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We Are Not Machines:

Stereotypes of Blacks as Machines Destroyed in Brodber's Fiction and Non-Fiction (Part 2)

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Abstract

This paper, part two of the article titled “We Are not Animals” which was carried in the previous volume of this journal, continues an examination of the concept of blacks as property. The stereotypes of blacks as animals was fully explored in part one, and the stereotype of blacks as machines is examined here. This latter stereotype is not discussed directly in any one of Brodber’s academic papers. However, a number of her non-fiction papers -especially Programme Planning in a Multi-Cultural Milieu - as well as Brodber’s first three novels are explored in this paper. Programme Planning is a compilation of excerpts from several of Brodber’s other non-fiction writings and is used by Brodber as commentary on what some of her other research papers had unearthed. It explores how blacks were planned for and expected to respond mechanically to colonisers’ dictates, without input into decisions that affected them directly. It explains further how this deletion of the blacks’ input proved critical to the destruction of various plans and programmes that had been instigated to regulate them. Consideration is given to western civilization’s concept of machines and the power they provide those who control them. The paper looks at how Brodber undermines and destroys the impact of such stereotypes in her first three novels and concludes that the characters’ refusal to mechanically regurgitate the beliefs and practices of their forebears, establishes that blacks are not machines.

Keywords: Erna Brodber, stereotypes, machine, mechanical



Introduction

Colonialism in the Caribbean was not necessarily erected on the physical ground of a people's land or on the blood of lives lost in the struggle, but upon the psychological exploitation of one people by another. This view was perpetuated by the psychologically manipulated who, over time, mistook much of what the colonizers taught them as fact and who, even after slavery was abolished in theory, still showed signs of mental colonization. Notions of white superiority and black inferiority flourished during slavery in the Caribbean as the Europeans created a myth of and for the black man. According to Frantz Fanon, "there is a fact: white men considered themselves superior to black men" (10). This supposed superiority meant that an inferiority complex was developed, and the blacks were the victims of it. "If there is an inferiority complex," Fanon states, "it is the outcome of a double process ... primarily economic ... subsequently, the internalization or, better, the epidermalization ... of this inferiority" (11). Myths that Blacks are animals, that they are ignorant and without a brain, that they are machines, that Blacks' religion is nothing more than mere superstition, and other such stereotyping, can be proven to be the basis of the success whites garnered during the period of black enslavement in the New World. Mental shackles then, were as essential to the planters' success as physical shackles.

Creation of Stereotypes

Stereotyping of blacks during slavery was an effective tool for the colonizers. To be able to control the minds as well as the bodies of slaves ensured that they retained the power to keep blacks in a constant state of dependence. Sociologist Guy Rocher, in his book *A General Introduction to Sociology: A Theoretical Perspective*, explains that "... [stereotyping] is a very profound dependence which is not only economical and political, but also social and even

psychological in nature” (498). Sociologist, historian, anthropologist, novelist and social activist, Jamaica’s Erna Brodber outlines how stereotypes are created in her study, *Perceptions of Caribbean Women: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes*. That paper is a compilation of research on women from Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica, and is based on the images of them that existed between 1800 and the 1960s. The study shows how negative images are created and how they make it difficult, if not impossible, for one to define one’s true self. In the daily intercourse of human beings, Brodber says, opinions and attitudes are formed and ultimately images and expectancies are created. These images often distort the reality of an individual’s identity and performance. Brodber goes on to explain that should this distortion not be met with open-mindedness, which allows for ameliorating the image, then the image is perpetuated and eventually crystallized. It is these distorted but crystallized images that are labelled ‘stereotypes’. Stereotyping begins on a small scale with an individual but eventually continues into the arena of societal interaction. Over time, this distorted view becomes ingrained into the culture as ‘right’ and the victim or actor is forced into behaving accordingly. Mechanically.

Creation of Myths

One result of colonialism is the psychological fragmentation of the stereotyped. The dilemma they face lies largely in the question of what constitutes their true identity, as this became obscure in face of the myths masters gave them to replace the truth of who they were. Myth is defined as “a traditional story accepted as history” (wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn) or as “something not true... a truth disguised and distorted” (www.carm.net/atheism/terms.htm). George Lamming attempts other definitions of myth as it relates specifically to the enslaved blacks, stating that:

it has little to do with lack of intelligence. It has nothing to do with one's origins in class. It is deeper and more natural. It is akin to the nutritive function of milk ... receive (d) at birth ... this myth begins in the West Indian from the earliest stages of his education ... it begins with the fact of England's supremacy ... a fact which can only have meaning and weight by a calculated cutting down to size of all non-England. The first ... is the colonial himself. (26-27)

This myth, this distorted history which was created for the enslaved blacks, is not easily dislodged, and George Lamming emphasizes this fact when he states "it may be modified by circumstances, exploited or concealed ... but it is there, a part of the actual texture of behaviour itself" (26). Frantz Fanon further emphasizes the dilemma of the black man in *Black Skin White Masks* when he comments that

Overnight, the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his "customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him. (110)

Having been made to feel unsure of their circumstances and inadequate in their perception of themselves, blacks had the further complication of being unable to associate or empathize with the enslavers. This Rocher describes as the "psychological ambivalence of the colonized". He goes on to describe the stereotyped as "a group who succeeds neither in identifying with the other that they would like to be, nor in detaching themselves in order to be themselves and different from him." (507)

Thus, a people's identity, sense of self and self-worth steadily eroded over time, as stereotypes of blacks as animals, as machines, as ignorant, as sub-human, continued. Notions of inadequacy and inferiority so embedded themselves in the blacks' psyche, that these notions became a part of the 'psychic landscape' of the people. Inadequacy and inferiority were logical results of the acceptance of the myths blacks were given. Lamming establishes that these and other such results are inevitable, as "at its worst [myth] is the soil from which the perfect lackey is born... [myths have] a great effect upon the culture of a community for it contains—and can even succeed in establishing as permanent—important judgments of value. (26)

Justification of stereotypes and myths

An already volatile situation was worsened when the colonizers sought to justify what they had done to the blacks. This system of justification forms what Rocher labels the "colonizing ideology ... a set of rationalizations by which the colonizer explains his position ... his superior status and his behaviour ..." (570) Put another way, this colonizing ideology is based on the fallacy of the colonizer doing the colonized a favour as the latter was deemed too weak and vulnerable to adequately tend to himself. This condition is the direct result of being considered animals and being viewed as machines.

To paraphrase Rocher's own belief, whites validated their positions and actions by claiming that blacks could not govern themselves and that any attempt to do so would ultimately lead to anarchy. They believed that blacks were ignorant pagans who could not be trusted to fend for themselves. Whites painted a picture of themselves as improvers of the blacks' condition. The blacks' past, they said, was fraught with primitivism and a high degree of history-less-ness and so in lieu of this history, the colonizers 'graciously' gave them myth. Whites believed they offered

blacks a certain level of civilization they were unaccustomed to. They did not offer them anything more than slavery, Rocher explains, as “it would be useless to provoke aspirations which would only cause [blacks] dissatisfaction and frustration ...” (505)

Having therefore presented their behavior as that of a civilizing mission or a humanitarian act, the colonizers not only justified their mission to their fellowmen, but simultaneously planted in the heads of the Africans the belief that all was being done for their benefit. Although notions of inferiority, ignorance, paganism, and barbarism were what they were being taught about themselves, blacks eventually accepted and - in that act - crystallized these labels.

The colonizing ideology is based on the colonizers’ belief in the hereditary superiority of the white race. By accepting stereotypes blacks have contributed to the perpetuation of notions of their inferiority. The perpetuation of these stereotypes even today means that the collective psyche of blacks in the African Diaspora is still being eroded, a sure testimony to the power the planters garnered by stereotyping slaves and to their success in undermining the blacks’ sense of self. Even the globally acclaimed black intellectual Frantz Fanon admits his own participation in stereotyping: “When I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness ... I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial deflections, slave ships” (112) Notably, Fanon’s admission came some thirty years after slavery was abolished in the Caribbean

Interrogating myths and stereotypes

Several writers, not only from the Caribbean but also from wherever Africans were distributed via the slave trade, are using their creative works to carve new post-colonial identities,

to rewrite the blacks' history through literature and thereby undermine the legacy of the fragmented psyche that stereotypes created. That they are able to write in an effort to right wrongs is itself a major accomplishment, as colonial discourse establishes that books are not supposed to be the creative result of black writers. What Lamming says of the West Indian writers' achievement can be used in reference to writers throughout the African Diaspora and truly testifies to the their remarkable legacy:

The greater mystery is that there should be West Indian writers at all. For a writer cannot function, and indeed he has no function as a writer if those who read and teach reading in his society have started their education by questioning his very right to write. (27)

Erna Brodber is one such African Diaspora—and more specifically, Caribbean—writer who has not only established her right to write but has also used her writings to interrogate the myths and the many stereotypes of the black man that have survived for hundreds of years. Not only does she interrogate these myths, she also uses her works to dispel them and to awaken a black consciousness within her readers and various other audiences, about the necessity of completely obliterating stereotyped identities that have shaped the realities of those in the African Diaspora. She uses her works to offer prototypes as the antithesis of stereotypes—prototypes that she believes are created by turning the colonizers' weapons back on them.

In *Perceptions of Caribbean Women: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes (Perceptions)*, Brodber purports that “crystallization of any attitude, image or stereotype depends in part on the willingness of the receivers within the communication system to accept this definition or reality and on the willingness of the actors to adjust their behaviour accordingly.” (2)

Realising, then, that the impact of stereotyping will be a direct reflection of the level of acceptance of those images of inferiority foisted upon them, Brodber uses both her fiction and non-fiction genres to introduce, discuss and analyze stereotypes of the black man, as well as make recommendations for change. Brodber further urges her reading audience to interrogate or question the validity of the myths that have been passed down through time and to find alternate realities and new identities in the untold, submerged half of history which is the history of the black people.

Stereotypes of blacks as machines

Just as she sets out to highlight and destroy the stereotype of blacks as animals in her novels, an ideology explored in part one of this paper and carried in the previous volume, Erna Brodber shows that it is equally important to destroy stereotypes of blacks as machines, as represented in the following well known observation: “A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master – to do as he is told to do” (36). The implications of this oft-quoted line from Frederick Douglass’s autobiography are usually overlooked. It is an expression of the planters’ opinion and hints at the Massa’s aim to create an existence for the black man based on mechanics. The enslaved blacks were asked to carry out whatever duties were assigned them without question, without objection, without expressing an opinion. Mechanically.

The invention of machines in western civilization was considered a sign of development and growth. Though decried by the Romantic Poets as “dark, satanic mills” (Blake), the Industrial Revolution of 1760 - 1830 is very often also presented and embraced in western civilization as representative of an important and beneficial mark of progress.

Ashton, in commenting on the impact of the Industrial Revolution to European civilization, posits that “In spite of destructive wars and a rapid growth of population, the material living

standards of most of the British people improved, and the technical innovations not only brought economic rewards but also provoked greater intellectual ingenuity”. Ashton therefore sees innovation not just as an economic course but also as a social and cultural process influenced by factors such as war and peace and by the framework of law and institutions (Ashton).

With machines, humanity has been able to work faster and accomplish set duties at greater speed and with greater accuracy, thereby improving efficiency and, to a limited extent, quality. The first machines were simple—levers, rollers, pulleys and ramps, for example. As the demands grew, more complex machines were created. In a sense the European saw the machine as making history, and once invented, they became something Europeans would not live without. They ascribed to it the potential to accomplish the most difficult and impossible of tasks, making the previously impossible, possible. Yet they saw themselves as greater than the machine as it could not operate itself but depended on their supposed superiority to turn it on or off, to feed information into it, and to develop formulae whereby the machine would then do necessary calculations and/or configurations. Misa, of Illinois Institute of Technology, establishes that “if machines make history, they do so only with the assistance of others ... it is historians (and others) who decide the extent to which technology acts as an independent force to shape history” (www.jstor.org).

Machines were deemed necessary to the growth and development of civilization, but the control the Europeans wielded over them was an added attraction. Ruth Oldenziel, in *Making Technology Masculine*, presents an interesting read as she speaks of “Men’s love affair with technology ... male technophilia” (www.jstor.org). This observation is especially interesting if read against the notion that the Europeans represented male dominance during colonial times. Oldenziel establishes that “technology developed into a powerful symbol of male, modern and western prowess machines like cars, bridges, trains and planes have become the measure of

men” (www.jstor.org). In much the same way, slaves were viewed as motor items over which the European masters had complete control. Like machines, slaves were expected to demonstrate a lack of will, to be less than human, to meet the demands placed on them; and they should always be readily available to accept the directives of the master class. Obviously, the stereotype of blacks as machines worked in the favour of the enslavers as it empowered them even as it undermined the enslaved; it rendered to further obscurity the blacks’ perception of themselves. Reverend R. Bickell, a clergyman who, during slavery witnessed firsthand how blacks were treated, comments that “in our colonies there is no inducement held out, for the slave is a complete chattel, a mere machine impelled by the whip, as the master has the power of perpetual possession.” (36)

Brodber’s non-fiction

In her research work *Programme Planning in a Multi-Cultural Milieu*, Brodber makes a statement that confirms this notion of blacks as machines impelled by the whip to a routine, mechanical, and robotic behaviour. She explains that “[the British] strategy for development did not lead them into involving the Africans in the planning process. For them, the African was a motor item to be simultaneously planned for and used in the implementation of specific programmes.”(1)

Written April 15, 1977, this academic work is a compilation of excerpts from a number of Brodber’s other non-fiction writings: *Abandonment of Children in Jamaica*, (1974), *Evaluation of the Adult Literacy Programme: A Report to the Literacy Planning and Evaluation Committee*, (1971), *Yards In the City of Kingston*, (1975). As previously explained, more than being a compilation of excerpts from these studies, *Programme Planning* is even more importantly the stage Brodber uses to comment on the findings of her above-mentioned research papers. She starts her paper with a statement that sets the tone for what she examines:

We must not forget that the African did not paddle here out of his own needs and creative energy.... To settle in Jamaica was not part of the African's creative impulse, it was that of the British. They planned to come here and subsequently made plans to develop this geographical area in ways they thought fit. (1)

Brodber here establishes that planning for the blacks was done without their consent and without their input in much the same way that machines are manipulated to get desired results. Her paper posits that even if rarely blacks were permitted to plan, they were not permitted the privilege of implementation. It meant then that one group was constantly planning for another whose culture was different from its own. It meant that the targeted group was not given an opportunity to comment on the programme being implemented and with which it was expected to comply. Brodber highlights the fact that the blacks were not meant to participate in the development of the new world but to be the 'tools' that brought about the desired change. Displaced Africans in Jamaica for example, were able to garner the right to plan hundreds of years after slavery began and almost twenty-five years after slavery was abolished in that island: "By a series of legislations culminating in the Act of 1962, the right to plan was formally handed over to the descendants of the Africans" (2). Even then, Brodber declares, the right was given "to individuals, not to an articulated cultural group" (2).

Programme Planning also looks at Brodber's previous research papers and proves that programmes or plans will fall short of what they were meant to accomplish if the targeted audience is not allowed an input. Brodber presents two case studies. In the first, she explores the *Abandonment of Children in Jamaica*. The objective of this study was to "examine the increase of the abandonment of children in Jamaica, because the Child Care and Protection Division of that Ministry was alarmed at the alleged increase" (3). Brodber's study found that what truly needed

to be given attention was not what was being investigated. The ‘history of a succession of Guardians’, as well as parents’ requests to have children removed to ‘Fit Persons’, was alarming and Brodber felt that these should also be focused on. She felt too that the Children Acts, that existed in Jamaica and were similar to those in Britain, were not necessarily best for the Jamaican situation.

Brodber’s second case study is “The Literacy Project”. Like the study of the abandonment of children, the planners again attempted to educate the folk and thereby change their “deleterious folkways”. Lessons were to be given through the mass media of radio and television, and then supplemented with face-to-face discussions. These ‘gadgets’ or machines were to be used as communication devices and would - as machines were expected to - expedite the time in which folks would learn to read and write. However, the machines failed, Brodber asserts, as they were not easily accessible; they were not flexible and so could not adjust themselves to the changing timeline or the blatant disregard for time that was a part of the culture of those planned for. Brodber refers to the whole literacy programme as a ‘gadget’ set up to bring about desired results. To put such trust in machines proved problematic, however, as the outcome could be predicted and no guarantees made. “The gadget had failed to engage the people” (8) in much the same way as the perception of blacks as machines failed to truly capture the essence of the black people. In reality, Brodber posits, blacks have their own thought patterns and are not predisposed to mechanically taking instructions from, or complying with the dictates of, another. This fact was demonstrated during slavery where the need to express their non-acceptance of enslavement saw the Africans engaging in various forms of revolt against the imprisoning culture.

In the section of *Programme Planning* sub-titled “An Ethno-historical study of Jamaica, 1914-1940”, Brodber demonstrates in her approach to research, how planning for another should

be done. She presents excerpts from some of the 90 respondents in an interview she conducted. Rather than mechanically plan for these respondents from the outside and assuming ‘the one formula’ would apply to all, Brodber treats “each interview as a life history ... [and as] ... a personality responding to life and as a historian” (11). She recognizes that each interviewee is unique and takes this into consideration. Brodber pays close attention to “the system of thought operating in the consciousness of our respondents” (13) and because she does this, she automatically proves that this individual thought pattern meant that those being planned for were not relegated to the status of machines and would therefore not fit into any pre-conceptualized notion of them that Brodber herself might have.

The writer does find some value in machines when used to assist her in carrying out her interviews. She recognizes the importance of taking not just the respondents’ spoken words but also their gestures, tonal quality, and expressions into consideration. According to her, “happily, tape-recorders can catch words and tone of voice” (13). Ironically, the respondent whose “laughter, inflections, shifts in decibel and in pacing [reflect] her personal comment” (14) is named “Bambi”. In the sub-head Brodber stresses that she is “Bambi, *the person*” (emphasis mine), showing an interest in distinguishing her perhaps from the animal character ‘Bambi’, who features in children’s entertainment. An interview with her leads Brodber to conclude that “Bambi identifies herself very much with a racial group and seems to feel herself as the keeper and dispenser of its history” (14). It is interesting that of the many persons who interviewed Brodber, it is Bambi whom she chooses to highlight in this regard. Her choice is perhaps borne from the need to individualise her subjects rather than robotically lumping them together as if they were all parts of the same whole, and perhaps because the description of Bambi can be compared to Brodber’s role as ‘keeper

and dispenser” of her racial group’s history, certainly the keeper and dispenser of her Woodside community’s genealogy and history, which she documented on their behalf in St. Mary, Jamaica.

Unlike the planners discussed in Brodber’s two case studies, the interviewer in “An Ethno-historical Study of Jamaica, 1914 – 1940” sees the value of becoming a part of the people whose lives are being explored, rather than treating them as machines and expecting them to function on her dictates. Brodber says of Bambi that “she invites me the interviewer to share her feelings by ... lowering her voice ... making ... a joke between us ... her sighs and her asides” (19).

As planner, Brodber recognizes the humanity of her subject and shares with Bambi on this level, rather than expect a mechanical response. By highlighting the subject’s ‘feelings’, Brodber undermines and negates any concept of the person being planned for as a machine and finds value in sharing her experiences rather than dictating what those experiences should be. Instead of bemoaning the failure of her programme as the planners did in “The Literacy Project” and in “The Abandonment of Children in Jamaica”, Brodber can celebrate Bambi’s reaction to life, her “pride in the ability of her race to overcome its obstacles ... [and its] ... triumph over the white man” (21). In the conclusion to the paper, Brodber expresses the hope that “this research will ground us and ... will suggest a model for planners which would take this finding into account in programme planning.” (22)

Brodber’s non-fiction highlights the planters’ and planners’ expectation of a mechanical response from those being planned for and the resultant exclusion of the target group from the planning process. More importantly, it is instructive in that it presents a model intended to show the planners an alternate way to plan. In her fiction, Brodber offers further alternatives as she shows what non-acceptance of stereotypes of blacks as machines would mean for the displaced Africans.

Brodber's novels

In her first three novels, *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980), *Myal* (1988) and *Louisiana* (1994), many of Brodber's characters are depicted as zombies—that is, as sub-humans or sub-normals who go through the motions and perform routine tasks - mechanically. Towards the end of *Myal*, the protagonist Ella expresses her realization that characters of *Animal Farm*--in keeping, with Part One of this study that explored the stereotypes of blacks as animals—have been made to become machines: “He has ... taken their knowledge of their natural world away from them and left them empty shells – duppies, zombies, living deads capable only of receiving orders from someone else and carrying them out.” (107)

Blacks were not expected to express their thoughts on any subject, but like machines, should carry out relevant functions with the ‘push of a button’, or rather the giving of any instruction, or the cracking of a whip. Zombies are mechanical as they go through motions and are emotionally and intellectually empty and usually controlled by another. Brodber shows in each of her novels, certainly in the first two, how zombies are created. This is seen in Maydene Brassington's accusation of her white husband, the pastor: “William ... have you got what to give people instead when you take away what they've got? ... William, you are a spirit thief. You keep taking away these people's spirits” (*Myal*, p. 18)

Like Brodber's female characters, Ella, Anita, and Nellie, blacks were robbed of their spirit and left as sub-normals open to whatever new identity was conferred upon them. Each new generation was expected to relive the previous generation's lives (and mistakes) and is thereby pulled into a mechanical existence. Brodber highlights this fact in *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* as protagonist Nellie sees herself, her femininity, as something dirty, a ‘hidey-hidey’ thing. Nothing about her is good enough and such notions of inferiority, which led her Aunt Becca of a

previous generation to take steps to be like the ‘other’, are passed on. Nellie finds it difficult to step outside of this prearranged mode of behaviour but expects to automatically – mechanically – live a similar kind of existence. She suppresses her true self, denies her culture, associates with the ‘right’ type of people and attains a formal education.

This mechanical existence naturally makes Nellie into a site for others’ manipulation. A machine can produce words but only in a language inscribed upon it. One’s mechanical status then, Brodber posits, can be expressed through one’s language, through one’s voice. Caribbean writers have long established that the reclaiming of one’s voice is integral to breaking free of the Colonisers’ mental shackles. In *History of the Voice* (1984), Barbadian poet, [Edward Kamau Brathwaite](#), establishes the concept of "nation language." It is language, he believes, that can unify and make a people distinct from others. He calls on Caribbean peoples to respect their languages, often pejoratively referenced as ‘dialect’ or ‘creole’, and that a people’s primary language should be the preferred source of communication at all levels. Brodber, in her own quest to prove that blacks never have to honour a stereotype by giving in to its dictates, highlights Nellie’s fight to find her original language and destroy all notions of mechanization. She bemoans “the word plays, word plays, word plays, the resistance to communication” (*Jane and Louisa*, 71). However, propelled by her personal ‘obeah man’, a rasta-man with his smell of lime, denoting his ability to cleanse her of her mechanical and robotic overlay through her longstanding efforts to pattern previous generations and strive to be like and talk like “those people so different – different from us” (*Jane and Louisa*, 73), Nellie eventually finds her voice:

You understand this damned, shameless rasta-man who is telling me that he wants to watch me grow. You understand this r...-c...t of a hungry man from nowhere who is to watch and observe me. What the hell he think he is. Man don’t let me ...

I had been talking aloud. Is that me? with such expressions ... - Yes, it is you. You have found your language, Ma'am – he said with a new kind of calm. (*Jane and Louisa*, 71)

Once she finds her language, Nellie eventually breaks the family routine of mechanically aiming for upward mobility by trying to be like “those people”. She thereby demonstrates that she is not mechanical, but is a thinking, creative individual who can effect change. In *Myal*, Ella equally learns that her British, upper class white husband, had zombified her, robbed her of her potential and left her empty. Like the characters in the book she had been reading, she realized that she and other blacks had been left “to run around like half-wits doing what the master has in store for them.” (106). She is challenged to move out of this mechanical, zombified state when she visits with Reverend Simpson, and is asked, “Have you been zombified? ... Need your voice say what his says?” (107). From that meeting, “she had been left much richer ... Ella was thinking out a matter”, and she eventually decided to not perpetuate (mechanically) in her own students, the lessons that she had been taught.

In *Louisiana*, Brodber presents us with an actual machine. The recorder plays a central role in the development of the plot, as in the initial stage of the story, it is the means of communication between the protagonist and the venerable sisters. It is interesting how Brodber undermines the stereotypes of blacks as machines in this particular novel. She shows the merits of the recorder as a data collecting item in much the same way as she does in *Programme Planning*, praising it for its ability to capture ‘words and tone of voice’. The association between blacks and machines is seen not to be solely negative, then, as the machine is capable of holding much information, yet another direct attack against the stereotype of blacks as ignorant – another discussion for another time. Brodber, however, goes further in her attempt to not merely undermine but totally destroy

this particular stereotype of blacks. The protagonist Ella is made to beat the recorder at its own game as not only is she able to decipher and analyse the information it holds, she eventually keeps her own records and erases the need for a recorder at all when she takes over its duties altogether:

Since Louise related the initial segment of her story more than eight years ago, I have not used the recording machine. As a matter of fact, since I named myself Louisiana, the sisters have not conducted conversation with me via the machine. I like to feel there is some promotion in that for me. (*Louisiana*, 131)

When she becomes Louisiana, she becomes the meeting ground of the sisters who had given birth to her. They speak directly through her rather than through a machine that had adequately filled its role while it was necessary, but which is destroyed in face of a superior intelligence – Louisiana herself. Science has indeed given over to ‘higher science’. It is also realized in *Louisiana*, that unlike Nellie, prior to finding her correct language, Ella does not reproduce the mistakes of her parents. Ella proves thereby that she is not mechanical and does not simply perform in a mode previously set by others.

Conclusion

In her treatment of the stereotype of blacks as machines in her fiction and non-fiction writings, Brodber holds out potential and possibilities to her readers. Labels of blacks as property, she posits, are not enough for one to accept these myths as truth. That Brodber is able to effectively dispense with them in her works proves how inadequate they were to begin with. The blacks’ ability to identify themselves as a part of the human race and as people able to effect change rather than accept the mechanical position they have been ascribed, is what Brodber aims for and achieves in her writings. This achievement dispels the myth of the blacks as property and perpetual possession and establishes them as the thinking, feeling people they are. It is undeniable that in



her non-fiction and fiction, and with a strident, moral voice, Erna Brodber establishes for displaced Africans in the Caribbean that we are not machines.

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Biography: Dr. Stephanie Fullerton-Cooper

Dr. Stephanie Fullerton-Cooper is Associate Professor of Language and Literature in the Arts and Humanities department at the University College of the Cayman Islands (UCCI). She is a graduate of the University of the West Indies, Mona, where she obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree (with Honours), Master of Philosophy, and a Doctoral degree, all in Literatures in English. She also completed a postgraduate diploma in education at UCCI. Dr Fullerton-Cooper is a member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of the University College of the Cayman Islands (JUCCI), and has co-edited *The Caribbean in a Changing World: Surveying the Past, Mapping the Future*, Volumes 1 and 2, a collection of essays examining the Caribbean 50 years after the demise of the West Indies Federation. She has published and presented papers at academic conferences, and her current interest is in conducting research in Cayman Literature with an aim to establish Cayman creative writings as deserving of a place within Caribbean and African Diaspora Literature. Dr Fullerton-Cooper has been married for approximately 20 years to Carrol Cooper, and they have 13-year-old twins, Abriann and Daniel

