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Dr. Linda Smith
Assistant Professor,
Department of English, College
of Liberal Arts and Social
Sciences Orville E. Kean,
Campus University of the
Virgin Islands St. Thomas, U.S
Virgin Islands 00802

The Role of Hegemonic Oppression in Contributing to Male Absenteeism, Gangster Culture and Violence in Jamaica and Neighboring Caribbean Islands: Reflections in Collin Channer's work: *Providential*

Dr. Linda Smith

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Abstract

Male Absenteeism remains a lingering problem in various Caribbean islands. The researcher has observed the crippling effects of the same on scores of Caribbean youth and senses that it is high time as a region, people of the Caribbean pay closer attention to some of the challenges that plague our youth such as gangster culture and violence, and firmly believes that we can collectively attempt to identify creative ways of lessening the incidence of male absenteeism, gangster culture and violence in our local communities. One creative way to address the problem of male absenteeism is to tackle it from the source- and tap into the critical tools of empire such as history, statehood and economy for example, in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of some of the societal complexities that characterize empire. Likewise, in analyzing Collin Channer's work *Providential*, it was discovered that the prevailing themes in several of his poems address the effects of hegemony, colonial oppression, material exploitation, injustice and the accompanying insidious forms of violence that remain an integral part and parcel of colonial society. This article seeks to address issues that stem from the same.

Keywords: Male absenteeism, hegemony, statehood, exploitation, gangster culture, violence

Introduction

Hegemonic power structures seem to have left an indelible imprint on Afro-Caribbean men. Collin Channer, the author of *Providential* focuses on the violence of Jamaican males and the underlying reasons for this violence, in his native hometown of Jamaica. To demonstrate how hegemony has negatively influenced Jamaican fathers in Channer's work: *Providential*, I will refer to the following poems: *Mimic*, *Occupation* and *Providential*.

To begin with, in Channer's poem: *Mimic* the prevailing theme is hegemonic oppression and how male violence and violence in general, is directly tied to that oppression. At the beginning of the poem, the speaker sits with his son watching a documentary with his son and states: "He was born with the ears of a mimic, a tight connect between what makes a sound and how to counterfeit it, make it feel authentic near its place of birth." (lines 23-26) Then further on in the poem, the speaker turns to his son and notes: "We shouldn't joke too much about this awful war and blah blah on about this country founded on the coast of Guinea by ex-chattel."

(Lines 61-66) And in lines 94 to 104 of the poem Channer's speaker indicates that the confessor's to the war he mentions above, are clan to killers on an island he knows and the nicknames from the news and movies, Rambo, Bin Laden, the Loafers, designer jeans and polo shirts worn loose, all discuss a slaughter with ease, by rote. Here, Channer refers to the insidious nature of the hegemony and how scores of young men easily fall prey to the socially driven ideals.

Thus, criminal activity and violence can result. Oftentimes, young Jamaican and countless other males are desperate to acquire the material possessions. Likewise, they would steal or kill- even if it is the last thing they do. They might wish to feel important and be recognized as a part of the popular crowd.

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Linda Smith
Assistant Professor,
Department of English, College
of Liberal Arts and Social
Sciences Orville E. Kean,
Campus University of the
Virgin Islands St. Thomas, U.S
Virgin Islands, United States

Equally important, in Channer's poem: *Occupation* the speaker touches on male migration from Jamaica, and he depicts how violence could also be tied to migration. He notes the push and pull factors of migration to the United States for example, and how a majority of Jamaican males are "scarred in ways they did not know." To qualify this statement, the Jamaican males unconsciously, conform to the insidious societal norms which could result in violence and criminal activity, if they are not able to acquire the socially-espoused possessions. Sadly, it is a critical mass of oppressed males, who value material possessions and are more often than not, hell-bound to acquire the same. Furthermore, material possessions do not come without consequences. For example, violence and criminal activity accompany materialism. The following quote exemplifies the latter view:

Working class, dark, and ambitious, but scarred in ways he didn't know, he saw the country as a Canan, land of sweet promise with a flag, an anthem, and not to be discounted, the ska, clean pop played by qualified sheet readers, black men from humble backgrounds dressed in loafers, ties, and suits. (lines 5-12)

In like fashion, the speaker of Channer's poem: *Occupation* further attests to the connection between materialism and violence in Jamaica: "Run for cover, run for cover, Rebel is taking over." (Lines 49-50) Of equal note, in Channer's poem: *Providential* the speaker seems to believe that violence among Jamaican males is built on old foundations of violence. As an instance in point, the speaker notes: "There but not there. Always there but never present. Where modern murder is considered different from the older kind-the kind enacted by Brits in red jackets, dunce militias put together by Creoles, before a new black order. 1860's: full-time paid police." (Lines 45-51) Again, one notices how historically and culturally engrained are the various forms of violence, displayed by Jamaican and other Caribbean men of color. It would seem that violence is part and parcel of the systems of the Colonial Project under which Jamaican males exist. The Jamaican males appear to learn as they live and imitate the socially-driven behavioral tendencies. Furthermore, Frantz Fanon in his book: *The Wretched of the Earth* attributes the violence displayed by Martiniquian males to the bigger social problem. (Fanon) Equally important, Paulo Freire indicates how owing to hegemonic control "people are dehumanized, and they mirror the images of the oppressor" in his text: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. By extension, Derek Walcott, a Caribbean writer, artist and poet highlights the critical role that hegemony plays in the colouring our various challenges as a Caribbean region. Accordingly, he writes: Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs? Where is your tribal memory? (lines 1-3) in his classic work: *The Sea is History*. In brief, hegemonic power structures are craftily designed and they continue to function like the trickster and "Beast," In the same vein, Esther Phillip's alludes to the trickster and societal "Beast" in her poem: *A Birthday Present to Cuba*. Hence, the violence referred to in Collin Channer's texts: *Mimic*, *Occupation*, and *Providential* speaks to the heavily institutionalized hegemony and the crippling and lasting effects of that hegemony (such as violence, criminal activity, and male absenteeism) on the masses of oppressed people in Jamaica, and in other colonized and formerly colonized spaces. In essence, the violence among males in Jamaican society appears to be a by-product of the patriarchal system that has been designed to dispossess,

displace and control Caliban's natives. The poems identified and some of the prevailing themes described underscore critical aspects of the material culture that scores of young men worship and would die for. To access the material possessions, not only the young men, but myriads of women and men would go to extreme lengths. Sadly, the disturbing part is that meanwhile it is a personal choice for one to do what one chooses with one's income- scores of misguided youth are consumed by the said material culture and some of their lives are cut short. Admittedly, since the youth in the Caribbean and elsewhere wish to acquire material possessions immediately and easily, as stated, the easiest consideration is to steal or likewise, engage in the illicit drug trade that leads to graver problems such as murder and incarceration. In response to the latter observation, one should consider that when one's neighbor's house is on fire, one's house can easily catch fire and burn to cinders as well. Along this latter line, is the fact that as individuals here in the Caribbean we tend to trivialize disturbances in the outside world without considering the ripple effects of these disturbances on our local region and islands. Might one require a more classic example than the decades old rancor between the Israelis and the Palestinians that led to the ongoing Gaza Strip War, where thousands of innocent lives including children continue to be lost? Are world leaders seeing this war as a global state of emergency? Are they considering that war begets war? Have they reached a decision to call for an end to this Gazan Strip War? Or will world leaders let indifference and the thirst for materialism continue to prevail and the wounds of Greed, Possession and Power over other humans continue to prevail? Or will they [World leaders] see it fit to become more humanistic and selfless leaders and thus- release the youth from the chains of insidious, structural discrimination and othering that keeps people divided and dehumanized? In essence, it is understandings of this nature that could place our youth on a path to individual liberty and authentic empowerment. As a result of our nonchalant attitudes, more and more of our problems remain unaddressed and the pandemic of materialism consumes us. Thus, greater attention should be given to our youth and people in general. More specifically, our youth should be taught to value people over material possessions, if we are to witness a shift in materialistic attitudes, a steady decline in hypocrisy, a sharp decline in criminal acts involving material possessions and in the same vein- drug possession and abuse that are connected to the espousal of materialism. Finally, Collin Channer's poems are instructive for Caribbean youth in Jamaica, neighboring islands and the world society at large- since our purpose in life should not be to become slaves, who help to perpetuate the exploitive system of Patriarchy, but rather laborers, champions and change agents for world peace, justice, equality, and harmony.

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