

The Child-narrator as an Instrument of Criticism: Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*

JULIA UDOFIA

Abstract

One of the narrative techniques at the disposal of the writer is the use of the child narrator. This technique which usually features in the bildungsroman or novels that trace a child's development from innocence, gullibility and comprehension, to when he starts losing his innocence and begins to learn the true nature of the world can be used to attain diverse ends. One of such ends is that they can be made to convey socio-political critique. In this type of situation, the child provides a façade behind which the author hides and makes his critique of his milieu so that the world and growing process of the child are of secondary interest. An example of this type of use is seen in Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*. The metaphor of the school-child then implies the nation as the meta-text and the child protagonist as the representative of the larger society. Consequently, just as the young protagonist, through whom the author mirrors the general situation of her society matures and overcomes her problems in this novel – *Beka Lamb* – there is hope that the newly independent nation of Belize which the text represents will also triumph over her difficulties. The methodology of the research is to first scrutinize the primary text – *Beka Lamb* – and then have recourse to relevant critical materials in an attempt to sharpen the focus of the arguments.

Introduction

The use in fiction of child-narrators is one of the narrative techniques at the disposal of the writer. This narrator (the child) features usually in stories which trace a child's development from innocence, gullibility and comprehension to when he starts losing his innocence and begins to learn the true nature of the world. This technique which is prominent in childhood novels or novels more usually referred to as the bildungsroman can be used to attain diverse ends. One of such ends is not they can be made to occupy a major position in novels which focus strictly on the world of growth. In this type of novel, the author tries to faithfully recapitulate the world of the child and the experiencing consciousness is

consistently that of the child who records and articulates what goes on around him. Here, the author's primary interest is to recall the world of childhood and nothing else so that any criticism or comments on societal wrongs are made in passing or deduced by the reader's sensitive analysis of the child's intuitive patterns, rather than by the child's direct comments. An example of this type of novel is Michael Anthony's *The Year in San Fernando*.

Autobiographical novels also often feature child-narrators. In this case, the author recounts his growth process with deliberate nostalgic innocence and sometimes with an exaggerated attempt to recreate the world of childhood. In this type of story, the narration is contrived (oftentimes) to idealize childhood and the society is presented as harmonious. Also, many authorial interventions in the description and analysis of certain events or characters are witnessed and the author interprets things in a way that exceeds a child's expected perceptive and analytical power. An example of this type of novel is Camara Laye's *The African Child*.

However, the use in fiction of the child-narrator could also be to convey socio-political critique. In this type of novel, the child features purely for critical purposes so that through his descriptions and observations, the author identifies and criticises particular societal ills. In this type of story, the world and growing process of the child is of secondary interest and the child's perceptive ability is exaggerated to a high degree to suit the author's purpose. An example of this type of novel where the child provides a façade behind which the author hides and makes his critique of his milieu are George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*, Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* and Geoffrey Drayton's *Christopher*. It also includes Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* which is discussed in this paper.

The Child-Narrator as a Critical Tool in Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*

Published in 1982, a year after Belize's independence and set around 1950 in the then British Honduras, now Belize, a former colony of Britain, *Beka Lamb*, both Zee Edgell's and Belize's first novel records seven months in the life of Beka lamb, her family and her friend, Toycie. A bildungsroman, *Beka Lamb* tells the story of Beka's development from a girl with lack of confidence in herself and with a penchant for lying, to one who matures and gains victory in the end.

Told in flashback from the eyes of Beka Lamb, the eponymous heroine, Beka's recollections begin when she wins an essay competition at St. Cecilia's Academy and stands in lieu of a wake for her friend, Toycie. Also, two members

of the Belizean Peoples' Independent Party, Pritchard and Gladsen, have been imprisoned for disloyalty to the British government. And so, as Beka reminisces about these past months, she recalls that her life started to change the day she decided to stop lying. Her last lie was a big one: failing three subjects, Beka had not been promoted to the next grade despite her lie to her parents to the contrary. In addition to lying, Beka also has other conflicts with her parents such as not cleaning the attic properly, throwing garbage into the yard, stealing money from her father's trouser pockets and procrastinating with her chores, a situation which her mother, Lilla Lamb often complains about to her husband who then must discipline Beka. In fact, to curb her wild ways and tale-telling habit, Beka's father, (Bill Lamb) cuts down Beka's tree (a bougainvillea) as a sign that the wild ways Beka has picked up must stop at once when she finally tells him that she has failed her examinations. Her mother, (Lilla Lamb) also buys Beka a special book and pen in which Beka must write any lies or stories she is tempted to tell. However, despite these parent-teen conflicts, Beka has a loving relationship with her parents. While her family does not like all that Beka does, they do love her. So, Beka begs her father for a second chance at school, promising to pass this time and the father eventually relents. Sister Gabriela, a nun at Beka's school, takes Beka under her wing and encourages her to enter for an essay competition about Belizean history, and despite Granny Ivy's fears that Beka has no chance of winning any contest at a "no convent school" because such prizes always go to "Bakras, Panias or Expatriates" (1) and certainly not to a Creole girl, Beka does win the prize and the novel ends where it began with the essay contest prize and a much bigger win for Beka – self-confidence and hope for the future and by implication, her country, Belize.

Emiley Smiley observes that there seems to be a trend in post-colonial literature of juxtaposing a character's coming-of-age with that of his country. In the same vein, Christopher De Shield notes that many pre-independence and newly post-independence novels studied in the Caribbean feature an adolescent narrator whose need for maturity and self-rule seem to parallel the nation's political struggle for independence and self-realization. This seems true of *Beka Lamb* whose heroine's need for maturity matches her country's. Other examples of stories where a bildungsroman hero is juxtaposed with his or her nation include, Nathaniel Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux", Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*, Joseph Zobel's *La Rue Cases-Negres* and Salmon

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

The metaphor of the adolescent child then implies the nation as the metatext, and Beka, the representative of the emergent nation, (and in this case, Belize). This point is driven home by the fact that apart from the novel being set during a critical period in Belize's history – the sedition trial of the 1950s which was crucial in Belize's attainment of independence – the author points out on the first and last pages of the novel that Beka won the essay competition on the very day Gladsen and Pritchard were imprisoned for sedition by the British Colonial government. As observed by De Shield, Pritchard and Gladsen seem to correspond on a one-to-one basis with historical Belizean political leaders such as Philip S. W. Goldson and Leigh Richardson, both of whom were charged with sedition by the British Governor, Renison (in *Beka Lamb*, Governor Radisson) for publishing pieces that supposedly called for a revolution. Both Beka's personal action and Gladsen's and Pritchard's national action were turning points in corresponding drives for self-realization and independence. Also, both were of equivalent degrees, though not final achievements in the steps leading towards fulfillment so that this way, Beka's drive for independence and self-realization parallel Gladsen's and Pritchard's national action as De Shield suggests.

This technique of juxtaposing a character's coming-of-age and maturation with that of his country, perhaps, makes Frederic Jameson assert that "third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory" (69). Jameson continues: "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (69). The implication here is that the problems and dilemmas of the individual reflect those of the polity. With respect to *Beka Lamb*, the best evidence of this is seen where the protagonist, Beka, after telling one of the Catholic nun school teachers that she feels she must drop out of the essay contest confesses: "sometimes I feel bruk down just like my own country, Sister. I start all right but then I can't seem to continue. Something gets in the way and then I drift for the longest while" (115).

The strong relationship between the author, her work and the nation seems in this case, more so in the light of the fact that *Beka Lamb* is both Zee Edgell's and Belize's first novel, which perhaps is why Elleke Boehmer opines that "stories.... embody nations, inscribing a national destiny into time and injecting

new life into its myths of the past” (11). It also seems to account for Richardson Patterson’s assertion that the novel is subject to the perceived desires of the nation and that the connection between the two is never severed....” (37). Thus, “by re-articulating the myths of the nation in print and placing the contingent historical moment within a literal narrative”, Edgell, it would seem, “preserves the territorial and sovereign legitimacy of the nation”, (De Shield, 14). Buttressing this point further, De shield continues that it was Said Musa, the then Prime Minister of Belize that was the guest speaker at the book launch while Prof. O. Nigel Bolland, celebrated scholar of Belizean history that provided the critical praise at the back blurb of the book rather than a professor of Caribbean literature or of women’s writing. It reads: “A novel that rings true. Not only are the facts right but it also conveys the complexity of human relationships with compassion and without simplification” (Backmatter).

However, be that as it may, the full range of social commentary in *Beka Lamb* is seen in Edgell’s close association of Beka with Toycie, another major character in the novel. Toycie is not only Beka’s schoolmate. “Both are tied together in a kind of extended family by the intimate friendship of Beka’s grandmother, Miss Ivy, and Toycie’s guardian, Miss Eila” (Ervin Beck, 2). As the latter puts it, “Toycie serves as a foil or alter ego for Beka Lamb” (2) as Toycie, in place of Beka, acts out certain tragic experiences which Beka, fortunately, can be spared and profit from by observing. In Beck’s words:

Specifically, as a seventeen-year-old, being initiated into sex, Toycie serves as a traumatic moral warning about such conduct for Beka who, at fourteen is not yet interested in boys (although there are indications that she is on the verge of it). The most explicit identification of Beka with Toycie occurs towards the end of the novel where Beka Lamb accepts the essay prize knowing that Toycie would have won it if she were still alive. Therefore, Toycie acts out the worst possibility in Beka’s life, just as Beka acts out the best possibility in Toycie’s (2).

With Toycie therefore as an alter ego for Beka and with Beka as an embodiment of Belize, their problems become representative of the main problems facing Belize as an emergent nation and culture. Beka’s main problem is lying, while Toycie’s is sex and conception outside of marriage. Although Edgell does not mean to imply that all or most of Belizeans are liars and fornicators, as Beck points out, she uses these character flaws to imply deeper, more subtle things

about larger, ingrained national problems. In other words, Toycie's pregnancy illustrates the propensity in Belize towards economic disintegration and ethnic conflict, while Beka's lying, on the other hand, serves as "a metonymy for the general problem of authentic identity, whether in Beka as a person, the Creoles as an ethnic group or Belize as a nation emerging into self-hood following colonization" (Beck, 2). In Beka's words, she is "ashamed of herself and her people" (19). She therefore comes to a realization of her "phoney" nature; of her undetermined, immature childish self (20). By implication therefore, the personal problems of these two adolescent girls – basically questions of identity and socioeconomic success – become representative of the most critical problems of an adolescent nation. This way, Edgell makes a comment about socio-political and economic post-independence realities in Belize.

This situation is analogous to that in George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, which, seen through the eyes of a young boy G., tells the story of a little village (Barbados) transiting from a stage of ignorance and acquiescence to that of awareness and insistence on its rights. In this novel – *In the Castle of my Skin* – the fortunes of this village are shown through three phases of existence; each, with its representatives. The first set of representatives fail because of their unwillingness to investigate the past, while the revolution of the second generation fails because they have no vision of how the society should be organized besides their rage at the colonialists. The true political vision emerges slowly through the third generation represented by the youths. And so, through Trumper, and later, G., Lamming suggests that the third generation of West Indians must acquire exposure to social and political truths in other lands before returning to the Caribbean to effect fundamental changes and guide the people out of their confusion and ignorance. So, through Trumper's exposure to institutionalized racism in America, Lamming suggests that true political vision can only be acquired through a total re-acquaintance with the past.

At the end of the novel, G. is preparing to leave for Trinidad for further education. This also emphasizes Lamming's implication that the West Indian youth must go on voluntary exile in order to expand his scope of possibilities and must also make an intimate contact with the past in order to chart the path of future progress. These, the author does through his child-character G., from whose perspective the story is told, so that this way, Lamming, like Edgell, makes a critique about the socio-political situation in Barbados.

Another subject of commentary in *Beka Lamb* is the issue of social insecurity arising from class division. A close look at the socio-economic status of the families of the two main characters in the novel – Beka and Toycie – suggests that Edgell seems to “associate the nuclear family with the economically successful middle-class and the traditional Creole matrifolka family with the poverty-stricken lower-class” (Beck, 3). As seen in the novel, on the whole of Cashew Street, the Lamb family is the only Creole nuclear family. The other Creole nuclear family is the Hartleys, who, as Beck observes, are so much wealthier than the Lambs as to belong to another social realm entirely. Beka makes an inventory of the Creole families on her street and she discovers five husbandless matrifolka households before Granny Ivy interrupts her. And the fact that her inventory comes as a reverie in the middle of her essay-writing implies that she is obsessed with the possibility of her life turning out like theirs and Toycie’s, Beck suggests. Only recently, at Great-Gran Straker’s wake, Beka was horrified by Miss Flo’s report that her daughter had just had her third child by her third boyfriend.

Clearly then, the Lamb family is an exception in Belize City. In fact, on both sides of Beka’s family tree, her own family – Bill and Lilla’s – is the only married nuclear family. As Beck notes, in the maternal branch of her family tree, there are four informal sexual liaisons: Beka’s Aunt Tama lived with a “gentleman” in Honduras for fifteen years; her maternal grandmother conceived Tama and Lilla with a half-bakra bushman father, who is now living with a Mayan woman in the bush; his father was an English man who had him with a Creole woman; and Great-gran Straker lived with a “gentleman” who was a cutter. Even less is known about father Bills’s family, although towards the end of the novel, Granny Ivy admits to Beka that “Toycie’s first trouble caught me too and I turned to rocking the cradle” (170). This means that she gave up her own dream of success (joining the circus) and became a washer woman instead.

The same issue of loose family is the case with Toycie’s. Abandoned by her unmarried mother and father, Toycie is raised by her Aunt, Eila and her education at St. Cecilia is at a great financial constraint to her family, as Eila has to work several jobs to pay her school fees. Being very poor, Eila knows that education is the only way out of poverty in Belize and although Toycie is an excellent student and Beka must struggle, both girls do not want to end up like many other Creole women with no education, no husband and the only job available being “the washing bowl underneath the house bottom” (2).

However, how it is that Bill married Lilla and established a successful nuclear family is not really clear. But what we are told is that as early as the age of fourteen, Bill had already become a hard and responsible worker, the reward of which is that he has a white-collar job, is a member of the Creole club, and has raised (very importantly) his family's social status to the next level, among other achievements. Therefore, by juxtaposing Beka's family with others, and especially Toycie's, and showing how each protagonist ends up, Edgell not only makes a comment about class division in Belize but also seems to recommend the nuclear family, education and hard work, within the dominant class system (as we see in the case of Bill Lamb), as the necessary or best means of "progress" for Belizeans in the modern world, in Beck's view.

The issue of class also brings to mind other childhood novels like *Christopher* and *Crick Crack, Monkey* which equally feature child-protagonists as narrators. Although told from the third-person narrative point-of-view, in *Christopher*, the focus of narration and experiencing consciousness is

Christopher's. Also, Christopher is the most well-defined character in the novel. His personal growth, dislocation and sense of loss as in *Beka Lamb*, are seen as a metaphor of the isolated white West Indian class. An only child, Christopher belongs to a relatively white planter family. The planters lost money during the Second World War while the merchants maximized their profit during the same period. This creates tension between Christopher's maternal parents who belong to the wealthy merchant group and his paternal family, who belong to the impoverished planter class. His father resents the wealth of the Frasers and bears Mr. Fraser a grudge for refusing to help him financially. The Frasers, on their own part, resent the gentle breeding of the Stevens. Being related to both groups, Christopher unwittingly becomes the primary focus of his father's resentment and is put in an initially helpless position because his mother is too weak to provide a buffer against his father's resentment. And so, through the delineation of Christopher's attempts to withstand the source and effect of the tensions in his family, Drayton makes a comment about social and political realities in Barbados. Maturity also does not seem to hold out much promise for Christopher. Rather, it accentuates his solitariness and awareness of the paucity of choices open to him, and by implication, the entire West Indians.

Similarly, Merle Hodge's *Crack Crack, Monkey* features a little girl – Tee – trying desperately to adjust to two diametrically opposed socio-cultural systems in her

milieu. Tee's mother dies at childbirth and her father subsequently emigrates to England. This causes Tee and her brother, Toddan, to go and live with their two aunts – Tantie and Beatrice. The two thus oscillate between the worlds of these two aunts. Having grown up in the intimate, communal, informal and caring world of Tantie, Tee and Toddan cannot come to terms with the formal and artificial nature of Aunt Beatrice's world when they later go to stay with her. It is only after an extended exposure to the values and possibilities offered by the middle-class Metropolitan culture that Tee suffers a psychological dilemma between a yearning force and a loathing of the world of the two aunts. The two opposing cultural systems presented in the novel are the Black Creole culture and the Metropolitan culture. Tee, like Christopher, is heir by consanguinity to both cultural systems and the dilemma arises when she tries to divorce herself at any point in time from either culture. At the root of her dilemma is the problem of identification with a particular set of norms and folkways which provide the framework for everyday life. And so, by specifically focusing on the attempts of a little girl to figure out how to reconcile the fundamental structural differences between the different worlds she is exposed to, Hodge, like Edgell, makes a comment about the problems emanating from displacement and being heir to several cultures.

But it is not only the issue of class or societal stratification that is being commented on by Edgell. The author also makes a statement on ethnic and racial matters in the novel. Very early in the story, we are told that fourteen-year-old Beka Lamb lives in Belize city, "a relatively tolerant town" where people with their roots in Africa, the West Indies, Central America, Europe, North America, Asia and other places "lived in a kind of harmony" and that "in three centuries, miscegenation, like logwood, had produced all shades of black, and brown, not grey or purple or violet" (11). However, not long afterwards, it is said not "Each race held varying degrees of prejudice concerning the others" (12), but that "in time of danger, it was a tradition for all races to present a united front" (12). Bill also states the problem thus: "Hatred of British colonialism unites us now. There are so many races here I wonder what will keep us together once they leave" (96). And Granny Ivy speaks of the hopeful solution this way: "We'll have to get used to it Bill. Don't you hear what the politicians are saying out at Battlefield Park? We must unite to build a nation" (102).

As catalogued by Beck, the ethnic groups mentioned in the novel are the Expatriates, (white colonialists and other foreign residents), Bakras (white citizens of Belize), Creoles (mixed whites and Africans), Panias and Mestizos (mixed Spanish and native Africans), Mayans (native Americans of Belize), Coolies (descendants of East Indian indentured servants), and Caribs (dark Africans with Carib Indian admixture). This ethnic variety depicted in the novel is also demonstrated in the songs that Beka arranges for the Mother Superior's visit – a medley of Belizean folksongs whose nature (except the Creole “pinqwing juk me”) is not specified.

However, although so many inter-ethnic /racial conflicts like the CreoleCarib conflict which is historically ingrained are featured, it is only the Creoles/Hispanics conflict that is the most pronounced in the novel. We are told that until recently, Spanish speakers tended to live in the districts – especially Orange Walk and Corozal. They retained their native language and remained on the fringes of national affairs. However, with independence and with a Creole outmigration to the United States, and an in-migration of Mestizos from Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador, the situation has changed with the result that the Panias now supersede the Creoles in education and economic power so that as a Creole girl in a Spanish-Catholic school which is the best school in Belize city, Beka, and indeed all the other few Creole girls attending the school are the “underdogs” (Beck, 6).

Granny Ivy also buttresses this situation as exemplified in her “befo time” stories. According to her, “befo time”, Creoles dominated the Panias in education, as well as with respect to their influence in national affairs, perhaps, due to their English-language skills that seemed to make them the preferred group for staffing the colonial bureaucracy. And “befo time”... “Beka would never have won that contest... But things can change fi true” (73). And change they do. Also, although the Lambs live with the Blancos who are Spanish on the St. George's Caye when on holidays, and though Mr. Blanco rides and drives “Nigger Gial” when he skims across the sea, the families remain separated by “wealth, class, colour” (51). This is so because the Lambs live below the house and cook in an outdoor kitchen like servants. Also, they look at Mr. Blanco as a “deity” (51), accept gifts of food from Mrs. Blanco (even though Daddy Bill chokes on Spanish food) and watch the Blanco children play (separate from them) in their anklets and leather shoes. Thus,

even though the Lambs holiday with the Blancos, they do so as second-class citizens; as subordinates, beholden to the Blancos.

But if Spanish culture dominates *Beka Lamb* and her Creole family, it is in the development of the Toycie-Emilio relationship that the Creole-Spanish conflict comes out the strongest. Both Beka and Toycie know that “Panias scarcely ever marry Creoles like we” (47). Indeed, Toycie crosses out “Espania” on the guitar she received from the English woman and writes “Belize”, and Beka rejects Granny Ivy’s suggestion that she go to Mexico and study Spanish. Also, Emilio and his mother, once friendly with Toycie and Beka, suddenly turn cold.

Nevertheless, Toycie goes on to “raise her color” (47) by believing Emilio’s promise to marry her and Emilio, (to use Beck’s words) “toys” with her to her tragic end (6). Therefore, through Emilio’s sexual conquest of Toycie, the author not only dramatizes the ethnic conflicts in Belize but also makes a comment about how the Spanish now dominate and exploit the Creoles.

Finally, the author makes a statement on the effects of colonization on the native population. This is seen in the British government’s conflict with Gladsen and Pritchard whom they accuse of sedition. As seen in the novel, Beka takes sides with her grandmother – and against her parents – in supporting Gladsen and Pritchard’s resistance to the colonial authorities. As Beck points out, in equating Beka’s struggle with that of Gladsen and Pritchard, (Beka wrote her essay during National Day and won the prize the day the seditioners were imprisoned), Edgell makes a statement which seems to be that she prefers an independent Belize to a colonized one. Even the preceding discussions of the socio-economic and ethnic problems of her country are contingent on the colonizing process: “Creoles are poor because they have been exploited by the British; and ethnic conflict in Belize stems at least in part from colonizers’ historic exploitation of ethnic differences to “divide and conquer” the natives (Beck, 8). Similarly, Evelyn O’ Callaghan observes that the colonial institution, as exemplified in St. Cecilia’s Academy and operated by the American sisters leave very strong influences on the lives of the natives. According to O’ Callaghan, “*Beka Lamb* focuses on women’s experience and implicitly equates economic underdevelopment under colonial rule with the devaluation of black working-class women under an educational system run by American nuns” (47). Although this indictment of St. Cecilia’s is more subtle and ambiguous with respect to Beka since it contributes significantly to her development into a Creole of “high mind”, the criticism is very apt with respect to

Toycie, whose life, according to O’Callaghan, ends in disaster precisely because the sisters of Charity show her no charity in her desperate situation.

And so, at the end of the novel, Beka becomes a self-created, autonomous, young woman. Her identity – and by implication, the identity of the new Belize – is complex and subtly drawn. Her work at St. Cecilia’s not only makes her a star pupil, but the way she goes about it and the effect of it on her is striking: She does not consult official sources such as colonial newspapers, archives and books but interviews Mr. Robateaus who was an eye-witness to the arrival of the sisters, thereby creating an alternative history. Beka’s achievement, according to Beck, “places her in the ranks of other colonized subjects such as C.L. James and Jamaica Kincaid – who say that they have used the substance of a colonial education ultimately to triumph over it” (10), unlike Toycie who is destroyed by it. Sister Gabriela, Beka’s most influential mentor tells her:

You are lucky, Beka. You are being given advantages most young people in this country far smarter than you are not going to get. Therefore, you have an obligation to serve, a responsibility to produce under the most adverse circumstances. You must go as far as the limitations of your life will allow (111).

Beka’s troubles have forced her to learn the value of money, education, unity within the community, and above all, good manners so that she transforms from a “flat-rate Belize Creole” to a girl with “high mind”.

And following Toycie’s death, Beka refuses to make friends both at school and on Cashew Street. The only friendship she has is with a Thomasita EK, a Mayan girl, who is also an outsider at St. Cecilia’s Academy. According to Beck, although this alliance may, on a national scale, lack much significance since Maya tends to be so culturally and geographically remote from urban culture that no true, long-standing ethnic conflict has thereby been bridged, on the political level, it may be more symbolic because “as Belize moved toward independence, the ancient Maya was chosen as the site on which to construct an “official” national identity hence, the new inland capital city of Belmopan was designed in a pseudoMayan architecture”, so that “by officially celebrating the ancient Mayas, Belizean authorities both invoke the Mayans’ glorious achievements as an inspiration to modern inhabitants of Mayan lands and also give national symbolic status to a cultural identity that all groups can accept – because both the ancient and modern Mayans are too remote from practical issues to be of any particular threat” (10).

The implication here is that, Beka's alliance with Thomasita EK, may, in Beck's view, indicate a similarly tentative fresh start in the forming of new social patterns and alliances.

Conclusion

Edgell therefore, through the personal, explores the general social, political and cultural situation of her country. Using her child-narrator and protagonist, the author mirrors the general socio-economic, cultural and political problems in Belize, which perhaps, is why Bernadine Evaristo remarks that from the colonial history of the country up to the present, Edgell's novels "filter the political through the personal" (1). In Evaristo's observation, while *In Times Like These* portrays the turmoil of Belize on the brink of independence, and *The Festival of San Joaquin* tells the story of a woman accused of murdering her husband, her short stories explore the layers of Belize's complicated social and racial stratification. In *Beka Lamb*, using Beka as a critical tool and representative figure, the author reflects and comments on the general situation of her country. Just as the young Beka overcomes her problems and dilemmas, there is hope that the newly independent country of Belize will surmount her teething challenges.

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