



On Colonialism and Deprivation in Colonial British Guiana: The Relationship Between the Immigrant Ramgolall and His Canister of Savings in Edgar Mittelholzer's *Corentyne Thunder*

Enderson Monteiro do Nascimento and Adriana Helena Albano*

Universidade Federal de Roraima, Avenida Capitão Ené Garcez, 2413, Bairro Aeroporto, 69310-000, Boa Vista, Roraima, Brasil. *Author for correspondence. Email: drikaalbano@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT. This research investigates processes related to European colonialism through the analysis of the Guyanese novel *Corentyne Thunder* (2009/1941) by Edgar Mittelholzer, with particular attention to the elements that portray the peasant life of its protagonist, Ramgolall, an old Indian immigrant and indentured laborer. The study sought to interpret Ramgolall's relationship with his past and with the money accumulated in his 'canister' over the course of his life, which has been marked by significant privations he imposed on himself and his family. To this end, the research draws on a theoretical framework on colonialism, primarily *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon, 2020), *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (Lomba, 2005), and *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Boehmer, 2005), as well as on studies of migration history in what was then British Guiana, such as *Aspects of Primitivism in the West Indian Novel of the 1930s* (Macintosh, 2008) and *Demographic Change in Nineteenth-Century Guyana* (Mcgowan, 2005). This framework allows for situating the Indian cow-minder's family within the broader social conditions of these immigrants after their years of indentured labor. The analysis reveals that Mittelholzer's novel, published under imperial license, articulates discussions that exceed the discursive control of colonialism by delving deep into the intimate and particular experiences of this family nucleus. In this confrontation, Ramgolall's obsessive accumulation of money in his 'canister' emerges as a fictional representation of the pathology of peripheral cultural identity in the face of oppression by a violent 'center', not through military means but through the symbolic paths of subalternity and silence.

Keywords: Literature; deterritorialization; immigration; empire; colony; Latin America.

Sobre o colonialismo e a privação na Guiana Britânica colonial: a relação entre o imigrante Ramgolall e seu cofrinho de economias em *Corentyne Thunder*, de Edgar Mittelholzer

RESUMO. A presente pesquisa versa sobre a investigação de processos relacionados ao colonialismo europeu a partir da análise narrativa do romance guianense *Corentyne Thunder* (2009/1941), de Edgar Mittelholzer, sobretudo, no que se refere aos elementos que caracterizam a vida rural do seu protagonista, o imigrante indiano e trabalhador indeture Ramgolall. O objetivo do trabalho consistiu na interpretação da relação entre Ramgolall, seu passado e o dinheiro acumulado em sua vasilha durante toda a vida, graças a significativas privações impostas por ele a si e à família. Para tanto, utilizamos aparato teórico sobre o colonialismo, principalmente, os textos *Pele negra, máscaras brancas* (Fanon, 2020), *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (Lomba, 2005), *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Boehmer, 2005) e sobre a história da migração na então Guiana Inglesa, *Aspects of Primitivism in the West Indian Novel of the 1930s* (Macintosh, 2008), *Demographic Change in nineteenth-century Guyana* (Mcgowan, 2005), a fim de construirmos um campo de inserção da família do vaqueiro indiano, assim como da condição social desses imigrantes após os anos de trabalho contratual. Da análise dessa conjuntura, foi possível perceber que o tecido textual da obra de Mittelholzer, uma produção sob licença imperial, articula discussões que transbordam o controle discursivo do colonialismo ao tocar no íntimo, no particular das vivências desse núcleo familiar. Nesse confronto, Ramgolall, em sua perseguição por acumulação financeira em sua vasilha, surge como representação ficcional que expõe a patologia da identidade cultural periférica frente à opressão de um centro violento, não por vias bélicas, mas pelas vias simbólicas da subalternidade e do silêncio.

Palavras-chave: Literatura; desterritorialização; imigração; império; colônia; América Latina.

Received on August 01, 2024.

Accepted on August 08, 2025.

Introduction

This is an article about the novel *Corentyne Thunder* (2009), written in English by Edgar Mittelholzer¹ and first published in 1941. The narrative depicts the conflicting colonial universe of what was then British Guiana, highlighting the subordinate spaces of immigrants. In this context, marks of ethnic and economic exclusion emerge, characterized by anguish and suffering in the context of cultural hybridity. Problems arising from the colonial model, such as submission, exploitation, rural commerce, conflicts of economic interest, and violence are depicted amidst manifestations of the cultural traditions brought by Indian, African, Chinese, and European migrants.

We understand the colonial model as a complex market system, a precursor to the current capitalist model. In this context, the production of *commodities* (basic raw materials, agricultural or otherwise, depending on demand, easily tradable in the global market) in the colonies became very profitable for the metropolises, while intense exploitation of bodies and lands in the dominated environment grew (Love, 2006).

The aim of this study is therefore to understand how it is possible to consider the main character of the novel as a mediator of conflicting relationships in the Guianese colonial scenario. Besides, it examines how this figure enters a changing game and brings forth the pathology of his relationship with money from this coloniality. Throughout the narrative, the ex-cane cutter is portrayed as a complete miser, unable to spend the money he earns and surviving on the minimum just to avoid starvation; everything he earns is deposited in his 'bowl.'

Ramgolall, a sixty-three-year-old dark-skinned, short, and thin cattleman, as he himself recounts, arrived in the colony in 1898, still in his youth, to work on *plantations* as a cane cutter under the contractual system used by the British Crown known as *Indenture* (a labor contract model). The narrative trajectory of this immigrant is portrayed within the Guianese colony, contrasting, in a complementary way, the rural (backward and wild) and urban (modern and civilized) spaces. In this way, we aim to reflect on the colonial world from the intimate and particular space of Ramgolall's Indian family, which, in the Guianese savannah, articulates, from the emerging voices of the periphery, "[...] the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 5). Ramgolall is an Indian immigrant, a landless peasant in a colonial world.

The *indenture* labor model to which the character was bound was very close to the regime of slavery (Mcgowan, 2005). Even though they were not officially slaves, the *indenture* workers lived under almost non-existent working conditions. The episodes of violence and humiliation recounted by Ramgolall—which will be seen ahead—point to this reality.

The range of socio-cultural constituents represented in the novel serves to shed light on problems previously obscured in 'traditional literatures.' The literary representation of the work, in terms of subjectivity and psychic suffering in Ramgolall, inevitably points to political issues such as colonialism, submission, and prejudice.

Thus, for the purposes of this research, we consider colonialism in its historical sense and action from the 15th century onwards: for us, colonialism consisted of a period of territorial and bodily conquests beyond Europe, initiated by the intense transoceanic displacements promoted by European empires five centuries ago (Boehmer, 2005). In these terms, it is possible, to some extent, to understand the colonialist practice as "[...] the conquest and control of other people's lands and goods" (Loomba, 2005, p. 8).

At the time of the novel's publication, however, the model of colonial occupation, of intense physical-territorial domination and exploitation—and of bodies, despite being widespread, was already in decline. Its political end, especially from the end of World War II, occurred through the processes of independence of European colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean.

Regarding criticism, through the lens of post-colonial thought related to literature, we understand that it is possible to not only re-read "[...] colonization as part of a global, transnational, and transcultural process—but [to produce] a decentralized, diasporic rewriting of the grand imperial narratives of the past, centered on the nation" (Leite, 2016, p. 66, our translation)². We consider that, in addition to offering new perspectives on the past, post-colonial studies, in their interdisciplinarity, also

¹ Edgar Mittelholzer is the son of an Afro-Caribbean mother and a European father. He was born in New Amsterdam, Guyana, in 1909. He is one of the few figures from that country to highlight the characteristics of the daily lives of immigrants through literature, a field he entered at a time when the aesthetic 'truth' was solely validated by the colonizer's perspective. He was one of the first Guyanese writers to achieve relative success and the first writer from that country and the Caribbean to establish himself as a professional writer (Mittelholzer, 2009). *Corentyne Thunder* (2009) stands out as one of the first Guyanese works to receive moderate acceptance and attention outside the country upon its publication. It was also the first local novel published in Europe without the help of European intermediaries.

² The original: [...] a colonização, como parte de um processo global, transnacional e transcultural – [produzindo] uma reescrita descentrada, diaspórica, das grandes narrativas imperiais do passado, centradas na nação.

allow us to see possibilities for understanding the continuous changes in the world through a process of reflection (Loomba, 2005).

Furthermore, taking this position as a focal point for discussion about the subaltern as a priority, Westmaas (2013, p. 121) argues that “*Corentyne Thunder* was thus a quietly revolutionary novel; giving humanity and voice to those who, in literature, had been [are] traditionally marginalized.” Within this field, in order to articulate the issues of subaltern and migrant identity in a colonial space, the books *The Wretched of the Earth* (2005), by Franz Fanon, for its deep insight into the relationship between oppressor and oppressed from the Caribbean scene, *The Location of Culture* (1994), by Homi Bhabha, for its intense reflection on literary and cultural productions originating from migrants, and *Orientalism* (1979), by Edward Said, will be of great value. The critical approaches brought by these texts illuminate important issues to question the condition of the Indian immigrant and worker within the regime of colonial relations.

Brief history

The English imperial presence in the colony displays its determining traits starting from the mid - 18th century, when colonial decisions promoted the beginning of agricultural development towards the regions of the Demerara River, motivated by the soil’s fertility and the river’s depth. The growth of plantations, especially sugar, was rapid, and by 1763 the English were already the majority of the population in Demerara. From this decade onwards, the development of this part of the colony surpassed that of Essequibo (Ishmael, 2013). Their presence intensified even more, especially after 1796, following the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789.

With the advance of English occupation in the Caribbean, the British presence increased considerably, resulting in the transportation of at least 1.9 million individuals to the colonies in this region of the American continent (Ishmael, 2013). Despite being small compared to the metropolis, the colony’s population grew at an accelerated pace, mainly due to the purchase of a large number of slaves.

Many of these slaves were purchased by new British settlers who had bought land and were seeking to extend coffee, cotton and sugar plantations. The higher prices being offered in Britain for these three commodities were an inducement to these settlers to seek to maximize production and profits through the acquisition of African slave labor (Mcgowan, 2005, p. 16).

The growth in the number of slaves began to decline from the end of the first decade of the 19th century. This was due to the end of the importation of slaves in 1807, influenced by the Industrial Revolution, as well as factors such as the low birth rate of the enslaved population and the high number of deaths.

In 1834, the legal abolition of slavery in the colony was proclaimed. However, slaves were subjected to forced labor for four to six years during a transition period called *apprenticeship*, which resulted in total abolition, at least administratively, in 1838 (Ishmael, 2013). The apprenticeship period was intended to prepare the settlers for the replacement of slave labor with another that adhered to the new anti-slavery rules (Mcgowan, 2005).

The *plantation* owners, especially of sugar cane, coffee, and cotton, adopted the system of importing workers known as *indenture*, a type of contract by which the immigrant “[...] was obliged to work for an employer for a period of three to five years, performing tasks designated by him for a specific salary” (Jain, 1990, p. 14). Additionally, the author adds, “At the end of the contract the immigrant was free to re-indenture or to work elsewhere in the colony; after ten years he was entitled to subsidized return passage” (Jain, 1990, p. 14). This contract model, which lasted officially for almost a century, ended in 1920.

It is at this point that Ramgolall’s journey to British Guiana begins to take shape, at the end of the 19th century, within the rules of the *indenture* system. Thus, we can observe that the transition from the slave system to the *indenture* system did not mark a change in terms of workers’ rights, even decades after its implementation. The *plantations*, run by slaves, remained the same after abolition, and *indenture* workers were seen as sub-workers during the contractual period.

In the context of intercontinental displacement of workers to British colonies, the “largest flow was of contracted workers from India. Between 1838 and 1917, more than 500 ships transported 238,909 migrants from India to British Guiana. Of these, 85% were Hindus and 15% were Muslims” (Husman, 2014, p. 31, our translation)³. In this context, “Guyana was the first British colony in the West Indies to receive Indian Indentured labours who began to arrive in 1838” (Jain, 1990, p. 15), a fact that decisively defined the

³ In the original: [...] maior fluxo era de trabalhadores contratados da Índia. Entre 1838 e 1917 mais de 500 navios transportaram 238,909 migrantes da Índia para a Guiana Inglesa. Desses, 85% eram Hindus e 15% eram Muçulmanos.

composition of the current population of Guiana, consisting of descendants of *indentured* Guianese as the majority ethnic group.

This is how Ramgolall arrives in British Guiana, which occurs at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. “He was an East Indian who arrived in British Guiana in 1888, as an immigrant indentured to a sugar estate” (Mittelholzer, 2009, p. 21). Additionally, “[...] his youth, the immigrant ship that had brought him from Calcutta... the five years of his indenture labour on the estate and the many years of voluntary labour that had followed” (Mittelholzer, 2009, p. 204) place him at the center of the history of the formation of this nation.

A large flow of goods and people was developing as never before, both towards the empires and towards the colonies. However, everything that was exploited returned to the metropolis. The colonies were the ‘midwives’ that enabled the birth of capitalism in Europe, and without them, this economic model would not have been possible on the old continent (Loomba, 2005).

Said (1979), in *Orientalism*, describes colonialism as a set of arrogant practices carried out in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We extend the author’s idea to colonialism as a period of territorial and bodily conquests beyond Europe initiated by the intense transoceanic displacements promoted by European empires five centuries ago (Boehmer, 2005). In these terms, one can, to some extent, understand the colonialist practice as ‘the conquest and control of other people’s lands and goods,’⁴ mainly based on the ideological conception of cultural superiority (Loomba, 2005).

The British colonial experience in India is an example, as Said (1979) addresses. Imperial political discussions argued for the Indian need and desire to be led. In this respect,

Beneficiaries of the system tended to laud colonialism as a virtual good and a harbinger of growth and development in the colonies. This is no surprise because by the late-nineteenth century racist views of the superiority of certain types of Europeans and the inferiority of other races had circulated and influenced the mindset, writings, and actions of colonial administrators and their business allies. Sceptics examined contemporary situations and considered colonialism a scourge of underdevelopment and the cause of continuous conflict in former colonies (Josiah, 2011, p. 24).

These nuances of English colonial domination over the Indian people imply understanding that the process does not end with the simple political end of colonialism. There are, in fact, economic and socio-cultural issues that persist in societies now considered free. In *Corentyne Thunder* (2009), the reality of colonialism is exposed through the events surrounding Ramgolall’s jar. The container holds elements that transcend the materiality of the saved coins, transcending into a political, humanistic, and historical questioning of the processes of degradation and conquest.

Ramgolall’s canister

The book *Corentyne Thunder* (2009) presents a narrative that exposes the corrosive social conditions of the Guianese colony, highlighting its characteristic incongruities. The novel centers on the family of Rangollal, with one part more aligned with the ideals of the colonizer (urban middle class), and another part living in the countryside, embodying a ‘primitivism’ (Macintosh, 2008, p. 38) that opposes the metropolis’s values. Rangollal serves as a voice for the consequences of domination over a former slave colony; he reflects the residual violence that plagues a place marked by the stratification of a multicultural society, a locale of multiple migrant voices in contact.

Our Indian character lives with his two daughters, Kattree and Beena, aged sixteen and eighteen, respectively, in a small mud hut located on a plot of land purchased with the proceeds of his work in the post-*indenture* rural context. “They lived... on the savannah and helped their father to mind the cows and keep the home” (Mittelholzer, 2009, p. 21). Land ownership for general activities was possible after the *indenture* period, provided the workers survived the terrible conditions they were subjected to.

Despite the modest fortune accumulated in the old canister over his lifetime, Ramgolall insists he is extremely poor. The money, the result of decades of savings since his youth, is kept in a tattered box, an old bowl tied with equally old rags. The character refuses to buy food; he spends the minimum necessary to avoid starvation. Even the milk produced on his farm is sold rather than consumed by him or his family. He refuses to spend on health, medicine, or clothing. He and his daughters wear only a few rags, barely enough to cover their private parts.

⁴ In a brief overview, the beginning of this practice can be situated with the navigations undertaken by the Kingdom of Portugal in the 15th century, along the coast of Africa, and the arrival of Portuguese ships at Madeira and the Azores. These discoveries sparked interest in the search for various maritime routes by kingdoms such as Spain, France, England, and the Netherlands, especially in the quest to promote profitable trade in Asian products, particularly with India. The experiences gained, combined with the rediscovery of ancient Greco-Latin texts in mathematics, geography, and astronomy, which had been lost since the fall of Rome, propelled the evolution of maritime technologies. This, in turn, led to transformations in geographical and scientific knowledge as a whole (Love, 2006).

In stark contrast to this reality, not far away lives Sosee, Ramgolall's eldest daughter, married to James Weldon, the Big Man, with whom she had seven children. As an Indian wife, her life is marked by various impositions, verbal insults, and authoritarian control. In the home, she plays the role of a mere servant.

Big Man, a white man of European descent born in the colony, is the wealthy son-in-law of the old herdsman, overseeing the *plantations* and colonial enterprises. He was a *settler*, a European or descendant born in the colony, who wielded power over many slaves and other subordinates (Ashcroft & Kadhim, 2001; Ashcroft et al., 2007). His lineage continued the tradition,

'Go at once and give that message'... 'Yes, Big Man'... 'And come back here within two minutes'... 'Yes, Big Man'... She hurries out... and was back within a very short time. 'Sit down', Big Man ordered her', and she sat down, breathing hard still from her exertions up and down the stairs... 'Sosee you're keeping my house in a filth condition. I've spoken to you about it before... the next thing I'm going to do is to kick you out and get someone who can keep the place clean and not like a dammed pigsty' (Mittelholzer, 2009, p. 45, grifos do autor)

In this excerpt, we see a microcosm of the relationship between cultures in action: the dominant colonizer and the submissive Indian. Big Man makes it clear that he owns everything; his wife Sosee, far from being part of the family, is disposable.

The rural (backward and savage) and urban (modern and civilized) spaces construct two worlds. In one, subjects are dehumanized, backward, exploited, and their rights are not guaranteed; in the other, they are wealthy and exploit others, having all the rights to do so. Thus, as Lindsay (2014) suggests, the dichotomy is a fundamental characteristic of the work. For the theorist, *Corentyne Thunder* is an important book not only as Mittelholzer's first novel and the first to describe rural life in Guyana but also for its depiction of this duality,

There are other important themes in the book, but the main impulse is towards a dichotomy. Two ways of life, two opposing attitudes, are constantly juxtaposed: Urban is contrasted with rural, 'European' with 'West Indian', 'foreign' with 'local', 'intellectual' with 'physical'. This is, in turn, related to the theme of cultural and psychic division which informs most of Mittelholzer's work. (Lindsay, 2014, p. 16, grifos do autor).

Toward the end of the novel, Ramgolall is robbed by Beena, one of his daughters living in the hut. The young woman, in love with Jannee, her married neighbor and an Indian farmer, decides to steal all of her father's money to pay for a lawyer to prevent her beloved from being hanged for murder. Jannee is acquitted, thanks to Mr. Burlock, a capital's lawyer. By a twist of fate, on the same day, Ramgolall, who had not gone to work, decides to review his old bowl in a rare and enjoyable counting of his 'treasure.' Upon discovering the theft, he suffers a heart attack and dies.

This outcome reveals that the contradictions of the colonial space represented through the psychological and social experience of the immigrant are unveiled through the events surrounding Ramgolall's bowl. Relating the bowl to the subjectivity of its owner reveals traces of incompleteness, suspicion, alienation, and death.

These traces are perceived throughout the novel through the description of the Indian Ramgolall's thoughts and precarious way of life, his extreme avarice,

One day, during the second week of his illness, Beena went to a pharmacy in Speyerfeld... the attendant, a black man... showed her a bottle of... tonic... The price was thirty-six cents... When she brought the bottle home and showed it to Ramgolall, he began a flood of lamentations. 'Oh, dear! You've wasted my money! I don't want any tonic! Oh! Oh my God! The guy robbed you! Oh! Oh, dear!' (Mittelholzer, 2009, p. 141).

Ramgolall's attitude toward money shows both attachment and desperation. Not even physical illness justifies spending any of the money saved in the bowl. This greed reflects a desire to preserve his growing wealth as an extension of his physical body, overriding any material, biological, or social needs. Similarly, the colonial enterprise cannot be conceived apart from the power and control it exerts over the colonies.

One day, during the second week of his illness, Beena went into a drugstore... the dispenser, a short black gentleman,... showed her a bottle of a... tonic... The price was thirty-six cents... When she took it home and told Ramgolall, he set up a great wail. 'Ow, bettay! You t'how 'way me money! Me na want na tonic! Ow! Ow me gaad! De man rob you! Ow! Ow, bettay! Me good amoney gone!... me na drink am. Teka m back, get back de money!... For the rest of that afternoon and throughout the whole night, Ramgolall wailed and cried, actually shedding tears. He beats his fists and head against the side of the canister. 'Ow! Ow! Me bettay t'row 'way me Money!' (Mittelholzer, 2009, p. 141).

The passage describes the episode when Ramgolall falls ill with malaria. His suffering over the money is hyperbolic, just as is the material misery he endures. The coins have a value beyond themselves. In this episode and in Ramgolall's death, we see the impossibility of separating Ramgolall from his bowl. The material

separation culminates in the mutual annihilation symbolized by the intertwining of subjectivity and money. This is the story, the memory, the *bio* of the Indian, for Marx (1988), money is a product of labor and represents it in an abstract form; Ramgolall's existence thus comes to be defined by this. His humanity was subtracted,

The authorized stay of the immigrant is entirely dependent on labor, the only reason for his existence is labor [...]. It was labor that made the immigrant 'born,' that made him exist; it is labor that, when it ends, makes the immigrant 'die,' decreeing his negation or pushing him to non-being (Sayad, 1998, p. 54, ,grifos do autor).

With the advent of money, human relationships become economic relations, as money represents the constituents of social relations that "[...] originate from the stomach or from fantasy" (Marx, 1988, p. 45). In Rangollal's case, this origin is closer to 'fantasy,' as it has become a pathology. For him, as Freud (1996) expresses, money is not an object of exchange for satisfying a desire or a lack. Money itself is the commodity, the fetish, and not an object of exchange, it is itself in lack of itself.

Depersonalization and invisibility impose a void on subjectivity. Feeding the bowl with more money also nurtures a subjectivity formed by pathology, transferring economic value to self-worth as a historical subject; a form of alienation that, after extensive loss and humiliation, found a way to continue living. "He crunched there for a time, looking at the fat bundles, looking at them and smiling a smile of memory, for he had had to work very hard for the money in these bundles" (Mittelholzer, 2009, pp. 42-43).

The migrant submits to this dual reality of colonial opportunity and the simultaneous devaluation of his own identity and culture,

The rain had soaked him and the sun had dried him. He had walked knee-deep in the mud, surrounded by clouds of mosquitoes. The ague of malaria had shaken him, and the fever had scorched him so that his anguished brain dreamt weird visions. Angry shouts from the overseers he had borne without a murmured word, without a frown. He had nearly been beaten to death in a riot when the labourers went on strike. Many had been shot by the police, many had been wounded (Mittelholzer, 2009, p. 42-43).

In nineteenth-century India, "A wide array of social and economic deprivations drove villagers from home. The practice of imperial capitalism destroyed traditional livelihoods" (Bahadur, 2014, p. 25). In brief practical terms, we see that the great migration of Indians was driven by factors of imposition and socioeconomic degradation in various British colonial spaces in India.

As observed in Ramgolall, the results of dehumanization, repression, atrocities, and inferiority served to reinforce power over others, diminishing resistance and increasing unilateral profit. The history of deprivation and anxiety over money experienced by the Indian herdsman created a context of fear of lack, endowing his coins with a symbolic value of security and comfort for the mind, but not for the body, which, ravaged, no longer held any significance.

Ramgolall's journey exposes, at its core, the story of the marginalized and reveals, at the heart of subjectivity, the repetition and continuity of the hierarchy imposed by colonial power, deepening the social critique of the conditions of Indians under British colonial rule both within and outside their homeland.

To him at that moment it seemed as though his whole life lay stored away in that canister: his youth, the immigrant ship that had brought him from Calcutta – the canister had contained all the valuables he had possessed at that time – the five years of his indentured labour on the state and the many years of voluntary labour that followed. In it lay stored away all the troubles and pleasures that life had brought to him: kicks and angry words from overseers... the labourers in riot and the shooting by the police... all those things, and more, lay hidden in the gloom within his faithful canister... mingled with the many tarnished shillings and florins and the pennies carefully saved throughout all the years gone by. Each shilling could tell its own tale of joy or of trouble, each penny. And to think that soon he might have to open the bundles and spend those shillings and pennies! Ah! It was a black, bitter thought. (Mittelholzer, 2009, p. 204)

Ramgolall's fear, expressed through his attachment to his wealth, suggests characteristics of an oppressed subject who, scarred by a life of near slavery as an immigrant, could not bear the loss of his origin. The contemplation of the money and the sense of possession are moments that provide Ramgolall with a fascination capable of alleviating his open wounds.

At one point in the narrative, Baijan, Ramgolall's eldest son, goes to visit him. He meets the herdsman, who is with Beena selling milk in Speyerfeld. Upon finding him in the city, Baijan asks:

'Ol man, you lookin' meagre,' said Baijan, 'Na' why you don' wear clothes? You shouldn' walk about naked so. You mus' buy cloth an' mek dhoti and shirt.' 'Ow, baaya! Wha' me go do? You' faddah pore man. 'E caan' afford buy clothes. Na money na deh buy clothes. Me poor man, Baijan' (Mittelholzer, 2009, p. 152, grifos do autor).

The excerpt above associates the image of Ramgolall's semi-nudity and thinness with the state of destitution in which he finds himself on the periphery of the world. The old man is still alive: he has not been annihilated by the life of oppression he has endured. Yet his body can only survive and resist through self-imposed deprivation. The character insists on continuing his existence as a poor 'cow-minder', though not without being marked by the imposed colonizer/colonized hierarchy. The amount of coins pathologically hoarded is tied to his self-perception, and this link between them is one of identification, of identity. The Indian himself is also a currency of exchange, a numerical value. Ramgolall's relationship with his 'canister' is so intimate that one becomes the other; both are things — their worth reduced to the profit they are capable of generating. This notion of the reified subject, imposed by the Other, is internalized by the character, who dies as a tool, as a commodity.

The hardships faced by Ramgolall, as presented in the narrative, illustrate how the structuring of power in the colony fatally ravaged the Indians. Physical and psychological illnesses, police violence, community conflicts, among other things, are recorded as memories in the herdsman's bowl. As already asserted, it is not the money in its conventional value that is stored.

Viewing the scene in this way makes it difficult to attribute to the Indian herdsman an existence essentially driven by economic factors, alienated and conditioned to collapse. Moreover, considering that many Indians were forced to migrate on British ships to various colonies in search of better living conditions due to the decline of the Indian economy, which caused social calamities beyond endurance (Desai & Vahed, 2010; Bahadur, 2014), we see a broader context of displacement.

From Fanon (2020), we can assert that the colonial experience articulates a continuous process of imbalances, as it is both devastating and cruel, built on a gaze of inferiority: "The native's inferiority is the correlate of European superiority" (Fanon, 2020, p. 107). And this violence, not only physical but also of dismantling the subject's sense of belonging, "[...] the white man imposes on me a discrimination, makes me a colonized being, extorts from me all value, all originality [...]" (Fanon, 2020, p. 112) manifested in the novel as an expressive critique of the social and economic process of dehumanization.

Final considerations

Based on the elements discussed in this research, we can say that the novel *Corentyne Thunder* (2009) addresses complex and intimate issues related to the colonial apparatus of the time. These themes are also significant in the current context, as they highlight the shortcomings of power structures, creating conditions of subalternity, dependency, violence, and marginalization.

The text explores the individual's relationship with money, presenting it as a side effect of colonization and life in scarcity. The likely obsession with accumulation, in Ramgolall's attitudes, points to a desire for the preservation of intentionally pursued cultural memory, and thus, self-preservation. The narrative space enacts the experience of the colonized immigrant, where the peripheral voice is given social substance.

These elements are supported by how the narrator presents the dichotomous languages of dominant and subaltern subjects in their power relationship: asymmetrical, unbalanced forces leading to dehumanization. The Indian drum, finally, in its melancholic rhythm, sets the tone of sorrow marking the immigrant's end in the final scenes. At the same time, it evokes a moment of hope in the search for a comforting cultural identity, in which one can recognize oneself amidst the changing uncertainty,

That morning, crouched near the door of his outbuilding, Ramgolall played his goatskin drum... tom... Tum, tum, tum... At night, the sound of Ramgolall's drum radiated across the savanna... Tum, tum, tum. Weak and mysterious. Perhaps a Corentyne thunder... The rhythm was different now... because he remembered the happy days of the Pagwah festival when he was still a young man on the farm. His soul seemed to fill with ecstasy with the spirit of youth (Mittelholzer, 2009. pp. 25-27).

It is a work that does not treat memory as infinite and unproductive lamentation but as a mirror reflecting the awareness of what happened while projecting subjectivity in search of the lost humanization.

References

- Ashcroft, B., & Kadhim, H. (2001). *Edward Said and the post-colonial*. Nova Science Publishers.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2007). *Post-colonial studies: The key concepts* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Bahadur, G. (2014). *Coolie woman: The odyssey of indenture*. The University of Chicago Press.
<https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226043388.001.0001>

- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203820551>
- Boehmer, E. (2005). *Colonial and postcolonial literature: Migrant metaphors* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Desai, A., & Vahed, G. (2010). *Inside India indenture: A South African story, 1860–1914*. HSRC Press. <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11910/4273>
- Fanon, F. (2005) *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press.
- Fanon, F. (2005). *Os condenados da terra* (E. Pinto & J. L. e Silva, Trans.). Editora UFFJ.
- Fanon, F. (2008). *Pele negra, máscaras brancas* (R. da Silveira, Trad.). Edufba.
- Fanon, F. (2020). *Pele negra, máscaras brancas* (S. Nascimento, Trad.; R. Camargo, Colab.). Ubu Editora.
- Freud, S. (1996). Sobre o início do tratamento (Novas recomendações sobre a técnica da psicanálise I). In *Edição standard brasileira das obras completas de Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 12, pp. 161–187). Imago.
- Husman, L. (2014). Fronteiras, migrantes e línguas nas Guianas. In *Estudos de linguagem e cultura regional* (pp. 145–160). Editora da UFRR.
- Ishmael, O. (2013). *The Guyana history: From early times to independence*. Xlibris.
- Jain, P. C. (1990). *Racial discrimination against overseas Indians: A class analysis*. South Asia Books.
- Josiah, B. P. (2011). *Migration, mining, and the African diaspora: Guyana in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230338012>
- Leite, A. M. (2016). Pós-colonial/ismo: Conceitos e conflitos. In *Pós-colonial e pós-colonialismo: Propriedades e apropriações de sentido*. Dialogarts.
- Lindsay, A. O. (2014). *Beacons of excellence: The Edgar Mittelholzer memorial lectures, Volume II: 1975–1984*. Caribbean Press.
- Loomba, A. (2005). *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203087596>
- Love, R. S. (2006). *Maritime exploration in the age of discovery, 1415–1800*. Greenwood Press.
- Macintosh, R. J. (2008). Aspects of primitivism in the West Indian novel of the 1930s. *International Journal of Bahamian Studies*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.15362/ijbs.v3i0.75>
- Marx, K. (1988). *O capital: Crítica da economia política* (Vol. 1; R. Barbosa & F. R. Kothe, Trans.). Abril Cultural.
- McGowan, W. (2005). Demographic change in nineteenth-century Guyana. *The Arts Journal: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Literatures, History, Art and Culture of Guyana and the Caribbean*, 1(2), 16–23.
- Mittelholzer, E. (2009). *Corentyne thunder*. Peepal Tree Press.
- Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. Vintage Books.
- Sayad, A. (1998). *A imigração ou os paradoxos da alteridade* (C. Murachco, Trad.). Editora da Universidade de São Paulo.
- Westmaas, J. A. (2013). *Edgar Mittelholzer and the shaping of his novels* [Doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham]. E-Theses Repository. <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/4367/>