

Re-enacting the Trauma of Cultural Shame in Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey*

Dr. Majda Atieh*
Angie Halloum**

(Received 12 / 3 / 2018. Accepted 20 / 6 / 2018)

□ ABSTRACT □

This article demonstrates how Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* projects an awareness of traumatic shame in the Caribbean transnational travel setting and contributes to the understanding of the epistemology of cultural shame. Hodge's narrative introduces disruptive trauma to experiment with the possibilities of transcending it in a way that evokes Dominique LaCapra's theory regarding the two forms of remembering trauma: "acting out" and "working through." In this context, Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* also reads Homi Bhabha's two notions of mimicry and stereotype to propose a healing strategy unrecognized by the traumatized protagonist. Reading the reenactment of cultural trauma of shame in Hodge's narrative introduces a genre of resistance and transformation through the investigation of the possible ways of working through trauma.

Keywords: Acting out, Working through, Trauma, Cultural shame

* Associate Professor, Department of English, Tishreen University, Latakia, Syria.

**MA student, Department of English, Tishreen University, Latakia, Syria.

إعادة إحياء صدمة الخزي الثقافي في رواية "انتهت الحكاية، فما رأيك الآن أيها القرد" للكاتبة ميرل هودج

الدكتورة مجدة عطية*

إنجي علوم**

(تاريخ الإيداع 12 / 3 / 2018. قبل للنشر في 20 / 6 / 2018)

□ ملخص □

يوضح هذا البحث كيف أن رواية "انتهت الحكاية، فما رأيك أيها القرد؟" للكاتبة ميرل هودج تبرز معرفة بصدمة الخزي في السياق الكاريبي للسفر العابر للحدود كما تسهم في إضفاء فهم لإبستمولوجيا الخزي الثقافي. تقدم رواية هودج مفهوم الصدمة الهدامة بهدف اختبار إمكانية تخطي الصدمة عن طريق استحضار الأسلوبين الذين ناقشهما دومينيك لاكابرا في نظريته عن تذكر الصدمة وهما "إعادة تمثيل أو إحياء الصدمة" و "التعامل مع الصدمة". في هذا السياق، تعتبر رواية ميرل هودج قراءة لمفهومي هومي بابا عن المحاكاة والصور النمطية إذ تقترح استراتيجية علاجية غير معروفة بالنسبة لبطلنة الرواية المصابة بالصدمة. إن قراءة إحياء صدمة الخزي الثقافي في رواية هودج تقدم آلية سرد قصصي مقاوم ومشجع على التغيير من خلال دراسة الطرق الممكنة للتعامل مع الصدمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصدمة، إعادة إحياء الصدمة، التعامل مع الصدمة، الخزي الثقافي

* أستاذ مساعد - قسم اللغة الإنكليزية - كلية الآداب - جامعة تشرين - اللاذقية - سورية.
** طالبة ماجستير - قسم اللغة الإنكليزية - كلية الآداب - جامعة تشرين - اللاذقية - سورية.

Introduction:

Addressing traumatic shame in Caribbean Literature, Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* (1970) posits one form of remembering trauma as a response to the ordeals of colonialism, cultural loss, and problematic self-identification. The destabilizing perception of cultural shame has generated what could be called traumatic fragmentation in the Caribbean identity in general and in Tee, the protagonist of Hodge's novel, in particular. So, shame is presented as a disruptive mode of individual trauma in Hodge's text where Tee, a West Indian child, experiences displacement, discrimination, dissociation, dejection and inferiority complex, culminating in traumatic shame and suicidality. The narrative becomes a recount of her coming-of-age story in which she remembers and reenacts her trauma, inasmuch as she fails to initiate agency, realize resilience, or precipitate social transformation.

Literature Review:

The scholarship on *Crick Crack, Monkey* reveals a main interest in the interconnection between gender, culture, and transnational travel. Critics have highlighted how such relation constructs a defining experience that contributes to the peculiar formation of the Caribbean identity. For example, in her dissertation *The Characters of Women in Caribbean Literature*, Alena Drabkova examines the search for identity and mother-child relationships in representative Caribbean narratives by Michelle Cliff, Geoffrey Drayton, George Lamming, Jean Rhys, and Merle Hodge. Drabkova identifies language and the educational system as two essential cultural factors that shape the migratory Caribbean identity. Drabkova integrates psychological and sociological approaches to address the role of travel in problematizing mother-child relationships as particularly presented in Hodge's *Crick Crack*. On the other hand, Geta Leseur's "One Mother, Two Daughters" mainly presents a comparative outlook that brings together the experiences of Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean girls by foregrounding their bildungsroman stories. Leseur addresses *Crick Crack, Monkey* as a narrative of growing up in which Tee, the protagonist, grapples with two cultures without realizing a resolution in her identification. In the same context, Simon Gikandi in "Narration in the Post-Colonial Moment" perceives Tee's fragmentation in a racist and gendered reality. Gikandi defines Tee's cultural disintegration as tragic ambivalence that problematizes self-identification. Obviously, all of these readings that address the narrative's response to transcultural encounters do not address the trauma of shame in the narrative. Thus, reading *Crick Crack, Monkey* as a trauma narrative that identifies shame as a symptom of transcultural disruption is a major lacuna which effaces the contribution of the narrative to the understanding of the Caribbean epistemology of enforced travel and cultural shame.

Theoretical Framework:

Shame as defined by Paul Gilbert in his article "Evolution, Social Roles, and the Differences in Shame and Guilt" is "the painful self-consciousness of or anxiety about negative judgment, unwanted exposure, inferiority, failure, and defeat" (1033). Until recently, it has been argued that shame is not to be considered as one of the peri-traumatic bases leading to Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) like fear, horror, and helplessness, where the term "peri-traumatic emotions" indicates direct responses to intensely stressful circumstances. However, Ashwin Budden in "The Role of Shame in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Proposal for a Socio-Emotional Model for DSM-V" not only provides a reason for shame to be associated with PTSD but also situates shame as the emotion central to the development of PTSD. He also confirms the essential role of peri-traumatic shame in interpersonal trauma as in the erasure of identity. He asserts that such traumatic

experiences magnify the victims' helplessness and strip them of their agency and control. What Budden is trying to accomplish in his article is an introduction of shame as a "panhuman defensive emotion" (1034), erupting as a response to overwhelming threats, especially threats to the ideal self-image or the integrity of the social self—both perils are encountered by Tee at the hands of post-colonial apparatus.

In this context and according to the historian and trauma scholar Dominick LaCapra, "Acting out" is one fundamental form of remembering trauma whereas "working through" is the other. LaCapra applies Freudian psychoanalysis, specifically an updated version of the transference phenomenon, to historical studies, whereby the two ways of coming to terms with trauma or events "charged with emotion or value" are either "full identification" that leads to the "acting out" or "pure objectification" (LaCapra 147) that leads to the "working through." According to LaCapra, "a posttraumatic response ... becomes questionable when it is routinized in a methodology or style that enacts compulsive repetition" (47). In Hodge's narrative, Tee's response to trauma is marked by indulgence in emotional and behavioral re-enactment of her cultural shame, constructing an obstacle to the development of her victimhood into agency and sustaining traumatic submissiveness. This indulgence is particularly apparent in her frequent attempts to shun any pre- or post-colonial consciousness and then to shamefully mimic and repeat colonial practices, all the while dwelling on shame-laden incidents.

Discussion:

Merle Hodge's narrative *Crick Crack, Monkey* proposes a critique of cultural and class differences, spatial politics, post-colonial authority, and social pathology in a West Indian setting to reveal ambivalent phases within the protagonist and the first-person narrator of the work, Tee. The narrative depicts the oscillation of the protagonist between two worlds representing two different, if not opposing, lifestyles. The structure of the novel serves the purpose of duality as the events of the second half subtly mirror the events of the first half in a different environment with different characters to contextualize the response of the protagonist. A double, Helen, is also introduced to the narrative to experiment with the possibilities Tee has if she assimilates the world of "chimneys and apple trees" (Hodge 67). Tee fashions and starts copying the way Helen dresses in an attempt to reach the other world. As a matter of fact, the introduction of Helen into the narrative marks a turning point where shame germinates and sprouts in Tee and evolves towards the second half of the novel. She is located in a field of constant tension, dichotomies, binaries and antagonism, which contributes to her dislocation and traumatic dissociation. Such embodiment of colonial reality sustains colonial authority, prolongs its discriminatory practices, and maintains shame-typical behavior within culturally defined roles.

Upon her mother's death and her father's migration, Tee and her younger brother, Toddan, are left to the care of Tantie, her father's sister. After spending some time in the boisterous and raucous company of Tantie, Tee moves, rather unwillingly, to the pretentious dull world of her Aunt Beatrice, her mother's sister. Throughout the narrative, Tee undergoes spatial and psychological displacement, resulting in indeterminacy in her identification. Such moments of indeterminacy initiate shame as a symptom of alienation and as the recurrent overwhelming emotion permeating and dominating Tee's meditations. In this context, shame is recognized as traumatic. Tee's trauma can be traced back to the loss of her parents who constitute the first attachment bond and defense against the insecurities and the threats of the external world. The fifth edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* states the diagnostic criteria for PTSD for children of 6 years and younger as experiencing, witnessing or learning that actual or threatened

death, serious injury, or sexual violence occurred to a parent. In the same vein, in his article "The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma: Re-Enactment, Revictimization, and Masochism," Bessel van der Kolk suggests that "uncontrollable disruptions or distortions of attachment bonds precede the development of post-traumatic stress syndromes" (26). Van Der Kolk's postulation is highly pertinent as Tee's mother dies giving birth and her father migrates shortly after. The caregivers Tee is entrusted to afterwards not only fail to free her from her consequent inhibitions but also imbue her shame. As a matter of fact, her sojourn at Aunt Beatrice's world triggers and nurtures her cultural shame while any encounter with her Aunt Tantie prompts a shame-about-shame reaction. Budden demonstrates that "once shame manifests, it can further instigate a cycle of shame-shame; that is shameful feelings about feeling ashamed" (1036). When Tee contemplates her shame-infiltrated reaction to her early upbringing at Tantie's, she thinks "I was ashamed and distressed to find myself thinking of Tantie in this way" (Hodge 107). Van Der Kolk contends that the defection and instability in parenting incite "extremes of under and over-arousal that are physiologically aversive and disorganizing" (20). The effect of this aversion accompanies the child into adulthood and "reduce[s] the capacity to cope with subsequent social disruptions" (18). In the case of Tee, these social disruptions are in some measure translated into discrimination. Wherever she goes, Tee is confronted with discrimination that is the instigator of shame whether at home, at school, or even at church. Such continuous exposure to stimuli, according to Van Der kolk, "may serve to re-enforce the preoccupation and fixation" of trauma (18). Consequently, although Tee is aware of her shame, she is unable to discern its source or recognize her irresponsibility for this emotion or its traumatic effects. As such, not thoroughly "acknowledging the feelings promotes acting out" and constitutes an obstacle to initiating agency (25). Thus, of the two major types of appraisal which the psychologist Richard S. Lazarus specifies as underlying emotional reactions, Tee shows signs of primary appraisal that is "an evaluation of knowledge about a certain situation or stimulus in respect to relevance for and incongruence with person's goals and motivations" (Carsrud and Brännback 176). She is traumatically suspended in reliving her shame and unable to transcend primary appraisal to secondary appraisal which "relates to the individual's perceived ability to cope with the situation" (176).

Tee's compulsive repetition of shame restrains her from envisioning one of the allusions of the title of the novel. Apparently, the counter crack to the crick intends to convey a reduplication-with-variation sound with imitative inclination. *Crick Crack, Monkey* surreptitiously connotes a way of surmounting trauma through mimicry, one of Homi Bhabha's key concepts and un-violent strategies of resisting the colonizer and evoking active agency. Tee is unable to comprehend that reality and subjects are textually and discursively constructed and the adamant hunt for any slippages of colonial power or knowledge or the purposeful 'excess' or exaggerated repetition with difference necessarily imply the colonized's agency through revising colonial discourse and creating a new hybrid identity for the colonial subject. In this respect, a close observation of the household of Aunt Beatrice could be held as an admissible example of the illegitimacy of the Colonial claim that there is a "structural non-equivalence, a split between superior and inferior which explains why any one group of people can dominate another at all" (Huddart 40). Excelling in emulating colonial reality on the part of Aunt Beatrice and her family is the further consequence of mimicry Homi Bhabha suggests and David Huddart expounds in his book *Homi K. Bhabha* as the "undermining of the colonizer's apparently stable, original identity. The fact that anyone could be 'almost white but not quite' implies that no

one could ever quite be white" (51). Blinded to all these gaps in colonial discourse, Tee has been too focused on her shame to realize the elusive field of resistance she has been thrown amidst. She fixates her mind on episodes of discrimination to the point of seeking isolation which extends her traumatic dissociation and culminates on the vacation with her Aunt Beatrice at the beach at Canapo. There, she exhibits states of acute traumatic hyperarousal represented first by startle responses as in her unconsciously rebellious act when she "savagely slapped the hand" (Hodge 104) of her aunt when she tried to take hold of her. Startling which is assumed to be fear-anxiety reaction, according to Budden, "may correspond to latent shame and an intense preoccupation with socially threatening triggers or the suppression of overwhelming shameful memories" (1036). She also suffers there from symptomatic claustrophobia when she feels "the walls closed in" on her (Hodge 97). Ultimately, in a climactic confession, she impulsively reveals her inclination to commit suicide: "Suppose I were to drown here at Canapo. Tomorrow maybe. It was the first agreeable thought I'd had for the day" (101). Suicidal ideation here, besides being the epitome of the range of symptoms a traumatic person experiences, is first and foremost an expression akin to shame like a severe gaze aversion or ultimate withdrawal. Budden notes in clinical and ethnographic observations that "[w]ithdrawal, the desire to escape and isolation, and suicidality are salient dimensions of posttraumatic shame" (1036). So, Tee's fixation on trauma prevents her from examining the colonizer's or his agents' acts of enunciation for any unconscious slippages of colonial authority. It further hinders her adoption of mimicry as "an opening for agency, and even a model for agency," (Huddart 51) for according to Bhabha, the craft of mimicry is in its synchronic disclosure of the ambivalence of colonial discourse, the disruption of its authority, and the acquisition of "what is new, neither the one nor the other" (25) which Bhabha connects to a third space opened up by hybridity.

Another way of fighting back and standing up to colonialism available to Tee could have been through Ma, her grandmother. Tee at the beginning of the novel talks passionately about her Ma whose primordial symbolism and lifestyle could have been Tee's safety buoy from cultural trauma had not she been so immersed in her cultural shame. Ma stands for pre-colonial reality that transcends colonial disconnections. She represents the traditions and beliefs that form the original Caribbean identity. There, at Ma's, Tee feels content and views darkness as "cool" and "cozy" (Hodge 19). Hodge chooses this part of the novel to plainly state the title of her book through Ma and to deliver another philosophy of resisting colonialism by clinging to one's origins and unearthing ancestral roots. Here, "Crick crack?" and the response "Monkey break 'e back/ On a rotten pommerac!" (15) infuse implications indigenous to the West Indians into the title, which gives the novel its aboriginal West Indian dimension. This facet could be further perceived through, for example, the intermittent glimpses at the practice of obeah in the novel, obeah being a folk religion and spiritual practice in Caribbean nations. Obeah is mentioned to ascribe supernatural peculiarity to Mr. Brathwaite: "For Mr Brathwaite who lived in the depths of the acres and acres of Santa Clara Estate was a spirit. Centuries and centuries ago he had killed a woman, a very beautiful woman who was a servant in the Estate house, and the woman's man had worked an obeah on him so he couldn't die" (62). The term itself is used earlier to refer to the syncretism of the obeah practice with Christian symbolism to impute the win of the Inter-school children at sports to sorcery: "of course it was all on account of their nuns and Fathers working obeah with Mary-statues and candles in the Catholic Church, as everyone knew" (58). On that account, had Tee continued along

the line of embracing and hanging on to her roots, it could have spared her the process of acculturation and all its traumatic effects of cultural modification she has gone through.

Bhabha's critique of western authority in the production of knowledge contextualizes the understanding of Tee's quandary and inability to counteract cultural shame generated by western control. Apparently, the pillar on which Bhabha's criticism is established is the binary opposition of sameness and difference. To be more specific, it is the blurring of oppositions that Bhabha seeks. In his *Location of Culture*, Bhabha extends the work of Edward Said and starts with deconstructing dichotomies of the center and the periphery, the colonizer and the colonized, and the self and the other. He is intent on subverting the polarization of the world and emphasizing the hybridity of cultures. In the process, he expounds the determination of the West to employ and fixate stereotypical knowledge in order to enhance colonial authority and control. Western control bases itself on the recognition and the ongoing production of stereotypical knowledge through which the colonizer achieves governance and justifies alleged innate superiority. Bhabha provides a definition of colonial discourse:

It is an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a 'subject people' through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited. It seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledges of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. (70)

Hodge's narrative articulates this definition through exposing the educational system in the West Indies which archives a restrictive version of the European history. Tee's first lesson at school is to feel ashamed at the sight of the hung portrait of Churchill, the greatest Englishman according to her teacher, Mr. Hinds. During her colonial schooling, Tee complains, rather tacitly, about the incompatibility of their curriculum with their reality. They learn about exotic fruit, white children, and snow. Their first introduction to language is through English songs, hymns and nursery rhymes. At Sunday-school, they are taught to sing a prayer featuring "children with yellow hair," modelling their tender minds in its wake to accept a shadow archetype (Hodge 33). They chant:

Till I cross the wide, wide water, Lord
My black sin washed from me,
Till I come to Glory Glory, Lord
And cleansed stand beside Thee,
White and shining stand beside Thee, Lord,
Among Thy blessed children ... (33)

This systematic projection of western anxiety in terms of color caste is further explained in Frantz Fanon's argument that "in Europe, the black man is the symbol of Evil.... The torturer is the black man, Satan is black, one talks of shadows, when one is dirty one is black-- whether one is thinking of physical dirtiness or of moral dirtiness" (188). In short, Fanon indicates that "the archetype of the lowest values is represented by the negro" (189). This results in the formation of a traumatized black subject who is taught to feel ashamed of and be alienated from his biological self. Teaching, thus, is not contextual. The purposeful "supplanting of native language and culture" according to Ngugi wa Thiong'o

generates "colonial alienation, which involves an active (or passive) distancing of oneself from the reality around, and an active (or passive) identification with that which is most external to one's environment," which further results in self-denial and self-loathing on the part of the colonized (28). As George Lamming puts it in his collection of essays *The Pleasures of Exile*, "The West Indian's education was imported in much the same way that flour and butter are imported from Canada" (27). A systematic cultural and linguistic damage is done through the educational system. As far as Lamming's metaphor goes, for the purpose of securing power, Prospero/the colonial agent imprisons Caliban/the colonized in his language, hence culture. That is, "as long as Caliban is still bound to his former master's language, he is still partly condemned to live the life of a servant" (12). Tee and her peers in the West Indies are introduced to unfamiliar abstract concepts that hail the Mother Country with no relation whatsoever to their culture. A foreign culture is imposed on them to internalize. It gets even worse for Tee at Big School where discrimination becomes more voiced out, her vulnerable shame-stained consciousness more exposed, and her cultural shame more amplified.

As such, Tee is considered a victim of stereotypical knowledge; however, she does not maintain the means by which she can subvert the stereotype. For, stereotype is double-edged weapon colonialism has anxiously utilized. The distinctive contribution of Bhabha to the debate of stereotypes is his assertion that enforcing stereotypes by colonial powers entails anxiety on the part of the colonizer, which is due to the continuous need of coming up with new stereotypes. The ambivalence resulting from such anxiety is at the same time a generator of more stereotypes but more importantly is "the space for counter-knowledge and strategies of resistance and contestation," according to David Huddart (39). In *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*, the definition of the interactions between the colonizer and the colonized runs in the same vein as in Bhabha's argument. It contends that:

Almost always, the analysis of these interactions acknowledges the importance of power relations in that cultural exchange – the degree to which the colonizer imposes a language, a culture and a set of attitudes, and the degree to which the colonized peoples are able to resist, adapt to or subvert that imposition. (2)

So, Bhabha stresses the possibility of the colonized's active agency in these interactions by understanding the dynamics of cross-cultural relations. But at the same time, he maintains an understanding of the inability of the colonized to surmount the illusion of innate superiority the colonizer has secured due to a selective pedagogical practice.

Conclusion:

Consequently, reading the individual trauma of shame in Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* foregrounds the limited contribution of "acting out" that fails to initiate agency. Hodge's narrative reveals how the colonial endeavor bases itself on enforcing power relations in which the colonizer dominates, maintains exclusive reality, and frustrates any attempt at transformation on the part of the colonized. This reading of *Crick Crack, Monkey* integrates Bhabha's critique of Western authority with the production of knowledge. Such a close examination of colonial exercise of power establishes a possible understanding of the traumatic powerlessness of the colonized to exert the effort needed to ensure the inclusion of suppressed shame-free cultural memories.

However, there is no denying that problematizing the "acting out" in Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* evokes a further call for investigating the options available for the traumatized protagonist to work through her trauma. To such effect, a promising research could be a comparative study of Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* and Edward Kamau

Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* in which Hodge's narrative is readdressed by Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* that revises the role of traumatized migrants in collective change. Reading the trauma of shame in both narratives suggests that traumatic recovery is never complete. However, the impossibility of transcending the "acting-out" of trauma does not necessarily negate the healing potential in the "working-through" strategy. So, traumatized migrants may fail to entirely liberate themselves from the trauma of cultural disruption but they can still be agents of mobility.

Works Cited

- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Budden, Ashwin. "The Role of Shame in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Proposal for a Socio-Emotional Model for DSM-V." *Social Science and Medicine* 69 (2009): 1032-1039.
- Carsrud, Alan L., and Malin Brännback, eds. *Understanding the Entrepreneurial Mind: Opening the Black Box*. London: Springer, 2009.
- Drabkova, Alena. *The Characters of Women in Caribbean Literature*. Brno: Masaryk, 2011.
- Fannon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove, 1952.
- Gikandi, Simon. "Narration in the Post-Colonial Moment: Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey*." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 20.4 (1989): 18-30.
- Gilbert, Paul. "Evolution, Social Roles, and the Differences in Shame and Guilt." *Social Research* 70 (2003): 1205-1230.
- Hodge, Merle. *Crick Crack, Monkey*. London: Heinemann, 1970.
- Huddart, David. *Homi K. Bhabha*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Innes, C. L. *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.
- LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000.
- Lamming, George. *The Pleasures of Exile*. 1972. London: Allison, 1984. Print.
- Leseur, Geta. "One Mother, Two Daughters: the Afro-American and the Afro- Caribbean Female Bildungsroman." *The Black Scholar* 17.2 (1986): 26-33.
- Ngũgĩ, wa T. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: J. Currey, 1986.
- Van der Kolk, Bessel. "The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma: Re- Enactment, Revictimization, and Masochism." *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 12.2 (1989): 389 - 411.