



Exploring the 'Third Space' in Postcolonial Trinidadian Literature: Presentations of Hybridity and Assimilation in Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* and Willi Chen's 'Trotters'.

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Introduction: Hybridity, Identity and the 'Third Space'

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact [...] we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.¹

In exploring the concept of hybridity, it is vital to form a working definition of it from the start, and to do so it is profitable to turn immediately to theorist Homi K. Bhabha. In his book *The Location of Culture*, he argues that 'the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space',² with this 'ambivalent space' being the 'third space'³ referred to in the title of this dissertation. Critic Leela Ghandi outlines this 'third space' as a site of 'communication, negotiation and, by implication, translation. It is in this indeterminate zone...where anti-colonial politics first begins to articulate its agenda'.⁴ Both Bhabha's and Ghandi's claims clearly show that hybridity is inextricably linked with identity — specifically with the identity of a colonised people. Moreover, it appears to be connected to the reclamation of that identity from the hands of the coloniser by means of what Bhabha terms 'a strategic reversal'⁵ of the colonial gaze, which has for so long been used as a device through which to perceive the world. This idea ties in with Hall's claim that 'identity is always constructed, within, not outside, of representation'.⁶ If this is the case, then I plan to argue that through representing the hybrid condition of Trinidad in their literature, Merle Hodge and Willi Chen are seeking to construct a hybrid identity which maps onto the real world and works to articulate the 'strategic reversal' that Bhabha asks for.

This framework of understanding will underpin the literary analysis that will make up the main body of this dissertation and will be used as a point of exploration into the wider make-up of Trinidadian hybridity.

Postcolonial literature, situated tightly in the present but continuously looking back to the colonial past, is arguably an inhabitant of the 'third space', therefore it is arguably a hybrid form. It is important to recognise then that this dissertation will be examining fictional presentations of hybridity through the medium of hybrid forms and therefore will be exploring the hybrid condition along two planes: both within the text in terms of its characters and events, and outside that text in terms of its context of production and authorship. It will be dealing fundamentally with the construction of identity within Trinidad and considering, as Hall suggests is vital, this identity as something ongoing rather than fixed.

The particular examination of hybridity that this dissertation will undertake focusses specifically upon the Caribbean situation, and, even more specifically, upon Trinidad. In his book *Zones of Instability*, Imre Szeman writes that the Caribbean 'has been seen as a paradigmatic space for the study of colonialism and post-colonialism, a space in which all of the contradictions and ambiguities of the colonial project have been revealed with particular acuteness'.⁷ If this is the case, then I argue, from the perspective of a literary exploration, that

¹ Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, online resource: <http://www.unipa.it/~michele.cometa/hall_cultural_identity.pdf> p. 222.

² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge Classics, 2004) p. 160.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁴ Leela Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) pp. 130-31.

⁵ Bhabha, *Location*, p. 160.

⁶ Hall, *Diaspora*, p. 222.

⁷ Imre Szeman, *Zones of Instability: Literature, Postcolonialism and the Nation* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 70.

such a 'space' should be expanded to include the Trinidadian people, and, by extension, the literature they have produced, as a site for 'contradictions and ambiguities' to be found.

The notion of 'the colonial project' in the Caribbean is particularly relevant to Bhabha's definition of hybridity as 'the productivity of the colonial power'⁸ for this is essentially how the Caribbean populous as we know it today — and as postcolonial authors will present it — came into existence; via 'slavery, transportation, colonisation, migration, [of people] predominantly from Africa — and when that supply ended, it was temporarily refreshed by indentured labour from the Asian subcontinent'.⁹ It is arguable that very few of the people in the Caribbean are 'native' to the area and this is important to remember when analysing identity in relation to place, as the two are not always so simply connected.

To further this instability, Trinidad is a particularly complex space. Known colloquially as a 'callaloo' — a popular Caribbean dish made from combining various different ingredients — Trinidad's demography and culture is hugely varied between African-Trinidadian, Indo-Trinidadian and Chino-Trinidadian amongst other, less numerous, races.¹⁰ As a result of this diverse mixture, Stuart Hall argues that 'there is a distinct lack of national identity in Trinidad',¹¹ an issue which makes this exploration of hybridity all the more complex, for it must not only consider the splicing of colonial rule with African slaves, but also the splicing of those people with more recent Indian and Chinese immigrants. Thus the hybrid condition of Trinidad becomes concerned with multiple identities at once and this will be considered in the following analysis.

Both *Crick Crack, Monkey* and 'Trotters' are written by post-colonial Trinidadian authors, with Merle Hodge being African-Trinidadian and Willi Chen, Chino-Trinidadian. As a result, the works are arguably charged with these identities and agendas, although it would be limiting to attribute their thematic explorations purely to such authorial context. Critic Frantz Fanon pertinently states: 'if I cry out, it will not be a black cry',¹² underlining the importance of understanding work by black artists as 'art' rather than 'black art', for such a label is reductive — much the same applies here in terms of calling these works 'Trinidadian'. However, in terms of constructing a rounded exploration of hybridity, I propose that such context must be considered, for it is not only the characters and events within these texts that comment upon the hybrid condition, but also the formation of the texts themselves, and the situation of the authors who created them. Stuart Hall neatly summarises this point when he states: 'it is worth remembering that all discourse is "placed", and the heart has its reasons...'¹³ Therefore this dissertation will progress from an initial critical analysis of two literary texts to examine the form of those texts and the part this form plays in a presentation of hybridity.

The literary works this dissertation will be studying offer differing interpretations of hybridity and this conflict will make a profitable point of exploration for analysing what hybridity means to postcolonial authors. It will also work as a means of discovering to what extent the idea of assimilation into the structures of colonial power is put forward as a positive one. *Crick Crack, Monkey*'s general drive is one of despondency as it emphasises the impossibility of resolve within a hybrid identity, through the presentation of the protagonist, Tee, who suffers throughout the story. 'Trotters' offers a far more optimistic presentation of hybridity, in which a hybrid situation in fact improves the lives of the characters, if only temporarily, through the medium of a pot of soup full of mixed ingredients. It is, however,

⁸ Bhabha, *Location*, p. 160.

⁹ Hall, *Diaspora*, p. 227.

¹⁰ Eric Hall, *A History of the people of Trinidad and Tobago* (London: A&B Publishers Group, 1993).

¹¹ Stuart Hall, cited in Abigail Ward, 'Tracing Significant Footsteps: Ismith Khan and the Indian-Caribbean Short Story', in *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Lucy Evans, Mark McWatt and Emma Smith (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2011), pp. 95-117 (p. 103).

¹² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Paladin, 1970) p. 22.

¹³ Hall, *Diaspora*, p. 223.

hugely restrictive to put forward at this point such a simplistic binary as Hodge's work being 'negative' and Chen's being 'positive', therefore detailed analyses of these texts will interrogate more thoroughly the intricacies of their conflicting explorations of such a complex notion as hybridity.

Such analysis will begin with *Crick Crack, Monkey*, and then move on to 'Trotters', before bringing the two together to draw wider conclusions about the presentation of hybridity in Trinidadian literature more generally. Chapter One will specifically examine Merle Hodge's presentation of Afro-Trinidadian hybrid identities and the conflict between creolised culture and Western influence in colonial Trinidad. Chapter Two will explore Willi Chen's presentation of the Indo-Trinidadian hybrid situation, with particular focus on 'Douglas'¹⁴ identity, and use this as a comparison with Hodge's work. The conclusion will then investigate the impact that these differing literary presentations have on the broader landscape of postcolonial hybridity as both a theoretical and material concept.

¹⁴ A person of mixed African and Indian descent.

Chapter One: Presentations of Afro-Trinidadian Hybrid identities in Merle Hodge's novel *Crick Crack, Monkey*

“‘jus’ you remember you going there to learn *book* do’ let them put no blasted shit in yu head”¹⁵

Crick Crack, Monkey is a novel by Trinidadian author Merle Hodge, published in 1970 as part of the ‘Trinidadian Classics’ collection. It follows the life of a young girl called Tee growing up in colonial Trinidad and presents her ongoing struggle, not only for a fixed identity, but for an ownership of self, in the complex landscape of colonial Trinidad, as she is pulled back and forth between the poles of coloniser and colonised. This chapter will explore how Hodge constructs the character of Tee to examine hybridity in colonial Trinidad across various planes, using this exploration to reach a conclusion about Hodge’s wider presentation of hybridity as a concept.

Crick Crack, Monkey is, in essence, a story of in-betweens, all of which are collated within the construction of the protagonist, Tee. Hodge forces this character to inhabit various liminal territories: physically, she is developing from a little girl into a young woman; geographically, she is incessantly moved from one ‘home’ to another — continually rupturing any connections she might build at either location; emotionally, she is torn between family loyalty and selfish self-improvement; and culturally, she is located within the divide between Trinidad and the West, with this final territory arguably being the most complex. Homi Bhabha writes of in-between spaces, that they: ‘provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood that initiate new signs of identity’¹⁶ and refers to them as ‘innovative sites of collaboration’.¹⁷ If Tee is a resident of such spaces, then we can understand how complicated her struggle for selfhood might be and perhaps begin to realise that the various conflicting poles she is pulled between are actually working in ‘collaboration’ to construct her identity: an identity which is, therefore, inevitably hybrid. To take this idea further, in his book *Zones of Instability*, Imre Szeman writes that ‘stories about childhood have long been seen as metaphors or allegories for the development of the nation’,¹⁸ a viable claim which, if applied to *Crick Crack, Monkey*, would see the evolving formation of Tee’s identity as an allegory for the evolving formation of Trinidad’s identity. In this way Hodge translates the notion of a hybridity across onto a much wider spectrum. This idea speaks quite specifically to the notion of a ‘Caribbean Bildungsroman’,¹⁹ which is a popular framework in colonial and postcolonial literary criticism that correlates plot with the maturation of a child. However, although Tee certainly matures, she does so in an arguably detrimental way, as she rejects her history and identity and eventually leaves Trinidad altogether. Through this manipulation of the framework, Hodge exposes the difficulties in development that a hybrid identity can cause.

The most tangible and instantly accessible presentation of hybridity in this work comes in Hodge’s construction of the fictional plot. The main narrative drive comes from the conflict between two opposing characters, ‘Tantie’ and ‘Aunt Beatrice’, who both feature heavily in Tee’s life at various points and act as the two poles between which she is pulled.

¹⁵ Merle Hodge, *Crick Crack, Monkey* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1970).

¹⁶ Bhabha, *Location*, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁸ Imre Szeman, *Zones of Instability*, p. 67.

¹⁹ Jacqueline Brice Finch, *The Caribbean Bildungsroman: Notes on a Culture*, online resource: <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED254865> for a basic definition of the form. For a more detailed exploration of the importance of this form and for analysis of it in use, see: Feroza Jussawalla, *Kim, Huck and Naipaul: Using the Postcolonial Bildungsroman to (Re)Define Postcoloniality*, online resource: http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&ved=0CEwQFjAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.raco.cat%2Findex.php%2FLinksLetters%2Farticle%2Fdowload%2F49868%2F87843&ei=s8B9U_K00Oic0AXvo4GLADA&usq=AFQjCNHsmOeFPo7Q2CL4c1__aXEuze5U1w&sig2=2S5ivqwtA7mi38ZFwXGt7w>.

Tantie is Tee's surrogate mother, 'loud and hilarious',²⁰ who raises her through childhood, chatters, scolds and teaches her, whilst Aunt Beatrice — labelled by Tantie, and accepted by Tee, as 'The Bitch' — is a distant character, an inhabitant of the Trinidadian middle class, intent on 'bettering' Tee and ridding her of the 'niggeryness'²¹ that Tantie's loving care has instilled in her. In his introduction to the Heinemann edition of *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Roy Narinesingh argues that 'Tee oscillates between [these] two spheres of existence and emerges as a deeply disturbed being'.²² Whilst I might substitute the word 'disturbed' — on account of its emotive weighting — for a more critically detached term like 'complicated', his point is a valuable one, for it raises the idea that it is the external influences acting around and upon Tee that render her a hybrid, rather than this being an internally constructed, inherent state.

If hybridity, then, is something created by external factors, it is profitable to look at the moments throughout the story that specifically shape Tee's identity. An interesting starting point comes in the form of a particular verb which recurs at numerous points throughout the story: 'haul'.²³ Consistently, Tee is both physically and metaphorically 'hailed' about by Tantie and Aunt Beatrice. Physically, she is hauled between homes, hauled to school, or hauled onto Aunt Beatrice's knee for a smothering of unwanted affection. Metaphorically, she is hauled 'out of ordinaryness and niggeryness',²⁴ away from her childhood and from typical Trinidadian ways of life, towards more Westernised — and therefore apparently more civilised — values. With all of this 'hauling', Tee's absolute lack of agency becomes clear, for in the construction: 'I was hauled', the 'I' is wholly passive, an object rather than a subject. This analysis supports the claim that Tee's sense of self is constructed by conflicting outside contributors and suggests that she is the site upon which these conflicts meet to clash and fuse, forming a hybrid identity that she herself had very little say in creating.

The effect of these conflicting outside contributors — namely Tantie and Aunt Beatrice — is made explicit in the differing types of clothes they like Tee to wear. When Tee puts on her school uniform, we learn in two side-by-side sentences that Tantie labels them 'damn nun-clothes'²⁵ whilst Aunt Beatrice 'remark[s] how nice [she] look[s]'.²⁶ This acute contrast of opinions succinctly highlights the divide not only between the two women, but also between the two ways of life they represent — the laid-back creole against the up-tight middle class — and, once again, Tee is set up as the battle ground for the conflict, this time as a passive, clothes-horse figure, upon which frocks and attitudes can be draped at will. As it is, Tee must wear the uniform if she wants to attend school; thus, by default, she is forced to side with Aunt Beatrice, with Westernisation, if she wants to succeed. In this way she rejects Tantie, and therefore rejects 'home', in favour of the promise of a better life through education. In his essay *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon explains that 'the Negro is appraised in terms of the extent of his assimilation';²⁷ thus it becomes clear that Tee will be measured, not only in Aunt Beatrice's eyes, but in the eyes of the middle class, by how effectively she takes on the culture of the West and her success will depend on this. Therefore, wearing the correct uniform — 'damn nun-clothes' or not — is one step in the 'correct' direction. This tight pairing of rejection and assimilation puts forward the notion that colonised identities are constructed through a continual process of abandonment and

²⁰ Hodge, *Crick Crack, Monkey*, p. 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²² *Ibid.*, Introduction, vii.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 27.

adoption in relation to the desired culture with which one wants to assimilate, in this case the culture of the coloniser. Thus, it becomes clear that assimilation will never be an easy or comfortable process for figures like Tee, for it requires a certain amount of severing, followed by hurried ingestion, in order to be successful. It is through this unnatural process that hybrid identities are formed, particularly across psychological and emotional planes.

To look next at a more physical plane of construction and take divided spaces more literally, it is worthwhile to study the regular movements of Tee from Tantie's house, to Aunt Beatrice's, most often against her will — 'hauling' again. As she is not allowed to comfortably rest at either place, these houses arguably become liminal locations for Tee and therefore have a complicated effect on her development of self. In defining liminal spaces, Bhabha writes that: 'the hither and thither [of them], the temporal movement and passage [they] allow, prevents identities at either end from settling into primordial polarities'.²⁸ This notion directly maps onto Hodge's characterisation of Tee in an arguably positive way, for she is not fixed, but fluid, and therefore open to change and development — an idea which is perhaps the only real positive presentation of hybridity throughout *Crick Crack, Monkey*.

Hodge soon dispels this optimism, however, by demonstrating the total desolation Tee feels when moving into her Aunt Beatrice's house for the second time. She uses the familiar imagery of a child alone in a big bed to underline just how small Tee feels, but then takes this idea further with the phrase 'it was the first time in my life, that I was to sleep in a bed all by myself',²⁹ which emphasises the crippling loneliness that comes with leaving home, particularly in such an involuntary manner. To turn to Bhabha again, he refers to this cultural fluidity — which Tee experiences in moving between Tantie and Aunt Beatrice — as a 'middle passage' which, 'as with slavery itself, is a process of displacement and disjunction that does not totalise experience'.³⁰ This evocative analogy perfectly embodies the difficulty and pain of Tee's situation, as she suffers both displacement and disjunction in the violent rupture that takes her away from home and drops her in an unfamiliar, undesired situation and, as a result, is left with a sense of self that cannot appropriately rationalise her experience. Thus her identity is not just fluid, but unfinished, and this is undoubtedly problematic in terms of constructing her sense of self. The elements of continuity that have survived the rupture — e.g., her loyalty to Tantie — further problematize this issue as 'the passage' has not severed past ties completely — just as it didn't during the transatlantic slave trade — therefore she forms a hybrid self as a result of the uneasy combination of past and present, of there and here, that are forced together within her identity after she has undergone the passage.

Another, more complex, manifestation of this divide comes in the conflict of languages used throughout the book: the difference between 'creole' and 'Western English', or the difference between 'niggery' language and that which is 'proper'.³¹ To turn to Fanon once more, he writes that to speak a language is 'to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation [...] to take on a world',³² indicating the vital role that language plays in achieving successful assimilation into a particular culture, with the word 'assume' implying a sense of performativity on the part of the speaker. In Tee's case, the culture, civilisation and world that she wants — or is forced — to take on is that of the Westernised middle class of Aunt Beatrice. In order to do so, she must learn to speak as Aunt Beatrice does and rid herself of the creole that defined her childhood. Fanon states that, in the middle classes, 'one avoids creolisms' and indeed that 'children were taught to scorn creole at school'.³³ This subjugation

²⁸ Bhabha, *Location*, p. 5.

²⁹ Hodge, *Crick Crack, Monkey*, p. 80.

³⁰ Bhabha, *Location*, p. 8.

³¹ Hodge, *Crick Crack, Monkey*, p. 38.

³² Fanon, *Black Skin*, p. 14.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

is problematic for Tee, as creole is, for her, so tightly interlinked with her childhood and the early years of her development of self; it is the language of Tantie, of home, of 'crick-crack' itself — 'Monkey break 'e back, on a rotten pommerac!'³⁴ Hodge works hard to set this up as a language of warmth, with organic, firm roots — despite the fact that it is itself a mutated fusion of English and African, and therefore essentially hybrid. Tee is then forced to abandon this homeliness in favour of speaking a 'proper' language, as incessantly pushed by the cold, detached Aunt Beatrice. The middle class disdain for creole is epitomised perfectly in the section where Aunt Beatrice directly reprimands her help, Eudora, for how she speaks. Eudora has a creole dialect and cries; 'Come put-on yu frack! Caral! Put-on yu frack!'³⁵ Aunt Beatrice, 'near hysterical',³⁶ scolds Eudora for this speech, saying: 'If you can't speak properly when you speak to these children then don't bother to say anything to them at all',³⁷ introducing the idea that language is connected to education and, by extension, to 'bettering' oneself. It appears that Aunt Beatrice is terrified that her middle class children may pick up the creole dialect — another 'niggery' habit — in case they are consequently held back, or even damned, as a result of it.

Thematically, this oppression of creole is particularly painful for Tee, something Hodge underlines when she has her draw a direct parallel between Eudora and Tantie, noting that when Aunt Beatrice — the oppressor — is out of the house, Eudora 'talks gaily with people going up and down the road, laughing quite as boisterously as Tantie',³⁸ with the word 'boisterous' again implying the warmth and wholesomeness that seems to be interlinked with creole throughout the story. Tee, if she wants to further herself, must cut herself off from this language, a relatively violent, unnatural rupture. In this way, she is forced to assimilate by altering her language to enable her to, in Fanon's terms, 'take on the culture'³⁹ of the Trinidadian middle class, without which she would be limited and stagnant in her personal progression. Thus, Tee's hybrid identity is forcefully constructed, across a social plane, specifically in terms of class, again highlighting the idea that hybridity is not an internally constructed state of being, but rather something brought about by varying external factors. More than this, and particularly relevant to the wider discussion of this dissertation, Hodge puts forward the notion that hybridity is in fact a destructive state of existence.

This idea is demonstrated at the numerous points throughout the story when Tee is rendered speechless, an indication that she has lost the battle between the conflicting languages, resulting in nothingness. Thus hybridity is here not seen as a 'gainful exchange'⁴⁰ — as is arguably the case in Willi Chen's 'Trotters' — but rather as a loss. In the Headmaster's office, Tee is 'blank' and 'silent';⁴¹ even in the face of anger she 'stares back with an intense coolness'.⁴² This presentation is a direct contrast to the warmth of the previous pages and, through creating it, Hodge implies an emptiness to Tee that has arguably resulted from her violent dislocation from her home — the 'passage' discussed earlier. This idea is forwarded at the point when Tee first moves into Aunt Beatrice's house as an older girl and she is cruelly interrogated by her cousins. She remains silent in the face of their mocking, so much so that Carol remarks: 'Oh dear, she has no tongue'⁴³ and the debilitating

³⁴ Hodge, *Crick Crack, Monkey*, p. 15.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin*, p. 29.

⁴⁰ Sandra Courtman, 'Cross-Cultural Readings of the Caribbean Short Story', in *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Lucy Evans, Mark McWatt and Emma Smith (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press Ltd, 2011), pp. 251-266 (p. 255).

⁴¹ Hodge, *Crick Crack, Monkey*, p. 65.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

effect of hybridity is made explicit. Again Hodge highlights the difficulties that come with attempting to assimilate into a new culture and the damage that unsuccessful assimilation can cause. Even when Aunt Beatrice enters to smooth over that damage, Tee is unable to respond appropriately; she can only ‘indicate dumbly that [she] hasn’t finished packing’,⁴⁴ a pathetic image, underlining the hopeless impossibility of her situation, in terms of comfortably resolving two distinctly separate cultures, through fusing two separate languages. If, as Fanon suggests, ‘to possess a language is to possess the world expressed and implied by that language’,⁴⁵ then the difficulty becomes clear, for Tee is forced to possess two languages, but then cannot feasibly hold onto two worlds.

In this way, Hodge uses language to emphasise the complexity of the hybrid ground within the fictional landscape of her story. Yet, perhaps more importantly, she goes further and tackles her own use of language in creating *Crick Crack, Monkey*. In *Les Tours de Babel*, Jacques Derrida argues ‘one should never pass over in silence the question of the tongue in which the question of the tongue is raised’.⁴⁶ Thus, the importance of studying Hodge’s use of language comes to light, for this in itself contributes towards the wider discussion about hybridity and assimilation.

Hodge writes in standardised English for the narrative bulk of the story, only slipping into creole in order to create speech representations for certain characters, primarily Tantie. Whilst this combination could be seen as a fusion of two cultures, it could also be viewed as an amplification of the divide between them. It is the latter interpretation that I propose has more weight, for the authoritative voice is English, with creole being used only to build ‘authentic’ character profiles — notably of lower class, less educated characters — rather than a middle ground of English-creole being employed throughout, which could have been a feasible option. In this way Hodge is arguably assimilating to the Western dominant framework of texts written in Standard English, and is thus reinforcing that dominance even whilst seeking to undermine it through representing the marginalised. This issue of submission to Western dominance is exacerbated by the fact that *Crick Crack, Monkey* is a novel. Speaking about the novel, Szeman writes that ‘the very idea of its potential effects, as well as its place within the culture [...] remain middle class and Western’,⁴⁷ and through this, *Crick Crack, Monkey*’s problems become apparent.

However, I argue that, in everything except formal length, *Crick Crack, Monkey* exhibits the qualities of a short story, a form much more tightly related to the Caribbean, where there is a greater ‘urge to tell stories that remain closer to an oral tradition of storytelling than is the case in Western cultures’.⁴⁸ Jeremy Poynting argues that one of the principal features of a short story is the ‘foreground[ing] [of] the storyteller’s voice’,⁴⁹ something which is evident in the presence of Tee as an older woman, narrating the events of her childhood and speaking out directly to the reader about the difficulty of accurately remembering, without tainting the past with her own present perceptions. Poynting also identifies ‘the telling of stories about individuals and communities’⁵⁰ as a key trope, something which is also apparent in *Crick Crack, Monkey*, as the plot focusses directly on Tee, but also expands into a wider narration of her surrounding communities: the Trinidadian creolised world of Tantie and the Westernised middle class of Aunt Beatrice. On a more

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 77.

⁴⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin*, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Des Tours de Babel*, trans. by Joseph F. Graham, online resource: <http://sites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic84298.files/Supplementary_readings/DERRIDA.PDF> p. 219.

⁴⁷ Szeman, *Zones*, p. 75.

⁴⁸ Jeremy Poynting, *The Caribbean Short Story*, online resource: <http://www.peepalmtreepress.com/feature_display.asp?id=1> p. 1.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 1.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 1.

complex level, Poynting claims that short stories always contain an 'absent presence'⁵¹ which is acknowledged but not explored. In the case of *Crick Crack, Monkey*, this presence is the West, the coloniser, Britain, and though it is never directly active, it is manifested in everything that Aunt Beatrice represents, overshadowing Tee's entire life. By including such idiosyncratic features of the short story, Hodge is arguably embodying the characteristics of the form in an elongated structure and is thus avoiding total subjugation to the Western novel.

To turn to Poynting for a final time, he states that: 'it is the Caribbean experience to inherit other people's imposed fictions'.⁵² It is such an experience that Hodge is arguably seeking to undo in her fusion of the short story and the novel, as she rejects the 'imposed' form of the West, and in its place, creates the ultimate hybrid form. This innovation on Hodge's part returns to both Ghandi's notion of an 'anti-colonial'⁵³ agenda, and Bhabha's claim that the hybrid space is a 'terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood'.⁵⁴ Thus it becomes clear that whilst Hodge's presentation of hybridity might be, on the one hand, despondent — the conflicts that Tee faces throughout the story are never resolved, they are simply ignored as she swiftly emigrates from Trinidad — on another level, she puts forward the idea that the 'third space' has a certain power; an ability to re-evaluate perceptions of the colonial self and undo the 'production of discriminatory identities that secure the "pure" and original identity of authority'.⁵⁵ Hodge's presentation of hybridity then is a dualistic one, as it is simultaneously put forward as a damning and liberating condition with no resolve between the two.

A similar critical analysis will now be applied to Willi Chen's 'Trotters' in a bid to discover whether such a presentation features more widely across postcolonial Trinidadian literature.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 1.

⁵² Ibid., p. 1.

⁵³ Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory*, p. 131.

⁵⁴ Bhabha, *Location*, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 160.

Chapter Two: Presentations of Indo-Trinidadian Assimilation and ‘Dougla’ Hybridity in Willi Chen’s ‘Trotters’

“If they sending Indians to India
 And Africans back to Africa
 Well somebody please just tell me
 Where they sending poor me?
 I am neither one nor the other
 Six of one, half a dozen of the other
 So if they sending all these people back home for true
 They got to split me in two,”⁵⁶

In comparison to *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Willi Chen’s short story ‘Trotters’ offers a far more optimistic presentation of hybrid identities in Trinidad. He comes at the issue of hybridity from an alternative viewpoint to Hodge, particularly in terms of racial and religious identity, for he studies the Trinidadian complexity in relation to the Indo-Caribbean and ‘Dougla’⁵⁷ situation, and in doing so fuses the study of four races and cultures: African, Indian, Caribbean and British (which will always be part of the make-up of a previously colonised country). To further the complexity, Chen himself is of Chinese origin, but was born in Trinidad in 1934. Chen might be classified as an ‘indigenous’⁵⁸ writer within a postcolonial literary structure as he chose to stay in the Caribbean to create his work, and is thus considered to be ‘one of Trinidad’s supreme artists whose practice stays firmly rooted in the Caribbean’.⁵⁹ Such labelling is similar to *Crick Crack, Monkey* being a ‘Trinidadian classic’⁶⁰ and it underlines the importance placed upon indigenous literature, charging it with specific concerns and motives.

Critic Shan Yamamoto argues that Chen’s position as a Chino-Trinidadian author gives him a ‘unique insight’⁶¹ into the hybrid condition as he can relate more directly to the issues of having a mixed heritage. This claim, however, is arguably a reductive one and it comes back to Fanon’s assertion that ‘[his] cry will not be a black cry’⁶² simply because he is black; therefore it can’t be assumed that Chen will provide a ‘unique’ perception of hybridity just because he himself is Chino-Trinidadian. This said, his presentation of the hybrid condition is a more positive one than Hodge’s, as he seems to focus not on hybridity as a loss of something, but rather as a gain. Indeed, he studies the positive elements of the synthetic splicing of cultures, seeing ‘cultural exchange [as] producing more and not less for its participants’,⁶³ with the very use of the word ‘exchange’ tying in closely with Bhabha’s perception of hybridity as a place for ‘innovative collaboration’ to occur. Such an idea is refreshingly optimistic after the themes of dejection running through *Crick Crack, Monkey* and this conflict between the two presentations reinforces in itself the plurality of the hybrid situation, in that it breeds multiple effects, interpretations and responses.

‘Trotters’ is specifically concerned with the conflict between Indo-Trinidadians and ‘Dougla’ and addresses it through the divide between two women: Ma Abdool, the ageing Mother, and Zobida the ‘plump...bright-eyed’⁶⁴ wife. Ma Abdool is a frail, Indo-Trinidadian

⁵⁶ Cletus Ali, *Split me in Two*, Calypso Poem, 1961.

⁵⁷ See definition in Introduction.

⁵⁸ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p. 227.

⁵⁹ Sandra Courtman, ‘Cross-Cultural Readings’, p. 256.

⁶⁰ Hodge, *Crick Crack, Monkey* (back cover of Heinemann edition).

⁶¹ Shin Yamamoto, ‘Swaying in Time and Space: The Chinese Diaspora in the Caribbean and Its Literary Perspectives’, *Asian Ethnicity*, 9:3 (2008), 171-77 (p. 174.)

⁶² Fanon, *Black Skin*, p. 22.

⁶³ Courtman, ‘Cross-Cultural Readings’, p. 260.

⁶⁴ Willi Chen, ‘Trotters’, in *King of the Carnival and Other Stories* (London: Hansib Publications Ltd. 1988), p. 117.

woman who 'is bent like her walking stick',⁶⁵ and whilst she is arguably a hybrid character herself, she is presented in this context as 'the norm', or the dominant structure, into which other characters must assimilate. Zobida, on the other hand, is the character pulled between conflicting polarities — she inhabits the same 'in-between space'⁶⁶ as Tee does in *Crick Crack, Monkey*, as she must choose between her desire to eat 'exotic, greasy dishes'⁶⁷ involving pork, and her desire to please her husband's Muslim family. Her hybrid identity is presented as externally constructed, much like Tee's is, as she is constantly caught between her personal longing to eat 'fat roti...fry fish and salt beef'⁶⁸ and the social obligation to eat 'dry baggee',⁶⁹ with the food metaphor underlining the conceptual conflict of hybridity in concrete, material terms.⁷⁰ However, the difficulty Zobida faces is held in direct contrast to the two other hybrid characters, who are both presented as entirely comfortable with their mixed identities.⁷¹

Through initiating this conflict, Chen challenges the homogenisation of hybrid identities and introduces the idea of a continuum of assimilation whilst questioning national identity. The Indo-Trinidadians of the story are allowed peace in their hybrid identities — Ma Abdool is never once exposed as being pulled between polarities — whereas Zobida, whilst she appears to be comfortable in herself, is brought under scrutiny by the narrative voice, constantly questioning her 'bloodline'.⁷² Thus assimilation takes on a different angle in this story, as the British colonisers are not held up as the dominant culture but rather the Indo-Trinidadians are. It is up to Zobida, as a 'Dougl', a hybrid, to integrate seamlessly into the culture of her husband, even though this culture in itself is hybrid. Therefore Chen's story could be seen as more progressive than Hodge's, as the issues Tee is dealing with in being torn between coloniser and colonised appear to have been settled within Ma Abdool and Azard, and the conflict now seems to exist between various denominations of hybrid characters instead. Thus Chen exposes the multifarious nature of hybridity within Trinidad, through focussing on the clash between Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian people rather than between Trinidadian and Western culture more generally.

This notion of hybridity as 'the norm' is emphasised by the consistent use of creolised speech throughout the story, specifically creolised Hindi, which is in itself a hybrid language. Unlike *Crick Crack, Monkey*, where creolised dialect is specifically written to identify lower class, less educated characters, and Standard English is marked as the desirable tongue for those who want to 'get on' in life, 'Trotters' presents only creole. Thus it becomes the dominant structure within the context of the story — in much the same way as Indo-Trinidadian identity does — and the issues that Fanon raised in terms of 'possessing a language'⁷³ and 'possessing a culture'⁷⁴ take on new meaning, as the dominant culture is no longer Westernised, but creolised and therefore hybrid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 117.

⁶⁶ Bhabha, *Location*, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Chen, 'Trotters', p. 119.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 119.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 119.

⁷⁰ Vijay Mishra investigates thoroughly the importance of food in the Caribbean diaspora in her book *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary*. It does not further the argument of this dissertation explicitly, but offers a valuable background to Chen's use of food as the primary metaphor for telling his story.

⁷¹ Shalini Puri offers a detailed exploration of Indo-Trinidadian hybridity and assimilation in her book *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, specifically in chapter 6, 'East Indian/West Indian: Racial Stereotype, Hosay and the Politics of National Space'. This dissertation is focussing specifically on the construction of Zobida, the Dougl character, as a hybrid identity, but it is worthwhile to consider Puri's arguments in order to develop a greater understanding of the Indo-Trinidadian characters, Azard and Ma Abdool, in terms of their hybrid identities.

⁷² Chen, 'Trotters', p. 119.

⁷³ Fanon, *Black Skin*, p. 29.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

This progression towards a fusion of cultures is mirrored in the thematic plot, for unlike the situation in *Crick Crack, Monkey*, where Tee is forced to choose between the polarities of her identity, in 'Trotters' no such choice is pushed upon Zobida. The trotters are put into the soup and the lie that they 'is beef bone'⁷⁵ is accepted by everyone around the table. Thus Zobida maintains her relationship with her Muslim husband and his Mother, whilst also being able to eat the tasty food that she has always enjoyed as part of her African heritage. So it seems that Chen has presented a resolve to the hybrid conflict that Hodge was unable to reach, because Zobida doesn't lose anything — unlike Tee who loses her home, her Auntie, her brother, even her voice. In fact, Chen takes it so far as to introduce the prospect of achieving some 'gain' from hybridity — something which returns to the notion of a 'positive cultural exchange' — as the taboo trotters turn out to be the tastiest ingredient in the soup. Ma Abdool, originally so opposed to the 'Douglas' traditions, enjoys the trotters the most, and asks at the end: 'beti yuh havam any more chotters?'⁷⁶ Through this comic twist of irony, Chen emphasises the arbitrary nature of cultural divides and glances forward to a future in which hybridity can be seen as a site for cultural and social gain, rather than loss.

However, it is essential to note at this point that the resolve Chen offers is not without its flaws, for it comes at the cost of deception and denial. The pig's trotters are only allowed into the soup under the guise of being beef; if they were revealed as pork then the whole dinner would have become inedible. Thus Zobida can only embrace her creole identity in secret, and whilst she successfully manages this small act of resistance against total assimilation, she still suffers the same subjugation to a dominant structure as Tee does.

With this dichotomy established, it is important to assess at this point the influence the short story form has on the presentation of hybridity. It is evident that Chen's work possesses the same idiosyncratic features identified by Poynting which I applied to Hodge's work in the previous chapter, and it is even more successful in the fact that it is only four pages long. However, its brevity works to achieve more than just an alignment with Caribbean literary culture; indeed, the entire crux of the presentation of hybridity is shaped by it. John Skinner writes that short stories offer 'comic vignettes'⁷⁷ of Trinidadian life and this assessment is certainly applicable to 'Trotters'. The idea of a vignette, however, is particularly potent as it emphasises the notion that the scene around the dinner table is a frozen tableaux which the reader can look at and then walk away from, with that lasting image in their minds. However, it is worth considering that if the vignette were allowed into motion it is possible that the pork could be discovered, meaning Zobida's deceit could be discovered and the whole situation could turn dangerously awry, particularly in terms of the inter-hybrid marriage, which is based on love, but also on silence. Thus the story ends just in time to remain optimistic, but Chen ensures that this optimism is destabilised by the overhanging potential of disaster at a later point.

In relation to this idea of superficial positivity, Andrew Salkey argues that 'West-Indian short story writers wear the comic mask with more assurance than the tragic'⁷⁸ and this is arguably supported by the humour laced into Chen's narrative. However, I propose that the word 'mask' is the most important element of this statement, as it implies a sense of temporariness to the humour — in much the same way as the 'vignette' analogy does — that could slip away at any point. If this is accurate, then Chen's work must not be understood as comic, but rather as a performance of something comic. Thus the humour is exposed as a façade, behind which lurks the more despondent presentation of hybridity, as a site of pain and unresolvable conflict — for Zobida is not capable of truly resolving her conflicting

⁷⁵ Chen, 'Trotters', p. 121.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁷⁷ Skinner, *Stepmother Tongue*, p. 164

⁷⁸ Andrew Salkey, cited in Abigail Ward, 'Tracing Significant Footsteps', p. 98.

polarities and thus she exists in an uncomfortable liminal space. Chen's solution, which seems to be 'love conquers all' — '[Azard] loved Zobida and that was that'⁷⁹ — is feeble in the face of cultural divides, which although they are revealed as arbitrary, and even trivial, are deeply entrenched in society and psyche nonetheless. This febleness, however, is arguably intentional, as once again Chen undercuts the initial optimism of his presentation of hybridity with a reminder that it is by no means a sustainable option. Thus his work ties in more tightly with Hodge's than might first be acknowledged, as once more, the duality of hybridity as both a destructive and creative condition is constructed.

⁷⁹ Chen, 'Trotters', p. 122.

Speaking from the 'Third Space': Conclusions about Presentations of Hybridity and Assimilation in Postcolonial Literature

"It is the in-between space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture, and by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves."⁸⁰

From the preceding analysis then, it is clear that there is no single presentation of the hybrid condition in Trinidad, for it can be interpreted as a positive and negative state both separately and at once. An idea which does seem to recur throughout both texts, however, is the impossibility of a comfortable resolve for conflicting identities. In *Crick Crack, Monkey*, Tee is forced to sever her creolised roots and leave Trinidad, whilst in 'Trotters', Zobida has to resort to lies in a bid to keep her hybrid identity intact and safe from such severing. Thus neither story presents a comfortable acceptance of hybridity; they rather demonstrate the damage that forced assimilation into a dominant structure can cause.

This issue, however, is not purely limited to the fictional texts and it is profitable now to turn to the situation of postcolonial authors, as they too find themselves inhabiting the 'third space'. Hodge was born and raised in Trinidad, but left to be educated in England at the age of 18 in a transition which closely mirrors Tee's. Willi Chen, although he has lived in Trinidad all of his life, is the son of Chinese immigrants and has therefore experienced the difficulties of assimilation into a new culture first-hand. Thus it is possible, without any issue of reduction, not only to map the authors onto their work, but also to map their work back onto them, a transfer which exposes the totality of the hybrid condition both inside and outside of literary representation.

Salman Rushdie, a 'migrant' writer under Boehmer's terms, summarises the difficulties that postcolonial authors such as Hodge and Chen face, when he writes:

The Indian writer, looking back at India, does so through guilt-tinted spectacles ... I am speaking now of those of us who emigrated ... and I suspect that there are times when the move seems wrong to us all, when we seem, to ourselves, post-lapsarian men and women. We are Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslims who eat pork. And as a result — as my use of the Christian notion of the Fall indicates — we are now partly of the West. Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools.⁸¹

This idea of simultaneous plurality and partialness, for me, summarises perfectly the complicated situation that Hodge and Chen inhabit in writing in a postcolonial landscape. They have had to assimilate, just as Tee and Zobida are forced to, yet, as has been made clear, this assimilation can never be totally complete and thus they are left with hybrid identities constructed across physical, emotional, social and cultural planes. The concept of 'partialness' here is particularly relevant to a discussion of hybridity, as this in itself is arguably a partial state of existence. In discussing the postcolonial situation, Robert C. J. Young argues that hybrid works 'do not arrive delivering [a] meaning already fully-formed' but instead 'enable new meaning to be created and projected in dialogic encounters' they 'offer challenge rather than solution' and 'allow audiences to interpret new spaces with relevant meanings of their own'⁸² rather than providing an exclusive, pre-prepared meaning.

⁸⁰ Bhabha, *Location*, p. 37.

⁸¹ Salman Rushdie, 'Errata', in *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Granta, 1991), p. 15.

⁸² Robert C. J. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 74.

In this way then, he sees partialness as a positive feature, as it leaves room for further development — in much the same way as Bhabha views liminal spaces as potential sites for collaboration and imagination in constructing identity.

In terms of this development of identity, with specific relation to literature, Merle Hodge explains the fundamental predicament of the colonised: 'We never saw ourselves in a book, so we didn't exist in a kind of way and our culture, our environment... did not seem to be of any importance — we overlooked them entirely. The real world was what was in books'.⁸³ This idea returns to the concept put forward by Hall in the introduction of this dissertation; that 'identity is always constructed within representation' as it becomes clear that Trinidadian identity was 'overlooked' because of its absence from representation. By creating literature about Trinidadian hybrid identities then, it is arguable that both Hodge and Chen are actually transforming the 'real world', forcing the subaltern 'culture' and 'environment' of Trinidad into a position of importance and promoting hybrid identity as something not to be overlooked.

This idea of material re-evaluation through discourse comes back to Bhabha's initial claim that hybridity 'is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the "pure" and original identity of authority)',⁸⁴ and if this is the case, both Hodge and Chen are fully embodying the hybrid condition through their work. They are reversing the colonial gaze and turning the 'other' into the 'self', and through this transformation they are reclaiming this identity from the pens of the coloniser.

Speaking about the West in his short story 'Lavana', R. K. Narayan writes 'such a man does not wait for the earth to turn towards the sun or away from it, but himself goes round and creates his own night and day',⁸⁵ with this metaphor emphasising the powerful agency of the coloniser in achieving actions and shaping the world to suit its purpose. It is this agency that Bhabha believes the hybrid condition has the potential of achieving and it is this agency which Hodge and Chen are arguably fighting to gain through their literature. Therefore, by presenting hybridity directly from the 'third space', they succeed in decolonising their identity and even if this identity is presented as conflicting, irresolvable and painful, it is, at least, their own.

⁸³ Merle Hodge, cited in Simon Gikandi, 'Narration in the Post-Colonial Moment: Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey*', in *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*, ed. by Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

⁸⁴ Bhabha, *Location*, p. 157.

⁸⁵ R. K. Narayan, 'Lavana', in *Gods, Demons and Others* (London: Heinemann, 1964).

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