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Cartographies of Class: Spatial Dynamics of Postcolonial Caribbean Landscape in George Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin

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Abstract
In the Castle of My Skin by George Lamming is a novel that deals with dynamics of spatiality and social class within the Caribbean postcolonial society, particularly in Barbados. This paper is focused on dealing with the spatial arrangements set in the novel in relation to the colonial power structures it symbolizes, to see how they reflect and reinforce class hierarchies. To Lamming, it is in this sense that the village itself becomes an ensemble of colonial society, where domination of land and space is constantly conjoined with all kinds of physical and symbolic power. From theory on spatiality, this paper will thus examine the crossing and intersection of race, class, and colonialism within the construction of social order as incited by Lamming's work.

Key Words: In the Castle of My Skin, spatiality, social class, Caribbean postcolonial society, George Lamming.

1. INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of space and class are a critical aspect in the understanding of postcolonial Caribbean society. George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) determine the social, political, and cultural systems of the Caribbean. In the wake of colonial rule Lamming's work was written, with the profound legacies of colonialism intertwined with the organization of space and the hierarchies of class that emerge during and after colonialism. Set in a small Barbadian village, this novel is located within the life of its protagonist, G., whom we meet from early childhood to adolescence. In so doing, this private and intimate lens shows the reader how space and class operate simultaneously to define identity, social relations, and historical consciousness in the Caribbean. This is a narrative of transition in Barbados, as it moves from colonialism to an emerging postcolonial consciousness. It explores the tensions of colonialism and postcoloniality along its economic, political, and cultural lines, with class dominating the social construction of this transitional phase. At the heart of the story is how the postcolonial subject negotiates the space created by physical, social, and psychological configurations, and how such relations of space reproduce or resist class divisions in the Caribbean. *In the Castle of My Skin* is fixated on the legacy of colonialism that had structured not only economic and political life but also people's understanding of their place in the world.

Spatiality is the ways in which space is constructed, organized, and experienced by individuals and groups. Both the physical spaces people occupy and the symbolic ones which bring into view relations of power and identity. Spatiality in the postcolonial context involves how colonial powers used geography to control populations and how its legacy continues to affect postcolonial societies. The village, in Lamming's eyes, is a microcosm of greater forces at play, and every space in the novel such as the school, the beach, the plantation is a multi-layered meaning of power, resistance, and social mobility. Class is a stratification system of social categorization according to socioeconomic status, the distribution of resources, and cultural capital. In the postcolonial Caribbean, the class structures were strongly marked by the racial and economic hierarchies. The plantation economy established rigid class structures that placed landowners and colonial administrators at the pinnacle while the labour force, which was nearly exclusively Afro-Caribbean, formed the bottom rung. These class structures did not dissipate into thin air once the colonial regime came to an end but, rather, adapted and survived in new guises, deeply influencing identity and power relations in postcolonial Caribbean societies.

Postcolonial theory is essential in critically looking at the social and spatial dimensions in Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*. It analyses how the legacies of colonialism influence cultures, societies, and identities as well, particularly concerning matters of race, class, and power. Edward Said's concept of "othering" and Homi Bhabha's notion of "hybridity" are important concepts to use while establishing how Lamming constructs identity within the colonial spatial forms. Especially in the negotiating confluence of colonial physical and social spaces, this novel delves into the identity negotiations of the most subordinated classes of colonial subjects. Another useful axis for study is the work on the psychology of colonialism by Frantz Fanon, especially in his classic *Black Skin, White Masks*. There Fanon dealt with how colonialism affects the consciousness of colonized subjects, including how they perceive themselves as living in a racially and socially ordered world. The discussion of Fanon's works with how colonized subjects take in inferiority and becomes an obvious aspect of Lamming's use of psychic impact of the spatial divisions by colonialism on his characters. Marxist literary criticism, based on the stress by economic structures and class struggle on the development of society, also provides a very important view in the discussion of the novel. Lamming's novel has portrayed the exploitation of lower classes and the enormous gaps between the wealthy planters and the working class. This novel could be read through the lens of Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony," which suggests the way in which the ruling class maintains power through institutions of culture. In the context of the Caribbean, the plantation "is not simply a physical space of economic and cultural domination, but a more than symbolic space of power that continues to operate after colonial rule has ostensibly ended." This hegemony is what Lamming's portrayal of class struggles in Barbados, where former slaves and their descendants are bound to the land and its limitations of economic availability, reflects.

Spatial theory is developed by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, is a means of ascertaining how space is not neutral but produced by social relations. Lefebvre contends that the space is a social construct and closely related to power, thereby ensuring that hegemonic forces control that space. This tenet can be conveniently applied to what Lamming has addressed through his accounts of colonial and post-colonial space in Barbados. The plantation fits well as a symbol of continued colonial power and the village as a more ambiguous space where resistance, just like social mobility, is going to be complex but possible. Michel Foucault's reflections on power and space provide further theoretical ground to understand the spatial politics in the novel. Foucault's concept of "heterotopia" is domains that exist outside the norms of societal order, places of alternative social realities that can emerge. The village, as Lamming depicts it, is a space of oppression and possibility - a heterotopia in which the traditional colonial power structures are legitimized, yet where the moments of resistance and self-definition take place, too. In the Caribbean context, space and class are thus so deeply entwined with the legacies of slavery and colonialism. The plantation system, which mapped labour and land to optimize profit-making for European colonizers, has left a jagged imprint in Caribbean societies. In fact, many of the postcolonial texts are an attempt to reflect on and discuss the recovery of space from its colonial past and the very anomalies of the intricate class structure that continues to exist to date. For George Lamming, the colonial spatial forms of Barbados both physical and social ones are still embedded in the texture of his characters' lives long after formal colonial rule is terminated. In the context of looking at the intersections between spatiality and class, *In the Castle of My Skin* offers a sharp meditation on the lasting legacy of colonialism in the Caribbean. But the spatiality of the novel has, more importantly, actually conceived in it such psychological and social boundaries that restrict the characters' identities and opportunities.

2. SPATIAL BOUNDARIES AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

It is within this light that George Lamming voices a deeply nuanced account of spatial boundaries and class consciousness, related to the conceptual understanding of postcolonial Caribbean society. This incorporation of space in the village and the plantation demonstrates how these physical boundaries could be synonymous with, or even reify, the existing social divisions and class structure. Spatial boundaries are manifestations of the social and economic orders within the lives of the villagers. Even the social stratification and rigid lack of mobility within the Caribbean society is further exemplified by the precarious housing and narrow, muddy roads of the village itself. Lamming continues,

> "The village was a marvel of small, heaped houses raised jauntily on groundsels of limestone… Sometimes the roads disintegrated, the limestone slid back and the houses advanced across their boundaries." *(Lamming, 2016: 4)*

This imagery of falling boundaries refers to the instability of the villagers' lives and fluidity in social roles within the marginalized lower class yet also that their material conditions are somewhat restricted and fragmented. The landlord's mansion is located on a hill, marked by stone walls with broken glass on top, which represents the solidified power of the colonial elite. This spatial elevation replicates the social elevation of the landlord's class, physically as well as symbolically estranging them from the villagers. When the landlord is about, especially when the flood comes, it tells us how spatial separation fortifies class awareness. Lamming was to describe how the landlord surveys his village as he sits atop his hill, distancing the ruling class from their subordinate in so literal and figurative a manner. This is in keeping with the overseers, themselves middlemen, representing the gulf

between the villagers and the absentee landlords. The overseers, being of lower social strata, become tyrants over their peers, the villagers, thereby manifesting how social class oppression cuts across all levels: "low-down nigger people was a special phrase the overseers had coined." On the other hand, the ways in which the villagers internalize the perceptions of the colonial ruling class do raise class consciousness. They assume the language and attitudes of their oppressors, so they achieve a fractured sense of self-worth and community. Lamming looks at how the villagers start to understand themselves as defined by the overseers and land-lords, which maintains the cycle of self-doubt and inferiority:

> "My people are low-down nigger people... Not taking chances with you people, my people. They always let you down." *(Lamming, 2016: 22)*

Internalizing colonial ideology goes on to further hint at villagers' inability to transcend their social standing, coming to believe in their inferiority because of the corruptions by the colonialist. The village, as the space, is both the setting and metaphor for a kind of social imprisonment that is likened to the vast gulf between the classes. The landlord's estate, described as a "castle around which the land like a shabby back garden stretched" underlines the spatial separation between the ruling class and the villagers. This picture of the landlord's house towering above the village symbolizes the social and economic domination of the white elite; the houses of villagers, usually flooded and in bad condition, reflected their subordination and limited movement within this spatial and social order. Class consciousness in the novel is heightened also with the internalization by the villagers of the overseer's "language of authority" which strengthens the submission tendency. Lamming has shown that the villagers are aware of their position in the social ladder but cannot break free from the precarious position they hold. For instance, in the story, a repose reflection by the narrator relates how the villagers "accepted instinctively that the others, meaning the white, were superior, yet there was always the fear of realizing that it might be true" *(Lamming, 2016: 22).* Such truth is created by indoctrination of many years of colonialism; thus, there is not enough power to challenge the structures of confinement. Moreover, how the landlord's light stipulates the rhythms of the village indicates his tenacious power over their lives. The villagers watch when "the landlord's light had been put out" and they ought to go to sleep too as if waiting for the nodding of the colonizers for them to take out even the most mundane activities of life. This spatial dynamic extends to the educational system, as the High School readies these young boys for certain roles that sustain the colonial order and detach them from their peers in the village. Here, a protagonist, G., comes between that other world of the village and that other promise of upward mobility offered through education. But such promise is fraught with contradiction. And as the boys grow older, they either have to side with colonial authority, like some of them do by becoming policemen, or emigrate to places like America for new vistas, a testament to what kind of spatial and social dislocation has come into their lives through colonialism.

3. HIERARCHIES AND SPACE AS A MICROCOSM OF COLONIAL ORDER

Hierarchies and space are presented as microcosms of colonial order, primarily in the postcolonial Caribbean society and its present date through the lens of social class. The village is portrayed here in space as a communal living organism, echoing the physical presence of colonialism and the psychological effects that are cemented in class-based discrepancies within the social framework. The relationship between the villagers and the landlord also has spatial hierarchies. The landlord's house atop the hill is a physical embodiment of the power exercised in the context of colonialism and class difference. The villagers, however, live in cramped houses that are badly kept up and whose "advanced across their boundaries to meet those on the opposite side in an embrace of board and shingle and cactus fence" *(Lamming, 2016: 4).* It follows the general colonial structure, in which the headman - the surrogate landlord stands above the villagers in terms of social and economic status. The headman overseers give last backing to the colonial order while doing their intermediary work between the landlord and the villagers. Their power should mirror the colonial control, and their aggressive style towards the villagers only reinforces power balances. Lamming highlights this tension by saying,

> "The overseers carried bunches of keys strung on wire which they chimed continually to warn the villagers of their approach." *(Lamming, 2016: 21)*

This control of space symbolizes the wider colonial strategy where surveillance is often paired with domination through the regulation of space for social order. Lamming further elaborates how these spatial hierarchies fracture the black community from within. Internalization of colonial attitudes creates a fractured consciousness where the villagers have lived with suspicion and hostility for each other. This reminds one of how, through such an internalized colonial thinking, social classes get well-grounded where the people start identifying themselves with the elementary view of the colonial oppressor.

With a detail study of postcolonial theory, mainly with the works of Frantz Fanon, we learn how colonization has disrupted the social and spatial identities in colonized culture. For this purpose, "space" in Lamming is not merely a physical concept but rather a psychological aspect, where colonialism inflects the identity of the villagers and the social standing of the inhabitants of the village. In fact, Fanon's notion of the "inferiority complex" for the colonized people is identified in the way villagers speak and conduct themselves. Mimicking the language and culture of the colonial ruler helps them to hold a semblance of order *(Fanon, 1967)*.

Lamming's work places space as a microcosm of colonial order where hierarchical structures are maintained through both physical and psychological control. Again, the village, a consolidation of spatial divisions and social stratification within it is analogous to the outer colonial system perpetuating the class distinctions and internalized oppression in the postcolonial Caribbean society.

4. SPATIAL DYNAMICS, CLASS, AND ASPECTS OF DECOLONISATION

The novel intricately interweaves space with aspects of decolonization and portrays the physical and psychological landscapes based on colonial history. Thus, Lamming depicts a society very fragmented along class lines with these divisions deeply influenced by colonial legacies. The novel's focus on space, both geographic and social, elicits insights regarding how and under what vestiges of colonialism's residue stick in the consciousness and identities of people. The Caribbean village is therefore an enlarged microcosm of colonial power structures, thereby giving the spaces in it, such as the school and the plantation, symbolic meanings. Thus, the very physical spaces are a testament to the intangible but enduring power of colonial institutions in postcolonial society. For example, the village is a space of communal life which nevertheless remains overshadowed by the landlord's presence - a symbol of colonial dominance. That image of Africa as a shadow that "broods" over the landscape underscores the weight of colonial history, as well as the collective trauma of slavery and the Middle Passage haunting the villagers. This concept of space as a site of resistance and oppression further comes through in the articulation of the school in the novel. In the novel, the school is a colonial institution wherein the colonized people were brought under the rigors of European norms and values. In the process, rather than just teaching academic subjects, the school instils in its students a colonial worldview, imposing a hierarchical conception of race and class. The process is critiqued here in how the characters, especially the boys in school, begin to be aware of the shackles imposed on them by colonial education. Their social mobility is restricted since the High School is, in effect, a school for clerks' and professionals' children and village boys are channelled into trades. This separation is an outfall of the colonial mentality of space and social separation, which has powerfully influenced even the postcolonial Caribbean society.

Class, therefore is closely tied to colonial legacies in the novel. Even when the island heads toward decolonization, the rigid class society that defined the colonial period does not lose its weight on characters' lives. It is the critique of how Lamming's narrative cuts across such as way of continuous continuation of structures that education and land ownership have taken and how colonial values have been turned inward. As an example, education is one of the major tools used in maintaining class divisions. The school in the village does this by teaching its pupils how to fit into subservient roles, while the high school remains a space for the elite's sons. Lamming attacks this system of education, which formed a "steeplechase" wherein the students were made to jump over different hurdles and in the process channelled them into different levels of social spheres:

> "Education was not a continuous process. It was a kind of steeplechase in which the contestants had to take different hurdles." *(Lamming, 2016: 213)*

This imagery of the steeplechase brings forward the themes of hardness and impenetrability of upward social mobility for the masses of the black people. Furthermore, Lamming depicts the creation of fractured consciousness among the blacks through colonialism. The characters often tend to see one another from behind the lens of the oppressor, perpetuating divisions based on class and fuelling self-hatred. The villagers take the language of the colonizer, and blaming their race and class for their lack of success. This internalized colonial mentality perpetuates the socio-economic cleavages even after the physical existence of the colonial powers has become a recess.

Decolonization in the novel is depicted as a process that is not only imperfect but complex. Although political independence may well seem to afford the possibility of liberation, Lamming is at pains to emphasize that the psychological and social effects of colonialism are long-lasting. People continue to be in the shade of colonial legacies within class divisions and an internalized sense of inferiority amongst the black people. Such a picture of decolonization failure in a novel is highly important, for it brings forth the fact that political change is not enough without deep cuts into the psychological damage and social imbalances that occurred because of colonialism. Trumper, returning from America with the new sense of racial consciousness is symbolic of the possibility of postcolonial identity free from the constraints of colonialism, in the sense that there will be a projection and development beyond imposed limitations. Trumper's claim, "you become a Negro like me" tells of the dawning realization of a universal blackness around the globe, that unites African diaspora struggles globally. However, coming back proves to be disillusioning too, because that's where the structures of oppression, deep and well-entrenched in Barbadian society. That is, Laming's description ends on the critical note against the shallowly decolonized system, leaving inside its way intact colonial structures of power and inequality. The ongoing struggles of the postcolonial Caribbean society to overcome its legacies of colonialism are revealed through the portrayal of spatial dynamics and social class in the novel. True decolonization requires not only political independence but also a restructuring of society's spatial and social hierarchies. In the novel, George Lamming uses such spatial dynamics and social class concerns to explore the relative complexity of decolonization in the postcolonial Caribbean. The novel reveals how colonial spatial arrangements and social

hierarchies are perhaps not even displaced by island-based movements of independence. Through the portrait of the village and its people, Lamming critiques the incipient incompleteness of decolonization, focusing on the necessity of a much deeper psychological and social transformation that would accompany political change.

5. CONCLUSION

George Lamming poignantly explores how spatiality and social class intersect within a postcolonial Caribbean society. The novel portrays the village as both a literal and symbolic space, representing a microcosm of the larger colonial and postcolonial dynamics in Barbados. The physical landscape of the village - its small houses, marl roads, and the estate on the hill - serves as a spatial manifestation of class hierarchies, where the villagers live in proximity but remain distanced from the white landlords and the wealth they represent. The village itself is portrayed as a tightly-knit, communal space, but one constantly under the scrutiny of external forces. The villagers' lives are shaped by the oversight of landlords and overseers, who enforce a system that defines their social and economic roles. As Lamming describes, "the village functions both as place and symbol of an entire way of life." where the villagers' spatial reality is inseparable from their subjugation under colonial power. The presence of the landlord's house, positioned high on the hill overlooking the village, symbolizes the social distance and economic power that separates the wealthy from the impoverished masses.

Lamming illustrates how class tensions are intricately tied to this spatial arrangement. The overseers, drawn from the villagers themselves, act as intermediaries between the landlord and the villagers, enforcing social hierarchies within the community. These overseers, though part of the village, occupy a liminal space between the landlord and the villagers, reflecting the fragmented social structure of postcolonial society. Spatiality in the novel is also linked to displacement and migration. The villagers' desire for better opportunities abroad - whether in England or America - reflects their struggle to escape the confined spaces of colonialism. Trumper's return from the United States with a newfound sense of racial identity underscores the global dimensions of spatiality, as characters grapple with their place within both local and international systems of power and identity. Ultimately, Lamming's depiction of space and class in this novel serve as a critique of the colonial legacy, where the physical and social landscapes are shaped by historical forces of domination, exclusion, and resistance. Through his exploration of the village, Lamming reveals how spatiality and class continue to define the postcolonial Caribbean experience.

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