sup>nd</sup> a section of the contingent members started a riot in the capital. For nearly two days Belize was in the hands of Sergeant Vernon and his contingent followers and the disaffected of the populace while the beleaguered Governor and his officials suspected they might have been the victims of a ‘coup d’ etat.’ (13-4)

Making a similar argument, Grant claims that “the need for a more open political system was dramatically emphasized in 1919 when the demobilized soldiers and the unemployed rioted. The political unrest was part of a pattern which the First World War nurtured in the West Indies” (59). In his history of Belize, *British Honduras: Past and Present*, Stephen Caiger also connects the disillusionment of the returning soldiers to the riots noting that the protests against “unemployment, homelessness, and high prices” were supported by “the demobilized soldiers just returned from Mesopotamia” (148).

Anne Macpherson, one of the few scholars who focuses on women in Belize, criticizes Ashdown and other historians who explained the riots as a result of “returning war veterans’ radicalized political consciousness of British autocracy and racism” (“Those Men” 45). She says that this interpretation ignores the discontent of the poor while constructing “political agency as exceptional and male” (45). Ashdown, presents the politics of the time as inherently male, describing the “political impotence” of the Creole middle and working classes and the “emasculated” Belize branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) (30, 29).

Although Bolland makes note of the 1919 riot, he argues that the trade unions and political organizations of the 1930s formed the basis of the nationalist movement in Belize. The beginning of the 1930s was marked by a devastating hurricane that all but leveled Belize City, the then capital of the country. Combined with the effects of the Depression, the hurricane destroyed the economy of Belize and brought high levels of unemployment, poverty, and homelessness. Bolland argues that the organizations that developed to demand relief from the government mark the birth of the nationalist movement. He argues that the Labourers and Unemployed Association (LUA) of 1934-

46, the British Honduras Workers and Tradesmen Union of 1939-43 (BHWTU), and the General Workers Union (GWU) were the first movements to successfully organize and politicize the working class (*Colonialism and Resistance* 172-3). Bolland suggests that these labor organizations and leaders like Antonio Soberanis Gomez led to the development of the People's Unified Party (PUP), Belize's first nationalist political party. He does not, however, discuss the role of women in these organizations. This is an important oversight because according to Macpherson the militant activism of Creole and Garifuna women in the LUA "embedded within the emerging nationalist culture a strong legitimacy for women's labor and political rights" ("Those Men" 160). The women of the LUA helped create a labor movement ideology that saw women as workers.

Indeed, Macpherson argues that Belizean women were actively involved in *all* the important political movements of the twentieth century:

the 1919 riot, Garveyism in the 1920s, the recovery of representative government and the eruption of subaltern labor mobilization in the 1930s, legal trade unionism in the 1940s, popular nationalism in the 1950s, the achievement of self-government in 1964, party politics and its radical and ultimately feminist critics in the 1960s and 1970s, the transition to full independence in 1981. ("Those Men" 5)

Macpherson's work notwithstanding, the histories of this period do not include women. The roles women have played at these critical moments in the nation's history have been erased.

Eliminating women's role in the record of important historical events has a consequence in terms of power in the present day. If men are the founders of the country, if men are the ones who defended it, and if men are the originators of the nationalist

movement, then it can be no surprise that Belizean culture continues to see politics as a male realm. Forty-nine percent of registered voters are women, but women are “underrepresented at the highest levels of political decision-making” (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4). In 2005, there was one woman in the twenty-nine-member House of Representatives. Out of thirteen Cabinet Ministers, only one was a woman and out of thirteen Senators, only three were women<sup>25</sup> (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4). The same pattern is evident at the local level. In 2003, only 36 of the 142 candidates for Municipal Elections were women and only 22 of those women were elected (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4). Moreover, there are few female diplomats, “partly due to the fact that women [are] not considered assertive enough to represent the country” and “most ethnic groups still [view] women as unable to engage in the ‘dirty business’ of politics” (WOM/1134).

The invisibility of women in Belizean history is also important to an understanding of education. Girls are out-performing boys in school, but girls’ achievements are not translating into greater economic, political, or social power. Women are better educated than men – sixty-five percent of the students at University College of Belize are female. (WOM/1134). And yet women have twice the unemployment rate of men – 21 percent for females and 10 percent for males – and are concentrated in lower-paying jobs (WOM/1134).

In order to account for this discrepancy we must look at the stories that are told about women. In this chapter I looked at how women fared in history. In the next chapter I turn to education. The Women’s Department maintains that

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<sup>25</sup> There has been some progress with this issue. The government committed to hiring at least 30% of leadership positions in the public service and other statutory bodies (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4).

one of the main obstacles to the advancement of women in society has been the manner in which young girls are socialized. Many women in Belize continue to suffer from a lack of self-esteem, making them unwilling and unable to challenge traditional gender stereotypes or to take on leadership roles. (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4)

Both history and education play an important role in the developing self-esteem of girls.

## Chapter 5: A History of Missionary Work and Education in Belize

*Education apparently is considered to be closely allied with Evangelicism and the denominations act on the implied assumption that there is an indissoluble union between education and religion.*  
--Norman Aschraft

*“It is not possible to fully understand religion and religious education in Belize today without reference to the past.”*  
--Nancy Lundgren

In Chapter 2, I argue that there was a symbiotic relationship between conquest and Christianity throughout the Anglophone Caribbean and that because of this history religious groups maintain a high degree of power in the present-day education systems throughout the region. It is useful to talk about the Anglophone Caribbean as a region because it helps make clear the policies and effects of British colonialism but, of course, each former colony has its own unique history. Therefore, in order to balance breadth and depth, in this chapter I want to look closely at only one country within the Anglophone Caribbean, Belize, and see how the particulars of its history affect the present-day influence of religious groups in the education system.

With the exception of St. Lucia, Belize is the only country in the Anglophone Caribbean that still employs the denominational system of school governance (Miller 5).<sup>26</sup> In Belize the education system is administered by what is called a “church-state partnership.” The Belizean government and the Ministry of Education (MOE) run only

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<sup>26</sup> In the other countries in the Anglophone Caribbean education is administered either by individual school boards or directly by the government.



16.1 percent of all the schools in the country (see Table: 5.1) (*Education Statistical Digest 2004-2005*). The denominational schools, which make up most of the remaining 83.9 percent, have control over the administration of schooling, including power over the hiring and firing of teachers, the code of ethics that teachers and students must abide by, and much of the curriculum. In the last decade the government has taken important steps to centralize and standardize the education system; however, the government's role remains mostly financial. Currently the government provides 100 percent of primary school teachers' salaries and 70 percent of secondary school teachers' salaries and pensions, plus an annual stipend to primary schools.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 5.1: Primary Schools by Management – 2004-2005<sup>28</sup>**

| Management            | Number | Percent      |
|-----------------------|--------|--------------|
| Roman Catholic        | 116    | 41.1 percent |
| Government            | 52     | 17.7 percent |
| Anglican              | 18     | 6.4 percent  |
| Methodist             | 16     | 5.7 percent  |
| Seventh Day Adventist | 21     | 7.4 percent  |
| Nazarene              | 7      | 2.5 percent  |
| Assemblies of God     | 4      | 1.4 percent  |
| Community             | 2      | 1.4 percent  |
| Other                 | 46     | 16.3 percent |
| Total                 | 282    | 100 percent  |

<sup>27</sup> The few government schools are fully funded by the government.

<sup>28</sup> From *Educational Statistical Digest 2004-2005*

While religious groups have significant influence throughout the region, it is my argument that Belize represents a kind of extreme example. The church-state partnership in Belize is sacrosanct. The partnership has been adhered to by every administration of Belize from the early settlements, to the British colonial government, through the post-independent era to the present day. Neither political party opposes it, the few academics who do criticize it do so in carefully diplomatic terms, and the general population is extremely loyal to the churches and believe that the church-state partnership is an asset to Belize. Amidst all this praise the historical role of missionary groups in slavery and colonialism has been erased from the collective memory. This erasure is important because it masks the role that religious groups continue to play in the creation and maintenance of hierarchies of race, class, gender, and nation.

Girls are out-achieving boys in all levels of education in Belize, and yet these successes have not translated into better jobs or more decision-making power for women. Belizean women still have higher unemployment rates than men, and they remain marginal in the political realm. In order to understand this disconnect between school achievement and employment we must look at the hidden curriculum of Belizean schools. Christian denominations in Belize, particularly the Catholic Church, which is by far the most powerful, have a rigid ideology around gender and power and it is my argument that this influence, legitimated through the schools, helps account for the disconnect between the educational achievements of women and their status in the society.

Although it is my argument that the influence of religious groups in Belize has hurt *women's* power, their influence affects men too. As I discuss in the first chapter, the sexuality of colonized women was used to mark and support racial hierarchies throughout the British Empire. This marking continues. Beliefs around marriage, unwed mothers, and teenage pregnancies continue to support hierarchies of race and class in postcolonial Belize. In the next chapter I shall look closely at the effects of Catholic constructions of morality on the social hierarchies that continue to structure Belizean society. Here I focus on the history of missionaries in Belizean education to make visible the ways in which religious groups continue to bring in foreign influence. Missionaries were instrumental in the colonization of Belize, and I think it is important to ask whether they contribute to the current neocolonialism of the U.S. The Catholic Church in Belize is a U.S.-based institution and it has encouraged Belizeans to switch their allegiances from England to the U.S.

In her dissertation, *Socialization of Children in Belize: Identity, Race and Power within the World Political Economy*, Nancy Lundgren points to the lack of research around gender and education in Belize. She argues that while mothers are the primary power holders in the household – particularly Creole households – the culture of Belize is patriarchal. Her work demonstrates the effect this has on how members of the family see themselves and others, and how parents raise their children. Most importantly for my research is Lundgren's view that there is "evidence to suggest that these differences affect children within the educational system. However, these issues have not been explored systematically within the Caribbean area generally or Belize specifically" (65). Although there has been new research on gender and education in many parts of the

Caribbean in the twenty years since Lundgren's work, there have been no studies of this kind in Belize.<sup>29</sup> The Belizean government has done a great deal to address gender discrimination in education, but they have not analyzed the effect of religious ideology on women's power in society or looked at how this ideology affects the translation of girls education into career choices and positions of power within the society.<sup>30</sup> This chapter represents the first attempt to trace the history of missionary work and its connection to the education system from the inception of the colony to the present.

### **“Vile Passions and the Lust of Gain”: The Early Years of the British Settlements in Belize**

Christianity and “civilization” have been at the nexus of Belizean history since the 1493 Papal Bull of Demarcation in which Pope Alexander VI awarded the New World to Spain and Portugal. Although it is known that Spanish conquistadores traveled to Mexico and the adjacent region shortly after Columbus's voyages, and that with the conquistadores came the missionaries, the presence of Spanish missionaries in Belize at this time is unclear. Even if Spanish missionaries had not yet come to Belize, these early colonial moments had lasting effects for Belize and the rest of the New World. As I discuss in Chapter 2, they established the symbiotic relationship between church and state, between proselytizing and colonizing. In his book, *A History of Christianity in Belize, 1776-1838*, Wallace Johnson argues, “With the army came the Church, united in, if not common objectives, certainly mutually agreed-upon objectives. The army sought

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<sup>29</sup> Wilma Wright's 2005 dissertation, *Education Reform in Belize: The Relationship between Teacher Characteristics and Stages of Concern*, might be an exception in that she looks at gender as one factor of her analysis.

<sup>30</sup> The Women's Bureau has looked at the issue of suspension or expulsion of pregnant students and the firing of teachers who have children out of wedlock, which I discuss in Chapters 6 and 7, respectively.

to subdue; the priests sought to convert” (3). Although Johnson’s point may be true over the long term, D.A.G. Waddell, another historian of Belize, suggests that in the *early* colonial period religion was not especially important to the British settlers, or Baymen as they came to be known (68). Indeed, he contends that “in the early nineteenth century missionaries denounced the unparalleled worldliness and iniquity of Belize” (68). Robert Cleghorn, a Baptist missionary in Belize from 1889-1939, quotes one writer as saying “there was probably not a more wicked place under heaven” (11). An epitaph from the period seems to support this characterization of the Baymen: “In Reverend Memory of George Hume, Mahogany Cutter and Bayman, *but* God-fearing” (Caiger 122, my emphasis).

Frederick Crowe, a Baptist missionary working in Belize in the 1840s, described the ‘Bay’ during and before his stay as “proverbial for licentiousness, dishonesty and every kind of excess” (321). He says, “In short, ignorance, intoxication, profanity, and the lust of gain openly triumphed over decorum as well as religion” (323). When Crowe says “licentiousness” he is referring to the sex between the Baymen and slave women and indigenous women. Because of the conditions of the settlement, the intermittent attacks by the Spanish, and the ambiguous legal status of the country, few European women came to Belize in the early period of the colony. Crowe says, “Marriage was the exception, and concubinage the rule, in all ranks of the community” (328). Cohabitation was so common that it was referred to as “living Baystyle” (Johnson 149). The Baymen frequently took slave women as “mistresses” (a privilege accorded the men by the slave system and which – we should remember – did not require consensual agreement). A Baptist missionary makes this clear when noting in his journal that “*property* was kept

about the premises of the slave-owner for the purposes of breeding and raising stock” (qtd. in Crowe 328, my emphasis).

White slave owners used female slaves for sex throughout the Caribbean – this is not unique to Belize. However, in the minds of European missionaries this practice may have been more threatening in Belize because there were few white women in the settlement. As I discussed in the introduction, European women served an important symbolic function in maintaining racial hierarchies elsewhere. In Belize, where slave women were made mistresses without the counter representation of the chastity and prudishness of white women, sex between the slave owners and slave women had a different effect in Belize than it did in other parts of the Anglophone Caribbean where there was a higher number of white women. Rather than marking slave women, and by extension their race, as inferior to whites as they did in much of the Caribbean, these relationships had the opposite effect – they disrupted and destabilized the constructed boundaries between racial groups. The early missionaries had contempt for Baymen who took female slaves as mistresses, which can be seen in Chaplain George Arthur’s 1816 letter to George Hyde, “the coloured son of a prominent settler, who had a black slave as a mistress” (Johnson 78):

The connection you have formed is neither honourable nor creditable and I should suppose it would not require so great an effort as crossing the Atlantic to emancipate yourself from the fascinating charms of a female negro slave.

This Settlement, unhappily has long laboured under great moral darkness and connections such as you have formed I am aware have not been infrequent, nor held so dishonourable as they should have been, but I trust, through the mercy

of God that the light of the Gospel is beginning to dawn amongst us, and that its influence will no longer suffer such degrading vice to endure amongst those who profess Christianity. (qtd. in Johnson 78)

As I discussed in the last chapter, the Baymen's practice of taking slave women as mistresses has been erased from most of the histories of Belize and is not part of the general knowledge of Belizeans, which indicates that this history is threatening to those in power. Certainly the revision of this early history of Belize was influenced by missionaries like George Arthur.

### **The Coming of the Missionaries: 1776-1850**

As I explain in Chapter 2, slaveowners in the Anglophone Caribbean were often at odds with missionary societies because slaveowners believed that education might encourage slaves to question the master/slave hierarchy and possibly rebel. This was not true in Belize where missionary societies faced little resistance in their efforts to educate slaves. Narda Dobson writes that, while "nineteenth-century English factory owners saw no need for their employees to learn to read" and West Indian "sugar planters feared the effects of education on their slaves," slave owners in Belize "seem to have been rather more enlightened; at least they did not positively prevent the education of their slaves, however little they may have done to encourage it" (162). The Baymen's acceptance of education, but reluctance to fund it, not only laid the foundation for a church-controlled education system. It also began a long history of the government's hands-off policy towards education.

The first chaplain of Belize was Robert Shaw, arriving in 1776 as a member of Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG). The SPG, founded in 1701, was closely linked to the Anglican Church, and although not officially part of the church, was presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Shaw came to Belize from the Mosquito Coast<sup>31</sup> to restore his health and stayed on as chaplain at the request of the Baymen. Although Shaw's ministry was well-received by the Baymen, his tenure was short-lived. In 1779 during a Spanish attack of the settlement, Shaw, along with many of his followers, fled and their place of worship was destroyed. Shaw returned in 1786, but the frequent Spanish attacks that I discussed in the last chapter made it difficult to establish any permanent physical structures (Johnson 16-23). Therefore, it is clear that when the Baymen started building a new Anglican Church in 1812, they did so because they felt a "growing sense of permanence" as a result of their victory over the Spanish during the Battle of St. George's Caye (42). The church, later called St. John's, was the first Protestant church in "Spanish America."<sup>32</sup>

The second Anglican chaplain, George Arthur, arrived in Belize in 1814. According to Johnson, it was under Arthur's administration that "Evangelical Anglicanism took root and grew" (73). Johnson describes Arthur as a righteous man who had rigid notions of right and wrong (74-5). It was under Arthur's guidance that the Baymen began to use notions of respectability to order people in the society. As the letter I quote in the previous section demonstrates, Arthur saw black slaves and indigenous peoples as de facto sinful; his moralisms were intended to influence the behavior of the white men in the settlement. Arthur was instrumental in getting St.

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<sup>31</sup> An area of coastline along present-day Nicaragua, named for the Mosquito Indians who lived there.

<sup>32</sup> Johnson notes that technically the first Anglican church was built during Shaw's ministry between 1779-1789, but it was destroyed soon thereafter by the Spanish (68).



John's built and the church became a space for him to enforce his ideas about right and wrong. The construction of the church brought with it a new legislation of morality, one that had important ramifications in terms of constructions of race and gender. The churchwardens issued an edict in 1816 saying that "the pews on the East End of the church shall be solely appropriated to white and married persons, and no kept mistress shall be entitled to sit in any pew at that end of the church" (qtd. in Caiger 122).<sup>33</sup> This edict legislated a connection between race and respectability. White was associated with marriage, and black with promiscuity. As I shall discuss in the next chapter, women's sexuality – particularly whether women have children out of wedlock – has been used to establish race/class hierarchies in Belize throughout its history up to the present day.

The focus on making money, the ambiguous status of the country and the ongoing battles with the Spanish made the Baymen reluctant to invest in any infrastructure including education, which is why Arthur had to direct much of his fundraising for the construction of St. John's to English congregations. Crowe says that the Baymen "were too eagerly bent on wealth, to cultivate even their own intellects or those of their illegitimate children; and when the appetite for accumulation was satisfied, they left the country to spend their gains elsewhere" (324). This may have been true, but despite the symbolic victory at St. George's Caye, the Spanish government was still outlawing permanent settlements in Belize at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Consequently, it was not until 1816 that Belize opened its first Free School, which remained the only school in the settlement until 1828 when two mission schools – one

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<sup>33</sup> The legislation of respectability can be further seen in the 1830 visit of the Bishop of Jamaica when several seamen were sentenced to "five days in prison on bread and water, with an hour daily in the stocks" for "bathing naked in the River as the Bishop of Jamaica and the Superintendent with their ladies were passing by" (Caiger 123; Burdon 321).

Baptist and the other Methodist – were established. The Free School was financed primarily by the local government, but it was connected to the Anglican Church (Easter 4). Attendance was free, but children needed a ticket from one of the governors in order to attend (Sanchez 1). There was a considerable population of freed blacks in Belize in the beginning of the nineteenth century, but the school tickets were likely given to the white and mixed race children of the wealthy slave owners.

In 1820 Caleb and George Fife Angus, who were members of a firm named Angus & Co which shipped goods between Newcastle, England and Belize, sent a plea to English missionary societies requesting that a missionary be sent to Belize (Cleghorn 13). Their plea emphasized the selfish and sinful ways of the Baymen. The Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) responded by sending Joseph Bourne and his wife in March of 1822 (14). Bourne reported that the forestocracy<sup>34</sup> disliked the Baptists because they were anti-slavery and that the Dissenting Churches received no encouragement and little cooperation from the authorities of the time who instead gave preferential treatment to the Anglican Church (15). However, Bourne started building a congregation, and beginning in 1828 Bourne's second wife ran a small school for about thirty girls, daughters of the forestocracy who "not being of the poorer class ... proved a source of considerable emolument" (Crowe 330).

The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) sent Thomas Wilkinson to Belize in 1825. Wilkinson died after a short time in Belize and in 1828 the WMMS sent Thomas Johnston to replace him. Unlike Wilkinson, who had presented an optimistic outlook to the WMMS, Johnston was deeply troubled by the state of the mission when he

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<sup>34</sup> The white slaveowners who made their money selling logwood and later mahogany and controlled the local government.

arrived (Johnson 129-30). As with Anglican chaplain George Arthur, Johnston was distressed by the relationships among the settlers. When Johnston arrived he found that most of the members of the Methodist society were living out of wedlock (Johnson 130). Whereas Methodists married slaves and freed blacks in other parts of the Anglophone Caribbean, in Belize only the Anglican chaplain was legally allowed to marry couples. However, the high fees that the Anglicans charged, along with Arthur's strong racism, discouraged freed blacks or "coloreds" from marrying (130). Furthermore, many slave owners did not allow their slaves to marry even though they encouraged cohabitation in order to encourage their slaves to reproduce (130).

After the construction of St. John's Church was finally finished in 1826, the Anglicans began to take on an increasingly important role in the hierarchy of the British colonial government in Belize (Dobson 317). Until the mid 1800s the Anglican Church was the established church of Belize, meaning that it was supported in part by public funds. Based on its association with the colonial government the Anglican Church had a great deal more influence than any of the other denominations that were in Belize in the first half of the nineteenth century. The preferential treatment the government gave to the Anglicans created growing resentment among the other denominations. According to Johnson, the 1830s were characterized by an aggressive, and sometimes even antagonistic, competition for students among three denominations: the Anglicans, the Baptists, and the Methodists<sup>35</sup> (210-12). Crowe describes the strained relationship between the Baptists and the Anglicans:

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<sup>35</sup> The rivalry between the Baptists and Methodists, who had a friendly relationship in England during this time period, seems to have been short lived. The Baptists were initially upset by the Methodists' decision to establish their church in Belize City rather than somewhere else in the settlement, but once the Baptists realized that they could not convince the Methodists to move, the animosity lessened. (Johnson 122-4)

The established clergyman and his supporters, jealous of the spread of Baptist principles, now made a strenuous effort to counteract their operation. The free school, which is connected with the Establishment and the public treasury, was entirely remodelled [sic], and put upon the best possible footing, so that it might compete with [the Baptist school], which it had not yet been able to do.... The visits of [the Baptist missionary] to the public hospital and to the jail were objected to and interfered with by the [Anglican] chaplain, and it was made apparent in many ways that the Baptists and their minister were viewed with disaffection by the magistrate as well as by the clergyman, who were evidently leagued against them. (342-3)

Despite the difficulties that Crowe recounts, the Baptists were gaining followers. The slave owners did not like the Baptists because of their anti-slavery beliefs, but the Belizean slaves, not surprisingly, were drawn to the Baptist mission.

Following a four-year apprenticeship, Belizean slaves were freed in 1838. Crowe says, “While the ungodly negroes were celebrating the day in riotous mirth, though without violence, and the late slave-holder was probably solacing himself with thoughts of *compensation*, the [Baptist] Mission Church had its method of noticing this important victory of right over might, and of principle over covetousness” (340, emphasis original). In a letter to the BMS Home Committee that was published in an 1839 edition of the Baptist Magazine, Mr. Henderson, a Baptist minister, gives an account of the first moments of freedom in Belize:

A little before twelve I went down and found the place filled with people, and the greater proportion slaves. I laid my watch on the table, sitting down quietly till

twelve, when I rose telling them that slavery was no more with them. Then we all fell on our knees and afterwards rose to sing. Oh, what hearty singing! A member, lately a slave, prayed. Another member prayed; again we sang, and [we continued until about 1 o'clock]. All seemed seriously cheerful, and gladness dwelt on every countenance. (qtd. Crowe 340-1)

Cleghorn says that in the first half of the nineteenth century “Baptists were frequently unjustly dealt with, and on numerous occasions imprisoned” (28).

Interestingly, while it is clear that many slave owners disliked the Baptists because of their stance against slavery, and that the Anglican Church regarded them as a threat to power, Cleghorn suggests that the biggest conflict was over the missionary’s refusal to be sworn in during legal proceedings. He says, “It was their conscientious conviction that the scriptural injunction to “swear not at all” was binding upon them as a Divine precept, without any limitation” and he cites a letter written to their home committee (28).

For several years past we have been called to testify to the truth of suffering, on account of various points of duty; but chiefly for declining to be sworn in the Courts of this Settlement, we have yearly endured in a progressive measure, fines and imprisonment ... but at length the enemies of the Gospel have been emboldened to assail us openly in the liberty of the public worship of God, and have craftily framed and enacted a law by which it becomes criminal for us to assemble ourselves together ... our meetings have become subject to visits of police agents. (29)

Although the legislation imposing penalties on the missionaries for not swearing was eventually overturned, the Baptists continued to lose followers and therefore power in

Belize. Because of these and other problems, in 1850 the Baptist Missionary Society relinquished their missionary efforts in Belize (Cleghorn 27). The Baptists in Belize continued their work, but as an independent mission.

In the years after emancipation, the British government subsidized education in its Caribbean colonies through grants. However, due to its ambiguous status within the British Empire, Belize did not receive any of this money. There is some disagreement over the extent to which the Baymen made up for this lack through their own contributions to the education system. Dobson, Grant, and Bolland suggest that the Baymen did not encourage or support education, but according to Johnson the donations made by the Baymen were generous in proportion to the size of the population. Johnson points out that British Guiana, a colony that was considered to have been generous by a British inspector in 1837, allocated approximately £2,500 annually, while Belize, a country with less than 5 percent of the population of British Guiana, was allocating £850 a year by 1839 (200). The disagreement over the generosity of the Baymen notwithstanding, the fact that Belize did not get money or support from the British government at this time had an important effect on the development of the education system. As in most places in the Anglophone Caribbean, schools that existed in Belize prior to emancipation were either Sunday Schools, focusing completely on religious teachings, or day schools for the sons and daughters of slave owners. After emancipation there was a significant increase in the number of children who wanted schooling. This period, therefore, was one of significant expansion and the decisions made during this time continue to have an effect on the Belizean education system in the present day.

The fact that Belize did not receive grant money from the British government as the other colonies in the Anglophone Caribbean did had a significant effect in that missionary societies had almost complete control over schooling in Belize. There was little or no debate in the colony over the issue of education, and there was little or no oversight from the British government. Missionary groups saw the establishment and running of schools as an effective means of proselytizing. Education, as a primary means of socialization, allowed religious groups to encourage, require, and reward various degrees of religious conversion. Further, schools became centers for the creation of community and parents who felt indebted to missionaries for educating their children were more open to converting themselves.

### **The Rise of Catholic Power, 1850-1950**

Passed in 1850, the first Education Act was entitled “Act to provide for additional schools for the benefit of every Denomination of Christians in the settlement of British Honduras, and to make certain regulations for the government of such schools and of the Honduras Grammar School (identical with the Honduras Free School).” This act authorized a five-member Board of Education to oversee a budget of £1000 per year (Sanchez 1). By 1855 there were three Honduras Free Schools including one girls’ school, all in Belize City.<sup>36</sup> These schools were supported completely by government funds even though the schools were connected to the Church of England. The three other primary schools, run by the Methodist and the Baptist churches, were eligible for twelve

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<sup>36</sup> The area around the mouth of the Belize River has gone by many names – Belize Town, the settlements, etc. For consistency I will always refer to this area as Belize City, which it is now called.

shillings per year for each student who attended regularly, in addition to supplies like books and maps, and some money towards the rent of the school building.

By 1855 the first two schools outside of Belize City were established – a Catholic school in Corozal and a Methodist school at Mullins River. The new schools were built to respond to the rapid increases in population outside of Belize City. The most important cause of the population increase was the mid-nineteenth-century Caste Wars in the Yucatán. Thousands of Roman Catholic Maya and Mestizos took refuge in Belize and many permanently settled there, creating a demand for more Catholic priests. In his essay, “Religious Influences,” Bolland notes:

By 1857 the northern town of Corozal, which was only six-years-old, had 4,500 inhabitants, predominantly Catholic Mestizos, and was second only to Belize Town, which had 7,000 inhabitants who were chiefly Creole and Protestant. The 1861 census recorded over 25,000 people in Belize, 57 per cent of whom were born outside the colony ... In the 1880s and 1890s Mopan and Kekchi Maya fled forced labour in Guatemala and settled in the remote south of the colony (24).

The changing population demographics created a major shift in the denominational competition. The Catholic Church, which was not even in the game in the early nineteenth century, instantly became an important force in Belize.

American Jesuits first arrived in Belize in 1851 and by 1856 the Roman Catholic Church was second in importance only to the Anglican Church (Dobson 319). The Baptists and Methodists became increasingly marginal as the Catholics gained more power. Unlike the Anglicans, who ministered primarily to those living in Belize City, the Catholics traveled to the outskirts of the country and to all ethnic communities (Dobson



319-20). Because the recent Maya and Mestizo immigrants settled primarily in the sparsely populated areas outside of what is now Belize City, Catholic missionaries focused on these areas and used schools as a central tool in establishing themselves within the community. According to Dobson, “By setting up village schools wherever they preached the Roman Catholic faith, they have created a lasting bastion of their religion which has enabled it to grow to its present position of dominance” (Dobson 320).

In 1868 the Board of Education was dissolved and their powers were transferred to the colony’s Executive Council. That year also marked the end of the government’s Free Schools, which made the entire education system denominational. Ashcraft notes, “The government’s role remained passive and its financial participation was restricted to grants-in-aid to denominational schools at the elementary level. At the secondary level, schools were wholly the responsibility of the churches” (*Education* 11). In 1877 the Executive Council issued regulations regarding the awarding of grants-in-aid to schools. The Council paid teachers with First Class Certificates 50 cents a head for older children and 25 cents a head for younger students (Sanchez 3). Second Class Teachers were paid 25 cents per student (3). This method of allocating government funds exacerbated the denominational competition by, in essence, placing a monetary figure not only on students, but on converts. Teachers also received bonuses based on their students’ exam results and the grants were dependant on the amount of money the school could collect from other sources. The schools had to raise a sum equal to 25 percent of the government grant (3). This was most difficult for the Baptists after they lost their affiliation with the English Baptist Missionary Society.

The population of Belize continued to increase throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. New schools were created to accommodate the increasing number of students. In 1877 there were 14 schools, by 1891 there were thirty-five, and by 1899 there were forty-two. Most of the new schools were created in the districts outside of Belize City where the new immigrants from the Yucatan settled. With the rapid increase in schools, native teachers were in demand. In 1894 the pupil-teacher system was established to meet this need (Sanchez 6). Pupil-teachers were recruited from primary schools. In his article, "Teacher Training in our Country," Palacio explains how the pupil-teacher system worked:

The pupil-teachers have one hour off each day for private study and must be given four hours instruction per week by principal teachers or qualified assistants who must hold either First or Second Class Teacher's Certificates. The pupil-teachers are under prevailing circumstances trying to do three full-time jobs at once: teaching, getting the equivalent of a secondary education and studying the theory and practice of their chosen profession. (9)

The pupil-teacher system has been continually criticized as producing poorly-trained teachers. It was gradually phased out in most places in the Anglophone Caribbean during the second half of the twentieth century. Belize maintained the pupil-teacher system longer than most countries, and began phasing it out in earnest only in the 1990s.

In 1892 the church-state partnership was formalized with an Education Ordinance that was adhered to for most of the twentieth century. Although this legislation reinstated the Board of Education as a government body with oversight functions, the Board did not provide effective oversight because members and supporters of the various church

managements sat on the Board. Indeed, the Board was “dominated by church managements” who “placed serious restraints on the local colonial government in making and carrying out education policies and goals.” Although the denominations retained control over most aspects of education, the government did use its power to create a compulsory schooling statute. At the turn of the twentieth century only about 50 percent of Belizean children were attending school (Sanchez 6). The government addressed this problem in 1915 by making school compulsory for children aged six to fourteen (although technically only in areas deemed necessary by the Governor) (7). The new legislation, which fined parents for absences, increased enrollment significantly.

Walter Gadsby, a Methodist missionary in Belize in the early years of the twentieth century, recorded his experiences in his book, *On the Shores of the Caribbean Sea: Stories of Far-Off British Honduras*. Gadsby’s memoir is useful inasmuch as it provides one of the only records of the interaction between the Methodist missionaries and Belizeans. Most of what is known about any missionary activity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries comes from letters between the missionaries and their home committees, or mission histories. Although these sources are obviously useful, they do not include many stories of their actual interaction with Belizeans, particularly children. Therefore, Gadsby’s narrative provides a rare glimpse into the relationship between missionaries and Belizeans. However, owing to the biased perspective of Gadsby’s writing, it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which Belizeans accepted and internalized Methodist teachings. Nevertheless, his memoir suggests that missionaries were well respected and that Christianity was a central element of the lives of many Belizeans. In

the passage below he recounts how children were used to collect money for the missionary fund of Belize:

Cards are issued to the children, and also adults, in November, which allows them two months to collect, and the money is brought in, with the card each week, and put to the collector's account. The week before the cards are issued, the ministers visit the Sunday Schools and address the children, explaining why the card has been given, and advising them as to the best methods of collecting successfully. The children listen with interested attention, and I have known my suggestion to take its first practical form by the children stopping the Chairman of the District, in the street, and asking him to head the list. I once told the children that if they could get someone well known in the town to head the list in their books it would be a splendid start. (21)

Gadsby notes the enthusiasm and commitment of the children with the following example:

One day, a little coloured girl, who is one of my best missionary collectors, brought her card in to be made up. Wanting someone to take a letter for me, I requested her to deliver it, and gave her a small piece of silver for herself. She looked longingly at the silver coin, took a step towards the door, but came back again, and said, "Please, Sar, put it down in my book for the missionary work." (22)

He mentions that another girl was able to collect BZ\$125 (£25) in one year.

The Methodists, Baptists, and Anglicans tried to thwart the increasing power of the Catholics. Indeed, Catholic and Protestant rivalry defined the 1930s. Because of

their association with the colonial government, the Anglicans were the most powerful religious group in Belize City. The Methodists had support in some of the rural areas. However, none of the other denominations had as much funding as the Jesuit Mission. They controlled most of the rural areas in Belize. Thus, while the Anglicans were empowered by their association with the colonial and British governments, the Catholics had more followers and more money. The high percentage of Catholic schools was a result of the large-scale immigration of Catholics from the surrounding area – who made up about three-fifths of the population in 1934 – as well as the Catholics’ growing reputation for being good educators.

In his article, “State and Church in British Honduran Education, 1931-39: A British Colonial Perspective,” Peter Hitchen argues that this rivalry had positive consequences:

The conflict between the Irish American Jesuits (wealthy but lacking political power) and the British Protestants (politically powerful but lacking funds) neutralized the colonial government’s ability to divide groups along ethnic or religious lines, as in British Guyana and other parts of the British Caribbean. This power balance reduced the effectiveness of either denomination to dominate.... this was not the case in other British territories such as Jamaica, where all denominations were culturally British based and more readily controlled by the colonial government. (195)

Contemporary scholars like Nigel Bolland and Assad Shoman disagree with Hitchen and argue that the denominational rivalry, then and now, stratifies the society in ways that are against nationalist interests.

If the 1930s were characterized by denominational rivalry, the 1940s seems to have marked the winner. The Catholics gained power during the anti-colonial struggles of the 1940s due to their association with the marginalized groups within Belize. Belizean Creoles were overwhelmingly Anglican, seeing the religion as complementary to the reproduction of British colonial values that were necessary for upward mobility. The Maya, Mestizo and Garifuna people, groups far more marginalized in terms of class, race, and culture, were predominantly Catholic. Furthermore, Catholic “priests and laymen ... were under represented and often entirely excluded from positions of influence and authority on public boards and in the colonial power structure” (Bolland, “Religious Influences,” 27). The Catholic Church’s association with the poor and those most disempowered by the colonial system, as well as “the growing resentment” Catholics experienced due to their exclusion from government positions, “is an important aspect of their involvement in and leadership of the anti-colonial movement” (27). However, according to Bolland, this progressive impetus was short-lived and the Catholic Church soon adopted a more conservative politics.

### **Reports and Repercussions: 1930-1980**

The history of education in Belize between 1930-1980 can be pieced together by reading a series of British evaluations and reports on file at the Belize Archive. The first dates to 1933 when B.H. Easter, appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, traveled to Belize to make a formal report on the state of the education system. Easter’s focus was, first, an economic one: the education fund had been drastically cut in the 1933-34 budget. Belize was in bad shape after the 1931 hurricane and Easter was to

provide advice on how to make the system more efficient in order to deal with these budget cuts. Arriving in December of 1933, he stayed four and a half weeks in the colony during which time he interviewed members of the Board of Education, heads of denominations, teachers and other school officials. He visited elementary schools, including those in Corozal, Orange Walk, San Jose and a mahogany camp in the north, and Stann Creek and Toldeo in the south; and four secondary schools in Belize City.

At the time of Easter's visit, more than a fifth of the population was illiterate and both primary and secondary education were almost completely denominational. Primary schools were subsidized with grants-in-aid from the government, but the government provided no funds for secondary schools, nor did they provide any scholarships for secondary school or university. Local managers of schools were the religious leaders of the local parish or district. The Board of Education had only oversight powers at this time. However, as I noted above, the idea that the government had oversight was really a farce because leaders from the religious denominations sat on the Board of Education and acted "as an intermediary between the Board of Education and the local managers in all school matters including the payment of grants" (Easter 5). Approximately 55 percent of schools in 1932 were Catholic, with Anglican and Methodist denominations in charge of 20 percent each. The remaining 5 percent was divided between the Baptists, the Salvation Army, and non-denominational schools (Easter 5).

There was no standardized curriculum or textbook in the 1930s, although many schools used the Royal Reader. Easter contends, "It would be difficult to find a more unsuitable book, though admittedly no really suitable reader exists which would adequately meet the needs of the mixed population" (8). There was a West Indian Reader

in use at the time of Easter's report, but he notes that, although it was probably the best available, it was only occasionally found. Other textbooks in use included the Granville Reader, favored by the Catholics, an American Reader and a Canadian Reader. There was no government assistance for providing textbooks, so, frequently poor families could not afford them (8).

The Easter report stimulated a number of reforms. However, as Hitchens argues the enactment of these reforms was limited by the power of the religious groups. Hitchens says that "while Easter's report itself did not generate conflict, Governor Burns's use of its recommendations within his overall scheme for social and economic reform created a source of acrimony between church and state" (196).

Evidence reveals the church's ability to be selective with reforms, modifying those appearing to threaten church authority but not impeding those of financial benefit to the schools, so that by the end of the Burns's tenure in 1939 the changes made, though instigated by the government, were only those given *de facto* approval by the church. (Hitchens 196)

One important reform that was accepted by both church *and* state was better teacher training.

In 1941 the government made scholarships available to send teachers to Jamaica for training, which was an important first step in the early reform of the education system. The scholarship program continued for fifteen years, training fifty-three teachers; but more importantly it established the importance of teacher training and began a process of reforms that eventually led to the establishment of the Belize Teachers' College in 1965. The significance of this cannot be overstated because in 1965 only



about 14 percent of Belizean teachers had been trained and the school system still relied on the pupil-teacher system.

The second major report on the Belizean education system was done by G.S.V. Petter, Education Advisor to the Comptroller, in 1955. Unlike Easter, who had focused primarily on primary schools, Petter's report looked exclusively at secondary education in Belize. Secondary education has never been compulsory in Belize and the limited spots available have always been allocated based on test results. In the 1950s, when questions of independence were a primary political issue, secondary schooling became more important as a training ground for the future leaders of an independent Belize. In his report, Petter emphasizes the role of elites in both independence movements and self-government. He says:

The achievement of independence, both economic and political, depends in the last analysis not on material factors but upon men and women. In any self-supporting community an essential ingredient is the nucleus of highly intelligent and responsible people from whose ranks must be drawn the administrators, the lawyers, the doctors and the leaders of political and religious thought. Such a nucleus is the product of sound education, by which I mean a long and continuous process during which mind, body and spirit mature under the influence of wisdom, scholarship and good teaching. A sound education also implies, in my mind, a system in which religious influences are allowed to play their full part.

(1)

Interestingly, Catholic secondary schools seem beyond reproach for Petter, and so he confines his report to the four non-Catholic secondary schools, all of which were located

in Belize City. His report thus focuses on the educational prospects for the population of non-Catholic students – approximately 5,000 at the time of the report, according to Petter. The four non-Catholic schools Petter focuses on include: Wesley College, a Methodist school; St. Michael's, an Anglican school for boys; St. Hilda's, an Anglican school for girls; and the Government Technical High School. At the time of the report, there were 1,650 non-Catholic children of secondary school age (between ages ten and fifteen) in Belize City, but the total population of the four schools was only 440.

Petter's criticisms focuses on the under-qualification of teachers. Out of the four non-Catholic secondary schools, only eight of the twenty-three full-time teachers had a university degree, although Petter notes that some without degrees had passed a public exam or earned a teaching certificate (2). The financial recommendations of the report hinged on teacher training. Petter advises that without increased government spending on teacher salaries and education in general, it would be impossible to improve the system. Further, he makes clear that, without greater government spending, he would not make recommendations to the Comptroller of the West Indies Development and Welfare Organisation for any United Kingdom grants: "It would not be justifiable to recommend grants from Colonial Development and Welfare unless the money were going to be well spent; and any money spent in the educational service is wasted if teachers are under-paid" (7). Petter's ultimatum had the intended effect. The government stopped sending a limited number of teachers to Jamaica and created a system for a larger number to be trained at home.

Petter believed that only about half of the non-Catholic secondary students were profiting from their academic courses. In his estimation only two of every three

Technical High School students, 45 percent of Wesley College students, one in three St. Michael's students, and one in four St. Hilda's were benefiting from the courses they took (2-3). Fewer than half, then, were suited for the work they were given. In his opinion, part of the problem was that because four schools were catering to a small population (divided into Methodist, Anglican, girls', boys') most classes were too small to be divided in terms of ability. Petters notes, "The range of ability is very considerable; what in fact happens in any class is that the teaching tends to be directed towards the average pupil so that neither the best nor the weakest receive the attention which they need" (3). Therefore, he concluded that the four non-Catholic secondary schools should be consolidated into one government school, the Belize High School and Technical Institute. This school would admit eighty to ninety students a year, two-thirds of whom would follow an academic program leading to an examination, the remaining following a shorter skills-based practical program. In all-but eliminating Wesley, St. Michael's, and St. Hilda's (he suggests that they preserve St. Hilda's as a non-academic school providing girls "valuable social and moral training"), Petters did express concern about losing the important role the schools had in the social and moral character of the area (5). However, even though the Belize High School and Technical Institute was to be a government school, Petters emphasized that it should be administered in part by a Governing Body in "which the Government, the Anglicans, and the non-conformists, should be equally represented" and who "must be made to feel that the major responsibility for the welfare of the school lies on the shoulders of its members" (6). He continued, "Both Anglicans and Methodists should be able to enjoy the confident knowledge that they have a stake in the policy of the new school. If arrangements are made for Ministers of religion to

superintend the teaching of religious instruction to members of their own denomination, they will be enabled to maintain the influence of the boys and girls in their spiritual care” (6). Although Petter’s criticisms helped spur important reforms, it also had the effect of reducing the power of the Anglican and Methodist churches, and thereby giving more power to the Catholics.

Perhaps the most important reform that came about because of Petter’s recommendations was the creation of a Ministry of Education (MOE). In the 1960s the Board of Education was dissolved and the MOE was given control over the formulation of educational policy, which provided, at least theoretically, an important check on church control (Bennett 21). However, as was the case after the Easter report, mass support for the church-state partnership continued to make it difficult for the MOE to take power away from the church managements.

Nine years after Petter’s visit, a UNESCO Educational Planning Mission was sent to Belize and it recommended two major reforms. First, this report suggested improvements in the content and range of the education system, proposing reforms in the curriculum to better reflect the social, cultural, and economic context of Belize. Second, it advocated a more rational use of public and private funds to avoid what they saw as the costly overlapping of services and the poor use of teachers and materials. With the church-state system, a small town might have several schools representing the competing denominations when the student population might only warrant one school. UNESCO was not the first, or the last, to point to the church-state system as inefficient or to suggest consolidating schools, but beyond the consolidation of secondary schools in Belize City, the religious groups resisted these changes because losing schools meant losing power.

In the 1960s, the Belizean government worked to implement many components of UNESCO's reforms, although it might be argued that what Hitchens said about the post-Easter reforms was also true of this period: the reforms implemented were only the ones given de facto approval by the churches. However, in 1964 Belize was granted self-governance and the spirit of the country was changing. The nationalist movement kept education reform in the forefront of people's minds and this provided the political will to make important changes. One product of this time was the education advocacy NGO, the Society for the Propagation of Education and Research (SPEAR), which was established in 1969. Initially SPEAR was a voluntary organization whose activities were limited to community discussions and the operation of an alternative community bookstore, but their role expanded in the last decades of the twentieth century to include research, and SPEAR has remained a powerful force in advocating progressive reforms in the education system. The fact that one of the founding members of SPEAR was Said Musa, the current Belizean prime minister, helps to explain the last decade's more far-reaching education reforms which I discuss below.

In addition to the British colonial reports mentioned above, this period also saw an increase in interest by academics. Writing in 1969, Norman Ashcraft echoes many of the Easter's and Petter's criticisms by pointing to the church-run system as problematic, ineffectual, and divisive. But his critique was markedly less reserved. Although Easter and Petters had criticized the church-state system, Ashcraft's essay evidences more of a wholesale rejection of the system:

In absence of direct government supervision, the various denominations have planned

and implemented their own programs with little attention to the country's economic problems or the government's goals. Individual programs rarely are coordinated with other schools as there has been little interdenominational cooperation. Religious schisms were steadily widening at the time of field research with each secondary school pursuing its independent policy. (*Education* 12)

Ashcraft argues that the Protestant and Catholic schools were divisive because they were both oriented to different foreign influences. Protestant schools taught British values, with British texts, stories and norms. Although Catholic schools still had to prepare their students for British exams, they reflected an American bias through their choice of textbooks and their overall curriculum (Ashcraft 12). Therefore, according to Ashcraft, "The country has not only a 'duel system' of control of education – i.e., State and Church – but also two different and invariably conflicting systems of education at the secondary level – one British and the other American" (13). Looking at Peace Corps involvement in rural primary schools, he says, "Most efforts by the volunteers have been directed toward group activities such as songs and games on the one hand and the exercises of the American type on the other" (16).

Ashcraft also points to the ways in which the current system maintains class hierarchies (13). In 1969, sixteen of the country's seventeen secondary schools were denominational (the one government school was a technical school). All of the denominational secondary schools charged fees, which made secondary school financially out of reach for many students. Although the government offered some secondary-school scholarships, in 1965 these monies went to only about 12 percent of

secondary school students. The financial burden was exacerbated for families living in rural areas “since it [was] both a financial and logistic burden to send children to secondary schools located in the town and cities” (14). It is important to note that while Ashcraft provided what was perhaps the most scathing criticism of the church-state partnership up until that time, he did not ask questions about the role of Christian *ideology* in creating mindsets of dependency, or social hierarchies.

In 1975 a UNESCO representative came back to Belize to assess the extent to which the government had implemented the UNESCO recommendations. In his report, *Belize, A View of Educational Growth and Change*, the regional advisor for Central America and Panama, Sylvain Lourié, analyzed the progress made in the ten-year interim. Lourié applauded the consolidation of two teacher’s colleges, the standardization of the Common Entrance Exam for advancement into secondary school, and the creation of a Curriculum Development Unit in the Ministry of Education. However, he noted that other key recommendations had not been implemented: “Until 1975, when the Curriculum Unit was established, little was done to ‘retool’ the content, spirit and method of primary and secondary school teaching which remains foreign-inspired, elitist and remotely linked to the lives of Belizeans today” (ii-iii). Further, he criticized the continued fragmentation of the system, with an “unproductive use of resources as denominational schools manage ‘their’ education” (ii-iii). Lourié bemoaned the ineffectiveness of government supervision over the denominations and suggested that the MOE give “serious consideration” to the “historical role of the denominations in education” (5).

Two important reforms were implemented after the UNESCO follow-up report. First, in 1978 the government created the Belize College of Arts, Science, and Technology (BELCAST), which provided the first opportunity for teachers to get an associate degree in secondary education.<sup>37</sup> Second, the MOE focused more on curriculum reform by producing new history and social studies texts meant to reflect the lives of Belizeans. These texts included a frank portrayal of slavery and colonialism which made them very controversial among the Belizean public. The 1983 publishing of the primary school textbook, *A History of Belize: Nation in the Making*, provides a good example. Assad Shoman describes the book as “a text that for the first time exposed the barbarity, racism and oppression of the imperial order” (77). The following is a quote from the textbook:

Slavery was built upon the unjustifiable theory that black people were inferior to white people. Because of this, several generations remained in bondage. Racism was used even after slavery to continue the abuse and discrimination of people, simply because of the colour of their skin.... The Colonial administration and the British settlers succeeded in dividing slaves from each other, African-born from Creole, blacks from brown, skilled and favoured from unskilled and unfavoured, converted Christians from "heathen," and so on. They also managed to divide the slaves from the "freed blacks and coloured" by giving the freemen just enough privileges and favours to make them identify with the whites.

Shoman points to the anger that this book created as a sign that Belizean society has not effectively dealt with its past. As I discuss in the previous chapter, there are a number of

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<sup>37</sup> BELCAST was dissolved in 1986 under the United Democratic Party and replaced with the University College of Belize.



myths that represent Belizean slavery as benign and in name only. In a letter to the MOE protesting the use of *A History of Belize* in schools, Emory King, an important political figure in Belize, wrote, “Slavery was bad, yes, but not bad as all that. It can be painted up to look better” and “No Government puts out a book saying bad things about their past” (qtd. in Shoman 77). In spite of the controversy, the new textbooks were an important step in decolonizing the curriculum, but significantly, because the church managements still retained power over the day-to-day operations of the schools (including which textbooks they used), the MOE could not mandate that non-government schools use these texts.

### **The Post-Independence Period: 1981-2007**

Since independence the MOE has made considerable progress in its efforts to reform the education system. The MOE has increased teacher’s salaries. A national curriculum is in place that guides teachers in schools across the country. To further standardize education, the MOE created a list of recommended textbooks for each subject. In 2007 they took this a step further and selected a set of textbooks that all primary schools must use, and they provided them free of charge to students. Although this has not been without problem, as I discuss in the last chapter, the new textbook program demonstrates the MOE’s commitment to centralizing the education system and to creating a more equitable system by recognizing the financial constraints of poor families. Furthermore, the MOE, in conjunction with the Women’s Bureau, has created several programs to combat gender discrimination in education.

Perhaps some of the most important reforms have related to teacher training. One of the first steps was moving away from the pupil-teacher system and encouraging teachers to get certified. In the 1994-95 school year there were 76,212 pupil-teachers and only 3,316 teachers (*Belize: A National Report*). Throughout the 1990s the MOE made significant efforts to train more teachers including pre-service and in-service programs, and in 1997 the University College of Belize began to offer a bachelor's degree in primary education. However, while commendable, the renewed focus on teacher training is only slowly affecting the education system as a whole. In the 2004-2005 school year only 52.4 percent of primary school teachers and 37.6 percent of secondary school teachers were trained<sup>38</sup> (Pineda 7). The lack of teacher training obviously affects the content and quality of school instruction. In October and November of 2006, 355 Belizean teachers took the Primary School Exam (PSE), an exam that structures the curriculum that they teach. The results were not impressive. In math problem solving, the average score was 34.2 out of 50 and only 12 teachers got a perfect score (Ramos).

While there is certainly more work to be done around teacher training, it is important to note that many of the problems with the church-state partnership identified by Easter, Petter, and Ashcraft have still not been addressed. As I see it, the two biggest problems with the church-state partnership are the role of religious schools in maintaining colonial hierarchies of race, class, gender and nation; and the extend of foreign influence. In the next chapter I look at the first problem, focusing on the constructions of women's sexuality and their use in marking race and class, here I will only discuss the issue of foreign influence. To do this, I want to return to Lundgren's dissertation, which I mentioned in the introduction. This dissertation is particularly useful in that it provides

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<sup>38</sup> The label "trained" means having at least a level-one certificate.

one of the most frank discussions of the church-state partnership. She expresses concern that Caribbean churches have uncritically accepted the models of religion used in the North Atlantic communities, despite the fact that North Atlantic countries have a political and economic interest in the Caribbean. One pastor of a small independent church, Pastor Jones, with whom she discussed this question, was adamant in his views that foreign influence, exercised through the churches, undermined Belizean democracy.

He says that the church controls Belize because it controls the schools and the church is

controlled from outside. People, he says, cannot talk about being independent or being free while the churches and schools are controlled by foreign capital.

“Whoever pays the piper, calls the tune,” he reminds me. The people, though, he says, will not let go of that external control because they do not want the responsibility. They are afraid and they believe that White and North American and British is superior. Pastor Jones goes on to tell me that in his opinion the missionaries have done the most to underdevelop underdeveloped countries because they have raped the people. It has left them greedy and needy, with no faith in each other and more loyalty toward foreigners than toward each other which has made it difficult for them to unite to throw off this common oppressive force. (184)

Lundgren does point out, though, that Pastor Jones’s comments did not reflect the opinion of many Belizeans. She says, “These people did not express to me concerns about foreign control of the churches .... They want their children to grow up obeying the

rules of obedience, humility and good conduct which they feel legitimately emanate from religious life” (185-6).

Charles Rutheiser, another researcher, also looks at the relationship between religious groups and foreign influence. In his 1990 dissertation, "Culture, Schooling, and Neocolonialism in Belize," he expresses a view not unlike Pastor Jones: “Attempts at ‘decolonizing’ the school system” have been restricted “by a continuing reliance on outside sources for staffing, curriculum, capital expansion, and planning expertise” (2). He argues that “the educational system provides a model of—and for—the redirection of Belize’s primary metropolitan relationships from Britain to the United States and the cultivation of renewed political, economic, and cultural dependency” (2).

Certainly it is true that as the Catholic Church became more powerful, the influence of the U.S. increased. There are a lot of factors that contribute to the influence of the U.S. in Belize, not least of which is the trade between the countries. However, I think Rutheiser’s question is important to consider. If Christianity was instrumental in colonialism, is it also working to further neocolonialism?

## **Conclusion**

In 1989, after they conducted a self-evaluation, the MOE issued a confidential report that said

[I]n quantitative terms the education system of Belize has been performing comparatively satisfactorily. An outstanding feature of the education system is the high participation rate of pupils within the six to fourteen compulsory age range. This is undoubtedly due to the strong commitment of Government to the

Church-State partnership.... [I]t is largely because of [the churches'] commitment that the literacy rate of Belize is so high today. (qtd. in Shoman 35)

Assad Shoman, speaking as a representative for SPEAR, challenged this assessment by pointing to another set of statistics. He said that for every twenty children, only nine will finish primary school, only four will move on to secondary school, and only two will graduate (35-6). For Shoman, one of the most significant problems is the church-state partnership. He asks,

How can a church that requires blind faith for its theology nurture enquiring minds? When an important aspect of a people's culture is put beyond question, where do you draw the line? How, for example, does a church whose hierarchy is closed to women inculcate the concept of gender equality in the child? And what becomes of nationalism and self-determination when a church responds to a foreign command structure? (39)

I think Shoman's question is an important one. Schools teach values as well as subjects, and so inasmuch as Belize has needed to reform its formal curriculum, they also need to analyze the hidden curriculum.

Unfortunately, the sources that I have relied on for this chapter – missionary records, government histories, and British colonial reports – have not been able to provide any window into what actually happens inside the classroom. Rutheiser notes this absence and points to literature as a resource. He says, “[F]ew social scientists of either foreign or local birth have effectively described the complexity of just what exactly goes on in schools in postcolonial societies. Generally, the most richly-textured accounts of life in schools, and by extension the societies in which they are embedded, are found in

works of fiction, like ... Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*" (30). It is with this quote in mind that I turn to *Beka Lamb* in the next chapter. I think that Edgell's novel is particularly useful in helping us to understand how religious ideology affects school culture and the consequences of this for girls in particular.

**Chapter 6: *Beka Lamb*: A Fictional “Memory” of Gender, Colonialism, and Education in Belize**

*I wanted to record my point of view – from this writer’s perspective – what I thought I had seen. Not necessarily what was, but what I thought I had seen. It was there. We don’t have a history written by the Belizeans yet, so that I wasn’t in any position to write a history, but I felt that history was sufficient to write a novel.*  
--Zee Edgell

*Beka Lamb* tells the story of two girls growing up in 1950s Belize, then a British colony named British Honduras. Beka’s story is a *bildungsroman* that chronicles a few months that mark a defining change in her life, but the story of Toycie, Beka’s best friend, is what might be called an anti-*bildungsroman*. That is, Toycie’s story is not one of growing maturity, or emerging identity, but rather a descent into madness and the loss of her identity. Indeed, the development of Beka and Toycie are inversely related: as Beka comes of age – marked by her ability to stop lying and to succeed in school, Toycie falls apart. The novel uses the characters as more than just foils, however. Beka’s success comes about in part *because* of Toycie’s failure. Beka learns from Toycie’s mistakes. The *bildungsroman* genre is intimately related to nation-building. Thus, when Beka and Toycie’s journeys are looked at symbolically, the meanings of these two interrelated stories make an important statement about nation-building in Belize as it declares its independence from Britain.

As most critics of the novel have noted, the coming-of-age of Beka can be interpreted as the coming-of-age of Belize. If Beka's story is about Belize, and Beka's success depends on Toycie's demise, then Toycie's story is also a message about nation-building in Belize. If, as I argue below, Toycie's story is a critique of the Catholic Church and the use of women's sexuality to create and establish hierarchies of race, class, gender, and nation, then it follows that the novel positions the success of Beka/Belize as dependent on an understanding of this influence, specifically of the Church's influence on the education system. As Newson explains, "Two central problems dominate the novel: Beka's failure at school and Toycie's involvement with Emilio Sanchez Villanueva" and "[b]oth problems are firmly situated in the socio-political and socio-economic realities of the country" (192).

Inasmuch as the novel tells us the stories of two girls, the novel also records a history of two periods: the 1950s which was the beginning of the nationalist movement in Belize; and the late 1970s-early 1980s, the years surrounding Belize's independence from Britain. *Beka Lamb* was published in 1982, one year after Belizean independence. In his article, "Reaching a Clearing: Gender Politics in *Beka Lamb*," Roger Bromley says that like the flashback structure of the story,

[t]he writing of the novel itself is also retrospective, but it is not simply a fictional record of a few months in 1950. It is a complex cultural production deeply influenced in its construction by discourses and experiences *at the time of writing*, and of the time being written about, as well by the experiences of the intervening period from narrated instance (1950) to the narrating and reading instance. (12)



Bromley emphasizes the importance of the novel as history by noting that “like so many people in colonized cultures, Zee Edgell and her contemporaries did not learn their own history at school and had little awareness of their own society. The writing of *Beka Lamb* was, in part, an attempt to offer a fictional ‘memory’, to supply some of the clues and explanations missing from the Belize story” (12).

As both fiction, and fictional “memory,” the stories of Beka and Toycie critique the education system and the social roles and expectations for girls, two areas where there has been little research. It is my argument that while the narrative takes place in the 1950s it also speaks to the issues of gender and education on the eve of independence and the present day. McClaurin notes the importance of the novel in this regard:

There are few descriptions of the process of gender enculturation in any of the definitive histories of, or studies about, Belize. Rich data are contained in various dissertations, but for the most part what little is known comes from literature. The Belizean writer Zee Edgell, for example, gives us glimpses of what is expected of girls in her autobiographical coming-of-age novel, *Beka Lamb*. (62)

Anne Macpherson makes a similar argument, noting that “anthropologist Karen Judd and Belizean novelist Zee Edgell have more effectively rendered the historical formation and dynamics of gender, particularly among the key urban Creole population” (3).

As I have explained above, despite the fact that Belizean females are doing better in school than their male counterparts, they are not getting better jobs than men once they graduate. Women continue to make less money, have double the unemployment rate, and have little access to decision-making positions (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4). Although the various governmental and non-governmental women’s groups in Belize have pointed to

some of the problems girls face in the predominantly religious schools – pregnant girls being forced to leave school, for example – it is my argument that *Beka Lamb* is possibly the only published source that can help to explain the more nuanced and subtle forces in the school system that may work to stymie girls' achievement. To understand why girls' education is not translating to more power in society, we must look at the hidden curriculum of the religious schools and how it affects the self-esteem and self-understanding of girls and women in Belize.

### **Virgin/Whore: Women as Markers of Race/Class/Nation**

When we are first introduced to Toyocie, she is already dead. The flashback structure of the novel defines Toyocie by her mistake, and so Toyocie's story unfolds like a cautionary tale. We the readers already know she has been punished; we are just waiting to see why. Toyocie is thus constantly under our surveillance as her relationship with Emilio develops.

Toyocie is presented as a kind, respectful, and responsible 17-year-old senior at St. Cecilia's Academy. Despite the fact that she is one of the smartest girls at St. Cecilia's, she develops no conceit, but rather a willingness to tutor other students. Toyocie has been abandoned by her mother and father, but she is obedient and loyal to her Aunt Eila, to whom her mother has "loaned" her. Indeed, it is because Beka's parents like Toyocie so much and see her as a help in taking care of Beka's younger brothers that they invite her to the beach with them for their family vacation at St. George's Caye. It is at St. George's Caye that Toyocie is intimate with her boyfriend, Emilio – a tryst that results in

Toycie's pregnancy and later, her expulsion from school and a descent into madness that ultimately brings about her death.

In her dissertation, *Reconfiguring the Body Politic: The Politics of History and Gender in Zee Edgell's Novels*, Julie Moody-Freeman says, "Colonialism flourished because of its insidious ability to divide the ethnic groups in Belize leaving deeply entrenched views about the superiority and inferiority of one's race" (122). If, as Anne Macpherson argues, "The most important process of colonial identity-shaping was the introduction of Victorian gender norms, designed to produce respectable and repressed West Indian sexualities," then Toycie's story may provide insight into the development of girls' identity in Belize (11). The story of Toycie's sexuality as public spectacle demonstrates the use of female sexuality as a marker of race, class, gender, and nation, which I discuss in the introduction. As such, Toycie's story is also important to the development of Beka/Belize.

Toycie's story functions on both literal and metaphoric levels. On the literal level, Toycie's story makes clear the race/class divides within the society and how connected they are to imported norms and values – particularly those around gender. Newson says, "The essence of the multi-ethnic conflict in Belize is engendered in the personal relationship between Toycie (the Creole girl) and Emilio (the pania boy).... Given the social, class and ethnic structure of Belize, she could never be satisfactory as a wife. Ethnicity and social class are powerful agents working against the young lovers" (192). The interactions between characters in the novel demonstrate the perceived connections between sexuality and hierarchies of race and class. Beka tells Toycie,

“Panias<sup>39</sup> scarcely ever marry creole like we” (47) and “Granny Ivy said that Toycie was trying to raise her colour, and would wind up with a baby instead of a diploma, if she wasn’t careful” (47). We can see the internalization of these norms in the character of Toycie’s aunt, Miss Eila, who

readily acquiesces in the low valuation of herself as unmarried, sexually undesirable, deformed (therefore, unmarriageable) and inadequate .... She is disfigured physically, and therefore invalid as an object of exchange *among men*, but also mentally in the terms of patriarchal definitions of a woman’s *worth*. Her self-image is conceived in the forms of an alien orientation, like those Belizeans who looked outwards to foreign sources for their political role models. (Bromley 14)

Toycie’s story also has symbolic value. Toycie is destroyed not only by Emilio, an individual of another class, but also by what he represents: colonialism and patriarchy, and their vehicle, Christianity. Emilio, a boy of fairer skin, and thus of a better social class, represents the legacy of (Spanish) colonialism. Because of his skin color, Emilio’s family is linked to Spain, and not to the waves of Mestizos who flooded Belize during the violent Central American wars. However, he is also linked to England who used their long rule to entrench the racial hierarchies that positioned Emilio’s family over Toycie’s. “There is a strong correlation between Toycie’s demise and the rigid and contradictory control the state, the Roman Catholic church, and the Belizean community of men and women have over gender politics; these attitudes toward gender, sex, and sexual relationships result in the destruction of some women like Toycie” (Moody-Freeman 84).

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<sup>39</sup> Panias is another name for Mestizos (of mixed Spanish and Indian descent).

In her work, *Perceptions of Caribbean Women: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes*, Erna Brodber describes the ideal for West Indian femininity as “delicate, diffident, tender, pleasing, tactful, suffering and at home” (qtd. in O’Callaghan 41). Therefore, as O’Callaghan argues, “Good behaviour for girls, by such standards – the standards of those wishing upward mobility for their charges – meant being compliant, obedient, self-effacing and submissive” (41). For Toycie, “a model child, a model student, a model young lady,” the pressure to conform “is reinforced by her precarious economic situation as a woman in her society ... and her desire to become ‘somebody’” (O’Callaghan 41).

Further, social mobility via education entails internalization of ideal stereotypes of womanhood, passed on by foreign-trained school authorities. So in *Beka Lamb*, the convent school offers an alternative future for girls to “the washing bowl underneath the house bottom” (2), but to graduate they must “leap through the hoops of quality purposely held high by the nuns” (112). And for many, these “hoops of quality” represent norms that clash with those of their indigenous working-class society (which they are expected to deny once inside the convent gates). (O’Callaghan 42; the page numbers within the quote refer to page numbers in *Beka Lamb*)

O’Callaghan notes that one important site of conflict between the “hoops of quality” and local norms is female sexuality. For Toycie “to rise up the social ladder (via schooling)” she must emulate the Virgin Mary (O’Callaghan 42). Beka tells Toycie, “If Sister Virgil only *hears* you have a boyfriend she’ll suspend you” (Edgell 50). “Her illegitimate

pregnancy thus brands her, in the eyes of the school authorities, as yet another black woman who can't say no" (O'Callaghan 42).

As Lorna Down points out in her thesis, *Singing One's Own Song: Women and Selfhood in Recent West Indian Fiction*, the code of morality of the school and church are at odds with that of the community. Beka grows up in a "traditional" family that was anything but traditional in her community. Moody-Freeman argues,

*Beka Lamb* reveals that [the marriage of Beka's parents] was an uncommon event in Belize; after all, Bill Lamb himself is the product of a single parent home because Granny Ivy became pregnant and had to raise him without help. Miss Flo reveals that she is about to become a great-grandmother, for her granddaughter is having another child by her third boyfriend ... Toycie's own mother was left pregnant by Toycie's father" (91).

Single parent households and unmarried mothers are not a question of morality, but rather a different form of family and sometimes a response to the economic conditions of colonization. Thus, "The community can accept Toycie's pregnancy which they view as a natural event, even though they are aware of the difficulties of the situation. Toycie herself hopes to salvage something of her dreams by concentrating on her studies."

The conflicting understandings of Toycie's situation are emphasized in the confrontation between Beka's father and Sister Virgil. Down notes that Bill Lamb, functioning as the voice of the community, wants to discuss Toycie's pregnancy openly with Sister Virgil (21). Sister Virgil, on the other hand, wants to shroud the pregnancy in secrecy both in word and act: in discussing Toycie's expulsion she uses euphemisms to

refer to the “delicate matter” and Toycie is expelled to prevent the spectacle of her pregnancy from ruining the reputation of the school, or tainting the other girls (Down 21).

In the world of Sister Virgil, women fall into one of two categories: virgin or whore. And this primary categorization affects how they are viewed in terms of race and class, which in turn affects their access to power in society. If Sister Virgil is the virgin, Toycie is the whore. The fact that Father Nunez mirrors this ideology in his class lectures demonstrates its basis in Christian belief and its centrality to the hidden curriculum. Father Nunez tells his class:

Of course, dear hearts, we all want to go to heaven when we die. This is why we must mortify the flesh, do penance always so that we will not burn in purgatory, or worse, be damned to everlasting hellfire. Remember the story of Eve. As young ladies you must walk always with an invisible veil about you so as not to unleash chaos upon the world. God, in His infinite goodness, gave us the Blessed Virgin to erase the memory of Eve, and to serve as an example to the women of the world.

As O’Callaghan notes, “Choice of social role is thus inevitably bound up with a binary choice between virgin/whore stereotypes, as made clear by Father Nunez (90) in his lectures to the school girls” (42; page number within quote refers to *Beka Lamb*). Furthermore, in a country with 58 percent of children born out of wedlock, the virgin/whore categorization implicitly damns most of Belizean society (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4).

As a fictional “memory,” the novel describes the hidden curriculum of the school, but it also works to destabilize this curriculum in its manipulation of the Virgin Mary as a

symbol. Roydon Salick points to the significance of Mary in her article, “The Martyred Virgin: A Political Reading of Zee Edgell’s “Beka Lamb.” According to Salick, the novel consciously links Toycie with the Virgin Mary. She says, “the details of [Toycie’s] conception, betrayal, and death contain deliberate overtones of sacrifice, of the death of an innocent” (110). Her “undoing” is blamed chiefly on ignorance. Beka asks Toycie, “Didn’t Miss Eila tell you when you having your period first time that sometimes if the sperm from a man touches your vagina, sometimes it can go into you and become a baby” (Edgell 109). Toycie responds, “No, Beka, no. I didn’t know and maybe Aunt Eila doesn’t know either. And Milio said nothing would happen ...” (Edgell 109). Toycie’s ignorance is emphasized by the fact that Beka, three years her junior, is already better informed. Although Beka attaches Toycie’s lack of knowledge to Miss Eila’s parenting, the novel suggests that there is more at play. Moody-Freeman says, “One must understand the sociology of sexual education in Belize and how the state and church contribute to a lack of knowledge about sex” (109). Beka tells Toycie, “[I]f it’s a girl we’ll *explain everything carefully about everything* so that her life doesn’t break down that way. And if it’s a boy, we’ll do the same” (Edgell 109, my emphasis).

Salick argues that the fact that Emilio’s “body didn’t go into [Toycie],” marks her pregnancy as an immaculate conception (110). Further, like Mary, after Emilio betrays Toycie, “she becomes the virgin who is despised because of the putative paternity of the fetus and the attendant public disgrace” (110). However, *unlike* Mary, Toycie will not be saved by the sanctity of marriage, and thus, Salick argues, her story becomes the counter-narrative to the story of Mary (110). “When the pregnant Toycie vomits on the chapel floor, she is established in the eyes of authority (religious and educational) as a



source of contamination, to be removed before her sins, like Eve's, infect other girls" (O'Callaghan 43). Toycie is "the virgin despised, betrayed, and vilified" (Salick 110). The setting of Toycie's expulsion emphasizes the stark contrast between Toycie and Mary: Sister Virgil shames Toycie against the backdrop of "a two-foot statue of the Virgin, her arms outstretched, her stone eyes expressionless" (Salick 110; Edgell ).

Toycie's sexuality becomes the most important marker of her identity and the novel shows us the consequences of questioning this ideology. When Father Nunez lectures the class on the sins of Eve, Beka objects: "Excuse me Father, but it's nature that produces the chaos, Father, and women and men are part of nature, and my Gran says that no matter how hard we try, sometimes, like bad luck, things break down. She says to do the best I can and not worry too much about living in heaven and hell for the guilt might frighten me crazy" (Edgell 91). Father Nunez asks Beka if she believes in heaven and hell and Beka says, "I don't know what to tell you, Father" (91). So, Father Nunez asks all Beka's classmates to raise their hands if they believe in heaven and hell. "Every girl in the room raised her hand and Beka sat down" (91). Beka is then asked to leave the classroom and the school. Sister Virgil wanted to expel Beka because she was "a heretic at worst, and a rough diamond at best" (91), but with her father's intervention, Beka is allowed to come back to school after a few days. Beka's questioning of Christianity cannot be tolerated. She is allowed to stay at school because her father's visit reestablished the patriarchal order, moving Beka back to her "appropriate" role, but Beka still fails religion that term. When Toycie asks Beka how she managed to fail religion, Beka tells her it was because of her trouble with Father Nunez. Toycie, who was a successful student prior to her pregnancy, understands the culture of the school.

She tells Beka, “The first thing you better learn, Beka Lamb, is to keep your tongue between your teeth!” (35). When Beka returns to school the next year intent on passing, we see that she has taken Toycie’s advice. “So far, so good,” Beka thought at the end of her first religion class, “I didn’t concentrate, but at least I didn’t say anything” (92). Beka has learned that success hinges on unquestioned acceptance of religious doctrine and her own silence.

Beka also sees the consequences Toycie faces for stepping outside of the bounds of “respectability.” When Beka and Toycie go looking for Emilio, Beka admonishes Toycie, “Emilio and his mother are coming now, Toycie. Don’t act so poorthingfied. People will wonder and begin to watch” (Edgell 102). Toycie replies, “Let them wonder ... I am fed up worrying about what people think!” (102). At this moment, when Toycie stops trying to be respectable and earn the approval of the society, she falls from grace. When Emilio’s mother greets her, she “forgot to call Toycie ‘reina’, looking her up and down with open hostility” (102). For the first time in the novel, Toycie’s physical description marks her as poor. Once Toycie is pregnant, it affects her race and class status and the novel demonstrates this by comparing Toycie’s appearance to Emilio’s mother, Senora Villanueva. Emilio’s “petite Mama [was] dressed exquisitely in a sheath fashioned of sharkskin material. Her tan patent leather shoes matched her dress, and the glass beads of her rosary sparkled like crystal” (102). Earlier in the story Granny Ivy connected patent leather shoes to gender and class by saying, “Only families with young ladies that step dainty can afford patent leather shoes from Wincham’s on Albert Street” (82).

Mrs. Villaneuava is described as having a face that “had the exalted look of a recent communicant” (Edgell 102). “Beside Senora Villanueva, Toycie appeared a trifle scruffy in her lavender, waterwave taffeta dress with its overskirt of billowing lavender bobbinet. Unravelling to one side, her frock tail drooped around her calves. Shoe whitening smeared Toycie’s brown ankles, and her worn flat-heeled shoes keeled over, on the outer sides, like sailing dorys on a rough sea” (102-3). Toycie’s scarlet letter is poverty. Once she is pregnant, she is marked as poor and black. Thus, in this second moment of expulsion – Toycie was first expelled from school and now she is cast out of the Villanueva family – Senora Villanueva becomes a substitute for the statue of Mary and the virgin/whore categories become imbued with race and class.

Inasmuch as Senora Villanueva doubles for Mary, the novel begins to associate Toycie with the local prostitute, National Vellor: “Vellor’s face melted into Toycie’s, Toycie’s face merged into Vellor’s and then Vellor became Toycie” (Edgell 128). As O’Callaghan claims, “To emulate the *opposite* of respectable is to incur the wrath of society and the Church, to become, in effect, no better than the prostitute National Vellor ... a scorned and feared outcast” (44). Demonstrating the limited options for women and the importance of education in social mobility, National Vellor explains her prostitution to Beka, “You see.... No mother, no father, no school. What can I do?” (Edgell 128).

At particular moments in the story Beka reveals her feelings about marriage and having children. Beka’s “talk” with her dead Granny Straker shows that she has adopted some of Sister Virgil’s ideology. After hearing about Miss Florence’s daughter, who has three children by three different men, Beka tells Granny Straker, “I don’t want to turn out like Miss Flo’s Granddaughter!” (77). After Toycie’s tryst with Emilio, Beka’s mother

Lilla buys Beka a notebook to write stories in. Lilla suggests that Beka can write stories for her children to read. Beka's response demonstrates the pervasiveness of Sister Virgil's gender ideology. When Lilla brings up children, Beka says, "I'm never going to get married" (71). This might be seen as Beka's resistance to traditional gender roles, but her statement also reveals that she sees marriage and having children as interchangeable, that one is inherently connected to the other, despite the fact that most of the families she is connected with in the story have children but are not married.

*Beka Lamb* gives us access to the culture of St. Cecilia's and to the ways in which a school culture and a hidden curriculum can affect the way a girl thinks about herself and her community. Students had to either shed "the lives they led at home the minute they reached the convent gates" or suffer the consequences:

There were others, many times of the highest intellectual capacity, who could not, did not, would not, for a variety of reasons, learn to switch roles with the required rapidity. Their upbringing, set against such relative conformity, was exaggerated into what was perceived to be vulgarity, defiance, ingratitude, lack of discipline or moral degradation. They were the ones who stumbled and fell, often in utter confusion, and sometimes were expelled from school. (Edgell 112)

These words were written in 1982, about 1951, but I suggest that they can help us to understand how present-day aspects of schooling – invisible in statistics and test scores – can nevertheless have an important impact on the way a girl sees herself, and her role in society. In attempting to understand why girls' education is not translating into greater power in the workplace, the question then becomes: Has the hidden curriculum remained the same?

### **The Past as Present?**

Zee Edgell, the author of *Beka Lamb*, attended St. Catherine Academy (the basis for St. Cecilia's in the novel) from 1954 to 1959. She later returned to the Catholic high school as a teacher in the late 1960s. In an email interview, I asked Edgell if she felt the culture of the school – particularly involving the pregnancy of students – had changed in the interim period. She responded, “The policy towards pregnant students was already beginning to change [when she wrote the novel], and it has changed now.” In this section I look at the policies regarding sexuality in denominational schools in Belize.

Prior to 1973, pregnant students were automatically expelled as we see in the case of Toycie in *Beka Lamb*. In 1973, St. Catherine changed its policy to allow pregnant students to finish secondary school if they abided by several regulations. This decision produced a heated debate amongs parents of children at St. Catherine and the larger community. Those who were against the new policy argued that allowing pregnant students to return to school would encourage students to see sex before marriage as acceptable. Shoman argued that the community's objections were rooted in class prejudice, specifically middle-class constructions of respectability. In a “Check it Out” column in a local paper he wrote, “Some parents who are or aspire to be ‘middle class’ or bourgeois like to regard the prevalence of illegitimacy as a ‘lower class’ problem. So they feel it shouldn't even be considered in the context of the school where they send their daughters” (*Backtalking* 17). Although many objected to the new policy, there were also many who championed the change. Women's groups supported St. Catherine and encouraged other schools to institute the same policy. In 2007, pregnant students can, depending on the school, finish their education. Although many schools have followed

St. Catherine's lead to allow 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> form girls to return to school, some have not ("Children and Adolescents" 6). At Ecumenical High School in Dangriga, pregnancy tests are administered for fourth form students about two months before graduation (25). If the test is positive, the girl is expelled (25). At Belize City Pallotti High School the principal has the right to require any girl to take a pregnancy test if there is the least suspicion that she is pregnant. Furthermore, all denominational schools expel pregnant girls in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> form (6). Based on the rules of the church-state partnership the government cannot prevent students from being expelled or mandate schools to let pregnant students return.

Returning to Edgell's statement, it *is* true that many schools have changed their policies. However, I think that Edgell's novel proves that the issue is more complicated than whether or not pregnant students are allowed to return to school. "Illegitimate" children are still used as a marker of class. The change in some school's policies has not changed the ideology of respectability. Ironically, even though St. Catherine has been praised for its policy, the language of their regulations reinforces the ideology of respectability and makes clear that the hidden curriculum of Beka's school is still in place a half-century later.

St. Catherine's "Policy on Parenthood" is as follows:

- Any student who becomes pregnant while registered as a student may be excluded or expelled from school programmes. This exclusion or expulsion, however, must be applied only after the entire case has been investigated.

- Any student who becomes pregnant while attending Saint Catherine Academy may be allowed to finish her education at Saint Catherine Academy, but the permission is not automatic. The consideration to readmit a student after she has given birth to a child from a pregnancy will be at the discretion of the Principal in consultation with the Saint Catherine Academy Board of Governors.
- A student who discovers she is pregnant should report the matter to the principal. A consultation will then be held with the parents/guardians to explain and determine the course of action. If the student and parents/guardians fail to comply with this rule and purposely attempt to mislead the principal, the student will be asked to withdraw from school.
- A student who becomes pregnant must withdraw from school during the period of the pregnancy. The return date, if permission is granted for her to continue her education at the institution, will be determined by the Principal. The return date must coincide with the start of a semester.
- A student who has had a child and is granted permission to return to school will attend several scheduled counselling sessions at least two weeks prior to the beginning of formal classes. Her name will be added to the counselling list and she will be required to attend counselling sessions periodically during the academic year.
- Individual consideration will be given to each student who becomes pregnant.

- A student who becomes pregnant for the second time will not be allowed to return to Saint Catherine Academy.
- Any student who becomes pregnant will not be allowed to participate in the formal graduation exercises. Upon successful completion of her studies, however, she will receive a Saint Catherine Academy diploma.

The underlying beliefs about respectability are still present. Women's bodies are still under surveillance (the cases are "investigated" and girls are expected to leave once they start to "show"). Furthermore, the girl has "sinned" and she is still punished (she is not allowed to participate in graduation, which is an event of great significance in Belize).

Although St. Catherine's policy regarding pregnant students has changed, I think that the language of their policy indicates that there has not been a change in the hidden curriculum. Indeed, their school song suggests that St. Catherine girls are still marked by their sexuality: "Mercians on we strive to honour your name; / A heritage from Our Blessed Mother's fame ... symbols of purity ... Here we come every convent girl / Emblems of honour true." This ideology can also be seen in the treatment of unwed teachers in the Catholic school system, which I discuss in the next chapter. Up until 2004 it was routine for schools to fire unwed teachers if they became pregnant. In 2004, a teacher who had been fired because of her pregnancy sued the Catholic Management for discrimination. Based on the Education Rules, the National Gender Policy, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>40</sup> the court decided in favor of the teacher and the verdict was upheld on appeal (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4). Although the legal case is seen as a precedent that will

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<sup>40</sup> Belize ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1990.



help end the practice of firing unwed pregnant teachers, the fact that the married status of a teacher is an issue at all suggests that things have not changed very much since the 1950s.

The consequences of this ideology of respectability are strongest for the students and teachers in the religious schools – particularly Catholic schools – but this ideology also affects elements of Belizean society outside the education system. In June 1999, a delegation of Belizean officials presented its progress in implementing the reforms of CEDAW to a United Nations committee. Joan Musa, Belize's First Lady and the President of the National Women's Commission, said that the current policy of restricting information and contraception to young people in hopes of preventing sexual activity was "obviously not working" (WOM/1140). Musa explained that 60 percent of births to young mothers were unplanned. Belize also has the highest rate of HIV transmission in Central America. In a presentation to The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Belize delegation reported that the rate of adolescent pregnancy in Belize was one of the highest in the Caribbean and Central America ("Committee on Rights"). Women's groups continually assert that the Catholic Church, with its power over much of the education system, stymies attempts to address these statistics. In a 2005 report to CEDAW, the Belizean government expressed this frustration: "AIDS prevention and pregnancy control [has] been difficult because of the Catholic Church's opposition to the use of condoms. The current policy of urging abstinence and providing no information on contraception [is], however not working, and it [is] hurting the poorest, who [have] the most children" (CEDAW/C/SR.438 3). The Catholic Church's opposition can be seen in an article printed in the Stann Creek Star (Dangriga's newspaper) in 2003. The article,

written by a Catholic Bishop, accused the Belize Family Life Association (BFLA) of trying to destroy the black race by providing birth control in an area populated mostly by Garifuna (“Children and Adolescents” 19). The consequences of the Church’s opposition can be seen in a recent survey that found that “56.9 percent of respondents had not received a class or course on family life or sex education, and 30.3 percent of the women did not know where to go for information on sex and contraception; 30.8 percent did not know where to go for information on STD’s and 32.4 percent did not know where to obtain information on HIV/AIDS” (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4). This ignorance is dangerous. The 1999 Family Health Survey found that 61.9 percent of women felt that they had no risk of contracting HIV/AIDS while only 45 percent had ever used a condom (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4).

The Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasized the connections between school policies regarding pregnant students and larger issues of gender equality:

Action must be taken to cease the continued practice in government and non-government schools alike of expelling pregnant students. This is of particular concern when it is considered that the education of young women is a significant factor in improving the quality of child-rearing, in reducing unwanted pregnancies and teenage fertility rates, and in addressing issues of the economic independence of women. It is considered unacceptable that such practices should be at the discretion of individual school administrations, and the Government needs to implement regulations to ensure that pregnancy is not a ground for denying a child an education. Furthermore, the Ministry should take steps to develop and

implement policies and procedures to encourage and facilitate the resumption of formal education by young mothers. (“Consideration of Reports”)

Despite almost 20 years of recommendations from CEDAW, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and other groups, and despite the efforts of many women’s groups in Belize, changes in the education system have been difficult. This is in part due the power the Catholic Church wields in Belizean society, and the church’s long connection with political leaders. The party leaders

during the 1950s had attended St. John’s College, a high school run by American Jesuit priests. During Belize’s nationalistic period between the late 1950s and 1960s, George Price, the Premier of Belize, himself an ex-Catholic priest, established religion as the basis for his “patriotic theme” declaring a “church state concordat.”

*Beka Lamb* provides insight into this situation with the description of the Hartley boys. The Hartley boys were “light brown” elite Creoles who “lived lives that had much in common with civil servants from England who headed many of the departments of the colony’s Civil Service” (Edgell 53). Beka says that whenever they walked past her with their “shirts neatly tucked into trousers with creases as sharp as razor blades” they stared “straight ahead,” “looking neither to the left nor the right” (53). The implication is clear. Because the Hartley boys were made elite by the current system, it was in their best interest to not notice what was going on around them. People who have gained middle-class status through the ideology of respectability depend on the “illegitimate” births of the “lower” class to mark their own middle-class status. They can ignore the issue.

People like Beka and Toychie, who have been hurt by the current policies, do not have that luxury: “The ability to look straight ahead was a thing of wonder to Beka” (53).

## Chapter 7: Church v. State

Toycie's expulsion in *Beka Lamb* is an important moment for Beka in that she begins to recognize the dynamics of her Catholic education. I address this particular issue in the previous chapter, where I contextualize and analyze Zee Edgell's work set in Belize. In this chapter I address the related issue surrounding unwed pregnant teachers, looking specifically at the precedent-setting 2004 court case, *Maria Roches v. Clement Wade*. Roches was a primary school teacher at a Catholic school in Belize, until she was fired for getting pregnant out of wedlock. Her dismissal was the result of an "unofficial policy" by the denominational schools to fire unwed pregnant teachers. Governmental and non-governmental Belizean women's groups had been protesting this practice for years, but not until Roches sued the Managing Authority of the Roman Catholic Church in Belize (hereafter referred to as the Catholic Management) was this unofficial policy brought before the courts for review. Roches' dismissal launched a fierce public debate over the relationship between the church and state in the administration of education in Belize. Therefore, a discussion of this case provides a fitting conclusion for my dissertation. First, I explain the context for this case. That is, I describe the role of Christian morality around marriage and sex in the employment of teachers. Second, I explain the evidence presented at Roches' trial and the Supreme Court's ruling on the case. Third, I analyze the case by looking specifically at problems with the church-state partnership and possible solutions.

Belizean schools follow a Christian "Code of Ethics." Teachers are expected to model the "Code of Ethics," which is only sometimes codified, and for most schools this

standard of behavior is viewed as a condition of employment (Jones 10). Schools within the Catholic Management usually require teachers to sign a contract that expresses “the need for teachers to live by the Christian values of the Church, especially Christian values as they pertain to marriage and sex” (10). Based on the belief that pre-marital sex is immoral, all denominational schools (excepting Anglican-run institutions) deem cohabitation or the pregnancy of an unwed teacher disreputable, and thus cause for disciplinary action. Written policies rarely specifically declare that cohabitating or unwed pregnancy will result in dismissal, but teachers are always made to understand that their decisions about sex and marriage – in contravention of Christian doctrine - will place their jobs in jeopardy.

The practice of firing unwed pregnant teachers in religious schools is not unique to Belize. In September 2005, Michelle McCusker was fired from the St. Rose of Lima School, a Catholic school in New York, once she informed the school that she was pregnant. Frank DeRosa, a spokesman for the Brooklyn Diocese, said that McCusker was fired because by having non-marital sex she violated school ethics, which are laid out in the personnel handbook (Brown). However, the situation in Belize is different from McCusker’s case because of the nature of the church-state partnership in Belize. In Belize two-thirds of primary schools are denominational. Consequently, because the pool of non-denominational schools is so small, this regulation of personal behavior inflicts greater hardship on Belizean teachers than it would on teachers in most other countries.

Despite the fact that primary school teachers are paid completely by the government and secondary school teachers are paid 70 percent of their salary from the government, the religious managements are entitled to make all personnel decisions,

including hiring and firing. On this basis, the religious managements punish unwed mothers and those in common-law unions, both of which are deemed immoral, with “disciplinary action” (Jones 10). “Disciplinary action” can range from a forced and unpaid leave of absence (usually while the teacher is pregnant) to firing. Married women, on the other hand, are given up to 3 months paid maternity leave (11). Prior to “disciplinary action” teachers are strongly encouraged by school officials to get married. Even the Anglican Management, under which female teachers fare the best, advises women to have no more than three children (11). Although the religious managements maintain that their policies pertain equally to men, they concede that it is difficult to prove if a male teacher has in fact fathered a child. Prior to the Roches suit there were no known cases in which a male teacher had received “disciplinary action” (11). According to Jones, this policy has the effect of mirroring the accepted belief in Belizean society that “it is OK for a man to indulge in permissiveness and an immoral lifestyle, but it is not so for a woman. The society will treat her with scorn” (25).

It is important to note that government-run schools provide maternity leave to both married *and* unmarried teachers. This clearly indicates the position of the Ministry of Education (MOE) with regard to pregnant teachers. Nevertheless, the religious managements, in charge of the majority of schools in Belize, control personnel issues in their schools, and so the MOE has been unable to extend maternity leave to unwed pregnant teachers in denominational schools. Furthermore, the policy to fire unwed pregnant teachers does not reflect the reality of Belizean life and the cultural perspectives of parenting in Belize. Jones states:

Single parenting is common and is a conscious choice most women make; it is also a part of the cultural reality we live in today. While this issue was taboo years ago, it is now acceptable providing mature adults can provide for themselves financially. Over the past years there has also been an increase in common-law relationships. More and more the younger population in the society is engaging in common-law unions before embarking on marriage. (13)

In 2001, 58 percent of births were to unmarried women (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4). In 2000, the rate of female-headed households was 24 percent and in the Belize district, where the population is mostly Creole, the rate was 36 percent (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4). School managements are also allowed to give hiring preference to teachers who practice their faith. “According to management, from this perspective, the chance of teachers or other employees starting a family before marriage is less likely to happen” (Jones 13).

The MOE took an important step towards ending the firing of unwed pregnant teachers in August 2000 with the publication of the *Handbook of Policies and Procedures for School Services*. The handbook states that “all female teachers are entitled to receive maternity benefits from social security” (Jones 10). However, the handbook does not state that teachers must remain employed during this period so school managements could still “take action they deem appropriate and in the process deny a teacher benefits she is entitled to” (10). The facts of the Roches case illustrate the tension between church and state over this issue.

### **Maria Roches v. Clement Wade**



Maria Roches began teaching in 1999 at the Silver Creek Roman Catholic School. Within four years she moved to the San Pedro Columbia Roman Catholic School and then to the Santa Cruz Roman Catholic School, but throughout the duration of her teaching she worked for the Catholic Management in Belize.

According to the Catholic Management, on September 28, 2000, when Roches was hired to teach at the Santa Cruz Roman Catholic School in the Toledo district, she signed a contract agreeing to live her life in accordance with Catholic beliefs around sex and marriage.<sup>41</sup> The relevant section of the contract reads:

As a Catholic Christian witness, I will take pride in my profession by willingly observing the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, such as, attendance at mass and other church services, being exemplary in conduct and language, and living Jesus' teaching on marriage and sex.

I accept that if I fail to live up to these terms, I may be released from this Management.<sup>42</sup>

Roches denies ever signing this contract and the justice hearing the case, the Honourable Abdulai Conteh, chief justice of the Supreme Court of Belize, found in her favor on this point. The contract that the Catholic Management provided at the trial had spaces for three signatures: that of Roches; Benjamin Juarez, assistant local manager of Toledo Catholic Schools; and a witness. Roches' name was *printed* above the signature line and the witness line was left blank. Both of these facts were important for Conteh in his decision to believe Roches on this point. Furthermore, Roches supplied the court with a

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<sup>41</sup> My summary of the facts in this case is based on Supreme Court records from April 30, 2004 and Court of Appeal records from March 9, 2005, including transcripts of the justice's judgments and pre-trial affidavits submitted by both the plaintiff and the defendant.

<sup>42</sup> The contract was submitted as exhibit BAJ 4 with Juarez's affidavit dated 31 March 2004.

copy of her University of Belize identification card, which had her signature on it. Conteh noted that the signatures on the card and the contract did not match, and that furthermore, the signature on the contract was not even a signature. Because of that, and because there was no witness signature, Conteh found that Roches had *not* signed the contract. Although he did not press the point, Conteh's finding on this matter suggests that the Catholic Management forged the contract.

Notwithstanding the court's finding that the contract was fraudulent, the phrase "living Jesus' teaching on marriage and sex," which was used in the contract, was repeatedly invoked by the Catholic Management in defense of their action to fire Roches. They used biblical passages to explain Jesus' teaching on marriage and sex and to illustrate the importance of this teaching. In particular, they invoked the following passage from St. Paul's Letters to the Corinthians: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators nor idolaters, nor adulterers, not effeminate nor abusers of themselves" (1 Cor. 6:9).<sup>43</sup>

In April of 2003, Roches informed Juarez that she was pregnant. Roches claims that the reason she told him at that time was to inquire about maternity leave. On June 26, 2003, Roches went to see Juarez again. This time she was handed a letter, the text of which reads as follows:

In view of the fact that you are not complying with the contract you made with the Toledo Catholic Schools Management to live according to Jesus' teaching on marriage and sex, this management is hereby informing you that you will be

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<sup>43</sup> This passage is from the *King James' Version of The Holy Bible*. Conteh asked for a the passage to be translated into contemporary English, so the Catholic Management also read into evidence the same passage from the *New American Bible*: "Do you not know that the unjust will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor boy prostitutes nor practicing homosexuals."

released from your duties as a teacher in this management effective August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2003. Thank you for the services you rendered over the past years.

Section 16 of the Education Act details the recourse a teachers has if fired. The first stage of appeal is the Chief Education Officer (CEO). If he supports the dismissal, the teacher may then appeal his decision to an arbitration panel. Roches appealed her dismissal to the CEO of Belize, who agreed that she had been unfairly treated. In a letter dated November 18, 2003, the CEO directed the Catholic Management to reinstate her because “the reasons stated for release are not supported by the Education Rules.” The Catholic Management did not obey the CEO’s injunction. Several non-governmental organizations, including the Women’s Issue Network, the National Trade Union Congress of Belize, and the Belize National Teachers’ Union, entreated the Catholic Management to reinstate Roches, but their pleas had no affect and so Roches filed suit in the Belize court system.

The lawsuit names Clement Wade as the defendant, but only as a representative of the Managing Authority of Catholic Public Schools. Roches’ lawsuit alleges that the Catholic Management violated section 16(2) of the Belize Constitution by discriminating against her based on sex. Roches alleged that even though many female teachers had been fired for getting pregnant out of wedlock, male teachers were *not* fired for impregnating women out of wedlock. Roches further claimed that Catholic Management’s refusal to reinstate her after being told to do so by the CEO violated her right to work, as stated in section 15(1) of the Constitution.

The Catholic Management’s defense hinged on three key issues. First, they argued that the Roman Catholic Church in Belize was not a public authority, but a private

corporation. They contended that as a private corporation, they entered into a contract with Roches as a private employer and consequently could not be sued for a violation of the constitutional right of no discrimination. Second, they maintained that Roches was dismissed because of a breach of contract. Although Conteh found that Roches had never signed a contract, he did consider this argument. That is, he considered whether the contract would have been enforceable if Roches had signed it. And third, the Catholic Management claimed that they had not administered their policy in a discriminatory manner. They maintained that the policy of dismissing unwed teachers with children was applicable to both male and female teachers. In evidence of this they submitted the dismissal letters for three male teachers, two of which were handed out on the same day that Roches received her notification.

Conteh disagreed with the Catholic Management's argument that they were not a public entity. Basing his finding on the nature of the church-state partnership, he said:

I find that it does not take a leap of faith to hold that in the field of education today in Belize, the respondent carries out important functions of enormous public ramifications and impact that it can reasonably and properly be regarded as the *alter ego* of the government, or its emanation, such as to make it a person or authority for the purposes of the Constitution's prohibition against discrimination, and therefore amenable to redress for any alleged violation of the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights and freedoms. (19)

Conteh addressed the second and third elements of the Catholic Management's defense together. His decision was based on the biological differences between men and women. He did not question whether or not men had ever been fired by the Catholic

Management for fathering a child outside of wedlock, but whether or not it was *as likely* for a man to be dismissed for this breach of contract. Conteh maintained that men could easily avoid detection, while women never could. Because of the biological differences between men and women – the fact that women get pregnant, thus carrying the proof of their parenthood on their body – Conteh said that “the unmarried female teacher [is] more directly open and vulnerable to the policy of [the Catholic Management] of releasing unmarried teachers because of pregnancy” (26). He concludes: “I therefore find that the respondent’s policy is inherently and in fact, capable of affording different treatment to different persons, in this case male and female teachers, attributable wholly to their respective sex or gender: unmarried female teachers are the prime if not the exclusive targets of such a policy” (27).

In terms of Roches’ allegation that the Catholic Management was remiss in not following the orders of the CEO to reinstate her, Conteh found that the Catholic Management had, in fact, broken with the Education Act.<sup>44</sup> He said that as a grant-in-aid school, the Santa Cruz Roman Catholic School and its management were under statutory obligation to adhere to the rules of the Education Act. Therefore, the Catholic Management was legally required to follow an order from the MOE, in this case the CEO’s direction to reinstate Roches.

Furthermore, Conteh found that the Catholic Management *did* discriminate against Roches and that this discrimination was a violation of her constitutional rights under section 16(2) of the Belize Constitution. The verdict stated that the Catholic Management failed to follow its statutory obligations by not adhering to the CEO’s order to reinstate Roches. However, the verdict did *not* order the Catholic Management to

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<sup>44</sup> See Rule 104(3) and Rule 108(g) of the Education Act.

reinstate Roches. Conteh said, “I am unable, given the facts of this case and the undoubted spiritual and moral position of the [Catholic Management], for which I have every sensitivity and respect, and coupled with the fact that Ms. Roches’ contract is one of personal service as a teacher, to order her reinstatement in the [Catholic Management’s] employ” (36). The sum awarded to Roches for the violation of her constitutional rights was BZ\$300,000 (US\$150,000).

The Catholic Management appealed the Supreme Court’s decision to the Court of Appeal of Belize. Justices Mottley, Sosa, and Morrison heard the appeal and supported the Supreme Court’s verdict in favor of Roches. However, they determined that the amount awarded to Roches was excessive and reduced the sum to BZ\$120,000 (US\$60,000). Despite the fact that the appellate court reduced the damages amount, their support for the Supreme Court’s decision was seen as an important success by governmental and non-governmental women’s groups in Belize.

### **Analysis**

I end my dissertation with an analysis of the Roches case because I think it is illustrative of the conflict between the church and state in their joint effort to administer education. I think the Roches case points to three principle problems with the church-state partnership: First, the churches are resistant to oversight by the MOE; Second, some of the church policies run counter to the espoused goals of the government; Third, the church helps maintain Victorian gender norms and continues the practice of using women’s sexuality to stratify the society.

The church openly questioned the authority of the MOE in the Roches case by not adhering to the order of the CEO. Although the court maintained that the Catholic Management was in error, Conteh did not impose any punishment on the Catholic Management for that finding of fault. The damages awarded to Roches were exclusively for the violation of her constitutional rights, and although the Catholic Management's refusal to reinstate Roches at the request of the CEO is clearly related to the violation of her constitutional rights, I think it is important to identify the Catholic Management's flouting of the MOE's authority as a separate issue. The reforms of the last 15 years have centralized the education system, intending to take power away from the religious managements, and the churches are fighting to maintain their influence and control.

The churches in Belize are continually praised for their work in the education system, but there is never an acknowledgement of the harm that they have caused. Part of the problem is that the history of the churches' complicity in colonialism is absent from the public consciousness. Indeed, a history of education in Belize has never been published, and the paucity of historical analysis on the education system is fragmented and scattered throughout a few theses and dissertations. My work aims to address this problem by providing the first comprehensive history of education in Belize that focuses on the role of missionaries.

The second major problem that the Roches case illustrates is the disconnect between the beliefs of the church and the goals of the government. The policies towards unwed pregnant teachers in religious and government-run schools are different. The policy of firing unwed pregnant teachers violates the government's commitments to international treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which I discuss below. Such firings are also an issue of human capital, as described by Jones:

The issue of school policy and its implications for unwed female employees is an education and labour problem. Instead, it is viewed solely as a religious and moral issue.... If teachers are expected to produce students that are intelligent and can adequately function in today's society, then the implications of [firing unwed pregnant teachers] on the system, mainly the children, should be examined critically. There is a loss of productivity when these teachers are forced out of the classroom, and a loss of human resource capacity when children are not being taught by teachers who are the most qualified or who have developed a relationship with the class. This adverse effect is critical regardless at what stage in the school year a teacher has to leave. (28-9)

The third problem exemplified by the Roches case is the role churches play legitimating and naturalizing Victorian gender ideology and constructions of respectability that disempower women economically, politically, and socially. Despite the significant changes that have come about as a result of governmental and non-governmental action, "gender stereotypes continue to dictate the economic, social, political and cultural lives of a majority of men and women in Belize" (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4). The socialization of traditional gender roles has had an important economic impact on Belizean women. Female participation in the labor force is 40 percent, compared with 78 percent for males (WOM/1134). Although women are better educated, they still make less than their male counterparts, and women have twice the unemployment rate of men (WOM/1134). The 2000 Labor Force Survey found that 25



percent of unemployed females had at least a secondary education compared to 16 percent of unemployed males, indicating that employers may impose higher qualification requirements for women (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4). Gayla Fuller, coordinator of the Women's Issues Network of Belize (WIN-Belize) says that even though women are better educated than men, they are still concentrated in "pink collar" jobs (WOM/1134). This has been of particular importance given Belize's two-tier minimum wage system.

Up until 2002, domestic workers and shop assistants, who were mostly female, earned a lower minimum wage than manual laborers, who were mostly male. The different minimum wages were defended based on the value of the skills in the different sets of jobs, and not gender. Advocates for a change to the two-tiered system argued that the *value* of certain skills over others *was* about gender and in 2002 their arguments resulted in the government creating one minimum wage for all workers. Increases in the minimum wage for domestic jobs were achieved gradually over the past five years, leveling out at BZ\$3.00/hour. Joan Musa, president of the National Women's Commission and First Lady of Belize, says that women also have a harder time getting loans, not because of outright discrimination, but because they do not possess collateral like land titles (WOM/1134).

Victorian gender roles also affect women's access to power. Belizean women are underrepresented in high-level decision-making positions in public administration, the civil service, and private enterprise (WOM/1134). "Traditional gender role practices and the seclusion of women in the domestic sphere discourage and inhibit women from engaging in activities that would allow them to reach decision-making structures.

Political parties do not provide opportunities for women to advance political careers, and there are no stimuli for running in elections” (WOM/1134).

In her ethnographic research of Belize, Irma McClaurin found that a “significant aspect of women’s personhood is a sexual identity shaped by secrecy, anxiety, distrust, and ambivalence” (69). She notes a number of ways that women’s sexuality is controlled in Belize. As in many other societies, women in Belize are controlled through expectations about appearance. Men may require that their wives wear conservative clothing and “making one’s self attractive and desirable is a generally suspect activity for a married woman” (qtd. in McClaurin 69). McClaurin says men perpetuate a myth that women are less sexually attractive after having children or while they are pregnant (69). Men may then use the woman’s diminishing attractiveness as an excuse for their own affairs. Certainly, encouraging someone to see herself as less sexually attractive is a means of discouraging them from having other relationships by affecting their self esteem. The effect on self esteem may also result in the woman feeling like she cannot find another partner, with the consequence that she might stay in a less-than-satisfactory or even abusive relationship. In fact, the Women’s Department of Belize has stated that “one of the main obstacles to the advancement of women in society has been the manner in which young girls are socialized. Many women in Belize continue to suffer from a lack of self-esteem, making them unwilling and unable to challenge traditional gender stereotypes or to take on leadership roles” (CEDAW/C/BLZ/3-4). McClaurin provides a quote from a Belizean woman to illustrate the way patriarchal gender norms affect women’s freedom and mobility: “I was mostly to myself before because my husband didn’t want me to be in any social gathering. Even in school I use not to go to the

entertainment. So I felt like I was penned up, couldn't talk to friends, couldn't go out or go to any dance parties. Not like you free, like confined, penned up" (69).

Religious constructions of respectability, another part of Victorian gender norms, have harmful effects for women and girls in Belize. In their 1999 testimony to the Women's Anti-Discrimination Committee as part of their commitment to CEDAW, the Belize contingent emphasized the role churches play in preventing access to sex education. They state that one of the biggest problems in fighting HIV/AIDS in Belize, which has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS in Central America, is "the Church's reluctance to allow the Government and non-governmental organizations to teach HIV/AIDS prevention techniques in schools" (WOM/1134). Programs that focus exclusively on abstinence associate sex with immorality, furthering colonial constructions of respectability. Moreover, these programs contribute to a climate of secrecy and ignorance. Ellen, one of the women McClaurin interviewed explained her experience:

I can remember at the age of thirteen I started having my menstrual period. I didn't know anything. I didn't even hear about it, not even from one of my friends. I didn't hear about this thing or I didn't know about it. They didn't leave anything around in the bathroom or anything. When I started having it, then I know what my sisters used to get a good whipping for in the kitchen or all over the place because if they slip and they leave one thing hanging around in the bathroom somewhere, my mom would beat them up. I didn't know what she was whispering to them and whipping them for. Then when I got a dose of it, then I knew what it was. (71-2)

Discussing Ellen's story, McClaurin argues that "lack of knowledge becomes a powerful tool of enculturation designed to limit women's control over and understanding of their own bodies" and she points to the influence of Catholicism, particularly in schools, to explain the continuing ignorance and high rates of teenage pregnancy.

The Roches case illustrates problems with the church-state partnership including issues around government oversight, the development of human capital, and gender equality, but the lawsuit also points to one important strategy for change. I think the lawsuit makes clear that international pressure can be an important tool in standing up to the churches. In his judgment, Conteh *directly references* CEDAW, which Belize ratified on March 7<sup>th</sup> of 1990. Conteh quotes Article 11, paragraph (2), subparagraph (a) of CEDAW:

In order to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure their effective right to work, State Parties shall take appropriate measures:

- (a) To prohibit, subject to the imposition of sanctions, dismissal on grounds of pregnancy or of maternity leave and discrimination in dismissals on the basis of marital status.

Conteh reasons that finding in favor of the Catholic Management in the Roches case would violate Belize's obligation under CEDAW. Belize's ratification of CEDAW was an asset in this case and I think CEDAW, as well as other international treaties, can provide the legal power to challenge church policies that are detrimental to state or individual well-being.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

At the start of this dissertation, I asked one basic question: Why are girls' educational achievements not translating into greater economic, political, or social power? Despite the fact that girls are out-achieving their male counterparts in education the female unemployment rate is double the male rate, women remain in traditionally female jobs, and women remain excluded from decision-making positions throughout the Anglophone Caribbean. In this dissertation I suggested that in order to better understand this disconnect between education and power, we need to analyze school culture. In the post-independence period – particularly since the 1970s – there has been a concerted effort to recognize and eliminate gender bias in schooling. These efforts have been tremendously successful in terms of changes in textbooks and curricula. A look at primary school textbooks throughout the region will demonstrate this with their use of both male and female protagonists doing activities outside of traditional gender norms. However, scholars like Olive Senior, Barbara Bailey, Elsa Leo-Rhynie, and V. Eudine Barriteau argue that despite these reforms much of school culture has remained unchanged. In the introduction I emphasized the importance of their arguments and situated the work of my dissertation within this body of Caribbean feminist scholarship.

As I discussed in the introduction, schools teach more than reading, writing, and arithmetic. They socialize a society's basic belief structure – including the expected behaviors for men and women – and these beliefs create and maintain social hierarchies. Indeed, sociologists like Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis argue that education

reproduces social class while providing the illusion of a meritocracy.<sup>45</sup> To investigate the role of school culture in girls' achievements and the translation of these achievements into economic, political, and social power, I invoked the term "hidden curriculum," coined by Benson Snyder in 1971. The hidden curriculum is the set of beliefs, values, and mores that are extracurricular or paracurricular, implied, or tacitly conveyed. Because schools in the Anglophone Caribbean were initially administered by missionary groups, and because the premier schools in the region are still run by Christian organizations, in this dissertation I focused on the influence of Christian beliefs on the hidden curriculum. Specifically, I centered my analysis on two themes: Victorian gender roles and respectability, both of which I defined in the introduction. My project is informed by postcolonial theory and made use of multiple disciplinary methods

In order to balance general understandings of the Anglo-Caribbean region with the specific knowledge of one country, my dissertation is divided into two parts. In the first part, I looked at the Anglophone Caribbean as a whole, while in the second I focused on one country within the region, Belize.

### **The Anglophone Caribbean as a Region**

In order to justify my focus on the influence of Christianity, and in order to provide a context for the later chapters, in Chapter 2 I provided a history of Christian missionaries in the region. While writers like Eric Williams<sup>46</sup> have written histories of education in the Anglophone Caribbean, scholars like J.A. Mangan have focused on

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<sup>45</sup> See their 1976 book, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*.

<sup>46</sup> See *Education in the British West Indies*, 1994.

British imperial education, and Norman Etherington<sup>47</sup> and Susan Thorne<sup>48</sup> have looked at the symbiotic relationship between missionary proselytizing and imperial expansion, there is a paucity of work that makes connections *between* education, evangelism, and imperialism. Indeed, within the body of scholarship on the Anglophone Caribbean, my work in Chapter 2 is the first effort to look at these connections with a focus on gender.

In Chapter 2 I began with Arthur Dayfoot's argument in *The Shaping of the West Indian Church: 1492-1962* that the use of religion as a unifying force in the *Reconquista* established a strategy that England later followed in its efforts to colonize the New World. Then looking at the pre-emancipation period of British colonialism in the Anglophone Caribbean, I traced the role of proselytizing from the Papal Bulls, to Biblical justifications for and against slavery, to religious instruction for slaves. In the second part of the chapter, I looked at the formalizing of education after emancipation in 1838. The British colonial government determined that missionary groups were best equipped to administer education to the newly freed slaves and so provided grants to finance the effort while leaving the management to the churches. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century the British government slowly centralized the education system throughout the empire, taking back some of the power missionary groups had over the administration of the education system. I argued that the early missionary management of schools has left a legacy on the hidden curriculum.

I used Chapter 2 to make clear the symbiotic relationship between evangelism and empire, and based on this argument I asked whether the same elements of Christianity that encouraged passivity and helped maintain social stratification during colonial rule

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<sup>47</sup> See *Missions and Empire*, 2005.

<sup>48</sup> See *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century England*, 1999.

still function today to encourage the underdevelopment of human resources, and rigid social hierarchies around gender, class, and race. Schooling has become increasingly secular throughout the Anglophone Caribbean, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century as post-independence governments have worked to reform the education system. However, as Nathaniel Samuel Murrel argues in his article, “Dangerous Memories, Underdevelopment, and the Bible in Colonial Caribbean Experience,” Christian beliefs are still an important force in the collective culture of the region. Therefore, I argued in Chapter 2 that the preeminence of Christian beliefs – particularly, in reference to this dissertation, the beliefs around women’s sexuality – that were *anchored* in the society in large part through missionary administration of schooling, remain a powerful force even in the increasingly secular schools of the present day. This chapter functions as an important part of the overarching question of the dissertation because if Christian beliefs still influence the hidden curriculum of even secular schools, then it is clear that we need to investigate the role that these beliefs have in the disconnect between girls’ achievements and women’s power in society.

While Chapter 2 is useful in establishing the interconnected histories of missionary groups and the education systems throughout the region, my sources – primarily mission histories and British colonial reports – cannot provide an actual picture of the hidden curriculum. They do not record the small-scale interactions between student and teacher, or student and student relations that contribute to the school culture. Indeed, there are little if any records of this kind prior to independence. Therefore, in Chapter 3 I proposed an interdisciplinary method to help provide insight into the hidden curriculum – the use of autobiographical literature. My use of literature in this chapter is



untraditional in that I am not attempting to contribute to the body of Caribbean literary criticism. Rather, I see my audience as historians and educators. Therefore, I suggested that a look at the similarities in autobiographical literature that is set in the pre-independence era and that focus on the schooling of the protagonist can help sketch out the hidden curriculum. I discussed George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*, Austin Clarke's *Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack*, Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Merle Collins's *Angel*, and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and *Lucy*. In particular, I focused on the insight that these novels can provide in terms of how gender is presented in the hidden curriculum. I used these novels as a source of memory and in a way suggested by Barbara Omolade in her article "The Silence and the Song: Toward a Black Woman's History through a Language of Her Own," which I discussed in the introduction. Omolade proposes that scholars break free of the intellectual and disciplinary boundaries imposed by a Western-oriented academia. Building on her image of the "griot historian" I suggested that an interdisciplinary understanding of literature from the Anglophone Caribbean can create a new source of knowledge.

I did not claim that this literature can be directly interpreted in terms of present-day schools. Of course, there are significant differences between the time period of the novels and today. However, I did suggest that the images of the hidden curriculum in these novels can help provide a set of questions for understanding the hidden curriculum of present-day schools. They can tell us what to look for, and why it matters. Indeed, what might be most useful about these works is that they chronicle the effect of the hidden curriculum on the psyche of their protagonists. In this section I wanted to emphasize the incredible resource that these novels can be for educators and educational

scholars, and to argue that disciplinary boundaries should not block the use of this resource.

## **Belize**

In the second part of the dissertation, I focused on one country within the Anglophone Caribbean, Belize, and in Chapters 4 and 5 I provided historical evidence that marked the ways in which Belize is both similar to, and different from, other countries in the region. Chapter 4 chronicled the unique history of Belize within the British Empire. I recorded Belize's history as a "forgotten" colony and the effects this had on the development of social services like education. Furthermore, because the focus of this dissertation is gender, I demonstrated the way that women have been written out of Belizean history. National stories about the establishment of the colony, slavery, and independence, contribute to both the formal and hidden curricula of schools. I argued that the absence of women in these historically important periods supports patriarchal expectations about men's right to power in Belize.

One of the most important differences between the present-day education systems of Belize and those of the rest of the region<sup>49</sup> is that the Belizean education system is run by a church-state partnership. While schools throughout the region have become increasingly secularized, this has not been true of Belize. Indeed, as I discussed in the introduction, this is one of the reasons I decided to focus on Belize. I wanted to know why Belize was different. In Chapter 4 I explained how Belize's "forgotten"-colony status affected the development of social institutions, and in Chapter 5 I traced the history

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<sup>49</sup> With the exception of St. Lucia.

of missionary groups and how British colonial neglect created the opportunity for them to maintain a powerful role in the education system.

In Chapter 6, I built on the methodology I developed in Chapter 3. In Chapter 3 I compared literature across the region in order to demonstrate related themes and how the novels can be useful in understanding the hidden curriculum. In Chapter 6, I use the literature in the same way, but I narrowed my focus to one novel, Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*, and how it can help us understand the hidden curriculum in one country, Belize. The story of *Beka Lamb* is particularly important in that it represents a topic that is still a significant political issue. It is still a site of conflict within the joint church/state administration of education. Set in the 1950s, *Beka Lamb* tells the tale of Toycie Qualo and her expulsion from school for becoming pregnant. While most schools will now allow pregnant students to return to school after the birth of their child, and under certain conditions, the premise that a girl's sexuality is the defining element of her character remains a strong component of the hidden curriculum. It is on this point that I argued for the usefulness of Edgell's novel. By chronicling the mental anguish of both Toycie and her best friend, Beka, *Beka Lamb* demonstrates the effect of this hidden curriculum on how girls see their value in society. As *Beka Lamb* demonstrates, traditional gender roles hurt more than just the individuals expelled or dismissed. They hurt the psychological health of Belizean women generally.

As with Chapter 3, I did not claim that *Beka Lamb* accurately characterizes the present period. I acknowledge that there have been significant changes that have benefited many girls in the continuation of their schooling. However, I did argue that the novel can provide a set of questions to ask about the current system. To further

demonstrate the relevance of *Beka Lamb*, I included reports from governmental and non-governmental women's groups which indicate that Victorian gender roles and religious constructions of respectability still affect women and girls in Belize a half century after the time period of the novel

To take this point further, and look at the relationship between *Beka Lamb* and the present-day education system, in Chapter 7 I analyzed a related issue: the firing of unwed pregnant teachers. I focused on the 2004 court case of *Maria Roches v. Clement Wade*, which brings into light the hidden curriculum around female sexuality. While the case focuses on how the hidden curriculum affects teachers, it is clear that the set of implied and overt messages around female sexuality is part of the entire school culture, and thus affects students as well.

Religious groups benefit from a veil of righteousness that allows their interests in present-day Belize to go largely unnoticed and unchecked. It is true that missionary activity in Belize has accomplished a lot of good for the Belizean people, but at what cost? And which groups in Belize have disproportionately borne this cost? It is important to note that intention is irrelevant here. We must not fall into a postcolonial blindness that forgets that the discourse of British imperialism also positioned British rule as a benefit to the people they colonized. There can be no doubt that many colonial officials believed that they were helping the people under their purview, too.

I am not suggesting a wholesale rejection of religious influence in Belize, or even the adoption of the U.S. model of separation of church and state, but what I am suggesting is that the financial benefits of church interest in Belizean education should not absolve denominational institutions of critique. I think the lessons of this dissertation

can be applied to the Anglophone Caribbean as a region, where Christian schools still retain power, and even for countries in the developing world generally, because the finances of those governments often require them to accept help from religious groups.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The questions of this dissertation are of the utmost significance because postcolonial development is predicated on the connection between education and empowerment. As I discuss in the introduction, the United Nations has positioned education as necessary for the spread of democracy and the increased equality of men and women. In this dissertation I prove that while education may be necessary, it is not sufficient. There needs to be a larger change in the way a society values women. There needs to be further research on the role of the hidden curriculum in the Anglophone Caribbean, and in postcolonial societies more generally. Furthermore, the influence of donor organizations, which postcolonial countries are often dependent on, needs to be better understood.

In the last chapter I pointed to the positive role CEDAW played in the outcome of the Roches case. Unfortunately, CEDAW has not been as useful in all the countries that have ratified it. There is no obligation for member countries to implement the reforms suggested by CEDAW and so it can function as an empty political tool providing the illusion of gender reform while not producing any real changes. Therefore, while the case of Belize demonstrates the possible benefits of CEDAW, it is also clear that CEDAW was only useful because the Belizean government *did* commit to CEDAW recommendations, and *did* submit regular reports to the committee. While CEDAW has

been an empty declaration in many countries, I believe the Belize case demonstrates that we should not give up on it as a possible tool of gender reform. There needs to be further research into ways of making member countries more accountable to CEDAW. Belize has shown that international agreements do make a difference and can become a beacon of hope for women in their struggle for equal rights and justice.

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