The Dynamic Character Impressions Regarding the Life and Person of Thomas "Indian Warner"

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Introduction

"The Dynamic Character of Impressions Regarding the Life and Person of Thomas 'Indian' Warner," is an analysis of the "The Case of 'Indian' Warner," a part of the wider anthology *Wild Majesty: Encounters With Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day* by Peter Hulme and Neil Whitehead. This analysis looks to understand how the mixed Kalinago Dominican*/British heritage of Antiguan-born Thomas 'Indian' Warner was manipulated by European powers to serve their colonial pursuits whilst maintaining positive imperial/indigenous relations in the Lesser Antilles. The analysis also explores abuses of indigenous populations in the Greater Antilles by Spanish colonizers known as *conquistadores*.

Hulme and Whitehead place 'Indian' Warner, born of an English father and a Kalinago-Dominican mother, in a state of "inbetweeness," perceived as "[both] a valued intermediary [and] a potential traitor." 'Indian' Warner's ethnic hybridity was never celebrated for its uniqueness, rather it was used by the British to serve their own needs, from their initial interactions with 'Indian' Warner to its serving as mitigating evidence during the trial of his half-brother, Colonel Philip Warner, who had murdered 'Indian' Warner in 1675. 'Indian' Warner was used as a diplomatic pawn by the British.

To maintain positive relations with and control over the Kalinago people on the island of Dominica, in addition to reducing the animosity between themselves and the French who had once controlled the island, the British moved to appoint 'Indian' Warner as Governor of the island. At this point in time, 'Indian' Warner's ethnic hybridity was of great utility to the British; however, the same cannot be said when it came to seeking justice for his murder years later. The overwhelming sentiment to acquit Colonel Philip Warner after he had murdered his own half-brother (who had been labeled "a slave", not a son of Sir Thomas Warner), coupled with the English Secretary of State's plea to "seek justice for 'Indian' Warner" so as not to tarnish the image of the British in the eyes of the indigenous Kalinago peoples exhibit the utter self-centeredness colonizing nations and their great abuse of an individual's ethnic hybridity.

**Kalinago* is the original name used to describe the indigenous populations of the Lesser Antilles. The term *Carib* is derogatory and carries with it a negative connotation derived from ignorant and detrimental colonial discourses.

Analysis

The primary sources documenting various aspects of the life and death of Thomas "Indian" Warner, supposedly the son of Sir Thomas Warner, Governor of St. Kitts, and a Kalinago woman from Dominica, are deeply interesting and act as the means from which "Indian" Warner's experiences can be interpreted. Prior to interpreting Warner's life, it is necessary to understand who he was and where his lineage lies. After the death of his father, Thomas "Indian" Warner suffered at the hands of his stepmother on the island of his birth, Antigua (Hulme and

Whitehead 95; Dampier 90). It is documented by sources such as those of Dampier and Du Tertre that after feeling disliked by relations on the English side of his family, that "Indian" Warner escaped to the native lands of his mother, the island of Dominica. Here, Warner lived among the Kalinago people, whose culture he shared and language he knew because of his Kalinago mother. In the year 1675, "Indian" Warner encountered his half-brother, Colonel Philip Warner, on the island of Dominica. It was at this time that Philip Warner murdered his own half-brother, his motive fueled either by avenging the "Indian" Warner for his treachery to the Crown by his involvement in the indigenous attacks of Antigua, or speculatively, by the shame he held in sharing blood with someone of indigenous descent (Dampier 90).

Throughout Warner's life, he experienced both positive and negative relations with two of the colonizing nations in the Caribbean at the time, the British and the French. In the abstract preceding their work, Hulme and Whitehead speak of the "in-betweenness" experienced by individuals of mixed background, such as Warner, and their characterization as "[both] a valued intermediary [and] a potential traitor" (Hulme and Whitehead 89). The notion of hybridity in the colonial Caribbean came to be dynamic, embodying the potential to be manoeuvred not only by the mixed-heritage individual themselves, but more so by external forces, such as colonizers, who would use this "in-betweenness" to the advantage of pursuing their own interests and succeeding in conquest (Barratt and Ranjitsingh 481).

In the earlier years of contact with the English, "Indian Warner" was advantageous to the interests of the Crown. Made initially by Lord Francis Willoughby in 1664 and revived after his death by his successor Lord William Willoughby in 1666 was the commission of "Indian" Warner to the position of Governor of Dominica (on the Leeward side of the island) (Hulme and Whitehead 92). The English, despite their understanding of "Indian" Warner's ambivalence towards the English, wished to gain a foothold for themselves on Dominica. Dominica was an island formally dominated by the Kalinago, as agreed upon in a 1660 treaty between the Kalinago of some of the Lesser Antillean islands and Europeans (Murphy 19). By having "Indian" Warner as Governor on the island, the English gave the impression that it was not their domination over the island, but friendly indigenous control over the people. In later years, when Warner's appointment was renewed, it too was intended for the favourability of the English. According to the President of the Council of Barbados, Warner was "only commissioned [as] an Indian… to avoid distaste with the French" (Hulme and Whitehead 92). Similar doings can also be identified in the Spanish-colonized Greater Antillean islands. Spanish *conquistadores* would engage in the appropriation of indigenous women as a "strategy to acquire rights of succession" (Schwartz 11). Just as the English used "Indian" Warner to their colonial benefit, so to did the Spanish men of islands such as Puerto Rico and Hispaniola to ameliorate their personal lives to the detriment of indigenous peoples.

Contrary to initial perceptions of "Indian" Warner as a beneficial agent by the English, similar sentiments were not shared by the French. According to an account by Du Tertre, there was animosity between the "Indian" Warner and the Kalinago of the Leeward side of Dominica and the Kalinago, allied with the French, on the Windward side of the island. After supposed hostilities between the two entities were ignited, "Indian" Warner was captured by "savages" from Guadeloupe and was held by the French, specifically under the orders of Monsieur de la Barre, for 2 years until the end of the war between the French and English in the Caribbean (Du Tertre 92). It seems plausible that the French harboured hostilities towards "Indian" Warner for a few different reasons—such reasons as his mixed origins (i.e. His Englishness, as well as the

"savage" nature accredited to him for his Dominican indigenous heritage), the many complaints voiced to the Governors of Martinique and Guadeloupe, and his lack of utility to the purposes of French colonization serve to explain the French distaste for "Indian" Warner. The French used "Indian" Warner's mixed heritage and the negative connotations attached to it vilify and villainize him.

Particularly interesting of "Indian" Warner's life is his murderous end and how his mixed identity served him at this time. As previously noted, "Indian" Warner was murdered by his half-brother, Colonel Philip Warner, on the island of Dominica (Dampier 90). Negative sentiments surrounding the rumoured treachery of Warner in accepting a commission from the French and his "growing Antiguan sympathies" after the death of Lord William Willoughby, and the legitimacy of his patronage, coupled with the condemnation of his murder by certain parties, characterized the period following Warner's death (Hulme and Whitehead 100). For example, upon hearing of the murder of "Indian" Warner, the English Secretary of State responded to the tragedy, on behalf of the crown, with a request to seek justice for the injustice to Warner and to prove to the indigenous peoples of the island that the English were not hot-blooded, murderous peoples (Coventry 102). Although this response hints at the maintenance of good relations with the indigenous, it more importantly addresses the need for redress towards the crime inflicted upon "Indian" Warner.

In contrast, other documents circulating at the time favoured Colonel Warner and his acquittal, depicting "Indian" Warner as the slave, rather than the biological son of Sir Thomas Warner. For example, in a letter to the Council of Plantations in 1675, Governor Stapleton made clear that Colonel Warner's attack was not unwarranted; more significantly, he claimed "Indian" Warner was a slave (Stapleton 103). Stuart Schwartz notes in his article "Spaniards, "Pardos," and the Missing Mestizos*,"* that "the relationship of *mestizos* to their mother's family… and the access of these *mestizos* to the patronage… served to determine their position [in society] (Schwartz 9)". In connecting this statement to the discursive nature of hybrid identity, colonizers are enabled to use this often administratively-troublesome "cultural impurity" to their advantage in the demonization or salutary differentiation of mixed-identity individuals (Whitehead 228; Bettez 142). Governor Stapleton illegitimated "Indian" Warner's biological connection to his father, Sir Thomas Warner. He used negative sentiments already cast towards "Indian" Warner and emphasized his indigeneity in order that a murderous, but pure and established English man, could go free. "Indian" Warner's indigeneity became so much of a monstrosity rather than the alterity it once was that his death was not avenged (Whitehead 228).

The life and death of Thomas "Indian" Warner are centered in the dynamic impressions and manipulations of his mixed heritage. "Indian" Warner's hybridity allowed him to be ascribed status and awarded prestigious titles, while simultaneously being denigrated as an "uncivilized" and treacherous individual, initially depicted as Sir Thomas Warner's son, but then reduced to the status of his slave. From these observations, it is evident that "Indian" Warner's position as a figure of historical relevance and hybridity lies in the ambiguous interpretations of peoples past and present, based on the circumstances and media of the time.

Works Cited

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