

RESISTING THE INNER PLANTATION: DECOLONISATION AND THE PRACTICE OF EDUCATION IN THE WORK OF ERIC WILLIAMS

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ABSTRACT The motif of the plantation is central to Caribbean scholarship. Its full explanatory power, however, is rarely found in contemporary understandings of education in the region, where globalised agendas and local aspirations for change seem to be conflating around normative and universalised language and practices. The central concern in this article is to explore the possibilities and challenges of understanding education as a practice in light of a postcolonial experience, particularly through Eric Williams' book *Education in the British West Indies* (1946). The ideas and work of Eric Williams have been instrumental in shaping and creating anti-colonial thinking in the Caribbean and internationally at a time when nationalism and anti-colonial struggles were rife and the aspiration for independence for many colonies, an urgent agenda. Williams' work, through his life as a scholar, teacher and politician, exemplified a counterpoint to the colonial experience by crafting a different set of images for Caribbean peoples. His was a decolonising vision for the education of Caribbean people to write their own histories and chart their own destinies on their own terms. For Williams, education as political action through public participation was central to this process of decolonisation. This important text, I will argue, can be read as a source of educational theorising that asserts a decolonising stance, modelling 'post-colonial pedagogy' (McCarthy and Sealey-Ruiz, 2010 p. 75) and drawing references to historical themes that come together to represent the persistent and urgent struggle to resist 'the inner plantation' (Brathwaite, 1973).

Introduction: Understanding the Nature of the Plantation

Caribbean social theory has been applied with enthusiasm, diversity, endurance and complexity in political, economic and cultural analyses about Caribbean civilization and the Diaspora of colonised peoples. Eric Williams has been a major influence in the development of these ideas, committing himself to challenging

colonial interpretations of Caribbean societies and reconstructing histories through the lived experience of Caribbean peoples. For Williams, the anti-colonial struggle was not only about getting rid of colonialism as a system, it was also and more importantly about recognising and resisting the deep implications of the experience of colonialism on the inner being of the people, and therefore, promoted a process of inner and intellectual decolonisation as imperative for the postcolonial agenda.

Eric Williams, born in Trinidad in 1911, was astute in making connections between his own upbringing and the general conditions of life of colonised peoples. Being Creole, the cosmopolitanism of his family context provided a composite setting from which to deconstruct the colonial condition given that he was born, educated and schooled 'into a colonial society par excellence' (Palmer 2006, p.6). Indeed, Williams prefaced his analysis of education in colonial areas by contending, 'the educational problem of the British West Indies must not be regarded in isolation, but rather as merely a specific example of a general colonial problem' (Williams 1946, p.11). Williams being Creole therefore is not insignificant in this discourse about the colonial experience and as I shall explain, it is fundamental to understanding the idea of the inner plantation.

According to Wilson Harris, to speak of being Creole or creoleness, is to acknowledge 'deep-seated emotion and passion which lie within shared layers of experience in person and society: layers that are native to the embattled, philosophic core of universality, universal crisis.' (1998, p. 23). Therefore, the term Creole resides in a contested, complex terrain where on the one hand, it may have resonance with conservative images of colonial settlers and descendants from Europe who occupied and owned the plantations. On the other hand, the Creole is also known as the colonised, 'mongrelised' by violence and 'the painful patterns of confrontations and ruptures' occurring in and signified by the plantation (Balutansky and Sourieau 1998, p. 5; see also Walcott, 1998). It is the latter interpretation that Williams' Creole lineage represents, signifying as Harris states, 'mixed race and a cross-cultural nemesis' (1998, p. 26). Thus the creoleness of the Caribbean bears witness paradoxically, to the afflictions of colonialism and the aspiration, desire and capacity to exercise a postcolonial imagination. Williams metaphorically does the hard work for colonial peoples in that through his scholarship and public work, he intellectually confronts the harsh realities of

colonial encounters and prepares the philosophical and methodological ground for understanding the purpose of education and the centrality of its practice in resisting a colonial inheritance. As can be seen from his biography, not only was being Creole central to his lifelong critique of colonialism, but also he recognised the pivotal role of education to the decolonisation process.

The subject of this paper is a critical reading of Eric Williams' *Education in the British West Indies* as a decolonising discourse that models post-colonial pedagogy. In addressing this topic, I draw, more generally, on the radical traditions of Caribbean thought and postcolonial theories as a deliberate epistemic and methodological commitment to privilege a perspective of the colonised. This vantage point as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) states, has allowed indigenous writers and researchers the space 'to address social issues within the wider framework of self-determination, decolonization and social justice' (p.4).

Given that the inner plantation is a central theme of this paper, as background to understanding the notion, it is useful to discuss Caribbean interpretations of the plantation. In this light, George Beckford's analysis of the plantation system is apposite. His focus was on the persistence of underdevelopment which is perpetuated by the deeply entrenched social, commercial and cultural systems established by systems of enslavement, coalescing in the plantation. The plantation, he argued, as the economic unit established in the colonies, was central to financing the industrial revolution in Europe (see Levitt, 2005; Levitt and Best, 1975; Beckford, 1972). Beckford also writes:

Within plantation community, interpersonal relations reflect the authority structure of the plantation itself. It engenders an ethos of dependence and patronage and so deprives people of dignity, security and self-respect. And it impedes the material, social and spiritual advance. Within plantation society, the tradition, values, beliefs and attitudes which have become established as a result of long periods of plantation influence are, for the most part, inimical to development (Beckford, 1972, p. 206-207).

As I will elaborate later on, education in the context of the plantation, served the activities of metropolitan centres, reinforced colonial values and hierarchies of power that were overridden by colonial desire. Also central to the discussion is the idea of the Caribbean subject. In commenting on her understanding of the Caribbean subject and concerned with how knowledge has been colonised, Sylvia Wynter claims:

My liminality comes from the fact that in my lifetime I was born a colonial subject and I think that in many ways I'll always be grateful for that because the knowledge it gives you is something you have to arrive at existentially... You know what it is to have gone to school in a curriculum whose function was to *induce* you to be a colonial subject... in the world I am still liminal because I'm black. I'm part of a group that has been constituted as the ontological other of man ... I am therefore part of that liminal group continually questioning (Van Piercy, 1988 in Anthony Bogues 2006 p. 317).

By occupying a deconstructed mode Wynter offers, to this discussion about the practice of education and the postcolonial condition, the notion of epistemic historicism which is 'an approach to history as a medium of human self-formation that rests on the dynamic relationships between epistemic change and the transformation of social orders' (Henry 2006, p. 267). For Wynter, the space of liminality provides unpredictable and new opportunities for reflection, resistance and re-writing all of which bring to the fore the inner plantation, presenting an historical and epistemological conundrum where 'in the interstices of history, we see in glimpses, evidences of a powerful and pervasive cultural process which has largely determined the unconscious springs of our beings' (Wynter, 1970, p.35).

Like Williams, Wynter is preoccupied with the role of the intellectual and the status of subalternity which in a Gramscian sense refers to a position of subordination and oppression where subjects are excluded from civic anticipation. In placing emphasis on the critical role of the intellectual in the academy, both Wynter and Williams embrace the radical desire of the Caribbean intellectual to be strategic agents of transformation, imagining such transformations as 'moments of historical rupture requiring concrete actions of the liminal and the

construction of a radical politics of speech, word and action' (Bogues 2006, p. 335).

Reference to the plantation and to the positionality of the Caribbean subject provide a background to understanding the imprint that the colonial experience has left on the peoples of the Caribbean. The colonial encounter has made the process of decolonisation demanding, as Williams recognised. Such experiences have become embedded in psychology, law, education, social organisations, habits and forms of representation and it is here that Williams was firm in his resolve to campaign for the reconstruction of national histories on the basis of the imagination of Caribbean peoples themselves. McCarthy and Sealey-Ruiz (2010) in commenting on the contemporary context demonstrate that these legacies of colonialism are systemic:

There is, we believe, in the Caribbean, like most societies arising out of plantation arrangements (we are especially here thinking of the United States), a profound antipathy, a deep-bodied hostility towards the people's history. This is so tacit. It is not a benign neglect. On the contrary, it is a very active will to the suppression of knowledge, empathy and sympathetic feeling to the great challenges, struggles and triumphs of the lower orders. This suppression is most keenly produced in the organization of knowledge in schooling and the practices of teacher education preparation (p. 76)

McCarthy and Sealey-Ruiz's analysis of the contrived structural forces that work to colonise knowledges, supports the central argument that although gains have been made through political independence in many former colonies, the concept of the plantation resides within – at individual and institutional levels, and cultural practices of education are complicit in the process of reinforcing what Kamau Brathwaite (1973) called 'the inner plantation'. The 'inner plantation' therefore refers to a deeply pervasive ethos of internalised oppression (see also Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986).

Privileging the vantage point of the colonised is in itself an act of resistance, and also leads me to pursue a philosophical and methodological interrogation of education in a postcolonial setting which embraces what Fazal Rizvi has called 'epistemic

virtues' (2009, p. 109). According to Rizvi, what is required in the context of globalisation and the contemporary global shifts is a rethinking of how we come to understand learning in the context of 'emerging conditions of global connectivity'. He claims that the rapid shifts through global connectivity are changing 'our identities and cultures' highlighting the need for 'cosmopolitan learning [which is] more diverse and extensive and can no longer be contained within the border of the nation-state' (2006 p. 29-30). The implications for understanding education therefore reside within a practice of historicity, positionality, criticality, reflexivity and relationality – these are the epistemic virtues to which Rizvi refers.

Understood in this way, education as a practice seems far removed from the instrumental and technical attainment of skills, teaching for marketability and imparting knowledge which is so much emphasised today in national curricula and in teacher education programmes. Rather, the practice of education, as a postcolonial response requires: a philosophical and methodological approach in which we adopt a critical history of ourselves and of others; reflexivity through which we interrogate our taken-for-granted assumptions about society and our location within the cultural and political contexts in which we are positioned- accepting that ideas and cultures are never neutral; and, having a capability to imagine futures (Rizvi 2006).

In this paper I contend that these epistemic virtues assume a vital centrality and are embedded in the democratic role ascribed to education by Eric Williams in his book *Education in the British West Indies*. Indeed, I will suggest further, that these epistemic virtues can constitute a practice of 'unlearning' or 'learning from below' (Spivak 2008; see also Tolman, 2006) that occurs within the art and craft of teaching as a specific practice of education. This critical text represents a deconstruction of the colonial problem and a reconstruction of education in terms of its role in forging an independent, self-determined future for the Anglo-Caribbean region.

Epistemic Foundations and Colonialism as a Practice of Education

The aim of education under colonialism was to provide the infrastructure for power and control, in which the legitimacy of metropolitan rule would be established and maintained. The type

and content of education was determined by the priorities of the imperial rulers. Prior to the Act of Emancipation in 1834, there were a few slave schools in the various islands through which religious indoctrination was meted out by missionaries to the enslaved African population. Not only was colonialism a form of direct control of external structures and resources, it was also and more importantly, a range of complex structures designed as London asserts to 'generate conceptions of personhood and identity' (2002, p 95). Consequently, Caribbean societies gave rise to education systems that were influenced by 'European colonization, the experience of slavery, the introduction of indentured labourers following the abolition of slavery and the development of a stratified system based on race, colour, and caste' (Bacchus 1994, p 1). The system of education exemplified a case of 'colonial imagination' (London 2002; see also London 2003) and the task was, as London has argued:

to show how the state, as a privileged entity, generated and mediated colonial imagination during a process of Empire building as a means of establishing for the 'other' a world view and concept of self and community (London 2002, p 96).

The effect of the colonial encounter is persistent; and Williams was aware that long after the formal system of colonialism was gone – its end was a main intention of the anti-colonial movement of which he was writing and in which he was a major leader - the inner plantation would remain.

Education itself is a system of organising and communicating knowledge, possessing within it both reproductive and transformative properties. Education is therefore implicated in the creation of thought and actions that shape identities. For education to operate it must do so through the objects and subjects of its project to assert dominate values and ways of being. It requires capacities and technologies of power, discourse and resistance to give effect to its intentions and priorities. In the case of the colonial experience, systems of knowledge were so organised to 'colonise the mind' (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986) and education therefore became a mediating force in negotiating identities. Stuart Hall has stated that, identity is 'based on a conception of the human person as a fully centred, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action, whose 'centre' consisted of an

inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same - continuous or 'identical' with itself - throughout the individual's existence. The essential centre of the self was a person's identity.' (Hall, 1992, p. 275).

Consequently, resisting the inner plantation, confronting the colonisation of the mind and undermining the legacy of dependence were decolonising projects in which education was to play a decisive role. Indeed as Williams stated 'a great responsibility rests on the educational system. Its role should be that of a midwife to the emerging social order. Instead, it is the chamber maid of the existing social order' (1946, p.10).

In redefining educational purpose as a decolonising project, Williams states:

Education in the modern world is, more than anything else, education of the people themselves as to the necessity of viewing their own education as a part of their democratic privileges and their democratic responsibilities (Williams, 1946, p. xi).

Education in the British West Indies therefore provides contrapuntal reading of dominant colonial discourses and practices in education in the region at that time; being strident in its advocacy of West Indian history, conceptualising education as a mission of community, and guided by a political commitment toward democratic society. What Williams does through the central text of this article is to engage in 'post-colonial pedagogy' (McCarthy and Sealey-Ruiz, 2010), a practice of education that is decolonising.

Originally published in 1946, the text had the benefit of a foreword by the well known American educational thinker, John Dewey. Dewey acknowledged the international message of the book and writes 'this study of conditions in a particular area is for those who have eyes to see, a case study of a world problem' (Dewey, 1945 in Williams, 1946 p. viii). Here Dewey was referring to the increasing resistance of the colonised world to old regimes of power. Anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movements were gaining ascendancy and preparing the path for the wave of newly independent nation state formation. The anti-imperialist, anti-colonial global political agenda of which Williams was a part, and in which he would eventually play a leading role particularly in

the political leadership in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean region, created a space for him to conceive of education as having a broad social purpose and thereby, as politically and historically implicated. In providing a cultural, historical and economic analysis, he located educational development at the heart of social change. According to Williams:

The increasing dislocation of the colonial economies, has stimulated social and political consciousness and produced in these countries the nationalistic movements with which we are familiar. This has important results in education (Williams, 1946 p. 20).

He understood that in historical and political terms, ever since the annihilation of the indigenous people, through pillaging and violence by Europe in the 1400s, the Caribbean region had been 'buffeted about from pillar to post, changing national flags and political allegiances' (Williams, 1962 p. 123). It is a history of conflict and contestation with European colonial powers fighting for control over the islands of the Caribbean. For almost five hundred years European imperialism governed the Caribbean. At the time of his writing, Williams described 'the British West Indian Community' as 'remarkably cosmopolitan' referring to the majority being 'black' descendants of enslaved Africans, Indians who were imported to work on the sugar plantations after emancipation, 'an appreciable number of Chinese', a substantial mixed cohort (black and white), and a small minority of whites of European ancestry (1946, p 3).

The configuration of these Caribbean populations exemplified the complex challenges facing the colonial rulers in the post emancipation period. Education was segregated, with each sector being provided for differently. The East Indians were the last to be included into the formal system. According to Bacchus (1994) there was consensus among the white ruling class 'to define or redefine, the role of education' and to offer those who were formerly enslaved education that 'should teach them to accept their new reality by modifying their occupations, aspirations and their behaviours' (p. 22). Priority was given to drafting a curriculum that would ensure obedience to colonial rule and Christian principles. This colonial imperative was experienced by other colonised people and as Smith points out in reference to indigenous people, 'the major agency for imposing

this positional superiority [of Europe] over knowledge, language and culture was colonial education' (Smith, 1999, p. 64).

Williams understood the nature of the colonial encounter and acknowledged the state of underdevelopment in the territories of the region and the wider colonies. In his text, he cast the postcolonial condition as a community that was 'overwhelmingly rural' (p. 3) noting that a large section of the working class and peasantry were largely excluded from the education system. Williams' analysis was that education was the key to addressing the increasingly complex issues of diversity, and of forging a society (Lavia, 2004). In delineating specific sectors of concern, Williams provides a critique of colonial education placing emphasis on rural education, the curriculum, vocational education, the training of teachers, illiteracy, school enrolment and attendance. He was particularly concerned about the absence of an indigenous university which he argued should be established by the State and open to the public. For Williams a regional university would serve to inspire the generation of new ideas, new societies and new ways of being that would be quintessentially Caribbean. This vision became a reality with the establishment of the University of the West Indies. The hope was for the regional entity to be the centre of Caribbean culture, thereby forging close regional integration. The promise of the university also offered an opportunity of a re-narrated story of colonial encounter, a project which is still unfinished and which was highlighted by Lloyd Best (2000) at the turn of the 21st Century, when he commented, 'we need independent, innovating thought to meet new reality. It has never been otherwise' (p. 283). Best's articulation of 'a moral philosophy starting from history to arrive an ontology, an epistemology and a hermeneutic' (p. 284) re-stated the decolonisation project as advocated by Williams, by contending that the moral philosophy of which he spoke, would lead to 'reverting to being, knowing and the reinterpretation of self with the aid of both myth and reasoned history' (p. 284). Its importance is also to be found in the argument that education that is fashioned around the historical realities and circumstances of Caribbean peoples holds a pivotal place in dislodging old oppressive representations.

Education and Democracy

I mentioned earlier that John Dewey wrote the foreword to *Education in the British West Indies*. Dewey, in deference to Williams' contribution to progressive education - to which Dewey himself has been given the signifier as founder - located the text within the international arena claiming its importance to a wider reach. This wider reach was one which had educational and social implications for communicating an agenda for education and for democracy in a developing world. Dewey's central focus was on participation, experience and community, bringing these points of focus together through an ideology of pragmatism in which the learner was the centre point. For Dewey (1916), education occurs in community where 'interests are mutually interpenetrating' leading to systems and practices of education that seek to 'break down barriers of class, race and national territory'; and leading to spaces for action and transformation on terms conceived of by the communities that have participated. According to Dewey (1916), 'a society which is mobile, which is full of channels for the distribution of a change occurring anywhere must see to it that its members are educated to personal initiative and adaptability' (p.88). Thus for Dewey, the arenas for educating a society were to be varied and based upon change as an impetus for personal and educational flourishing. He treated the notion of society as problematic and proposed that 'the conception of education as a social process and function has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind' (p. 97).

Williams had a vision for Caribbean societies and his response to the fundamental tenets of Dewey's educational philosophy became manifest in his analysis of colonial education, curricula, systems of schooling, teacher education and higher education which can be found in the four parts and fifteen chapters of the book. For each of these topics Williams provides a deconstruction of the colonial practices of education and also the requirements for reconstruction in light of the 'rising tide of democratic aspirations' (Dewey, 1945 in Williams, 1946 p. viii).

Williams draws our attention to the example of Mexico. Described as 'the most significant and instructive example of new trends in education' (Williams, 1946 p. 24), the Mexican revolution, which established a new constitution in 1917, inspired hope nationally and internationally particularly among colonised territories. According to Williams, the revolution had far reaching implications for education in emerging nations, through

its mode of practice, and in the role ascribed to the school 'as an active agent in changing the social and economic order' (Williams, 1946 p. 24). He highlighted the idea of education through community in which 'the rural school [was] a school of action', and functioned as 'a community agency to lead community life' (Williams, 1946, p. 24-25). Further, Williams elaborated how the experience of a transformed Mexico exemplified popular education. The pedagogy of community education in the Mexican model was identified as being stimulated by 'a spirit of democratic liberty [that] pervades all activity' (Ebaugh, 1931 in Williams, 1946 p. 25) and the theme of Mexico's philosophy of education 'to educate is to redeem' was subsequently used in the preparation of the political manifesto of the People's National Movement (PNM) of which Williams was political leader.

The idea and practice of popular education was also to be seen in the national context of Williams' work (Trinidad and Tobago) where he used public lectures as a political pedagogical device to pursue an agenda of political education of the masses. In practice, Williams was engaged in a process of 'conscientisation', a term used by Paulo Freire to describe a process of political self-awakening (see Freire, 1972). He used his skill as an educator, orator, historian and anti-colonial activist to create public spaces where people would gather to listen to and discuss national, regional and international affairs. The founding of one such public space, which came to be referred to as the 'University of Woodford Square', is a case in point. Woodford Square is located in the heart of the capital city of Port of Spain directly opposite to the House of Parliament on its western side. Williams addressed the idea of the 'inner plantation' and the need for decolonisation in one of his famous public lectures at Woodford Square entitled 'Massa Day Done'. In his exposition, Williams brought to his very large audience a re-crafting of the experience of enslavement and indentureship as features of the plantation. He constructed Caribbean and national life in historical terms and presented the people with a vision of a new and democratic society that would be able to hold its own within a changing international context. Such a society for Williams' would emerge out of an education system crafted through transcendental discourse about the relationship between the national, regional and global. Williams was writing at a time when to be a nationalist meant that you were also a regionalist and had a global perspective - the colonial experience required

such a stance. More so, Williams' anti-colonialism necessitated a postcolonial pedagogic stance, which used history as a means of unmasking the colonial encounter. Indeed, postcolonial pedagogy still has the potential for turning a critical gaze to imaging postcolonial futures (see also Bhabha, 1994; Hall 1996; Fanon, 1963; Said, 1993). Williams ably confronted the global and the national question where, in his general analysis of education in colonial areas, he states: 'Imperialism in its crudest form is seen in the attempted japanisation of Formosa, where, not inappropriately, the teacher was a policeman and the school was sometimes in the police station. But even where imperialist domination is less crude, the nationalist spirit is unmistakable' (Williams 1946, p. 20). Williams moves back and forth interrogating national and global contexts to underscore the central tenet of the text which is the role of education in the development of political democracy, not only for the 'British West Indies' but also for the colonised world. He states:

If there is to be the new type of education we have indicated, it must be based on the different concepts, economic, social, and political, which have been outlined. That is the post-war problem in British West Indian education. Education of this scope cannot be established under the Crown Colony system. But it is the governing premise of the ideas on education here expressed. For, without democracy, there is no true social education (Williams, 1946, p. 114).

Williams' pedagogy can be related to my earlier references to Rizvi's notion of epistemic virtues where the practice of education resides in historicity, reflexivity and the necessity to have to a vision of and for society. What Williams had exemplified in his own practice as a public intellectual still holds true for contemporary debates about education and democracy. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) in commenting on education and public policy in an era of globalization, state that education has a central role to play 'in the development of a socially cohesive democratic community' (p. 78).

The brunt of the discussion thus far has been on the relationship between the practice of education and strivings for a democratic ideal. However, as Colin Palmer notes, 'aware that the colonial experiences shaped the colonized in psychologically damaging ways, Williams knew that the task of decolonization would be difficult to accomplish' (Palmer, 2006 p. 18). The slow

process of unlearning as Williams would go on to demonstrate in his practical political life, required a postcolonial pedagogical model that embraced political education of the masses and an emancipatory project of rewriting the histories of Caribbean peoples through their own perspectives.

History, Education and the Postcolonial Condition

History can be traumatic in how it is experienced, created and represented. My concern with history therefore is to unravel the ways in which it can be useful in helping to discern issues of knowledge, power and values in the practice of education, to develop a process of 'unlearning'. This concern becomes even more urgent and emotionally embellished in its application to issues of social justice and the context of postcoloniality. A major challenge in this regard, is the effect of historical amnesia on the construction of cultures of practice that seek to hold out both possibilities and barriers for reclaiming identities and ensuring survival. Here I argue that historical amnesia springs from deliberate acts of erasure that render the economic and epistemological practice of transatlantic transplantation and translation forgotten or suppressed. That is, for colonised peoples history has lost its axiological power, it being stripped from their very being and rendered useless, marginalised and silenced. This is the central point made by Spivak (2008) in her thesis on 'learning from below' where she ascribes axiological and political power to teaching; for it is in teaching that the historical, cultural and psychological encounters that create voicelessness, difference and othering are confronted and mediated. Further, Gandhi asserts that:

Postcolonialism can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and crucially, interrogating the colonial past. The process of returning to the colonial scene discloses a relationship of reciprocal antagonism and desire between coloniser and colonised. And it is in the unfolding of this troubled and troubling relationship that we might start to discern the ambivalent prehistory of the postcolonial condition. The forgotten archive of the colonial encounter

narrates multiple stories of contestation and its discomfiting other, complicity (Gandhi, 1998 pp 4-5).

These are indeed 'difficult lines of encounter' (McCarthy *et al* 2010, p. 76) where the depths of a lost and abandoned past are confronted by experiential knowledge - that the contested relationship between history and the plantation is expressed through regimes of power. By returning to the concept of the plantation, I underscore Frantz Fanon's notion that the experience of colonialism has shaped both the coloniser and the colonized, perpetuating unequal oppressive relationships (see 1963, 1965, 1967). Systems of schooling and educational ideas have sought to 'organise, classify and store new knowledge to legitimize colonial practices' (Smith 1999, p. 60) thus it can be said that 'Colonial education was not meant to liberate the colonized, but rather was the means whereby the values and interests of the colonizers and masters would be internalized by the colonized and perceived as their own' (Reddock, 1994, p.48). Returning to the idea and experience of the plantation and its connection with subjugated knowledges is core to understanding the decolonising project required and the contemporary context of educational change in an era of globalisation. Here I refer to the experience of postcoloniality where the postcolonial, Caribbean subject is creolised (in the sense that I have explained earlier), conflicted by internalised images of self-deception transmitted through historical violence, marginalisation and exclusion on the one hand, yet on the other hand, re-presenting and re-emerging a postcolonial imagination that is dependent on historical excavation and reconstruction for adopting a continual process for the production of the new.

Evidently, the success of the project of decolonisation through education as outlined by Williams is yet unfinished and remains urgent, particularly in light of the rapid global shift and demands alluded to at the beginning of this paper. Well established work of Caribbean educators referenced earlier as well as others such as Carl Campbell, Hyacinth Evans, Anne Hickling-Hudson, Didacus Jules, and Pearlette Louisy, exemplify acts of resistance to colonial discourses about the purpose, intent and new directions for Caribbean education. Their discourses bring together notions of inner plantation and epistemic historicism to understand the decolonising potential of Caribbean education in an era of globalisation. Laurette Bristol also

contributes to emerging Caribbean thought that refreshingly locates education and its practice in the context of postcoloniality, at the heart of educational inquiry. Bristol (2008) argues for an understanding of 'plantation pedagogy as a theory of teaching within a postcolonial context' (p. 62). She extends a practical logic showing that on the one hand this understanding readily identifies the ways in which educational practice is sustained as a practice that is in conformity with colonial notions of the plantation. Indeed she emphasises that this conformity is structural and cultural, to the extent that 'the primary school teacher is not expected to make use of historical understandings to shape her/his practice' (Bristol 2008, p. 95). Like Spivak, her concern is about the 'mental theatre' that is played out in the classroom where plantation pedagogy becomes articulated as the reproduction of subalternity.

On the other hand, Bristol suggests that plantation pedagogy can also offer a decolonising approach to the practice of education. Arguing for a critical practice, Bristol addresses the education of the teacher that promotes critical consciousness through a process of re-acculturation in which colonial legacies are surfaced and the 'inner plantation' is confronted. Williams in his text had recognised the radical potential of teaching as an instrument of social change in his declaration, 'as is the teacher, so is the school' (Williams, 1946, p. 18). And I have suggested elsewhere (Lavia 2004) that teachers, as an intellectual force, were instrumental directly and indirectly, in engineering the process of political independence in the Caribbean. As a consequence, the embeddedness of the subject as an 'organic' agent in the discourse suggests that not only are teachers affected by imposed change, but also, they influence social change through their practice.

Using the example of storytelling to convey orally the histories of our civilisation, Bristol proposes:

Given that subversion, via storytelling, is a part of the historical-cultural fabric of Caribbean society, and given that teachers are implicitly charged with transmitting the story of their society, teaching as a subversive activity can re-define the teacher as a commonsense intellectual who acts as the cultural critic of plantation pedagogy. In so doing, the cultural force of teaching becomes applied to an agenda of social transformation where teaching as an educational

practice is marked out as the interrelated processes and practices of biography, desire, community and dialogue' (Bristol, 2008 p. 133).

I share Bristol's view that plantation pedagogy as subversive activity expressed through a critical practice of education opens up possibilities for the teacher to develop a culture of confidence through which they become 'self-consciously involved in cultural production of knowledge' (Bristol 2008, p. 133). If we are to fully appreciate the intensity and machinations of colonial practices and their neo-colonial expressions such as the psychological and cultural imprint of 'the inner plantation' in the Caribbean context it is necessary to reflect on how, for many societies the colonial encounter has created a postcolonial condition shaped by cultures of the plantation where complex relationships were forged and have become calcified and persistent.

Conclusion: Decolonising practice

I set out to illustrate through this article the inextricable relationship between history and biography. In so doing, it has been my intention to exemplify that a critical study of this relationship provides essential and transcendental signposting of the decolonising intent of a practice of education that embraces history, reflexivity and political action. Arguably, the epistemic worth is to be grasped in its emphasis on the axiological and methodological foundations of historicism and the importance of these foundations to understanding the Caribbean subject and Caribbean societies.

Contemporary debates about the practice of education in an era of globalisation are not far removed from the concerns expressed by Williams in his work. Indeed the unity to be found in discussions about the contested notion of globalisation is in the emphasis placed on the deconstruction of educational contexts. Williams too acknowledged the necessity to keep questioning 'what education should be' (Williams, 1946, p. xi), stating that it is not possible to delink education and its practice without referencing 'the economic, social and political characteristics of the community which education is designed to serve' (p. x). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) describe an emancipatory project for contemporary times which is not unlike the decolonising agenda as advanced by Williams. They state:

The citizenship functions of formal education need to be located within local, national and global considerations of the work of citizens today and well extended beyond constructions of citizens as merely consumers of policy. If the neoliberal social imaginary of globalization is to be challenged, the new ways of thinking about global interconnectivity and interdependence are necessary. We need a new imaginary which recognises that human beings are social and cultural beings, as well as economic ones, an imaginary that recognizes the need to think locally, nationally and globally (pp 200-201).

In this paper, I have suggested that Eric Williams' philosophy of education emerged against a background of his understanding of the nature of the plantation, the epistemic foundations of education in the colonies and his unrelenting commitment to propose a practice of education that was developed on the basis of the imagination of Caribbean peoples. At the time of writing *Education in the British West Indies* Williams had recognised that 'A West Indian culture [was] slowly but surely evolving' (1946, p. 8). Further, he elaborated the centrality of education and its practice to the process of decolonisation by concluding:

The British West Indian community is today experiencing labour pains of the new society that is being born. The dominant fact is the emergence of the popular movement, its awareness of the problems to be solved. In the attainment of this goal in the British West Indies, a great responsibility rests on the educational system (Williams 1946, p.10)

Writing at a time when a new nation was not yet born but only imagined, Williams opened up to the world the possibility of the postcolonial aspiration conveying, in historical terms, how the decolonising projects of social transformation, recovery, development and self-determination could be driven by a practice of education that, philosophically and methodologically, referenced the lived experience of the colonised.

Developing a critical postcolonial pedagogy for education in present day circumstances suggests an aspirational intention as an act of recovery. Consideration of the strategic location of

educational practice in postcolonial societies as has been discussed within this paper, signals a promise of a pedagogy of hope that requires critical engagement about contested values and interests; interrogation of intellectual and moral commitment; the generation of cultural values through the practice of teachers; and a consideration of practice as deeply implicated in political struggle. These elements reflect a commitment to constitute a practice of education that can serve to resist strategies that work to re-colonise, leaving the inner plantation unchecked.

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