

# **RE-CONNECTING THE SPIRIT:**

## **Jamaican Women Poets and Writers' Approaches to Spirituality and God**

by

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## **Abstract**

Chapter One asks whether Christianity and religion have been re-defined in the Jamaican context. The definitions of spirituality and mysticism, particularly as defined by Lartey are given and reasons for using these definitions.

Chapter Two examines history and the Caribbean religious experience. It analyses theory and reflects on the Caribbean difference. The role that literary forefathers and foremothers have played in defining the writers about whom my research is concerned is examined in Chapter Three, as are some of their selected works.

Chapter Four reflects on the work of Lorna Goodison, asks how she has defined God whether within a Christian or African framework. In contrast Olive Senior appears to view Christianity as oppressive and this is examined in Chapter Five.

Chapter Six looks at the ways in which Erna Brodber re-connects the spirit. Chapter Seven regards the spiritually joyful God of Jean 'Binta' Breeze

Conclusions are then drawn as to whether writers have adapted a God to the Jamaican context, whether they have re-connected to the spirit and if it is true that Jamaica is a spiritual nation.

## **Dedication**

To my husband Paul, my daughter Laura and my son Scott for all their love and support, though none of them will probably ever read this.



## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Introduction**

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## Introduction

### JA MAC I

Many Jamaicans, when asked, believe themselves to be a very spiritual people. Often they regard themselves as having a close personal relationship with God and feel that God dwells within them. Patrick Taylor (ed), *Nation Dance- Religion, Identity and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean*, (Indiana, Bloomington, 2001, p.10) argues that religion provides a fundamental source of identity. This sense of the 'Divine' is never far from the natural world and it is women, in particular, who are traditionally regarded as the repository for the spiritual. There are high proportions of churches of various denominations compared to secular buildings in Jamaica. Gordon Collier 'At the gates of Cultures of the New World Religions, Mythology, and Folk- belief in West Indian Poetry,' in Jamie Scott, (ed) (1996), *'And the Birds Began to Sing'- Religion and Literature in Post-Colonial Cultures*, (Amsterdam, Rodolpi, 1996, p.227) recognises this in the context of literature and states that: "West Indian poetry has always had a spiritual and spirited edge to it." This, it could be argued, is reflected in various ways in the work of the writers who are considered in this thesis: Olive Senior, Lorna Goodison, Pam Mordecai, Erna Brodber and Jean 'Binta' Breeze. In this thesis the writers' perceptions of God and their relationship with God will be examined. Moreover whether their relationship with God has been re-defined within a Jamaican context will be questioned as a result of reviewing and discussing their work.

Spirituality is not easy to define and a homogeneous definition is not possible.

Emmanuel Lartey, the Ghanaian theologian (Interview in 1999) comments that the

words spirituality, spiritualism and mysticism are used virtually interchangeably, with people now using spirituality where they mean mysticism. Rex Nettleford (Interview in 2001) considers, somewhat sceptically, that 'spirituality' is a fashionable term, used instead of 'religion' by 'ladies of quality'.

There has always been a strong didactical and dialectical relation between religion and colonisation and also religion and history. Christianity was imposed on Jamaica as part of the process of colonisation. Whilst the church may be a representative symbol of oppression, it can also provide solace. Christianity can have both a positive and a negative influence. This Christianity is illustrated by some of the examined writers, with biblical references and phrases found in their poetry and writing (for example the Gospel according to St John, referred to in Lorna Goodison's work) which can, at times, contribute to spiritual depth. Others of these writers have discovered their own spiritual and cultural ground in the notion of a lost Africa or a spiritual connection with nature, whilst some of the writers examined have de-colonised and adapted Christianity to the Caribbean.

Although Christianity came with the colonisers, has it remained the same theologically – a part of a Euro-centric model? This Christianity may be the model of a white God and at times a restrained faith, which can sometimes, but not always, be gloomy. Or has it been adapted and re-defined so that it has become more relevant and meaningful within a Caribbean and especially Jamaican context? If it has been adapted, how is this explained in a literary context?

Churches in Jamaica have been fragmented and poets and writers represent and reflect this fragmentation in their work. Jamaican literature and art however do not always conform to the European model, but can tend to be more collective and celebratory, especially in more recent writing. (Collier, 1994, p.227). For example, few poets and writers of the present day in Europe write in an openly celebratory manner about Christianity (and expect to get published). However, writers such as Jean Binta Breeze and Lorna Goodison do. The women of the study have not written in isolation, as there are those who have preceded them – their literary forefathers and literary foremothers, who also had something to say about ‘spirituality’.

The writers who were studied all seem to recognise a spiritual base, but whilst it is impossible to generalise the notion of Jamaican spirituality, they identify it as an important part of Jamaican culture and deal with it in different ways to produce a diversity of responses.

The methodology that I have employed in researching this thesis includes fieldwork undertaken in Jamaica. This involved attending church services and meetings of different denominations as well as talking to local people about their perceptions of spirituality and poets and writers. I also visited the University of Jamaica and met with Victor Chang (Appendix 1). I visited Egypt to research the background to Lorna Goodison’s poems on Egypt and Sufism and met with the renowned Egyptologist Maher Haggag to discuss Sufism. I have also visited South Africa as background to other poems by Lorna Goodison. (Appendix 2)

I have interviewed and listened to readings by Lorna Goodison, Olive Senior and Honor Ford Smith and also Mervyn Morris, Rex Nettleford, Allison Donnell and Emmanuel Lartey. (Appendix 3)



I have attended a meeting on Liberation Theology given by Theresa Lo Chang at Birmingham (Appendix 4)

I would regard this research as fundamental to a better understanding of Jamaica, of religion and spirituality as well as of the poets and writers – both past and present and has led to a multi-disciplinary approach which includes theology and anthropology as well as literature. In addition I have undertaken close readings of the works studied and decided to use Emmanuel Lartey's definitions of spirituality because there was a danger that the work would be too broad and these definitions would give boundaries and a framework with which to study the poets and writers.

# Chapter 1

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Has Christianity been Re-defined in the Jamaican context?**

#### **Definitions of Spirituality and mysticism**

*For, behold, the kingdom of God is within.*

(Words of Jesus, Luke, 17:21)

Spirituality, spiritualism and mysticism are words that are generally misused and difficult to define. They are often associated with clairvoyance, demonology, witchcraft and the occult, as well as magic and weird psychical experiences. These misconceptions of meaning arise from the fact that the word 'mysticism' so easily suggests mystery and from the mystery of natural order and space there is a short step to the conclusion that 'supernatural' means occult. The meanings of the words have perhaps changed over the centuries with the term 'mysticism' being associated more often with the Middle Ages. Collier (1994, p.227) regards religions and other proto-religious beliefs such as mythology, superstition and legend as making up the social collective of folk culture that is both in the established form of writing and in the perceptions of history.

Emmanuel Lartey, *In Living Colour – An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral care and Counselling*, (London, Cassell, 1997, p.112) states that spirituality is a notoriously difficult term to distinguish. He argues that spirituality refers to the human capacity for relationships with self, others, the world, God and that which transcends sensory

experience. Lartey (ibid.) suggests that our spirituality is to do with our characteristic style of relating and has at least five dimensions:

1. A relationship with transcendence
2. Intra-personal (relationship with self)
3. Interpersonal (relationship with another)
4. Corporate (relationship among people)
5. Spatial (relationships with place and things)

Transcendence, or a mystical relationship with God, is perhaps the most important dimension in this work and will be dealt with in the most detail. However, the other dimensions are also fundamental and belong together as an integrated whole and will be discussed as they arise as in reality they are inseparable. These definitions provide the framework for the thesis as this enables an arbitrary boundary for the examination of the concept of spirituality.

### **Spirituality as relationship with transcendence**

Spirituality as relationship with transcendence is the most common and widely recognised of Lartey's spiritual definitions. Lartey (1997, p.115) suggests that some people feel this is the only way in which spirituality can be understood. In this sense spirituality refers to:

*An apparently universal human capacity to experience life in relation to a perceived dimension of power and meaning which is experienced as transcendent to our everyday lives (Lartey, 1997, p.115)*

However, this transcendence can, and often is, experienced in the middle of our everyday lives.

The response to transcendence is often given through religious traditions and their systems and symbols. For example, transcendence is spoken of in terms of God, Allah, The Almighty, Mystery, Ultimate etc. Lartey (ibid) states that in apophatic

traditions, transcendence is approached by *via negativa* – it is not possible to affirm what it is – one can only recognise what it is not.

### **Spirituality as a relationship with self**

Spirituality as a relationship with self was first highlighted, according to Lartey (1997, p.116), by Carl Gustav Jung; who had the clearest view of the importance of self and the discovery of self- realisation. He was careful to distinguish between ‘individualism’ to which he objects because it highlights the individual, rather than ‘individuality’ which values an individual as part of a collective. There is no ‘private’ spirituality as the word ‘private’ comes from *privatio* (robbery) and is not a Christian word. Leech (cited in Lartey, *ibid*) states that he is alarmed at the confinement of spirituality to the realm of the private life of individuals. Instead, spirituality should be seen as a way of living every sphere and that spirituality would then become a sphere in its own right ‘the spiritual dimension’. However, care needs to be taken that dualism – a separation between body and spirit which can lead at times to bizarre rites of body torture to ‘free the spirit’ - does not take place. Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul*, (New York, Harper Collins, 1992) suggests a shift from an individual focus on self to an individuate embracing of soul.

Spirituality, as a relationship with self, can involve self- denial which can be damaging to members of oppressed groups (Lartey, 1997, p.118), such as women who may have low self-esteem. Such Christian teaching was also present with the slavers who forcibly insisted upon this self-denial in slaves, whilst frequently pursuing their own wealth and greed in the name of Christian civilisation. Healthy relationships with self require variable responses to particular characteristics of self. Those who

suffer from low self-esteem need to re-value themselves and those with too much pride need to experience humility. An aspect of a relationship with self can be described as self-transcendence which allows us to engage in self-criticism and 'go beyond' ourselves and our state – entering into critical conversation with ourselves so that this openness can also be directed at others. (Lartey, *ibid*)

### **Interpersonal spirituality**

Interpersonal spirituality is the starting point for the corporate spirituality. To be able to cultivate a relationship with another in which mutuality, respect, accountability and friendship is sustained and maintained is in itself a spiritual task. Philosophers like Martin Buber make this spirituality the cornerstone of their system of thought and living. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, tran. Walter Kaufmann, (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1970, p.54) sees the spirituality of a relationship with God and relationship with another as overlapping. Much of the language of mystics is the language of love; erotic, and also longing for union with the Beloved, a longing for intimacy, closeness and union with another. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, spirit and heart are close. The heart can be seen as the centre of the soul. An example of interpersonal spirituality is the union of marriage (even with all its problems).

### **Corporate spirituality**

Corporate spirituality is an extension of interpersonal spirituality and is the spirituality of a group of people. Perhaps the best example of this is a religious organisation or group based on traditions into which persons are socialised and which have an influence on their patterns of prayer and relationships with others. Gestalt psychologists advocate that 'the whole is more than the sum of its parts'. The power

of corporate spirituality is more than the individuals and leaders within the body. The body, it would appear, acquires a life of its own (whether positive or negative). Lartey cites African spirituality (p.120), where belonging through participation is the mark of being- religion is not a separate entity, but is an integral part of being. In traditional African society, ritual commemoration can be a binding force, which can express the communality of the spiritual bonds of the community.

### **Spirituality as a spatial entity**

Spirituality as a spatial entity is particularly important for groups such as Native Americans who believe that existence is spatial not temporal. Spirituality is deeply rooted in the land. Land rootedness can manifest itself in ceremonies, symbols, architecture and worldview. In such societies each individual recognises herself as a combination of sky, earth, spirit, matter, peace, war, male and female and we struggle individually and communally to hold these qualities in balance (Tinker, G.E., (1994), 'Spirituality and the Native American personhood: sovereignty and solidarity' in K.C. Abraham and Bernadette Mbye- Beya (eds.) *Spirituality of the Third World: A Cry for Life*, (New York, Orbis, 1994, p.125). One of the goals of Native American spirituality is the achievement of harmony and balance in all creation and this can constitute a clear expression of spirituality as relationship with place and things of the earth.

### **Mysticism**

Transcendence is linked with Mysticism. Mysticism (Joe Jenkins, *Examining Religions – Christianity*, Oxford, Heinemann, 1995, p.30) could be described as an awareness of beyond, or a consciousness, which is interwoven with the material

world, yet is not part of it. It is an awareness of the unseen, over and above the seen. There is a belief in a divine source so that the words 'God', 'The Holy One' 'Ultimate Reality' can never give us a sense of the true power of this source. Humans are able to find knowledge about this divine source, not solely from the mind but also from feelings and intuition. Religious experiences are not about knowing but believing and this comes from intuition, which leads to spiritual discovery. Our true self is within us and is not usually obvious. It can be called spirit, soul, eternal self, inner person, divine spark, but we normally know very little about it. Some people feel the need to attain a spiritual relationship so that they can discover and identify their true selves because life can seem relatively short and seemingly insignificant in the larger pattern of things.

George Harkness, *Mysticism – its meaning and message*, (London, Oliphants, 1973, p.16) states that mysticism is found in all great religions. It centres on the communion of the human spirit with the ultimate ground of reality on which our existence rests. Mysticism, in its purest form, is a rare experience in which someone can be lifted out of themselves into a state of ecstasy and they may see visions and hear supernatural voices. This is true transcendence. However others argue that it can simply be called 'the practice of the presence of God', or the strengthening of the inner life through communion with God, and is available to all, I would suggest this is closer to Lartey's definition of transcendence.

### **Christian Mysticism**

The Old Testament has fewer references to the communion or union of God and man than the New Testament. The Songs of Solomon allude to the relationship between God and man, but it is the Psalms that recognise the transcendent holiness of God, the



rewards of moral righteousness and cleansing from sin. Although these may not be essential mystical concerns, they use the language of the mystics, which includes deep devotion, praise and prayer. There is also the thirst for the sound of God, affirmation of security in God's hands and God as the guardian and sustenance of the soul.

(Harkness, 1973, p.40) Psalm 139 verses 6-10 suggests the mystical view of the direct and immediate presence of God:

*Whither shall I go from thy spirit?  
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence!  
If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!  
If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!  
If I take the wings in the morning  
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
Even there thy hand shall lead me,  
And thy right hand shall hold me.*

The New Testament has many more references to the mystical. The Beatitudes: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" is at the heart of the New Testament and the Beatitudes require that there is rigorous self examination, penitence and the endeavour to live life blamelessly in the eyes of God. Paul was the first mystic to be mentioned in the New Testament as he had a mystical experience resulting in his conversion. He had a direct relationship with Christ, not personally, but with the risen Christ and he identified the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Christ as within him. His thoughts are expressed in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Paul says in Colossians: "Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, but Christ is all, and in all." These, amongst others of his sayings, emphasise a mystical implication that puts the emphasis on Christ within the believer. Although Paul was the first great Christian mystic, The Gospel according to St. John is considered to be the core of Christian mysticism. The

mystical spirit pervades throughout the Gospel and Clement of Alexandria, in the third century, called it 'The Spiritual Gospel.' (Harkness, 1973, p.49).

The Gospel according to St. John has the power to move the reader to a deeper spiritual life. Whoever wrote the Gospel had a deep spiritual insight into the meaning of Christ in relation to both God and man, though this gospel is seen as less historically accurate than the synoptic Gospels. In St. John's Gospel, God is not only the father of Christ but is also the son, love, light and spirit (Harkness, 1973, p.50). These are not abstract qualities but are very personal. The same God has been incarnate in Christ who manifests in his own person the love of God, the light of the world and the eternal divine spirit. Jesus does not appear in agony as in Gethsemane, (before his crucifixion) but He is in control, bearing witness to God's power and love. Yet, He is human and He experiences our emotions. In the prologue Jesus is symbolised by the words He spoke:

*And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only son from the Father... And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. (John 1: 14-16)*

These words are important to the Christian mystical experience. The mystic's life and light, his spiritual strength and his capacity to love God and his fellow persons come to him from a divinity that is beyond, yet manifest within, the world of human experience. In the seventeenth chapter, Jesus' prayer "that thy may all be one; even as thou, father, art in me, and I in thee," again advocates that God is within us. The author makes it clear that re-birth takes place through the spirit and this is done through the blowing of wind or breath but is a mystery. Millions of bereaved have taken comfort in John 5:24

*He who hears my word and believed him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life.*

Mystics and others have been assured that there is life after death in the presence of the goodness of Christ. Christian mystics believe in the radiant joy to be found after death.

Joy is an accompaniment to any genuine mysticism or transcendent spirituality, (Harkness, 1973, p.33), but not necessarily to transcendence, because unlike pleasure, joy can be present even in deep suffering: “These things I have spoken to you, and that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:11) The prologue to St. John’s Gospel: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men”, is the Christian mystic’s special, though not exclusive, way which she is called to be a bearer of that light. There is an unquestionable mystical note in the Bible, especially in the New Testament. Yet not everything that has religious or spiritual values is mystical. The basic note of mysticism is an awareness of the presence of God, whether in union or communion. There is also a serene and steady confidence in the nearness and sufficiency of God, but it is also a highly individual experience. It is not a theological system, though it has implicit theological grounding. It is not an ethical system, though mystics insist that moral purity is a prerequisite to the vision of God and should also be its fruit. It is not nationally, but individually orientated though there have been many mystics who have exerted great influence in and upon their country.

Symbolism is very powerful and significant in St. John’s Gospel and the passage (15.1):

*I am the true vine, and my father is the vinedresser... I am the vine, you are the branches.’*

gives us insight into the direct expression of a mystical communion between Christ and the Christian. The Bible recounts how the Holy Spirit visited the disciples after Jesus' death and spoke in tongues and recently this speaking in tongues – Glossolalia (which is part of mysticism, but not pre-requisite) - has become more popular in some churches, including the Pentecostal Church.

Whilst a definitive broad definition of spirituality is difficult to determine because the word is brandished around freely, I would support William Owen- Cole, (ed.), *Spirituality in Focus*, (Oxford, Heinemann, 1997, p.40), who suggests that Christian spirituality is about experiencing Jesus as realistically as his friends had done - Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter and the disciples, 2000 years ago. This definition of spirituality recognises Jesus as alive and real and this spirituality is about becoming one with Jesus. In my experience, (and that of Collier, 1994) many Jamaicans experience this form of spirituality today. It suggests being 'at one' with God, with self, family and friends, as well as with the community. The land and the earth are embraced as part of being. It does not necessarily need the out -of -body experiences that some mystics require, but is a simple faith in the presence of Christ and strives for the ideals of Christian mysticism. However, the words, 'mysticism' and 'spirituality' are often used interchangeably.

### **Other definitions**

Not all definitions of spirituality include a Christian viewpoint. There are other forms of spirituality such as the humanist view of being at one with nature, the universe and life; Jesus does not come into such a definition. Buddhism reaches spirituality and, indeed, mysticism through prayer and meditation; the Hindu through yoga. Judaism

states that the same goals can be reached through the *Torah* or Holy Book. Islam advocates that spirituality can be achieved through prayer, fasting and charity. Sufis belong to the branch of Islam recognised as mystics, and as with most religions, mysticism holds a hallowed place, yet hovers on the edge of orthodoxy. This is explained in detail in the chapter on Lorna Goodison, who favours a Sufi approach to spirituality. Indeed to most mystics and those who attain spirituality, prayer is important. Peter Paris in the *The Spirituality of African Peoples*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995, p.22) argues that the:

*Spirituality of a people refers to the animate and integrative power that constitutes the principal frame of meaning for the individual and collective experience.*

This implies that the soul of the people and the spirituality of the people mean the same thing so that it could be argued, writing and poetry written as part of a collective experience reflects a spirituality of the people.

### **Spiritualism**

There is a need to define spiritualism – especially in the Jamaican context. William Raeper and Linda Smith (*A Beginner's Guide to Ideas – Religion and Philosophy* (Oxford: Lion, 1991, p.167) state that it is an activity grounded in the belief that people can, by means of mediums, or in the case of Jamaica, ancestors, make contact with the dead and receive messages from the other world. Duppies or ghosts are significant in Jamaica, but many Christians do not agree with the phenomenon of the supernatural and believe that it may not necessarily be good or come from God. This is closely related to mythology which Bultmann cited in Lewin Williams, *Caribbean Theology*, (New York, Peter Lang, 1994, p.140) defines as “ the mode of representation in which the unworldly, the divine, appears as worldly, human and the

other-worldly as this –worldly”. This suggests myth is important because of the nature of its purpose to express divine realities in inner terms. Spiritualism will be examined in more detail later in the chapter.

Spirituality, according to Lartey (1997, p.114) can lead us in many directions. It could be a vocation to serve God, or lay down one’s life for one’s country or cause. It could even be the urge to write, paint or create. Poetry and writing in themselves could be considered ‘spiritual’ arts and Lorna Goodison, Pam Mordecai, Erna Brodber, Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze, Olive Senior reflect aspects of spirituality in a variety of different ways that will be examined in the main body of the work.

Whilst some of the definitions of spirituality bear no relationship with Christianity, I would suggest Christianity is the dominant religion in Jamaica. Whether accepting it or rejecting it, the writers examined have attained their own form of spirituality. However, there are strong African influences as well as influences from other religions. Therefore, I would suggest that the historical process of religion is important to understanding the beliefs and faith of the individual writers and poets.

## **The Historical Process of Religion**

*There is a movement of time and the occurrence of events within which the human being is not simply a spectator. This sequence is the creation of history and the human being is part of it (Williams, 1994, p.148)*

### **The Arawaks and Caribs**

The history of the Caribbean is uncertain. Thinking has progressed from the old 'certainties' of Europe-centric historical perspective. Jeffrey Quilter cited in Ricardo Alegria, and Jose Arron *Taino: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, (U.S, Monacelli Press, 1998, p.10) reflects that there is no single or 'true' explanation or accurate description of this period in history. He suggests that this is because research of the ancient New World is in its infancy and past scholarship has consisted of sweeping generalisations.

Well before the arrival of Columbus, the majority of the inhabitants of ancient America depended on agriculture for subsistence and Native Americans saw themselves as inhabiting a multi-layered universe that was the most recent of several creations within a linear and circular temporal dimension. (Quilter, 1998, p.11). Samuel Wilson (cited in Alegria, and Arron, 1998, p.15) states that people had been living in the Caribbean for about 5000 years before Columbus arrived. Caribbean cultures were changing constantly and groups of people migrated into the islands from the surrounding mainlands and moved from place to place. Languages changed and people learned new ways of living from off the land.

According to Wilson (ibid) it is difficult to mark the beginning of the Taino. Their settlements emerged as a continuation of the cultural development of Caribbean history. Their settlements were similar to those of their predecessors, though larger and more numerous and their religious beliefs and rituals were related to those of their Saladoid and Archaic predecessors. These had developed from worshipping the jaguar and caiman and progressed to a system of symbols that featured other powerful creatures including dogs, bats and humans and also forces of nature such as hurricanes and volcanoes (Wilson, cited in Alegria, 1998) Although they drew their way of life from the cultural and historical past, they fused these into something new and unique (ibid).

The Tainos (or Arawaks) were the earliest inhabitants in the Americas to encounter the 'first tourist' in the shape of Christopher Columbus, who arrived in 1492 (Rex Nettleford, *Inward Stretch, Outward Reach: A Voice from the Caribbean* (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1993), although the Vikings and possibly Africans visited the area before Columbus (Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro – The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969*, London, Andre Deutsch, 1993, p.18). The Caribs did reach Jamaica so space precludes mention of them and their beliefs in this work.

Christopher Columbus, who thought he had found the islands situated off the coast of India, called the indigenous people Indians. Dale Bisnauth in *History of Religions in the Caribbean*, (Trenton, African World Press, 1996, p.1) argues that Columbus also made another mistake as he asserted that the native people belonged to no religion. However, although they had no priestly hierarchy and no church, creed or dogma such as Columbus' Catholic Church, they were not lacking in religious beliefs, neither were they lacking in patterns of worship that expressed and sustained these beliefs.



Bisnauth (1996, p.7) suggests that the Taino practised Animism, which was used to designate the belief in a large number of spirits, any of whom may interfere with daily life. They believed everything was living (Ivor Morrish, *Obeah, Christ and Rastaman – Jamaica and its religion*, Cambridge, James Clark, 1982, p.6). These spirits are thought of as personal beings and identified and associated with the natural phenomena they controlled. The spirits may inhabit, represent or be connected in some way to physical objects which are worshiped. These spirits could also pass on messages to and from the gods (Morrish, 1982, p.6). They are not (according to Bisnauth, 1996, p.7) strictly identified with their effigies as they are not able to exist independently of those effigies. A feature of animism is a strongly held conviction that evil spirits must be exorcised. This is often called Shamanism. Alegria (1998) states that shaman played an important role in Taino society as medical practitioners and contacted spirits to determine the cause of illnesses. The Shamen, in their role as healers, took hallucinogenic substances and recited sacred chants. They were perceived as mediums through whom men and women could communicate, they exorcised evil spirits, foretold the future and declared the will of the gods whilst in a trance-like state.

According to Ricardo Alegria (1998, p.23) as recorded by Pane, The Taino believed in the existence of a supreme God called Yucahu Maorocoti and in a fertility goddess called Attabeira. Yucahu may have been associated with a supreme spirit linked to the growth of cassava and Attabeira may have been the goddess of water, river and seas. There were lesser gods associated with natural forces and the Taino made images of their gods in stone and wood. The Taino placed strong importance on ancestor

worship and everyone honoured one's deceased relatives. They believed in afterlife and bodies were buried with offerings of food (ibid). Religious images called Zemís, a term the Taino used to refer to their Gods or indwelling spirits was represented the highest form of Taino art. These were objects of great power and were perceived as supernatural beings who could be called upon to help or hurt the person who possessed them (ibid). The Taino mixed crushed seeds, shells and tobacco to make a powder which, when inhaled produced hallucinatory visions that the Taino interpreted as messages from their Gods and ancestors (Alegria, 1998, p.24). The practice of using hallucinogenic trances to interact with the supernatural world was widespread in preconquest America and continues today in some religions.

### **Catholicism**

The discovery of the New World by Europeans led, as they saw it, to an extension of the boundaries of Western Europe. Civilisation was believed to be rooted in the Christian religion and along with economic exploitation, missionaries and priests sought to introduce Christianity to the indigenous peoples. Bisnauth (1996, p.12) reflects that the Arawaks did offer resistance, but this was met with reprisals of a ruthless nature. For example in Hispaniola, even when resistance had been quashed, the conquistadors moved to massacre twelve Indians daily in honour of the twelve apostles and a thirteenth in honour of Jesus Christ. The Caribs fared better, not because they offered resistance but because the Europeans had turned to Central and South America by then in search of gold and silver. In 1513, Martín Fernández de Enciso stated that God had apportioned the Indians to the Spaniards in much the same way as he had given the 'Promised Land' to the Jews and if a few died on the way, then that was the will of God. The outcome was that the Indians would acknowledge

the Catholic Church, the Pope and the King and Queen of Spain. They were Christianised but their villages were razed to the ground if they did not accept these requirements. However, if they had not disappeared into the bush before the requirements were read, it was unlikely that they would have been able to understand.

The first missionaries to undertake the task of evangelising the indigenous peoples were Franciscan and Dominican friars (Bisnauth, *ibid.*) They firmly believed in their missionary work and were later joined by the Jesuits. The Dominicans brought the banana plants from the Canaries and both Dominicans and bananas could be found in Jamaica! The Indians had to work hard and in return they were given religious instruction. However, the greed of the conquistadors triumphed over the friars and the Crown so that the natives and indigenous people were Christianised. The Indians then started dying at an alarming rate. The plight of the Indians was recognised in Spain and the Dominican, Francisco de Vittoria, claimed they were entitled to liberty and their own nation. As a result of pressure from Dominican friars, the Spanish crown decreed that the Indians were not to be treated as slaves.

In 1514 another Dominican friar, Batholome de Las Casas, condemned the robbery, evil and injustice committed against the indigenous peoples. He advocated that Christianisation should be by persuasion and never by force. (Las Casas, B.de, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, Translated by Nigel Griffin, London, Penguin, 1992) He engaged Sepulveda – a fellow Spaniard – in a debate as to whether it was right to behave in a warlike manner. He felt that Indians should be converted by peaceful means, won over to Christianity by peace, love and good example and then they would be faithful Spanish subjects. Sepulveda however, felt

that it was necessary to wage war as the gravity of the sins of the Indians, particularly their idolatry and sins against nature, merited war. He quoted St. Luke, Chapter 14, Verse 23:

*Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.*

He used this as justification for war against the Indians to bring them into the Christian fold. Sepulveda was generally applauded for his views. It did however, take up to seven years to prepare the Indians for baptism, but few were admitted to the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist as they were not considered worthy and were only just considered above animals. The Christianity of the Spaniards was the faith of the late Medieval Christendom as it prevailed in the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the seventh century. It called for reconquest for independence from Muslim rule. The Church was the focus of identity in the struggle and was an important part of the Spanish national as well as religious life. (Arthur Dayfoot, 'Themes from West Indian Church History in Colonial and Post-Colonial Times', in Taylor, Patrick, (ed) *Nation Dance- Religion, Identity and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean*, Indiana, Bloomington, p.80). Bisnauth (1996, p.20) states that some Spaniards were more 'zealous' than others and forced the Indians into the water for baptism, and once baptised, slit their throats so they could not apostate.

Christianising had limited results as many natives died due to European introduced diseases and brutality. Many Indians resented being forced into Christianity and remained animist at heart but went through the motions of Catholicism. They tried to identify it with their own beliefs. God, they identified with Jochuna and sometimes they identified Jesus with Jochuna and sometimes believed him to be the son of Jochuna. The Virgin Mary was conflated with Atabei, the goddess of Arawak belief.

The vagueness of the identities of God and Christ fitted in with these beliefs.

(Bisnauth, *ibid.*) The Holy Ghost or Spirit was identified as Hurakan, the mighty wind, who 'blew' power over wherever or whoever he wished and the role of the Catholic priest was identified with the Bohito. Once these identifications were made, some Indians embraced Catholicism more readily but were surprised that their old ways were considered so evil and repugnant when they considered them as similar.

### **Protestantism**

In Europe, Luther and others were challenging Catholicism in ways which finally resulted in the Reformation. Meanwhile the first Englishman to infringe Spain's monopoly of the Indies was the Elizabethan seaman John Hawkins who made his first voyage into the Caribbean in 1562 with the purpose of trading illicitly in African slaves. Francis Drake who had the blessing of Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup> closely followed him. It was the primary desire of France, England and the Netherlands to benefit economically at the expense of Spain. Many of the French who were involved were French Protestants or Huguenots who came to regard Catholic Spain as their enemy. They fought against Spain in the Caribbean and in Europe. The rivalry was bitter between England and the Netherlands on the one hand and Spain on the other because the former were Protestant countries. In 1655 England wrestled Jamaica from Spain with an expedition by Penn and Venables. The expedition included seven ministers of religion who were naval and military chaplains so that the religious aspects were important to the conquest. General Fortescue, the president of a military council that administered Jamaica for a short while wrote to Cromwell:

*Forasmuch as we conceive the propagation of the Gospel was the thing principally aimed at and intended in this expedition. I humbly desire that His Highness will please to order that some godly, sober and learned minister may be sent to us, which*

*may be instrumental in planting and propagating of the Gospel.* (Newton, p.126, cited in Bisnauth, 1996, p.51).

With the settlement of Jamaica, Spaniards and priests in particular were expelled from Jamaica. In 1661 General Edward D'Oyley, the first governor of the island was instructed to:

*discourage vice and debauchery and to encourage ministers that Christianity and the Protestant religion, according to the Church of England, might have done reverence and exercise* (Ellis, cited in Bisnauth, 1996, p.52).

King Charles 11 gave instructions that “persons of different judgement and opinions in matters of religion” should be tolerated. (Ellis, p.35, cited in Bisnauth, 1996, p.52).

Jamaicans were not noted for their piety. The early zeal noted by Sir Thomas Modyford, which led people to meet and pray in each other's houses was met with indifference. Lady Nugent, who came to the island at the beginning of the eighteenth century, noted that the military had not attended church for nearly three years. While at Black River, the Governor's wife reported that even the wife of the clergyman excused herself from church on the grounds that she thought the sermon would go on for too long. Some priests were recruited from unsuccessful planters, merchants and ex-military men. It was not until 1825 that bishops were appointed to the Caribbean, so before that time there could be no ordinations without a bishop. As there were no Bishops or church hierarchy, priests were difficult to control and they did not appear to follow any set rules or discipline. Many priests were noted for their zeal and at times, their harshness to ensure more converts.

Ellis (cited in Bisnauth, 1996, p.60) stated that the eighteenth century Church of Jamaica was as the Church of England in the Caribbean, little more than a respectful and ornamental adjunct of the state. It was the survival of a harmless home institution, which would not have been tolerated if it would have shown any energy or activity. It

served the white plantocracy and was a rather dull sort of church because it was modelled on the Church of England. Morrish (1982, p.31) argues that whilst Catholicism tended to bind society even by its own weakness and internal contradictions; Protestantism was much more divisive. The island also harboured Quakers and the first Jews to settle in the Caribbean settled in Jamaica in 1509. As Spain had provided a refuge on Jamaica for Jews, Jews from Netherlands and England added to their number and later migration of Jews from Brazil, Portugal and Surinam amongst other countries joined them as they fled from intolerance or persecution. So Jamaica in the nineteenth century was the centre of Judaism in the Caribbean but it was the Church of England that was outwardly the most important religious force on the island.

### **African Slaves**

In 1517 Las Casas and other ecclesiastics recommended that there should be a development of Spanish - Indian communities in the New World. At the same time, to assist with this expansion, African slaves might be employed instead of Indians, as they would be better able to cope with heavy work. The enslavement of Africans by Europeans developed from contact between West Africa and Western Europe in the late fifteenth century. African slaves arrived in the Caribbean as early as 1510 and were put to work on the mines and on cultivation of tropical agricultural products. With the development of sugar plantations, African slaves were brought in their hundreds of thousands to the Caribbean. The bulk of African slaves were brought from Senegambia, Sierra Leone, Windward Coast, Gold Coast and Bight of Benin. They belonged to several tribes and several different language groups (Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters – Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797*, London, Routledge, 1992). Africans in the New World affected every part of

Caribbean life, including religion. Richard Ligon, an early settler in Barbados, declared in 1647 (cited in Bisnauth, 1992, p.82.) that Africans did not know any religion and this view was repeated by Jamaican planter Matthew 'Monk' Lewis in 1817. They represented the commonly held view of English planters that Africans had beliefs that amounted to little more than heathen superstitions and that Africans were not developed or civilised enough to have a religion.

In fact, many Africans were very religious. Some had the beliefs of their homelands and some were Muslim. Yet, Islam did not initially last long after the Middle Passage due to the fact that slaves were separated from each other and discouraged from any assembly. (Bisnauth, *ibid*) However African religious ideas did survive the difficulties of estate life (*ibid.*), which testified to the strength and vitality of these beliefs. They were to undergo significant changes but remained firmly African in structure. However, the beliefs were modified to suit estate life and as meetings were discouraged, these ceremonies and rituals associated with these beliefs could only be practised irregularly, so some aspects were bound not to survive under these conditions.

Slaves were obviously not encouraged to have any political organisation. Any political or social support came from personal initiative and self-assertion. In Africa there had been a tradition of interaction among religious groups and there was evidence that this interaction was not uncommon. (Mervyn Alleyne, *Roots of Jamaican Culture*, London, Pluto Press, 1989, p.79) It was not unusual in Africa and Jamaica to adopt the gods of another religion, especially if the gods in question had attributes and powers that another group desired. In Jamaica the absence of political



organisation led eventually to the fragmentation of African religion into many local groups, each dominated by a priest – whose individual power and probably charisma determined how far the group's influence could be spread (Alleyne, 1989, p.76). This meant that there was little hierarchy or structure in the priesthood, which produced a lack of uniformity in theological concepts or in religious practices, so though a general frame of reference arrived from Africa; this was evolved to suit local conditions.

### **African Beliefs**

African slaves brought with them a variety of different African beliefs depending on their area of origin and the slaves looked back to Africa seeing it as a source of their religious and cultural identities. African slaves in the Caribbean preserved, to the extent possible, a sense of a link to a particular people or kingdom from where they came in Africa. (Taylor, 2001, p.4). Although there was a diversity of beliefs, Winston Lawson, *Religion and Race – African and European Roots in Conflict – A Jamaican Testament*, (New York, Peter Lang, 1996, p.8) states that traditional African cosmology held in common by many African societies, reflected clearly a view that a high god sat at the top of a pantheon of lesser gods. It was these views that generally seem to have been carried to the Caribbean. These views included the notion that a high and mighty god dwelt in the skies and was the supreme creator and was removed from the mundane day- to- day rituals of everyday life. These were dealt with by the lesser gods and ancestor spirits who actively concerned themselves with the detail of daily life and affairs of society. Some myths told how a Supreme Being withdrew from the company of men to live in the skies, and these myths usually held women to be responsible for the fall of men. Bisnauth (1996, p.84), however, argues that not

every religion had priests, temples or rituals dedicated to the worship of the supreme God. Some people felt that a god who had the welfare of his people at heart did not need sacrifices and prayers in order to act. However, the Akan worshipped *Nyame* or *Nyankopon* regularly and nearly every Akan compound had its *Nyamedua* or 'God-tree' which served as an altar and sacrifices, prayers and offerings were made by priests. Followers said the equivalent of 'amen' after the prayers – *Mno ne Kasa*. Bryan Edwards, the 18<sup>th</sup> century historian (cited in Bisnauth, 1996) noted that the Ashantis who inhabited Jamaica believed in *Accomong*, the creator god of the heaven, although they did not sacrifice to him. They did, however, offer libations to *Assarci* – the god of earth. Bosman, (1705, p.368) cited in Lawson (ibid) observed that:

*they believe that he created the universe, and therefore vastly prefer him before their Idol-Gods. But yet they do not pray to him, or offer any sacrifices to him; for which they give the following reasons: God .... Is too high exalted above us, and too great to condescend so much as to trouble himself or think of mankind; wherefore he commits the government of the work to their Idols; to whom, as the second, third and fourth persons distant in degree from God, and our appointed lawful Governors, we are obliged to apply ourselves.*

Below the high god there were a group of gods who were directly related to natural phenomena. The heavenly gods represented thunder, lightning and rain, whilst the earth gods controlled fertility and punished wickedness by sending diseases such as smallpox, cholera or fevers. There were deities who were associated with the seas, lakes and rivers. Those spirits who lived in the winds, animals, trees or hills were the native spirits. They were named differently by the traditional African religious – for example the Ashanti called them '*abosani*', the Ewe '*vodun*', the Ibo '*alose*' and the Yoruba '*orisha*' (Edward Parrinder, *West African Religion : A Study of Beliefs and Practices of the Akan, Ewe, Yoruba, Ibo and Kindred Peoples*, London, Epworth Press, 1961, pp.75-94). These gods were important because they controlled the forces of the world and acted well or badly in the face of everyday human affairs. They

were given proper obedience, dutiful praise and appropriate sacrifices. Parrinder (1961, pp.13-25) writes that these lower gods were closer to the human dimension and especially the spirits of the dead ancestor, who were anything but dead and gone. Each deity possessed a certain ritual and festival administered by priests, diviners, herbalists and devotees. The priests led the worship and at special ritual moments in the worship then became mediums of their gods (Lawson, 1996, p.11). They became 'possessed' by the spirit of the deity and could dramatise, dance and become the mouthpiece of the God. The God could be recognised by the demeanour or dance of the possessed devotee. Lastly as well as these Gods there was a powerful world of the spirits, for example, the peoples of the Congo paid attention to a wide range of 'Minkisi' or sacred medicines which embodied spirits to help or harm. These taboos and rites had to be observed otherwise they could become malevolent. Certain trees – such as the Baobab tree were commonly believed to house powerful spirits. There was a high respect for the power of spirits and all life was considered sacred, whether it be human or material. It was this which Christian missionaries condemned as paganism and uncivilised idolatry. Phillippo (1843, p.269, cited in Lawson) condemned them as:

*worshippers of the sun and moon, of the ocean, of the rocks, of fountains and rivers, of lofty trees and images of various forms and dimensions". Their idolatry ... was of the basest possible description ... ascribing "divine power to the material itself.*

However according to Lawson (1996, p.12) the most revolting belief to the missionaries was that of the relationship that the Africans had with their ancestors. The ancestors were respected and revered whether they had just died or had been long dead. According to Moorish (1982, p.19) the main concept behind this seems to be a logical one of continuity, and many Africans appealed to the spiritual powers as part of this pattern of continuance. They were seen as the guardians of cultural heritage,

founders of the village and cultural life and were responsible for well being.

Ancestors were believed to have the power to intervene, as guardians in everyday life, granting safety, health and fertility to the offspring, for whom they mediated with the gods. Any misfortunes were attributed to an angry ancestor who was punishing them for neglecting to offer proper sacrifice or performing a customary rite. Any spirits associated with trees, especially silk-cotton trees, rivers, streams and rocks were considered to be ill disposed to the living. Any evil could often be discovered in a dream and no peace could occur until rectification was made. Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, (Accra, Presbyterian, 1961, pp.4-6) states that most people were:

*in practice, more afraid of offending these (ancestors) than of offending the gods*

However, in theory, they gave the higher place to the gods.

The reincarnation of the ancestor in their descendants was a central belief, so the elderly – as “living repositories of the memory of the dead” (Parrinder, 1961, pp.115-129) were especially respected as they were the closest to the dead. These spirits had considerable interest in the welfare of their living relatives and could affect the lives of these relations for good or evil. So they had to keep their ancestral spirits happy and these spirits needed venerating. Burying the dead was done in some style. The body of the deceased was dressed in his or her best clothing for burial, and the funeral was followed by a celebration. On the anniversary of the funeral the relations assembled round the grave, usually near the slave compound, and were led in prayer by the oldest members. This was followed by sacrifices. When these beliefs transferred to the Caribbean, rum could be offered to the dead and sometimes poured on the ground, where ancestral spirits were supposed to live and then these spirits could be persuaded to allow a new grave to be dug and a new person admitted to their

company. A spirit might be caught, after many ceremonies, into a box and carefully burned in case duppies (ghosts) would appear. It was not unusual for the suit of clothes in which the body was buried to have its pockets cut away so duppies could not fill them with stones and annoy the living on their return. Other ceremonies were sometimes held on the ninth night after death or the fourteenth, when the deceased was believed to attain the status of an ancestor.

Alleyne (1989, pp.79-80) believes that the religion of the Akan was the most important in Jamaica. However, he suggests that this was a belief system rather than a system of active ritual and worship. Ritual and worship were not possible in slave society because slaves did not control their daily lives and had no set free time (if any). Alleyne (ibid.) argues that the emphasis in slave religions on the belief in spirit forces that can be manipulated by persons 'good' or 'evil' who possess certain attributes and qualities was due to the "insecurity which the slave regime created in slaves".

### **Obeah and Myal**

The distinction between priest and Obeah man was not always clear, certainly not to the whites in the Caribbean and sometimes not to the blacks. People sometimes resorted to the same person for cures as well as avenging themselves or others. Sometimes confusion arose because priest and Obeah man doubled up as the same; however, they were invariably African in descent and not Creole. Both priest and Obeah man had considerable influence. Obeah was related to witchcraft and connected with magic (Bisnauth, 1996, p.91). Morrish (1982, p.40) suggests that Obeah is essentially a magical means whereby an individual may obtain his personal

desires, eradicate ill health, procure good fortune, turn affections, evince retribution and generally manipulate the spiritual forces of the cosmos for his or her own purpose. Obeah is concerned with the individual and his/her appetites as opposed to the total good and welfare of society. Change is engendered through successfully communicating with spirits and divinities (ibid). Witchcraft involved a theory of causation – why and how did something befall a person? If someone dies it could be the will of Nyame or the ancestral spirit, but as these spirits were usually well disposed to people, the likely explanation was *Sasabonsam*, or the spirit which controlled the Obeah man that was responsible and this Obeah man, as agent acted on his behalf.

Using rites, spells and potions in order to harm people assisted the sorcerer's art, and people believed in what he could do because they believed in magic. Magic, I would argue, had always been present. It can be linked with the creator and the universe and the ways in which the universe was formed. Some people would regard the creator as magic. The Obeah man was supposed to have the necessary knowledge to control and utilise the spirits and he could use these spirits to do as he wished. It is, in my opinion, fundamentally because people believed in this magic, that it worked. If people did not believe in his powers then he would use poison. If slaves did not believe in him he would use the power of suggestion, similarity, contiguity and unusualness. Suggestion involved 'threatening' that he would put a curse on them. Similarity involved an effigy, for example, if pins were stuck into this then the victim would experience pain and if he did experience pain, he was likely to think an Obeah man was at work anyway. The principle of contiguity was based on the belief that things that were once in contact would continue to interact, even though the contact

had been broken. For example, if a footprint was lacerated with poison, then it was believed that the foot itself would be lacerated and poisoned. Finally the principle of unusualness worked, for example, if someone was about to leave her partner, her partner could do something unusual and ridiculous and incantations said for the rival to do the same, the woman in question would see this and not leave her partner. Sometimes people would have Obeah signs such as feathers or cat's teeth to protect their property.

Priests and Obeah men used herbs and plants such as the root of the *Whangra*. It was thought that although medicines came from herbs, healing did not simply consist of the use of such herbs but by evoking gestures and incantations in favour of the gods to go with these cures. This stemmed from the belief that spirits were responsible for all sickness and in consequence, sometimes exorcism was used to try to cure the sick and sometimes amulets were worn. J. M. Phillippo, *Jamaica It's Past and Present*, (London. 1843, p.248) reported that there were beliefs and behaviour which indicated that they believed that the source of all evil and misfortune, including slavery were the malicious forces which lay in the shadows and spirits of the dead. Since all the problems of the world and of the body were derived from these spiritual sources then these sources needed to be exorcised and the doctors were specialists at identifying the malevolent spirit who should then disappear.

Christianity and Obeah in African-derived cultural thought was seen as complementary because even if the Afro-Jamaican rejected Obeah it would be foolhardy in practice not to be aware of it. It is the age-old contrast between good and evil. It was best to keep on the safe side of all supernatural power for the enslaved of

Obeah responded to needs and areas that Christianity did not, (Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion : The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1978, pp.286-288) and Christianity likewise answered purposes which Obeah was never intended to and indeed could not respond to. Obeah can use hallucinogenic substances to induce a state of trance to ensure their renewal and it is through this orality that this form of spirituality continues (Frederick Case, ' The Intersemiotics of Obeah and Kali Mai in Guyana' in Taylor, P., (ed), *Nation Dance-Religion, Identity and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean*, Indiana, Bloomington, 2001, p.42). In Obeah the phenomena of water, candles, incense, herbs, vestments of a particular colour, chants, prayers, bells, etc. are important and so not dissimilar to those symbols of worship in the Catholic Church. Using these phenomena lead to a cleansing and enable a striving for a closer relationship with the divine that confers the experience of the power of intensity. (Case, *ibid.*)

Animal sacrifices take place in an Obeah ceremony and whilst the external view of this is usually negative and associated with evil, Case (*ibid.* p.47) argues that the animal is carefully chosen by the particular divinity or spirit to be honoured and the nature of the request to be made. The principle of returning vital energy to the source in an effort to reinforce protection and help is central to the idea of sacrifice in many African traditions. The experience of trance is common in Obeah and the initial period of contact will be the spirit world, then travel beyond this to speak in the tongues of Africa (or India in the case of *Kali Mai*). There are also the transmissions of messages and healing taking place to lead to epiphany which is the highest state of trance. Vegetable sacrifices can also be made by using 'black water.' Camphor is poured over the uncooked vegetables as hymns are sung and prayers said and this



ceremony re-enacts God bestowing identity on His people. (ibid. p.48). This bloodless sacrifice seems to combine Earth, Air, Fire and Water to consume the sacrificial elements and as the smoke rises so does the epiphany. These stem from the symbols in the Old Testament and *Jhandi* of Hinduism. (Case, 2001, p.48). The coconut is also an important part of Obeah as the coconut gives the outward appearance of obscurity, but contains light. The oil of the coconut gives the light and the shell is often used for lamps and signifies transcendent truth and light of knowledge which resides in the heart. (ibid.)

While some people relied on dreams for revelation, others relied on possession by the Holy Ghost. Amongst these were Myal men – the priest *Okomfo*, rather than the Obeah man – *Obayifo*. These Myal men hated Obeah. The Myal men of Western Jamaica in the 1840's claimed to be possessed by the Holy Spirit expressly for the purpose of combating Obeah men, who they insisted, were under the influence of the devil. Myal men claimed to be Christian. Their evening services were held under silk-cotton trees and the services also included dancing and drinking rum. They had little patience with Bible study, probably because they could not read. Before he was exposed to the influence of Christianity, the Myal man received his inspiration from the world of the African spirits. As he became increasingly Christianised, he came to rely more and more on the inspiration of the spirit from the world of Christian beliefs – the Holy Spirit, but this was not to say he had forgotten African spirits completely.

Myal (R. Stewart, *Religion in Jamaica 1831-1880*, Unpublished University Ph.D. Dissertation, University of the West Indies, 1985, p.32) emphasised a philosophy in which there were no compartments in life and no discrepancy between the sacred and

secular, nor the present, past and future world which links the living and the dead. Past and present were linked together in the form of a continuum and this meant that the next world was 'geographically here' (ibid.). This made the spirit world as real in this cosmology, as was the natural physical world. To link all these worlds Myalism had three types of members – archangels, angels and ministering angels. The archangel's primary responsibility was of the divine – so they were the first rank leaders. The angels however, had the capacity for frequent visions and they could also detect Obeah and forms of evil. The administering angels enlisted converts, dug up buried Obeah charms and caught shadows and these administering angels worked in small groups. Men and women were included and they were expected to be highly disciplined and devout in their duty (M. Schuler, 'Myalism and the African Religious Traditions in Jamaica' in *Africa and The Caribbean: The Legacies of a Link*, (Ed) Margaret and Graham and Franklin, W Knight, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, p.72). In order to eradicate Obeah, Myalist members would engage in a public ritual, which took the form of drinking the potion made from the root of the lily plant, then singing and dancing to help them become sufficiently entranced under the power of the Myal spirit. They were then led to the offending charm or person and if it was a person, they were made to undergo a trial and ordeal, requiring a confession, acknowledgement of guilt and a vow of repentance. They believed that the ills of society were buried in a spiritual psyche of all those who selfishly pursued anti-communal behaviour. The Christian idea of sin was the 'sorcery', which Myalism was fighting against, and just as Christians were offered salvation through repentance and baptism, being filled with Christ's love in the form of the Holy Spirit, Myalist devotees saw their rituals as being similar.

African religious ideas as they evolved in the Caribbean did not only alleviate suffering but they did also produce joy. Morrish (1982, p.46) cites Katrin Norris in her book *Jamaica: The Search for Identity*, who suggests that Jamaicans have adopted Christianity without abandoning the traditions of African religious ritual. These ideas helped sustain people in the struggle against their harsh and oppressive conditions of slavery, (Bisnauth, 1996, p.100) and helped them to survive. So African religious ideas and practices shaped the perspective of the way that Caribbean people would perceive and receive the message of Christianity. Bisnauth (ibid.) argues that in time, the pietism of Protestant Christianity and its emphasis on the after life, and Catholicism with its preference to be non-engaging as far as society was concerned, would re-inforce this. In turn, Christianity itself would be affected. Religion played an important role in the process leading towards the development of a new national culture and could be seen as an agent for social change and often provided a site of opposition to the colonial orders (Taylor, 2001, p.4).

## **Evangelisation**

According to Flores (Taylor, 2001, p.55), Christian Evangelism in the Caribbean was a process that resulted in and also justified the mistreatment of blacks. A different culture and vision were imposed with the ultimate goal of destroying the African's original vision of the continent. In 1732 the first Evangelical missionaries to arrive in the Caribbean were Dutch Moravians, Moravians from Saxony and later from England. They were non-fundamentalist (Soares in Taylor, 2001, p.116). Before this the Spanish and French islands had been Christianised by Catholic priests and missionaries, but in the Dutch, Danish and British colonies, apart from a few Quakers, no one had made a serious attempt to evangelise the slaves. Protestants were not sure whether non-Europeans were of theological significance. By 1696 the Jamaican Slave Code stipulated that all slave owners were to endeavour as much as possible to instruct their slaves in the principles of religion, to facilitate their conversion and do their utmost to make them fit for baptism. However, to ensure this could not possibly be attained, the Jamaican Assembly set such a huge fee for slave baptism that it was prohibitive. Conversion to Christianity had to encompass baptism, communion, confirmation, marriage and training in Christian doctrine and in some cases this resulted in the conversions being forced. (Flores in Taylor, 2001, p.55) There was obviously a conflict of interest, as Christians should not be enslaved so Christianising them should really mean they were emancipated, which obviously did not appeal greatly to the plantocracy. (ibid.)

Although Christian missionaries did not start working seriously in Jamaica until the end of the eighteenth century, African slaves began experiencing the power of the European God as soon as they arrived on the island. (Alleyne, 1989, pp.87-88) For example, it was thought by some that the destruction of Port Royal as the result of the earthquake in 1694 was a judgement of God brought down on the city because of its wickedness. The European habit of attributing Jamaica's frequent hurricanes and earthquakes to the vengeful work of the Christian God must have deeply impressed the African slaves, who then incorporated that particular god in their pantheon, especially since He possessed qualities that matched those of African deities. The Christian God was also often pitted against the spiritual powers of the Obeah man, and in some cases seemed triumphant, as Obeah men were put to death for plotting and carrying out revolts, despite their claim to be invulnerable. However God, like other supreme gods in African religions, was not worshipped as such. Even as Christianity began to gain followers, the slaves tended to venerate and invoke spiritual powers of other Christian figures such as the Saints, the Apostles, the Holy Ghost, and to a lesser extent, Jesus Christ. The missionaries tried to persuade the planters that it would increase their output if the slaves went to church. They would, according to the Bishop of London (1727,cited in Lawson, 1996, p.45):

*Perform these duties with the greatest diligence and fidelity; not only from the fear of man, but from a sense of duty to god, and the belief and expectation of a future account.*

There was little fear of undermining the social control as the slaves were taught that "every person remains in the condition in which they are called" (I Corinthians 7:20) when they became Christian. The Bible seemingly was interpreted in favour of the planters.

Bisnauth (1996, p.102) argues that the British perceived slaves as property, and the Spanish viewed them as simply inferior persons. You could therefore Christianise a person, but to Christianise a property was more difficult. If they were baptised and given admission to the Church of England, that would have been tantamount to bestowing the status and privileges of British citizenship which, the planters thought, was asking for trouble. With the arrival of the Moravians, a greater zeal for evangelism took place so that the 'heathen' might be saved from the wrath to come. Moravians particularly believed that they should Christianise as part of their aim to 'bear witness' to Christ. Slaves were taught about Jesus, since it was assumed they knew about God. The crucifixion was explained so that the 'heathen' could see how salvation demanded they should be baptised. Great emphasis was placed on the suffering of Christ and with this the Moravians had particular success in converting slaves in the Caribbean. They managed to persuade the planters that a Christian slave was more of an asset than a liability on the sugar plantations and they were invited into Jamaica to convert slaves in 1754. The Moravian Church accepted the status quo and advocated that slaves should do the same, accepting their lot as part of a divine order. Industry and a stringent work ethic was enlisted so that the slaves could provide the sugar industry with a reliable, highly manipulable and placid work force. In Jamaica, Moravian missionaries operated New Carmel, a sugar plantation, by slave labour, so they saw no conflict of interest between Christianity and slavery, so it is not surprising that they were invited to Jamaica by the planters.

Lawson (1996, p.58) states that in 1655 the Church of England was established in Jamaica as a true colonial creation. There was a close union between 'Mother Country and Church'. Lawson (ibid.) also suggests that to ensure that Jamaicans

conformed, the islands were divided into 'parishes' which were civil and ecclesiastical in their jurisdiction. Then 'vestries' were divided as governing bodies, which were given the dual role of responsibilities for both church and state. Churches emerged starting with parish churches in the capitals.

Methodist missionaries followed the Moravians into the Caribbean and they arrived at about 1760. Evangelism became a prominent feature of this religious revival as preachers such as Griffith Jones, Daniel Rowland and Howell Harris became convinced that Jesus Christ had died for them and all their sins were laid on Him. Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ became the theme of their preaching. John Wesley (1703-1791) also effected by this revival and was a leading force in Methodism. He combined the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith with the Anglicans doctrine of grace so that although man was in a state of sin as a consequence of Adam's fall, he could be pardoned and this was justified by the grace of God. All that was necessary for his salvation was that he should believe that Jesus Christ died for his sins. Perfection was not attained by man's own power but by that of the Holy Spirit. By 1824 Methodist bases were established in Jamaica and when Dr. Coke, an American Methodist, visited Jamaica in 1789 and preached that "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God", he was attacked by whites in his congregation because of his favourable references to the Negroes. Methodist societies were predominantly non-white and made up mainly of people of colour, free blacks and black slaves, so the Methodist Church was seen as a completely separate entity to the Anglican Church. However, the planters still distrusted the missionaries. They realised that the founder of the Methodist movement i.e. John Wesley was clearly opposed to slavery.

In 1782, The Baptists first arrived in Jamaica and were established by George Lisle and Moses Baker who came from Georgia in America. As Lisle had collaborated with the British during the war of Independence, he was forced to go to Jamaica, upon his arrival he resumed his vocation as preacher and in seven years baptised about 500 (considered a success). Lawson (1996, p.29) also found that George Lewis provided another means of black expression by rejecting the 'white' version of Christianity in favour of his own, which was more appealing to the Afro/Caribbean. However, even within groups of missionaries, there was a certain amount of un-orthodoxy as illiteracy and misunderstanding was commonplace. In 1814 John Rowe was sent from England from the Baptist Mission Society along with others, including James Phillippo and Thomas Burchell. Membership of the Baptist churches was predominantly blacks, mostly slaves, and in Jamaica a number of small peasant farmers became members. They were taught that if they died in a state of sin they would go to Hell. If someone made them lose their temper or hit them, they were to turn the other cheek and love one another regardless. They believed in God's saving grace. The Baptists believed that salvation was available to all and that they were separate from the state, unlike the Anglican Church.

When the Calvinists arrived in Jamaica, they believed that there should be no established church and declared that each member of the church was a king, priest or prophet under Christ. Although pastors were ordained, they were chosen by the congregation. The Scottish Presbyterians reached Jamaica in 1884. Their church was open mainly to whites, although slaves could go with their owners. Free people of colour were not excluded, but colour was obviously an issue. They believed that the



difficulty the Negroes had in believing and obeying Jesus Christ rose from the wickedness of their hearts, a condition which the Spirit of God alone could rectify. Notions that Christianity made better slaves ensured that planters became more amenable, allowing missionaries onto their estates.

In 1755 the Quakers openly condemned slavery, William Wilberforce, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau as well as Adam Smith, in his book *Wealth of Nations* (1776) joined the attack against the slave trade and declared that it was inconsistent with the Christian religion. As the campaign mounted in Britain, the clergy, especially the Methodists, came under suspicion from the plantocracy and white communities became nervous so they banned Methodist evening meetings. Mounting panic caused the Jamaican Assembly to enact legislation in 1802 preventing 'preaching by persons not duly qualified by law'. The Morant Bay chapel in Jamaica was re-opened in 1814. However, a pamphlet was found on a black woman saying "The Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violence taketh it by force." The pamphlet fell into the hands of the whites and they became very agitated and put the militia on standby, even though the same ticket was given to Methodists in England. Evangelical missionaries were persecuted but they maintained that they had only carried out their instructions which had been given when they arrived. These included promoting the moral and religious improvement of the slaves without interfering with the institution of slavery. They could not pursue their activities without the express permission of the planters, nor infringe on the time that blacks were supposed to be in work. Bisnauth (1996, p.129) suggests the belief was that salvation, produced by the blood of Christ, was for the souls of slaves and it did not affect the state in which the slaves lived.

Until 1828, when legislation was passed by British parliament to regulate the unions of slaves, slaves were not allowed to marry, but could enter into a solemn agreement in front of witnesses and live in what was called faithful concubinage. In 1834, the *Emancipation Act* was passed and planters needed to demonstrate that they looked after their slaves and high on the agenda was religious instruction. Planters did not regard religion as being a factor that would undermine society but felt that it would guarantee stability of that society. If slaves were taught that the 'meek shall inherit the earth' upon death then they were more likely to stay with the status quo in life. Some slave owners did permit their slaves to go to church on Sundays – either from genuine concern for their well-being or through their own self interest and a measure of social control. The planters were told they had nothing to fear if the Anglicans were in charge.

In 1831 there was a slave revolt in Jamaica and this was blamed on evangelical missionaries, particularly the Baptist ministers William Knibb and Thomas Birchell. In fact, it was the work of one of Birchell's deacons – the slave Sam Sharpe. The ministers were acquitted and on being questioned, Knibb indicated that he felt that it was his duty to refrain from any passages in the Bible that would imply that slaves would expect their freedom and that there should always be obedience on the part of slaves to their masters. Some slaves obviously found these attempts at Christianising them to be unconvincing and dismissed it as a 'white man's religion' intending to cheat them out of their cultural heritage. (ibid). Christianity in this form also imposed social control upon them by a back door method of using religion, which gave it a respectability, and this made the religion meaningless and demeaning. They felt that

the missionaries of this religion were conspiring with slave-owners to try and maintain peace and tranquillity in an unfair system. There were some missionaries who had a genuine, misguided belief that they were going to improve the morale of the enslaved and save their souls from the perpetual African darkness of their pagan religion. For these missionaries, slavery was unfortunate, but could be defended as for the greater good of souls that needed to be saved. The Church of England evangelicals in the Caribbean were opposed to slavery, but they kept quiet about it. Neither they nor the Nonconformists in the Caribbean could claim any credit for the abolition of the slave trade in the Caribbean. Even after emancipation, it did not take long for Afro-Jamaicans to realise that their new-found freedoms were hedged with various qualifications. In practice, the promised liberties did not occur so now the new struggle was then to protect individual liberties, whilst trying to gain socio-cultural, economic and political rights. The primary vehicle to which the Afro-Jamaican turned was religion (Lawson, 1996,p.33). It would convey for many, resistance to cultural and socio-economic oppression in countless disturbances between 1838 and 1865 as it had in the past. However, for those who would not accommodate Christianity and rejected cultural and religious hegemony there would be a conflict for many years.

With a greater understanding of the Christian message, blacks prayed to the judge of slavery for deliverance to come. They maintained hope for that day by incorporating into their mythology the drama of the Old Testament exodus of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. They identified (Lawson, 1996, p.41) with the common experience of enslavement between the tribes of Israel and themselves and so hoped that like the tribes of Israel they would be God's chosen ones. With this in their minds they could

somehow create meaning and sense out of the chaotic, brutal, corrupt and evil experience of slavery in the 'Egypt' of Jamaica. They confidently expected God, in answer to their prayers, to repeat this with his divine intervention to liberate his people from bondage. (ibid). So Exodus became the most familiar and important book of the Bible and Moses became the ideal of a brave and noble man – Jesus was seen as a second Moses rather than a spiritual saviour. They repeated Christ's words to each other "him whom the son sets free is free indeed" and this is a phrase often heard in present day sermons in Jamaica. Many obviously asked how would a just and loving God permit slavery and why did the innocent suffer? They also concluded that nothing bad seemed to happen to the corrupt, greedy and exploitative owner class who seemed to prosper rather than suffer their pain. Lawson (ibid.) quotes a famous religious leader, Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne, in North America, who voiced a philosophical dilemma in 1839 and no doubt, echoed the sentiment of Caribbean-based members of the Diaspora:

*The slaves are sensible of the oppression exercised by their masters and they see these masters on the Lord's day worshipping in his holy sanctuary. They hear their masters professing Christianity.. they hear these masters praying in their families, and they know that oppression and slavery are inconsistent with the Christian religion, therefore they scoff at religion itself – mock their masters, and distrust both the goodness and justice of God. Yes, I have known them to question his existence – I speak not of what others have told me, but of what I have both seen and heard from the slaves themselves.*

## **Hinduism and Islam in the Caribbean**

Full emancipation of slaves in the British Colonies came in 1838. This liberty was followed by a reluctance of ex-slaves to work on the plantations and estates, except on their own terms. Ex-slaves still had to do some work on estates, but when land became available, either by purchase or by squatting, they gained more independence. The planters were still in need of a large labour force and this labour force was obtained by importing on particular terms, natives of the Indian sub-continent, which included Hindus and Muslims. They brought with them their beliefs. Bisnauth (1996, p.140) states that 33,000 East Indians arrived in Jamaica, fewer than Trinidad or Guyana, but still enough to affect the religious beliefs of the island.

Very briefly, the Hindu fundamental belief is that there is one supreme God who is all loving. He is not identified with idols or effigies and not present in temples, shrines or holy places. He is not impressed with the externals of ritual and worship unless the worshipper is truly devout and this is reflected in moral living. *Dharma* (or Karma) is a key word in Hindu culture and this meant that there is a right course of action for men and women appropriate to their caste, age and station in life. God frees people from their Karma, which is their path of life and re-incarnation and it is the aim that men and women should eventually be free of this re-incarnation and the soul is then absorbed into the Absolute. In the Caribbean, the caste system (as in India) took on racial overtones. Priests demanded that anyone of Indian origin should follow the religious traditions of his ancestors. This duty was demanded by *dharma*. According to his *dharma*, a man must meet his obligations to his family, his fellow humans and his religious superiors, the gods and the spirits of his ancestors in order to go to heaven. Hindus celebrated many festivals and those who arrived in the Caribbean

often elevated their class, as many got richer from money made from rice farming, cattle rearing and shop keeping. Brahmin priests tried to stem the conversion to Christianity by mounting a campaign to emphasise and re-iterate Hinduism. Most Hindus believed in the existence of spirits which they called *bhuts* (ghosts). Some of these were supposed to haunt strangely formed trees. They also came to believe in the powers of the Obeah man and soon they credited Brahmin priests and Muslim imams with the powers of the Obeah man and enticed them to give amulets and potions to protect against real or imaginary enemies.

Muslims also came to the Caribbean, and central to the Muslim faith is the doctrine of the Unity of God. Allah is one, beside Him there is no other. Disobedience or refusal to submit to Allah will be punished by the Almighty. Allah has re-iterated his will through the prophets, including Adam, Moses, David and Jesus. In every case the message has been changed and distorted by perverse men. For example, Jesus' disciples chose to worship the messenger and not hear the message. At last Allah sent down his final revelation through Mohammed in the form of the *Qur'an* – the word of God. They believe in the Day of Judgement, whether people will go to paradise or to hell, and meanwhile people are well advised to perform dutifully the Five Pillars of Islam. They must repeat the confession that Allah is great, they must pray five times daily with their head turned to Mecca and on Fridays male Muslims are expected to attend prayers in the mosque. The Muslim is required to give alms to the poor and needy and is obliged to go on a fast in the holy month of Ramadan. If at all possible, Muslims are supposed to go on a pilgrimage or *hajj* to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. However it was not possible for the Muslims of the Caribbean to go to *hajj* to Mecca, but celebrations and festivals were marked and celebrated.

Hinduism and Islam survived the crossing to the Caribbean. That they could do so meant that their beliefs were strong and vibrant and could be adapted to life in the sugar plantations. Although it did not survive as well as African beliefs in Jamaica because there were fewer sent to Jamaica as to other islands such as Trinidad and Tobago. However, some Hindu beliefs were modified and linked with both Catholicism and Obeah (Case, 2001, p.41) such as *Kali Mai Puja*. Obeah and *Kali Mai* have fulfilled similar psychological roles and have sustained inner life for those, who in their quest for God, adhered to their beliefs. (Ibid.) From the perspective of the Christian Church, non-Christian Indians were perceived as barbarians and so their assimilation into Caribbean society was all the more difficult. However, the Hindus in particular, made good workers as they saw their lot in the plantations as part of their karma and so did not try to protest or change the status quo.



## **Africanisation**

Although missionary work did undoubtedly have some affect and some slaves turned out to be fully assimilated to the new religion in its entirety, others had only a partial grasp of the new faith and their faith was still founded in Africa. According to Lawson (1996, p.4) a common link can be made with Shouters in Trinidad, Voodoo in Haiti, Convince, Kumina, Pocomania and Revival in Jamaica. There is little doubt that the roots of these lie in Africa.

Bisnauth (1996, p.175) suggests that many blacks in the Caribbean wanted to be made into Christians. He states that one Richard Ligin knew a slave who wanted to become a Christian because he thought the whites got their power from religion and he could have some of this power. Some thought of Christianity as a superior species of magic. Baptism was also regarded as a form of magic by some blacks and the baptism service was sometimes followed by a dance, although they were discouraged from this by missionaries. Phillippo, a Baptist missionary in Jamaica, tells of how some blacks came to Jamaica from America and assumed the role of teachers and preachers but they were unsure of the faith and so made up some of it. A Presbyterian Missionary named William Jameson identified these as Moses Baker and Mr. Gibb who:

*were sincere and zealous men, but their knowledge of Christianity was most imperfect and their mind filled with the most absurd superstitions.*

The converts of these Baptists placed great emphasis on dreams and visions. It was thought that God had given the Bible to whites and dreams to the Africans, which were a source of revelation in the same way that they were in African beliefs.

Baptism was by immersion and they legitimised their ministry by claiming prophecy



and speaking in tongues as if possessed by God. At Christmas, and other times, they would seek a secluded spot to find the Saviour as John the Baptist did. If people were ill they were anointed with oil, as Mary Magdalene had anointed Jesus before his crucifixion. They were also able to communicate, through dreams, with those who had died. D. Hogg, *Jamaican Religion – A Study in Variations*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University. (1964, p.110) argues that:

*the native Baptists considered themselves Christian, but their religion resembled Myalism as much as sectarianism... They stressed personal interaction with spirits more than sin and salvation... Some cult leaders required spirit possession (for membership).*

‘Official’ Baptists attracted slaves (Alleyne, 1989, p.90) by their support for equal rights and emancipation. They found, in the Bible, a theology of liberation, while also retaining their African beliefs and practices. (Dayfoot, 2001, p.82).

The more modern Revivalism movement is, according to Bisnauth (1996, p.178) Myalism under a new name. So Myalism has undergone a change to be closer to Christianity over the years but this assimilation has taken place within the structure of African traditional beliefs. Simplified, Voodoo and Shango represent Africanisation of Catholicism; Revivalism represents the Africanisation of Protestantism.

Revivalists believe in a High God and He is God the Father but He is not involved in worship services. He does not leave his throne to go ‘trumping’, which is the laboured, rhythmic dancing associated with revivalist worship, nor does he possess worshippers. Jesus Christ comes to the services, but never trumps, God the Holy Spirit however does come to every service, he is the chief spirit in the revival and he trumps. Other important trumpers at a revival service are Biblical characters,

prophets, evangelists, archangels and apostles, including Elijah, Moses, Daniel, Mark, Luke and John. Biblical characters replace the divinities of African religion.

Important shepherds and shepherdesses of the revival bands, on dying, enter the spirit world they also trump. The Holy Ghost, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are invited first, as their presence is vital to the service. The whole purpose is to be possessed by the spirits. Possession is desirable because the worshipper is at one with spiritual truths, the worshipper is cleansed and grows spiritually. Blue gowns are worn by members during a conference involving the spirits, and white gowns used when a cure is sought. Revelations will be given through dreams and emphasis of revelation is on spiritual growth and development. The movement shares the ethos of the Protestant thrust in the Caribbean up to recent times. (Bisnauth, 1996, p.179).

African and Christian ideas are mixed in practices surrounding Death. Since the spirit of the deceased is believed to affect the living, for good or evil, it is vitally important that the dead are treated with respect. A wake is held on one or two nights before the body is buried. It is believed that on the third night, the spirit or soul is resurrected, like Christ's. On the ninth night the spirit of the dead returns to the former home and on this occasion a service of remembrance may be held at which the departed soul is admonished to continue to serve God. A 'Table' service is held three months after death and another after a further three months. At this second 'table', the departed soul is committed to Jesus Christ and a year later another service commends the soul to the Holy Spirit. At this service, the Holy Spirit comes to 'trump' (be alongside) the departed soul, who is now at peace.

Morrish (1982, p.52) suggests that Pocomania follows the usages of Revivalism and is similar 'Po' means shake in Twi and 'kom' means to dance in a wild state of frenzy and Myal has been added to make the cult that mingles Revivalism with spirit possession.

The Spiritualist Church is very similar to the Revivalist movement. Followers believe that the Bible is the chief authority in all doctrinal and religious matters. They believe there is one true God, who is infinite, the supreme ruler of heaven and earth, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. He expresses the qualities of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is the creator and sustainer, the known and the unknown and the Holy Spirit is the comforter and instructor. Followers also believe that Jesus was incarnated as the Son of God and born of the Virgin Mary and they believe in resurrection and the need for spiritual retreats. (Taylor, 2001, p 22-23). Ceremonies include washing and anointing and observing feasts and festivals of the African Culture. The lighting of candles is significant as well as praying, singing, beating drums, clapping hands and preaching. Olive oil is used to anoint and the staff is a symbol of leadership. Trumpets are also sounded. (Ibid.).

E. Moore, 'Religious Syncretism in Jamaica', *Practical Anthropology*, 12. (1960, p.4) suggests that Convince, whilst adapting Biblical material and Christian hymns into its cosmology, has its roots firmly buried in an African theology. Its members are called Bongo and Convince originated amongst the Maroons in the Blue Mountains. God, the Supreme Being, and Christ are too unworshipable to merit much attention, but there is an importance placed on lesser deities and spirits. The strongest Bongo ghosts come from Africa, others derive from ancient Jamaican slaves and Maroons

(Moore, 1960, p.6) so that there are degrees of removal from contemporary generations. Bongo songs are sung in the call and response format and dances are performed. They attach the same importance as Myalism to the silk cotton tree where spirits are supposed to reside in the branches of the tree or in the chambers formed by its huge roots, which protrude from the earth. Convince rests on the assumption that men and spirits exist within a single unified social structure, interact with one another and influence each other's behaviour. The principles of co-operation and reciprocity give the relations between certain cult members and certain of these spirits. Bongo men believe that spiritual power is morally neutral and that it can be put to both constructive and destructive use by spirits who possess it and by persons who can influence them. It makes no sense, in their opinion, to propitiate spirits who are neither potentially dangerous nor immediately useful. Bongo men focus their attentions on lesser, accessible spirits who can take an immediate interest in every day affairs and have a greater influence on phenomenal events. Bongo men deal exclusively with ghosts. (Hogg, 1964.) Alleyne (1989, p.89) states that when Christian elements began to infiltrate Myalism, the two branches of Convince and Kumina became an autonomous tradition whereas the forms of Myalism most strongly influenced by Christianity ended up as Revivalism (and Zionism) and as Pocomania.

Kumina is another Jamaican cult but Christianity has a limited impact on this (Alleyne, 1989, pp.23-93). The spirits who come to dance Myal at Kumina are described as Sky gods, earthbound gods and ancestral spirits. There are no prophets, archangels, evangelists and apostles. However, some Christian figures such as Moses, David and Ezekiel are introduced. The services are rounded off by the singing

of Christian hymns. Sky gods include *Oto* and *Judee*, but it is generally felt that these gods are African in origin. Ancestral spirits are deceased members of families that belong to the cult. In life they would have been Kumina drummers and men and women who became possessed frequently. These are called zombies (George. E. Simpson, *Black Religions in the New World*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1978, p.98). The pivotal element in Kumina religion is the worship or invocation of ancestral spirits that take possession of the living. A zombie has possessed the person, his soul takes on a new quality and at the death of the person the soul joins all ancestral zombie spirits and can return to earth, attending cult ceremonies and possessing living individuals. ( Simpson, 1978, p.336). They are generally a menace to the living.

Alleyne (1989, p.79) writes that the religion of the Akan took two paths in Jamaica, a conservative path amongst the Maroons, who still preserve religious relics and religious ideas of Africa and the path of those in an 'alternative' society who were prepared to endure and were influenced by contact with Christianity. Both Alleyne and Lawson agree that the nature of the belief system has evolved. There are no longer the same hierarchy and pantheon of Gods and the number of objects in nature that possess in-dwelling spirits. However, new religious systems like Revival, Pocomania, Kumina and Convince emerged in Jamaica. According to Alleyne (1989, p.96) important points in the continuum of religious differentiation created by the meeting of Myalism and Christianity can be found in the religious movements known as Pocomania, Revival and Spiritualism. These movements are largely, but not exclusively, urban. They model themselves on the Native Baptists and have a well-defined priesthood.

Pocomania and Revival have evolved directly from Myalism – examined in detail earlier - and Myal, as a name, has fallen into disuse. ‘Daddies,’ or leaders, won recognition outside their groups. Pocomania is the closest descendant of Myalism. Revival or Revival Zion and various forms of Baptism, including Spiritualism, show greater degrees of Christian influence. Followers of Pocomania generally prefer to be called Baptists or, in my experience, Zionists rather than use the term Pocomania. Since the movement is not controlled by a central authority, they are free to choose their own individual forms of worship and their own belief systems within the general framework of Myalism. There are certain similarities and I found that the rhythmic nature of the worship and the spirit possession found in both Zionist and Baptists to be similar to Myalism and ultimately to African religion. African spirits seem more active than Christian ones, but the most popular spirits are Michael and Gabriel followed by Jesus Christ, Mary, the Holy Ghost and Satan. These spirits, like the African ones, take an active part in human affairs. They punish or reward the living and may descend on their devotees and possess them. All spirits, with the exception of God and Jesus, may possess their followers and be invoked by them, either to help them or to harm their enemies. Moore (1960) refers to the Morant Bay area, and states that the Pocomania devotees set up their own altars to ‘cut and clear’ evil spirits, and Pocomania followers, especially their leaders, use rum and marijuana. Pocomania has less emphasis on preaching and Bible explanations and more on singing and spiritual dancing. They make greater use of witchcraft and use more extreme techniques of healing than, for example, the Revival Zion Church and they are closer to Myalism than Revival. Pocomania songs are phrased in biblical terms and others contain specific references to the invocation of ancestor spirits. There are

many similarities between African Kumina and Afro-Christian Zions. Kamu Braithwaite, Kumina, 'The Spirit Of Africa Survival,' *Jamaica Journal*, 42. (1978, p.52) argues that they are similar, especially in the rhythmic nature of worship and possession of a worshipper's body, mind and character by a god or spirit.

### **Rastafarianism**

This movement is indigenous to Jamaica and started in the 1930's. The Rastafarian doctrine states that Haile Selassie is God. He is a God because, it is believed, the Queen of Sheba (who could have been Queen Makeda of Ethiopia) who by becoming Solomon's lover, fulfilled David's wish (Taylor, 2001, p.67 and Glissant, 1989). This meant that Ethiopia was a chosen tribe of Israel and, as God's chosen people, they could be guardians of the Ark of the Covenant. (Ibid.) Rastafarian Imaani Nyah, (Samuel Murrell, Spencer, W.D., McFarlane, A. A., *Chanting Down Babylon – The Rastafarian Reader*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1998, p.3) declared that Rastafarians are African Centred Christians who proclaim that Ethiopia is Judah and that Christ was manifest in the person of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie. Ras (tafari) means 'head of Christ' and so any person claiming that he is a Ras must identify himself with Christ. The movement has very strong millennialist orientations and believes in the possibility of social, political and religious reforms. Morrish (1982, p.68) argues that it appeals to those mainly from the unemployed who are dissatisfied with their social and economic position. Murrell et al (1998, p.4) argue that while Rastafarian beliefs and practices are influenced by Africanisms in Jamaican culture such as Myalism, Convince, Revivalism and Pocomania, Rastafari's rise and ethics are driven by social, economic and political forces in the region. Therefore,

Rastafarianism is more than a religion, it is a cultural movement, a system of beliefs and a state of consciousness.

The doctrine of Rastafari was first preached by Leonard P. Howell in Kingston. He had previously travelled to Africa and had preached in the US, where he had first-hand experience of black and white racism. The movement's 'forefather' was, however, Marcus Garvey who was an influential exponent of social reform both in the States and in Jamaica. There was a development in the growth of the symbolic value of Ethiopia. Bisnauth (1996, p.186) states Ethiopia was spoken of in the same breath as the greatness of ancient Egypt and there was a dream of a 'Free Ethiopian Empire'. Throughout these developments, the religious theme was always present. Cugoano, a black writer, looked to God to bring about the reversal of Africa's fortunes. Gustavus Equiano (b.1745) had already remarked on the strong similarity between the Africans and the Jews before the latter entered the 'Promised Land'. He even argued that the Africans were descended from the Jews. Others, such as J.C. Pennington, referred to the myth that black people were cursed because they were descendants of Ham and remarked that Noah's curse could not apply to Africans since they were the descendants of Kush and Miriam and not Canaan. The black evangelist James M. Webb declared in 1906 that Jesus had curly hair and Ethiopian blood and he would have been classified as 'Negro' in America. The theologian Henry Grant, quoted psalm 68:32 to the effect that "Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hand to God." This passage was to become the text of many sermons preached by Jamaicans and was regarded as a Biblical prophecy and that Africa would soon be redeemed (Bisnauth, 1996, p.187). These were subjects looked into between 1912 and 1914 by Marcus Garvey in London, and when he returned to Jamaica he founded the Universal



Negro Improvement and Conservation Association and the African Communities League. His objectives included the establishment of a universal confraternity among the African race; to promote the spirit of racial pride and love; to reclaim the fallen; to minister to and assist the needy and to assist the backward tribes of Africa.

Although Garvey was unsuccessful with his main aim, which was to liberate Africa, he assumed the status of a prophet in the mould of Elijah or John the Baptist. When Ras Tafari was crowned as Emperor Haile Selassie in 1930 and given the title King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, many Jamaicans saw in this the fulfilment of Garvey's prophecy that one day someone would rise in Africa. There were no shortages of Biblical passages to support this. It followed that if Haile Selassie (which means power of the Trinity) was the one of whom Garvey spoke, then it must mean that exile in Babylon (wicked white land) would be over. It could not just be coincidence that Ras Tafari (Prince of Peace) was elevated to Haile Selassie (Power of the Trinity) and the Bible makes direct reference to a Saviour who would redeem Israel and gather the children of Israel who are scattered amongst the nations of the world.

Rastafarians used their spiritual gifts to translate Garvey's dreams and gave him the force and dynamism of a religious movement. They appropriated the terms and expressions from the Old Testament and regarded themselves as the children of Israel; Israel itself was transposed, in Rasta thinking, into Ethiopia. Rastafarianism preaches the overthrow of the present power structures and a reversal of the present social order. In the new order of things, the present disinherited and disadvantaged – 'the Sufferers' will occupy positions of ease and power and those who occupy such

positions now will be slaves and servants. As the Bible says: “To the last shall be the first” and “the meek will inherit the earth.”

Rastafarians share the same Scriptures with mainstream Christians, so have been forced to justify their ideas doctrinally. They argue that Biblical passages reflect the wicked distortion of Jah’s (God’s) word by white men and black traitors. They heap scorn on those who have traditionally interpreted the Bible such as priests and ministers. These officials, they claim, support Babylon – the symbol of wickedness and oppression. They believe they know the truth intuitively because they are re-incarnated Israelites and have been with God from the beginning of creation. So Rastafarianism, in their opinion, offers a new interpretation of the Scriptures.

In 1973 Joseph Owens published a ten-point summary of Rastafarian theology, which the Guyanese clergyman, Michael N Jagessar rewrote in 1991. This included the humanity of God and the divinity of man, revealed through Haile Selassie: ‘God is man and man is God’. God is to be found in every man and the one who is supreme is Rastafari Selassie I. The doctrine further states that human beings are called to celebrate and protect life (Murrell et al, 1998, p.6) and to that end they are called to protect the environment, reduce pollution and eat natural foods. Sin can be both individual and corporate so that corporations and economic powers like the International Monetary Fund must be held responsible for Jamaica’s fiscal problems. Rastafarians have shown some modest changes in some of their theological and ideological concepts, for example the brethren have re-interpreted the doctrine of repatriation as voluntary migration to Africa, returning to Africa culturally and symbolically, or rejecting western values and preserving African roots. The idea that

'the white man is evil' has also become less prominent and the concept of Babylon has broadened to include all oppressors and corrupt systems of the world (Murrell et al, 1998 p.6). Liberation from traditional values enables Rastafarians to experience a tremendous release of emotional energy and this has expressed itself in all kinds of creative activity from Music to Art. Bob Marley gave Rastafarianism international recognition with his music and Albert Artwell, amongst others, is gaining recognition for Jamaican Art. His paintings and those of other Rastafarian artists follow 'primitive' African art, but usually have a religious theme, with Christ, if shown as the largest figure amongst a group (Veerle Poupeye, *Caribbean Art*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1998, p.95).

Previously, attempts have been made to destroy or neutralise the movement but the fact that they have adapted their ideas and that some are now wealthier due to their creativity means that the movement still has influence. People such as Bob Marley brought more international acclaim for the movement. The Movement has a political voice, so politicians obviously see it as a voting force and exploit this, especially since the time of Prime Minister Michael Manley in the 1960's and 1970's. According to Bisnauth (1996, p.191) there has been a levelling of social inequalities which the movement itself particularly tried to address, but there is still considerable inequality. However, the Rastafarian hair, dress and language are also more acceptable than previously and many churchmen give Rastafarianism more recognition. Rastafarians have their own dialect which is similar to, but not the same as Jamaican. The main modifications have been in the lexicon, in the forms of greeting, address and in the pronunciation system. (Alleyne, 1989, p.147). This intermingles with their philosophy, which categorises the world into positive and negative forces and also a

belief that language should reflect these categories. The most popular force is perception, physically realised through the 'eye' by means of the sense of sight and leading to the metaphysical realisation of self, the ego, 'I' language. Therefore words are these forces, rather than symbolising them. For example, 'I' replaces me and we, so 'I' is a singular form for subject, object and possession, and 'I and I' is the plural and in some cases the singular form as well. They also observe the food taboos of the ancient Hebrews and many Rastafarians are vegetarian. They live by what they consider to be the Nazarene vow regarding the shaving of the face and consuming alcohol. They hold the institution of marriage in contempt, but have a high standard of fidelity (in principle) and infidelity and promiscuity are abhorred as deadly sins. As Rastafari was primarily as man's movement, women are generally regarded to be subordinates, although they have a growing voice in the movement and the dignity of women is recognised. The 'daughters' are also called 'Queens' (Taylor, 2001, p.73). Apart from these distinctions, Rastafarians regard one another as brothers and sometimes address one another as Jah.

Rastafarians do not converse with the dead or ancestral spirits. Death for them is the result of sin, as the Bible says, "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." Therefore, being sinful provides its own punishment. They believe in their own mortality and Rastafarians have their own version of the Bible. The most important religious ceremony is the Groundation. Men and women share in this activity which has been described by them as the grounding of the spirit (Murrell et al, 1998, p.192). It is similar to the Eucharist of Holy Communion to Christians. The bliss of new life in the 'Promised Land' is anticipated and they sing songs of praise, dressed in African robes, and praise Jah and share a vegetarian meal. A state of euphoria is reached by

smoking *ganja* or cannabis and this is done in an elaborate and formal ritual. The pipe is smoked communally and strengthens the bonds of the community. The act of sharing focuses on the morals of the society, as anyone out of perfect love or charity with the brethren does not share the pipe. The ceremony also serves to assert and reaffirm the beliefs and values.

Rooted in a radical Afro-Christian and Jamaican tradition, Rastas have forged a new religion and culture out of African, European and even Indian roots. *The Bible of King James* has been re-read through the *Kebra Nagast* of Ethiopia and both texts reflectively applied to a Caribbean historical reality. (Taylor, 2001, p.75) This has helped reawaken in Jamaican people a sense of themselves as Africans in a struggle for social and political change (ibid.) C.R.L. James pointed out (James, *The Black Jacobins*, New York, Vintage Random House, 1989, p.399) that for Rastas “Africa is a Caribbean desire.” There can be no doubt that Rastafarianism has had a great influence on the life of Jamaican contemporary society.

## **Has Religion been re-defined?**

It can be seen, through the historical process of the development of beliefs in Jamaica, that religion, especially Christianity, seems to have evolved so that churches such as the Spiritualist and Revivalist Churches, amongst others, have made Christianity their own. Taylor (2001, p.74) argues that the Bible is a Caribbean text and Jamaicans know the Bible better than the North Americans. Taylor states that religion furthermore provides a fundamental source of identity in the Caribbean (p.10).

Althea Prince, (' How Shall We Sing The Lord's Song in a Strange land? Constructing the Divine in Caribbean Contexts.' in Taylor, P., (ed) *Nation Dance-Religion, Identity and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean*, Indiana, Bloomington. 2001, p.27) asks whether the Caribbean person can embrace a religious tradition that is foreign to her/him and also how is this transformed, if it is, and why? Prince argues (ibid.) that life comes into being first in the realm of spirit. She asks what people from India feel when they listen and dance to the drum? Will it suffice to say Mass in a sonorous voice by one person or does the entire congregation need to be part of this for it to mean something? (ibid). Nettleford argues (2001) that dance is the most effective means of communication and strengthens the spirit of the people so that dancing and drumming can be a way of re-defining religion in Jamaica and elsewhere. This gives a shared unity in place of tension. (Rex Nettleford, *Inward Stretch, Outward Reach: A Voice from the Caribbean*. London, MacMillan, Caribbean, 1993) Prince asks "How can we sing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land?" (Taken from Psalm 137) and suggests that the land is no longer strange and the people:

*Sing their own definition of the Lord's song. For the Gods are creolised, the Divine is their Divine and so the methods used to conduct enquiry must also move from the strange to the particular. (In this case – has literature in Jamaica been re-defined?)*

## **Conclusion**

The Arawaks and the Caribs have all but been destroyed and full emancipation of slaves took place in 1838. Afro/Caribbean's have never forgotten the humiliation of slavery and they feel they have been left disadvantaged. It was recognised in the mid-nineteenth century that to be Christian was an important social stepping stone into society. Government officials, school teachers and ministers were Christians and this helped to strengthen that feeling. Meanwhile in schools, staff were appointed by the church and the importance of English cultural values was stressed and these values became the criteria for excellence. Christianity, Englishness and fair skin were and, to some extent, still are perceived to be a measure of civilisation. Membership of the Church of England became desirable and much hard work was undertaken to make the church attractive to British Caribbean people, and anyone working at a good job would also join the church. In the 1920's, missions were sent from America, which included the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church of the United States.

In the 1950's, before Independence, the elite of Jamaica consisted of original descendants of the plantocracy and members of the civil service. At the base of society were the ex-slaves and their descendants and in the middle, the mulatto, the offspring of the white managerial class and black slaves and ex-slave women. The most important criteria was skin colour, so social structure was still virtually the same as pre-emancipation Jamaica, but slaves were now free. The distribution of church members in Jamaica broadly follows this race and colour bias. Whites are usually Anglicans, although some families of Scots descent show preference for the Presbyterian Kirk. Urban membership of Methodist churches is almost exclusively 'coloured'. The urban membership of the Baptist church is almost exclusively black.

The Baptist Church in Jamaica had black leadership from their early establishment. Bisnauth (1996, p.198) suggests that black church leadership was slow to arrive in Jamaica, due to the lack of education, which was also costly, although many Jamaicans are, in my experience, indebted to missionaries for their schooling.

In Latin America a movement called Liberation Theology has emerged. Theresa Lo Chang, a Jamaican nun (Interview, 1999) declares that this is the future path for some Jamaican religious experience. The movement consists of Christians who believe the Gospels' demand that people stand up and fight against poverty, exploitation and the lack of human rights, inspired by the words of Jesus:

*He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty and to continue to set free the oppressed. (Luke 4:18)*

In the past the church has done little to alleviate poverty or injustice (Jenkins, 1992, p.172). However, in some parts of Jamaica, especially urban areas, priests identify themselves with the poor as Jesus did and they are not afraid to speak out, live with the poor and take risks for them.

Today, Jamaica has the greatest number of churches per square mile of country in the world and more than 80% of Jamaicans claim to be Christians. There seems to be a church every few hundred yards, representing virtually every denomination in the world. The Church serves as an important social centre in Jamaican communities and the gospel offers a source of hope with its talk of redemption in the afterlife. The African legacy, however, still runs deep and religious beliefs brought by the slaves linger, often interwoven with church ideology. It is common to see adults and children walking along country roads, holding Bibles and dressed in their best clothes. Men in suits with starched collars and women looking as if they are going to a wedding. On



Sundays, most churches look to be full and many services go on for several hours with strong sermons and discussions on the Bible. Many church services include hymns with guitars, drums and tambourines to help the crowd work itself up to climax. The majority of the population (Chris Baker, *Jamaica, a Lonely Planets Guide*, London, Lonely Planet, 1996) 38% belong to the Anglican Church of Jamaica (formally the Church of England), Baptists consists of 18%, Methodists, 6% and Presbyterian, 5%. Each town of significance also has a Roman Catholic Church, and about 8% are Catholics, mainly Chinese and East Indians. There are also Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists and other fundamentalists. In addition there are the Revival and Spiritualist groups, Pocomanai and Kumina, and though they are not a recognisable religion - a faith not a church - the Rastafarians. The latter have profound influence that has far outweighed their small numbers. Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians and Seventh Day Adventist churches in Jamaica reject the idea of spirit possession that is so much a part of Revival and Pocomania, but nevertheless 'members' of these churches often quietly and unobtrusively become possessed during religious services and I have witnessed this myself in those around me. Other churches such as the Pentecostal and Bible churches of God do allow spirit possession but only by Christian powers, unlike Pocomania and Zion, which allow the spirits of departed ancestors to possess members. However, Rastafarians believe in no spirit possession at all.

I would therefore argue that religion, which is a mixture of Christianity and African beliefs, is important and fundamental to Jamaica. A society that claims to be religious will also perceive spirituality to be a dominant force and, I would argue, be spiritually aware. Some Jamaicans, including Rastafarians, feel that they are descended from the

Israelites and God will lead them out of the wilderness. Others are content with the status quo of the Church of Jamaica and other mainstream churches. Certainly, I would argue, that religion colours virtually all aspects of Jamaican life, whether it be in a historical context or in present day church - attendance or spirituality in its different forms. There is still much poverty, class and colour differences in Jamaica, but religion is perceived to offer the promise of redemption and also acts as a social meeting place, especially for women, who often see it as a refuge in the hardships of their lives. I would argue that religion has been re-defined and Erskine (1909) would argue that theology needs to be de-colonised. Jamaicans can "Sing the Lord's song in a Strange Land"(Psalm 137) and the Bible has become a Caribbean text. I conclude with Katrin Norris (cited in Morrish, 1982, p.46) that many Jamaicans have adopted Christianity without abandoning the traditions of African religious ritual.

In the following Chapter, I will examine whether literature in Jamaica has become re-defined with regard to Christianity and whether Jamaican poets and writers have adapted forms of literature to make them their own. However, because religion and spirituality are so important in Jamaica, as can be seen in this chapter, the concepts examined must influence, in a variety of ways, the work of the women writers of the study, as well as their literary forefathers and mothers.

*The cock, the totem of his craft, his luck,  
The obeahman infects me to my heart  
Although I wear my Jesus on my breast  
And burn a holy candle for my saint.  
I am a shaker and a shouter and a myal man;  
My voodoo passion swings sweet chariots low.*

Eric Roach (from Tobago) links Christianity and Obeah in 'I am the Archipelago'  
(Brown, S, Morris, M. and Rohlehr, G., *Voiceprint*, Harlow, Longman, Harlow, 1989)

## **Chapter 2**

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## Chapter 2

### History and the Caribbean Religious experience

*In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God (St John Chapter 1, verse 1)*

History, religion, language and culture are, I would suggest, interwoven and inextricably linked. The history of religion has already been examined in Chapter One and much has been written about the history of the Caribbean and this can only be dealt with briefly in this thesis. However, some aspects are too important to be left unsaid and 'place' the religious context. Perhaps this history of the Caribbean can help towards explaining why the Jamaican writers of the study are so spiritual. Language and culture can be seen as interwoven. Edward Kamu Braithwaite in his *History of the Voice*, ('Caribbean Nation Language' in Walder, D, Havelly, C and Rossington, M., (ed) *Post Colonial Literatures in English – Offprints Collection*, A421, Milton Keynes, Open University, 1984) suggests that the imposition of English was the most powerful tool of oppression available to the conquerors. However the slaves, through their resistance to it, reversed this to make it a powerful weapon of defiance.

Columbus' voyage was the first gold rush in the history of the modern world (Williams, 1993, p.23) and the promise of profit encouraged the extermination of the aboriginal Arawaks and the destruction of the Caribs, so, depriving the West Indies of the indigenous culture. (James, 1968, p.2). In the seventeenth century, the Caribbean territories became pawns to the power struggle of Europe and the invasions were all the more horrific because pirates and buccaneers were used instead of troops. One such was Henry Morgan, who after a particularly horrific attack in 1670, seized

Panama. He was ordered back to England to stand trial for his actions. Instead of being punished for his crimes, Morgan was acquitted, knighted and returned as Governor General of Jamaica. By the end of the seventeenth century, this phase had passed, but still left a tradition of violence which runs deep in Caribbean life (ibid) and which was not helped by the slave trade in the eighteenth century. The tradition of violence, perpetuated by the slave trade, established the need for subversion which can be observed in the form of the language used by those oppressed by such violence.

The Atlantic Slave Trade brought about one of the largest migrations in history. Antonio Benitez-Rojo ( *The Repeating Island; The Caribbean and Postmodern Perspective*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1992, p.9) argues that it produced no fewer than 10 million African slaves and thousands of coolies from India, China and Malaysia. This colonisation was also responsible for mercantile and industrial capitalism, African

Underdevelopment produced imperialism, wars, rebellion, repression, sugar islands, runaway slave settlements and revolutions of all sorts. (ibid). Colonisation (not just of the Caribbean) led to the spread of European, especially British hegemony, rather than direct control of the colonised. Although there were evolutionary and evangelical notions of racial superiority, there was also the belief that European manners and culture were values to aspire towards.

Benitez Rojo (1992, p.1) argues that the Caribbean basin is one of the least known regions of the modern world and I would suggest that in a 'post colonial' era

academics cannot expect to agree about the factors in history which led to colonisation and its consequences. However, colonisation is a vital part of the history of the Caribbean, the slave trade is still a poignant part of history, but there is still much unknown of the history of the Caribbean and still a great deal open to debate.

Braithwaite (1984) argues that 'nation language' is an important part of resistance – the language used by slaves and people brought to the Caribbean. This can be in the form of the written or spoken word. He argues (pp. 5-19) that the language may be English in terms of its lexical features, but its contours, rhythm and timbre – its sound explosions are not English, even though the words that may be heard sound English. Braithwaite (ibid) argues that language alone cannot cause revolutions, it is people that do that, but language does have a role and this 'resistance' and 'nation language' can be seen in various degrees in the work of the writers being examined.

## **Theory and the Caribbean difference**

Much has been written regarding literary theory and in particular those such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back – Theory and Practice in Post Colonial Literatures*, London: Routledge, 1989) who have written about postcolonial theory. Ashcroft et al (1989, p.149) argue that it is within the Caribbean that the most extensive challenge to post – colonial literary theory has taken place. In this work, I have chosen to mention some of these theories only briefly as background to the texts that I have examined. To write in detail would involve another large separate topic.

Initially much of the literature of the colonial period was about the problems of settlers and plantation owners, histories of flora, fauna and especially work on manners, morals, policies and religion which were examined in contrast to their relationship with Europe (Bruce King, (ed) *New National and Post Colonial Literatures- an Introduction*, Oxford, Clarendon University Press, 1996, p.6). However, King (ibid.) argues that the act of filling a page, describing a space and populating it with local characters and names (for example, Lady Nugent's work cited in James, 1968, p.2) was the start of a new national literature.

I would argue that post-colonial theory cannot usefully be understood as an isolated theory, but has been influenced by other theories. Wilson Harris also expresses important views on post-coloniality and the Caribbean difference of that theory. He suggests that the basis for Caribbean art of all forms is the antagonistic energies of past traditions, which manage to transform themselves into a creativity. (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p.150). He believes in the psychic regeneration of communities and

individuals through the 'catastrophe theory'. Harris argues that transforming the powers of imagination, that appear to have been lost forever, may be recuperated and since this was violent and destructive, this could help creativity. This can, in varying forms, be recognised in the writings of those examined. Therefore, the more intense the race hatred and oppression, the more their own energies deconstruct themselves into the psyche – so the more powerful the text. (Wilson Harris, *The Womb of Space: The Cross- Cultural Imagination*, Westpoint, Greenwood Press, 1985, p.127). Harris regards the values enshrined in the beliefs of an ancestral culture as secondary to the transformative power of the imagination to effect 'genuine change'. Harris further suggests that mixed populations, such as those in the Caribbean, offer unique possibilities for cross- cultural creativity and believes language must be altered and 'set free' with attitudes and words expressed. Hena Maes- Jelinek ('Another Future for Post- Colonial Studies?' In *Wasafiri*, pp.3-7, no 24. *Wasafiri*, 1996, p.3) suggests that Harris sees the cross –culturalism not as a difference between peoples and cultures in the modern world, but a difference between established people and 'silent and eclipsed voices'. This view seems to contrast with the assertion of a 'distinct national identity' because Harris does not appear to discard one politically inspired worldview for another. The meaning is not therefore simple to define.

Many post-colonial critics have felt the need to reject both European theory and the term post-colonial. Critics such as Bhabha, Spivak and JanMohamed offer ways of dismantling colonialism's signifying system and exposing its operations in silencing and oppressing the indigenous population. Others, such as Benita Parry ('Problems in current theories of colonial discourse,' *Oxford Literary Review*, 9 No 1 and 2.1987,



p.37) ask whether there is a danger of colonist discourse becoming a coloniser in its turn and encouraging a continuation of neo-colonialist domination.

Benitez-Rojo (1992, p.10) states that the Caribbean is the natural realm of marine currents, folds and double folds of fluidity and sinuosity and the choice of all or nothing, for or against, honour and blood have little to do with Caribbean culture. These are ideologies perpetuated by Europe and the Caribbean shares these only on the surface. This realm of nature allows Caribbean people to be called 'Peoples of the Sea' and the difference between these and other people is their performance and rhythm which is linked to nature (ibid, p.17). Benitez-Rojo, argues that scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge can co-exist so the link with nature does not hamper the Caribbean, but coexists as differences within the same system. (p.17) Rhythm, as a code of the Caribbean, precedes music, including percussion. It is something 'already there' amid the noise "something ancient and dark to which the drummer and the drum-head connect on a given moment" (p.18). However, Caribbean rhythm is not just percussion but is a metarhythm and can be dance, music, text or body language (ibid). Benitez- Rojo (1992, p.26) colours rhythms, for example, white rhythm is binary including marching steps. However copper, black and yellow are different, but they all have one thing in common in that they belong to the 'Peoples of the Sea' and are turbulent and erratic. In his formulation, they are rhythms without a past or, better still, rhythm whose past is the present. (ibid, p.26).

Therefore the Caribbean text can be read as a '*mestizo*' text – a stream of texts in flight where there is intense differentiation in themselves and in the rhythmic texts. Novels and poems of the Caribbean communicate with their own turbulence, their

own clash, their own void, which is produced by the 'plantation', which makes them different with regard to the West. Caribbean society is unpredictable and fragmented in its mixture of ethnicity and desires but there are no single factors of instability and it would be a mistake to oversimplify these aspects. (p.27).

## **Postcolonial/Caribbean perspectives on Theology**

Williams (1994, p.136) argues that re-colonisation within the Caribbean is now more of a possibility. When Caribbean theologians speak of a re-colonisation threat they are not necessarily thinking of military overthrow but of ways in which the power of thought can “hold so much psychological sway over people that it immobilises their efforts into self-actualisation” (ibid, p.137). Williams cites Watty (p.141) who worries that any wholesale transportation to the Caribbean of foreign theologies such as Black Liberation or Latin American theology is the re-colonisation of the Caribbean.

Bultmann (cited in Williams, ibid, p.140) suggests that mythology is more than story telling and is the description of human understanding of human existence and this is vital to self-actualisation. Although self-actualisation is among Maslow’s higher psychological needs (ibid, p.147) it is still vitally important in the establishment of post-colonial identity.

Williams (ibid, p.151) argues that Christology in the Caribbean context is the most crucial area in the Caribbean perspective. It is crucial because:

1. Christian theology is centred in Christianology – once Caribbean theology has identified itself as Christian theology. It is concerned that it express the Christ as a reality in the Caribbean context.
2. It further decides how to express the Christ reality within the Caribbean context. It decides what the Caribbean Christ looks like. How transcendence by the Incarnation is transferred to the Caribbean context.

A particular point in the debate questions whether the necessity for a Caribbean Christ has truly arrived. Clifford Payne of Trinidad (ibid, p.151) suggests that no other than a Caribbean Christ can address “the deepest needs of the Caribbean people”.

Although Christ is also universal.

Leo Erskine, ( *Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective*, Trenton, First Africa World Press, 1998, p.110) relates Caribbean spirituality to other third world experiences. He argues that theology as it was practiced in the church did not address the identity problems that slavery created among the Caribbean people. God was presented not as a symbol of freedom but as the extension of the European and North American church experience. The European zeal to Christianise and civilise the world often provided a rationale for third world oppression (ibid, p.7). In that process of domination, Christian churches very often insisted that Christianity was a superior religion, which provided the reasons to conquer and dominate the so-called 'pagan people'.

As a result many third world countries, for example, Jamaica, experimented with socialism and also began to develop independent theologies in an attempt to counter oppression and give religious expression to their historical experience. In 1966 a consultation took place in Nigeria for African Churches which concluded that there were indications that individuals were beginning to examine the heritage of the church to see how pertinent it “related to African thought, ideas and life in a changing situation” (Erskine, 1998, p.12).

After Emancipation many missionaries held the view that black people were “ a slate that could be wiped clean of the last vestiges of black religion” (Ibid, p.108) and church attendance appeared to support this. However, if missionaries would have looked closer they would have seen that black people did not relinquish black religion but were in fact allowing the practice of Christianity to co-exist with African religious beliefs. They were between two faiths. In Christianity they were confronted by a religion where they would not be assimilated by the white majority and in black religion they found religious beliefs that they would not abandon if they did embrace Christianity. The missionaries mistook church attendance to mean assimilation and failed to recognise that black people could not abandon black religion. So the African cults gave to black people an Afro-Christian perspective which brought about a sort of merging of black religion and Christianity (p.112).

As a consequence of the past, the church in Africa can be related to the foreignness of Christianity. The Church has taught and preached about a strange God whom Africans identify as the God of white people. This makes Africans turn to the God of their fathers – the god whom their ancestors worshipped. This All Africa Conference recognised that “We have left them with two Gods”.

In 1950 *Christ for Jamaica* was published in which Jamaican theologians reflected upon the church’s mission in modern Jamaica. In this publication each denomination attempted to demonstrate that Jesus Christ was central to the problems of identity in Jamaica and whether he was relevant to Jamaica- a Caribbean Christ? The Church however, is still largely influenced by European ideals of salvation are now starting to think about black humanity and the need for a new social order. The church needs

black prophets in Jamaica in an attempt to 'wrestle' with the theological significance of blackness for Jamaica. At last the church has ceased to ignore the black experience. S. E Carter (cited in Erskine, 1998, p.120) supports the needs of the church to be an incarnation of a people's quest for identity. Theology, he says, should not be divorced from black people's quest for identity.

### **Language – a ‘Jamaican response’**

*Language is the perfect instrument of Empire*, Bishop Seville to Queen Isabella cited in Chamberlain. (1993, p.68.)

Opal Palmer Adisa (‘De language Reflect Dem Ethos: Some Issues with Nation Language,’ in Newson, A.S., and Strong-Leek, L.,(eds), *The Transforming Voices of Caribbean Woman Writers and Scholars*, New York, Peter Lang, 1998, p.20) regards language as a reflection of culture in motion - language being the root of any culture. Caribbean writers operate within a rich landscape of language and the speech act validates lives and cultures and supports a group conscience (ibid, p.13). Caribbean writers, including Velma Pollard, suggest that language, culture and autonomy exist in a symbiotic relationship – one which “would define the individual character’s way of being in the world.” (1998, p.30)

From the beginning of European settlement in the New World, language was used as an instrument for turning barbarians into civilised beings. At the heart of the endeavour was an assumption that European thought and feelings were superior and that these superiorities were embodied in its language. It was hoped (J. Edward Chamberlain, *Come back to Me My language – poetry and the West Indies*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993, p.69) that savage feeling might be changed into civilised thought by instruction in a European language. Braithwaite in his *History of the Voice* (1984, pp.5-19) states that because officially the conquering people i.e. English (or Spanish, French and Dutch) insisted that the language of public discourse and conversation, of obedience and command should be English (or Spanish, French and Dutch). The conquerors did not wish to hear native languages and so these languages became submerged and its status was considered inferior, as were the

people who spoke it i.e. slaves. They were considered inferior and even non-human. The education system reinforced this by furthering English heritage such as Shakespeare and Jane Austen which had very little to do with the Caribbean cultural experience.

English was the dominant language in Jamaica and when two languages are mismatched, as in this case, the second language is un-directional. The speakers of the subordinate languages not only learn the dominant language but can also surrender their own language. Slaves were discouraged from speaking their native tongue, not because they were to be elevated in status but because, according to Chamberlain, (1993, p.69) language determines thought and language conveys thought. However, in the nineteenth century, there was an alternative view, which suggested that language in some sense precedes, creates or conditions thought and shapes our perceptions of the world. Language encodes not only perspectives but also privileges. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) suggested that the limits of our world are the limits of our language. To many Europeans, the absence of an articulate language and the presence of what they thought of as an inarticulate babble with 'bad English', (Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*, London, Heinemann, 1983, p.86) was associated with the absence of coherent thought and civilised feeling.

Jamaicans, as a result of colonial conquest, were never thought to possess a language of their own. (Adisa, 1998, p.7) Through colonisation, the colonised people's tongue has been cast in a prejudicial light and this led in some instances to the colonised not being considered to possess culture, history or philosophy, never mind any original



ideas (ibid, p.18). Alleyne (1989, p.120) suggests that the lower language undergoes drastic changes as the result of either borrowings from the dominant language or to losses in inner form as a result of growing disuse. The dominant language however, changes very little when spoken by the native speaker but as a second language it can change dramatically. Some interpret (according to Alleyne, ibid) Jamaican 'Creole' or 'Patois' as a product of the continuity of African language structure with loss of inner form and borrowing from English, others see it as a product of drastic changes. Amon Saba Saakana, 'Language and the Shaping of Consciousness,' (in Walder, D, Havelly, C. and Rossington, M., (ed), *Post Colonial Literatures in English – Offprints Collection A 421*, Milton Keynes, Open University, 1987) suggests that the grammatical structure of Caribbean language speakers have more in common with African language structures than with European languages.

Chamberlain, (1993, p.73) suggests that even enlightened nineteenth century reformers believed that racial and political equality would only come about when Africans started behaving and speaking as whites and learning about white achievements. A notion of a correct language was closely associated with the idea of a civilised society with incorrectness supposedly encouraging incivility. Brave armies may conquer countries and save the world but sloppy vocabulary and weak grammar will lead to downfall. Ashcroft et al (1989, p.7) argues that imperial education systems install a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as the norm and marginalise all 'variants' as impurities. Braithwaite (1992, p.123) recognises that the education system encourages and maintains the language of the coloniser, the language of the planter, the language of the official and the language of the Anglican preacher.

Chantal Zabus 'Language, Orality and Literature,' in King, B., (ed) (1996), *New National and Post Colonial Literatures – an Introduction*, London, Clarendon Press, 1996, p.29) declares that when the British settled and colonised various parts of the earth, they did not know that their tongue was going to be (metaphorically) “twisted, bloated, shrunk, pulled out, severed, mangled, hacked.” English has very often ousted the indigenous language altogether or has transformed it, along with the social arena wherein it is used. Postcolonial societies, Zabus (1996, p.29) argues, have moved from “tribe to nation” or from oral to written cultures.

The linking of oral and written language is seen in terms of a continuum. (Philip Nanton, 'Making Space for Orality on its own terms,' in Brown, S (ed) , *The Pressures of the Text – Orality, Texts and the Telling of Tales*, Birmingham University, Centre of West African Studies, 1995, p.84). Gordon Rohler (*The Shape of that Hurt and other Essays*, Trinidad, Longman, Rutherford, A, Jensen, L and Chew, S., (ed) (1994), *Into the Nineties – Post Colonial Women's Writing*, Dangaroo Press, London, 1992, p.135) argues (like Braithwaite) that:

*A continuum exists between a living oral tradition and a growing scribal one in the West Indies.*

From this, speakers naturally select types of language, which are appropriate to particular contexts and situations. Poets and writers need to be aware that all aspects on this linear continuum are available to them. Rohler (1992, *ibid*) argues that some linguists think Creole is simply another language, neither worse nor better than any other, but this is to ignore the social and political nature of the language.

Jean D'Costa also writes of a concept of a Creole continuum and says that Caribbean writers operate within a "polydialectal continuum with a Creole base." Their medium which is written language belongs to the sphere of standardised language, which exerts pressure within their own language community while embracing the wide audience of international Standard English. (Jean D'Costa, 'The West Indian Novelist and language – a search for a literary Medium,' *Studies in Caribbean Language*, (ed) Carrington Society for Caribbean Linguistics, Trinidad, University of West Indies, 1983, p.252). The concept of a Creole continuum is now widely accepted as an explanation of the linguistic culture of the Caribbean. The theory states that the Creole of the region is not simply made up of discrete dialect forms but overlapping ways of speaking which individual speakers may move in and out of with considerable ease.

Jamaican code switching can be seen as subversive, because writers are questioning the English canon. It is seen by Ashcroft et al (1989, p.47) as the only way to reject the language (and hence the vision) of the colonisers. For example, Rastafarians have adopted various ways of 'liberating' language from within and of altering Jamaican Creole to insist on the 'I' for the personal pronoun in all positions.

Velma Pollard in her essay 'Language and Identity: the use of Different Codes in Jamaican Poetry,' in Newson, A.S., and Strong-Leek, L.,(eds), (1998), *The Transforming Voices of Caribbean Woman Writers and Scholars*, New York, Peter Lang, 1998) observes (pp.30-35) that "protest is at the forefront of the movement towards the full embrace of nation language". Pollard examines the different codes associated with the different levels of stratified Jamaican society as the poet struggles

to voice representational speech communities. She identifies three aspects of the Jamaican linguistic environment. The Jamaican dialect of English is the “formal motions of the society and of education.” Jamaican Creole is a Creole of English lexicon which everyone in the speech community understands, and ‘Dread Talk’ is the code of the Rastafari – a lexical adjustment invoked to satisfy the requirement of speakers sympathetic to the philosophy of Rastafari (p.14). Adisa (1998, p.18) argues that the majority of people of African descent have combined African syntax with English words to create a language of their own.

Pollard’s essay ‘Mother Tongue’ (cited in Pollard, 1998, p.32) identifies the prose of Olive Senior as almost “a perfect match between life and fictive reproduction” which “might serve as a kind of laboratory for examining Jamaican speech” without losing its accessibility to the foreign reader (ibid). In her essay on language and identity (ibid) Pollard follows her assumptions with an analysis of ‘Ochios Rios 11’ by Lorna Goodison, in which Pollard regards language as being used as a mark of identity in a medium which must be “at once tense and expressive”. In this poem Goodison illustrates the different voices of the Jamaican community and shows how they find their expressions in discreet but overlapping codes which can be described as ‘language culture’ and ‘living language situations’. (ibid). Goodison invokes code switching and minimal shifting to interweave within her work and is also able to manipulate the different grammar without losing intelligibility or her English-reading public. She is able to accommodate as many as three codes in one sentence- for example:

*Bless you with a benediction of green rain  
no tell no way  
its not that the land and sea and sun has faded  
is so rain stay*

*You see may need rain for food and grow  
So if it your tan, or my yam fi grow? Is just so*

*P.S. thanks for coming anyway,*

This illustrates the complex voice manipulation, lexicon and grammar which alternates between Rasta, Jamaican English and Jamaican Creole and this is what Pollard argues is the major contribution Goodison has made to the language of Caribbean literature (p.34). As Goodison is also a watercolour artist, it could be argued that she paints in words.

Adisa (1998, p.19) maintains that in order to safeguard a link to ancestral history, some Caribbean writers shaped their tongues so that every syllable sounded as if it came from a European. However, she argues that by rejecting the language, the Caribbean writer/intellectual has rejected his resistance and has decided to remain no more than a marginalised person who is unable to project values or a worldview.

Astrid Roemer 'Dangerous Liaison: Western Literary Values, Political Engagements, and My Own Esthetics,' in Newson, A.S., and Strong-Leek, L.,(eds), *The Transforming Voices of Caribbean Woman Writers and Scholars*, New York, Peter Lang, 1998, p.180) believes that there is a danger of Western literary values clouding the work of Caribbean writers. She argues that western literary values are based upon a belief of "conducting and teaching through the written text." (p.182) She suggests that Caribbean writers must accept that being a writer is being caught in one of the main colonial power proposals of conducting, teaching and judging. Roemer states that she plays the 'power game' to gather 'power things' for the others back home and involves herself in political engagement as a commitment to her writing. The ways in

which language and myth are used are also important aspects of writing and these should not be overshadowed by a white male bourgeois perspective called “humanity or Christianity” (p.184). She warns that Western literary values have developed in an intellectual, artistic and philosophical context where Africans were nothing more than slaves and humanity defined as ‘Christian’. She further suggests that literature cannot exist without exploring the interests of one’s neighbours, one’s home, concepts and morals and also that western values should be adapted to Caribbean interests. Writers should play the game for their own ends. Roemer (1998, p.184) argues that colonial language should be “reconstructed by colonised writers before using it” as language is a power medium. However, Adisa (1998, p.19) suggests that those Caribbean writers who make a conscious effort to refrain from using the native language suggest that these people are incapable of speaking for themselves or that the nation language is incapable of expressing the full breadth and range of emotions and ideas. (ibid). Roemer (1998, p.184) maintains that it is necessary that the ‘neighbourhood’ understands the language and the outside world ‘overstands’ it, because it is not ‘written in their size and not dealing with their interests’. (p.186) I would argue that this could be a contentious position, as this would mean a very limited audience for such work. Saakana (1987) states that people in the Caribbean speak English using perfect grammar when the occasion demands, even though the nation language is Creole.

Jamaican fiction can portray an historical dimension which can lead to an obsession with the past that leads writers to re-examine and re-evaluate the order and relationship of events. The driving force of fiction appears to be (Barbara Lalla, *Defining Jamaican Fiction – Marronage and the Discourse of Survival*, London,

University of Alabama Press, 1996, p.14) a commitment to truth. However, arriving at the truth depends on our pre-suppositions. Lalla argues (1996, p.14) that logical dimensions of any narrative involve causation, necessity, probability and possibility which connect the text. However, she suggests that Jamaican fiction is shifting gradually in its emphasis from exile, loss and displacement to nationalism (p.89)

Gordon Rohlehr, in his 'Introduction to *VoicePrint, The Shape of that Hurt*' (Brown et al, 1989, p.1) states that it is only since the 1970's that the term 'oral tradition' began to be consistently used in connection with certain developments in West Indian poetry. Before then Creole dialects were thought to belong to the semi-literate and poor. It was widely believed that dialect (Rohler, 1989, p.1) was a "restricted code-incapable of expressing abstract ideas, sublimity or complexity of thought and feeling." It was considered too sentimental and folksy. Defining oral culture may be open to debate, (Paula Burnett, *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse*, London, Penguin, 1986,p.xxvii) but it is generally agreed that it is not incompatible with a written literature.

Caribbean writers such as Braithwaite have attempted to define Patois (the language of slaves, indentured labourers and servants) or the language of Jamaican as a nation language.

*Now I'd like to describe for you some of the characteristics of our nation language. First of all, it is from, as I've said, an oral tradition. The poetry, the culture itself, exists not in a dictionary but in the tradition of the spoken word. It is based as much on sound as it is on song... When it is written you lose the sound or the noise, and therefore you lose part of the meaning.. (Edward Kamu Braithwaite – History of the Voice, 1984)*

Braithwaite sees this nation language as being closely aligned to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean. He (1984) argues that the pentameter is the main force of

English poetry. In his 'nation language' he largely ignores the pentameter and regards this form as not fully describing the Jamaican experience of aspects of nature such as hurricanes. His book *History of the Voice* makes a precise connection between language and national identity using the term 'nation language' to define the indigenous Caribbean languages such as Jamaican Creole. Braithwaite (1984, pp.5-19) argues that English is an imposed language. The African model influences this nation language. The language may sound like English, but its rhythm, timbre, sound explosion and contours are not. Braithwaite suggests that English can be used as a revolutionary tool, because it is "not language, but people who make revolutions." He uses the notion of nation language in contrast to dialect, because a dialect is perceived as inferior English. He advocates that though it is English, it is often an English which is more like a howl or a shout, a machine gun or the winds and waves. It is also like the blues "and sometimes it is English and African at the same time." (Braithwaite, 1984).

However, Lalla (1996, p.11) argues that literary discourse in Jamaican fiction is not identical to what Caribbean critics call 'Nation Language', whilst Lloyd King (*Towards A Caribbean Literary Tradition*, Trinidad, University of West Indies, 1993) sees Kamau Braithwaite's pursuit of nation language as part of a flight from alienation and identifies the relationship between authenticity and writing as a "characteristic object of anxiety" in Jamaican literature.

Braithwaite, for example, recognises an ancestral relationship with a folk or aboriginal culture, whether African or Amerindian, involving the artists in:

*a journey into the past and hinterland which is at the same time a movement of possession into present and future.*



Through this movement, he suggests, “we become ourselves, truly our own creation, discovering word for object, image for word.” (Braithwaite, 1974, p.42). He stresses the African and Amerindian ancestor over the European to assert an identity swamped by the imposed cultural ‘norm’, but he does not deny the role of the European presence in Creolization. He argues that Creolization is a cultural action based on the stimulus-response of individuals to their environment, within culturally discrete white-black

Daryl Dance (1986, cited in Mordecai and Wilson, (eds), *Her True True Name – An Anthology of Women’s Writing from the Caribbean*, Oxford, Heinemann, 1990) suggests that language and identity are inseparable. In this quest the West Indian author and his *dramatis personae* make three journeys. The first starts with the journey to England (or more recently to the USA or Canada) - a journey to the white western world. Generally this journey reinforces the fact that the:

*cold and alien land is not home and that the traveller must divest himself of his Europeanisation or his westernisation.* (ibid)

The second journey is to Africa (or India) to discover roots and finally a return journey, which may be impossible because European education has taken them too far from ‘their people, their roots and thus themselves’ (Dance, ibid). For many, economic possibilities, including access to publishing, dictate this exile.

Louise Bennett (Miss Lou) did more than anyone to dispense with the prejudice against dialect so that today there is hardly a poet or writer from the Caribbean who does not use the vernacular from time to time due largely to her example. She learned

to combine hilarious entertainment with serious satire. She has done more to promote respect for ordinary people and their culture than any number of academics. She realised that she could write poetry about the drama of ordinary people's lives and she wrote it in the language which they spoke.

Many poets who are considered to have made 'oral poems' such as Louise Bennett make use of the printed word. Louise Bennett has made use of newspaper publication and performance and, until recently, with only partial adult literacy. Newspapers were often read aloud, so although the poem was printed, it did attract a larger audience in an oral form. However, to appreciate work such as this today, it is preferable to have an audio-visual performance to go alongside the written text. More recently the development of technology involving radio, tapes and records have made it possible for the spoken, oral language to reach more people. In the 1960's popular local music developed in the shape of rock steady, ska and reggae. Originally these lyrics were closer to English than Jamaican with perhaps the chorus being written in 'Jamaican' For example, Bob Marley – *No Woman no Cry*. Then came the development of dub poetry, a body of poetry which has been developed to be performed by a musical accompaniment. The outstanding poet/performers include Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mikey Smith and Jean Binta Breeze. David Dabedeen (Dabydeen, D., and Wilson-Tagore, N., *A Readers Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature* (London: Hansib, 1997) suggests that Creole is an intensely kinetic language and gestures naturally and spontaneously accompany oral delivery.

The sung word characterised the oral tradition long before it adapted itself to spoken poetry (Burnett, 1986, p.xxiv). In the Caribbean the song or chant which is part of performance speech and its use of a range of tones and expressive emotion may be as

important as the sight of the words on a page and we can have a different interpretation of the poem for the latter. The musical tradition has continued alongside the spoken tradition in the forms of Calypso and Reggae – forms original to the Caribbean, but in the African tradition with the twin roles of singer and song-writer and an ability to improvise being esteemed. A call and response structure of choral singing, which came from Africa, was used in folk songs and dance and is still sometimes used in poetry. The traditional African forms of song were so strong that they adapted themselves to take into account the English language and the Christian religion without losing the characteristics which are as alive in the Caribbean today as they have always been. Amongst its heritage, oral tradition can include sermons of both grass roots and established churches and hymns. Rohlehr (1992, p.141) maintains that sermons of the Anglican and Catholic or other churches are as much part of the Caribbean oral tradition as Baptist Shouting, Zion Revival, trumping or Rastafarian reasoning.

Merle Collins suggests ('Orality and Writing: A Revisitation,' in Newson, A.S., and Strong-Leek, L.,(eds), *The Transforming Voices of Caribbean Woman Writers and Scholars*, New York, Peter Lang, 1998, p.39) that audience response is part of the performance and that each audience responds differently. She maintains that orality reminds us that Caribbean poetry reflects the fact that its writers are shaped largely by silent stories in a variety of traditions from African to European and also Asian, and even those writing now and who are removed from these traditions, are still spiritually influenced by them. (ibid.) For example, Lorna Goodison's work involved various chants and sermonic aspects and the way in which Goodison delivers her poems, the importance of healing and hands and the calming turn of a head which suggests

listening is an important dimension. Collins argues that these appear to be techniques of a religious tradition effectively employed in poetry, but that all are taken from religion (ibid, p.41) Even when words may not necessarily speak of an institutionalised religion they can speak of a spirituality. There is, according to Collins, (ibid) a great variety of religious poetry in Africa which includes hymns, prayers and praises, possession songs and oracular poetry, all with their varying convention, content and function in different cultures. In traditional African religion such as Shango, there is a similar prayer to 'Our father' where the spirit of prayer is translated into religion and spiritual ideas.

Yoshita Shibata ('Appropriate Voices, Eloquent Bodies: Revisiting Caribbean Popular Spirituality', unpublished, Japan, Kobe University, 2000, p.2) regards spirituality in performance as having a dynamic energy which takes the form of great waves of melody and rhythmic sounds and noises. In a spiritual performance music, speech, chant, prayer, recitation, shouting and silence are all important as well as body language and gesture. Even seemingly meaningless noises and sounds play a crucial role in order to embrace individual spirituality and uplift the soul or spirit. The call and response can be between the leader and congregation or singers and instrumentalists. Heavy breathing or 'groaning' can also forge spirituality as can movement, dance or jerking. However Shibata (ibid, p.3) argues that it is the participation – the being part of the whole ritual performance- that encourages the spirit to come. Although silence is valued sometimes such as in meditation or prayer, it is the loudness in Jamaican churches that stands out. Perhaps this is for the voices to be heard in the next world.

Storytellers play an important role and need a good memory and knowledge. These storytellers often have the ability to control their voice and create rhythm and smoothness as well as control of delivery. Rhyming, puns and onomatopoeia help create rhythm and humour but also help deconstruct the standard/official language (ibid, p.5). These combined values give the storyteller a 'spiritual energy'.

Divine settings can sometimes induce trances or 'spirit possession'. These are visible signs of the work of invisible powers and help participants to try and renew or confirm their faith. However, Rastafarians do not allow spirit possession, but those in other settings who do can lose the ability to control words and body movements in order to 'become possessed'. Speaking in tongues can be meaningful and interpreted by chosen mediums (ibid, p.6) and the voices uttered when the 'possession' takes place become more important than the person speaking. Allowing this to happen is seen as a blessing, although it can be painful for the medium. Laboured breathing also encourages possession and each spirit is said to have a specific rhythm and tone of breathing demanding specific ways to inhale and exhale by the medium (ibid.).

Revivalists particularly value breathing. They believe that in Genesis, God uses his breath to create life. He voiced out the birth of life. So this means that the most vital organ for life – breathing, can be channelled to create life. A special way of breathing enables a communion or intercourse with God – a spiritual transcendence.

The flexibility of Caribbean language and orality whether in performance or on the page, allows leaders/orators/performers or writers to produce and control powerful messages. Power over words can empower the socially powerless, just as the

inappropriate use of language can confirm their disempowerment. (ibid, p.8). These words can take on a multiplication of meanings. Ritual language normally requires a special kind of understanding i.e. speaking in tongues is meaningless to the majority of listeners, as are religious symbols. The message of performance, as well as that of reading the written word, is not meant to be understood entirely by all participants at the same level and can be contradictory. Some readings are deliberately obscure and ambiguous to allow for this, which encourages negotiation between the participants and can allow for a 'private' language for believers. Shibata (ibid, p.9) regards the quest for spirituality as providing the momentum for re-embracing and re-imagining the mythical past and re- visioning the future without definitive meaning.

Merle Collins' novel *Angel* is an attempt to make language encapsulate the power of speech, including religious signs and symbols, photography, holy pictures, signs of the cross and sayings, which are part of traditional culture. Religion, she argues, has an important role to play in shaping the dimensions of Caribbean culture and in Caribbean orality. For example people might say "if God spare" in everyday speech which is an attitude to existence which acknowledges a force greater than ourselves and whether modern or traditional in form, religion is embedded in language and orality. (Collins, 1998, p.42)

Only recently have marginalized texts become canonised. These texts include religious and spiritual works which have emerged from a 'Jamaican' response to Christianity – examined later. Ashcroft et al (1989, p.188) argue that societies who have a strong link with oral traditions judge literature quite differently from those who continue a predominantly written tradition. There is a need to recognise that from an

essentially oral culture, texts have been, and are, emerging from the Caribbean.

Braithwaite argues that it is only through language and literature that a conscience emerges – whether this be backward or revolutionary.

## **Feminism in the Caribbean – a Jamaican response**

Like religion and spirituality which are examined in this thesis, feminism also has an uniquely 'Jamaican response'. The term feminism is itself questioned by many 'third world' women (Chandra Mohanty, (ed) (1991), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Bloomingham, Indiana University Press, 1991, p7). The Feminist movement has been challenged on the grounds of cultural imperialism and short-sightedness in defining the meaning of gender in terms of middle class, white experiences and in terms of internal racism, class and homophobia. Mohanty, (1991, p7) suggests that third world women have always engaged in feminism, but she argues that the experiences of social and political marginality, of racism and imperialism are essential to a black feminism. This feminism, she believes, must take into account the daily lives of third world women and their struggle. It must foreground the significance of memory and writing in the creation of an oppositional agency. This seems to imply a desire for separation from Western feminism. Mohanty (1991) argues that there must be this separation from western feminist discourse because western feminist discourse defines, by her argument, all third world women as (1991, p.72): 'oppressed.' This gives them the added attribute of third world difference. She suggests that (1991, p.21) feminist struggles are waged on two interconnecting levels: an ideological level which addresses questions of representation of womanhood and femininity and the material, daily life level which focuses on work, home, economic factors, family and sexuality.

Rhoda Reddock ( 'Feminism, Nationalism, and the Early Woman's Movement in the English speaking Caribbean.' in Cudjoe, S., *Caribbean Woman Writers, Essays from*



*the First International Conference*. Massachusetts, Calaloux, 1990, p.62) suggests that the characteristics of the early women's movement in the English speaking Caribbean was its close association with the nationalist struggle in its peculiarly Caribbean form. However, Carol Boyce Davies expresses (*Black Women, Writing and Identity*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.ix) concern that there is not sufficient excitement and passion about feminist issues in the Caribbean. She declares that women in Caribbean society have greater freedom, although still suffer some inequalities. Davies (1994, p.xi) makes the point that male writers in the Caribbean have a tradition of debate and it is this that women constantly need to develop. However, there are strong and radical women's groups in the region such as CAFRA – Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action – based in Trinidad. I would suggest that this group, and the work they have undertaken with regard to writers, is fundamental to feminism in the Caribbean and to the importance placed on women writers and poets.

Ramabai Espinet in her CAFRA *Anthology of Caribbean Women's Poetry* (1990) states in the introduction that women are writing themselves into being. They write because the time has come when they must invent their new world. The voices from the collection are from women all over the Caribbean who have brought their voices together so they could articulate a shared Caribbean history and many of these writers have not published collections of their own. It is important that with the establishment of CAFRA, an association dedicated to feminist research and action in the Caribbean set up in 1985, that many women spontaneously wrote poetry (ibid). Although there were few women in the Caribbean who had published work at that time.

Espinet (1990), in her efforts to attract women for her anthology, realised that the problem of getting women to contribute was one of context. She recognised that women writers everywhere have a problem with context and not taking themselves and their tasks sufficiently seriously enough that they would put their writing above other activities. CAFRA found that there was a necessity to bridge the gap between the writers' perceptions of themselves and writing a bit of 'hobby poetry' to believing themselves to be poets and writers.

*CAFRA News Vol 1 (1987)* indicated that research showed that there were more women writers and poets than the printed output would suggest. However, this output is usually in the form of poetry. It is not difficult to understand why, because poetry can be written in a few minutes between cooking or looking after children rather than a novel or play which takes more time. However, much of the poetry is silent and private because the poets do not take themselves seriously enough so the writing tends to be sporadic and can lack development.

The organisation and the anthology voice the concerns of the group rather than facilitate individual prominence, so they speak as a voice of the region, expressing their hopes, dreams and concerns. Espinet states (ibid) that the core of the anthology sets out to see the process of living in a holistic manner with no artificially imposed divisions upon mind, body and spirit. Woman's healing and procreative power is physical and primal on one level, and equally vast and creative upon every other level. Espinet concluded that poetry is seen as the most rebellious and unconventional form of writing and she cites Derek Walcott when speaking of the processes involved in

poetic development as saying: “I have always written to the melody of my own voice”.

Alice Walker, the black American writer, has difficulty with the term ‘feminism’ with regard to the black experience so has coined the word ‘womanist,’ which she feels is more relevant. This defines women of colour rather than feminism as such, which suggests that Walker is concerned with the whole human race rather than just feminist problems. The images of the third world women include being chaste, ignorant, traditional, backward and the victim. She is the ‘other’. She is the periphery that (western) man, and according to Mohanty, western woman can represent themselves as the Centre by foregrounding their own concerns and, in the case of this thesis, their own adaptations of Christianity. It is not the centre that determines the periphery, but, argues Mohanty (1991), the periphery and its boundaries that determine the centre.

Through schooling and Christianity, sexuality is associated with shame – Eve’s shame in the garden of Eden- and this is supposed to taint all women. This corresponds with the notion of ‘other’ which sees African slave women as promiscuous, available and exotic. However this same sexuality of the ‘female’ natural world can be a gateway to spirits – spirituality and spiritualism – the magical and dreams, all of which exist side by side within daily life.

Women such as Erna Broder are rejecting linear narrative i.e. ‘conventional’ male discourse in favour of a more ‘modernist’ approach to narrative, which is better suited to *écriture féminine*. This includes a multiplicity of voices and perspectives with fluid boundaries of self /other, living/dead, spirituality/spiritualism, mad/sane, dream and

reality. Carolyn Cooper ( *Noises in the Blood – Orality, Gender and the 'Vulgar' Body Of Jamaican Popular Culture* , Warwick University, London, Macmillan, and Wasafiri, Spring (1990) no.11.) suggests that this fluidity is particularly appropriate to writing about spirit possession as do so many of the writers from the study examined in this thesis.

The common themes of third world women's writing include the bond between mother and daughter, tradition, history – both cultural and oral, song, cooking and the garden. Myths are an important source of imagination, but also myths can damage, for example the all-powerful male, white god and biblical associations of white and light with goodness and black with darkness and evil. Women wield language and transform it to express their deepest pleasure and pain (Adisa, 1998, p.25). She further argues that she has never conceived language as gender- specific or gender-biased and manipulates language to suit her own voice. She maintains that (p.28) Caribbean women writers have a responsibility to speak in a language “their sisters can understand” and write in a style with which others can empathise, because writers in the Caribbean speak for the people who may not have access to print. She concludes that women writers in the Caribbean must make language work in their favour – decoding and de-constructing Standard English to build a world more suited to their taste (p.29).

Much of women's writing draws freely on Biblical narrative i.e. Lorna' Goodison's *Heartease*. Songs, fairy tales and folk tales are important. Evelyn O'Callaghan (*Women Version – Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women*, Basingstoke, Warwick University and Macmillan, 1993, p.18)) suggests that there is

little regard for traditional genre boundaries in such stories and fluidity moves freely between literary styles (prosaic, parodic, dramatic, lyric and satiric) and the techniques (reported speech, dialogue, streams of consciousness, monologue).

Written texts are not produced in isolation and examining the Jamaican response to religion within texts also cannot be examined apart from other themes such as feminism and race issues. It is within this context that the writers who were researched in this thesis are questioned. Literary foremothers and 'female tradition' – those who have gone before - within literature are important. O'Callaghan (1993, p.18) suggests that feminist literary theory has for a long time stressed the importance of tracing 'literary foremothers' and recovering forgotten works by writers who helped to establish a 'female tradition' within literature.

I would argue that Caribbean women's writing defies easy definitions of any kind. Caribbean women can be seen as echoing and as subverting themes of regional literacy. Women have traditionally been either associated with Eve and shame or Mary mother of God and virgin. However all the women examined have 'transcended' these stereotypes and have developed their own relationship with God, themselves, with others and with the land which is mostly an equal relationship and they do not regard themselves as inferior or incapable of a truly spiritual relationship. Calio ('A Rebirth of the Goddess in Contemporary Women Poets of the Spirit,' in *The New Voices*, Vol xii, no 231984, 1984, p.41) regards them as 'women poets of the spirit' and it is through their writing that they find the true source of self. They call into question, as do many women everywhere, accepted norms and established truths, to find a 'truth of their own' which is both 'women-centred' and diverse.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Literary Foremothers and Forefathers**

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## **Chapter 3**

### **Literary foremothers and forefathers – Introduction**

Spiritual writing cannot come from nowhere. History, theory and language all play an important role. The Bible and other works, including Shakespeare, may also play a part in moulding the West Indian writer. The education system in which they were brought up and the missionaries who influenced this encouraged the study of the Bible and various genres of English literature. Whatever writers have read along with the background within which they are situated obviously influences their work. Both men and women are important as literary foremothers and forefathers of Caribbean/Jamaican writing, I looked at the women in some detail, but I am only able to deal briefly with the forefathers as space precludes too much detail.

## Literary Forefathers

There are a number of notable literary forefathers of spirituality in Jamaican literature. I have chosen to write about Claude McKay, Roger Mais, Vic Reid and Mervyn Morris to write about in more detail and I have mentioned others. However, space precludes writing about all the forefathers so I am aware that there are omissions. I would regard those chosen as being both part of and initiating a Christian/spiritual context to their work and paving the way for literary foremothers to do the same as an example to those later women writers whom I have examined in detail in this work. Some of these writers are acknowledged by the women writers examined as influential to their work and I would regard them as helping to influence the way in which Jamaican spirituality has evolved.

Claude McKay (1890-1948) was one of the most prominent early writers and considered by many (including Goldweber) to be one of the greatest poets of the Harlem Resistance in the 1920s. He had revolutionary beliefs and believed that it was part of a poet's job to politically inform the minds of people. David Goldweber ('Home at Last: The Pilgrimage of Claude McKay, Black Poet Converted to Christianity,' *Commonweal* (Sept 1999) ([www.findarticles.com](http://www.findarticles.com), 2003) states that McKay originally blamed Christianity for being a tool of oppression and in particular for ravaging the 'Black Lands of Africa'. His poem 'Baptism' invoked Christianity in order to distort it. (ibid). However in the 1920's he became aware of the great beauty of European cathedrals and this, linked with the fact he was becoming disillusioned with Communism, promoted a gradual change to Catholicism. He confronts his spiritual torment in 'Through Agony'. It opens:



*All night, through the eternity of night  
Pain was my portion though I could not feel.  
It ends:  
To bathe my spirit hankering to rest  
But after sleep I'll wake with greater might.*

He sees Catholicism as the best hope for preserving humanity's spirituality in the face of narrow-minded modern day 'isms'. His 'Cycle Manuscript' (1943) was written in sonnets, the first of which (usually considered his best), McKay anticipates his conversion and spirituality:

*Or the thorns the soldiers weaved for Jesus' crown  
For I, a poet, can soar with unclipped wings'*

During his life he often spoke out against and wrote about institutionalised racism of governments in the world's most powerful countries, including the USA, stating that: "The Eagle and the Dollar will command" (from 'Tiger'). He was one of the first writers to really experiment with dialect and he wrote mainly about the working class black who struggled to make it in his allotted life. He published several volumes of poetry including *Songs of Jamaica* in 1912. Some of his poems allude to religion. His poem 'Wise Men of the East' reminds us that one of the three wise men was Ethiopian and that Ethiopia, a black nation, was the first Christian nation and yet Rome has appropriated the power of Christianity and subjugated black people. In his poem 'Truth' he asks God where he can find truth, suggesting that it cannot be found in "thy Holy Church," neither in science nor revolution, but "upon my knees, Oh Lord for truth I plead," which alludes to a spiritual, personal relationship with God (Goldweber, 1999). Others of this era, writing about religion and spirituality include Philip Sherlock (b.1902). In his poem 'Pocomania' he contrasts the "Black of night and candle light" and links the Shepherd and his flock – suggesting Jesus, with Africa and Asia and these with the acts of dancing and singing. As he talks of Pocomania, he invokes the spirit:

*Let de spirit come again  
Fling away de flesh an 'bone  
Let de Spirit have a home.*

He speaks of the dead ancestors in control. Therefore, I would regard him as one of the forefathers of Jamaican spirituality.

Andrew Salkey (b.1928) also wrote of a religious afterlife in his work 'Jamaica'. Other writers of note, dealing with spirituality in the period, include Neville Dawes, the writer and historian and A.L. Hendricks,(b.1922). Hendrick's poem 'An Old Jamaican Woman thinks about the Hereafter' has a strong theme of life after death and the 'ancestor'. His poem: 'D'ou venons nous? Que sommes nous? Ou allons nous?' speaks of the church as being frigid and "mothering a mystery" and that Paradise is peopled by the dead – referring to the ancestors and afterlife.

Vic Reid (1913-1987) is the author of one of the best known of all Jamaican novels *New Day* (1949) – a work regarded as a landmark in Jamaican literature. The work could be classified as an anthology of folk beliefs and practices. Oral culture and storytelling appears to be of particular value in this work. He has a certain communication with the countryside, a spirituality and communion with the natural and spatial.

George Campbell in his poem 'Holy' from his *First Poems* (1945) acknowledges a more inclusive litany than the familiar Christian one. He regarded Christianity not as the preserve of the whites, but of Negroes, Chinese and Indians as well: 'Holy be the white head of a Negro.' His work could be seen as an example for others to challenge the traditional concepts of a 'white, Anglo-Saxon God,' and as such is also a prominent forefather of Caribbean spiritual writing. Another poet who can only

be mentioned briefly due to lack of space is John Figueroa. He wrote many poems exploring faiths and Christianity. Figueroa was accompanied by a sense of divine favour in his life (Nanton, 1999). He wrote poems about French churches and Christian or spring festivals. In one of his last poems, read in the annual Commonwealth Carol Service in St-Martin-in-the-Fields, he wrote:

*'I was the darkened sun  
My heart the riven earth  
Now I am the Easter Sun arisen  
The wind-tipped eagle  
Calling across the sky*

*Magdalene I was  
Judas, Peter;  
Now I am the Risen Lord.*  
(Nanton, 1999)

In my opinion, one of the most significant forefathers who wrote of religion and spirituality in Jamaica is Roger Mais. His books include *Brother Man* (London: Heinemann, 1954) and other major novels include *The Hills were Joyful Together* (London: Heinemann, 1949) and *Black Lightning* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1955). Braithwaite (Mais, 1974, p.x) argues that *Brother Man* is his best work because “it brings together in one minor classic all the author’s varied talent.” The good and evil among the poor are brought alive and the novel portrays the beginning of the Rastafarian cult in Jamaica. Shoemaker John Power is a Christ-Like figure of Brother Man and his progress is shown against a chorus of ordinary people. Kenneth Ramchand (*The West Indian Novel and Its Background*, London, Heinemann, 1983) argues that the extended parallel between the life and Crucifixion of Christ and *Brother Man* shows Mais’ determination to universalise his work, but it leads to the introduction of arbitrary visions and apparitions, miracles and naïve moralising. This is illustrated in the incident of the crab and the little boy and, as Ramchand suggests,

this is “unfortunate pseudo- Biblical prose”. Some of these elements are present in the description of Brother Man among the multitude:

*And through him blessings came to the people of the lane, even to those who did not go out to receive it... And Bra 'Man didn't even know it was done. He went amongst them blessing them and healing them, and a crowd followed him. (Brother Man, P.109).*

This illustrates a corporate spirituality and a love for others. Although Mais tries to make Brother Man a separate character from Jesus, the parallels are too strong for the differences to make any impact on the reader. Ramchand suggests comparisons between Minette and Mary Magdalene where intercourse, not through passion but through compassion, is permissible. Ramchand sees the character of Brother Man as a failure because there is a conflict within the character only recognised as an uncertainty of intention. With his crucifixion:

*when they had mauled him to the satisfaction of their lust, they voided on him and fouled him. (p.188)*

Mais' exploration of the redeeming power of a secular Messiah comes to a disappointing end. Yet Mais does not allow disillusionment to be registered in the novel. His failure is cushioned by an ambiguous 'vision of certitude' and indeed there is hope after the crucifixion of Jesus:

*they'll all come crawlin' to you yet, an' beg you to forgive them.*

The rejection of Brother Man by his followers, like the crucifixion of Christ, was a revelation of human inconstancy. The wild impulse by which they become a mob to destroy the one upon whom they found themselves dependent was the result of inner, not outer pressures.

It is this inner world that Mais explores in *Black Lightning*. The setting of the novel is rural and self contained. Jake starts making a model of Samson and takes him as an example of man's independence. It is ironic that Jake should identify with Samson, for Samson is the symbol of strength and weakness – the typical human person. Jake's carving of Samson in mahogany is slow because he cannot find the truth to express his perception within the carving. He then reveals that the finished carving is not Samson in his prime but when he has been blinded. The comparison with Samson is enhanced when Jake is blinded by lightning and brought to depend upon Amos and Bess. Mais expressed a tragic view of life and a dignified response to it, according to Ramchand (1983). The combining strength of love between Glenn and Miriam after the suicide of Jake enhances the feeling of spiritual renewal after destruction. The sense of renewal is also recognised in the wood:

*birds sang from the wood again, and little by little it lost the dank peaty smell of sodden nothing (p.201).*

Ramchand (1983, p.188) argues that Mais' sense of the tragedy in life and his compassionate understanding were stimulated by the society in which he lived, and in his most assured fiction he attained to a genuine tragic vision.

Anthony McNeill also wrote of Christianity and believes that a poet was someone who lights words (Daryl Dance, *Fifty Caribbean Writers; a bio-bibliography and critical Source Book*, Westpoint, Greenwood Press, 1992, p.160) and so could be seen as a literary 'spiritual' forefather. His spirituality included writings about Rastafarianism. He was brought up a Catholic but then he began to address his prayers to trees, leaves, the earth and various other natural phenomena (ibid, p.167) – a spatial spirituality bordering on spiritualism. However, he went back in his later work to a more traditional God. His poem 'Saint Ras' seemed to illustrate the

crossroads of spirituality and religion. He talked of intersections and traffic where “his spirit stopped at each crossing, seeking the lights...” Finally he is still unable to make up his mind: “Both doubt and light.”

Mervyn Morris, I would argue, is an important figure in Jamaican writings of a spiritual nature. Whilst he is still writing, I would regard him as a spiritual forefather as he is acknowledged by some of the women whom I have examined to be of influence in their work and he has also influenced my thinking. Whilst he has written several collections of poetry, I will focus on his work entitled *On Holy Week*. The work examines how the prominent figures in the days leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion interrelate (Mervyn Morris, *On Holy Week*, Jamaica, Pathways, 1976) and relate to one another. It is, in my opinion, a moving piece of work which was written during the period of Lent and illustrates not only the importance of the Biblical message to Morris, but the importance of Lent as a time of contemplation. In an interview (Victor Chang, V, (ed), *Three Caribbean Poets on their Work*, Institute of Caribbean Studies, Jamaica, University West Indies, 1993, p.50) Morris states that ‘Pilate’ was the first written poem of this series and, as an administrator himself, he found the notion of Pilate familiar. He also argues that Pilate was not the “simple villain of a hundred sermons”. Justice was one of the absolutes to which he felt committed in his job and eventually other priorities took preference:

*You know  
I am not weak, I could, I would  
Stand up for Jesus if I thought  
That were the thing to do.*

He calls Holy Week, Unholy Week and apologies to God for the simplification of his characters and his interpretation of the Bible: “blame the borrowed bible”. Judas is also illustrated as being more complex, as he is not necessarily betraying Christ for

the money, but he perceived that Jesus withheld His trust from him. The Apostles and followers write of their side of the story as does Mary, Mother of Christ and Mary Magdalene and even Pilate's wife's dream is full of symbolism; "I sat alone, playing with thorns" alluding to Jesus' crown of thorns. However, I would argue that the characters of the women have less substance than those of the men. They seem to be shallower in nature and have less to say, particularly Mary, mother of Christ who could and would have had a lot more to say. The rhymes are simple; almost standing alone to emphasise the message such as "priest's liar" followed by Messiah in the next line. John's "divine" followed by "benign". There is a spiritual dimension, and there appears to be a personal relationship with Jesus and the spirituality that he aspires to is relevant to the present day with the hope of the same personal relationship with God as Jesus' friends had with Him. In my discussions with Morris, he was proud to say that he was a practising Anglican and goes to church regularly. (Interview- May 2002)

Other notable men writing in this field include Orlando Patterson, John Hearne and Denis Scott as well as contemporary poets and writers such as Kwame Dawes, but space precludes me writing about them in this work. All these poets in various ways have written about Christianity, spirituality and religion and may have influenced the writers whom I have examined. They have been the 'founding fathers' in forming a Jamaican model of religion and have, to varying degrees, been subversive in their quest to ensure that Christianity is not exclusive to whites and to the colonisers. I would argue that they have a distinctive way of writing about spirituality- a Jamaican approach which involves, in varying degrees, a close relationship with Jamaica, with Africa and with a personal relationship with God. No particular writer can be said to

have a definitive approach to Jamaican spirituality – each person’s religion is personal and no one writer can speak for all, but I would suggest that each writer uses Jamaica as a context to ensure writing about spirituality is distinctively Jamaican. This will be examined in more detail later. The forefathers whom I have examined, as well as others who have also been mentioned, though only briefly, have set the scene for women writers, both literary foremothers and those examined in detail in this work, to further develop the concept of a uniquely Jamaican religion and spirituality.



## Literary Foremothers

The chapter goes on to examine the role and work of the first stage of literary foremothers and in particular examines the work of Mary Seacole, Eliot Bliss, Una Marsen, Louise Bennett, and Sylvia Wynter. It concludes that there are signs of some progression and development across the first phase from a public type of writing that speaks as a collective unit rather than for self and the private sphere. There is also a transference of old to new, past to present and from spiritualism of the ancestors to a new spirituality – of making Christianity their own, making God in their own image which is more the image of the black God, perhaps sexless and more inclusive. This does not seek to ignore traditional spiritualism but includes it as part of the backdrop of Jamaican culture and this, I would suggest, continues to be a theme amongst current writers.

According to O'Callaghan (1993) feminist literary theory has long stressed the importance of tracing literary foremothers and recovering forgotten works by writers who helped to establish a 'female tradition' within regional literatures. This project, O'Callaghan (1993) argues, is particularly important in the Caribbean where publishers have not reprinted material and local libraries are either unable or apathetic in preserving these works properly. Selwyn Cudjoe (Caribbean Women Writers - Essays from the First International Conference, Massachusetts, Calaloux, 1990, p.6) suggest that:

*The rise of women's writing in the Caribbean cannot be viewed in isolation. It is part of a much larger expression of woman's realities that is taking place in the postcolonial world and post-civil rights era in the United States. The enormous productions of literature from the women of the Caribbean does not only contribute to our literacy development but it begins to change the very contours of that literature as well.*

Leota Laurence argues ('The Historical Perspectives of the Caribbean Woman,' *Negro Historical Bulletin*, 47 No's 1 & 2.1984) that:

*the woman in the Caribbean have actually been the primary shaper of Caribbean destiny.*

Yet, I would argue that there was a significant partnership between men and women.

In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, slaves who managed to escape were encouraged (Cudjoe, 1990, p.11) to tell their stories to the larger British public to help the anti-slavery movement. This was done through a newspaper – *The Anti Slave Reporter*, which carried regular accounts of the abuses suffered by

Caribbean slaves. One of the most important accounts was *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself 1831*. (cited in Cudjoe, 1990, p.11)

Encouraged by the editor to tell her story, Mary Prince recaptured the brutality of slavery. She described the contradictions of slavery, the cruelty of the masters and the shame to which slave women were subjected:

*I am often much vexed, and feel great sorrow when I hear some people in this country say, that the slaves do not need better usage, and do not want to be free. They believe the foreign people (West Indians), who deceive them, and say slaves are happy. I say, Not so. How can slaves be happy when they have the halter round their neck, and the whip on their back? .... Since I have been here I have often wondered how English people can go out into the West Indies and act in such a beastly manner. But when they go to the West Indies, they forget God and all feelings of shame ....*

This passage speaks for itself in its importance of highlighting the spiritual violations of women in so many ways, whilst women stand by helplessly, their children are whipped or raped.

Another important work in the English speaking Caribbean during a similar period was published by Mary Seacole in her *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands 1857*. Mary Seacole was a free woman of colour and was born into well to do society in Jamaica in the early nineteenth century. Seacole broke away from the

traditional conventions of women by travelling alone extensively, practising medicine and setting up her own business. Through this confidence and transcendence of her traditional role she had risen even above affluent white women in her expertise and training, as they would not have had the opportunities that she had. Seacole emphasises her pride at being black and also her independence and she played an important role in opening up medical and nursing professions to women. She worked with Florence Nightingale and, perhaps unfairly, her name does not have the same legendary status that Florence Nightingale's has – yet her work was just as worthy.

Whilst I recognise there are some glaring omissions in my work on literary foremothers I must also be selective because space does not allow me to examine all those who are foremothers. Others not included are Pamela C. Smith, Claire Stephenson and Mary Lockett, but I must by necessity be discerning.

Seacole's work in particular, I would argue, sought to deconstruct the concept of 'black' women as powerless and inferior. The outsider's version – such as that of Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey, involve the double alienation both from neither being 'black' nor being European white – often accepted by neither or belonging to none. The white West Indian woman has neither her blackness, her economic independence nor her Englishness to sustain her. She is excluded from all groups that matter and enjoys privilege to an extent, without the power that goes with it. She shares the oppression without feeling the solidarity of the support of fellow victims; she is often denied and despised by both cultures.

I have chosen to use Eliot Bliss' novel, *Luminous Isle* (London: Virago, 1984) to illustrate white West Indian writers. I do not wish to exclude Phyllis Shand Allfrey,

but I have to make choice when I have so little space. O'Callaghan (1993, p.18) cites various arguments that this should not be part of Caribbean literature. O'Callaghan (1993, p.14) believes there is an uneasy middle ground between black and white occupied by the Creole which includes ambivalent relations with mother country and motherland, the engagement with European feminism – a 'room of one's own.' However, a place to speak is fundamental to a concept of woman's version on West Indian literature. O' Callaghan stresses the difficulty of white writers 'reclaiming' their work, whilst 'black' women in literary terms were often silent until well into the twentieth century, due to the restriction of social, educational and economic circumstances. Although they may have written, their work was not preserved. Kenneth Ramchand (1972,) cited in O' Callaghan (1993, p.19) believes that white women should be included in the literary canon because of their 'social relevance' – because they portray a "terrified consciousness of elites in the decolonisation process". However during the 1950's and 1960's 'white' Caribbean literature tended to be less popular as there was a need to redress the balance of British Colonial exploration and its racism. 'Black writing' was needed to give black people the voice they deserved. Braithwaite, cited in O' Callaghan (1993, p.20), believes that Caribbean literature has a broadly ex- African base, so white writers represent the 'outsider's voice' and have nothing to say of relevance to West Indian literary traditions. The argument suggests that texts written by white women do not constitute a 'truthful' recognition of the realities of the situation because a white writer's perceptions and representation of experience and class do not relate to, neither is relevant for, that of the non-white minority.

O'Callaghan (1993) argues that 'white' women's writings do have some relevance, because it was:

*largely in reaction to such colonial discourse that early mainstream literature came to be written and out of this mainstream comes the woman's version.*

Eliot Bliss was born in Jamaica in 1903 and her novel examines Emmeline Hibbert's childhood in a privileged, white, colonial ruling class Jamaican society in the early twentieth century. Em has an English education and then returns to play her part as the daughter of a colonial family. She however finds the life difficult and although she has an affinity with the black population, she finds the colonial ethos of "perfect Englishmen under the hot tropical sun" difficult. She wishes to be sexless, creedless, classless and free. She tries to change her traditional role by mixing with people whom her parents would see as invisible or would not approve. The novel makes the distinction between "large white house" and "nigger huts" and highlights the conflicts between expatriate and white Creole, about the periphery and the metropolis. The differences can be seen between English girls with "trunkloads of new clothing" who ensured that the local Creole girls could not compete in the market place for husbands. There is however a certain sense of black being exotic and seen as the 'other' to the oppressive white society. Jamaica is not even named in the book. Black society is not perhaps valued for itself but because black society is 'naturally rhythmic' and represents a freedom and absence of social restriction. She envies them and her perception of their freedom. She feels stifled by the patriarchal values of the society in which she mixes. Eliot Bliss may not represent black society, but I believe that she represents her view of Jamaican society at that time – and writers, regardless of colour represent their view of the world seen at a particular time. She may not speak for the majority – but who has the right to do that anyway? Everyone is, thankfully, different but she speaks as a woman living in Jamaica at the time and her work is no less valuable for this.

The novel is in many respects ahead of its time and it is structured as a feminist novel. There is also a strong backdrop of Catholicism – of a Catholic upbringing and the form of spirituality advocated by Catholics that God is the all powerful rather than a close friend. The novel, is in my opinion, overtly English and in places ‘too nice’ which was a criticism levied on her work by some publishing houses which refused to publish her work partly for this reason. The descriptions are often bland and tedious and are often interlocked with brutality – her mother’s brutality, her sexlessness and her absence of a sense of belonging. The black people she meets seem more stereotypical than real, and whilst I abhor authors being rejected because of their colour, I can nevertheless understand that this book, with so much triviality at a time of suffering for many Jamaicans could cause offence and could be seen as irrelevant. Although, it may be argued, people need light entertainment in times of suffering. She did, however, pave the way for others, such as Una Marson to develop.

Una Marson certainly lays claims to be a literary foremother. Lloyd Brown (1978) suggests that Una Marson was “the earliest female poet of significance to emerge in West Indian Literature”. He argues that Marson attempts to combine her feminist concerns with her nationalistic preoccupations. Marson was born in Jamaica in 1905, although other women such as Kathleen Archibald, Albinia Catherine Hutton, Constance Hollor and Stephanie Ormsby were writing at this time, Marson chose to speak about the problems of women and pride in a cultural landscape. According to Honor Ford Smith, cited in Cudjoe (1990, p.21), she combined her feminist concerns with her nationalist preoccupations. After the death of her parents she was forced to leave Hampton School for girls and began work for the *Jamaican Gleaner* in the 1920’s. In 1929 she edited *Cosmopolitan* – the first woman’s publication in Jamaica

and wrote *Tropic Reveries* in 1930 and *Heights and Depths* in 1931. Between 1932 and 1935 she worked as secretary to Haile Selassie when he pleaded Ethiopia's cause before the League of Nations. In 1936 she returned to Jamaica to continue as a journalist and published *The Moth and the Stars* in 1937. She returned once again to England to continue her social welfare work, by which time she had completed her most important literary work. (Cudjoe, 1990, p.21). She saw the problems faced by some middle class women, she has achieved acclaim in her career and was not just a middle class housewife embarking on frivolous issues or with a social conscience. Her work is at times proto-feminist in its nature. Her imitation of Shakespeare's work 'To be or not to be' reads:

*To wed, or not to wed; that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The fret and loneliness of spinsterhood  
Or take arms against the single state  
And by marrying end it? .....*

This poem on whether a woman should marry or not, though arguably not pertinent today when it is fine to ask such questions, would have been seen at the time of writing by some to be 'revolutionary'. Some of her early work has been dismissed by critics as being too imitative of nineteenth century English Nature poetry – the fact that she had dared to involve herself with the work of Shakespeare, Kipling and Blake is itself a 'revolutionary' aspect of work at that time.

Marson is also an important foremother in writing about spirituality and religion and the making of God into a 'Jamaican' God. She came from an overtly Christian family and her poem 'Getting de Spirit' written in 'nation language'

*Lord gie you chile de spirit  
Let her shout  
Lord gie you chile de power*

*An' let her pray-  
Hallelujah – Amen-  
Shout sister – Shout-  
God is sen' you His spirit  
Shout- Sister- Shout*

This shows a celebration in her religion, which is born out by her article in 1929  
*Cosmopolitan* in 'In love with life'

*Who would not fall in love with life after sitting and contemplating for an hour the wonders of the creator and of creation. We can do with more optimists, more poets, more ministering spirits, more peacemakers. Truly it can be said 'blessed are those who are in love with life, for they rejoice in the wonderful work of God, and their joy will lead them and others to everlasting and perfect joy – as they were in love with earth, so shall they most abundantly be in love with heaven.*

She argues that the missionaries taught the slaves to read, and their book was the Bible, so the Caribbean lost the language of its own and gained English as a mother tongue. She had much to say on tourism and trade quotas as well as women's issues so she was very political and spoke up about those things in which she believed.

Her most moving poem in my opinion is 'Black Boy': (a parody of William Blake's

'The Little Black Boy')

*Why should they tease me, Mother  
Because my skin is black? ...*

He goes on to ask:

*Why do they call me 'Niger'  
And laugh at me Mother?  
Does it matter that my skin is black?  
And theirs is White?  
Your skin is black, Mother,  
But you are beautiful,  
And I love you...*

The little black boy tells his mother he is working so hard so that he can be top of his class so they will respect him and asks at the end:

*'Didn't God make all little boys?'*



Which surely question those who call themselves Christians but treat people so badly.

Lloyd Brown, cited in Cudjoe (1990, p.25) argues that Marson was not merely a woman who happened to write poetry, but a female poet whose works were concerned to a considerable degree with the situation and identity of the West Indian woman. She moves from clichés of the pastoral tradition of Wordsworth to an “innovative exploration of her experience.” Therefore her importance, though somewhat forgotten previously, is now being reviewed, but is perhaps not as prominent as that of Louise Bennett.

The work of Louise Bennett also has a considerable influence in the Caribbean, according to Cudjoe (1990, p.25). She established a unique Caribbean literature and woman’s voice and this language and speech of Caribbean women has always played a dominant role in contesting slave and colonial domination and has been an important tool in the struggle for liberation. As ‘Miss Lou’ the persona of her poem, she became a household name in the Caribbean and published several collections of ‘dialect verse’ as well as records of folk songs, stories and singing games. She is a pioneering figure at the centre (E. A. Markham, *Hinterland- Caribbean Poetry from the West Indies and Britain*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe, 1989, p.44) of the oral tradition of Caribbean poetry but she had to wait for popularity until the 1960’s when her vernacular poetry was acknowledged as literature.

According to Markham (1989, p.23,) Louise Bennett’s:

*marriage of the oral traditions of popular songs, folk songs, Anacy stories, proverbs – to a rigours (if at times stiff) scribal craft is now much admired. Bennett is a storyteller and gives a sense of drama to her work so her poems are occasions to play out social scenes,*

and uses – according to Markham (1989, p.23) the “unliterary language of the people”. She succeeds in portraying the street life of Jamaica. Markham states (ibid,

p.24) that a disturbing but humorous vein in her work is when she writes about those who go away and change their accent, styles, colour. The boy who spent six months in 'Merica' came back to display "not even lickle twang" is a source of shame to his mother. Part of her achievement, Markham suggests, is that she makes us laugh first and then we feel conscious that we have laughed.

In her interview with Dennis Scott (Markham, 1989, p.43) she explains that she used Jamaican dialect because it is so adaptable and is more easily able to express feelings than Standard English. She feels the nature of dialect is linked with comedy. She also speaks about her fight for recognition, her fight to be taken seriously as a poet.

However Cudjoe (1990, p.26) argues that:

*Bennett used the power of Jamaican speech to explore the complexity of the Jamaican experience, in so doing, forced the members of the upper and middle classes to face their own linguistic and class bias.*

Barbara Gloudon in her article on The Hon. Louise Bennett, O.J.: 'Fifty years of laughter,' published in *Jamaica Journal* 1986 cited in Cudjoe (1990, p.26) says that because people had never seen anything like her work they flocked to buy the *Jamaican Gleaner* where her work was published. What she was saying was what was occurring in the lives of ordinary people – their capacity to "tek bad sinting mek laugh." To laugh at their problems and see the best in the worst. It was Mervyn Morris' essay " *On reading Louise Bennett, Seriously*" (1963) that started Louise Bennett to be seen as more than a joke and her work started to be regarded as literature.

'Colonisation in Reverse' offers satire and irony on the situation of Jamaican people arriving in England as:

*An tun history upside dung!*

*Oonoo se how life is funny,  
Ononoo see de tunabout?  
Jamaica live fi box bread  
Out a English people mout.*

In her poem 'Back to Africa', Bennett questions those Jamaicans who wish to go back to Africa – a sentiment of Rastafarians in 1945. Cudjoe (1990, p.24) suggests that Bennett allows us to understand the woman's psychology in a way that had not been thought of before. She examines the unconscious of the female experience and allows us to see the strength and weakness of Jamaican women who are the oppressed in society. It took a great deal of courage for her to continue writing in dialect during the time when no one took her seriously, although space precludes me looking at her work in the detail it deserves. Her interview with Scott portrays her as a strong and defiant woman who has the courage of her own convictions and most of all believes in herself. It could be argued that the way she wrote was subversive in its form and challenged the dominant Standard English, although I would not suggest that her writing was overtly spiritual but more political. The work sets the scene for the writers who followed her and are examined in this work to question the Establishment in both content and the form in which their work is written.

Sylvia Wynter's *Hills of Hebron* ((New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962) is, according to Cudjoe (1990, p.41) the last work of importance in the first phase of Caribbean women's writing. This brings to a close the kind of writing which involves a type of public speaking about the Caribbean self and emphasises the collective rather than personal self. She also writes of spirituality and religion.

Sylvia Wynter was born in 1928 in Cuba of Jamaican parents. *The Hills of Hebron* is her only novel as her other interests include drama. ( Mordecai and Wilson, 1990,

p.77). The novel, which is set in Jamaica, is about a group of people who join a religious sect in order to overcome “three centuries of placelessness” (1962, p.276). The activities of the sect, however, are misguided and they become very insular. Their leader, Moses, is a misogynist and people are led from Pocomania to Christianity. This is not the Christianity of the Anglican Church as (p.135) in the “Anglican Church of Paradise Bay God and the Christian Church remained exclusive.” The Bible is taken as literal truth and Moses finds it hard to live up to the rigidity and expectations and crucifies himself. There is little Christian compassion for the wife of Obadiah, his successor Sister Rose, who has been raped by the man chosen to be the next leader. She is cast out and awful oaths from the Bible are cast upon her as the congregation felt that her husband Obadiah had broken his vow of chastity, which ensured the land was barren. The barrenness is symbolic of the narrowness of fundamentalism, children no longer laugh and the women have nothing to gossip about. There is the further metaphor of the land being barren like the people after the legacy of slavery. The people of Hebron hope to find a kingdom of the black God (p.143) and the converts are promised an afterlife, which consists of their prophet taking them to heaven on a gold chariot and they would be served by white angels. Moses has made God black in his own image. (I would suggest that the work bears similarities with that of Erna Brodber, examined later). The tables would be turned because the dispossessed now become the powerful.

There seems to be little communion with God only the kind of fundamentalism that encourages the vulnerable to become part of a sect. The promise of afterlife has long been a ‘pull’ for the ruling classes to ensure that those they ‘control’ will know their place as if they do then the promise of their reward in the next life will reward them.

To Miss Gatha (the new leader) “the face of God was anonymous and not to be depended upon.” However, she has an apron, kept from her past life as a symbol of defiance towards Moses. Further in the novel we read that the apron is again used as a symbol but this time of oppression, when Hugh recounts the death of his mother he takes her apron from her when she dies and then stamps on it.

The ideals of the group are good in that the colony of Hebron could find a sense of self – the disinherited rising up as a collective unit – a corporate spirituality. The *Hills of Hebron* heralds a new pride in blackness and self government and the subversiveness of the colonial order. She quotes from the incantation of Boukman,

The Haitian Prophet:

*The god who created the sun which gives us light,*

*Who rouses the waves and rules the storms  
Though hidden in the clouds he watches us..*

*Our gods call upon us to do good works..  
Throw away the gods of the whites*

*Who so often caused us to weep.*

*Listen to the voice of liberty which speaks  
In the heart of us all! (p.148)*

However, towards the end of the book Wynter quotes Dostoevsky from *The Possessed*:

*With every people, at every period of its existence, the end of the whole national movement is only the search for God, of a God for it, in whom it may believe as the one true God. God is the synthetic personality of a whole people considered from its origin until its end.*

Many Caribbean women writers today are indebted to their foremothers and forefathers and are also engaged in furthering the agenda of conscious self-affirmation. Writers are still exploring history, myth, culture, memory and women’s place in society, which contribute to a cultural consciousness. They celebrate their

own presence and the presence of God, spirituality or the African ancestor. They challenge, in varying degrees, the dominant colonist culture and have tried to make their God relevant to Jamaica, for example the work of Sylvia Wynter. They have also challenged the form in which the work was written as, for example, Louise Bennett has done in her use of dialect. It is some of these writers and these themes that will be explored in the body of this work.

## **Chapter 4**

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## Chapter 4

### Spirituality and Lorna Goodison

#### A 'Christian' God or African Traditions?

*Jesus said " For behold the kingdom of God is within you. " Luke, 17:21*

Lorna Goodison's work, like that of all the writings studied in this thesis has to be examined in the light of the history of the Caribbean, its politics, its religion and through the past tradition of women's writing in Jamaica. These aspects have been examined elsewhere in the thesis and I will deal only in this chapter with aspects that directly influence Goodison's work. I shall briefly revise the definition of spirituality which is:

*To know; to understand is not enough, the deep spirit of humankind craving for something more: a union with God. (Jenkins, 1995)*

Emmanuel Lartey (1997, p.113) suggests a framework for understanding spirituality.

Although these have been mentioned in Chapter 1, it is important to re-emphasise this framework as it acts as a basis for this thesis. This framework includes at least five dimensions:

1. A relationship with transcendence
2. Intra –personal (relationship with self)
3. Interpersonal (relationship with another)
4. Corporate (relationship among people)
5. Spatial (relationship with place and things)

To attain 'spirituality' these dimensions are not separated, but belong together as an integrated whole and are inseparable. However, the writers who are being examined each demonstrate, I would argue, various degrees of this spirituality and for some all dimensions are included in different degrees, whilst for others only a few are evident in their writing.



However, Lartey maintains that spirituality is not just about inner feelings, it is also about the integration and coherence of ourselves as we experience and act out our own lives. (p.113). It also gives us the capacity to relate. Relationships are the goal of spirituality and the pathways, which can lead us in many directions, are the means of developing and sustaining these relationships.

Spirituality as a relationship with transcendence is perhaps the aspect of spirituality that is most common and widely recognised. For some, this is the only way spirituality can be understood. In this sense (Lartey, p.115) spirituality refers to the universal human capacity to experience life:  
*to a perceived dimension of power and meaning which is experienced as transcendent to our everyday lives.*

However, this transcendence can be, and often is, experienced in the middle of our everyday lives. Rites and rituals as well as religious symbols are included in the language which attempts to describe the nature of transcendence (Lartey, *ibid.*)

A spiritual relationship with self is about coming to selfhood or self-realisation (following the work of Carl Jung). Spirituality is not about individualism – the confinement to the private lives of individuals and Leech (cited in Lartey, p.117) says that in Christian teaching there can be no ‘private’ spirituality. Instead it is an individuate ‘embracing of the soul’. We can have the capacity to ‘go beyond’ ourselves and enter a critical conversation with ourselves. This openness can also be directed towards others.

In order to be able to cultivate a spiritual relationship with another there needs to be mutuality, respect, accountability and friendship. There is an overlap between a spiritual relationship with God and that which has to do with another (Lartey, p.119) Much of the language of the mystics is the language of love, the erotic and longing for union with the 'Beloved'.

In examining spirituality as a corporate entity, Gestalt psychologists take as the maxim the phrase "the whole is more than the sum of its parts." The power of corporate spirituality cannot be identified just by individuals neither can it be identified by the leaders within the body. It would appear that the body develops a life of its own and its powers for good or evil seem to have a force beyond individuals (Lartey, p.120)

Lartey (p.120) comments on the communal nature of African spirituality:

*To be human is to belong to a whole community, and to do so involves participating in its beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinship and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence. To be without one of these corporate elements of life is to be out of the whole picture.*

This suggests that religion is not a separate entity but is integral to our being.

Although this view is not the norm in the West and perhaps the writers who I examine do not easily fit into this particular category. Although in traditional African society ritual commemoration is a binding force which expresses the "communality of the spiritual bonds which tie people together" (Lartey, p.120) Spiritual movements are often sustained through the rituals in which members participate.

Spatial Spirituality can be deeply rooted in the land – such as the spirituality of the Native Americans. This spatiality and land-rootedness manifests itself in various

ceremonies, symbols, architecture, worldview and views of self. The goal of Native American spirituality is to achieve 'harmony and balance in all creation'. They worship the sky and earth gods and each individual recognises in him/herself a combination of qualities which include:

*sky and earth, spirit and matter, peace and war, male and female and we struggle both individually and communally to hold this balance with each other*

(Lartey, p.121). So there is a very clear expression in spatial spirituality of a relationship with place and with the things of the earth.

Goodison, I would argue, has to an extent all these aspects of spirituality present within her work, although some are highlighted more than others. Perhaps her strongest form of spirituality is transcendence as, at times, her work suggests that she reaches a mystical transcendent sensory experience.

Lorna Goodison in her interview with Denise De Caires Narain (*Wasafiri*, 11, 1990, p.21,) declared that spirituality is an important issue in her life and her work. I would argue that her spirituality is unlike the supernatural and traditional forms of worship in Jamaica, influenced by Obeah and Myal – mentioned previously; and more by the mystical and spiritual - transcendence, divine, eternal, heavenly and visionary. This is spiritual as opposed to spiritualism, which can be defined as an attempted communication with spirits of the dead. In this chapter I will examine most of the aspects which influence Goodison and the forms of Spirituality and also important themes that are prevalent in her work. I suggest that although Goodison is a Jamaican woman and speaks as a Jamaican woman of her time, she has to an extent transcended – gone beyond – the traditional forms of worship and religion within her society and developed her own spirituality. Her work suggests that her role is more of a priestess

and her writing has developed to talk less of the body, women's problems and identity and more of universal problems. Her work appears to speak on behalf of the community. She has taken, I will argue, the traditional God of the coloniser and adapted this model not so much to a 'Jamaican' God, but to her own ideal. Her work recognises a spiritual relationship with God, with herself, with others, with the community and with places and things.

In an interview with the *Guardian* Newspaper cited in *I Am Becoming My Mother*, (1986), Goodison says:

*I'm a poet, but I didn't choose poetry – it chose me. It's sometimes dominating, intrusive, tyrant. It's something I have to do – a wicked force.*

In her interview with Anne Walmsley (Markham, E A., (ed), *Hinterland- Caribbean Poetry from the West Indies and Britain*, Bloodaxe, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1989, p.232) Goodison sees the word 'religious' as meaning "realignment, being re- bound to the source, being connected again." Lorna Goodison was brought up as a High Anglican (Interview with Cudjoe, 1990, p.292). She felt that this Church was Henry VIII's excommunication step from the Roman Catholic Church. The traditions within which she was brought up were those of ceremony and the rituals of incense and candles, which she loved, were part of her childhood experiences. She hoped that something 'big' would happen to her in church – as it does for some, who are moved to raptures or tears by the Eucharist – but it never did. Her priest, acting a part of a traveller from Jerusalem to Jericho was, in her opinion, the most exciting thing that happened to her in church. So she never experienced the great 'inner soaring' that she longed for. (*Wasafiri*, 1990, p.23) It might be argued that the Anglican Church does not generally accommodate 'inner soarings'. It is often a very intellectual and distant kind of religion, which does not usually demand a way of life. It does not easily

accommodate deep feelings and total commitment for the majority of its followers.

Goodison's spirituality has many influences including the *Bible*, Rasta and Rabindraeth Tagore - the Indian mystic and Bengali poet. Tagore spoke of souls that have been wounded trying to find an expression through poetry and this soul trying to strive for wholeness. He suggests a process where there is almost a "crying out which takes place within you" (Warmesley, 1989)

Goodison's friend and 'guru' Ali Darwish has also affected her thinking. He is an Egyptian Sufi mystic and writer. She says in her interview in *Wasafiri* (1990, p.23) that he has been a huge influence on her life. He pointed her in a particular direction and spoke to her of things that she did not realise until she heard his views. She claims that she is intense, that she feels strong emotions and Darwish helped her to articulate these intense feelings. She feels an admiration for his relationship with God, his relationship as a writer and as an "integrated human being" (*Wasafiri*, 1990, p. 23). She also admires the way he builds up a story around one word and how his work illustrates multiple layers of meaning like a 'Chinese puzzle'. It is these characteristics, I would suggest, that she tries to emulate in her own work. Her *Heartease* Collection is dedicated to him.

Goodison felt that her inner soaring happened to her through poetry. Her poetry has been influenced by her childhood experiences of English poetry. The poetry of Walter James Turner in the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, edited by Yeats brought her recognition of the power that moved through his work. Although he is now little known for his poetry and primarily remembered for his painting (but not to be confused with W M Turner). (*Wasafiri*, 1990, p.23) Goodison was aware as she grew

up, of the poetry of her 'literary foremothers' – Louise Bennett and Una Marson.

Whilst both poets have similarities, they also have considerable differences and these have been briefly mentioned previously. Goodison however believes that these poets are 'faint-hearted' and do not demonstrate strength and power in some of their work. (*Wasafiri*, 1990, p.21). It is this strength and power of a poet that influences Goodison. She felt that her six brothers fashioned her wanting to write strong poems: "I wanted to write strong poems as good as the men, but about women's business". (ibid) It could be argued that the poetry of Marson and Bennett lack this masculinity. Goodison did not wish to follow in their mould but instead, wanted to develop her own work, which said something to her as a young, black West Indian woman. I believe that this refers to her poetry having a confidence, strength and power that, it could be argued, were not attainable to such an extent in the earlier days of Jamaican women's writing.

Goodison suggests (*Wasafiri*, 1990, p.21) that she was particularly influenced by the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, whom she read in translation, because of her elegance. Akhmatova 'bears witness'. Her poem 'Requiem' states: "I stand as witness to the common lot" (Akhmatova, 1961). This is an aspect which is important in Goodison's later work, as a 'priestess' of the people. They both use techniques of symbolism, recourse to myth and the poet as a figure who articulates the grievances of his or her society and presages its destiny. This in turn is deeply bound up with the poets' sense of themselves as guardians of their society's historical past – its memory. The poetry of both Goodison and Akhmatova 'bears witness' in registering the predicaments of society and draws attention to the repetitions and irony of history so that this history and mythical attributes become both a burden and a crucial source of

identity to society. The Russian poets have used their experiences of suffering totalitarianism in society with the horrors of the past and memories to build the future. Goodison writes 'Moon Cakes and Akhmatova' (*Turn Thanks*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1990, p.48) to illustrate the influence Akhmatova had on her.

Goodison admits that she enjoys the work of Derek Walcott and Emily Dickenson (*Wasafiri*, 1990, p.21) so she has a wide section of poetic influences and experiences from which to draw. However, she avoids the 'suicide poets' such as Sylvia Plath because their work is so intense and perhaps too powerful. She believes that this intensity is dangerous in the context of poetry, although she dismisses Louise Bennett as 'faint-hearted?' This is something of a contradiction. I believe that she is afraid of such powerful poetry, dangerously close to what her work might become if she allowed it. Her writing has been compared to that of Sylvia Plath (*Wasafiri*, 1990, p.21) because of its intensity.

Goodison believes that her poetry is a divine calling and when she writes it is 'out of her hands.' She just has such an urge to write, although her work involves many drafts so that she can be sure that she is writing 'the truth'. She feels that writers such as Erna Brodber, who offers a spiritual dimension to her work, Olive Senior and Velma Pollard are her favourite women writers in the Caribbean.

Goodison's poetry is firmly rooted within the family. She is a Jamaican wife, granddaughter, daughter and mother as well as a lover and friend. Growing up with six brothers, it is important for her that men should also have their say. She has lived side by side, at ease with the men in her life - her father and her brothers and now her

son Miles. Her childhood was spent playing football, cricket and music (interview with Victor Chang, 1993, p.32). She felt that Miles' birth woke her up and this giving birth and motherhood are vitally important aspects of her life. This giving of new life is evident in her work and will be examined later. A universal audience can identify with Goodison because her work transcends barriers and although her voice is unmistakably Jamaican, it reaches far and people can empathise with the experiences she explores in her writing. She is more a 'womanist'- as Alice Walker defines women of colour than a feminist, which suggests that she is concerned with the whole human race rather than with just feminist problems. Alice Walker defines 'Womanist' as: (*In Search of Our Mother's Garden*, London, Womanist Press, 1995, p.xi)

1. From *womanish* (opp. Of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious) A black feminist or feminist of colour. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish, i.e like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or wilful behaviour. Wanting to know more and in greater depths than considered "good" for one.
2. Also: A woman who loves other woman, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers woman's culture, woman's emotional flexibility (values tears as a natural counterbalance and /or nonsexually. with laughter), and woman's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female.
3. Loves music, Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves the Spirit..*

I would argue that Goodison does want to know more and in greater depth than considered 'good' for her, she is committed to survival and wholeness of the entire human race- male and female - and that she loves the spirit. These attitudes, I would suggest, reflects her attitudes to spirituality in her work.

Goodison combines wide sympathy with a sense of her own placing. She knows where she is at and her work often suggests this confidence and power. However, whilst she speaks as a Jamaican woman, for Jamaican women and as a person of the 'third world,' she also speaks as an equal with poets and writers from the so-called



'developed' world. Edward Baugh ('Goodison on Road to Heartease,' *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 'Vol. 1, No. 1 Oct, *Jamaican Popular Culture*, Basingstoke, Warwick University and Macmillan, 1986) suggests that her sensuality and vision prevent her work from fitting easily into some of the generalisations of feminist criticisms.

Her first collection *Tamarind Season* (Institute of Jamaica. 1980), according to her paper at the *First International Conference on Caribbean Women Writers* (Cudjoe, 1990, p.292) releases some of the ideas and experiences that were backing up from her late teens. She felt it was like a: 'Crying out' (*Wasafiri*, 1990, Vol, p.20). In her interview with Chang (1993, p.33) she said the poems were; "a sort of mourning of words....they just kinda came out." She had yet to develop her sense of spirituality but perhaps it was necessary to get these words 'off her chest' before she could have a self-realisation developing into spirituality. She had always loved poetry (although she tried to hide this when she was a child) and wanted to write her own points of view. The crying out was for herself, for other women, for Jamaica and also a broader sense for the world. However, she feels detached from the poems now and does not feel she knows them, which is why I have not dealt with them in such great detail. Many of the poems present an image of a poet embattled and the poetry is used as a physically abusive force (Narain, 1995, p.149). In 'I'm in Here Hiding' the poet is besieged by words:

*I'm in here hiding from words  
they cloud my vision like wide-winged birds poet.*

There are few references in this work to a spiritual relationship with God; instead, the poems appear to be dealing with sexuality, poverty and poetry. Towards the end of *Tamarind Season* she was crying out for something "much bigger on a bigger kind of

level” (*Wasafiri*, 1990, p.20). Jewish mystics speak of the seven bonds binding the heart and Goodison says (Walmsley, 1989) that in her case *Tamarind Season* was the releasing of at least one bond binding her heart. Up until that time she did not think of herself as a poet, but as the floorwalker that she had aspired to be.

I suggest that there is evidence of spiritual development in Goodison’s collection of poetry *Heartease* (London, New Beacon Books, 1989). This work focuses on her ‘personal, internal journey.’ It is evident that her identity has changed within the collection, but although the work is a logical progression, it also appears more fragmented as if Goodison is experimenting with different voices. Goodison feels that the collection ends with a “lot of praise songs to the Creator” (Chang, 1996, p.35) and believes that this is another of her ‘bands’ which has been released.

Goodison feels that her interest in mysticism comes to the fore in her *Heartease* collection with more references to light, change and renewal. She feels that the purpose of humanity is to be re-unified and so this is bound to reflect in her work. The readings that influenced this collection according to her interview with Markham (1989, p.233) include *Chasm of Fire* by a woman who studied under a Sufi master in India and *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, a small book written by a French monk in the eighteenth century. These books, Goodison explains, developed her interest in mysticism, which she thinks is particularly strong in this collection. The theme of Egypt is also important. Goodison feels that the mysticism, the religious awareness is firmly anchored in the ‘here and now.’ This links with a Jewish belief in the here and now rather than one view of Christianity which concentrates on her afterlife. It could be argued that Christianity in this form was brought by the colonisers to ‘pacify’ the colonised with promises of an afterlife (see previous chapter)

Her next collection which is an anthology of short stories, is *Baby Mother and the King of Swords* (Harlow, Longman, 1990) links the feminist/ womanist aspects of Goodison's work with a strong sense of mysticism and religion. A spiritual dimension appears important in most of the stories, but there are also women's issues and identity that are featuring in the work. The book itself is dedicated to the "gracious spirit who leads us into understanding". The stories are littered with references to God. "The King of Swords" (pp.1-6) links the themes of mysticism, magic and sexual imagery with the storyteller's views on the men who have tried to have power over her. When she releases their hold on her she can curse them and God is seen as competition by the violent man who "roars when I mention God's name." Although "Some things have to be left to God". *Baby Mother and the King of Swords* is a release from the male centred myths that have oppressed her.

Goodison's next collection: *To Us All Flowers Are Roses* (University of Illinois, 1995) is a mix between the African and the spiritual. I felt that there is perhaps less of a spiritual (as in 'Christian' spiritual) dimension to this work and more of an ancestral tone. I would suggest that the main themes of this collection include history and injustice.

In her collection *Turn Thanks* (1999), Goodison has divided her work into themes- which include her mother and father, her dedication to poets and poetry and her relationship with God. This collection, I would regard as one of her most spiritually developed. In her latest collection *Travelling Mercies* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 2001), there seems to be a continued acknowledgement of Goodison's role as a priestess. There seem to be more Christian symbolism but also mention of Africa

within the work. These references to Africa are less to do with reflecting on ancestors, and more, it would appear, to her travelling in Africa. There is a continued fascination for Egypt and a continued belief in the principles of Sufism as well as other religions. In this work, I would suggest, Goodison continues her personal spiritual journey, although perhaps now there is less of a marked progression in her work. She is more in tune with her spirituality and with her ideas of God, and this spirituality, especially in her later work, I would argue, is an intense spirituality leading to mysticism.

Lorna Goodison's work has a number of strands and themes which highlight her particular version of spirituality which will be examined in this chapter. These include Lartey's definitions of spirituality (p.7)- relationship with transcendence, intra-personal spirituality, interpersonal spirituality, community spirituality and spatial spirituality. Within these definitions, Goodison's spirituality is explored through a number of themes which permeate throughout her work, such as her affinity with Egypt and the elements, her work in relation to Africa and Jamaica as well as her attitude towards religion. Her work appears to be autobiographical and this can blur the distinction between the poet and the persona. This makes her work difficult to detach from her own beliefs and, I would suggest, adds a sense of power and commitment to her work.

## Transcendent Spirituality

In all her collections, I would argue that Goodison illustrates a close relationship with God – a mystical spirituality which, I would suggest, is a transcendence – the ability to rise above and an awareness of the beyond. It is a consciousness that is interwoven with the material world, yet it is not part of it. It is an awareness of the unseen, over and above the seen and a belief in the divine source, which can be found in all the major religions of the world. It is a rare experience; a communion with God and it is this communion with God, whilst not present in all Goodison's poems that permeates her work to various degrees in most of her collections.

The poem 'Invoke Mercy Extraordinary For Angels Fallen' (*I Am Becoming My Mother*, London, New Beacon Books, p.34), introduces a man in his thirtieth year. Significantly this was the age that Jesus was alleged to have died. The man appears to be looking for a meaning to his life. He is "in search of signs" but then:

*God's face appeared to him*

This does not appear to be a clear vision of God because the image is seen on a "brackish" pond which is "littered" with leaves, illustrating a cluttered, dull reflection. This image of God's face was "So suffused with light" and so intense that it could not possibly be healthy and positive. The heat from that light was so intense that rotten leaves were not just burnt but cremated (like dead bodies). The heat separated the salt and water, perhaps the salt from the tears so that the water now "rose clear". This suggests that whilst he found something within himself, this did not bring joy or peace.

Such was the power of this image of God that in describing it he said he was “grateful” that he was kneeling and in the repetition of “kneeling” suggests that he had become obsessed, showing the dangers of this intense relationship with God and the madness “heard in his head” that can accompany this. He does not seem to have been prepared for the experience and remained kneeling, rather than getting up and living his life in a better way. The poet asks:

*Who knows what God*

*in his speaking*

*Said to the man kneeling*

The reply, however, is ambiguous. Whilst the messages are supposed to be released as a “clean new source of singing”, there seems little rejoicing in this man’s life.

Perhaps this illustrates a similarity with Jesus who saw God before his crucifixion and had mixed feeling of both happiness at seeing God his father and of sadness that he would leave the world and those he loved.

The poet does not blame the man because she asks, “What else there is?” what can you aspire to after your eyes have: “Framed the face of God”? Instead of being crucified like Jesus, from then onwards he is allowed to live, but a painful life. This is compared to alchemy, where instead of trying to turn metal into gold, he tries to re-create the vision of God. Both alchemy and the vision are desired, but neither is achieved. The only alternative to this man is to re-create the image with the help of “pain and white powder”. He had turned to drugs to try and relive the experience – bringing pain to himself and those around him, just as Jesus brought pain to those around when he was crucified. He is unable to live up to the expectations he felt that God demanded and the poet asks God to “Invoke mercy extraordinary” for “angels fallen” and let him die (as he had done for Jesus).

In contrast to this poem, death is confronted in a more positive light in “A Rosary Of Your Names.” (*Heartease*, p.58) In facing up to death, the persona takes on a heightened sense of being, whereas in the previous poem God’s face appears on the surface of murky water, it is now not as frightening:

*God your face made manifest  
on surface of sand or water*

Instead of the rotten leaves, suggesting Autumn and death from the previous poem, God’s image is now compared to Spring and “balance of the green”. The image of the previous poem is suggestive of God, but now it is definitely God’s face and is seen in more than the water:

*Your face is day  
Your face is night*

This revelation is compared not with the salt of tears, but with topaz, rubies and small sea stones. God is seen in everything from the grandest to the simplest. He is seen not only in light but also in darkness and not only in the elements but as “Lord of Trains”. Instead of the bittersweet message of the singing man in the previous poem, there is no ambiguity as the:

*rose soul’s unfolding  
sing*

She invokes his name as creator of all things “Your names are infinity” and instead of there being only pessimism, there is now “light and possibility” and God is merciful.

Instead of seeing death as the end, she sees it as an awakening, a resurrection and even suggests that God is her bridegroom:

*And behold the bridegroom cometh*

Water in the form of rain, falls as a blessing from his hands – a “benediction” and this instead of the pain of the previous poem, brings release and a “stillness of surrender” which is found by invoking God’s names and by giving herself entirely up to him.

Through this she can attain peace and “Heartease”. This poem, I would suggest refers to imagery from St John’s Gospel (Chapter 1 verses 4 and 5):

*In him was life: and the life was the light of men...  
And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not..*

But by using this imagery, she is also ‘signing up’ to a male, traditional God as a symbol of power and authority and the ultimate creator. However, perhaps as a woman at ease with herself, she does not have to adhere to a feminist notion of either a sexless God or God as a woman – she has the freedom to choose her own vision of God.

The grace of God is desired in ‘Clearing of Possibilities’ (*Baby Mother, King of Swords*, p.57), she declares that “He is in you”. She finds him this time initially through singing hymns from an old hymnbook, which leads her to think of Jesus and love and “thanks the one who created love for creating love”. Because of this love within her, she had the strength to live. This gives her a choice of how to live her life (unlike the man in ‘Invoke Mercy Extraordinary For Angel’s Fallen’, who does not appear to have a choice). Anything is possible and this gives light to her life which is reflected in her eyes (the eyes being the symbol of the soul and light as the symbols of goodness and truth). She feels that this love can help her live her life a new way which can alleviate envy and bring inner contentment and peace. Through this she can find love and ultimately transcendence and spiritual wholeness:

*I am not alone for I have met myself and never will be alone again..*

She has attained this transcendence and inner fulfilment by meeting God on a personal basis.



Unlike visions that can send you mad, simple faith is exalted in 'From the Book of Local Miracles, Largely Unrecorded' (*To Us All Flowers Are Roses*, p.48). The poem tells of a woman who:

*set a pot of water  
over a candlewood fire  
when she knew she had no food*

However, because she had given her heart to God, because she believed that anything was possible, a miracle was achieved through faith. Just as she was feeling at her lowest with no possibility of food, her friends and neighbours came into her house with an abundance of food. One brought coconuts and provisions, and another came "offering a portion of goat's flesh". The only thing she needed was salt – a recurring theme in Goodison's work, which seems to be associated with faith – giving both food and life a taste. As the widow had faith she also had salt and this gave quality to her life. The "Bright angels" (in contrast to "fallen angels" in 'Invoke Mercy...') came not from the sky, but meeting the believers at the point of their greatest need. This shows that God is within us all – we can all be at one with him. Although the widow is simple and she does not presume a personal relationship with God, she is able to encounter the 'practice of the presence of God' by having a communion with God through her friends and by sharing food with them (as did Jesus in the Last Supper). Goodison asks the angels to "Come again when these women call for miracles". This shows that simple faith and trust can bring out the best in everyone and that he can be everywhere if you let him in and trust.

Her final part of her *Turn Thanks* collection is called 'God a Me' (p.64), reflecting and developing her spiritual approach and its importance in her work. I would argue that in this collection, Goodison is firmly 'back on track' with her theme of spirituality and her own continued spiritual journey. In the title poem she speaks of

her relationship with the land and elements, especially with water. She suggests her name itself is a prayer. She emphasises her relationship with God “God a Me” is repeated. She feels she breathes uneasily on land and part of God’s will is to pull her:

*back into  
the flow’ (p.66)  
and back into the ‘merciful earth*

She writes of her spiritual relationship with a higher being in ‘Sometimes on a Day Such as This’ (*Turn Thanks*, p.67). She reflects that after “medicinal silence” she is “eased to this place” and becomes at one with herself and enters into a spirituality between herself and God. She is ready for a relationship with God (unlike the man in ‘Invoke Mercy...’) She speaks of this as:

*Loving you is a high a pleasure  
as I will ever get*

She is spiritually rising onto another plane of transcendence, which could be achieved because of her ‘expanded self’ and the link with the Hindu deity through yoga, enabled her to reach a trance-like state. She states that “on cue”; she is “connected”, suggesting a movement into this trance-like state and her spiritual connection with God. This, I would argue, is not a simple religion that most would aspire to, (like the woman in ‘From the Book of Local Miracles.’) but an advanced relationship with God. She explains that she becomes a “living chandelier” – an analogy to the light of the world, but also because she is swinging in the air, so that now she has transcended herself and is floating as “now you will pass beneath me”. However, this is not swinging that is left unchecked- a chandelier is attached to the ceiling, just as Goodison has not completely let go and has God to hold on to – she is not left swinging. She sees the crown on the head of her God and the halo glowing which she guides with her “lit” fingers. So she recognises God as a deity, but is not in awe of

him, and this ability to circle the crown with her fingers, suggests an almost equal, intimate, relationship. She reflects that she is not ashamed of herself and doesn't bear herself down by thinking about sin (as can be the case in Christianity). Her errors are now iron and fed back into her blood – as iron gives strength and is good for the blood, so she can learn and be renewed by her mistakes which can give her strength. She can also be forgiven and reborn. Her relationship with water is emphasised by the comparison between her blood and the “strong surging water” of the Tiber or the Black River and the power of the river is still with her as she returns to herself once again.

The presence of God in all the elements is highlighted in the poem ‘I Know I Never Lose You’ (*Turn Thanks*, p.74). Goodison sees God as “in all things” and once again in the “thoughtful” Sunday afternoon rain and she sees God as present in each day in the food (like the woman in ‘From the Book of Local Miracles..’, who sees God through the food she is given), which combines its flavour and makes it taste good. This is illustrated in the “onions, pepper, pimento, oil and vinegar”- strong flavours for strong faith. This, she suggests, is made even better by condiments – not salt and pepper, necessarily, but “of praise” (p.74). Fish is itself a “bright thanksgiving garnish”. God is compared to salt that is needed (according to Shakespeare’s *King Lear*) in everything to make it taste – so that as in faith and love of God is saturated and “ your presence permeates everything good” and God’s substance changes the texture and colour of life. Everything is more heightened and everything possible by the “unction grace and presence” (p.74)

The final poem in the collection ‘Close to You Now’ (*Turn Thanks*, p.94), emphasises how close she feels to her maker – this is what the man in ‘Invoke Mercy..’ can only

aspire to. The crescent moon of Islam is also mentioned. There is also the mention of the scythe of the 'grim reaper' bearing death. Her spiritual relationship is so at one with God that when she asks questions before she goes to sleep, in the morning as she awakes, she is given the answers. She makes the analogy of walking from door to door "with my begging bowl" (p.94), trying to find more faith, the meaning of life and wanting more from life itself, until she realises that her bowl has always been "full of fine gold wheat" that only the "prayerful" can see. She realises she needs to count her blessings, (like the woman in 'From the Book of Local Miracles.')

otherwise she would always live off leftovers, never feeling really happy and never having the best. This idea, she suggests, helps her to write her poetry and gives her "shows of blessing" (p.95) and then when He covers her lips, she goes quiet – silent and still, calling to mind 'be still and know that I am God' (from the hymn and Bible reading). Then she will see his face and "Want then for nothing". She is content with having attained spiritual wholeness.

Goodison continues this transcendent relationship with God and emphasises being content and counting her blessings in 'Shining One' (*Travelling Mercies*, p.55). She paid "good money" and sold her gold guard ring, because not only did she need the money, but she was putting her faith in false trinkets and charms. She wanted to find real faith. The "walkabout," whom she sent to find, never returned and she craved for what she sought when it got dark and life was tough. She seemed to have spent an age waiting and in the end gave up searching and waiting for his return and "want for shining" – wanting the light of faith or searching for something which would give her life more meaning. She gave up looking and gave up on her money. Until one day her garden caught fire – an unexpected occurrence - and she found her faith. It was

through this burning bush (just like Moses) that she found what she had been searching for and she released the man from bringing her 'the shining'. She had found faith and witnessed being at one with him and implored this light, this faith and love to "enter, come burnish my life, my being". She needs to search no longer. Her writing shows that she has found a spiritual transcendence. Whilst it is important, at times, to separate the poet from the persona, I would argue that these poems reflect her own spirituality and transcendence. I would suggest that she would not be able to write with as much conviction about that which she had not herself experienced.

## **Intra-personal spirituality**

I propose that Goodison has a strong relationship with self – Lartey’s ‘intra-personal spirituality’. Her writing shows that her relationship between God and herself when it is not mystical and transcendent is one where she is close to God and walks ‘side by side’ rather than directly at one with him (as in transcendence). Through her writing she recognises the importance of a relationship between herself and God. She experiences God as being alive and real and has faith in the presence of God. This strong relationship with self can manifest itself at times in doubt – whether she knows who she is or when she is less sure, but through forgiveness she can reach spirituality and have a spiritual relationship with herself.

‘A Forgiveness’ (*Heartease*, p.10) invokes pardon and a gentleness with self because the poet has made mistakes, she has been undermined and has loved the wrong person: “The voodoo priest” and for loving “her children too much” when they disappointed her. Instead, forgive them and she invokes her audience to forgive themselves for their past mistakes and invoke the “rains of redemption”. I would argue that it is only through forgiving yourself that you can love yourself enough to truly love God and others around you. She recognises that people can only change from within (like the changes she has made) and this is a “light from within”. This light (symbolic of God’s love) can allow you to love yourself and from this light you can draw more light which gives renewal and peace. Not to forgive can eat you away, but forgiveness can only come when you have enough self-esteem to recognise, respect and love yourself- a spiritual relationship with self.

In 'I come through' (*Baby Mother and the King of Swords*, p.12), loving yourself and an acceptance of yourself is sought. The protagonist has reached rock bottom. She is a singer and always seems to find men who treat her badly, use her and cast her away. The men want her for her singing but then hate her "because of it". She and her son are thrown out onto the streets in the rain and she asks God some "hard questions" about this. Because her son wants lifting up, she just manages to stop herself from ending her life. She tries to pick herself up but each time she is knocked back. She wonders who will protect her.

One night she gets a vision. She dreams she is at the foot of a hill with her head "resting in a pile of stinking garbage" with dogs all around her. She sees herself and her life as being full of rubbish, her children are not being fed and she is on the lips of every gossip in town. In her dream she asks "Lord make a way" and in her dream she manages to lift herself up and sees a clear pool of water (unlike the man in 'Invoke Mercy Extraordinary For Angel's Fallen' who only saw brackish water with littered leaves). This pool was blue like "if God did wear a ring" (suggesting a marriage) and she takes her clothes off and bathes deeply in this pool. When she wakes up she is crying. She decided to do something about her life and goes to 'talk' to her gran who is dead. She sits on her gran's grave and clearly hears her gran telling her to give up singing for a while and to come and live in the country. In the country she farms her grandmother's land – the same hill as she saw in her dream and learns acceptance of herself and how to love herself. She changes completely due to "love" because "love is a light that have to catch you first". When she has learned to love herself, to have a relationship of respect for herself and forgive herself, she can start to re-build her life. She starts to sing again, but a new kind of singing that lifts her up. Through waves

lapping she sings her song called 'I came through' which tells of when she was nearly at the bottom of life and she is tempted by Satan but:

*I rise up like new  
I came over, I give thanks  
I came through.*

Towards the end of her *Turn Thanks* collection, she suggests she now has a "don't care philosophy" (The 'Revival Song of the Wild Woman,' p.91). The wild woman that is inside her forever (p.90) won't let her go (p.91) and is leading her astray, so that she doesn't care what people think- she is at ease with herself. (Even though she had thought she had said 'farewell' to this 'Wild Woman' in *Heartease*)

She goes to find herself and be re-connected in 'Natal Song' (*Travelling Mercies*, p.45) – as "I come to find my vital self left back here." She says that all the time she was searching, she managed to find herself in Africa- "You had my remedy". It had been there, like the wild woman, all the time. (Perhaps, because she is now older, the 'wild woman' philosophy does not hold as many attractions, or show itself as often as it once did). She goes on safari to Natal in South Africa in search of white rhino. She feels at home discussing the paper charms and bush baths. There is an undercurrent of violence here as lions have been seen killing a tourist, but she sees none of this, only the gentle wildebeest running through the veldt and animals sleeping under the acacia trees. She feels that she has travelled to this "continent of her forefathers" over "seas, oceans, seven-sourced rivers" – the theme of water recurring again. She has been re-connected to her source once again. She wants to put aside bitterness and past wrongs, especially in this part of the world and stand "full grown". She exalts God "Thank you God for this day most amazing" but says that whilst she found herself she didn't find the rhino. She has found her true self so it is through forgiveness that she



has truly attained freedom to be herself (the wild woman within her) and ultimately to re-connect to her source so as to be 'fully grown' and confident in her spiritual relationship with self.

## **Interpersonal spirituality**

Goodison illustrates many close interpersonal spiritual relationships in her work between herself and others. These especially include her mother, father and her son Miles. She also appears to feel a spiritual 'kinship' with Mary Magdalene and also calls on the saints to intercede for her (similarly Africans may ask their ancestors to intercede between themselves and higher powers). Asking the saints to intercede is normally a Catholic notion and is not part of the Protestant church where Goodison was brought up.

Her close relationship with her mother and father are highlighted in 'The Domestic Science of Sunday Dinner' (*Turn Thanks*, p 7). I would argue that strong religious imagery and symbols are used in the poem. She recalls her mother's strength at this time of her life as the poet takes over the cooking whilst her mother nurses her father. She begins cooking the dinner by soaking the peas and beans which have "dried out from a hard life", perhaps like her parents. Garlic is used in profusion to season the meat, which can also be used against evil. Seasoning gives taste to the meat just as life needs 'seasoning' (perhaps with faith) to give it value. Putting so much effort into making the meal means "your efforts are returned to you" and you have a feeling of "well-being", as in life if you put effort into living a good life, you will be rewarded (perhaps in another life). The well-being of Sunday afternoon is contrasted with the "aggressive cells of destruction" that her father has within him, his fight against cancer and the "battle" takes place in the "closing days of the Advent season" (p.7). The cooking of the meal and the ceremony of the Sunday dinner is described in detail. The red legumes produce the taste of "redeemed richness", a curious analogy between legumes and being reclaimed and being free from sin –likening this to death and re-

birth. Her father, on Sundays, when he was well, used to pour water (the elixir of life) into a wine glass, perhaps a symbol of the communion wine and blood of Christ, because then her mother lifts the glass 'like a chalice' to her lips, suggesting religious ceremony. The rice and peas are in a "combined state of readiness" as is her father in preparing for his death. The preparations for the meal reminded the poet that these are products of the earth's bounty and the earth is where her father is preparing to return. The melting of elements recalling 'unto dust we shall return'.

However, now her mother is lying in hospital, there is no delicious food here – only bland hospital food and a bland environment (unlike her father's last days). She can still give thanks "upon this Sunday" that she is still alive at eighty-five years old. Her mother's pain is evident as some days she cannot eat even this bland food. The poet hopes that the drip being administered will soften the heart and that "hard things are breaking open" just as the beans and peas of the first lines of the poem were being softened, and that like her Sunday lunch, all will come together. She prays that God will take pity on her mother's suffering and hopes her soul will safely be redeemed and "released" (p.11)

After her death, her mother's spirituality is reflected in the elements. She is not mentioned so much in terms of the afterlife with God, but rather with going back to a spiritual relationship with the earth. In Part 1 of *Turn Thanks* she writes of her mother's death in 'After the Green Gown of My Mother Gone Down' (p.3) she says she "laid her down, full of days". She talks of those who have gone before her mother – her ancestors and speaks of the "Blue Mountains" of Jamaica opening to her and sealing her in their vault – like Jesus buried in a tomb. She mentions exotic

substances – lapis lazuli stones and myrrh resin. She asks for her mother's body to be returned to "follow the earth" and hopes the white hair will mingle with the clouds. As her body mingles with the earth, so new life in the form of an orchard can spring from this, especially an orchard bearing "lush fruit groves". So that whilst the poem illustrates an inter-personal relationship between herself and her mother, it also shows a spatial spiritual relationship between her mother and the elements and her mother is at one with these.

In 'My Mother's Sea Chanty' (*Turn Thanks*, p.6), Goodison dreams of washing her mother's body in the night sea upon her death – a particularly personal spiritual act to perform for her mother. She dreams that her mother becomes a mermaid and she tells how her "dark mother" has a direct, almost God like, understanding with the fish, showing them how to "bear away our grief and anguish" (p.6). The purpose of the poem is that her mother will encounter freedom and peace from these 'marine chores' and the chores of the kitchen which she performed in life. Instead, she will ride away on a white horse, riding away on the waves (white horses) in a sense of spiritual freedom from pain and at one with the earth. The final poem in Part 1 of *Turn Thanks* 'Signals from the Simple Life' (p.23,) suggests a cleansing assisted by the tides of the moon, traditionally associated with women. Her mother has finally died and the white napkin is a signal to spirits to leave her alone. Everything is white and clean and her mother, instead of life coming to an end, starts a new beginning in what one assumes is a new life – a spiritual life either with God or of going back to the elements and the earth. These poems illustrate a particularly close personal relationship between the poet and her mother, one which I would suggest, is almost

spiritually linked. She now feels that she is now her mother in 'I Am Becoming My Mother' (p.38) the title poem in her collection and reflects "my mother is now me".

Whilst the poet's mother is linked to the elements and to the earth, Goodison appears to see her father in terms of a 'spirit father'. She seems to feel that she is more like him than she is like her mother. Her father is linked, I would suggest, more with God, than perhaps her mother. Her father represents a symbolic order and Goodison empowers her own voice to join this order - of her Biblical and of her earthy father. (This is unlike the poetry of Sylvia Plath who fears her father.) A close relationship with her 'father' is mentioned in 'My Father Always Promised Me' (*Heartease*, p.9). Her father is seen as a bit of a dreamer. The poem begins by quoting Nina Simone's song:

*My father always promised me  
that we would live in France.*

Yet she thinks no less of him because he has not initially fulfilled all his promises and dreams. Instead, she remembers him spinning her around his head and taking and her spirit to new places "forever homing." He is the axis of her world and her inspiration.

He would whisper:

*Fly be, of all worlds and a healer  
source of mystery and a Morning Star- be.*

He passed on his dreams and aspirations to her. He wants her to be first and foremost a healer and a 'Morning Star,' traditionally used to guide people. She realises before it was too late:

*Almost too late I learnt the flying steps  
father, look see me rising lighter  
in the name of my father, dreamer  
who said I should be  
of all worlds and a healer.*

Perhaps a reflection on her own spiritual journey; and that to be a healer, guide and a source of mystery is what she strives for and aspires to in her work. She attempts to

speak with the voice of the people by attempting to speak with the authority of her father – biblical and biological and make a place for herself (Narain, 1996, p.436).

In part two of *Turn Thanks: 'This Is My Father's Country'* – the title poem speaks again of her spiritual relationship with her father – her “spirit father” (p.29) and in turn his relationship with the land. In her dreams she sees him in “stillness, high transcendent peace” (p.31) and how he appears as a ball of bright light to be with her. So he is spiritually present. The ball of light suggests goodness and a link with God. She bemoans the fact that he was deceived out of his land that was his. She prays to St. Elizabeth for all those who are not able to “store up treasures here on earth.” (like her father). Her father “with a clean hand” (suggesting a good man) breaks the bread, as would be done in the communion service, signifying the body of Christ. Her father was buried in a churchyard and the parish church is the place where Great-grandfather William was married (p.32), which suggests a firm foundation and importance of Church life within the community.

Goodison's deep spiritual love for others shows itself in her love for her son Miles. In her poem 'Songs For My Son' (*I Am Becoming My Mother*, p.17) she celebrates the birth of Miles. She watches over him as she is breast-feeding. She is consumed with fear that something will happen to him and she is fiercely protective. She worries about him still breathing. She strikes a bargain with God:

*I strike a deal with him  
For his life I owe you something, anything  
But please let no harm come to him*

Her dead ancestors also gather round to protect him with “healing hands” as they gather at the banks of the “family river” and they all celebrate his birth:

*It's a son, a great grand grandson, a man, born to a headstrong, heartfoolish woman.*

“Behold your son... Flesh of your flesh,” gives Miles biblical qualities, using language from the Bible: “your life’s work begun.”. However, she also invokes the “appropriate spirits” and the “healing roots” of Africa and the African midwife to help. She also uses garlic to ward off evil, as if hedging her bets and summoning help for Miles from all sources possible and celebrating all the cultures that surround her. She realises that whilst he relies on her, she too relies on him.

When she writes ‘My Will’, (*I Am Becoming My Mother*, p.19) again about her son Miles, she hopes for the love of God to be a force within him and invokes “blessings” on him, just as her father did for her. She wonders what to bequeath, she wants him to have the gift of song, of loving books and having good friends rather than material goods. She wants him to know the simplest ways and to be thankful. She hopes that he will not strive for too much and be greedy, thus making him ungrateful:

*each day's salt and bread  
with praise*

She hopes that he will never know hunger. She does not wish wealth on him because gold brings unhappiness and “its face is too bold”. I would suggest that after the birth of her son Miles, her spiritual journey began to take place in earnest. As a mother myself, I would argue that giving birth changes your outlook and your priorities in life.

There are a number of poems in her *Travelling Mercies* collection dedicated to the Saints. She appears to have a close relationship with them, despite the fact that they are long dead. She speaks as a priestess on behalf of all the community as she asks them to intercede on behalf of this community (as Africans can use their ancestors to

intercede between them and God). Her first is to St. Michael – the Archangel, who is known as a warrior commander when he and his angels fight the dragon. ('The Garden of St. Michael in the Seven-Hilled City of Bamberg', p.34) She says that he has told her not to remember him especially for this but for his garden. However, she asks that a corner of this garden should be given to Jamaican plants – such as the donkey's ear, because Christ was made a scapegoat when He rode on a donkey on Palm Sunday. Jamaican plants are also used to emphasise that Christ is relevant to Jamaica.

Goodison petitions Mary Magdalene (*Travelling Mercies*, p.78) by lighting candles, and of all the saints has a closer relationship with Mary Magdalene. Mary is the patron saint of penitents – herself being the model penitent of the Gospel story. She is the reformed prostitute and chief witness of the resurrection. Goodison complains that she has never even seen her in a dream except in her Egyptian alabaster jar which she likes to think holds ointment, just as Mary used ointment for Jesus' feet. She also weeps 'Maundy' tears and it was Maundy Thursday when Mary washed and anointed Jesus' feet. The poet feels she is linked with Mary for as well as having birthdays at around the same time, she has also wasted her love waiting for someone who couldn't return it. Similarly Jesus was unable to return Mary's love in the way she may have wished. She, like Mary, has wept:

*maundy tears*

*enough to wash face, hands and feet*

Goodison even wandered in the desert and escaped the world to try and find her and pleads for her to appear in a dream, especially as she is the saint of wild women (and Goodison dedicates some of her poems to the wild woman within her). So Goodison in her poem has adopted her as her own saint and developed a spiritual closeness,



which may be a little 'one way' but still illustrates an interpersonal relationship between the poet and Mary Magdalene.

In Part 11 of the poem, Goodison relates the rumour that some say that Jesus was not crucified and settled down with Mary Magdalene and raised children, but the poet doubts this. She says that whatever happened Jesus still honoured her for what she was and "loved her still" (p.82). Mary had the great gift of tenderness because she was able to wash "his feet with her tears" and dry them "with her hair" (p.82). She still regards herself as a loyal follower even though she is unable to communicate with Mary and asks her as a "dear friend" what is the true end to her story? She would like to get to know Mary better.

Goodison has a deep inter-personal spiritual relationship with her family and this illustrates a deep love for them. Her relationship with her friends and others in the community is also strong as is her bond with the saints, even though they are dead. It is partly, I would suggest, through a relationship with others that can allow her to attain true spirituality.

## Corporate spirituality

Goodison admits that she sees her role as a priestess, and bear witness among the people – she delivers the word as in Lartey’s corporate spirituality. She uses her collections as a means of delivering the word. These poems are particularly suited to performance. In her *Heartease* poems the use of Biblical language is strong, especially the references to the Gospel According to St. John, which highlights the power of the word, illumination, symbolism and bearing witness. The Gospel itself is rich in imagery and symbolism and also has a multiplicity of meanings such as in chapter 10, the shepherd and his sheep – the leader, the follower and the caring given by the shepherd. Denise Decairnes Narain (1996) clearly feels that Goodison in ‘Heartease’ (p.32) uses this title poem to articulate her role as poet using the image of Biblical crowds to provide healing images evoking possibilities to help keep the spirit and imagination alive:

*I speak no judgement  
this voice is to heal  
to speak of possibilities*

In her role as a poet-priestess, she ‘delivers’ the word. Her poem ‘I Shall Light A Candle’ (*Heartease*, p.7), is subdued and trance-like, invoking incantation but also uses the symbol of light as St. John’s Gospel in ‘Jesus is the Light of the World’ and light being regarded as goodness. She appears in the poem to speak on behalf of others as she begins the poem:

*I shall light  
First debts to pay and fences to mend*  
She wants a new beginning where forgiveness is sought and where “foes distinguished as friends”. For this purpose she seeks to “light a candle of understanding”, suggesting that it is prejudice and lack of understanding that cause

trouble. She also regards contentment as being important – not to train “impossible hedges around life”. All things should have their place and purpose, but there should be a special place for Him – apart. God should be treated as special. She acknowledges this light shall never be an “extinguished flame,” if you believe in God. If the flame does go out – and there is no faith, then there is only “exit, death, fear and doubt.” Yet if the candle is lit “within a lit heart”. Life is full of possibilities and love and the heart ‘shines,’ and hope and joy prevail.

In her poem ‘This Is a Hymn’ (*Heartease*, p.19) she expresses her kinship with the hungry, homeless and the dispossessed. The poem again expresses her sense of the religious properties of poetry, which are strong and compelling, especially when read aloud. (Markham, 1989, p.231):

*This hymn  
Is for the must-be-blessed  
The victims of the world  
who know salt best  
the world tribe  
of the dispossessed  
outside the halls of plenty  
looking in  
this is a benediction  
this is a hymn*

She links her traditional respect for her calling as a poet with her ‘mystic side’. In her *Heartease* collection she writes:

*For my mission this last life is certainly this  
to be a sojourner poet carolling for peace  
calling lost souls to way of Heartease. (p.41)*

Carolyn Cooper (1993, p.80) notices that Lorna Goodison has an “oracular authority of clarity” and in her work uses the metaphors of “calling”, “Mission” and “Channel” which recur in her work. Goodison therefore assumes the public persona of ‘sojourner poet’

Narain (1996, p.435) suggests that Goodison uses 'I' when making her testimony or observation and uses 'We' when using the spiritual aspects or mapping the healing properties, including herself in the process. In 'And You Being So Abundantly Blessed' (*Heartease*, p.57) Goodison uses 'I' in "I strive to commit each one to memory," reflecting perhaps, her own shortcomings, but "we love your names" – a more biblical priestess speaking on behalf of others. In 'Rosary Of Your Names,'(p.58) she writes, "To you we belong". Goodison's voice in these poems is a public speaking voice - a voice bearing witness. Her poetic identity strongly allies her to her people and her poetic voice is a collective one. It is difficult to distinguish between her own voice and that of the poet. God's face is manifest, her soul is unfolding and God dawns as morning. This God is a creator. She mentions bridegroom and benediction, as she dedicates her life to his service. This will bring stillness and surrender and the "rosary" of faith is not cold here and her belief is strong. The relationship continues in 'A Rosary Of Your Names II' (*Heartease*, p.60) she calls him by all his names, revering him and developing her relationship with him, as well as recognising him in all things. She is the 'body politic' representing the people by her person. Her role of healer draws on the divining traditionally associated with women, but also on the linguistic power of the Biblical word and other patriarchal discourses. Towards the end of the *Heartease* collection, there is a clear change in her writing, as she becomes even more of a priestess.

The poet highlights this in 'The Prophet Jeremiah Speaks', (*To Us All Flowers Are Roses*, p.43) and suggests how difficult it is to be a prophet/prophetess, bearing

witness when no one wants to hear what you have to say. Jeremiah feels that perhaps it is best not to deliver these prophecies:

*For they hate the sight  
of me, these people*

Because prophecy shatters their “careful illusion”. Still he says God makes him speak out against poverty and injustice. Everyone finds an excuse not to listen to him because they are too busy:

*When I appear in the marketplace  
everyone remembers some urgent  
task left undone  
all because  
I am charged to speak.*

If he doesn't speak out then he has God to contend with. This conflict eats away at him. The poet declares through Jeremiah:

*I did not choose prophecy  
Prophecy chose me' (like Jesus)*

He wants his life back because he wants to marry and lead a normal life but instead he is “Commanded” to tell them “What they do not wish to know”

Although he fears he will be stoned if he continues to speak, he promises that he will try and keep quiet today, but knows that the flames of prophecy will not be contained for long and he is torn.

Goodison feels the need to write about past wrongs and reclaim her history, and to speak on behalf of the community in doing this. Although she still needs to “draw from the mountain's energy” the energy seems to be both natural and ethereal – these are not in conflict. She also still feels the need to be a healer and to tell the truth on behalf of the community – a corporate spirituality, as she promises that:

*I will return to teach the wind  
how to make poetry from tossed about and restless leaves ('Missing the Mountains,'  
To Us All Flowers Are Roses, p.1)*

## **Spatial Spirituality**

Goodison seems to have a strong spiritual relationship with things and place – this is Lartey’s ‘spatial’ spirituality. These aspects are manifested in themes which permeate throughout her collections. Egypt is a particularly important theme and her love and spiritual affinity with Egypt is evident. It could be argued that her fondness for Egyptian iconography suggests a search for an alternative mythology, she does not feel the ‘inner soaring’ in Christianity which she appears to find in Sufism. Although it satisfies her close feelings for Egypt, which according to Markham, (1989, p.232) stems from her childhood’s attraction to its arts, and to Egypt as being part of Africa. Sufism, which is a strong influence on her work also, has its origins in Egypt, and her Guru Ali Darwish is Egyptian.

Maher Haggag, a renowned tour guide and Egyptologist stated that Sufism is a form of mysticism. (Interview in 1998). This mysticism has especially guided Goodison’s later writing. These ideas borrowed from Sufism and Egypt are especially important in her collection *I Am Becoming My Mother*. She explains that her readings of Sufi masters and of mystical works have developed her interest in these topics and much of this influence shows in her work. The basis for this Sufism is faith - Islamic faith, although there are influences from most of the world’s religions. Religions often differ in fundamentals but not nearly as far as they may seem because they are misunderstood and misrepresented. There is frequent agreement in the world’s major faiths that ‘God is One.’ The Islamic faith has six pillars. They include the fact that God exists, God is one, there are angels and prophets, there is a day of restoration and there is fate. Sufism perceives these in the heart. Sufism is thousands of years old,

although the name is relatively new. Many Christian writers and ideas, such as the notion of chivalry and the writings of St. Teresa of Avila, are thought to have borrowed Sufic influences. Shakespeare also is thought to have used the ideas in his work as his plays show that he thought the true relation between man and man is love. The Sufi believe that inner experiences are not a department of life, but life itself. Sufi means love and Sufism is a way of life, believed by its members to be the essence and reality of all religion and philosophical teachings. It leads to the completion of man and womankind through the institutions of discipleship, meditation and practice - the latter is the living of reality. Wisdom is to be distinguished from intellectualism and scholastic according to Sufism as these are merely tools. The paths show how to use these tools and how to amalgamate action with destiny. Sufism is transcendent spirituality but because it is so strongly linked with the spatial spirituality of Egypt it is dealt with under this heading.

She reflects on the links between Christ and Islam in her poem 'When They Took Down the Sun of Tabriz'. (*Travelling Mercies*, p.69) She feels that the two religions are linked like "two drops of blood". The Beloved and the Rumi come from the same source, they just separated from the same "wild reed bed."

The spatial spirituality of Egypt is revealed in 'The Mulatta And The Minotaur' (*I Am Becoming My Mother*, p.31) which talks of resurrection. The poem is placed during the times of the Pharaohs and is situated by the Nile. The Minotaur's half man, half bull characteristics become reality as he moves to the day of redemption: "Shield your eyes, he's wearing God's head". The Prophet Mohammed said that on the day of resurrection man is raised in the form of one or other animal, corresponding to his

leading characteristics. His form changes from the human shape. The metaphor also reflects the imagery of Egypt such as Gods wearing the heads of creatures such as the ram and crocodile evident in the tombs. This is also supported by the almond eyes, which are a feature of all the drawings of the ancient Egyptians. However, the head was “already turbulent and deeply stained”, alluding to the wars and injustices of the world, often carried out in the name of religion. Goodison talks of lives rocketing “through separate centuries” and of love, the basis of Sufism. She regards herself as innocent when they first met, but the poem suggests sinister intentions as ‘he’ marked her “left breast with his stain”, knowing their paths will cross again and fate will bring them together. She will always be his. The Queen of Sheba is referred to - symbolic of magnificence and love, she is linked with the phoenix which suggests the reincarnation and transcendence:

*For the Queen of Sheba has willed me  
her bloodstone ring*

The mystic influence of being together through separate centuries is important for the idea of Sufic redemption. In the poem, the wind is frequently alluded to: “And he wed the faultless wind” which on another level refers to the Holy Spirit but is in itself so dramatic in Egypt in sandstorms. The seal of the serpent symbolises both the serpent at the entrance of every tomb which signifies death and evil, and the dove, the opposite, being the Christian symbol of love: “The seal of a serpent engorged by a dove”. The spilt, which is referred to, does not go all the way and is “stuck together with glue”, and relates to the differences in their lives whilst underneath their spirituality is the same. The poem illustrates the overwhelming feeling of love and mysticism as well as the themes of redemption and resurrection. I regard this as being a very sensuous poem, invoking all feeling of intensity and of being within the writer.



Other poems in the collection also refer to her relationship with Egypt. 'Caravanserai' (*I Am Becoming My Mother*, p.22) speaks of her favourite themes of dreams, the moon and water. Either as part of her dream or her past, remembers the "night by the Nile" and suggests that there was "Egypt in her hair." The past is revealed again in 'Letters To The Egyptian' (ibid, p.49) and she hopes that when she returns to her previous life, she will be recognised. She associates her journey with the source of the White Nile and the Blue Nile, perhaps reflecting on the source of her own life.

She suggests that at the height of the storm, she:

*chained myself with prayers  
they held)*

After this there was calm and peace. Her trust in her prayers had been fulfilled.

## Dreams

Dreams appear to be an important part of her spirituality and link with her spatial spirituality of place, yet also with transcendent spirituality because the dreams are often situated in Egypt or Africa. In her poem 'Angel of Dreamers', (*Turn Thanks*, p.75 ) she speaks of trying to set up a shop of dreams. These dreams are based on faith, and have the symbols of the moon and stars. This suggests, as well as her reference to Darwish and bazaars, the link between Sufism and her beliefs. She knows her dreams are of the best quality. However, other people selling dreams live in fear and superstition – yet she uses “just the power of prayer”, which she implies, is more powerful. She is imitated and attacked (as is God), yet the material world cannot hold such dreams. Instead, they can only expect “the proceeds from their bankruptcy sales” and will lead to nothing. (p.75). There is no fault in the dream of God, everything is beautiful in the ‘shop’, and perfect, neither is it only available to high officials, instead “I just threw open the doors and sat there quietly”. It is for all. She reflects that those who stop there are those who have tried other health schemes and “bush medicines” and they stumble wearily to look for something better in their lives. So the only ones who stop are those who are looking for something. Her suggestion that she is descended from the ancient Egyptians is mentioned in *Heartease* and is reflected in this poem – that her ancestor was a darwish chemist, and yet she is also a great-granddaughter of a psalmist and a “griot Guinea woman”, so there appears a real mixture of spirit ancestors. The payment for the dreams is sincerity and red roses – not perhaps too much to ask. In this dream shop, doves (especially Barbary doves) come and sing, symbolic of peace. So the dreams can bring peace and “ease”. A Tuareg Woman gave the song of the Barbary dove to the poet and she uses it sparingly, only when peace is really needed. When it has been

recited, it gives a “joyful gurgling” like a “rain replenished stream” (p.78) and it is only through this peace that she can withstand the efforts of all ‘dream sellers’ in the materialist world who aim to undermine her. She asks that when she sees God face to face, she prays God grants her:

*Celestial insurance from the arsonist efforts  
of the job-lot sellers.*(p.78).

She hopes God will recognise her talents even if she fails. She wonders if she can still be allowed to sell her dreams of peace and faith against those who pedal superstition and materialism.

In ‘Winter Dreams’ (*Turn Thanks*, p.80) she again revisits Egypt in her search for her identity and her dreams. Dreams are once again an underlying theme in her work. She dreams she is apprenticed to a master potter – someone who creates- perhaps an analogy with the creator and herself. The blue glaze of Egypt and its gleam is created. She also dreams she is a handmaiden to the “ancient of days” and is drawing water from the life-giving Nile and the water sustains whilst the potter creates. The potter, from whom she is taught is now “my father”, which could suggest her father in heaven, especially as he protects her from danger. However, the semi-circular vase, which she clutches in her dream, could allude to the moon shape of Islam and the raised letter “life” around the side of it, suggesting its importance. When she wakes there is a contrast with Egypt as there is snow instead of heat and desert. She feels that her soul is covered by a blanket and is not able to express itself in this cold. She needs the warmth of Egypt to be part of her spirituality.

Fantasy and dreams are suggested as Goodison journeys to hell in a translation of the Canto about Brunetto Latini (*Travelling Mercies*, p.24) from Dante’s *Inferno*, where

she meets Mr Brown, a Jamaican Duppy conqueror from her own land of 'look behind' (p.25). This duppy appeases the Afro/Jamaican yet she compares him to a 'Revivalist Darwish/Sufi who now is "leading me home"'. This illustrates that she still feels the pull to the Sufi and the advice is to "follow your guiding star" to attain your fate. She suggests that true poets are "God Blessed" and seems to feel that her 'calling' as a poet comes from God. She states she would not let Mr Brown be in hell if it was up to her, but she herself is ready to "follow her destiny". Her spirit guide (Ali Darwish) guides her. He turns and looks in her eyes (the mirror of the soul) and says "Well heeded is well heard" (p.27). Mr Brown counsels against arrogance and excessive self-love that is responsible for bringing people to hell. In its original form, this is largely a Christian poem. However, Goodison has cleverly adapted it to the Jamaican context by using a Jamaican duppy as the teacher. She adapts the themes of the work to her own idea of faith and spirituality, which includes Revivalist, Sufi and spirit guides as well as Christianity.

## **Rastafarianism**

In her interview with Kwame Dawes ( *Talk Yuh Talk- Interviews with Anglophone Caribbean Writers*, University Press of Virginia, 2001), she declares that Rastafarian thinking has been a strong influence on her work. (ibid.p.102). It defines and shapes her view of the world and the way Rastafarianism subverted the English language. Rastas gave a way of defining oneself for oneself. It helped her to see through “the game being played by the Establishment” (p.103). Rasta refuses to play this game (as you can’t win, according to Goodison), so they made up their own game and their own rules and subsequently subverted the language. This may also help explain why there are so few links with ancestors and spirit possession as Rastafarians refuse to be ‘possessed’ by spirits but adopt different ways for meditation and spiritual communication.

Goodison draws on Rastafarian ideas as well as the *Bible* and the *Quoran*. In particular, the last stanza of ‘Heartease I’, Pollard (1991, p.251) suggests that the poet puns on the sound of the pronoun ‘I’ and so includes a strong symbol from the Rastafarian belief system – the sound which is shared by the Rasta pronoun and the organ of sight. Although I, as a non-Rastafarian, would not see any particular Rasta connotations in this:

*Believe, believe  
and believe this  
the eye know how far  
Heartease is*

The 'I' being the Rastafarian sound for 'ego' and eye is important to the Rasta as seeing is the opposite of blindness – a hallmark of non-believers. Goodison generalises the statement by 'know' instead of 'knows' and this emphasises in Pollard's opinion (1991, p.231) that the heartease, especially for the Rasta man, is not yet attainable.

In 'Calling One Sweet Psalmist' (*To Us, All Flowers Are Roses*, p.53), Goodison dedicates her poem to Bob Marley (a Rastafarian). She writes of Marley rising to go with Emperor Haile Selassie to Ethiopia (whom Rasta's believe is a manifestation of Christ). They fly in a spiritual transcendence to get there and when they arrive in Africa, Marley is healed with "new leaves" and his flesh is purged of the poison of the "old ways." He asks to be nourished with honey and transcends and resurrects to new heights- especially as he has been promised that he may play on David's harp. He can "Come in now one sweet psalmist" and create new songs and psalms and can chant "celestially" and attain his full potential to be the sweet psalmist who sings God's words.

## Water

The element of water is a recurring theme and reflects spatial spirituality for whilst it is not a place, it is part of the natural world and the elements. God gives his spiritual blessings through rain. In 'Keith Jarrett – Rainmaker' (*I Am Becoming My Mother*, p.33), Goodison writes of the musician whose roots are in Africa so it is natural to pray for rain. His people are farmers and artists and the songs of redemption, "the petals of resurrection," which are lilies, all require rain. Therefore, to be born again requires rain. Prayers are answered, as when he opens the curtains, he watches "the lightning conduct your hands." This could be God's hands guiding the rain, but also the pianist's hands being guided. The blessing of rain is again asked for in 'Mine, O Thou Lord of Life, Send My Roots Rain' (p.32), dedicated to Gerard Manley Hopkins, the poet who also dedicated his life to Christ and who used an abundance of religious imagery and symbolism in his work. Goodison alters the poem to make it uniquely Jamaican – mentioning "bougainvillea" but says that in her appearance she is "hybrid". She says that as she is getting older she feels she has been so long on the earth "in a sere dry place" and watered (with blessings) only occasionally. Now, in her middle life, she is a tree with her trunk "not so limber." She hopes that the worms will have to wait much longer to eat her body on death – she wants a longer life but one which is fuller of God's love and blessings and in

*this noon of my orchard  
Send me deep rain*

Clouds bringing rain and blessing, bordering on the transcendent spirituality are again mentioned in 'rainstar iii' (*Heartease*, p.46). She says that she has been told that stars cannot shine from clouds – but as clouds bring rain and blessings she feels this cannot

be so. Instead she feels that the bright star is “rain star regenerating” and the stars bring light – symbol of God’s love so that between the rain and light there is:

*peace within  
about you  
grace and joy now follow*

She asks the star to rise- suggesting she hopes that God will rise again and regenerate her.

## **Stones**

An important theme in the work is ‘stones.’ She appears to use them to have a ‘spatial’ spiritual relationship with the elements. Two poems have ‘stones’ in their title: ‘Mother, the Great Stones Got to Move’ (*To Us All Flowers Are Roses*, p.4) and ‘Birth Stones’ (ibid, p.3) and in the title poem ‘Lapis Lazuli and Sapphire’ they are mentioned. In *Turn Thanks* she continues this theme. There are also various references to gems and jewels and all of these stones are given mystical qualities and give a rich texture to the work. The title poem brings together a multiplicity of linguistic traditions and cultures. It unites Ashanti with Zion and also the Nile with Stonehenge. I believe that these poems of her ancestors are another bond being released, but the bond is not as strongly spiritual in the same way as her last work – it is a different bond.

Stones of the past and future are mentioned in ‘Mother, the Great Stones Got to Move’ (*Guinea Woman*, Manchester, Carcanet, 2000, p.44). She feels that a stone is wedged “across the hole of our history”. This hole has in it the other side of history – the side of injustice and truth –her side of history and the history of ordinary people. This history needs to be told and she must be the one to tell it but the stone is covering



it. The stone (symbolic of prejudice and bitterness) must move in order for there to be spiritual healing and then the nightmares can ease away. In order for the children to have a future these stones, which are suffocating them and blocking their spiritual renewal, must be removed. When the world was created there was plenty of food for all but then another kind of poison - "powdered white" arrived. Drugs now replace the green of the land and with drugs come the gun, bringing death. This brings poverty which is overwhelming, especially for the homeless who have only got stones to sleep on. She invokes spiritual healing and a lifting of these stones (which are a burden, and have been for ten thousand years). She is critical of the "sacrificial lives we breed" that have led to the "suicide God of tribalism". If the burden of the stones (which symbolise coldness of heart) – past and present is moved, then light and spiritual rejuvenation can shine through.

In her poem 'When I Know You as Mountain', (*Turn Thanks*, p.69) she suggests that she can, at times, see God as part of the earth. A mountain can be steadfast and solid (like a stone) and it can reach to the sky, but then she also thinks of the 'mountain' as running liquid and ocean, the sun god and the moon. Therefore, God is all the elements that give life and she sees God as:

*exploding across*  
*My understanding as rockets*  
*Meteors, comets and shooting stars*

This suggests a violence and passion in her understanding of belief. In contrast, the last verse speaks of trying to find gentleness and tenderness in the Morning Star and in the daytime before the "final and fiery sunset". In this poem the tenderness being sought does not appear to be found. Her faith is like the forces of nature – air, fire, ice

and water – always creating and destroying, rarely at peace but spiritually linked to these elements.

Her poem 'Because I Have Been Everything' (*Heartease*, p.8) reflects directly on spirituality and the elements of light and water. The poet says that she has been many things in life, including a wild spirit. Now she has found "grace" which gives the key to possibility and hope. She is discovering herself as she suggests:

*My heart life is open, transparency*  
*My soul's life in otherworlds*

The good of morning and bad of midnight are with her and strive to be reborn, but through the sea (water again being important) washing away the badness. She sees the light as coming from within herself. In this poem, she is attaining a self-sufficiency, a peace within herself- not necessarily a relationship with God.

Therefore, Goodison uses Egypt, Africa and Jamaica as well as dreams, water and stones to illustrate a spatial spirituality that reflects her love and the importance she places on the elements and place. This spatial spirituality helps her to achieve the ultimate transcendent spirituality.

## Goodison and Christianity

Goodison's use of religious imagery is strong, especially in references to St John's Gospel (examined earlier). She is at times critical of the church, though not of religion. The church does not necessarily show her the way. In 'My Last Poem (Again) (*Heartease*, p.14)', she says that the "rosary beads are colder" and "that its harder to hold them". She recognises that both her poetry and her relationship with God are changing and reflects that the church does not have any answers. This theme is continued in 'Some Nights I Don't Sleep' (*ibid*, p.24) when she mentions the:

*False consciousness  
The teachings in the church  
Of everyman for himself (p.25)*

She feels religion should be more about healing and less about material goods – after all it was the church's obsession with material goods that assisted the colonisation process (examined earlier). Love is more important. Her God on the other hand:

*Speaks in silence  
or responds to drums (p.31, 'In Anxiety Valley',)*

She seems to have put distance between herself and the 'wild woman' (p.50). She has also put the 'King of Swords' behind her, as she now prefers the light of her new spiritual knowledge (p.55)

In Goodison's story 'Follow your mind' (*Baby Mother and the King of Swords*, p.21), the poet is critical of the church. Sylvie does not want to go to church without a hat or church frock (p.21). The hat that Sylvia thought she must wear is symbolic of hypocrisy. However, Gatta says its fine because they help out in church with food and clothes for the family. They are both at cross- purposes because Sylvie thinks you should join church because "you wanted to go there and worship God" (p.22) and not to receive. Sylvia believes in God more than most people there, who are only there for

food and used clothes, yet she is made to feel inferior. However she is desperately in need. When she did go to church in her hour of need the Rev. Sam Phillips made her feel small and insignificant. He believed that to be poor was a “result of some sin passed down from generation to generation.” (p.25). He had been born into poverty and now was a redeemed and righteous man. To be poor was the result of a generation of sin, so there could be little hope of forgiveness unless you were now rich like him. This is the church at its worst- a tool for social climbing. However, his dominant theology is ‘God helps those who help themselves’ – a traditionally John Stewart Mills, Victorian viewpoint. People, he argues, should not look for charity. However, Sylvie is already questioning him in her mind (although Rev. Sam particularly hates rebellious minds). He believes in the authority of ‘those in high places’ and that servants should obey their masters and that rebelliousness is the worst form of sin. Sylvia maintained that it was true that God helped those who helped themselves, but “because he was God, he really helped those who could not help themselves”. (p.27). His rebuff in the sermon causes Sylvie to reject the food parcel, even though she needed it so badly. This seems to be a far cry from the teachings of Christ and an illustration of the worst sort of hypocrite- born poor, and now ‘holier than thou’. This illustrates how wrong it is for the church to play God and not offer the charity that Jesus would have considered to be fundamental to Christian belief. Goodison is critical of Rev. Sam because he is not willing to help those people in need. This church is unfriendly, unlike the one in the country, so Goodison does not generally condemn the church just some aspects of it. The preacher questions a society that has children without a plan. The implicit question asked by Goodison is whether this sort of Christianity, brought by the coloniser, is suitable for Jamaica. It is the church that she is critical of – not God.

Goodison uses religion in both a positive and negative way to illustrate her relationship with God. The backdrop for some of the poems is imagery from the Bible, Islam and the Jewish faith. 'In City Gardens Grow No Roses as We Know Them,' (*To Us, All Flowers Are Roses*, p.13), the garden here has no blessings of water from God. The river is made of "asphalt" and there is only one tree (the symbol of life) there. This tree is blunted and dry but still hopes for regeneration by looking towards the East (symbol of Islam). Goodison mentions the poverty and degradation of slavery and compares the poor with Lazarus who received the leftovers from "the people with plenty".

The angels passing suggest both the Jewish Passover and the fact that angels are not stopping to give their blessings on these poor people. However, mint (symbol of virtue), if planted, will be able to let people know that the angels have passed – they are nearby. Other plants are suggested for the garden in order to heal "lost shining", which suggests the healing of the spiritual soul. She goes on to use the Biblical story of Joseph's coat of many colours, particularly as Joseph was a dreamer, (a favourite theme). She feels he must have been the poet "of the city". He had to interpret the results of violence. She mentions that even in a crowded place he has to witness (bearing witness to what he believes) and praying. Through the fear and savagery the poet, as the offspring of Joseph, in taking after him "have no choice but to sing". They still interpret dreams and remind the righteous of the blessings of the angels being near them, through the smell of mint that reminds them to keep hope and faith in their souls. The marks on the door and the Passover itself are a reminder of the Jewish feast of the Passover.

*After angels assigned to city churches  
have come and gone  
passed over*

However, the poor are still poor – the angels have forgotten them.

Christian redemption is highlighted in Goodison's poem 'Turn Thanks to Grandmother Hannah'. (*Turn Thanks*, p.14) She speaks of her grandmother Hannah aspiring to sanctity (and attaining it in the poet's opinion) through washing the vestments of the clergy. She did such a wonderful job of washing, starching and smoothing that every clergyman in the parish sought her services. This cleaning of wine-stained clothes, which Hannah did with so much zeal, seemed as if she was "harvesting energy from the coals of hell."

The poet reflects that:

*To be perfect in whatsoever you are called to do  
is counted in heaven as a sincere prayer* (p.14)

Whilst she was washing, she prayed and the poet gives thanks for the "redemption" in her washing. The washing, perhaps, also represents the washing away of sin. This illustrates that even those who do the most lowly tasks can attain greatness (and redemption) in the eyes of God.

Goodison does not wish to impose her God on anyone - she wants a freedom of having your own relationship with God and looking at what is good in all religions. God is what you make of Him and it is up to the reader, how she takes this level of meaning in her poetry, if she wishes. Goodison's voice (Narain, 1996, p.435) is powerful and confident and demands to be read aloud. She draws on a range of discourses and collapses boundaries between them such as the Bible, Sufism and Rasta. Goodison speaks in tongues with a sense of delivering the word and exploiting this style of delivery to powerfully consolidate her role as the poet-priestess. In

performance a pause or an inference in the speech can subtly alter the rhythm and therefore the interpretation and meaning of the poem. It can alter the multiplicity of language, in 'I Shall Light a Candle Of Understanding,' if there is no pause after 'I shall light' then 'light' ceases to have the same significance and then does not have a spiritual meaning. The readers' 'interpretative community' can also influence the multiple meaning – light may mean only the opposite of dark, but to some it is the light of the world – Jesus Christ. The reader also brings into the poem her own experiences and can interpret meanings in a poem that are personal to her and not necessarily meant to be interpreted as such by the poet.

I argue that Goodison feels no conflict between her spirituality and traditions. Her God is not really Jamaican but universal. Her work continues to develop to a different dimension. Some of her work (Scott, 1996, p.238) suggests that Christian ritual is able to shape a poem which can be a straightforward praise to God such as 'A Rosary Of Your Names.' (*Heartease*, p.58) Scott (1996, p.246) suggests that Goodison has an easy cohabitation of Christian and African cultural allegiance. She phrases her vision in terms of "redemption, resurrection" and Sundays, and at the same time asserts, in empathy with a jazz pianist, declaring that her roots are African – 'Keith Jarrett – Rainmaker.' (*I Am Becoming My Mother*, p.33) In her earlier work *Tamarind Season* 'The Road of Dread', Goodison speaks of the danger ensuing in animistic folk-beliefs, but the poem frames these uncertainties with an assertion of the positive protectiveness of the natural world and human companionship, and its universal application, that compares with Rastafarian beliefs. But Scott argues that it does not confer any sociological validity on these beliefs (1996, p.238).

I suggest that her spirituality is her own; it is what she has created. As Kendel Hippolyte suggests in an interview with Kwame Dawes, Goodison has “spiritual engagement” (2001, p.163). She has exercised the Existentialist principles of freedom and choice. She speaks on behalf of others and this can be dangerous -the assuming of others. She also speaks for others and as she rightly points out, some do not wish to be told. She uses religious imagery as a backdrop. Scott (1996, p.227) believes that all West Indian poetry has a spiritual dimension or a spirited edge to it. The slow unwinding of decolonisation encourages many poets to re-create an ultimate spiritual and cultural grounding in a lost Africa. This, I believe, is partly what Goodison has done especially in *To Us All Flowers Are Roses*. Her work illustrates that she does appear to believe in a God and in Jesus and also believes a mixture of other religions in the form of Sufism. Is it fair, however, to ‘mix and match’ religions? I believe it is, if it goes towards finding the meaning of life and spirituality, but it is also dangerous at times because it leaves little to cling on to, especially when life gets ‘tough’. She gets despondent about the dispossessed, the homeless and poor and also about women’s issues and the hardships some women have to face. She believes she needs to tell the world the truth as she sees it. Organised religion does not solve these problems and she walks away from it – it is not for her. She has, however, no difficulty mixing her faith in a male God with her being a woman, or that ‘He’ may be the God of the colonisers. She can still maintain her African traditions and her Jamaican roots. She is free and this brings choice, meaning and a sense of spirituality.

She is released:

*I hold no control, me of myself  
I am free  
From the considered hold  
Of frantic fingers  
On levers  
For when I thought I could hold*



*HE lifted me, flying free.* (‘Songs of Release’, p.13, *Heartease*)

I would suggest that there has been a slight progression in this work towards Christian imagery and a development of a more Christian spiritual God. However, her spirit guide Ali Darwish is frequently mentioned, but there do not appear to be as many references to Islam. In her later work she has fallen in love, not just with Egypt, but now with Southern Africa and there are references to bush medicines, but she does not dwell on these or the ancestors. I would regard her relationship with God as being deeply spiritual, bordering on the mystical. She feels that it is her calling to speak on behalf of her community and on behalf of the poor and oppressed. She has a fervent respect for her spirit guide and is influenced by Islam but perhaps she is not so much influenced by a Jamaican context as she is not living there full time. She uses intra-personal, inter-personal, corporate and spatial spirituality to attain transcendent spirituality and mysticism. I would suggest that this mysticism/spirituality is well developed in her work. Whilst some of the poems show conflict (perhaps within herself), there appears little doubts within the work. I would argue that there is little question that Goodison has attained an advanced spiritual relationship as defined by Lartey. However, because Goodison now lives in Canada and has been influenced by pastors and church members from Canada and America, perhaps looking at God as a Jamaican concept is not as relevant and examining Goodison’s own concept of God would perhaps be more appropriate.

## **Chapter 4**

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## Olive Senior

### Repressive Christianity or a Spiritual relationship with the Earth and Africa?

*Umblemished  
Father of Wisdom  
Lord of High Mountains  
Take my aspirations  
Beyond heights  
Of great men  
Reached  
And kept*

(Olive Senior, *Gardening in the Tropics*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe, 1995), 'Obatala: Father of Wisdom', p.116)

In contrast with Lorna Goodison, Olive Senior - in an interview with Anna Rutherford- ('Interview with Olive Senior,' in Markham, E A., (ed) (1989), *Hinterland- Caribbean Poetry from the West Indies and Britain*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe, 1989, p.212) states that, as a child, she felt more oppressed by religion than by anything else. She believes that a combination of a very restricted, narrow kind of Christianity, combined with poverty is ruthless as they both "attack the spirit, are anti-life, anti-freedom and soul destroying." (ibid). Senior believes her whole childhood, adolescence and early adulthood were wasted trying to transcend these (Rutherford, 1989, p.212). It is only when these handicaps have been overcome that she can hope to attain any spirituality. This spirituality is not linked to a God, but to her own inner peace and relationship with herself.

It is this repression, I would argue, that fashions her work. As with Goodison, there is a progression within her work. I suggest that in order to come to terms with 'her' God, she first has to face up to the 'demons' of her childhood which, I argue, are the Church and repressive Christianity. Much of her work rejects a Christian God and

particularly rejects the Church. She accepts that religion is important for some people, but she is not sympathetic to it. I suggest that she does feel that Jamaica, and ultimately herself, are hampered by this adherence to the traditional God of the coloniser. She appears to relate better to African/Arawak Gods. The progression in her work develops a relationship with the earth and Africa, that develops into a close spiritual union with God.

I would argue that Senior has a very ambivalent relationship with 'spirituality'. As Lartey argues (examined previously), spirituality is notoriously difficult to define and this is particularly the case with Senior. She spends much of her time illustrating throughout her work, a rejection of the Christian God or any notion of a Supreme Being. Her work is projected through conflicts and engagement. She rejects a Christian God but this does not mean she has no spirituality. I would maintain she is not mystical, as has been previously defined, and has, I would suggest, no transcendent sensory experiences. She appears to support the notion of African Gods and, it seems, she must at first strongly reject the bonds of the Christian Church, which have haunted her since childhood before she can move on and find spirituality. This spirituality, I would suggest, is in the form of Lartey's intra- personal spirituality – a spiritual relationship with herself through African Gods, her identity and her history. However, I would argue that the predominant type of spirituality in Senior's work is Lartey's 'spatial' spirituality which manifests itself through the role of landscape, plants and also through Africa and Jamaica. She develops a spiritual relationship with the land as a country and as a cultivator. It is through her rejection of a Christian God, exploring African and Arawak beliefs and searching through her history and identity on behalf of herself and community, that she attempts to find her

true spirituality in this spatial spirituality of a relationship with the earth. However, this spirituality is linked with a 'transcendent freedom'. Only when she loosens the bonds and cuts free from her past (*Arrival of the Snake-Woman*, London, Longman, p.44) is she able to "soar above our world", like Miss Coolie. She even needs to transcend- puts behind her- African Gods, Jamaican Kumina, and "Jesus' Second Coming" before she can attain real spirituality in the shape of freedom. (ibid.)

Senior's existential questions are 'who am I?' which leads to 'who are we?' which in turn leads to from where are we coming? (Dawes, 2001, p.74) It is through this, I would argue, that Senior develops her own sense of meaning in life, which is not mystical or indeed worshipping other gods, but trying to find herself and a sense of purpose to bring meaning to life and freedom from the past. This, it could be argued, is in itself a form of spirituality – a oneness with oneself – and Lartey's intra- personal spirituality.

Senior's verse explores the role of landscape in the quest for identity and belonging and this is linked with a search for a way to speak her own spiritual sensibility (Dawes, 2001, p.73). She is rooted in the earth, history and social realities, which is why she suggests that she uses the metaphor of cultivation (ibid). She argues that she is engaging the 'Other' in her dialogue and providing people with the means to proceed from voicelessness to engagement in a dialogue with the colonisers and those in power. She declares that she herself is not engaged in confrontation, but her purpose is to open up dialogue. (ibid, p.74) Her engagement is personal and also an engagement with ancestral history (ibid).

Senior often writes from the perspective of a young child who often has parents who are distant, absent or unkind, and sometimes the adults around her treat her unfairly. She writes about individuals but by using the 'eyes' of a child is able to be more direct and honest about aspects of the community, which may otherwise be accepted even if they are wrong. Senior is a rural poet/writer, brought up near the cockpit country, refuge of the maroons in Jamaica (Chamberlain, *Come back to Me My language – poetry and the West Indies*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993, p.249). Her village was isolated even from the nearest town and there was no running water, no electricity and a dirt road to the nearest town. Even the rest of Jamaica seemed far away. This, I would argue, is reflected in most of her work, which highlights issues of rural communities and the importance of nature. Her view of the world also encompasses plants. She does not see plants or nature as something separate. Plants are personal and have names, a life of their own, they are part of her life and she does not, I would suggest, separate her life from her art. Her book *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994) highlights plants and nature and her interest in gardening.

Senior has been compared to Derek Walcott for the clarity of metaphor and dynamic use of image in her poetry (Dawes, 2001,p.73). Senior regards the use of language as the least important aspect of her work. She believes herself to be 'bi-lingual' in both Jamaican English and Jamaican and uses the most appropriate language for each situation, as do her characters. Although Senior argues that she does not start out to make a political statement, it could be argued that her use of Jamaican language is, in itself, a political statement. She declares that writing in both Jamaican and Jamaican

English is good enough to be the language of literature (Funso Aiyejina, 'Desire to Tell Stories' *Trinidad and Tobago Review*. 1995, p.28). Ramchand (1988) states that:

*once there came into existence a class of West Indians who combined Standards and dialect in their linguistic competence, the two registers became open to influences from each other.*

Patterson (*Caribbean Passages*, Colorado, Lynne Reiner Publishers, 1988, p.17)

declared that it is at this point that Olive Senior enters the picture with regard to Caribbean writing.

Senior's command of the various registers of Jamaican English, combines with her ability as a poet. Her background in orality and flair with figurative language gives her prose a distinctive character (Patterson, 1998, p.17). In several of the stories in her first book *Summer Lightning* (London, Longman, 1986), a version of vernacular speech is the norm, rather than the deviation. The language of these tales, their diction, figures of speech, humorous asides and individuality of the characters draws the reader almost, as Patterson describes (*ibid*), intimately with the characters and this has to be experienced rather than described. However, these stories are written with the linguistic versatility of daily life using language that Jamaicans use – their dialect, and in more formal occasions, a more Standard English. Patterson argues (1998, p.16) that it is through her reliance on the devices of oral storytelling that Senior succeeds in finding a voice that is somewhat different from the standard forms of European discourse.

Even though Senior manages to use Jamaican English with flexibility, she is still the product of a society whom educational, economic, religious and political institutions are predominately European. Senior states (Aiyejina, 1995, p.26) that the European tradition has schooled her and, she argues, has enabled her to write. However, she

believes that also wanting to reclaim other traditions need not be in conflict with the European model. Senior, in her interview with Funso Aiyejina (1995), remarks that she did not have any powerful literary influences but she felt the power of words and wanted to be a writer. Growing up in a largely oral society influenced her desire to tell stories, using rhythm, which was part of everyday life.

Wilson Harris, amongst many others (Patterson, 1998, p.18) has criticised the Anglophone writer for the use of literary form to render 'invalid' the native world and pander to a European audience. However, Patterson recognises that Senior, whilst appearing at times to conform to the European model, is subtly attacking it by using traditions of oral storytelling. Alison Donnell ('The Short Fiction of Olive Senior,' in Conde, M., (ed), *Caribbean Woman Writers- Fiction in English*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999, p.117) locates Senior's work within this Anglophone Caribbean literature and within the context of the late 1970s and 1980s women's writing from the Caribbean. She suggests that Senior believes that the lives of individuals are interesting and worthwhile in their own right and not simply because they offer up experiences that are political, be they imperialist or post colonial. Donnell (ibid) argues that this does not mean that Senior is not political but that her stories demonstrate the fact that 'oppressive' ideological systems need to be understood within a context of everyday human meaning. A mode of resistance can be silent and invisible. Like most West Indian writers, Senior's stories are about everyday life and not about recycling colonial pastoral themes or glamourising and pandering to the European model of the 'noble savage' that makes the work, I would argue, so powerful. Her work is powerful possibly because she writes about individuals rather



than communities, in contrast, Lorna Goodison, I would argue, writes on behalf of communities.

Senior's stories do not advocate a nostalgic way of life or an essential Jamaican identity. Donnell, (1999, p.132) suggests that rather:

*They disclose the multiple and competing discourse in, and through which, a connecting proliferation of subject positions present themselves in Caribbean cultures. These conflicts include the traditional and the modern, town and country, old and young and the historically privileged and historically oppressed elements of society.*

Conflicts that are examined also include order and disorder, imposed structures and unleashed nature (Allen- Agostini, 'Olive Senior – An Embodiment of Conflict' cited in *Sunday Guardian*, March 12, 2000, p.19,) as well as Christian Church and African values (examined later). These conflicting aspects of society, according to Patterson (1998, p.38) lead to a strengthening of society. This happens in particular in Senior's book *Discerner of Hearts* (Toronto, M&S, 1995), which is a parable of broken through barriers and bridged gulfs. She argues that there is a need to bring into the discourse all voices. Just as she found difficulty in belonging to either African or European values, much of her work, examined later, looks at the difficulties of people 'fitting in' or belonging, being an outsider and of not relating to what is happening, being lonely, isolated or the wrong colour.

Senior explains that she is of mixed race and she has conflicting aspects to her life. This strengthens the theme of 'not fitting in' to any one group – of not belonging. (This is reflected in the numerous stories written about colour). When she went to stay with her adopted family, who were closer to white in colour and close to Europeans, she knew that she had to behave differently that she was being groomed for status and

advancement and that this conflicted with behaviour expected from her own parents. (Donnell, 1999, p.23) Her adopted parents had a higher status. She was conscious that she had to speak proper English and she had to pretend ignorance folk life, as this was regarded by people with European values as nonsense because they were related to black people. She had to find a way to mediate between these conflicts and she argues that this is the paradigm of the Caribbean. Her tales of childhood in *Arrival of the Snake-Woman* (1989) and *Discerner of Hearts* (1995) as well as *Summer Lightning* (1986) illustrate this and can be seen as autobiographical in her attempts to reconcile this duality. In many of the stories, children live with people who are not their natural parents or perhaps with parents who are distant and uncaring (Donnell, 1999, p.23). For example in 'Bright Thursdays' (*Summer Lightning*, 1986), the real parents are less well off financially, less educated and 'less cultivated' than the surrogate family. Frequently the child's natural mother is dark skinned whilst the adopted parents are lighter skinned or even white. The real parents, for whatever reasons, are often placed a distance from the child whilst the adoptive parents are suffocatingly present and can often embody a different, more European outlook and values and exercise a kind of authority linked with the establishment and the Church.

O'Callaghan (1993, p.4) suggests that Olive Senior's stories, amongst those of other writers, foreground female 'conditioning', transmitted by middle class values and aspirations in-built in an inherited educational system and emphasised by the teachings of an authoritarian Christianity. O'Callaghan argues that in some stories, older women within the community are blamed for supporting and transmitting damaging ethics, encouraging conformity and submission that are implicit goals of a good, Christian education for girls. Hand in hand with this go the Victorian attitudes

of respectability, morality and a taboo on the expression of female sexuality. This sexuality is associated with shame, defilement and the “forced renunciation of childhood freedom” for what is perceived to be dangerous vulnerability of female adulthood. (O ‘Callaghan, 1993, p.4)

Senior is an avid reader and also has a strong visual sense, which can be seen in her poems. Her reading enables her to know as much as she can about society. Self-realisation is important and she wanted to be her own person and in control of her life before she had ever heard of feminism. She does not advocate feminism as such; as it is ‘conceptualised’ in the metropolis, but she feels all women should have the opportunity to take control of their lives. Senior, however, does at times adopt the perspective of the male such as Mr Barton in ‘A View from the Terrace’ (*Arrival of the Snake- Woman*, 1989). Her stories can offer a significant and searching analysis of the damaging effect that ascribed gender identities have on both sexes.

Olive Senior trained as a journalist and she writes both poetry and short stories. Her poetry collections include *Talking of Trees* (1986) and *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994). Senior also draws on Jamaica’s natural world to comment on her country’s history, political situation and the effects of colonisation. Her works also include an *A-Z of Jamaican Heritage* (1984) and *Working Miracles: Women’s Lives in the English Speaking Caribbean* (1991). Her short story collections include *Summer Lightning and Other Stories* (1986) and won the Commonwealth Writer’s prize, *Arrival of the Snake- Woman* (1989) and *Discerner of Hearts* (1995). She divides her time between Toronto and Kingston, Jamaica. Her book – *Summer Lightning* (1980), is, I would argue, the most critical of her works with regard to organised religion,

possibly believing the church' motives are not strictly selfless. It is also her earliest published work which, I argue, shows the church in an unfavourable light, due to her childhood experiences. Perhaps she needed to write about this before she could move on and find her own God or spirituality.

*Talking of Trees* represented her earliest adult work and so according to Senior (Dawes, 2001, p.76) is bound to be more autobiographical, so there is more of the 'I' in it than in her later work. In *Gardening in the Tropics*, she has distanced herself much more from the 'I' (apart from the poem about Jean Rhys). She suggests that now she is far more confident of herself as a human being, not just as a poet. She wanted to take away the author and make the characters speak for themselves (ibid). Unlike Goodison, she does not see any role for herself, neither as an activist, nor as having a mystical role, but rather as illustrating the characters as "Here they are" (ibid).

Senior uses conflicts throughout her work, especially within her short stories. It appears that through this conflict she attains a freedom from the repression of her past and at times manages to attain a personal spirituality – Lartey's 'intra-personal' spirituality. A major part of her criticism is directed at the Established Church, which seems to have been a repressive force in her childhood. Whilst this is seen in a negative light, African Gods and African religion is often seen as a more positive force, although she does not write about African religion to the same extent as Christianity, especially in her earlier work. Examples of Lartey's 'inter-personal' spirituality can be seen when Senior writes from the perspective of a child in conflict with less sympathetic and distant adults. Senior has fewer examples of community

spirituality than does Goodison, as she does not appear to act as a priestess on behalf of the community. However, she does write about rural and village concerns and cultural identity, as opposed to the often lack of cultural identity in towns, cities and in the new colonial power of America. Lartey's 'spatial spirituality' is present in relation to the relationship Senior has between the landscape, cultivation and her garden as well as her relationship with birds.

## A Cruel God and a Repressive Church

Senior cites the Established Church, as part of the dominating culture and this dominating culture is one that is not necessarily sympathetic to the cultures and values of the Caribbean. Although in my discussions with Olive Senior, she remarks that Christianity acts as a 'backdrop' for the Caribbean, in that it is part of the educational establishment and part of culture so is never far away. It is also a repressive part of her childhood about which she needs to write in order to attain her freedom and her own spiritual transcendence. Her 'intra-personal' spirituality is not a mystical spirituality, neither is it a transcendent sensory experience.

The title story of *The Arrival of the Snake-Woman* (1989, p.1) is particularly critical of the Established Church. The story highlights the arrival of the Snake-Woman through the eyes of a child. The Snake-Woman is beautiful and an exotic prize won by SonSon in a game of straws. She is brought to the community as a silent bride, stripped of her own identity. However, Senior questions society's attitude to Miss Coolie. Miss Coolie is seen as the antithesis of a good Caribbean lady, conforming within society. As she is cited as 'the other' – a 'Heathen' (a frightening word for a small child) then the fantasy is fuelled, she is the 'opposite' and therefore an outsider but still something exotic and different. Indeed, she represents the absolute spiritual 'other' to Parson Bedlow:

*replacing rum drinking, fornication, smoking, cursing, lying, wife beating, idleness, backsliding, taking the Lord's name in vain and some other sins we have never heard of.* (p.10).

This only serves to make him look ridiculous. He has set her out as the devil's disciple. He is the leader of the community and respected (falsely it would seem), and so Parson Bedlow's hostile attitude towards Miss Coolie is reflected in the

community. However, she appears untroubled by this and continues with her Indian cooking and cultivation. He has turned the community into “deceivers and liars”, but not Ish – the child narrator who is sympathetic towards her. However, Ish wonders if she was a real “Heathen” because she was “so good and kind to me” (p.11). She only abandoned her jewellery because it was impractical for her work, but her jewellery is an outside signifier only, her soul remains intact and true. Meanwhile other members of the community were losing their standing as the church became part of the dominant culture. Mother Miracle who practised Jamaican Kumina as the “spirit had entered her body” (p.16) and Papa Dias, who summoned the Shango God of Thunder (p.15), were now laughed at. Yet, slowly people started to drift back as the church did not allow tambourines and drums in the service. Miss Coolie continues to be indifferent towards Parson Bedlow’s attitudes until her son, Biya, needs the medical attention that only the Parson can provide. However, in a bid to teach her a lesson, for not being conventional, and perhaps show her who is boss, he arrogantly refuses to help and turns her away. Perhaps this reflects Senior’s view of the church as being cruel, tyrannical and ‘high handed’ to those who do not conform. Miss Coolie has to travel to the bay to get the help she needs. However, the church suffered a greater loss of numbers after this even though some people still went because of the ‘knowledge’ they could get from the church school. Ish however, realises that he has “sickness of the soul” because the charity and love that he had been taught that Jesus possessed and the 10 commandments of loving one another were not really part of the church in practice. Ish vowed he would never be like Parson Bedlow or a missionary.

Miss Coolie forgave the Parson – showing her to be a much better ‘christian’. Later, she has to return to Parson Bedlow to ask for her son to have a place at the school, but

this time she is welcomed into the flock as she wears “the garb of conformity and acquiescence”. (Donnell, 1999, p.125). She is dressed for Sunday now like other women, all in white, with long stretched petticoats and skirt, a long-sleeved high necked blouse and white headscarf that totally hides her hair (p.38). She does this only because it is the best for her son and for the love of him she would be prepared to do anything. However, these garments cannot conquer her spirit or her conscience and it is evident that Miss Coolie has made a cultural compromise, which comprises of changing her costume, but she has not converted to the level of belief. She has neither abandoned her culture nor history as those around her naively assume, but has only taken on this new identity whilst she can acquire what she wants out of it and then her true identity can be reassumed:

*She has reverted to wearing saris again...put on her bangles, her rings, earrings and her nose ring; put a red spot on her forehead to show she is a married lady..And she gave all her daughters Indian names..’ (p.43)*

Miss Coolie is recognisable as one of Senior’s characters who represent the mode of resistance to the dominant ideology. Miss Collie will not abandon her history or her culture and though she has to take on the garb of conformity to get an education for her son, her self-esteem and her identity remain intact. If she is being critical of the church it is perhaps only what the church deserves in expecting her to conform before they give her medication or an education for her child. This should, if the church was following the example of Christ, be given freely, regardless of ‘conformity’, as Jesus did not conform. However Miss Collie represents a silent mode of resistance that endures at the level of consciousness despite the necessity of working within dominant cultural imperatives (Donnell, 1999, p.126). Miss Coolie was able to “soar above the world still structured around our faith”(p.64). This is African faith,



Jamaican Kumina and Christianity. However, Ish believes he is unable to attain his 'spiritual' freedom like Miss Coolie because he feels:

*halfway between the old world, where my navel string is buried and the new, unable to shake off the old strictures, the sentimental attachments of my upbringing, not feeling, like Miss Collie, at ease enough to shift fully into the relentless present (p.45)*

Perhaps this reflects Senior's views and why she herself finds it difficult to attain spiritual freedom.

A disturbing association with Christianity is highlighted in 'Lily, Lily' (*Arrival of the Snake Woman*, 1989, p.112). The subject of child abuse is examined and its association with power, the Establishment and especially the Church. The adoptive father, as is so often so in Senior's work, associated with the colonial order. Lily describes him:

*And always now the nightmare of his hands ugly and thickly covered with matted hair like some wild beast his hands holding the reins his hands at table carving the roast his hands holding the prayer book in church his hands .....unbuttoning.....trembling...touching (p.121)*

The prayer book being mentioned in the same sentence as the unbuttoning of the dress, stresses the hypocrisy of going to church, the 'appearance' of being Christian and the respectability that goes with it. Yet the church is not able to protect vulnerable young children and may even turn a 'blind eye' to such activities. There may also be a metaphoric link between the prayer book representing the church, the establishment and colonial order and the abuse of Lily as the abuse of Jamaica by the church, establishment and colonial order. She also says that the hardness of the bench of the church pews helped her to become a non-believer, reflecting I would suggest a child's view of disliking church and religion and also perhaps suggesting her own view justified through a child's eyes.

God is seen as only a God for others in 'Country of a One Eye God' (*Summer Lightning*, p.16). Ma Bell still prays and talks to God, possibly as a result of her conditioning, because even she recognises that God is sometimes "deaf and blind". However, she finds him a comforting presence and talks directly to him. In this story, I would suggest that Senior seems to emphasise the fact that while Ma Bell may talk to him he does not appear to listen and that she is misguided in putting her faith in him. She tries all her life to be righteous and lives a good life, but then her grandson comes back having escaped from the law and now is on the run. He demands money. The only money she has is that which she has saved all her life for a coffin on her death, because again, perhaps misguidedly, she:

*Wanted to leave this world and enter the next cocooned in the luxury she never had in life (p.22)*

It suggests that perhaps people are better making the most of this life rather than believing too much in an afterlife. Her grandson laughs at her faith and tells her

*God is a one eye God. Him only open him good eye to people who have everything already so him can pile up more on top of that (p.24).*

God, he says, is not interested in the poor suggesting that repressive Christianity itself brings poverty. Ma Bell is willing to die for her dream of having a coffin, which highlights the injustice and futility of saving all your life for an afterlife – brainwashed by the dream.

In 'Confirmation Day' (*Summer Lightning*, p.80) the thoughts of a young lady about to be confirmed are represented by a series of overlapping and repeated observations (Donnell, 1999, p.122). The girl is struggling to prepare herself for confirmation and to know what it all means as she tries to make sense of the "spiritual dimensions of

her imminent experience” (Donnell, *ibid*). She mixes up being a child of God with dying, because children who are very ill are confirmed before they die. She also associated God with clouds, which instead of being magical are “clouds of terror” because he is always on “billowing clouds of white and His judgment was swift and terrible.” (p.82). She hopes the bread and wine of her confirmation, which the parson says will help make her stronger, will actually assist her against God chasing her with his clouds, rather than, as she should after confirmation, feeling closer to God. Then she associates the smell of the church with the smell of old people and realises that the young never return to church after their Confirmation Day because “of the terrible reality of Him”. (p.82) She feels that she would be obliterated by ‘His’ reality (*ibid*.) so she believes that confirmation will squeeze the life out of her. She therefore sees God as a tyrannical God, sitting in cruel judgment over the world and there is a “terrible reality of His existence.” (p.83).

However, the moment of the confirmation is witnessed by the grandmother with conventional pride which should allow her granddaughter spiritual grace, but instead, this is seen as more secular by the girl and not ‘moving’ at all. The flashing ‘Sprite’ sign is a sign that her faith is not with God but with consumer capitalism. This brings a sense of escape and liberation. She irreverently sees the Bishop’s car as “a small black beetle in a vast green world” (p.84) – a sign that not only is the Bishop irrelevant, but also God. She knows:

*instinctively that not the reeds in the river nor the wine nor the blood of Christ nor the Book of Common Prayer can conquer me. (p.84).*

The emphasis on reeds is important in her picture of a tyrannical God, because in a disturbing story in the Old Testament, Moses had to be hidden in the reeds so that he, unlike all the baby boys of the time, would not be killed. There is an ultimate sense of

freedom as she declares her independence from a patriarchal, tyrannical God, “not a single cloud of God in that sky” (p.84) but appreciates that breaking away from convention and her grandmother will be hard. Her thoughts are left untouched by an experience that is meant to touch. She has attained her own spirituality – an ‘intra-personal’ one. She has attained freedom from a repressive faith.

The same irreverence is shown in ‘Do Angels Wear Brassieres?’ Becca is cheeky, inquisitive, intelligent and resists with enthusiasm her aunt’s attempts to bring her up properly. Donnell (1999, p.123) regards Becca as probably the most irreverent and knowing of Senior’s child protagonists. She is the opposite of the colonial ideal that Erna Brodber (‘Perceptions of Caribbean Woman: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes,’ cited in O’ Callaghan, E., *Woman Version – Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women* London, Macmillan, 1992, p.32) describes as “delicate, diffident, tender, pleasing, tactful, suffering at home.” Becca has spirit. Her night-time study of the Bible by torchlight seems pious and admirably conventional, but then we discover that her intention is not to study but to “try and find flaw and question she can best them with”. (p.67). She recognises that the Bible and the Church are being used to repress her, socialise and silence her so that her spirit is dampened. She links God with the shape of the big fat Anansi in the corner of the roof (p.67) (symbol of folklore) and winks at him irreverently. She has an enquiring mind, but for her questions she is “licked” and told that she has the devil in her (p.70).

With the much awaited arrival of the Archdeacon to Auntie Mary’s house, what Becca will say or do in his presence terrifies her aunt and mother to the extent that even though they profess Christian morals, they pray that she will get sick and have to

stay in bed (p.73). They are, however, pleasantly surprised by her excellent behaviour and are confident enough to leave her alone with the Archdeacon. Becca seizes the opportunity to exercise her knowledge and questions aspects of the Bible. Becca begins a deep discussion, which initially the Archdeacon finds amusing, though he is unsure of where the conversation is taking him or whether he should be speaking to an eleven-year-old like this. She is, in her conversation, putting him to shame and making him inferior to herself. Becca's aunt and mother, however, come back into the room and are particularly mortified as they hear the notable question "Do angels wear brassieres?" They drop the tea tray and confusion results, although the Archdeacon himself is not particularly shocked by the question but is pleased that he doesn't have to answer amidst the confusion. It is, I would argue, Becca's way of questioning the dominant culture and shows her resistance to the church. She finds the answer to the question, not from the Archdeacon or anyone in the church or her family, but from Mr Connor, her friend, who simply says "only lady ones do." (p.79) She shows her resistance to her upbringing by initially refusing a conventional life of the scholarship child, instead wishing to run away to the circus, go night clubbing, drink alcohol and dance all night –going against the view of a 'good Christian woman'. However she initially refused to go away to school, she is fuelled by the knowledge that she can find some really awkward questions for the Archdeacon next time, illustrating she feels no remorse for what she has done and again finding freedom in escaping from repressive religion.

In Senior's story 'The Glass Bottomed Boat' (*Discerner of Hearts*, 1995, p.106)

Christianity is seen once again in a less than favourable light. When it is mentioned it is in a particularly negative way. Eric John initially only went to church because "he

liked the sound of organ music” (p.114). Sybil Pearson, his new secretary was initially belittled because she wore clothes that proclaimed themselves

*Christian- those self-righteous women who had nothing better to do than go to church and prayer meetings every night and act holier than other people” (p.109)*

However, when Sybil, a regular and devoted church -goer became pregnant by Eric – a married man, and really needed friends and help but simultaneously she needed the Church most, she was forced to leave in disgrace – she was “read out”. In leaving the church she had lost everything – the church was not there for the needy – contrary to the teachings of Jesus. However, eventually she no longer needed the church – or the cultural conditioning it brought. Instead she grew plants and attained a freedom and a form of spiritual freedom from those. Eric, however, seems unable to find solace in anything and just smashes up Sybil’s plants – her freedom.

Christianity is linked with violence and: in ‘Ancestral Poem’ from her book *Talking of Trees* (1985), she tells of this heritage and the poet’s hard-won freedom from rituals and rigors and their continuing hold on her imagination.

*My mother stunned  
Wept and prayed  
Forgive them knowing not  
What she prayed for*

Synonymous with Jesus’ words on the cross – forgive them, they know not what they do. Christianity is linked with “centuries of dirt”. The second stanza portrays confusion in the mind of the writer between her father in Heaven and father on Earth. When one day: “I did not pray” she feels she is free and the final line “confirmed me freedom” is reminiscent of Sylvia Plath’s work in her sense of defiance. This defiance of that part of her heritage is bound up with the establishment in the form of the Church. Senior could possibly have found a new sense of liberation as she shakes

off these rituals and traditions – she has found her own spirituality – a transcendence, not to a relationship with God, but a spiritual freedom of a relationship without him. In her collection of poems *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994), Senior is critical of Columbus who colonised the island in the name of Christianity. In ‘Meditation on Yellow’, she states that for the exchange of a string of islands, Columbus and the colonisers “gave us a string of beads” in the form of a Catholic Rosary. It was greed that pushed them to terrorise. Silver of the armour, sword, steel and bullet and all this carried out in the name of the Lord – even his cross was silver and threatening. Yet this greed to move from silver into gold, instead of being seen as a sin, was seen as ‘the gateway to heaven’. Senior makes a direct reference to the church owning the communion plate, and a different form of silver service is mentioned with a new form of slavery – waiting on tourists, but the establishment and the church do not own Jamaica:

*You don't own  
the tropics anymore*

Christianity and the church have no role in Jamaica now- it is perhaps time for Jamaica to find its own version and move away from Columbus’ model. Jamaica should find a spiritual freedom for the whole community (Lartey’s community spirituality) but this would be free from colonialism and Christianity. The poem’s developing irony illustrates the resistance to the coloniser in the present, with imposed social habits and imposed religion, wondering how they will ever understand Jamaica:

*You cannot comprehend  
the magic.*

In ‘Hurricane Story 1903’ the tale of Noah’s Ark is the backdrop. It is written, as Braithwaite would say in ‘Nation Language’. It may allude to Noah’s Ark, but it is particularly Jamaican in its context. The poet mentions yams, sweet potatoes, cassava

and corn that the grandparents grew, to make the story relevant to Jamaica and to show this is not a traditional Bible story. The family did not need courage from God to survive the storm, but it was Granny who would “extract milk from fallen coconuts” to make a chocolate drink to “give us courage.” The storm is predicted not by God but by the postmistress, who puts out a black flag. It is not God who instructs the grandfather, but his instincts as a “seventh son of a seventh son” that helped him to read the signs. It was through traditional ways and magic rather than faith in God that allowed him to survive. The grandfather knew from instinct and from his ancestors what to do, not from God’s instructions. The Caribbean weather also out-trumps the flood in the Bible. “Noah’s Ark was never as crowded and wet. “ The poet’s grandparents wait for the storm to finish with granny up to her waist in water, searching “the blue skies for a sign as Noah’s wife did”. (p.20). It is not the white dove – a sign from God that tells of safety but the peculiarly Caribbean sensay fowl and favourite leghorn rooster. They have spent the night together in the cotton tree; traditionally a harbinger of African spirits and the poet looks forward to see the offspring of this night of passion between the two birds. Instead of using traditional, European idioms for the signs from the Bible, the poem is made uniquely Caribbean by the hurricane, and instead of the dove that Noah spotted, there are the missing “sensay fowl and favourite leghorn rooster”. This gives real relevance to the story in a Jamaican context. The Bible, I would argue, has been marginalised to emphasise the relevance of Jamaica and Jamaican symbols and signs above those of Christian imagery.

Christian conditioning is again illustrated in ‘Hurricane Story 1944’ (p.25). Mother, who hardly ever spoke, “crooned hymns in the garden.” This poem also regards



Christianity as something paradoxical and sinister, as the father in his Sunday best who pedalled to where his navel string was buried. Whereas the Western expectation of Christian observance is undercut by the Afro-Caribbean phrase for “the place you were born in”. The father’s mother (in Creole) expects the young man to support his parents “as it ordain (as it set out in the Good Book amen)” (p.21). He marries and later loses everything in a hurricane. Though the family has lost everything in this hurricane, the wife orders her family to “thanks to the Lord each night” for what they receive even though they only have black tea and water crackers. This emphasises Senior’s continued theme of poverty linked with repressive Christianity. Every one had to work hard to make ends meet, yet her husband took all the money and got drunk and beat her up. Despite this, every “Sunday she went to church and sang” in thanksgiving for what she had. This Christian conditioning, I would suggest, is seen by Senior as, at best, misguided and she questions the concept of a just God. Yet, it is also the Caribbean way of mixing strength and sufferance.

In a further poem ‘Seeing the Light’ (p.93), the invasion and colonising is once again the subject, as Jesus is traditionally associated with light. Yet, whilst the ‘Conquista’ were supposedly bringing light, they destroyed the countryside with machines and by burning, so that erosion has taken place and the land has become less fertile. The animals have also gone: only “our bones will remain as a testament to this effort to bring light”. Before the arrival of light there was always a respect for Mother Earth. The natives always gave back “our thanks and praises”. They respected the Gods and the Moon and its phases. It would have been easy and fine for the conquerors to take a little – but not be so greedy and take so much, especially tobacco. The conquerors also took the souls of the West Indians – they took their religion away from them so

that they no longer had the power to “summon the spirits”. The conquerors told of one God whom “had the power to bring us the true light, but we waited in vain.” (p.84). Yet the contradictions of Christianity are intense. Those trying to bring light are dressed in black, linking it with mourning and so many people being killed. How could it be that “Cristo”, the bringer of light was nailed to a “dead tree”, crucified and tortured? Now the West Indians are supposed to bow down and worship him. The poet recognises that Christ may have laid down his life to ‘enlighten us’ but that more trees, such as the one He was crucified on, need to die to illuminate his death, “Just as many leaves must fall to cover up our dying.” How many more people need to die for His death to have been worth while? There may be a long way to go before real Christian ideals permeate throughout the world. Others must recognise the true message and not use Christianity for their own ends, selfishly and cynically. The poem contrasts criticism of Christianity with positive aspects of nature and spirituality (Collier, 1996, p.228). Senior sees her work, and particularly this poem, as making no distinction between life/land or living and landscape. In ‘Seeing the Light’ she writes from the persona of a native South American and portrays what would be said if this person had a chance to talk to Europeans.

In her latest work *Over the Roofs of the World* (expected publishing date: 2005) her themes include ‘birds’ and ‘blue’ and there appears less cynicism towards Christianity or the Church. However, this is not replaced by an acceptance, but a concentration on other themes so that Christianity is peripheral and perhaps she has moved on from the direct condemnation in her earlier works. However, there are still some of the poems in this collection that renew her criticism. In the poem ‘Pearl Diver’, the poet speaks of the cruelty of Friar Antonio who uses the poet’s father to dive each day for the

wealth under the sea and treats this father cruelly in between. This is all the more harrowing because Friar Antonio is a member of the Church and this continues with Senior being critical towards the Church and its followers who conduct themselves in the name of Christ. Her father is mentioned as going down to the depths to bring up:

*Ave Maria  
bring up sweet  
Pater Noster.*

The hypocrisy of the sweetness of these Christian illusions, contrasting with the cruelty with which the father is treated is not lost in the poem. The further anomaly is that her father is finding so much wealth for the Friar, who traditionally is supposed to give up all worldly things – especially wealth. When her father comes up from the dive with nothing, Friar Antonio:

*Calls it an insult  
to our maker.*

He alleges the poet's father cannot find anything because he is thinking of sin, especially of his wet dreams and the Friar "has him whipped". It is the Friar, and ultimately the Church, that is sinning in behaving this way.

'White' is one of her most openly critical poems regarding Christianity in this collection. It also highlights a recurring theme in her work – colour. Many of her stories mention the person's shade of black, as if colour is very important to her throughout her work. In this poem she castigates the linking of white with goodness and the idea that you go to Heaven to "become whiter than snow". This is what the church tells Miss Dora, who is forever washing clothes to make them clean. Her whites are purged with "laundry blue" to get rid of the dirt, just as sinners are purged. She is hardworking and the allusion that people may be dissatisfied with her washing even though she does her best, may allude to Christianity. She is, as are so many of

Senior's characters, doing her utmost to live a good, decent and hardworking life and yet this is often not seen as good enough for the church although it should be. Poverty is again linked with repressive Christianity. The implication is that no just God would deny the right of such as Miss Dora to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Heaven shouldn't be for 'do-gooders' - there for the appearance but quick to look for the bad in people. Miss Dora may not 'come up to the mark' in chapel because she is not white and this makes her forsake chapel, though she still keeps Sunday as a day of rest and she has not lost any of her goodness or her faith in God. She will not go through the "darkened church door". Sin is seen as black and yet she is made to feel that you can only become white if you have no sin. However, what would all "the fine folk in Church" wear on Sunday if she did not wash their clothes? At times the church congregation are sometimes the 'worst sinners' but the irony of it is that they always look neat and tidy. Senior asks why she should want to be white and feels that she would have to tell Jesus to "go easy on the bleach"- that black does not mean sin and that colour should be respected. The Christian ideal of 'all equal in the eyes of God' should be the foundation of the Church, but it is absent. It appears that all Ministers of the Anglican Church are good for is eating up all the Sunday dinner, even when people have so little food that it leaves them nothing for supper ('Zig Zag', *Discerner of Hearts*, p.206)

## Identity

Senior also recognises that America has now replaced Britain as the coloniser and is in danger of swamping the Caribbean with its culture and values. America replaces Britain by bombarding the Caribbean through the use of the media. This challenge to identity also includes building up the concept of the 'American Dream,' presenting the American way of life as being the most desirable. Senior is concerned that young people are caught up in a 'satellite' culture and that the true indigenous cultures, which just began to be explored at the time of independence, are being swept away or ignored (Lisa Allen Agostini, 'Olive Senior – An Embodiment of Conflict' cited in *Sunday Guardian* (March 12, 2000, p.19), 2000).

Carol Boyce Davies and Elaine Fido (*Out of the Kumbla – Caribbean Women and Literature*, Trenton NJ, African World Press, 1990, p.16) believe that the greatest threat to Caribbean life at this time comes from the denial of the spiritual/intuitive/emotional strengths which have developed to sustain the customs of the past as well as provide stability for the future. This denial takes the form of adherence to excessive materialism, attraction to fast food, video recorders, cars and multi-channelled TVs, assisted by American influences. It is this danger that can often be seen as being highlighted in Senior's work.

Senior often speaks through the eyes of a child and one that is often lonely and alienated. Even the 'good' adults she writes about are often ostracised from society, such as Bro Justice in 'Summer Lightning'- an outcast Rastafarian. The Snake Woman (*Arrival of Snake- Woman*, p.1) is also an outsider as is Mr Chin (reflecting

Senior's strong Chinese connections) in 'A Tenantry of Birds' (*Arrival of the Snake-Woman*, p.46). Colour is also a recurring theme – children are often upset about their colour, usually because adults tell them they should be lighter. In the 'Two Grandmothers' the narrator asks "Mummy, am I really a nigger?"

So many of the girls in Senior's stories want to have a man, for example Cissy in 'Discerner of Hearts'. However, men and fathers seem to be virtually absent from the stories or, if they are present, they are weak and faceless. Sons and grandsons fare little better as in 'Country of a One Eye God' when Jacko treats his grandmother so badly and also Miss Evadney's sons in the 'Chocho Vine'. Mothers don't appear to be any better at times; they often seem to have left their children with grandparents or relatives while they go to 'foreign.' They promise to collect the child but never seem to turn up or ignore them as in 'The Lizardy Man and his Lady' (*Discerner of Hearts*, p.99):

*the little child cannot even go near her mother now, she pushes her away, tell her to go and play. Have no time for her at all. Sometime as if she don't even see her*

The Lizardy man turns out to be a drug dealer who is possibly selling drugs to her mother. Guns are the norm and violence permeates throughout the story. Even grandmothers are at fault, it could be argued because they are forever 'licking' the child as they "spare the rod and spoil the child as the Good Book Says" (*The Chocko Vine*, p.140) as though Christianity could be blamed for this undercurrent of violence that permeates throughout Jamaican society. Rastas seem no better as they help themselves to Miss Evadney's Chocko vines ('The Choko Vine' p.145) even though Miss Evadney is poor and needs the money from selling them. Eventually the Rasatas cut it down with a machete – cutting the only means of support and pride she has – no sign of a positive faith remaining.

## African Gods and cultivation

Senior's collection *Gardening in the Tropics* (1995) highlights the poet's pre-occupation with nature, Africa, Yoruba religion, culture and the Amerindian. It also illustrates the gradual diminishing of the role of Christianity in her work, as if she recognises that she must move on and break the bonds away from her childhood and repressive religion. She is perhaps attempting to move on in order to find her own spirituality and so must now explore African Gods to see if she can find this spirituality and relationship with herself (intra-personal) through Africa. Although in her interview with Dawes (2001, p.85), Senior acknowledges the importance of the Bible and the oral culture that went with this during her childhood. However, Collier (1996, p.229) argues that Senior affords considerable respect to African spirituality in the Caribbean.

The work is organised into 4 sections: 'Traveller's Tales', 'Nature Studies', 'Gardening in the Tropics' and 'Mystery'. The work treats the vegetation of the Caribbean first as natural and then under cultivation. Most of the poems, I would argue, emphasise her close spiritual relationship with place – both the land and Africa. The closing section portrays the West African nature of the Gods of the Caribbean (Collier, 1996, p.228). The opening poem 'Gourd' is a shaped poem and brings all the themes together. The 'Gourd' is portrayed as a "cosmic container" of the calabash and is simple to look at, yet it symbolises divine creation and universal unity according to Collier (ibid). The container of pre-historical and historical significance discharges its African powers magically on those "mystical shores". Senior asks whether harnessing this simple utensil to make a rattling sound and a dancing rhythm

in the New World can “un-stopper the faint voice of an African spiritual legacy” (Collier, 1996, p.228). Senior associates the creation stories of the first flood and cosmic snake, not with the Bible, but with African traditions. The Gift of Life does not appear to come from a Christian God, of whom there is no mention, but from Orehu, the spirit of water and sacred Mbaraka. She states that “we’ve walked from that water, from those mystical shores”. This collection, I would agree, is an attempt to get back to those roots, those “mystical shores” with a re-assertion of African’/Arawak beliefs and a development of a spiritual relationship with those ideals and beliefs rather than any relationship with a Christian God. The collection associates with the soil, with cultivating that soil, rural Maroon Jamaica and turns its back on the establishment and the Church. Whilst Senior does make some incidental references to Christianity, these have been mentioned earlier in the chapter. It is the mainly African /Arawak with some references to Christianity that is now examined in detail.

Christianity and African traditions are linked in the fourth of five variations of ‘Bamboo’, (p.79) the speaker is an eleven year old girl, who is testing her courage by lying in a bamboo grove that folklore says is inhabited by duppies, which induce paralytic fright in their possessed victim. There is also an intermingling between this and Christianity as the girl thinks she may:

*One day in bamboo cathedral  
I might encounter even the Holy Spirit (p.79)*

This Holy Spirit will help her breathe a “naturally fresh and liberating air”, so she appears to have respect for the empowering properties of the Holy Spirit, but not a Christian Holy Spirit and not so much respect for the church, because “Church makes me sneeze” (p.79)



In a similar vein 'Caribbean Basin Initiative' tells of fishermen who, in keeping with African beliefs, especially those found in Haitian Voodoo, swear allegiance to Ague "Sensitive sovereign of the sea" (p.30). Ague must be honoured before the fishermen can hollow out a tree to make a canoe. For two young men, this process was not followed and their canoes did not float. Collier (1996, p.230) regards Senior's sensitivity to the cross-cultural echoes of language as being detectable here. The final aspects of the poem speak of 'converting' a tree into a canoe- which could also refer to the conversion of the colonised by missionaries and 'uphold' in the sense of 'make float'.

Much of the collection refers to Senior's relationship with plants. She associates Jean Rhys' graveyard with flowers (p.50) – spring flowers when she feels Jean Rhys would prefer bright summer flowers. The creation of the earth is also associated with plants – the fern (p.67) was part of the beginning of the earth, signifying the importance as does Lucifer who falls as an innocent "star-flower" (p.66), that is now recognised as "Madame fate" and is poisonous. Senior associates pineapple with the colonisers, who have adapted the fruit as their own and yet (p.64) they never suspect the "retribution" that is in store as the pineapple is "waiting, counting down".

According to Collier (1996, p.229), the introduction of plantation monoculture (which is coupled with the European notion of 'cultivation', hence culture) is not only referring to the pineapple but also represented with gentle ironic dramatisation of God's injunction to chop down the tree of life ('Tree of Life' p.91). This tree is where the folk of the New World get their sustenance. There is confusion between Christianity and traditional African and Amerindian beliefs and the poem also

highlights politics and social conditions. Senior plays on these ambiguities as God established the tree “before the flood” and “(after the great fire)” (p.91). The Caribbean images are brought into sharp focus, such as the wild pig, the woodpecker and the rat of Amerindian fable. The story of Adam and Eve in the Bible is paralleled, but distorted as the “Mighty one” took pity on them and planted the tree. This tree bore fruit of every kind. However, the tree was a secret. It was Mapuri, the wild pig, who found it (and not Eve as in the Bible) Mapuri stuffed himself with fruit and the rest of the population wanted to know its whereabouts and tried to send the woodpecker to follow him, but the woodpecker couldn’t keep quiet. It was the rat (again of Amerindian traditional fable) who succeeded although “he tried to keep it hidden” and they had to “threaten to kill him before he took us there”.

When they found the tree they fell down and praised “Him” and then “we ate our fill”. However, this meant that they did not have to do any work and they just had to “reach overhead” and life became easy. “His Voice” then told them to “*Cut the Tree down*”. They obeyed, though they were dismayed. God is mixed up with the coloniser who tells them to cultivate many crops from the tree. Greed had got them in this predicament, but they still had to chop

*away for generations  
until it swayed and fell.*

The cuttings and plants that they took from the tree led to “mixed farming”. However, multi-national companies and the colonisers in the guise of “long-sleeved white-shirt boys” tried to persuade local people to cut down these mixed crops and grow just one again – because there was more money in it. Just one crop could be exported as a cash crop for material gain and greed, for such things as fast cars. The poet questions the wisdom of the conquerors/ multi-nationals and wonders if there is a

drought or blight “What will they eat?”. She feels that the great plan means that all the seasonings, food and medicines are all in the ground (her link with spatial spirituality – all she needs is there). The idea of cultivation has come full circle because if God only wanted one tree in his garden why then did “He make us chop down the Tree of Life?” The return of the tree and garden notion exploits Western/oriental ideas of Paradise and the way in which human wisdom, that ‘evolves’ into monocultural destruction, is destroying the source of life and knowledge.

The poem illustrates Senior’s affinity with using Biblical stories as a backdrop, yet distorting them (thus, I would argue, challenging them) so that they are particularly Amerindian, African or Jamaican in nature. Her spiritual relationship between the past Gods and the land appears much stronger than a relationship with people, especially in this poem. In the Bible it is people who are given the most prominence and everything else is secondary. However, Senior, I would suggest, gives the land a spiritual importance of its own. Senior also highlights the political message that poverty is the result of colonisation/ multi-nationals/Christianity going against “the plan”, making rich pickings for the few, but leaving others and future generations to go hungry.

Part IV of the work is an exploration of the African presence in the New World (and perhaps in her own spirituality) and Senior illustrates this by various means and methods. All the poems have a separate entity and there is no one central preoccupation or set of myths and legends surrounding the gods and their relationship with human beings. However, I would argue that particularly in this section, Senior

is giving recognition and importance to these gods – not just as stories, but as part of her own belief system and spirituality. Senior highlights the forces of nature and personifies natural phenomena – she develops Lartey’s ‘spatial spirituality’. Collier (1996, p.230) regards the poems not merely as re-tellings, but as vivid character sketches. The place of gods in human consciousness is regarded as so self-evident that there is very little allusion to the ritual of celebration and possession such as voodoo and Shango, which bind some other poetic treatments of the divine. Collier (ibid) argues that it is socially embedded psychological traits (i.e. the human) that are generally celebrated by Senior, rather than some notion of transcendent spirituality.

Senior justifies an affinity with the Arawaks or Tainos as she felt their presence (or absence) was a strong aspect of her childhood. Whilst she recognises that she can have no Taino blood in her, she sees an affinity between them and the black people – between the red and black people who, she suggests, would have far more in common that either race towards the European. (Dawes, 2001, p.78)

In the section entitled ‘Mystery: African Gods in the New World’, Senior organises rhythms which are at times drum inspired. She draws on Jamaican beliefs reflected in a Caribbean/South American substrate in ‘Marassa: Divine Twins’ (p.115). This opening poem tells of this double deity involving the splitting of the original cosmic totality into the bivalency of mortal, human, material/immortal, divine and metaphysical. The *Marassa*, according to Collier (1996, p.230), as the first humans, are both children and the original ancestral dead and so are associated with motherhood and burial rituals. The competing dualism gives way in the *Marassa* to the affirmation of unity, relationship and simultaneity. In the poem she speaks of “one spirit split in two” and highlights the dualism in:

*I am the day you are the night*

*You are left I am right*

*I am up you are down*

*You are young I am old*

*I am a man you are a woman*

*You are death I am life*

Then they switch places and play it “the other way round”. When they assure ‘mother’ of their vigilance at the end, they are addressing both the (African) mother of all creation and also every other human mother.

The importance of African Gods is again reaffirmed in the next poem 'Obatala' (p.116), which addresses the supreme Sky God, Yoruba. It invokes the ‘Father of Wisdom’ to take the speakers:

*aspirations  
beyond heights  
of the great man.*

This is a classic invocation to the Muse for inspiration. This poem provides this particular part of Senior’s work with sequence and progression in her work. The opening poem speaks of divine/human creation (in Haitian ritual, Pap Morassa is the first to be saluted, before all the gods). Then there is the dedication to the Muse asking for poetic creativity and the set of poems is rounded off with ‘Guede: Lord of the Dead’ (p.134). In Haitian Voodoo, Guede- the wisest god, repository of life, copulation and death, the crossroads of physical generation and metaphysical resurrection- is the last god of all to be saluted in any ceremony. (Collier, *ibid*, p.231). Guede stands at the crossroads between life and death; his symbol in ceremonies of worship is the cross upon the tomb. In an inversion of the norm of man invoking the god, Guede enjoins man “by the sin of the crossroads” to “put the pepper in the rum”. As the lord of the dead, Guede is so incensed that not even his favourite drink, which is rum, steeped in hottest spices and used as a test to determine that the ceremonial

servitor is genuinely possessed, can stir him. He will come only if he is not too busy which, paradoxically, he always is. Senior portrays him as streetwise and describes him as:

*dressed in top hat  
and tails  
dark glasses  
on mi face, puffing big Havana*

The god offers a threat in the last lines as he reiterates his demand for food (pepper rum, cassava bread and virtual chicken). However, this serves as a veiled threat that his hunger, depending on the whim of the moment, may be stilled only by devouring mortals who worship him. (Collier, p.231)

‘Osanyin: God of Herbalism’ (p.117) tells of the powerful survival in the New World of the West African herbal healing which involves a spatial spirituality with the land. This involves the transition from the ‘medicine men’ and the ‘witch doctors’ of Nigeria to the everyday domestic practices of Jamaica, which consists of Obeah and Myal (examined earlier). Senior links physical disability and supernatural transcendence with the image of a “one-legged man” who:

*shoots up a tree  
root without end*

His voice calling out for Osanyin to “rain heavenly leaves down.” These leaves, like the faculties of the leaf doctor are a sign of both imbalance (‘O Wilderness’) and of balance (‘O Harmony’) and can be used paradoxically for either society/prophecy/divination or healing/balance/witnessing. The merging of herbalist and deity is suggested by the leaf doctor’s:

*bird  
of a voice*

Osanyin is associated, in his watchfulness and supernatural wisdom, with the owl.

(Collier, *ibid*, p.232)

Senior uses Biblical stories once again as the backdrop in 'Orumilla: God of Divination' (P.124). She begins by saying

*like St Josph  
the carpeneter*

By comparing Orumilla to St Josph, it could be argued that she is challenging the assumption of Christianity that there is only one God and that all other religions are inferior. Senior focuses on the aspects that Orumilla can interpret individual destiny:

*forecasting  
forewarning*

Although this makes him more powerful than St Joseph. Orumilla stands for order in the universe (represented by the four points of the compass and the mystical number four):

*in  
four square  
is all*

Maureen Warner Lewis (*Central Africa in the Caribbean*, Trinidad: University of the West Indies, 2002) suggests that Orumilla's connection with order links him with St Joseph, whose tools are recognised to be the compass and the set square:

*take our measure  
Sending back order*

This plays on the notion of destiny ('measure') and creation ('order') and universal balance that are not confined to a Christian God. Divination and symmetry are emphasised as the poem moves from using the words, forecasting to forewarning, foremost, fortunate, for, forever and ending with four, representing balance and symmetry.

'Oya, Goddess of the Wind' (p.127) is connected with storm winds and creation:

*As long as we breathe  
We know you are there.*

The poem is constructed of conversing with the divine and sharing the consequences,

both natural and human and the mention of the "hallelujah chorus" gives it Christian

connotations, but these are, I would suggest, secondary to the power of Oya – the

African Goddess who only has to whisper:

*You whisper  
The hallelujah chorus rises  
You hiss  
Lightning forks...  
You chuckle  
Angle-trumpets bloom  
You yawn  
Death rattles. (p.127)*

Collier suggests (1996, p.232) that Senior makes skilful reference to Christian ritual, exploiting polysemy to further contrast the spiritual with the natural. The trumpets are an element of Christian iconography and they are also flowers that are unlucky at the deathbed. The poem also suggests the bored withdrawal of the life- God's protection leading to the last yawning death rattle. Within the poem are several further contrasts, which include the choral collective aspirations towards Heaven versus the spitting deflection towards Earth, with the additional level of the devilish serpent's tongue; the angelic versus the realm of mundane commerce. This bears a likeness to a nature poem but there is a strong feeling of folk belief in the divine presence and at the other end of the continuum, an awareness of the universal connection between the divine, the natural world and human action.

Water is again important in 'Olokun: God of the Deep Ocean' is a prayer for fishermen and opens up the image of the Middle Passage and asks the god to

*Send  
unfathomable answers*



*from the deep?*

The meaning of the suffering can be retrieved by plunging and:

*descending  
like our ancestors  
that long passage*

This gives a notion of re-birthing. However, there are no answers to the despairs of human suffering and the depth of the waters suggests a notion of un-fathomability. In its counterpart 'Babalu: Lord of the Earth', this God is the Yoruba Shankpana, whose function is to be the bearer of smallpox, a disease which strikes during hot, windy months. He can also be the god of healing, through his spiritual relationship with the earth. The poem takes a deferential tone, as the poet does not want to antagonise the god into sending smallpox:

*the marks of your last  
visit we wear forever on our skin  
(with pride...*

And "whatever you send us, we thank you". The "Doctor of the Poor" has the power to hurt or heal and should be treated with reverence.

The most powerful gods of the Yoruba slave settlements in Jamaica and elsewhere are the brothers Shango and Ogun, who are both tyrannical, prone to anger and associated with the element of fire. Senior appears to give these two more importance than she does to the Christian God. Senior writes a pair of poems 'Ogun, God of Iron' and 'Shango: God of Thunder' in honour of these gods. Ogun, who is the god of fire, war and is a blacksmith, forged the iron tools of civilisation and is frequently regarded as a master of political diplomacy. He is held at arms length and is addressed as "you" in a formal, Standard English idiom. Shango, in contrast as the god of thunder and lightning is approached from the inside and 'talked about' in a conspiratorial fashion. Ogun is given a mantle of advanced technology which "transmits your power" and

which can “unleash atomic energy”. Shango is more tightly controlled by the Creole register. He is pictured as a womaniser, arrogant; smooth tongued and a sharp dresser. He is changeable, but don’t cross him as:

*'his tongue quick  
like lightening  
zigzagging  
hear him nuh: I SPEAK ONLY ONCE!*

This zigzagging is associated with the energy of the drums, which are reserved for whenever he comes near appearing:

*on his steed  
plenty horsepower  
there*

Jamaican Obeah and Myal are mentioned in the title story ‘Discerner of Hearts’. A “spiritual bath” is suggested for Cissy to get what she wants, which is a baby. This spiritual bath involves herbs, leaves, flowers and roots – so emphasises a spirituality that is spatial and based on the elements of the land. However, after she achieved this and received what she wanted she believed that the other girl friend Ermine, from whom she stole Fonso, had cast Obeah on her (p.15). Such was her belief that she felt her insides turning to ashes and felt as if she was going mad. When Theresa herself went to the Myal man – Father Burnham, on behalf of Cissy to obtain a cure for her, she saw scenes from the Bible in his house, Jesus and his disciples and signs and symbols likened to her church but:

*For one thing, they all ran into one another with nothing to define each one, and they were much more colourful and lively. And all the people, Jesus included, were black.  
(p.21)*

This suggests a religion at least more relevant to Jamaica as all the characters were black, but perhaps also suggesting that Christianity itself has nothing with which to define itself. Mr Burhams’s real job, it is stated, is to cleanse evil and bring light and restore confidence. However, Cissy still needs “charms and baths, ceremonies and

drums” (p.30) to protect her – Mr Burham’s religion is not enough. She believes absolutely the folk stories, perhaps suggesting that the poor do need faith in charms on which to cling. What is really needed, Senior hints, is also to have freedom from this. This is especially so as Cissy feels the need to spend money that she doesn’t really have by paying Mr Burham to arrange a drummer for the feast and calling down the spirits and ancestors to possess her. Theresa, however, finds confidence and her spiritual wholeness from within herself, with just a little help from Mr Burham who gave her the confidence to attain her own spiritual wholeness. This may suggest that spiritual wholeness can only ultimately be attained from within you rather than from any God. Therefore, in this story, it would appear that Senior’s views on Myal and Obeah are slightly ambiguous. She does not condemn it completely, but neither does she condone it.

In Senior’s latest collection *Over the Roofs of the World*, she makes very little mention of African or Yoruba gods, there is also very little mention of Christianity – this has been examined earlier. The collection is in three parts. The first is ‘A Little Bird Told Me’ and deals with flight – over the roof of the world. The parakeet is a recurring bird within the collection and in ‘Bird Man/Bird-Woman’ (p.3) she feels the time is right for ‘transformation into pure spirit of air.’ She speaks of the “terrifying gift of foreseeing” a guardian spirit and a sacred calling. The bird, which in the first few lines of the poem, suggests a link with Shamanism, also has to hang for nine nights from the tree – suggesting a link with the Nine Night Ceremony of the ancestors (examined earlier). She speaks of a spirit death and a resurrection –that he will rise again another day to fulfil a destiny to “recover lost souls”. She also suggests a re-birth into a bird in ‘Hummingbird’ (p.13). Whilst there could be a spiritual

dimension to flight and its freedoms, I would argue that this collection is so detached from the author – she has got rid of so much of the ‘I’ - that the danger in this latest work is that she has become too distant.

In her poem ‘The Birth of an Island’ (p.31), Senior talks of a creator who has created the Caribbean “from your longings”. It does not mention a Christian God, but rather adapts creation myths – as in the ‘Ode to Pablo Neruda’. This is the “source of creation” and is a “Creole spider- work of many hands” alluding to the spider of Miss Anancy in Jamaican fable. The poet links the rosary and the “Alpha to Omega” with the necklace for Brahma and The Virgin Mary. However, in my opinion, the poem highlights the ancestral ‘mish mash’ of the different religions and the range of different peoples in the “Spirit necklace”, which is of what the rosary and beads for Brahma could be made. Yet, Neruda has no patience to learn to thread these- to thread the beads might lead to inhibitions. The poet’s final lines tell that:

*God is dead' wrote Nietzsche*  
*Heaven is empty*  
*Wrote Kandinski*  
*'God is dead'*  
However Pablo Neruda saw instead that :  
*The Heavens*  
*unfastened*  
*and open (p.79)*

This could mean that she does not dismiss the notion of a God altogether.

Senior’s later work is, at times, less directly critical about the church and mentions it less and less and instead, develops a greater relationship with nature and with African Gods. She acknowledges that she has more freedom to express herself in poetry than in her short stories (Dawes, 2001, p.75). However, Dawes in his interview with Senior (2001, p.82) suggests a tension between the Afro-centric and the European paradigms

because he sees that she celebrates non-Western belief systems and traditional folk practices in opposition to a Christian ethos. She, however, appears to evade the question of Christianity in her reply, she just does not mention it at all. She regards herself as a person of many races and connects with Africa and African religion through stories, games and her research. Although she acknowledges that European values were important in her childhood, at the same time African values were frowned upon and it is partly this that she is trying to redress. She was later thrilled to discover Yoruba culture as opposed to the culture of the ancient Greeks and Romans. (ibid.) She argues that she is only affirming the African part of her rather than being Afro-centric –it is her way of discovering ‘who am I?’ It could also be argued that the reply to this question is to discover a form of spirituality – of a oneness with oneself. Perhaps in her last collection she no longer feels the need to explore who she is – maybe she has found herself and attained a oneness and ‘spiritual’ relationship with her surroundings. This, I would suggest, does not involve any one god, unlike Goodison, and Brodber whom I have examined in the next chapter, but a sense of affinity with the earth and also with African/Arawak Gods and perhaps a self-reliance and confidence that may not need a superior being to articulate. She does not need a God to find her spirituality, she needs to have freedom from dogmatic religions. She uses the African gods to discover herself, but it is through her relationship with the earth that she gets closest to find an intra-personal spirituality. She does not need a transcendence with God, but freedom from God and she generally does not speak on behalf of others or the community. She discovers a spatial spirituality with Africa, plants and the earth. However, I would suggest that she still has some bitterness towards the church. She also, I would suggest, equates poverty with a Christian spirituality, but why should a sense of injustice be in conflict with a spiritual

understanding? The bonds of her childhood have not been totally broken, neither does her work reflect, I would propose, a person truly at peace with herself. There occasionally still appears to be a certain bitterness regarding colour. Perhaps she has a distance to go before she attains 'spirituality' which in her case is a 'oneness' and a peace with herself. However, this sense of injustice might always be there and will not hamper her spirituality.

## **Chapter 6**

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## Chapter 6

### Erna Brodber -

#### Re-connecting the spirit

Erna Brodber, I would argue, has strongly adapted the Christian and Afro- Jamaican beliefs to find an unique spirituality and interpretation of God. She does not necessarily support a positive view of the church. However, the two forces of the Christian and the African are not necessarily in opposition to each other and whilst there are some conflicts within the work, these I suggest are mainly resolved so that within Brodber's writing, these two aspects can successfully run parallel with each other. Goodison, I would suggest, has a spiritual relationship bordering on the mystical with God, and Senior who appears not to regard God as being of primary importance. Unlike these two writers, Brodber appears to have a corporate spirituality -a spiritual relationship both with and on behalf of the community. Moreover, she has a spatial spirituality -a spiritual relationship with the land and place with references to spirit possession and spiritualism.

Erna 'Lixie' or 'Stick' Brodber was born in 1940 in St. Mary's Jamaica. Her family were active in the affairs of the community in the small town in which they lived. Brodber pursued an academic career, ultimately attaining an M.Sc.and a Ph.D. and has also studied psychiatric anthropology. Amongst other professions, she was a teacher before focusing on writing. She worked at the Institute of Social and Economic Research in Mona and whilst there researched the histories of elders in rural Jamaica which would later inspire her novel *Louisiana*. (David Lichtenstein, ' A Suffering Saviour' Brown University,1999).



Brodber's work includes *Jane and Louis Will Soon Come Home* (London, New Beacon, 1980), *Myal* (London, New Beacon, 1988) and *Louisiana* (London, New Beacon, 1994). She has also written articles and monographs including 'The Perception of Caribbean Women', 'Abandonment of Children in Jamaica' and 'A study of Yards in the City of Kingston'. The powerful forces that have influenced her include The Black Power Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement. These, along with her upbringing that highlighted the importance of community, led to her concerns and interest in social research and to her seeking out those whose stories are untold. Her themes include spirituality in a number of forms, with aspects of Christian religion, African Religion, a relationship with her environment and a personal relationship with a creator.

Narain (1999, p.97) states that her prolific output is very much part of the 'boom' in Caribbean women's writing from the 1980's onwards and Brodber is centrally placed in relation to what Narain suggests is a well-established Caribbean women's literary tradition. Narain (ibid) argues that Brodber's novels are notoriously 'difficult' to reach and because the realism factor is not as evident this difficulty has perhaps been exaggerated. Narain (1999, p.97) regards women writers as having taken more risks in their style than their male counterparts, but believes that Brodber has taken even more of these risks and has been more experimental than most women. Her work in this respect has been compared to that of Wilson Harris. I would argue that her books can, at times, be difficult to read because her writing makes demands on the reader and bears similarity to the style of the 'Post Modernist' writers whose narrative jumps and whose style often resembles poetry (for example, Virginia Woolf). It is not a

seamless flow of continuous chronological narrative, but moves in fits and starts and any meaning can only be discerned when the reader reads and listens – a kind of multi-textured approach advocated by opponents of *écriture féminine*. Her work, I would suggest, needs many readings. Her writing also focuses on the women's bodies and sexuality and many post-colonial feminists have stressed the centrality of women's body as symbolic in inspiring the colonising mission (Narain, 1999, p.99). The linking of women and the land also has interesting implications when language is added. Women are perceived as safeguarding the 'mother tongue' and thus mother tongue and motherland become conflated so that women's language "occupies a pure original untouchable symbolic space" (Narain, 1999, p.99). This is where the post-colonial and feminist intersect. In this there is also a need to retrieve the lost mother 'mother Africa' and the desire to remember and reconnect with the material body. The text is more like a series of dances or tightly orchestrated movement.

Mordecai (1990) acknowledges that Brodber's novel *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980) is revolutionary in structure and it celebrates aspects of life of the small Jamaican community and focuses on problems of a girl growing up in the Caribbean. This novel, as does her later work, demonstrates Brodber's control of language and her accomplished powers of description (Mordecai, 1990, p.42). Renk (2001, p.116) suggests that Brodber illustrates a shared story rather than the life of the individual. Brodber shows that a community speaks as a collective. I would suggest that there is not necessarily a progression in Brodber's work. Her writing, I would argue, is consistent in its themes and ideas. Her themes and the actions of her protagonists are often similar.

In her article 'Why I Write', in Rutherford, A, Jensen, L and Chew, S., (ed) *Into the Nineties – Post Colonial Women's Writing*, (London, Dangaroo Press, 1994), Brodber says that she has always been shy and had admired her sister for the art of conversation – especially with the white child of the parson. She chose jobs that required no ability to converse and felt conversationally inept. However, she realised she could make her point without speaking but instead by writing. She states that is “is the message not the medium” that is important (p.372). Brodber further suggests in her article 'Fiction in Scientific Procedure' (Cudjoe, 1990, p.164) that she finds it difficult to be addressed as a writer or artist, as she still sees herself as a sociologist and her fiction is an extension of this. She argues that her work has activist intentions. She wants to 'study' behaviour in order to be able to explain her findings to the children of the people who were put on ships on the African beaches and woke from this nightmare to find themselves on the shores of the 'New World'. She hopes that her writing will then forge a closer identity and allow her audience to face the rest of the world more confidently. (ibid).

Brodber (ibid) acknowledges that she was racially conscious from an early age and also at her university as there were large gaps in information of 'her kind' and her path was clear – she must fill these gaps. She states that it was eventually boredom with a social science methodology devoted to 'objectivity' and so distancing the researcher from the people to the detriment of interaction between the two, that led Brodber into fiction (ibid, p.165). In order to defeat her boredom, she developed a habit of writing down her feelings and her speculations that for example questionnaires could never achieve. However “this activity was to me like vomiting and defecating, and I flushed away the effort”. It was only 10 years later that she came

across a short story that she had written which led to fiction not just becoming the act of cleansing “but something of intrinsic worth”.

Brodber became a member of a circle of writers and would-be writers who valued her comments, and these people gave her confidence. However, she was aware all the time of prejudice against black people in a country of blacks and the “enemy was a ghost that talked through black faces.” (ibid). She also felt she had to develop more case studies for her students in abnormal psychology, as there were so few, a situation which restricted the development of the Social sciences across the Caribbean. She had up until then been using the works of Roger Mais and Orlando Patterson, but considered them to have limitations. Originally her book *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980) was written for her students and not for a public audience. However, her sister Velma Pollard with her long involvement in literature, thought the public ought to share her work along with her students. (ibid) Brodber argues that her work in social science should not be carried out from the ‘outside’- the traditional standpoint of supposedly a disinterested scholar - but should incorporate the ‘I’ of the researcher-making her work a ‘culture in personality’ study. This, she contends might make it a more transforming work for therapists and also for the clients with whom they would work. (p.166). She argues for the need for her work to be short, sharp and topical so that the poor, semi-literate people who have neither the time, skills, nor paper to deal with long works, could access it. People could then have space to do their own dreaming, thinking and planning. However, Brodber states that the book is on reading lists for Caribbean literature rather than Caribbean sociology and so has failed to inform sociology students directly. Nevertheless, the act of writing did

inform her own social science work so that all her work, she argues, comes from the twinning of fiction and science.

However, I would suggest Brodber does have a spiritual relationship with both her subjects and her audience. Her main theme, of women's struggle to understand the past and present in terms of their roles in this community, is very much part of the spiritual relationship. Her work is examined here with regard to Lartey's 'community' spirituality primarily, though aspects of her work also include the 'transcendent', 'intra-personal', 'inter-personal' and 'spatial'.

Kathleen Renk (*Caribbean Shadows and Victorian Ghosts – Woman's Writing and Decolonisation*, London, University of Virginia, 2001, p.24) states that the novel *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980), alternates between a multi-vocal voice which first appears as a series of overlapping voices to become a collective choral voice. The speakers acknowledge the past and also the ancestors who must be acknowledged before Nellie's psyche can be fully integrated (ibid). The first section is appropriately termed 'Voices' and the narrative is a series of overlapping voices giving the reader the impression that he or she is 'overhearing' random conversations related by anonymous tellers through these choral speakers who speak as a collective voice. From this we can learn that the people lived in a "dark paradise". (ibid)

*Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980) is largely based in rural Jamaica and family ties are complicated and intermingled with bonds of colour and class, oral traditions, family history, gossip, alongside books and the distant town (Caroline Cooper, *Noises in the Blood – Orality, Gender and the 'Vulgar' Body Of Jamaican*

*Popular Culture*, London: Warwick University, Macmillan, 1993, and Wasafiri, Spring 1990 no.11.1994. The work is written in a “modernist stream of self-conscious narrative voice” which encourages the traditional telling of tales, from the Anansi stories to proverbs, folk song and dance (ibid). The story also examines the spirituality of individuals and the community which includes a relationship with God – a re-connecting and a balance. This God appears to be a mixture of the African, Christian and Jamaican elements. The importance is that this spirituality involves all the community – Lartey’s ‘corporate’ spirituality, where spirituality and the strength of the community is made even stronger by everyone being involved. The community is favoured rather than the individual ‘hiding away’ from self, others and the community. Corporate spirituality, as Lartey’s suggests, is not made up of members of the community alone, nor its leaders, but by all. Then the community acquires a spiritual life of its own, more powerful than any individual members.

Although *Jane and Louisa* was not initially conceived as a novel but as a psychological study, (according to Cooper, 1994, p.279), literary critics appropriated the work, recognising the “allusive imagery, evocative language and carefully etched characterisations.” Brodber writes within a Neo-African folk framework, which sees words as the repository of the community and the creative medium “through which the norms of appropriate social behaviour can be elaborated metaphysically”. (p.279, ibid)

### **Re-connecting spirituality – finding intra, inter, corporate, spatial and transcendent spirituality**

The folk culture and community is the backdrop for the work and its primary theme is healing – a spiritual healing- initially of self, of the protagonist Nellie, who travels to ‘foreign’ and on her return develops a sense of homelessness. She has lost her relationship with history, the land, her sexual identity and ultimately herself. She needs to find an intra-personal spirituality so that she can have spiritual ‘inter personal’ relationships with others, with the community and with her spatial surroundings. She has become dis-connected and she must be re-connected before she can hope to attain a spiritual transcendence with God. Whilst she is discovering and developing these aspects, so too is the community and the family, some of whom find their own spirituality by helping Nellie. It is through the therapeutic power of words that Brodber develops this concept. These words involve a mutual cultural exchange of Jamaican, British and African, so that Braithwaite suggests:

*The Middle passage, is not, as it is popularly assumed, a traumatic, destructive experience, separating blacks from Africa, disconnecting their sense of history and tradition, but a pathway or channel between this tradition and what is being evolved on new soil in the Caribbean (Braithwaite, 1970, p.4-5)*

Nellie must revitalise and find her history and folk culture for the sake of her sanity.

The deliberate attempts to remember the past – personal, racial and cultural (according to Cooper, 1994, p.281) “restore the breach of history” and recreate a significant past. This will help her attain spirituality.

The opening pages of *Jane and Louisa* (1980) address the contradictions within the churches and which are reflected in society. The community as a whole is favoured

rather than the inward-looking isolation, suggesting the importance of Lartey's 'corporate' spirituality.'

Brodber introduces the family as part of a community but it is fragmented and not united. (p.7) by speaking of the grandparents who were in the:

*upper reaches of our world, so we were brown, intellectual, better and apart... The cream of the earthly isolated quadroon, mulatto, Anglican. (p.7)*

Miss Tucker, however "Mama's mother" is proudly black and she is a Baptist trying to belong to a community. She is rurally respectable (O' Callaghan, 1993, p.60). She dismisses her slave ancestry and works hard for a "Baptist seat in heaven" (p.7). Her 'kumbla' – the place in which she wraps herself - is either a prayer or a blessing – but she herself is not sure which. All the characters must break "out of the kumbla", a web of traditional, restricting values. (Renk, 2001, p.116) Nellie on the other hand, is brown, middle class, educated, Anglican and well spoken and a world apart from her compatriots (p.73) who are "so different – different from us." They have no culture, sense of identity, no shame or respect for themselves (p.51). This gives Nellie a schizophrenia, whereby she neither fits entirely into a white community nor a black, so the idea of Anglicanism is an uneasy one and runs alongside Obeah- a mingling and mixing of both Jamaican and Christian. She is dis-connected and has not attained a spiritual relationship with herself. This idea is highlighted in their New Year when the family speaks of bad spirits and ancestors but still "each praises God that we can live to see another New Year's morning come." (p.14)

Granny Tucker particularly prays for everyone and everything from the poor to praying for rain. She acts as a spokesperson to God for the whole community and asks not to fight evil with evil, but to stand proud (p.86) and help beat temptation



because 'evil' is strong and only with God can it be fought. (p.87). However, her prayers (which are not answered) are strongest on behalf of her family with whom she needs the strongest spiritual relationship but who are dispersed to the ends of the world and this deeply upsets her and is echoed in her hymn:

*and although the way be cheerless  
we will follow calm and fearless (p.87)*

In the story there are several examples of individuals trying, and sometimes not succeeding, in finding an 'intra-personal' spirituality. A relationship between themselves and God – of being at peace with themselves.

Granny Tucker comes the closest in the novel (apart from the more illusive Baba) to having a spiritual relationship with God as she scolds God and talks to him in order to keep her family from "lip rouge and straighten hair" (p.88). She gets annoyed with God for not answering her prayers, pleading "Bring them back Lord" and says that she doesn't go to church every Sunday for nothing so asks why doesn't God reward her by answering her prayers (p.88)

Aunt Becca is the epitome of respectability – a Sunday school teacher who continually warns Nellie that she must take care not to be "weighed in the balance and found wanting" (p.17). This is a constant source of torture for Nellie and the phrase echoes in her head as she feels she is falling "against the Church"(p.19), but asks: "So where is my faith?" (p.45) She wonders to whom she can turn for help. This continuation of the theme of being "weighed and found wanting" shows the Church's teachings in a cruel light and illustrates the effects of the presentation of an omnipotent, distant God. Nellie feels a sense of repression and shame and there is no spiritual communication between God and herself. Aunt Becca cautions Nellie, when

asked if she could go on a date with Baba, a male childhood friend (ironically to see Jack the Ripper). She is told:

*Learn that the world is waiting to drag you down "women luck de a dungle heap" they say "fowl scratch it up" But you save yourself lest you turn a woman before your time, before the wrong fowl scratch your luck' (p.17)*

It is with the onset of puberty that Nellie's problems or 'madness' start. Sexuality is taboo and white values (Renk, 2001, p.117) are suggested as representing sexual repression.

Becca regards herself as superior and more religious and respectable than others.

Becca seems to discover all the secrets of the family, but even prim and proper Aunt Becca has her 'skeleton in her closet'. She is sterile, as contrasted with Sarah's fertility. Her aborted child is proof of her failure at love and the constraints of rural respectability and sexuality. She is wrapped up in this kumbala of respectability. She cannot face up to herself and her faults and to being re-connected with her spiritual self; instead she develops a veneer of religious respectability.

*But is she home? Is she at peace? Spinning in purgatory, her soul, her heart, her baby are in thatched huts, perspiration and drums, praying for peace (p.133)*

Her spiritual relationship with herself is challenged. When she goes to pray at the Baptist Church the congregation do not know why she is there and why she has come out of her 'kumbala' (her enclosure) to be at the Baptist Church:

*So why is Aunt Becca praying for Mass Tanny in Mass Mehiah's bamboo and thatch church when our big people's church is in her back yard? (p.92).*

The rest of the family feel she is a lady and are shamed of her and her cleanliness and decency (p.93) and believe that she has her own church and doesn't need to worship in theirs. It is as though some in the community see two Gods: one for the rich and one for the poor.

The Church, whilst playing an important role in the community, is not seen as a healthy kumbla. The Anglican Church in the form of Aunt Becca is portrayed as intransigent and 'proper', not really meeting the needs of ordinary people. It is not seen as somewhere for spirituality to be easily found. The Anglican Church appears to perpetuate the Adam and Eve tradition of making a woman feel inferior and of seeing Eve as the temptress and temptation. This temptation is the corner stone of the Church with its encouragement of guilt while paying lip service to the real Christian elements. The churches worked in isolation because when the Harvest Festival came, no one seemed to know of the Baptist Church's contribution (p.114) and when all the churches were supposed to co-operate the question is asked "for don't we all serve the risen Christ and await the second coming!" The differences within the church community are highlighted by some church-goers who were considered better than others – not realising or recognising that they worshipped the same God. But Baba's sermon brought even Aunt Becca to tears because "there was something here that did not need to be cleaned." (p.116). Even for Aunt Becca, the healing process of re-connecting to her spirituality had begun and this was started in Baba's church, not the Anglican Church.

Nellie initially turns against the Church (p.19 and p.22). Her father puts on a special 'voice of appearance' for religious speak, but religion cannot feel the pain of Cock Robin's death (p.57). Whilst the congregation was reminded, in the funeral service, of the transfiguration of Elijah and Christ, she says she had not thought of Elijah and Christ being as one before. The Baptist church comes out a little better with Granny Tucker at least finding her 'kumbla' through prayer and Nellie (p.53) declaring that

she wanted a grave beneath the earth “with flowers and the sound of raucous Baptist singing.” Yet, this made her feel subversive, especially as Robin was burnt to ash and couldn’t have a tombstone which is seen as the cornerstone of white respectability.

After Cock Robin, Nellie is in a kumbla of mourning:

*But the trouble with kumbla is getting out of the kumbla. It is a protective device- if you dwell too long in it it makes you delicate. Makes you albino, skin white but not by genes. Vision extra sensitive to the sun and blurred without spectacles. Baba and Alice urged me out of mine- weak, thin tired like a breach baby (p.130)*

This suggests that ‘white’ is bad and weak. Nellie’s kumbla is also a retreat from sexuality, fear of the responsibilities of independence and fear of dependence on the wrong man. She cannot attain any form of spirituality without being healed and coming out of her kumbla.

Nellie’s journey out of her enclosed ‘kumbla’ begins with Baba, a childhood friend, who appears unseen and unrecognised when the 36 year old Nellie is on the point of collapse and is crying uncontrollably about everything: from herself, about others and the world. (Dance, 1990, p.175). Baba is also an example of ‘inter personal’ spirituality – of reaching an understanding with yourself through others. Baba mysteriously approaches Nellie from behind and kisses her, leaving her with the unforgettable smell of sweet lime, which Cooper (1994, p.286) suggests has the capacity to ‘run duppy’ and has folkloric associations with asceticism and starts the process of exorcising Nellie of the ghost of Aunt Becca. Renk (2001, p.118) suggests that Baba is a Haitian Obeah-man, he is surely also a Christ-like figure: straight and tall in a white gown (p.63). He is bearded with long hair and wearing Jesus Sandals. It is important that he is seen as both because it is through this mixture of both that

Nellie is able to attain her spiritual wholeness. Baba compares to the Christ-like and Rasta figures in Roger Mais's novels. Baba's hands are compared with surgeons and (p.110) his toys were always the doctor's kit and the carpenter's set – the healing properties of Jesus and the background of carpentry associated with Joseph. He has a pastoral smile (p.63) – that of the shepherd guiding his sheep and his room is described as sanctified (p.63). All this challenges Nellie and she becomes angry at this challenge. The Christian imagery (Dance, 1990, p.176) is re-enforced by his uncertain birth origins and the revelation that he was “sent here for a purpose” (p.43) and that he has “saving power” (p.115).

It is a miracle that Baba returns in his nurturing role as a healer, as he assists Nellie in re-connecting her spirituality by teaching her self-love. Baba is seen as a figure of redemption. Baba is an example of Lartey's 'intra- personal' and transcendent spirituality. He appears to have a close personal relationship with God and is at peace with himself, others, the community and his spatial surrounding, including African and Jamaican elements of religion.

Baba, like Roger Mais's characters, is sexless and when Nellie offered herself, he rejects her gently, perhaps making a comparison between himself and Jesus with Mary Magdalene. It is Baba, whose elements are water and earth (Cooper, p.285) and who is also described as “an Obeah man of Anancy” (p.69), who refuses to allow Nellie to cry her way out of the challenge he has given her to overcome her helplessness. He insists that she finds it herself and builds up her self-esteem so that she does not give herself to him or others when she doesn't want to. She thinks of herself as worthless “something you throw out on the scrap heap” (p.71). She

renounces the sect with Baba's guidance but she still has the conditioning of her upbringing from Aunt Becca who has told her she is better than 'others' and different. She realises she needs to accept the "aliens who surround me". Baba teaches her that she must find her own language and prepares her, along with Aunt Alice, for her move into the spirit world as part of his higher science and transcendence (p.67). She has to find her ancestors and acknowledge that "Baba (who) had settled me not with my people" (p.77). It is the drums that brings it all together. Her ancestors help her to know who she is "I had to know them to know what I was about" (p.80) and will free her from the 'kumbla' and restore her balance. This encourages her to "hold her head up high" (p.146) and it is Baba who teaches her self-love (Cooper, 1994, p.286).

In the 'think in' of their sect, that supposedly enhances the community, Baba challenges the status quo and Nellie records the minutes from the meetings. He spends each meeting carrying a baby doll (which is sexless) and, when he eventually presents it to Nellie, it crumbles. Baba is trying to illustrate that she is cracking up and is ruled by others and needs to find herself, however, whilst he himself is self-assured (p.60). He is not only compared to Christ but with an Obeah-man, as making the doll is more in line with Obeah and Voodoo than Christianity. She feels angry with him for embarrassing her and asks, "Who made him God?" (p.62). He believes that she needs to stop hiding and confront herself. It is when she confronts Baba that the process of healing starts.

Nellie's sect – her community- is portrayed as dangerous and any religion, which sets itself apart, appears to be viewed by Brodber with suspicion. The sect is 'elitist' and does not include the whole of society and so is not what Lartey had in mind as an

example of corporate spirituality. Nellie has been conditioned by her upbringing by Aunt Becca, (the standard bearer of the 'white' world) who has told her that she is better than 'others' and different. However, she realises that she needs to "accept the aliens who surround me" (p.67). This once again stresses the 'appearance' of religion, a traditional religion, I would argue, where a cloak of respectability hides the inner person.

From early childhood Baba is a self-confident leader (Dance, p.176). He has a transcendent relationship with God. He was always calm and peaceful (p.67) and he is "dabbling in a higher science" (p.67) with the healing powers of his index finger and the laying on of hands which suggests he could draw water from the brain (p.68). He also has the illusion of disappearing into an electric bulb, offering a "fleeting glimpse of Nellie's transfiguration." Yet, she still worries about being found wanting (p.66) and goes through a period of levitation and becomes light before her resurrection: "You have a clean slate, you can start all over again." (p.67). This leads her to find herself and the discovery that she is part of the earth (her spatial spirituality) and not found wanting but too heavy and sinks (p. 69)

It is Baba, rather than Aunt Becca's Anglican hypocrisy that takes the metaphorical curse of Obeah from Nellie by the laying on of hands. Aunt Alice is the antithesis of Aunt Becca and helps Nellie accomplish her final healing. She is the spirit messenger who acquaints Nellie in childhood with the science of herbal healing. Her spiritual/spatial relationship with the land is important:

*I travelled with her inside that round and she showed me our garden...she made me taste the guinea hen weed and the leaf of life, for better vision, she said. (pp. 75-76)*

This is significant in that it is 'our' garden – and she tastes the leaf of life and has a vision highlighting, at last for Nellie, a spiritual (spatial) relationship with the land and as part of that land.

Aunt Alice is eccentric and almost crazy, silent, unmarried and without responsibility (Dance, 1990, p.179). She has never been burdened by 'it' (white, Victorian values and sexual repression) and has no distinctions of colour, class or Anglicanism. Alice prepares the way for Nellie to be saved and travels with her when she is dead to acquire the knowledge of her ancestors that will free her from the 'kumbla' and restore her balance (Dance, 1990, p.179). Lartey suggests that it is through others that spirituality can be attained.

It is important that the visionary Aunt Alice completes the spiritual healing by fitting together the jigsaw of family history and healing. Maureen Warner- Lewis, in her study 'The Nkuyu: Spirit Messengers of Kumina,' states that in Kumina:

*Harmony with the divine world is achieved primarily through ancestral spirit... the concept of the living dead provides African society with the major base of the people's sense of continuity as a family, a clan, and a nation.*

Throughout the novel, prayer is seen as a backbone of the community. The family praises God and thanks God that they have lived for another year (p.14). Simple religion is supported as a good example to living. Nellie's father believed in God and whatever anyone else does to the land, the increase comes from God. Life should be governed by God's seasons (p.21). However, in the novel there is also a hope that the Second Coming will bring black angels (p.50)- perhaps a desire for a more meaningful Christianity. A simple faith in the novel suggests, I would argue, a happiness and contentment that God was still in His Heaven and that He was still



smiling (p.110). However, there is an acceptance that God takes and God replaces “That was God” (p.112) and this involves a deep simple faith – the envy of many. I would argue that Brodber has no difficulty with the concept of faith so long as the past and the ancestors are not denied. There is a place for both in Jamaica and in her concept of religion and spirituality.

Great Grandfather William, meanwhile, was made into a veritable saint. He was christened as a “child of God” and was “an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven.” (p.134). Whilst he was brought up in the Anglican Church, he acknowledged that the parson had done his job well, but that it was his “divinations” that were limited and at fault. He could not foretell the future. Nevertheless Great Grandfather Will is seen as the hope of a black dynasty (p.135). As time went on, it was acknowledged that he was a sinner, but “not a faithless one” (p.137). He kept his Christian promises to his brothers and father and upheld Christian morals. However, when God called “he merely put the receiver to a deaf ear” (P.137). He was a good, kind and intelligent man and a ‘christian’ (with a small ‘c’). When his daughter turned away from the expectations that her family had for her, Great Grandfather Will saw nothing wrong in her and still visited her. Because of this and because of the way he lived, he was made a virtual God by Pappa and “became established in his home as an embodiment of all that was good and desirable” (p.140).

Great Grandmother Tia Maria’s advice to her ‘khaki’ (mixed race) children is that they must adopt the values and language of the privileged status like their father. Great-grandfather William acknowledged his membership to the Anglican community and the faith of his father (p.135). However he was without real faith. To be spiritual

can, at times, have its downfall and goodness can be a sign of weakness in an otherwise greedy world. Tia, meanwhile, went mad and there is the suggestion that this may have been because she “didn’t know the drum and very soon she did not know what a Nine Night was.” (p.138). This meant that denying her culture and inheritance was like denying herself and so there was no anchor in times of trouble and no community spirituality.

Papa’s grandfather (O’Callaghan, 1993, p.60) was the white ancestor who is associated with “wafer disintegrating on your tongue” (p.30), suggesting communion and High Church of England allegiance. However, Nellie shows some confusion as she says she meets the “pale one” at communion every month. When she takes the blood and body, instead of associating this with Jesus, she relates this with gobbling, an Obeah reference to the hen registering deep in her personal unconsciousness (p.30). This could also be a critical association with the church, as she does not appear to feel at ease neither with communion nor with the church- she does not find spiritual wholeness here. There is a suggestion that these people of mixed race are fragmented because they do not acknowledge their ancestors, but some unity develops during the work as they strive to find their own spirituality. (Renk, 2001, p.116).

*Jane and Louisa* chronicles the history of a Jamaican rural family and helps it move out of the kumbla and allows the family and community to gain intra, inter, corporate and spatial spirituality. The community and individuals are re-connected and balanced. They can now aspire to transcendent spiritual harmony and this has been achieved through the African, Christian and Jamaican aspects to include the whole of the community to make this community stronger.

Spirit thievery in its many forms is a major theme of *Myal*. (1988) Lalla (1996, p.95) suggests that *Myal* is a generically distinct novel. Its themes include betrayal, exile and the alienated wife. The replay of memory retrieves crucial elements. O'Callaghan (1990, p.51) states that the novel contains Biblical resonance and contemporary illusion. She further explains that the English have brought in all the African peoples who have a particular world view, and they insist on taking this view away from them and this is the same as taking their spirit away. Without the spirit "you cannot live; without it, you're just plain flesh." (ibid, p.52) The novel is really the struggle to get back the spirit. I would argue that the novel locates consciousness and ultimately re-connects Ella back to the source. She needs to regain her 'intra-personal' spirituality. There are several parallel narratives of spirit extraction and replacement. The novel explores reconstruction and healing through articulation of the obscure past- the half that has never been told. (Lalla, 1996, p.96) Cooper (1994, p.70) discusses the ambiguities of spirit thievery, possession and zombification, which act as the novel's parallel plots which centres on the 'dis/possessed' women Ella and Anita. Their stories illustrate appropriation of consciousness and the destruction of their wills and are regarded in the novel as the process of zombification or spirit thievery. Reverend Smith defines this as (p.107):

*Taken their knowledge of their original and natural world away and left them empty shells – duppies, zombies, living dead capable only of receiving orders from someone else and carrying them out.*

The story initially introduces Mass Cyrus who is called upon to heal. He is the Myal man (p.4) and the events into which he is asked to intervene are seen as not strange but natural- where the supernatural, natural and demonic are defined and intermingled (Cooper, p.74). The cosmology is clearly linked, in Mass Cyrus' eyes, by the

thunderstorm as the novel begins (echoes of thunder and rain of King Zombie) and the psychological trauma of Ella, whom he is called upon to heal.

Ella is displaced. She has links with “big eye” and its association with the “evil eye” metaphor in Jamaican folk culture, symbol of envy and greed. Therefore, while she is envied, she is excluded and even becomes invisible to her teachers. Her reading of Kipling’s poem “Half devil and half child” substantiates the links between good and evil. The community also laughs at her and her mother who takes her as a baby to the reeds. They wonder if she thinks she’s like Moses (p.7). She is also called an “alabaster baby” (p.7), which highlights her strangeness. Later, as her tummy grows, she is likened to “carrying baby Jesus” (p.83). She needs to be healed, but as Maydene Brassington in her capacity as White Hen suggests (p.83) spirit thievery comes in so many ways. Selwyn, by making a play out of her story, takes away her original knowledge of her world and leaves her an empty shell. He has taken away her spirit and her soul.

Miss Gatha represents the healing powers of Kumina, where Christianity has limited impact. Amongst the spirits who come to dance Myal and Kumina are ancestral spirits. Miss Gatha invokes ancestral spirits that take possession of the living – so has contact with zombies. The tabernacle is her place where she exorcises the zombified spirit of Anita. Everyone recognises that this is her day and there would be no church (p.73). She has a direct “telephone from earth to heaven” (p.73) (a transcendental spiritual relationship) and Maydene like everyone else, knew that “Miss Gatha dealt in drums and in spirits” (p.77). However, she is not seen as lurid voodoo nor exotic, but part of healing and ordinary faith in the spirit world like Ole African.

Ole African is a necromancer and deals in witchcraft. He recognises a spatial spiritual relationship with Africa and the land. He has a scarecrow-like appearance and, in Selwyn Langley's play, he is portrayed as the arch punisher but this is a distortion of the truth. He goes where the spirit has been let loose and needed to be "cut and cleared" (p.34) and is seen as having saved Mass Levi (p.31). He is highly respected in an odd sort of way and accepted as part of the community, but not by the Reverend Brassington who would rather not come into contact with him. However, his wife Mayedene prayed much more often after she met him and instead of only praying in the morning and evening, she now prays at lunch time as well. There seems to be no confusion in the community that the minister's wife and the Necromancer work together, although at first this was an uneasy relationship. There seems a place for Christianity and witchcraft, spirituality and spiritualism side by side.

The Rev. Simpson is very much in touch with the spirits. He speaks of the spirit preparing him for his Sunday Sermon (p.36). In line with Maydene Brassington, he uses the expression "spirit thieves" (p.37) for separating people from themselves (p.37). He realises he has too much anger in him and it is his weakness. He feels he has "an out of body experience" as he tries to "join the spirit back to flesh peaceably" (p.37). He is Dan whilst Ole African is Willie in their conversations and these are their other names, like Maydene who is "White Hen". Dan and Willie have easy conversations between Voodoo and the Bible (p.66). They both speak of "Hoodoo Men, Voodoo men, wizards and priests" (p.66) and Dan quotes Timothy in the Bible: "For God has not given us the spirit of fear but power and love and of sound mind." (p.66) They may see their 'spirits' as coming from different places, one a spirituality

with Biblical ancestors, another with Voodoo ancestors, but there seems to be no overall conflict as spirituality is not seen as a uniquely Christian. Cooper (p.72) argues that the spirit's power is manifest, but it is its containment (the healing) and the ordinariness of faith in the spirit world that is Brodber's point – not a lurid voodoo tale.

Mass Levi - the Baptist Deacon - is portrayed as being particularly evil as he appropriates the spirit of Anita to regain his sexual potency. Apparently his sexual powers were well known (p.31) and he was desirous of women (p.33). However, he and his wife, Iris, doubted his powers and he spent much of his time in the privy with the Bible and other books (p.61). His wife thought that his talking to God was giving him power (p.63) and states that there are several ways of going to Church (p.61). Little does she know that whilst she thinks he is "spiritually strong", he is zombifying Anita. She only suspects when she sees the baby doll in the privy (p.74) and hears a girl's scream coming from there after Miss Gatha has had her day. It was the Rev. Simpson to whom Iris went for help when she found Mas Levi dead and "still hanging like a dead rat." (p.61). The Rev. Simpson covered it up so there would be no disgrace to the church, much to Rev. Brassington's respect.

The Rev. Brassington is a weak character, although initially he thinks he is in charge of his wife. However, she is much stronger than him. He soon learns that she is in contact with the Obeah man (p.64) and he very much hopes that his wife is not part of a coven (p.90). He is 'out of his depth' although his wife joining the 'coven' makes for a more exciting sexual life (p.44).

Maydene Brassington is one of the strongest characters in the novel, although she is white and the wife of the Methodist minister (p.13). She is spiritually strong. She initially went for walks in Grove Town as an excuse to spread the ministry, and her father dealt with exorcism (p.65). She felt that God had particularly wanted her to watch him change scenes (p.13). She had initially been attracted to her husband because he was a half-caste – like the brown Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross (p.15) and her parents agreed to the union. She was seen in the community as a cross between a Miss Gatha (a woman who could see, in the sense of a gift of prophecy) and as dealing in darkness. As she was white the community did not initially understand her and felt that she was interfering.

Maydene regards her husband as a "spirit thief" (p.19). "You keep taking away people's spirits". However, her husband feels his ministry is to "exorcise or replace" (p.18). She wants him to refill his people, to re-connect them to their spirituality but he reduces them to become dependent children. She treats the community as equals and her conversation is compared to Adam and Eve, eating the forbidden fruit (p.23). Treating black people as equals was unusual for whites. She prayed to be equipped with the armoury for spiritual welfare and to "teach us how to pray". (p.56), but after she met Ole African (p.83) she prays far more which perhaps emphasises the link between Christianity and the Occult. Maydene worries about giving someone else control of your spirit (p.64): "put your spirit in another's hands and you hold him back". (p.65) However, she feels that she has something to offer when the spirit of the forest invited her to be part of the group (p.69) and the spirits acknowledged her powers by calling her "White Hen." This gave her acceptance within the community and a recognition that she was spiritually strong (as defined by Lartey's definitions of

spirituality) by being part of their corporate spirituality and this made her more powerful than her husband or the church.

Between Miss Gatha, Rev Simpson, Ole African and Maydene, they draw out the spirit from Ella. They re- connect her to the source, but this cannot be done in isolation. All members of the collective community have a part to play. Whilst the Afro/Jamaican is ultimately what works in the end, there seems to be a place for the Church and Christianity (although this is more marginalized than the spiritualism) This links a cross-section of the community so that it is not seen as an exotic tale of zombification. However, there is mention of dolls (like Jane and Louisa) and a voodoo baby doll is used by Mass Levi. Ella is referred to as an alabaster baby. Maydene retrieves Ella from the United States, which is seen as the extreme Europe and brings her back to Jamaica (Lalla, 1996, p.103). Drums are also mentioned as trying to extract the spirit – the icons of zomification. The final mediation takes place as Rev Brassington goes to Simpson to speak about Zombification (p.108) and comes to respect Simpson as “a very evolved spirit” (p.97), especially as he covered up the disgrace of Mass Levi. Rev. Brassington comes to terms with his wife’s role and acknowledges that “faith is the substance of things unseen.” (p.91) Maydene recognises that the individual is ultimately responsible for resistance or complicity and the novel ends with her firmly established as part of a growing “community of resistance”. This manifests itself in her dialogue with the spirits (Lalla, 1996, p.103).

Myal itself means spiritual liberation and in *Myal* (1988) the spirit is purged and freed. Child and community grow from simplification to intellectual empowerment and this change is possible through collective resistance, through recognition of



individual responsibility and through recognising the spiritual strength of the ancestor (Lalla, 1996, p.104). O' Callaghan (1990, p.58) sees the importance of the novel as not just about getting back the spirit – which includes a re-affirmation of the sacredness of the African heritage, which is part of West Indian culture; but also implies the recognition of the 'evolution' of the spirit. This, she suggests, is the creolisation and adaptation of the spirit to the realities of the modern Jamaica. I would argue that it is this spiritual strength that is an intricate part of Brodber's idea of a Jamaican god.

In *Myal* (1988) Brodber briefly mentions the church in a less favourable light. The Rev. William Brassington expects his parishioners to buy special clothes for Sundays; even "felt hats" (p.18) and they had little enough money to buy clothes that they could only wear once a week. The church should not be encouraging this, argues Maydene Brassington, his wife. It would be more practical if the women wore head ties so that these could be worn on many occasions and the church would be more favourably considered for adapting a less rigid approach. She compares the rigidity of wearing hats with taking the parishioner's spirit. She is cynical and worried about old men "sitting in empty church, unable to read the responses." (p.18) They hang on William's every word, which reduces them to children. She wants the church to give something back, not just take and thinks that William should be careful not to try and "remodel them into shapes he approves." (p.21). Mass Levi, The Baptist Deacon, is also seen in a cynical and evil light. He is a womaniser and "He had his way with women" (p.33), especially the matrons of the church. He also gave rum to entice the men to go to church. "Many a man come to the Lord that way. Love Mass Levi and shame." (p.33) He took the Bible into the privy with him and his wife thought he was

praying; yet he was using the Bible to assist him in his spirit thievery of a young girl so that he could enhance his sexual potency. The Rev. Brassington is seen as rather weak and out of touch: "Parson read too much book. That is why him can't look straight in people's eye". (p.52). The Methodist Church is therefore not seen as meeting the needs of the community and seen rather as a peripheral, and not a very effective part. Although the Baptist minister has more authority, the Anglican parson is barely mentioned.

Narain (1999, p.108) suggests that in *Myal*, Brodber focuses on the way in which colonisation, especially in the form of Christianity attempted to take away the spirit of a people, reducing them to Zombies. Ella needs to re-connect herself and her community. By the end of the text she is able, in her role as a school teacher, to recognise the damaging effects of words being a potent symbol of colonial damnation and so she can destabilise this effect by choosing to read against the grain of colonial texts and to appropriate meanings for herself. This enables her to gain freedom and a healing for her community.

After Ella succumbs to Selwyn's attention and questioning, she is finally violated and has her spirit stolen. Her story is transformed to 'The Biggest Coon Show Ever', her body bloats into a phantom pregnancy and she is sent back to Grove Town to re-connect and recover. She is reconnected with her community and all in the community witness her exorcism and the smell of poisons coming from her body.

Anita's story, runs parallel to Ella's, both being of similar age, but Ella is a black Jamaican, whose body is being possessed by mass Levi who is trying to cure his impotence. He tries to drain her vitality and her house is stoned as he tries to "thieve

her spirit". Narain (p.110) states that what Brodber dramatises in *Myal* with the use of Anita's and Ella's bodies is a playing out of the variety of ways in which cultural alienation is "imposed on the whole community" and their bodies become "the stage upon which the whole community's zombification is enacted and exorcised". This brings spiritual healing and Lartey's 'corporate' spirituality for the whole community.

Narain (1999, p.114) argues that there is a shift in Brodber's work from the female body towards the spiritual. She believes that Brodber invites parallels between Ella as a spirit medium and the black woman writer as a conduit and cultural medium.

However, I would suggest that Brodber's aim in all her novels is to re-connect with the ancestor, with Africa and whilst there is a certain respect for the Christian, it is only through developing a spirituality suited to the Jamaican concept that the 'spirit' can be returned to the community. Brodber sets about to speak, I would suggest on behalf of that community and develops an unique 'god' which encompasses many aspects of 'spirituality and spiritualism' to make it Jamaican.

Lartey's 'corporate' spirituality is particularly prominent in Brodber's *Louisiana* and the major theme of the book concerns this. She does this by using the heroine Ella to unite the community spiritually. Ella achieves this through healing and builds bridges between the past and present, between one place and another and between those who suffer confusion of displacement. She helps people find their own spiritual relationship with God, with themselves, each other, with their community and their surroundings. However, according to Lichtenstein (1999) 'A Suffering Saviour', although she finds spirituality in the community, does she find a spiritual wholeness

for herself? She is not able to attain her wish to have children, so Lichtenstein wonders if she dies a satisfied woman.

According to Lichtenstein (1999) Brodber positions Ella as perhaps one of the most heroic figures in Caribbean literature. She embodied spirituality and healing for the Louisiana community that she inhabits. Ella exhibits her healing powers on a variety of levels. To begin with she (and Madam Marie, her mentor) are used as a comfort for the many displaced souls and unhappy people who are trying to find their own spirituality and identity. She and Madam use their power as psychic mediums to aid the community. For the sailors who pass through the parlour, Ella re-connects them to their spiritual source by reconstructing the stories of their past. In particular, she connects with Ben, who comes from her own home, which is Louisiana in Jamaica, and together they work through the past so that he can move on “My job was to help him relieve his painful past” (p.103). Using her psychic powers Ella takes on the role of Lilieth (a student that Ben had impregnated then abandoned, but for whom he suffers angst). So Ben can work out the anguish and attain spiritual wholeness and Lartey’s ‘intra-personal’ spirituality – being at peace with himself.

Ella plays this role for many of the men – suggesting she represents the whole community and not just women. The men who pass through the doors are mostly displaced and many are feeling homesick for their home country of Jamaica. Through music she tries to re-connect them to the world of the South and New Orleans (Lichtenstein, 1999). Her main mission is to unite black people from the South with those of Jamaica- both from disparate communities and she seeks to heal them and make them feel a sense of belonging.

Ella also works for women's healing. Her first encounter with the spirit world is when the spirit of Mammy King, the old woman whose history she used the tape recorder to investigate, possesses her body. Through spiritualism she also meets Lowly, Mammy's friend who died years before and gradually Ella connects spiritually with these 'venerable sisters' and moves beyond a social science investigation into exploring the history of a small community in order to re-connect it and give it its cultural identity. The tape recorder and the power of the voices which were heard become increasingly important because she would commit to words those things that these women did which were important, but which they themselves had no power to write about for the benefit of future generations. She helped them move from the oral to the literate world and the world of print so that future generations could know about the past, learn and help gain spiritual healing from a sense of belonging, not only for themselves but also for their community.

Lichtenstein states ('A Suffering Saviour – The Trials of Ella in Erna Brodber's Louisiana', Brown University, 1999) that by delving into the notion that death brings an end only to the body, not to the spirit, Brodber has given Ella a powerful experience with African cosmology. By adding an alternative conception of death and the spirit in her novel, Brodber has further delivered the notion that the West holds but one perspective out of many. She draws together Western and African together in the novel and so (according to Lichtenstein, *ibid*) has reduced the cultural stronghold that the West held on both history and religion.

Ella, in the novel, often suffers from ill health as she pays for her talent of healing through the spiritual world. When she becomes possessed, she struggles (unconsciously) and has to take to her bed for weeks. She risks losing her own identity and spirituality to help the community; neither can she come to terms with the public and private spheres. She cannot be a mother because: “Are female prophets allowed to have children?” She finds no substitution for children and she struggles with herself because she is unable to reproduce. She seems only to be able to be either a prophet or mother but not both, so she must make sacrifices for the greater good. She goes between the domestic sphere of “Reuben’s woman” and the spirit world wherein she conducts her work.

Ella’s view of Christianity is ambiguous in *Louisiana*; on the one hand Ella holds the view that God is a vengeful God as illustrated in her mother’s Episcopalian Church. She cites words such as ‘dread’, “before Jehovah’s awful throne, ye nations bow”. The words “awful and confound” stick in her throat (p.43) and she compares them with dread to the iron gates over the city’s sewerage system. Not a flattering comparison. She feels that she lives in fear of these awful words linked to Christianity and “go hurtling down to into nowhere” (p.44). Even near her bed there were other words taken from her mother’s church – “sore” and “distress” and she likens the chanting of psalms with something threatening. Even the interior of the church, where her mother worshipped, had a stained glass window with a “horn-headed picture” of Jesus Christ and which had, she believed, a dart going through his heart. Whilst many churches have just such an image of Christ in stained glass, the fact that the service started at 6.a.m meant that probably at this time of the morning, Jesus would look even more frightening and re-enforce the idea of a vengeful God. Apart

from this, a 6 am start does not encourage church-going, especially amongst teenagers and this is emphasised by Ella stating that “I dropped out of Church-going before I entered high-school”. (p.58). After she had dropped out she still remembered quotes from the Bible, but these suggested the same vengeful god “I am a jealous God.” (p.59). However, because she appears to be working hard in school, her family forgives this rebellion of non-attendance at church. As the novel develops into a story about ancestors and spirit thievery, the impact of a cruel Christianity diminishes. I would argue that in the early part of the novel, Ella recognises that the traditional Episcopalian Church is not a model to sustain her and she cannot find comfort from such a cruel God so must move on to find something more suitable to a Jamaican version of religion. However this novel, whilst critical of traditional Christianity in the form of the Episcopalian Church, does not condemn religion and indeed the novel suggests that there is a need for a belief that is suitable to individuals, especially in Jamaica.

On the other hand, Ella speaks of her conversion to the Bible (p.98). She acknowledges Madam just “took her Bible and read” (p.98) and recalled Genesis – the birth of the world and symbolising that she herself is being re-born. She says that from then on the Bible fascinates her and takes up her time. “I’m glad Madam brought it into my life” (p.99). However it is still used as a tool for predictions and to explain her transfiguration and is still used to work with the ancestors. However, the Bible eventually becomes her obsession and (p.106), she gradually regards herself as a female prophet and wonders if, as she is one, she will not be allowed to have children. Eventually, she becomes something to gawk at by the Catholics, like a freak show. (p.109)

Narain (1999, p.110) regards the text of *Louisiana* to be more fragmented and fractured than that of *Myal*. The text is, like *Jane and Louisa*, littered with different voices, which include snatches of conversations, proverbs, songs, jazz rhythm and 'spiritualisms'. There is rapid shifting between 'real' voices and 'spirit' voices and also the voice on the recording machine, all of which suggest spiritualism and recognition of the ancestor as being important to the 'spirituality' of Jamaica. Ella is an anthropological researcher and her 'case study' dies before she has a chance to finish her work, which involves the new technology of the tape recorder to record her interviews. Mammy and her spirit friend, however, communicate with Ella through the tape recorder. Cooper (1995, p.4) suggests that the use of the tape recorder is a metaphor for cross-cultural, transcendental communication. She argues that the physics of sound reproduction becomes the psychic medium through which spirits of the dead communicate with the living. Narain (1999,p.111) states that Ella becomes increasingly receptive to these voices and through these re-connects to her Jamaican heritage. She becomes the focus for the community and, on behalf of the community, she connects with the ancestral past and operates the spiritualist group, which includes giving group therapy. The physics of sound reproduction becomes the psychic medium through which spirits of the dead communicate with the living.

At the start of the text, Ella is portrayed as a 'little woman' (Narian, 1999, p.112), but by the end, she has developed into an almost Rastafarian type figure in long flowing gowns and is now a vegetarian. (Although Rastafarians do not accept 'spirit possession'). However, because she is mother of the community, she cannot be a biological mother, it appears. In this transformation the tape recorder is eventually



replaced by the pendant with a hole in it-she is now able to have some control over her 'calling' as opposed to having very little control with the tape recorder. Although Ella does find 'corporate' spirituality, she does not find spirituality and spiritual peace for herself. She has an uneasy relationship with the spirits and a relationship which does not heal and re-connect her. She is not able to be at one with herself, but has become the body politic – she has sacrificed her own spirituality and happiness for that of the community.

Narain (1999, p.114) argues that there is a shift in Brodber's work from the female body towards the spiritual. She believes that Brodber invites parallels between Ella as a spirit medium and the black woman writer as a conduit and cultural medium.

However, I would suggest that Brodber's aim in all her novels is to re-connect with the ancestor, with Africa and whilst there is a certain respect for the Christian, she places importance on cultural identity, folk culture and the past so that communities can be re-connected spiritually. Lartey's 'corporate spirituality' can only come about when individuals have found their own sense of spirituality and this can ultimately make the community stronger, more balanced and in spiritual harmony.

*Jane and Louisa* emphasises Lartey's corporate spirituality. The community, through individuals and their experiences, are re-connected. However, it is through individuals finding spirituality for themselves, initially through Lartey's definitions of intra, inter and spatial spirituality (relationships with self, others and place), that the community can acquire a powerful sense of spirituality. *Myal* also gives prominence to the community through spirit liberation and empowerment of individuals. Brodber, I would suggest, shows that a 'Jamaican God' gives spiritual strength to the

community and challenges traditional colonial beliefs of a 'colonial God.' God should be relevant to Jamaica and its communities. *Louisiana* once again highlights community and illustrates that people can achieve their own relevant spiritual relationship with God so that co-ordinate spirituality can be attained. This is achieved through healing and 'spiritualisms' and by re-connecting with the ancestral past.

By showing various aspects of 'spirit thievery' and the importance of a sense of belonging, Brodber shows that Christianity, at times, can take away the spirit of the people. Traditional western beliefs hold one perspective of religion, but there are others, perhaps more suited to Jamaica that are important and the Church can work with these. It is only through developing a spirituality, suited to the Jamaican concept, that the 'spirit' can be returned to the community, developing a corporate spirituality. Brodber re-connects the spirit so that each person within the community can find their own spirituality to enrich their lives and make the community stronger. Without spirituality they are empty shells and life is hardly worth living – there is no quality of life. Brodber speaks, I would suggest, on behalf of that community and develops an idea of an unique 'god' which encompasses many aspects of 'spirituality and spiritualism' to make it Jamaican.

## **Chapter 7**

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## Chapter 7

### Jean 'Binta' Breeze

#### Christian Spiritual?

There is a strong spiritual dimension to Jean Binta Breeze's work and, whilst there are some concessions to the African ancestor, her work, I would suggest, highlights a Christian spirituality as well as a spatial spiritual relationship with the earth and its elements. Jean 'Binta' Breeze is mainly a 'performance' poet. Mervyn Morris (cited in Hassan, L., *Women of the Word*, London, Creation for Liberation, 1988, p.13) argues that Jean 'Binta' Breeze is the best of the generation of Jamaican performance poets and pays particular attention to gesture and detail in her performances. Henry Palmer ('The NI interview Jean 'Binta' Breeze,' *New Internationalist*, Issue 310 March 1990) in his interview with Breeze, remarks on her powerful stage presence and her performance poetry was so entertaining and emotional that when Breeze performed at Maya Angelou's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday (backed by a Gospel choir), Angelou was so moved that she stood up and walked straight into Breeze's arms.

Breeze was born in 1956 and brought up by her grandparents in rural Jamaica. She learned early in life that "there are simple pleasures in life that can get you by." For Breeze (interview with Palmer, 1999) these have always included poetry and performance. Her art is a fusion of Reggae music and the spoken word, which is labelled as 'dub' poetry. Breeze regards dub poetry as a public voice, a political voice and a social commentary that works to a rhythm (ibid). The rhythm comes from the Reggae and the poetry is the love of language with a sense of rhythm and music whilst using this to record stories and oral observations, and her poetry becomes

verbal dance (Cooper, 1993, p.7). However, I would suggest that Breeze regards any poem which a poet decides to read in public to be a performance poem and her recordings, I would argue, are evidence of this.

June Bobb (*Beating a Restless Drum – poetics of Kamu Braithwaite and Derek Walcott*, Trenton, Africa World Press, 1998) argues that Breeze is clearly very much influenced by Braithwaite, in her use of Nation language. She maintains the live aspect of poetry so that poet and public are always in debate (Bobb, 1998, p.233). They address their public directly in speech patterns that their audience understands. Breeze has shattered the boundaries of the written word. She involves body, sound and spirit in her work, (ibid.) and has an awareness of self and the world. Whilst her consciousness is no longer fragmented, she appears to be consistent in her opinions and has, it could be argued, attained a spiritual wholeness and one which involves many of Lartey's definitions of spirituality. This includes, at times, a mystical relationship with God, but more often a personal relationship with him, a spiritual relationship with others and the community and perhaps most importantly, a spiritual relationship with place – a spatial spirituality. She acknowledges a Caribbean cosmos. Africa is no longer marginalised but is now a centre of her existence. (ibid, p.235)

However, performance is not quite the same as dub which Breeze stresses has a role to play in bringing otherwise complex issues into the life of ordinary people. Dub poetry is political and Breeze herself is not afraid to tackle the IMF, Third World debt or the issue of colonisation, which she regards as international theft of resources and robbery of people's land. She worries at the stereotyping of Third World writers in

that they only deal with colonisation and history and so cannot therefore be at the forefront of current political happening.

Whilst her most famous poem 'Riddym Ravings' cannot be fully appreciated unless heard in performance, I would regard dub poetry as having a different relationship with the audience than that which involves the pages of a book. Whilst the performance is more immediate it can, at times, be less thought-provoking as an audience only gets one chance to understand the work, but as a reader there are several chances available. Bobb (1998, p.232) suggests the poem captures the vernacular of the region, the poverty, joylessness and the sense of a country under siege. Also, I would suggest that whilst Breeze's work is recorded, this loses the gestures and sexual energy as well as the body language so important to performance.

'Riddym Ravings' engenders women's despair between her madness and her sanity (Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood – Orality, Gender and the 'Vulgar' Body Of Jamaican Popular Culture*, Warwick University, London, MacMillan, London, and does not debase her condition of madness, neither is her state diminished by her moments of lucidity. This is an uncomfortable subject and one that, at times, some people would prefer not to confront and it is such issues that Breeze chooses to bring to the forefront. Cooper (1993, p.70) argues that the power of the performance "derives in part, from the righteous anger of utterance" and the text of performance poetry develops itself in front of an audience. Mervyn Morris (cited in Cooper, 1993) suggests that:

*if a poem in print does, however minimally, alter with, the specific context of its reception, the performance poem is even more difficult to fix, dependant for its meanings on the variable interaction between text, performer, audience and occasion, the relationship between performer, word and audience then becomes interdependent.*

Whilst one argument (cited in Cooper, 1993) suggests that the work would be appropriated and appreciated by the community, opinions differ. For example Gordon Rohler (cited in Cooper, 1993, p.71) argues that dub poetry is, at its worst, a kind of tedious jabber to a monotonous rhythm and the dubber can settle for automatic reflex of cliché and the nonsense performed cannot stand alone on the page. He further suggests that an indiscriminate audience can relinquish its responsibility to the artist and medium and can simply opt out of the critical contract “applauding a noisy belch of vacuity as great art” (ibid).

Stewart Brown in his essay ‘Dub poetry: selling out’ *Poetry Wales*, 22.2, 1987, pp.53-4) assesses the contradictions in a dub poet. He argues that as dub poetry becomes commercialised and wishes to entertain a mass, multicultural audience, there is a real danger that the protest, anger and fire become an act whilst the image of the chant/rant becomes the real substance of the performance. During my work with dub poets in schools, I would regard this as a valid point, as some of their views off-stage are not necessarily those of their on-stage performance. At times their anger may be a little hard to justify. They can be leading highly successful lives and are perhaps exploiting the stereotype of Jamaican rap and anger which is then an act for them.

However, whilst politics is a major force in Breeze’s work, she also writes of rural Jamaica, women’s themes and of religious issues. Although she states that her work has been criticised for being too political (Palmer, 1999), Breeze shrugs this off by saying that she recognised that her art is rooted firmly in social and political concepts. She is heavily indebted to Louise Bennett (Donnell, A. and Welsh, S.L., *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, London, Routledge, 1996) whom she

regards as an influence in her performance poetry. At times Breeze has tried to be asexual on stage because she was told that as a radical poet perhaps being a man was better, especially whilst dealing with such violent themes and that she should not present a sexual image which would detract from the radical message. However, she has accepted herself as having this sexual energy which is important in her work. She has also realised that whilst her poetry is regarded by some as too conventional and too personal, she doesn't mind and is determined not to follow rules.

Breeze deals with a variety of issues and themes in her work, and I would regard the spiritual/religious message as just as important to her as her political themes, for example in her powerful re-working of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm (examined later). As her spirituality is often 'entwined' with politics in her work, it illustrates that spirituality is a fundamental aspect of her life, just as making a political point and this, I would suggest, makes her work all the more potent. I would argue that because she is spiritually at ease with herself, her political messages start from a position of strength which would not be there if she was still 'searching for herself' and being bitter about the past or what might have been. Her work includes *Riddym Ravings* (1988), *Spring Cleaning* (London, Virago, 1992), *On the Edge of an Island* (Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe, 1997) and the *Arrival of Brighteye and other poems* (Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe, 2000). Her later work, in particular, deals with life, spirituality and the culture of her beloved Jamaica. Breeze conceives these meditations of her island as a kind of personal communion (a spiritual relationship with her environment and her God?- Lartey's spatial spirituality) and says; "They come from my healing side". She states that it is this side of her that "gives the strength to make it to another day." (Palmer, 1999)



## **Christian Spirituality – a personal relationship with God and community**

Breeze develops all Lartey's themes of spirituality – all intermingled in her poems. She illustrates a strong personal transcendent relationship with a predominantly Christian God. Her spiritual relationship with herself, others and her community show through, especially her love for others. The initial poem of Jean 'Binta' Breeze's *Spring Cleaning* (1992) places Breeze and the work, I would argue, in this spiritual dimension. The poem 'Holy Day' which suggests that sisters (meaning all women) should not to do the housework on Sunday, but to keep it holy. This places women at the forefront of her concerns. The awakening that she speaks of, if taken in a Christian context, could be seen as a Christian awakening and a new beginning, but on another level it could mean the awakening of women's consciousness and 'rebellion' in standing up for themselves and not doing the jobs expected of them. She tries to speak to the community and on their behalf, showing them how to start to be spiritual.

'Spring Cleaning' is directly taken from Psalm 23 "de Lord is my shepherd". In this poem, I would suggest, she illustrates a close personal relationship with God. The words of the psalm are intermingled with aspects of life and the poem is written in Jamaican dialect, which appears to make it particularly relevant in the context of mixing Christianity of the 'conqueror' and adapting it to Jamaica, but could be seen as irrelevant because it mixes the ethereal with the material. In between lying down in green pastures, leading her beside still waters and restoring her soul, she is hanging the washing out and mixing sugar, water and lime:

*She filling she favourite jug  
de one wid de cool palm pattern.*

She is enjoying her tasks and her life and gives the impression of contentment and of having a spiritual relationship with Jesus, (similar to that of his disciples 'walking' with him). He is part of her life. However her choice of psalm also reflects "I will fear no evil" as she sweeps her floor and hopefully sweeps out "all de dark spirits" (so she still believes in spirits) and is hoping to keep her house blessed by using Psalm 23 with her housework. So she mixes superstition with religion, making religion relevant to the Jamaican context. She tries instead to give women time for themselves, mixing her corporate spiritual and political messages. Breeze's relationship with God suggests one of fluid spirituality. She is not necessarily, it seems, tied to a practice of religion or church-going - God is everywhere.

These views of religion, I would suggest, reflect those in her poem 'Red Rebel Song' (*Spring Cleaning*, 1992):

*I is de free Christian  
who know Jah  
de one who roam  
an come home  
I is de red rebel (p.6)*

This suggests she has found God, but she has now returned from "wandering" and a freer faith to that of a more steady faith. Her God is one that allows a sense of freedom. I would argue that her faith is bordering on the 'transcendent', as she has a close personal relationship with God, but her faith is not necessarily mystical, as many of her poems are rooted in everyday concerns and politics. Yet, at times she is able to transcend and be completely at one with God. However, this depends on the definition of spirituality and Jean Binta Breeze, I would suggest, 'walks with God', rather than the more mystical spirituality of Goodison. She also has a strong spiritual

relationship, as Lartey would define, with self, others, the community and with things and place but this is not the 'spirit possession' illustrated in Brodber's work.

Prayer is, it seems, a fundamental aspect of her life. In her poem 'Testament', she is trying to tell her daughter how to live her life and explain from where she has come before she leaves home. She tries to explain her childhood and the reasons why things are as they are. She also tells her that she comes from a family that goes to church regularly and believes that:

*a likkle formal prayer  
to de heavens  
fah dese days ah fine (p.7)*

But that "every thought is a prayer", although her prayers involve asking God for simple things such as that the pot won't boil over or that the cooker won't leak. Whilst this does not appear to diminish the importance she places on God.

In 'For Patrick' (*Arrival of Brighteye*, p.13) she reflects on a "breath of air" which passes and touches you – perhaps once again the breath of God and the raindrop- a transcendent spirituality;

*baptise yuh  
in de lawd (p.13)*

which reflects a oneness and a spiritual relationship both with God and the elements. She suggests that goodness and love can be seen in the shade from a tree on a hot day or a passing smile from someone you meet and even the flavour of food brings pleasure. She suggests that people should:

*tek a moment  
tell yuhself  
someone is loving me. (p.14)*

However, in her poem 'Ja', (*Spring Cleaning*, p.73) she suggests the solution is to:

*Fill my eyes  
of your glory*

She says she never wants to leave or desert God. She mixes the transcendent with spatial spirituality as she mixes herself with the sea and the skies. Her mind is “ocean’s wide” and God’s love is the fuel for her journey and enables her to be strong and expand her mind and horizons. This reflects a personal relationship with God which tells of her mind being open, of love and flight. This poem, I would suggest, reflects more of a transcendent spiritual relationship with God as opposed to a simple faith because it does imply a rising above everyday life. On the other hand, her relationship, at times, is close to but not necessarily transcendent. She prays to God and also asks him to hear her prayers.

*Hear, O Lord  
and answer  
answer (Hear Lord, Spring Cleaning, p.32)*

She suggests that God should do something about injustice. She wants him to hear the collective community in:

*the sound of our voice*

because turning the other cheek as Jesus suggests is making the cheek bruised – life is damaging because of the constant knocks and injustices. Love, sadly, she feels does not conquer all:

*of our love  
soft answers  
do not always  
turn away the wrath*

This poem is an example of her relationship with God being one of closeness, simple prayer but not transcendence. This poem mixes a personal spirituality with that of the collective community spirituality and her ability to speak on behalf of the community and mix politics and religion.

In the *Arrival of Brighteye* (2000) – ‘The First Dance’ is an allegory of the Gospel according to St. John – “In the beginning there was silence” (p.16) whereas in St John’s Gospel it is “In the beginning was the word”. However, Breeze goes on to say that the silence was black and it was from this blackness that the earth was formed – a pertinent reflection on race, again mixing politics and religion. Later in the poem, the breath of the world – its heartbeat- is associated with drumbeats, reflecting images of Africa. The breath of the Holy Spirit is mentioned in “breath grows like a tree” which reaches for the sky. Then, as in Genesis, the serpent appears as a symbol of temptation and evil. The poem then changes to the first person and the creator. The poet is linking herself in a spiritual relationship with the creator and stating “breathed” (putting herself in the place of God- a transcendent spirituality). God’s breath, perhaps in the form of the Holy Spirit that created the world and the sun was born, as was darkness and the moon and trees given leaves and jungles formed as did fires and oceans. This parallels the story of the creation. It suggests that this is the best story of all and that the audience should look and listen as the poet asks, “can you move that?” It seems that part of her ‘feel good’ factor is her faith.

Breeze, it seems, like Goodison (examined earlier) sees herself as a healer and as she writes, she prays for:

*de touch of understanding  
for a word for de eagle an de dove* (‘A Song to Heal’ *Spring Cleaning*, p.15)

She hopes that everyone can be moved by her heartbeat, which is “like a rustling wind”, perhaps referring to the Holy Spirit and to life. She hopes that a song to heal will come.

Her African ancestry is mentioned in 'Birthing' (*Spring Cleaning*, p.55), as she remembers the dignity of giving birth and of being female. This femininity is also reflected in 'Ilands' (*Spring Cleaning*, p.77), where a comradeship is mentioned between women – sisters, mothers, and daughters. The poem speaks of the formation story and how the Caribbean came into being, a more Afro/Caribbean version rather than a Biblical version. The elements of water and an island spirit are recalled. She experiences a spatial spirituality, in Barbados, for example, from spiritual Baptists, who spoke in tongue:

*We found stories  
of our mother  
strength (p.83)*

God and nature in the form of Mother are seen in 'For the Mother' (*Spring Cleaning* p.48). She says that the mother sent the comets to light the night:

*Dispelling  
Clouds of doom*

The Earth is her womb. There is a reference to Christ's crucifixion when she:

*Rolled away the stone  
Blocking the empty tomb  
To prove  
We are not here  
We  
Are  
Risen*

Therefore, whilst God is usually seen as the father, in this poem 'he' is mother and nature linked. There is, the poem suggests, life after death, there is hope and love and there can be faith because Christ rose again – and so can we.

Another example of love not solving all, but that it should do, is illustrated in Jah Son' (*Spring Cleaning*, p.43). It is the cruel world of which she speaks and she acknowledges that only the light (of Jesus) shines out in the world, but there is so

much anger around and dreams “shot with guns”. Once again she asks God if he is there and how it is possible to keep the light of Jesus and goodness shining. But then she gets her answer – “Jah love.”

In *On the Edge of an Island* (1997), Breeze amusingly writes of ‘Sunday Cricket’ when the West Indies were playing England. She expresses an inter-personal spirituality through the characters and their relationship with each other and with God. The family had to go to church, especially as it was Easter Sunday. Church is obviously an important aspect in their lives. However, the minds of the protagonist and of others in the congregation are not on the Risen Lord, but on how the West Indies were doing in the cricket. Bredda B was going to take his radio in with him to listen to the match during the service. Many of the men in the congregation would prefer the cricket, However, they all seem to be answerable to their wives and mothers and have to do as they are told. Although there are strong views expressed on the church and the way that it is administered, it seems they do take an interest in church, but just not at the time that cricket is on the radio. They acknowledge that inspiration is important and “I don’t feel dat de number of years yuh spen in church qualify yuh to preach.” (p.64). However, the priest didn’t agree and felt it was the word that was important, not who preached it. The narrator was dismayed to see Bredda Kelly in the pulpit, which sent some of the “backbenchers to sleep and another bored.” (p.64). He complains that it is so depressing there that it could be mistaken for Good Friday – when there is so much solemnity because of Jesus’ death, and not Easter Sunday which should be celebrated as a joyful occasion. However, thankfully it was Bredda Jerry who was preaching the sermon and at least he has some empathy and sympathy with cricket as he used to play, before he was called to the church, but is now unable

to play on a Sunday for that reason. Bredda Jerry calls for a chorus and hand clapping, which, was we are told: “Dis is a fairly new ting in Baptis church.” (p.67) The older members of the congregation refuse to clap because they felt that this was what happened in the Pentecostal Church where “de poorer people go.” (p.65).

In the middle of the sermon, Bredda B like “im late fi heaven” shouts and claps that “Im mek a double century or im out?” But Bredda Jerry saved the day by asking Jesus to help him because with “Him on yuh side yuh cyann lose, no.” (p.66). He asks Jesus to lead the cricket team and the narrator declared that even if they collapse after a good start into the grave (like Jesus), they can rise again – an analogy with Easter Day. So their faith has appeared to be strengthened by Bredda Jerry and their visit to church, especially as church can be related to cricket. Church is obviously an important aspect in their community and their daily lives. This faith is regarded by Breeze in her poem ‘I Jonah’ as a gift – “a gift of faith” (p.93) which suggests a real joy and blessing and an important part of life to be cherished.

In her poem ‘Baptism’ (*Arrival of Brighteye*, p.16), Brighteye, Faith and the poet get baptised on the same day. Their names themselves reflect the importance of this baptism, which takes place in the sea (as I have also just witnessed in Africa). The poem highlights the importance of a close relationship with God that should take place in the baptism ceremony. (intra- personal spirituality) Jesus asked the little children to come unto him in the Bible, but there is a forewarning in that neither the pastor nor Brighteye were able to swim, so they are not in control. Faith is personified in her poem of the same name (p.17). Trust comes with faith and nothing can get her down if she possesses faith as she sits:



*on heaven's gates  
swinging bare feet over fires  
warmed by hell  
and cooled by fate.*

In her poem 'The Garden Path' (*Arrival of Brighteye*, p.23), Breeze speaks of a life with its many opportunities and choices. This is a poem which expresses a freedom of spirituality- a fusion of spatial spirituality of her relationship with the land of Africa and a spiritual relationship with God, be he African or Christian. She hopes that her possibilities will extend to making music out of words and sounds out of language. She feels she cannot easily ask for grace and she invokes many people for help – Mother Woman, visiting Obeah men, priests and soothsayers- a mixture of the traditional African and Christian. She remembers her past and from where she has come to try to develop her gifts. She reflects on the importance of freedom of spirit which is “more than church”, “more than virgin” (p.21) and “cannot be crucified” (p.25). She states that there is life after death as the:

*spirit lives  
without the flesh.*

In this spirituality there is freedom – a transcendent spirituality. She then refers to the Garden of Eden where “He walked me through a tree” and then he asked “Will you bite?” Yet she is tired of accepting Eve’s blame and wonders how many journeys “there were yet to come”. (p.25)

The spirit is again mentioned in her poem dedicated to Maya Angelou 'Planted by the Waters' (*Arrival of Brighteye*, p.26). However, this offers a spiritual relationship with the earth (a spatial spirituality) as it comes “out of the damp earth”. The poem speaks of age and the poet asks the winds to blow, perhaps referring to the Holy Spirit that will come again “to feed dis land” (p.26). The spirit rises up through the spine and so

the spirits can call again. Perhaps these are the spirits of the ancestors like Maroon Nanny. The drum is mentioned several times, referring to her African roots. She again suggests that she is bigger than her surroundings- a common theme within her work:

*We are bigger dan stone chile  
bigger dan mountain (p.28)*

They will end up being at one with Earth and/or God in “rooting out to sky” (p.31). This suggests a transcendent freedom of spirituality.

The theme of a joyful life is highlighted in ‘Wife of Bath Speaks in Brixton Market’. (*Arrival of Brighteye*, p.62). The title is taken from Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* – ‘The Wife of Bath’. The Wife of Bath suggests that although Jesus only went to one wedding, God didn’t mean for everyone to only go to one wedding and he certainly didn’t mean for her to have only one husband. It is more important to have “sex an multiply” and, after all, Solomon had lots of wives and she is envious of him and all the fun he must have had and God must have given him the energy to do all this. She says that the Apostles would have approved of her having another husband if the last was dead. There was no commandment that God had decreed regarding the number of husbands, but it was only St Paul who forbade it and she argues that he was in no position to judge. She reflects that what she does with her own body is her business and if God wanted virgins, the population would have died off. Men don’t want chastity and besides a good sex life is fun. Surely everyone could not be expected to give up these things for Christ because he never asked for that. Therefore, she will enjoy her sexual pleasure whilst she can – even though, it could be suggested, she is interpreting Christianity for her own ends. However, Breeze hints that God would be

happy for people to live a joyful life and would not be cross with her. Her spiritual relationship with God is celebratory.

Her God is a vibrant God. Breeze writes of playing God in a drama production in 'Playing the Messiah' (*Arrival of Brighteye*, p.65). She finds it hard to play God because she has no idea what he should be like. When "God" needs a place to eat there is only "Burger King" and so this doesn't allow her to get into the part well enough. She feels she needs a God who created tropical thunderstorms and Shango litany, not a measured God who speaks in "such cool tones". Instead, her God is powerful but he also smiles and is passionate so that it fills her with:

*big sweeping tears  
like Hallelujahs (p.66).*

## **Spatial spirituality – God is everywhere**

Spatial spirituality in the form of the skies is mentioned in ‘rising’ (*Arrival of Brighteye*, p.48). She turns to God to release the roots of pain, because although she may have many dreams, she has not lost the art of healing. Being healed, I would suggest, leads to freedom which allows her to have a spiritual relationship with God and with the elements- a mixture of many of Lartey’s types of spirituality including corporate spirituality and healing on behalf of the community. Although this Christianity is not like the “blindings of St Paul” who “looked spectacular in horsehair” (p.52 ‘Awaiting our Coming’ *ibid*), such sacrifices are not required by everyone and a simple, joyful life is best.

Her spatial spirituality is identified in ‘Bush Babies’ (*Arrival of Brighteye*, p.9). She indicates that the land where she is born is part of her:

*Here my skin became a part of nature as ferns fondled and bushes slid round me*

Whilst this suggests a relationship with the land, it does not look positively on the church which is described as “coming like a frightening orgasm”. She resents having to leave the land and have to dress up to go to this place where adults “pant and pray and pound the wooden flooring with their feet.” The preacher spoke of fire and brimstone and her innocence left her because he preached of sin. Mondays saw life getting back to normal with school and this life revolved around the circle of school, church and bush.

Relationship with the elements is important in ‘Easter Lilies’ (*On the Edge of an Island*, p.24). Max and Uncle Massa are part of the land. Whilst all the other members of the family have moved on and ‘progressed’, they have stayed. The

community sees this as something bad as they must have no ambition. Uncle Massa, however, is illustrated as a St Francis like figure because the birds “ would fly into his hands”. At school the only story that appealed was the story about lilies in the valley- he dreamt of being outside with the elements and spiritually linked with the land. Uncle Massa was Max’s mentor and Uncle Massa had taught himself to listen- a quality sadly lacking in those who had progressed and left. He listened to the sounds around him and could feel himself:

*part of the heat, the earth, the trees, the sky, part of the universe*

He experienced spatial spirituality and yet Max knew that his Uncle Massa would lead him to the site where a “ man could be silent with his gods”. This is vital to Breeze’s notion of spirituality.

When Max calls out looking for Uncle Massa, it is the animals and insects who answer. The birds that had come to him are awake and lead Max to Massa. The smell of Easter Lilies is present and the perfume is “held between life and death”- a circular spiritual relationship between Earth and Creation and it is by these lilies that Massa has gone to find his ancestors and help his sister, Max’s mother, to die and pass over to the other side although she did not live with them. He was able to spiritually communicate with her and Massa had told Max that he held her through the night (even though when she was alive she frowned on Massa). On seeing Massa, Max is compared to a vine, symbolising his spiritual bond with the soil. The land is also important in the burial process, as it is on her own piece of land that ‘Mamma’ had wanted to be buried – her spiritual roots are in the soil. The poem suggests that this kind of spirituality, which is perhaps frowned upon in the ‘progressive’ world – in the

end is important – people need to come back to this and this spirituality is essential to the balance of life.

Her poem 'Duppy Dance' (*Arrival of Brighteye*, p.67) alludes to Africa and her relationship with her ancestors. She expresses her spirituality at times through her spiritual links with Africa: the burial ceremonies of drawing a white circle and, on a moonlit night, chanting so that the ghosts can be exorcised. She also mentions rum as a present to the African Gods and ram's blood, as a sacrifice to the African Gods of Legba, Ogun and Shango. However, the duppies have to awak and dance to the drums, but Africa is what they need and this is part of Breeze's respect for the African Gods as well as the Christian God.

I would suggest that Breeze has a deep spiritual relationship with her God. God is everywhere- in the earth and in others as well as his own entity. This God, I would argue, has mainly Christian attributes, but is not traditional Christianity such as the Christianity of the missionaries. Instead she celebrates a joyful God but also acknowledges her African heritage and the earth around her and she brings all these aspects into her spirituality to make her idea of God and spirituality a Jamaican one. She experiences and illustrates all of Lartey's components of spirituality. This bears some similarity with Lorna Goodison's view of spirituality.

## **Conclusions**

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## Conclusions

All the writers within the study consider spirituality, in its various forms, to be an important force in their work. Lartey's definitions of transcendence, intra-personal, inter-personal, corporate and spatial spirituality are clearly recognisable in varying degrees throughout all the work examined, but each poet seems to favour one particular definition of spirituality above the others. I concentrated on Lartey because he provided a framework for the multi-disciplinary research and because without a framework the thesis would have been much more difficult and incoherent. However, such a framework produces restrictions which can also limit the exploration of the themes. Lartey's framework did appear more restrictive than the definitions offered by other theologians and post colonial theorists whom I examined, but overall I would regard Lartey as providing the best structure for this work.

### **A relationship with transcendence**

Transcendence, according to Lartey, is spoken of as God, Allah, Mystery, The Almighty, the Ultimate and a host of other definitions. Transcendence can and often is experienced in the middle of our everyday lives. A transcendent spirituality is the capacity to 'go beyond' ourselves. Lorna Goodison in her collection, I would argue, shows a close relationship with God – a mystical spirituality- a transcendence to rise above life and an awareness of the beyond. It may be part of the material world, but I would regard Goodison's mysticism as rising above this and not necessarily part of it. It is a communion with God and this communion with God permeates Goodison's work. Sufism is an important force in her work. This predominantly Islamic form of spirituality is, I would suggest, the 'backbone' of her work. There is a place for a Christian God and Sufism, Islam and a Christian God do not appear in conflict. With



God, who appears to rise above an individual faith, Goodison appears to have a very special spiritual, mystical relationship. Her quest appears to achieve this 'oneness' with God, although I would regard 'her' God as not particularly Jamaican, but He rises above and becomes universal. Lorna Goodison appears to show respect for the Church and Christianity. She also regards other religions, especially Sufism as important.

Olive Senior, on the other hand, does not appear to have a spiritual relationship with God, particularly a Christian God. Erna Brodber, whilst highlighting spirit possession, does not reflect a transcendent relationship with God in her work. Jean Binta Breeze's work illustrates more of a transcendent spirituality than Brodber or Senior. There is more emphasis on a Christian God than Senior, but she does not consistently attain the 'mystical' aspirations of Goodison. Transcendence is not uniquely Jamaican and many individuals from other faiths and cultures aspire to transcendence. Goodison, of all the writers whom I have examined, appears to be the one who has attained this transcendence. She has illustrated this through her work, most evidently through writing about Egypt and Jamaica appears to be on the periphery of her work and not necessarily at the centre. Hers is not a purely Jamaican response to spirituality.

### **Intra personal spirituality**

A spiritual relationship with self is about knowing yourself, but is not just individual. It is an individuate 'embracing' of the soul. Intra- personal relationships require evaluation by those who have low self-esteem and highlights self- consciousness and self-criticism. In Intra- personal spirituality we have the capacity to go beyond

ourselves, but not, I would suggest, to such a high degree as transcendent spirituality. Intra- personal spirituality is often the best that some people can hope to attain, as transcendence can allude many.

I would regard Goodison as having a strong intra-personal spiritual relationship for otherwise she could not attain transcendence. Her God is someone with whom she can talk and be with as an individual. Senior speaks as an individual, although I do not believe that this is the predominant type of spirituality in her work. Brodber does not appear to favour an individualistic notion of intra- personal spirituality. However, amongst the writers of my study, I would regard Jean Binta Breeze as having the strongest, intra- personal spiritual relationship with God. She appears to 'walk with' God and has a confident relationship with herself and her faith. She is a 'free Christian'. Unlike Goodison, I would regard Breeze as being uniquely Jamaican in her approach as she uses Jamaican 'dub' poetry and Jamaican dialect in her poetry.

### **Inter-personal spirituality**

Many of the writers whom I have examined illustrate through their work an intra- personal spirituality. Goodison has a strong relationship with family, especially her parents and her son Miles as well as her spirit guide Ali Darwish. She feels strong links between herself and her family which could be regarded as spiritual links. Senior, on the other hand, does not appear to have such a close relationship with others, especially family; perhaps because she has no family of her own and closeness to your parents can often be recognized only when you have children yourself. Senior often speaks through the mouth of a child and this can be part of a relationship with others but also perhaps a not very confident one- she speaks on behalf of herself less

often. Erna Brodber uses intra- personal spirituality and a relationship with others to attain her goal of corporate spirituality so it is not as predominant in her work. The other writers also allude to inter-personal spirituality, especially Jean Binta Breeze, but it is mostly used in order to gain corporate spirituality.

### **Corporate spirituality**

Most of the writers of the study illustrate corporate spirituality as define by Lartey to a greater or lesser degree. Goodison speaks as a prophet for the corporate community- she speaks through her work, I would suggest, as a priestess. However, the community on whose behalf she speaks is difficult to define. It can be the poor or dispossessed, but not necessarily just in Jamaica, but everywhere. Senior, alternatively, speaks more as an individual than a 'priestess of the community'.

It is Erna Brodber that, I would suggest, uses corporate spirituality predominantly in her work. All members of the Jamaican community – regardless of colour -appear to play a part in 're-connecting' to the source and in reclaiming a corporate spirituality. She highlights 'spirit possession' and it is not only the current community but also communities gone by – the ancestors, who figure predominantly. There is a gathering of all members of the community and Brodber speaks on behalf of and amongst the community together to attain a communal, corporate spirituality and re- connect the often rural, Jamaican community. Although it appears to be a uniquely Jamaican form of spirituality, it is also her own interpretation of spirituality and she cannot speak for all members of the community. Breeze believes that God is everywhere and also speaks on behalf of the community. She appears to see herself in the role of priestess of a community through her work.

## **Spatial Spirituality**

Whilst Goodison has a spatial, spiritual relationship with Egypt and in her later work with Africa, it is peripheral, I would suggest, to transcendent spirituality. Senior, in contrast, uses spatial spirituality throughout her work and this form of spirituality, as defined by Lartey, using the elements and place, features strongly. Senior uses Africa, the elements and the land, especially in the form of her garden, to form the basis of the spirituality in her work. Erna Brodber uses the spiritual relationship with land, but only to attain corporate spirituality. The other writers who have been examined do use some spatial spirituality but it is not as fundamental to their writing as it is to Senior.

## **The Church**

Goodison, I would suggest, whilst valuing a Christian God and having respect for the Church, does not necessarily appear to favour organized religion in her work. Transcendence is not always easy in organized religions, and perhaps giving power from the Church to individuals may be seen as manifesting itself in a lack of discipline and a familiarity with God that may not be encouraged in the Church – as there would perhaps be a lesser role for priests and for Church dogma. The God of the missionaries and the God of the coloniser, which sought to ‘keep people in their place’, is very far from Goodison's concept of God. Her God is someone who she can be with and talks to as an equal.

Olive Senior, in contrast, is far more critical of the Church and Christianity. It affected her childhood and it is the Christianity that was defined by the missionaries, a narrow kind of religion which, she argues, exploits the poor. She sees the Church as part of the Establishment. She does not appear to argue with the concepts of Christianity which, it could be suggested, is a good set of principles to live life by, but of how Christianity has been delivered to her in Jamaica and how it oppresses rather than liberates. Her early work, in particular, is highly critical of the Church, but her later writing concentrates on her relationship with the earth and the African Gods. The African Gods appear to be placed before Christianity and this, towards the latter part of her work, has only a peripheral role as spatial spirituality becomes more dominant. Alternatively Erna Brodber, I would suggest, sees a place and a role for both the Christian and the African and also for the Church, although at times, she can be critical of organised religion. Jean 'Binta' Breeze, I would argue, strives for a more Christian emphasis on the spiritual than Goodison. Her work does appear to be predominantly Christian in its emphasis.

Religion through the ages, it could be argued, has served to subjugate women and the poor, for example, the original translation of the Bible did not suggest women were inferior, neither did the original interpretation of the Koran. Religion has also helped to keep the poor in their place- 'The rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate'. This suggest that the poor man should accept his lot and missionaries and later generations, including the Victorians, used religion in their zeal for colonisation, justifying themselves through their interpretation of it.

However, it has also served to give hope of an afterlife and a sense of justice in this afterlife. It can also provide an example of a set of morals with which to run society

and ones life and it could be suggested that people need to feel there is a superior being in order to make sense of their lives. Whilst all the writers of the study hold differing views on Christianity, religion and spirituality and have different priorities in attaining a peace with themselves, they all, to a greater or lesser extent, have freed themselves from the 'colonial yoke' of Christianity. They are fluid in their approaches and they must be confident in their own spirituality to be able to be as fluid – it is, after all, often easier to follow an approach to faith that is traditional i.e. to go to a church and not to think too hard about what it all means. Although they are all Jamaican women, no two are the same, so there can be no unified view of Jamaican spirituality. What is without doubt is that there is a spiritual dimension in all the work. Each poet or writer has an undercurrent of Lartey's definitions of spirituality throughout their work, but equally no one writer can speak on behalf of all, but they are all 'uniquely' Jamaican, though I would argue that Goodison is less distinctly Jamaican and more universal. Most of the writers speak on behalf of their community, but the ideas are different and so the community cannot be universal. However, religion and Christianity in particular remain an important part of their lives. Even if, like Olive Senior, the Church is a cruel oppressor in the Caribbean, it is nevertheless an important theme of her work, as it is for all the writers of my study.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Fieldtrip to Jamaica**

I visited Jamaica with my family in July 1998. We stayed in a hotel in Port Antonio but refused the 'all-inclusive' option, instead eating at local shacks everyday and much to the tour guide's disgust, hired a little jeep and went out into the blue mountains, into little villages and down dirt tracks where we were warned that some 'bad things' were going on and for us not to go down this track. We visited Port Antonio itself many times and I spoke to Denise Palomino – a local poet who had a market stall. She said that Lorna Goodison and Olive Senior had been a big influence on her, but others I spoke to on the beach and in the hotel had never heard of either poet and instead preferred to read 'Mills and Boon'. However, when I saw the price of books in the shop, I realised why! This meant books were beyond the reach of most people.

Around Jamaica I was struck by how many signs said 'Jah loves you' and 'Ja mac I'. I sat with groups of Rastafarians on the beach. I went to speak to the elders of the village about churches in the area – I was invited into their homes because they saw us as a family with small children walking every day in the heat over 2 miles to the local shack – an unusual site for many Western people who prefer to stay in the hotel (and miss out on so much). I sat in shops waiting with mothers – who regardless of colour all have a sisterhood in common especially when it comes to discussing children. I went to see Nanny's grave and talked to taxi drivers who say that so many tourists miss out on treasures such as this because they perceive Jamaica is too dangerous – possible at times a myth perpetuated by tour companies to sell their tours and hotels to keep their guests in and spending there. We also drove to Kingston and the University campus where we met Victor Chang and after he had showed us round and chatted to us about his research work we had a lovely lunch with him around the pool at the university with my children and husband trying to show an interest in my work!

I visited churches in Port Antonio. I briefly visited an Anglican Church service, which was much like home, I also listened to some of the hymns in the Pentecostal church but the highlight was a church service in the Zion church. The service had already started and had been going on for many hours – our western tastes would not have the patience for such a long service. Everyone was dressed in really smart clothes – often white looking as if they were off to a wedding. The service was taken by a man who quoted the Bible constantly and who still continued to talk of slavery and the chosen peoples of Israel. I was the only white person there but was made to feel very welcome and also had the privilege of seeing my neighbour become quietly 'possessed' in the service and start to speak in what I thought must be 'tongues'

## **Appendix 2**

In June 1999 I visited Egypt with my family. I talked with the renowned tour guide and Egyptologist Maher Haggag. I talked about Sufism and also about Egyptian iconography. I showed him Lorna Goodison's poems about Egypt and we discussed the symbolism.

In addition I have visited South Africa and in particular Natal many times and have been to the same places as Lorna Goodison mentioned in her poem 'Natal Song'

### **Appendix 3**

Interview with Olive Senior – June 1998 – chatted to Olive whilst we were in a workshop in London, I asked her about Christianity and her views and we also corresponded for a few months after and sent Christmas cards

Interview with Emmanuel Lartey – February 1999- in Birmingham University – talked to him about his views on spirituality

Interview with Honor Ford Smith – 2002- Corresponded over the internet and Honor told me where to look in her work for examples of spirituality

Interview with Mervyn Morris- 2002- Listened to poetry reading in Mold and especially 'On Holy Week' and chatted afterwards about religion and his work

Interview with Rex Nettleford – 2001 – Listened to his lecture and chatted afterwards

Interview with Lorna Goodison- 2004- Listened to poetry readings and then chatted afterwards about her views

#### **Appendix 4**

**Interview with Theresa lo Chang – Birmingham- Theresa is a nun working in South America with the poor and street children and talked of Liberation Theology.**