

## MITOCW | MIT24\_908S17\_Creole\_Chapter\_04\_Post\_Colonial\_300k

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KAREN: Okay. Today's our last class, and so, in this presentation, we hope to discuss and pull together a lot of different themes that we've talked about over the course of the semester, namely centered around discourses of power.

So we've kind of teased apart the idea that there are political, economic, social, and linguistic discourses of power that impact the way people live their lives and how they identify, and hopefully by learning about these different discourses of power, we can find the treasure trove of understanding identity.

RACHEL: So in terms of discourses of power, in the political sense, in our readings about the different issues in the Caribbean, we discussed the general topic was colonialization as a discourse of power and how colonialization, in all of these countries, established dominant discourses for racial, social, linguistic, and economic hierarchies of power.

We-- and how these hierarchies kind of dictated the structure of the society, so the governmental power went to a small group of elites that were kind of reminiscent of the way the colonies were set up.

And then even after colonial power left these colonies, these new nations were still set up in this structure of colonial power with the dominant hierarchies remaining unchanging-- race, social, linguistic, and economic.

KAREN: So we've talked a lot, this semester, about the idea of Caribbean exceptionalism and Haitian exceptionalism, but last weekend, you kind of also touched on the idea that this neo colonial power political aspect is something that's pervasive worldwide in post-colonial states, like Rachel said, in maintaining colonial power hierarchies even after independence.

Personally speaking, India is an example of this.

People from upper castes and like Hindi speaking populations within India under British colonial rule tend to be given a lot of power, and that is very much how India is structured today.

Also within the diaspora, even like non-political in terms of legislation, a lot of the South Asian diaspora is centered around Hindu-speaking upper caste experiences.

So then there's also the idea of economic discourses of power-- that political power kind of also confers economic power on a small group of elite people.

This limits access to a lot of resources and global capital and further helps in keeping people in post-colonial stratified societies.

In the Caribbean, you can look at trade and how and unequal balance of trade kind of support more importing

than exporting, which is very damaging.

RACHEL: And so, globally, these dominant discourses of economic power have a parallel throughout the world in terms of the distribution of economic capital and the allocation of funding-- of global funding, and so, specifically, certain countries tend to have control over valuable resources even if they're not necessarily located within their own countries.

An example of that is US's hand in oil in the Middle East at some point in history and currently-- and then the idea of international aid being focused on certain countries based on natural disasters and such.

KAREN: I mean, also if we look, like, two months ago, there was a conference held in California, the African Global Economic and Development Summit.

That's meant to help bridge ties between businesses in the US and Africa and lead to economic development, but none of the delegates from African countries were able to even enter the US to attend the summit because of visa difficulties.

So we had, like, discussions of Africa's economic and developmental future being held, like professor DeGraff was saying, by no one who really had a personal stake in Africa.

So these economic and political discourses of power also contribute to socially stratified societies, where social mobility is challenged.

Education is usually seen as a means for social mobility and subverting the stratification, but in a lot of cases like we have discussed previously, education and access to education is also stratified, and it is very unequal.

We've talked about linguistics and, like, language being a barrier to accessing education within the Caribbean with French-based education in Haiti-- and the work of MIT Haiti to try and change this.

But education is also barred by political and natural disaster issues and the idea that this unequal access to education further cements stratification.

RACHEL: Globally, there are parallels of this stratification throughout countries, and so the idea of cultural capital and different countries' cultures being more valuable than others has kind of created this idea of, like, ultimate cultures to aspire to.

And it's contributed to the idea of cultural assimilation, which is happening in such a global-- like, as our society becomes more and more global, and there's a lot of migration, and there are more correct cultures and more incorrect cultures-- and the same with language.

And so, we've seen, like, situations of this cultural assimilation in the US throughout history and throughout the world but specifically in the US, thinking about boarding schools for the Native American, where they were forced to-- where they were punished for speaking their native languages or participating in their native culture even amongst themselves and not in an educational setting-- and parallels in countries like Haiti and Jamaica, where they were not-- when they went to school, at some point, they were not allowed to speak their creoles, their native languages.

Personally, the thing that comes to mind in terms of cultural assimilation is in the small town where I went to high school, specifically at the high school, there were three acceptable cultures or, like, two well-defined cultures.

It's like being a white American, being a black American, or being Hispanic.

And within Hispanic, they specifically Mexican-- not really being either Hispanic, Mexican, or white-- being a white Hispanic and not Mexican, it was kind of interesting to resist cultural assimilation of, like, choosing one or the other, especially when people would tell me things, like, speak English because we're in the US-- to which I vigorously responded in Spanish much to their irritation.

But it's just like having to choose between having friends and losing my culture.

Often I chose just to be with my family, because I was more important to me, but that pressure was definitely present.

KAREN: Definitely also someone who is first-gen, the idea of assimilation is something that's had an impact on my life.

And for me it's really been really interesting to kind of tease apart the differences and attitudes toward assimilation between my generation and my parents' generation, because my parents were the ones that moved to the US.

And for them, assimilation was something that they didn't teach me their languages, and for people of their generation that-- we have family friends that seek to assimilate kind of by not only adopting Western American styles of dress and language but also by forcibly distancing themselves from their South Asian roots even if they are born and raised in India.

Like, there's a family friend that refuses to fly certain airlines to certain places in the world to not be seen as part of that South Asian crowd and things like that, versus, like, people in my generation, where it's become kind of a reclamation of identity-- a kind of like what Rachel was talking about-- kind of trying to avoid assimilation by adopting different styles of dress and sort of reclaiming your heritage.

But it's also interesting to compare assimilation and attitudes towards-- like, assimilation towards the melting pot in the US, versus in the Caribbean, people tend to call the US a melting pot, but there's definitely still, like, stratified social groups and cultural groups within the US, versus in-- and almost as if you're trying to aspire to one assimilated one American norm, whatever that means, even though we're supposed to celebrate our cultural diversity.

But the Caribbean, as the Walcott reading pointed out so beautifully, I thought that there is so many different points and lingering memories of vestiges of different cultures within the Caribbean.

They all exist harmoniously and create a new culture, so the idea of, like, is the US truly a melting pot, or are there better examples of that in the world?

And then we've been hinting around it, basically political, economic, and social discourses of power also confer into linguistic discourses of power.

There is the quote from-- RACHEL: Oh, and it was very wonderfully captured in several of the readings, the quote from the bishop of Seville to the queen of Spain when Columbus requested to go into the colonies, he, like, handed her a dictionary of Spanish and was like, "language is the perfect instrument of empire." And I thought that was very representative of how social, political, and economic kind of fed into linguistic discourses of power as the, like, predominant vehicle for it.

KAREN: And today within the Caribbean, as we've discussed, this plays out in education-- in the language of education, in the language of politics, in the language of the upper class, where the native language of a very, very small population is given so much precedence over the language-- the lingua franca of these countries and a language that is very emblematic of these countries itself.

It's a language that is a melting pot.

Creole is a language that is born of so many different languages coming together just as Caribbean cultures born of so many different peoples coming together, and it's a bit ironic.

There's a Lippi-Green quote that says, "to take away someone's access to their mother tongue is to also take away access to their best tool for social change," essentially.

And a lot of the readings hinted at this-- that reclaiming language through music like what Coke was doing in Jamaica through poetry-- like what Chamberlin was suggesting is a way of subverting these economic and political discourses of power.

RACHEL: And these discourses of linguistic power are paralleled globally, as have all of that difficulty discourses of power we've been talking about, in two prevailing ideas that are linked together-- the idea of prescriptivism which feeds cultural capital-- that there is a correct way of speaking every language.

And then there are predominant correct languages and incorrect languages or better than worse, and this has been a largely larger form of global control of language.

And it contributes to the idea of linguistic genocide, which has now been documented very well that it's rampant throughout the world that languages are dying at alarming rates, but it's due to-- it's linked to this idea that there is a correct language, and the speakers of these quote, unquote "incorrect languages" have abandoned for violent and nonviolent reasons.

And so, like, this idea has been very prevalent.

KAREN: So then now talking about how all of these predominant discourses of power impact the shaping and formation of identity.

So there are a lot of complex in defining identity in a post-colonial world.

The Barack Obama has a quote that "the worst thing that colonialism did was to cloud our view of the past," but also this view of the past is kind of something that a lot of countries are struggling with when defining today's identity-- is what is our relationship to the past?

Was it a relationship to colonial powers-- to countries that the people of today come from?

And how do we or do we at all use these influences to shape a unique national identity today?

If we look at Jamaica, their way of shaping a unique Jamaican identity was through their music through what Coke was doing and in sponsoring these dancehall music-- the popularity of it, and through the propagation of Caribbean poetry, and just the idea that language can be used as a tool to maintain a sense of identity.

RACHEL: And then identity also has kind of a dual nature that goes along with this, like, choosing whether or not we are colonial, or not, or both.

Or a new thing is that identity is both self-chosen and imposed, and you can choose how all of these discourses of power influence how you define yourself, and so then like the idea, as Walcott said-- KAREN: Yeah, so he kind of hinted at the idea that historically Caribbean cultures have struggled, or people have struggled with the idea of buying Caribbean cultures as being a culture of people, because they're so hodgepodge and made up of so many different influences-- kind of hearkening back to the idea of, like, purity and authenticity.

RACHEL: And so, using this idea of purity as a way of deciding whether, like, what you choose or what's imposed on you makes you pure or not, and how you decide to identify with that idea, and whether or not it's authentic to have chosen or to be imposed, and, like, what remains in your identity in terms of the idea of authenticity that Tiango and Achebe discussed in a paper that we read.