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“God doing limbo”: Creolised belief systems represented in selected Caribbean poems

by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the representation of Afro-Caribbean mythology, folklore, and tradition in postcolonial Caribbean poetry. In addition, this study explores how references to Afro-Caribbean folklore connect the African diaspora in the Caribbean to a shared history of belief and has become essential in the creation of a creolised national culture. The significance of the representation of Afro-Caribbean folklore, mythology, and tradition in poetry is explored through selected poems by Olive Senior and John Agard. Poetry by Kei Miller is also explored to highlight how the rejection of evangelicalism and the reshaping of Christianity is an important aspect of creolised culture in the Caribbean. Thereafter, Tanya Shirley's poetry is analysed for a unique view of black female sexuality in relation to Afro-Caribbean spirituality. As this dissertation delves into the intricate threads of Afro-Caribbean mythology, folklore, and tradition woven into the verses of postcolonial Caribbean poetry, it becomes evident that beyond the rejection of colonial forces, these rich cultural expressions serve as a unifying chorus, harmonising the echoes of shared histories, resilient beliefs, and diverse voices, ultimately crafting a vibrant creolised national culture that resonates with the heartbeat of the Afro-Caribbean spirit.

Key words:

1. Afro-Caribbean belief systems.
2. African folklore.
3. Creolised Christianity.
4. John Agard
5. Kei Miller
6. Olive Senior
7. Postcolonial Caribbean poetry.
8. Tanya Shirley
9. Trickster figures.
10. West African Cosmology.

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Contents

Declaration i

Abstract ii

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

Chapter 2: Resurrecting Precolonial Gods in Olive Senior's *Gardening in the Tropics* 13

Chapter 3: Ananse's Web: Afro-Caribbean Belief Systems and Nationalism in John Agard's Poetry 41

Chapter 4: "*Child, Put Yu Ear to de Stones"*: Christian Revivalism and the Reorientation of Christianity in Kei Miller's Poetry 64

Chapter 5: Finding "Our Water Selves": Female Agency, Sexuality, and Spiritual Practice in Tanya Shirley's Poetry 86

Chapter 6: Conclusion 114

References 119

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Chapter 1:
Introduction

This dissertation explores the representation of belief systems in selected postcolonial Caribbean poems by Olive Senior, John Agard, Kei Miller, and Tanya Shirley. Through a nuanced analysis, this dissertation unravels the profound significance of Afro-Caribbean mythology, folklore, and tradition as they intertwine with the Christian influences and the spiritual climate in the post-colonial Caribbean.

Caribbean societies have evolved and changed since the ominous arrival of Christopher Columbus (Taylor & Case, 2013:130), who referred to the Caribbean indigenous people as *caribe* which, to colonisers, came to mean "bad Indian", "brutal savage", and those who are not willing to adopt Christianity (Taylor & Case, 2013:79). This classification was used to justify the brutal genocide of Indigenous Caribbean people, leaving the space open for African slaves to be forcefully introduced into the Caribbean through the Atlantic Slave Trade (Taylor & Case, 2013:130). While colonial efforts and the establishment of slavery were primarily economic exploits, racial denigration was used to justify and expand these endeavours. By establishing non-white people as inferior, any treatment or level of exploitation is justifiable. Thus, the establishment of the African as allegedly sexually deviant and devoid of morals was the foundation on which colonial oppression was built and fortified.

Afro-Caribbean belief systems sprung from the introduction of African slaves and were despised by missionaries who attempted to exterminate these beliefs (Taylor & Case, 2013:130). The perpetuation of Afro-Caribbean religious practices and folktales served as a tool of secret resistance (Darroch, 2005:105). Belief systems are an important part of the cultural identity of a place and yet within postcolonial literary criticism – including forms that centred around Caribbean poetry – these belief systems have been largely overlooked. I explore the reconfiguration of spirituality as a form of resistance against the attempted cultural assassination that occurred because of the slave trade, missionary infiltration in the Caribbean, and colonisation. I argue that poetry is used to bring Afro-Caribbean and indigenous belief systems to the forefront of the Caribbean religious experience in order to create a creolised national culture. By using belief systems as a touchstone in my research, I explore themes that would otherwise be ignored in order to unearth a renewed understanding of Caribbean postcolonial poetry.

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The Caribbean is a popular site for postcolonial criticism because, as Imre Szeman states in his book *Ones of Instability: Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Nation*, the Caribbean is "a space in which all of the contradictions and ambiguities of the colonial project have been revealed with particular acuteness" (Szeman, 2004:70). As a result, the literature on the Caribbean is extensive. Most noteworthy for the current study is Ngũgĩ's research in *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*. However, within this extensive canon, belief systems are largely ignored. One exception is Fiona Jane Darroch's dissertation "Memory and Myth: Postcolonial Religion in Contemporary Guyanese Fiction and Poetry". Darroch (2005:3) examined postcolonial literature from Guyana by placing it within a religious context and by redefining the term "religion" outside of Western history. Darroch (2005:3) argues that caution and an unwillingness to criticize the category of "religion" has created a silencing and ignorance of the category of belief systems in postcolonial literary criticism. Darroch (2005:3) posits that "a vital aspect of how writers articulate their histories of colonial contact, migration, slavery and the re-forging identities" can be elucidated by analysing colonial histories within a religious context. Darroch demonstrates this by closely analysing Guyanese literature within a religious context.

Darroch draws on Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity to position Afro-Caribbean belief systems in a postcolonial context. Bhabha's theory is helpful in locating certain connections between Western belief systems and Afro-Caribbean spirituality; however, my research favours Glissant's (1997) theory of creolisation.

The concept of creolisation is intrinsically linked to the studies of multiculturalism, multilingualism, identity, and hybridization. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity is used "to describe the construction of culture and identity within conditions of colonial antagonism and inequity" (Mambrol, 2016). Hybridity places identity in the space between otherness and the rearticulation of the other after colonisation (Radhamony, 2018:36). Bhabha' concept of hybridity comes from his investigation of literary and cultural theory and is used "to describe the construction of culture and identity within conditions of colonial antagonism and inequity" (Mambrol, 2016). Bhabha asserts that there is a gap "in-between the designations of identity" and that "this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha, 1994:4) The space that Bhabha identified is "celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two

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cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference" (Hoogvelt, 1997:158). Bhabha asserts that the adoption of colonial culture by the colonised and the subsequent remodelling of identity and reversion back to a shared history by the colonised leads to hybridity of culture (Bhabha, 1994:121). Bhabha investigates a pattern of mimicry in which the colonised begins to act like the coloniser (Bhabha, 1994:121), this mimicry is considered as a sort of camouflage with which the colonised aims to gain the same recognition and authority as the coloniser (Bhabha, 1994:121). This mimicry leads the colonised to a space of construction where the traditional hegemonic practices are "confronted, mediated and, re-enunciated" (Radhamony, 2018:34-35), this interstitial space is the "third space" to which Bhabha is referring (Bhabha 1994:4). Bhabha further defines the third space as the "interstitial passage between fixed identifications" that "opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 1994:4). This third space allows the indigenous person to "[straddle] two cultures" (Hoogvelt, 1997:158) and from this in-betweenness there is the initiation of "new signs of identity" (Bhabha 1994:1). Hybridity and the initiation of "new signs of identity" (Bhabha 1994:1) creates a space in which a person can fit into both parts of a society, the part that was excluded, erased and subjugated and the part that was bolstered by prejudice. This line of argument is a helpful way of looking at the process that ends in a creolised culture. However, hybridity as a theory is flawed and is often regarded as a mistake in postcolonial criticism due to the way in which it simplifies identity politics and constructs the hybrid subject as lacking in agency. The process of hybridity and the idea of mimicry reflects the acculturation that Brathwaite criticises as a forced kind of synthesis based on proximity (Brathwaite, 1997:10). Edouard Glissant's theory of creolisation can be understood as a method which remedies the shortcomings of Bhabha's hybridity. Glissant (1997:34) defines creolisation as a "limitless", "meeting and synthesis of two differences" and an "explosion of cultures". The explosion and synthesis of cultural aspects does not mean they are diluted or that this sharing is a forced condition of postcolonialism (as is insinuated by Bhabha's theory of hybridity); rather it implies that creolisation represents the consensual sharing of culture (Glissant, 1997:34). Glissant (1997:34) refers to the creolisation of language in the Caribbean as the most "obvious example" of this explosion. The creolisation of language in the Caribbean is prevalent in Caribbean poetry and exhibits the opposition to superficial definitions of identity in relation to rootedness. The idea of rootedness and belonging is important to consider in the quest for identity after colonisation and the movement of people. Glissant (1997) explores identity in relation to geography and rootedness, the idea that the culture of a person is defined by their geographical roots is contested with specific reference to

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the creolisation of cultures in the Caribbean, asserting that a person in the Caribbean exists within "a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open" (Glissant, 1997:34). What this suggests is that identity is no longer completely within the root but also in relation (Glissant, 1997:18). Glissant's theory of creolisation as a hybrid method makes apparent the connections that exist between language, stylistic technique, geography, identity, and religion.

Creolisation as a concept is intricate and I draw on Kamau Brathwaite's definition of creolisation in *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (1974) to unpack this phenomenon. Brathwaite emphasises the dynamic nature of creolisation as a multifaceted process of cultural adaptation, hybridisation, and resistance within Caribbean societies shaped by historical forces such as slavery and colonialism. Brathwaite separates the process of creolisation into two categories: "acculturation and interculturation" (1997:11). Acculturation refers to the "absorption of one culture by another" (Brathwaite, 1997:11) and interculturation refers to "a more reciprocal activity, a process of intermixture and enrichment, each to each" (Brathwaite, 1997:11). This conceptualisation underscores the intricacies of cultural interactions in the Caribbean, where the imposition of one culture upon another through colonialism (acculturation) coexists with a more organic, reciprocal exchange of cultural traits (interculturation). In this light, the Caribbean's cultural milieu emerges not as a static product but as a continually evolving process, shaping and reshaping the cultural norms of society. My research resonates with Brathwaite's framework, as it explores how Caribbean poets navigate and articulate this complex creolisation process. Their poetic expressions reflect a blend of African, European, and indigenous influences, not merely as a result of historical imposition but also through the spontaneous, creative fusion that characterises the Caribbean's unique cultural ethos.

Whereas Darroch (2005) is concerned primarily with the placement of the postcolonial genre into the religious space, Kasey Jones-Matrona (2019) is concerned with identity and the reclamation of spaces by rediscovering history. In her article "Reclaiming Jamaica's Indigenous Space through Storytelling in Lorna Goodison's 'Controlling the Silver'", Jones-Matrona explores Arawakan folklore, including the poem "Rainstorm Is Weeping: An Arawak Folk Tale Revisited" by Lorna Goodison. Jones-Matrona (2019:125) argues that the work of Lorna Goodison is important because it represents the history of indigenous people of the Caribbean. Jones-Matrona (2019:125) investigates how Goodison's poetry "serves as an act

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of reclamation of both ecological and spiritual Indigenous space". This exploration of reclaiming indigenous spaces will be expanded in my research as I explore the reclamation of religious and spiritual places as an Afro-Caribbean and a Christian concept.

As has been stated previously, research into Caribbean poetry is extensive. In the same breath, research on famous poets like Olive Senior, John Agard, and Kamau Brathwaite is equally as extensive. For example, Jordan Stouck (2005) explores Olive Senior's famous collection of poems *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994) by unpacking the metaphor of gardening in relation to "postcolonial theories of hybridity, diaspora, and dissemi/nation, and in relation to colonial histories of conquest and the desire for pure origins" (Stouck, 2005:103). Stouck's thesis examines the postcolony as "a garden" and examines this garden as "a figure for regional affirmations of identity, as well as for fertile and often painful cross-cultural exchanges" (Stouck, 2005:104). A notable distinction that Stouck makes is the link between the idea of gardening and the Garden of Eden which places the act of rediscovering and propagating identity as "ideal and metaphor […] to (re)enact cultural myths and identity practices" (Stouck, 2005:104). Stouck (2005) notes the distinctly Edenic terms used in Christopher Columbus's letters and journals to describe the Caribbean. Stouck's (2005) research focuses on the Edenic descriptive terms and the fetishization of the Caribbean as a tool for the erasure of Afro-Caribbean identity and the metaphor of gardening for reaffirming an individual Caribbean identity after colonisation. However, Stouck's research does not include the last section of poems in Senior's book, entitled "Mystery", which includes 12 poems dedicated to African Gods or divine figures. My research bridges this gap and includes the importance of reintroducing the African Pantheon into the Caribbean as a fundamental part of the postcolonial project.

Chapter 2 looks at this neglected section of poetry and focuses on the reintroduction of African gods into the Caribbean. The forced acceptance of the Christian religion means that Afro-Caribbean people "derided the old gods and they too recoiled with a studied (or genuine) horror from the primitive rites of their people" (Ngũgĩ, 1972:10). That which falls outside of Christianity was considered savage, heathen, and disgraceful. In this context, I suggest, the poet acts as an embalmer and a resurrector of African Gods that were cast into oblivion by the establishment of one true Christian God. This chapter demonstrates how the poet breathes new life into the forgotten Gods by rewriting the African pantheon into the Caribbean. The poet essentially acts as the scribe of an ancient spirituality and writes a "Bible-like" text that reflects

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the musical and oral quality of worship and storytelling in Africa. As a result, the Afro-Caribbean people can establish a connection to a past spirituality. The 'acculturation' (Brathwaite, 1994:10) that occurred as a result of the dominant Christian colonial culture means that African belief was forced to dilute in the face of Christianity. Olive Senior's poetry removes African belief from this acculturation and shows the 'interculturation' (Brathwaite, 1994:10) that is developing between African belief and the Caribbean. As I show in this chapter, through a reading of Olive Senior's poems, Afro-Caribbean folklore and mythology inoculates the Caribbean from a single-minded view of belief systems and allows for a cathartic return to a stolen religious space.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo's position establishes literature as a tool with which people can understand history and the past in order to form a national culture and an individual self-image (Ngũgĩ, 1972:40). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has referred to colonisation as a "cultural bomb," which "[annihilated] a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves" (Ngũgĩ, 1986:3). In Ngũgĩ's exploration of the postcolonial genre, he is concerned with the formation of identity after colonisation. Ngũgĩ explores hybridity and duality of identity, otherness, displacement, and language. Ngũgĩ also tackles the idea of spirituality and culture in *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* and writes: "Culture, in its broadest sense, is a way of life fashioned by a people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment. It is the sum of their art, their science and all their social institutions, including their systems of belief and rituals" (Ngũgĩ, 1972:4). He posits that in order for a national culture to form after colonisation, colonial institutions must be rejected because these "colonial institutions can only produce a colonial mentality" (Ngũgĩ, 1972:12). One of these colonial institutions is the institution of the Church by missionaries who "attacked the primitive rite, the dances, the graven images" (Ngũgĩ 1972:9). Therefore, in order to create a national culture and a "meaningful self-image" (Ngũgĩ, 1972:14), there needs to be a restructuring of thought and policy, as well as a rejection of colonial influences and a reclamation of the past (Ngũgĩ, 1972:14).

Ngũgĩ is critical of the Christian Church because despite the "basic doctrine" of Christianity is that of "love and equality", Christianity played an integral role in colonisation which was built on the hatred and inequality of races (Ngũgĩ, 1972:31). He argues that during colonisation "the measure of your Christian love and charity was in preserving the outer signs and symbols of a

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European way of life" (Ngũgĩ, 1972:32), thus the adoption of the Christian Church meant the complete rejection of indigenous belief systems, rituals, and customs (Ngũgĩ, 1972:32). He thus contends that establishing a new national culture and an identity after colonisation means that the writer "is haunted by a sense of the past" and is often concerned with coming to terms with the past (Ngũgĩ, 1972:39).

By representing indigenous belief systems in African literature "the African novelist has attempted" to "restore the African character to his history" and "has turned his back on the Christian god and resumed the broken dialogue with the gods of his people" (Ngũgĩ, 1972:43). The collection of essays in *Homecoming* portrays the Caribbean people that originated from Africa as having specific identity crises (Ngũgĩ, 1972:82). The Afro-Caribbean population was stifled and denied a common culture because whiteness was forced on society. Hence, "even after "freedom" was regained, the uprooted black population looked to the white world for a pattern of life" (Ngũgĩ, 1972:82). The Afro-Caribbean people were conditioned to accept otherness and looked shamefully and with negativity on "their past, even to their skin colour" (Ngũgĩ, 1972:82). The displacement of African people in the Caribbean has created a particularly difficult struggle for identity among black people (Ngũgĩ, 1972:85). Ngũgĩ's specific preoccupation with the effects of missionaries and the erasure of indigenous belief systems on the identity of a people directly relates to the central theme of this study. The framework of ideas will be applied to the thematic links between the poems and the importance of poetry in the creation of a national identity after colonisation. As I argue, the selected poems explore Afro-Caribbean belief systems, rituals, and folklore, and act as tools in the reclamation of the past and the creation of a new self-image that is divorced from whiteness. Hence, within this framework of Ngũgĩ's theories surrounding identity after colonisation, Caribbean poetry can be analysed as an attempt to reject colonial institutions and form a new national culture.

W.E.B. Du Bois coined the term "double consciousness" in 1903 and Fanon's ([1952] 1967) exploration of identity in *Black Skin, White Masks* closely resembles the concept that Du Bois constructed almost 50 years previously (Moore, 2005:751). Du Bois wrote that double consciousness is the "sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" and that there is an experience of being "an American, a Negro…two warring ideals in one dark body" (Du Bois, 1903a). The theory suggests that after colonisation the indigenous person is caught between a newly forming self-image and the image that a white-centred society deems

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acceptable. Postcolonial poets and authors have since grappled with the internal conflict experienced by indigenous people in the quest for a national culture and identity. The poet reflects the already stewing identity conflicts happening in Caribbean, thus the literature produced in the Caribbean represents the ongoing process of cultural transformation in the Caribbean. The theory of a dual identity or "double consciousness" is evident in Caribbean poetry due to the struggle for identity after the forced divorce from a shared culture, homeland, and identity due to slavery and colonisation. Caribbean poets and authors have commented on the crisis of identity that spawns from having no immediate connection to Africa but also not being fully accepted into the white-dominated society created by colonialism.

This crisis of identity and dual consciousness has birthed a literary rebellion in which poets, artists, and authors rediscover a shared history and forge new relationships to society in order to form a national culture and a new self-image. This framework can be applied to the reintroduction of indigenous folklore and Afro-Caribbean belief systems into the forefront of literature and to the attempted redefinition of Christianity to the black population of the Caribbean after colonisation. As this dissertation demonstrates, postcolonial poetry from the Caribbean is often concerned with mythology and folklore in an attempt to recapture that lost part of the Caribbean narrative and culture.

In the third chapter of this dissertation, I focus on how Ananse, limbo, and the steelpan drum flow through the collective experience of Caribbean people with specific relation to John Agard, an Afro-Guyanese poet and children's writer who is specifically interested in representing Afro-Caribbean culture in his writing. *Weblines* (2000) is a collection of poems that makes specific reference to Ananse, limbo and Afro-Caribbean rituals. This chapter serves to further the investigation of Ananse as a figure of "social and therapeutic anamnesis" (Darroch, 2005:20) in literature. The significance of these trickster tales in the Caribbean is analysed with special attention on Ananse as a metaphor for the Caribbean and the creation of a creolised national identity. This chapter thus explores how the creative repositioning of Afro-Caribbean belief systems forges a new national culture and self-image after colonisation.

The current canon of postcolonial research, and the Caribbean as a whole, does not focus on the importance of spirituality in relation to identity. This dissertation focuses on belief systems and spirituality as a vital aspect of identity and establishing a national culture after colonisation. Critics have started adopting this angle in modern studies of identity and culture in post-colonial literature (Ashcroft *et al*., 2006:188). However, the focus of this research has been

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concentrated on literature from North America and Canada (Ashcroft *et al*., 2006:188). While the current research that has been explored in this review is a helpful tool in understanding the nuances of identity in postcolonial Caribbean poetry, this dissertation extends this research into the realm of identity in relation to spirituality and the historical connotations of religion in the post-colony. The next two chapters in this dissertation focus on the more modern poets and attempt to fill the gaps in research surrounding spirituality in the post-colonial Caribbean.

The fourth chapter turns its attention to Christian revivalism and the reorientation of Christianity in Caribbean poetry. While Christianity may have been rooted in colonisation, the influence of evangelical Christianity is still prevalent in the Caribbean. The role of Christianity in the oppression of black bodies and erasure of blackness is evident in Caribbean poetry. In particular, evangelical Christianity is often associated with rigidity that is excluded in the new relationship formed between the Caribbean and Christianity. This process by which Christianity is reshaped is explored in Kei Miller's collections of poems *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (2014) and *There is an Anger That Moves* (2007). These poems show how Caribbean catharsis after colonisation cannot avoid an interrogation and reconfiguration of Christianity. This chapter shows how the acknowledgment of a flawed Christianity and the incorporation of the imperfect history into a creolised version of Christianity shows the evolution of belief systems in the Caribbean.

Kei Miller is a modern poet, but his poetry is significantly more famous than some of his contemporaries. Prior studies on Miller's poetry are relatively readily available as a result of Miller's popularity. Most of the prior research focuses on *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (2014) and has looked at theories related to the rewriting of colonial histories and the implicit challenging of colonial genres. A dissertation by Dania Annese Dwyer entitled "Writing Genres, Writing Resistance: Uptake, Action and Generic Dissent in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry" (2018) explores the idea of rewriting colonial genres. Dwyer claims that Miller challenges colonial histories and genres by invoking and subverting the cartography genre "implicit in histories, travel narratives, and maps" (Dwyer, 2018:81). A research paper entitled *Kei Miller's 'First Book of Chronicles' and 'Second Book of Chronicles' as Postcolonial Rewritings of the Bible* (2015) by Marie Berndt focuses on Kei Miller's poems as a rewriting of the Bible. The research explores the "numerous references to the Jamaican enactment of religion in general and the Bible in particular" (Berndt, 2015:1). The research focusses on the issues of displacement and broken history, while dissecting Miller's attitude to

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religion (Berndt, 2015:2), in the two poems "First Book of Chronicles" and "Second Book of Chronicles" from *There Is an Anger That Moves* (2007). Berndt's research provides a detailed account of the history of the Bible, specifically the motives and backgrounds of the biblical Chronicles. However, Berndt (2015:13) claims that the main reason for this is the fact that "[Miller] sees himself in a similar position as the author of the Books of Chronicles and takes upon himself the same task". Her study does not engage with the issues of identity in the post-colony and functions as more of a comparative study of the genre of the two poems and the Bible.

However, the evolution of Christianity in Kei Miller's poems does not unpack a vital part of the colonial and Christian experience; patriarchal views of women and the struggle that black women face in the post-colony. Female sexuality, and the repression thereof, is explored in this study using research from the critics Anne McClintock and Patricia Hill Collins. In her book *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest,* Anne McClintock explores the colonial probe into black female bodies and the impact of this violation on the black female psyche. McClintock (1995:1) states that one of the three themes of her research is "the transmission of white, male power through control of colonised women". In her analysis of the map in Henry Rider Haggard's novel *King Solomon's Mines* she points out the sexualized nature of the map and the implications of this portrayal. She argues that "the land, which is also the female, is literally mapped in male body fluids" (McClintock, 1995:3) and the map displays the colonial interest in the "conquest of the sexual and labor power of colonised women" (McClintock, 1995:3). The abstraction of the female body as land, an obstacle, and as conquerable reflects the colonial domination and violation of black female bodies. Throughout the book she unpacks the fetishization of black women and the erotic nature of colonial discourse which "draws on a long tradition of male travel as an erotics of ravishment" (McClintock, 1995:22). Africa, Asia, and the Americas became "figured in European lore as libidinously eroticized" (McClintock, 1995:22) and these discourses "firmly established Africa as the quintessential zone of sexual aberration" (McClintock, 1995:22) and within this emerging tradition "women figured as the epitome of sexual aberration and excess" (McClintock, 1995:22). McClintock explains this constant gendering of imperial endeavours and the eroticism of African women as a "strategy of violent containment" (McClintock, 1995:24) and as a resulting from "a profound, if not pathological, sense of male anxiety and boundary loss" (McClintock, 1995:24). Black women are cast into the role of sexual deviant and as that which demands control and needs to be constrained, conquered, and civilised. In

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this way colonists take control of the black female body and the narrative associated with female sexuality and agency.

Imperialism and the patriarchy rely on the condemnation of female sexuality in order to retain control of political and social spheres. In order to establish Black women as Other to the European women, in terms of values and sexuality, there was a need to establish the physical difference between European women and Black women in anatomy. McClintock (1995:35) claims that in the colonies "the mission station became a threshold institution for transforming domesticity rooted in European gender and class roles into domesticity as controlling a colonised people". The Victorian obsession with domestication and the eradication of female sexuality in favour of European ideas of marriage and religion led to a specific model of existence that was deemed moral. Hence, colonised African communities adopted the patriarchal class system and the idea of gender roles in society and in the home.

Patricia Hill Collins has identified a history of Black sexual repression in relation to colonialism and slavery in her book *Black Sexual Politics*. She maintains that "colonial regimes routinely manipulated ideas about sexuality in order to maintain unjust power relations" (Collins, 2006:87). The lore about Black sexuality and African sexual practices were grounded in "preexisting English beliefs about Blackness, religion, and animals" (Collins, 2006:87) instead of in reality or truth. Collins writes that "Western religion, science, and media took over 350 years to manufacture an ideology of Black sexuality that assigned (heterosexual) promiscuity to Black people and then used it to justify racial discrimination" (Collins, 2006:98) and the sexual exploitation of Black women. Black women were dissected, displayed, and shamed and robbed of control over their sexuality and their bodies. Both McClintock and Collins establish links between female sexual repression, colonisation, and organized religion, which will be used to analyse the reclamation of a female sexual identity and bodily autonomy by poets such as Tanya Shirley in Caribbean poetry.

In Chapter 5, I analyse the female body and a creolised Christian view of the body is explored in selected poems by Tanya Shirley from her collections; *The Merchant of Feathers* (2015) and *She Who Sleeps Wit Bones* (2009). The Bible portrays Christianity and morality as a state of being at war with the body; a good Christian is someone who readily battles the body's desires to remain sanctified. Colonisation and the "othering" of non-white people also created a war within the black female body. The historical demonisation of Black female sexuality facilitated the oppression of Black women. Thus, the removal of the moral constraints associated with a

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colonial Christianity facilitates the sexual liberation from the racist colonial discourse about black sexual deviancy. This chapter looks into gender and black female agency in relation to belief systems and faith in Shirley's poems.

There is a considerable gap in the research of Caribbean poetry, this gap being the neglect of more modern poets such as Tanya Shirley. The bulk of the academic work on Tanya Shirley is interviews with the poet and short reviews of her poetry collections. Carol Bailey has reviewed *The Merchant of Feathers* by Tanya Shirley (2017) and Andrea Shaw has reviewed *She Who Sleeps Wit Bones* by Tanya Shirley (2010), both for the *Journal of West Indian Literature*. Bailey acknowledges the importance of Shirley's portrayal of taboo topics such as society's treatment of homosexuals and the female body. Bailey acknowledges Shirley's treatment of female sexuality in relation to belief systems and Christianity. Shaw claims that *She Who Sleeps Wit Bones* is "a haunting collection in which Shirley thumbs her nose at tradition and formalized religion while concurrently celebrating God's grace and the value of rituals" (Shaw, 2010:96). The reviews are a helpful tool for engaging with Shirley's work, however they are not extensive enough due to the limiting length of a review style article. My research offers a critical and engaging analysis of Shirley's poetry. I focus on the implications of portraying the sexuality of the black female body in relation to belief systems and faith.

The representation of belief systems – both Afro-Caribbean and Christian – in Caribbean poetry redefines the relationship that Caribbean people have with religion after colonisation. Poetry is a unique vessel with which identity is explored and this medium offers a substantial view into the ever-evolving religious space in the Caribbean. In the reclamation of Afro-Caribbean religions that were nearly extinguished, poets have created a cathartic relationship to history and religion. This dissertation serves to shed light on the complexity of belief in a space that was colonised, and the portrayal of the metamorphosis that has created a uniquely Caribbean relationship to belief systems is significant in understanding the struggle for identity after colonisation.

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Chapter 2:
Resurrecting Precolonial Gods in
Olive Senior's *Gardening in the Tropics*

In the final section of *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994) by Olive Senior, the gods from the Yoruban pantheon are portrayed as powerful and transformative forces. These poems serve as profound decolonial tools, intricately woven to resurrect the gods in the contemporary postcolonial Caribbean context. In this dynamic poetic landscape, the Yoruban gods fulfil multifaceted roles, catering to the needs of the Afro-Caribbean people in the wake of colonialism. Among them, Yemoja and Olokun emerge as figures of restoration, while Sango and Ogun embody retributive qualities. Significantly, Ogun and Sango also assume the vital roles of community cleansers and architects of the future, ensuring justice and accountability for past transgressions. Through a skilful fusion of traditional forms and symbolism of *Oríkì Òrìṣà,* the incorporation of English and creole language, interwoven with Western and African mythological allusions, these poems enable the decolonisation of faith and the creolisation of Western and African belief systems in the Caribbean.

As the title *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994) suggests, Senior's poetry collection uses gardening as a metaphor to unpack colonial and imperial influence in the Caribbean. This analogy is particularly impactful as the Caribbean was fetishized during colonial times as an Edenic paradise that required taming. The collection explores the various ways in which colonial oppression has impacted the Caribbean in the past, and lingers during the postcolonial, or neo-colonial, present. Interestingly, the final frontier in the exploration of the Edenic metaphor is a rejection of Eden, as the new ideal is instead reinstated as a reconnection with the mysterious and unfamiliar gods from Africa. The collection moves through years of colonial history and ends with a section on African gods in the Caribbean. The last section, entitled "Mystery", engages with African gods and how they have adapted to the Caribbean context. Hence, *Gardening in the Tropics* confronts the effects of "cultural cleansing" as oppression and seeking a decolonial path forward. The use of African gods in Senior's poetry reclaims a connection to Africa, showing the potent power of literature that engages with African belief systems.

Postcolonial poetry from the Caribbean aims to reconnect Africa and the Caribbean by establishing a legitimate tether between Afro-Caribbean people and the history from which

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they were forcibly removed. However, the trauma and cultural erasure that comes with colonialism is inescapable; it actively hindered Afro-Caribbean connections to an African heritage. Therefore, an overt rejection of colonial institutions in an attempt to decolonise the Afro-Caribbean culture is necessary in moving towards the meaningful creolisation of Afro-Caribbean culture. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o unpacks decolonisation as a theory in relation to language in African literature in the book entitled *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986). Ngũgĩ advocates for the rejection of colonial language and highlights the need for African writers to revert to African language. Ngũgĩ defines the internal difficulty facing the postcolonial African as being "imperialism in its colonial and neo-colonial phases continuously press-ganging the African hand to the plough to turn the soil over and putting blinkers on him to make him view the path ahead only as determined for him by the master armed with the bible and the sword" (Ngũgĩ, 1986:4). In reaction to this difficulty, the African must engage in "the ceaseless struggles […] to liberate their economy, politics, and culture from the Euro-American-based stranglehold to usher a new era of true communal self-regulation and self-determination" (Ngũgĩ, 1986:4). The African writer is essentially locked in an "ever-continuing struggle to seize back their creative initiative in history through a real control of all the means of communal self-definition in time and space" (Ngũgĩ, 1986:4). Ngũgĩ's essay is an account of the ways in which colonisation floods African writing through colonial institutions, particularly, in his opinion, through language (Ngũgĩ, 1986:9). Ngũgĩ contends that "the bullet was the means of the physical subjugation" while "language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (Ngũgĩ, 1986:9). He calls for the African writer to return to using African languages instead of English because language is an important tool used by colonial powers in the eradication of African culture and serves not only as a means of communication but as a tool of cultural and intellectual domination. Therefore, the African writer must engage in decolonial practices to liberate the writing from colonial dominion. Ngũgĩ's position on the eradication of the colonial hold that is still present in the post-colony and the literature thereof can be applied to all aspects of colonial impact. This basis established by Ngũgĩ portrays language and literature as playing a crucial role in the process of decolonisation.

Using this framework, my research shows the importance of challenging the colonial Christian dominion over legitimate spirituality. Senior's act of resurrecting and reconfiguring the African pantheon serves as a potent challenge to the dominant religious and moral paradigms imposed by colonial powers. The forced acceptance of the Christian religion during the era of

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enslavement aimed to strip African people of their spirituality, deeming their indigenous gods as savage and heathen. However, through the act of rewriting the African pantheon into the Caribbean context, Afro-Caribbean poets restore agency and cultural legitimacy to African gods, challenging the Western domination of religion and reclaiming a sense of familiarity that became foreign in the diaspora. In acknowledging the role that Christianity has played in slavery, colonisation, and ethnic cleansing, the need for decolonisation in relation to belief systems in the Caribbean is apparent. Christianity assumes a monopoly over spiritual legitimacy and rejects all other religions, and Gods, as false. Furthermore, the values associated with Christianity had become the basis of morality for Western society. This establishment of a Christian morality justified the enslavement of African people as they were regarded as immoral and in need of saving. That which falls outside of Christianity was considered savage, heathen, and disgraceful. The cultural cleansing and enslavement of African people relied on having to accept Christianity. The forced acceptance of the Christian religion means that Afro-Caribbean people "derided the old gods and they too recoiled with a studied (or genuine) horror from the primitive rites of their people" (Ngũgĩ, 1972:10). Afro-Caribbean poets have reclaimed a connection to African gods by rewriting the African pantheon into the Caribbean. The poet acts as an embalmer and a resurrector of African Gods that were cast into oblivion by the establishment of one true Christian God. The slaves brought along the Middle Passage to the Caribbean originated in West Africa. Thus, the poetry in the Caribbean reintroduces Yoruba mythology to the Caribbean.

The Yoruba pantheon was born when a slave rolled a stone down the back of the first deity and shattered this deity into fragments. This was regarded as the first act of rebellion. The Yoruban gods are rooted in rebellion and thus can be effectively used in the rejection of Western dominion over religion. Wole Soyinka explores the way Yoruba myth and ritual are portrayed in African poetry and literature in *Myth, Literature, and the African World* (1976). Soyinka unpacks the ways in which African gods are approached in Africa, and their further significance to the diaspora. He describes this endeavour as "[pressing the gods] further into service on behalf of human society, and its quest for the explication of being" (Soyinka, 1976:1). He acknowledges the impact of the gods on the African diaspora and claims that their attributes and their "manipulative histories" have made them popular among poets and dramatists throughout history (Soyinka, 1976:1). The representations of the gods and their symbols have evolved in diasporic literature because the symbols of certain gods and the gods themselves have evolved due to contact with Roman Catholic saints and technological, artistic, and

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academic advancements (Soyinka, 1976:1). This fusion of African gods with the gods of other worldviews comes from the fractured connection that the diaspora has with Africa. The diaspora is reaching, in this case through poetry, towards a sense of familiarity with that which has become foreign. As a result, the diasporic representations of the African gods mimic certain representation of Western gods and Western mythology. Soyinka (1976:3) acknowledges a connection between the mythology of Europe, Asia, and Africa in the way that man did "exist within a cosmic totality, did possess a consciousness in which his own earth being, his gravity-bound apprehension of self, was inseparable from the entire cosmic phenomenon". Thus, the gods from Europe and Asia are easily entwined with African gods. Essentially, the gods represent a connection to the inexplicable natural universe and a space for the explication of uncertainties. Moreover, myths arise from man's attempt to externalise and communicate his inner intuitions" (Soyinka, 1976:3). In the Caribbean, there is a distinct impression that the representation of African gods is an attempt to reconnect and establish a familiarity with the gods that were severed from the diaspora. Soyinka (1976:40) describes the portrayal of African mythology in literature, specifically drama or poetry made to be enacted, as an attempt by writers to understand the vastness of the cosmos in relation to our own limited existence. The poet attempts to define the Caribbean person's relation to the African worldview and cosmos after coming into contact with Western mythology.

Olive Senior's poetry serves as a powerful tool for decolonisation, introducing African gods into the Caribbean and representing them as symbols of the creolisation of Gods in the region. These poems not only challenge the traditional colonial poetry form but also incorporate the structures of traditional Yoruban poetry, thereby subverting the dominant colonial worldview. By delving into the genres of Yoruba oral poetry, such as *Oríkì*, *Ese Ifá*, *Ìjálà*, *Iwì*, and *Ofo* or *Ohuń*, Senior's work explores belief systems and their impact on society (Olupona, 1993:248). According to Karin Barber, *Oríkì* serves the purpose of extolling the reputation of the individuals they are addressed to, while also giving shape to intangible notions within the community (Barber, 1991:3). In essence, *Oríkì* affirm the essential attributes of all entities, nurturing people's connections with one another, the spiritual universe, and their ancestral heritage (Barber, 1991:7). However, it is important to acknowledge that *Oríkì* also carry social implications, as it becomes a tool for power struggles and the validation of the existing social order (Barber, 1991:3). These poems serve as a means of connecting the worshipers to both the venerated deity and the Yoruba land, often performed by priests, priestesses, or the Babalawo at rituals and shrines dedicated to specific *Òrìṣà* (Barber, 1991:3, 7). Moreover, Thomas

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Lindon's article "*Oríkì Òrìṣà*: The Yoruba Prayer" (1990) outlines the structural elements of Oríkì praise poems. Typically, these poems begin with a short introduction that expresses respect and worship, followed by a series of praise names and titles used as acclamations (Lindon, 1990:207). The body of the praise poem consists of third-person statements about the deity, forming an Oríkì phrase. These descriptions and chants often anthropomorphize the gods and highlight their involvement in human activities, physical attributes, or incantations and chants used for invocation and veneration (Lindon, 1990:207). Worship and acclamation phrases may be repeated throughout the body of the hymn and at its conclusion, symbolizing the personal presence of the deity during the poem's performance (Lindon, 1990:207). The *Oríkì* poems also exhibit recurring thematic elements, such as the ongoing presence of the deity in the human world, descriptions of their mythical past, and the importance of continuous worship (Lindon, 1990:208). Furthermore, the *Oríkì* frequently explore the character of each deity in relation to their mythical past, current activities, and the enduring significance of their cult (Lindon, 1990:212). By weaving together Olive Senior's utilization of African gods, the incorporation of Yoruban poetry structures, and the insights from scholars like Karin Barber and Thomas Lindon, it becomes evident that the purpose, structure, and connection of *Oríkì Òrìṣà* to human lives and the contemporary world are all interwoven, offering a profound understanding of the role of mythology and decolonial attitudes in the Caribbean context.

The use of *Oríkì* poem structure reconnects the Caribbean people to Yoruba gods, while acting as a decolonial tool. The power of African gods is reflected as being both restorative, and as violent and rebellious at times. Poetic references to Yemoja and Olokun are examples of the restorative nature of decolonisation. Yemoja, also called Yemonja, Yemaya, and Yemaja, is the Yoruban deity that is "celebrated as the giver of life and as the metaphysical mother of all [*Òrìṣà*] (deities) within the Yoruba spiritual Pantheon" (Canson, 2014). Yemoja helped with the creation of human beings during the creation of Earth (Canson, 2014). Yemoja is the *Òrìṣà* of fertility, bodies of water, and protects those that live, work, or travel around water (Canson, 2014). Yemoja and Olokun are popular deities in the Caribbean as the slaves that were brought to the Caribbean implored the water deities to protect and bless the drowned slaves that were lost on the journey (Canson, 2014). The poem "Yemoja: Mother of Waters"[1] by Olive Senior

[1] All titles of poems are formatted according to the original printing in the collection of poetry from which they come.

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is a post-colonial, decolonial, and a specifically Caribbean version of the traditional *Oríkì* praise poems:

Mother of origins, guardian
of passages;
generator of new life in flood
waters, orgasm
birth waters, baptism:

Summon your children
haul the rain down

white water: blue water
The circle comes round

Always something
cooking in your pot
Always something
blueing in your vat
Always something
growing in your belly
Always something
moving on the waters

From Caribbean shore
to far-off Angola, she'll
spread out her blue cloth
let us cross over—

Summon your children
haul the rain down

sweet water: salt water
the circle comes round

Always something
cooking in your pot
Always something
blueing in your vat
Always something
growing in your belly
Always something
moving on the waters

If faithful to Yemoja
mother of waters, fear not
O mariner, she'll
smooth out your waves—

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Summon your children
haul the rain down

fresh water: salt water
the circle comes round

Always something
cooking in your pot
Always something
blueing in your vat
Always something
growing in your belly
Always something
moving on the waters

Life starts in her waters
and ends with her calling
Don't pull me, my Mother,
till I'm ready to go—

Summon your children
haul the rain down

ground water: rain water
the circle comes round

Always something
cooking in your pot
Always something
blueing in your vat
Always something
growing in your belly
Always something
moving on the waters

Renewal is water, in
drought is our death,
we dissolve into dust and
are washed to the sea—

Summon your children
haul the rain down

white water: blue water
the circle comes round

Always something
cooking in your pot
Always something
blueing in your vat

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Always something
growing in your belly
Always something
moving on the waters.

(Senior, 1994:133-135)

The poem starts with the traditional *Oríkì* introduction that includes a number of praise names and titles. Yemoja is addressed as the "Mother of origins, guardian/ of passages;/generator of/ new life in flood/waters, orgasm/birth waters, baptism" (ll. 1-5). The description links to Yemoja's mythical past as her involvement in the creation of life on Earth is alluded to, and her birthing of the other *Òrìṣà*. These designations hold profound significance, which can be deciphered through a nuanced understanding of the symbolism employed. While floods are commonly associated with devastation, they also possess the potential for rejuvenation and purging, akin to a cleansing process. Thus, the attribution of generating new life to Yemoja within flood waters underscores her role as a transformative force, capable of engendering renewal and regeneration even amidst apparent destruction. Interestingly, the inclusion of "orgasm/ birth waters" (ll. 4-5) in Yemoja's epithets serves as a provocative departure from conventional religious representations. Religious contexts rarely intertwine with intimacy and sexual experience. However, this deliberate juxtaposition challenges societal norms and religious boundaries. It disrupts the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, accentuating Yemoja's all-encompassing power that extends to the realms of sexuality and personal pleasure. By associating Yemoja with orgasms as well as birth waters, the poem highlights her embodiment of female creative energy, affirming her role as a deity intricately linked to the cycles of life, birth, and creation. The poem shows that Yemoja has power over baptismal waters as well as birth waters (l. 5). Somewhat ironically, she is given control over the literal cleansing practice that missionaries used to induce Christianity and erase African religion. This degrades the potency of the practice and affirms Yemoja's position in the faith of Afro-Caribbean people. The degradation and bastardisation of the baptism practice rejects colonial Christianity and furthers the decolonisation of belief systems in the Caribbean. Yemoja did not allow the slaves to be severed completely from their roots, as she invaded the baptismal waters. Furthermore, in contemporary times those that are baptised into the Christian faith are doing so with the help, or permission, of Yemoja. These varying designations highlight Yemoja's transformative power, her embodiment of female creative energy, and her role in challenging and reclaiming cultural and religious narratives. This portrayal accentuates her ability to foster rejuvenation amid destruction, while also subverting societal norms and

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embracing the entirety of human experience. These epithets position Yemoja as a symbol of resilience, decolonisation, and the revitalization of African spirituality.

The poem invokes many of the traditional qualities associated with *Oríkì Òrìṣà* creating a sense of incantation and invocation. The speaker or performer of the praise poem calls for Yemoja to "summon [her] children" (l. 6). The praise poem calls for Yemoja to call for the rest of the *Òrìṣà* to return to the Caribbean. The call for Yemoja to "summon [her] children" (l. 6) is the beginning of the body of the *Oríkì* that will be repeated throughout the poem. These phrases can be considered *Oríkì* phrases that would connect the performers and observers to the deity. Barber comments on the orality of *Oríkì* saying that "all oral texts should be thought of as action rather than object, as process rather than pattern" (Barber, 1991:7). By embracing Yemoja through poems like "Yemoja: Mother of Waters", Senior and other Afro-Caribbean poets actively engage in a process of decolonisation, rejecting the dominant religious paradigms imposed by colonial powers. The *Oríkì* phrases, when repeated, represent the chant-like orality of the performance of the *Oríkì*. The chanting and performance of the *Oríkì* is a ritual that allows the cult of the Yoruba deity to transcend into the spiritual plain and connect to the deity. The *Oríkì* phrase that makes up a portion of the body of the *Oríkì* poem uses second-person phrases that describe Yemoja:

Always something
cooking in your pot
Always something
blueing in your vat
Always something
growing in your belly
Always something
moving on the waters

This deviates from the traditional *Oríkì* structure in which the gods are described in third-person statements so as to provide more reverential distance. Yemoja, however, is portrayed as more familiar and connected to the Afro-Caribbean people. The refrain addresses Yemoja personally which highlights the presence of the deity in the *Oríkì* and the connection that is established during the performance of the *Oríkì* poem. The repetition of "Always something" (ll. 9, 11, 13, 15) (and never nothing) implies an atmosphere of omniscient abundance. Furthermore, by emphasizing Yemoja's productive hearth and inexhaustible sustenance, the poem affirms her connection to the Caribbean and challenges the scarcity imposed by colonial forces. This aspect of Senior's poem is quite typical, as *Oríkì* poems to Yemoja often thank the

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deity for their continued health and for the health of the land due to life-giving waters (Amogunla, 2020). The refrain declares that there is always something; "cooking in [her] pot" (l. 10), "blueing in [her] vat" (l. 12), "growing in [her] belly" (l. 14), and "moving on the waters" (l. 16). The reference to Yemoja cooking and being in a perpetual state of gestation depicts Yemoja in a very domestic and maternal role. Furthermore, the reference to Yemoja having something "blueing in [her] vat" (l. 12), reflects the process by which steel is fortified against damage from rust. Yemoja's hearth is also a space that fortifies and protects those that enter into her praise and into her waters. Furthermore, the contemporary necessity of the deity is exposed because the poem shows that there is no shortage of sea-travellers that require her protection. Yemoja's present activity with specific relation to the Caribbean is presented in ll. 18-21:

From Caribbean shore
to far-off Angola, she'll
spread out her blue cloth
let us cross over—

Yemoja's presence in both Africa and the Caribbean is highlighted, underscoring Yemoja's role in connecting the diaspora to their African roots. In this way, the worship of Yemoja represents rejecting the Christian monopoly over spirituality and re-establishing a link to African belief systems. The use of a traditional *Oríkì* praise poem to Yemoja in a distinctly Caribbean context reinforces the tie between Africa and the Caribbean. Just as Yemoja's waters touch the Caribbean and Africa, her influence connects the diaspora to a spiritual history that originated in Africa. The creolisation of the mythology, belief, and spirituality of Africa and the contemporary Caribbean is reflected in the assertion that Yemoja is present in both Africa and the Caribbean. In ll. 34-37 the speaker continues to show the present activity of Yemoja in the world:

If faithful to Yemoja
mother of waters, fear not
O mariner, she'll
smooth out your waves—

The speaker says that faithfulness to Yemoja and a renewed connection to African mythology allows for smooth traversing of the seas; Afro-Caribbean people are afforded a safe and easy metaphorical journey back to Africa. There is the opportunity for a cathartic journey across the Middle Passage to reclaim a connection to African belief systems. In engaging in decolonial practices and challenging colonialism, reconnecting with Africa and moving towards a

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creolised sense of self will be smooth. Yemoja's guidance and protection serve as a guiding force, facilitating a spiritual and cultural journey that transcends physical limitations and fosters a profound rediscovery of ancestral heritage.

The last thematic concern in a traditional *Oríkì* is the depiction of the continuing cult of the deity: ll. 51-54 show the continued belief in Yemoja's power over fertility. The poem says that "life starts in her waters" (l. 51) showing the continued belief in the deity's power. Yemoja is not traditionally associated with death, however the poems show that life "ends with [Yemoja's] calling" (l. 52). Many slaves drowned after being thrown overboard and the bodies of slaves that died from the poor conditions on slave ships were thrown into the sea. Thus, Yemoja in the Caribbean has evolved to suit the Afro-Caribbean history and context for in descending into the water, they are renewed (l.67) but without Yemoja's water there is only death (l. 68). The belief in Yemoja acts as a Christian-like antidote to true death of the soul. Yemoja is given similar attributes to a Christian God that can choose to end someone's life and if that person is a believer, they are renewed and resurrected in the water but if they are not, they "dissolve into dust" (l. 69). The speaker refers to Yemoja as "[their] Mother" (l. 53). The use of the possessive pronoun in describing Yemoja shows the cult to the deity is present in the Caribbean. Furthermore, the reintroduction of the Yoruban goddess in the Caribbean, with the rejection of Christian practices, reflects the rejection of the Christian monopoly over a true God. Yemoja is portrayed as a strong influence on the Caribbean, and her legitimacy as a goddess is reaffirmed. Notably, there is a school of thought that attributes the River Mumma figure from Jamaican folklore as being derived from Ashanti belief, more specifically from Yemoja herself (Williams, 1934: 173). Through the revival of Yemoja's worship and embracing of the Oríkì tradition, the Afro-Caribbean community actively decolonises its spiritual practices, restoring a sense of cultural identity. In this way, the poem becomes a powerful testament to the enduring strength and resilience of the Afro-Caribbean people as they forge a path towards creolisation and a unified sense of self.

Another figure that is of primary importance in the *Oríkì* tradition is that of Olokun. Olokun and Yemoja are often regarded as working together in representing "abundance, fertility, wealth, healing, and source of life and its mysteries" (Asante & Mazana, 2009:489). Olokun represents the dark and unfathomable bottom of the sea, while Yemoja represents the surface of the sea and smaller bodies of water (Asante & Mazana, 2009:490). Their combined restorative presence challenges the dominant colonial narratives and shows the importance of

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reclaiming African spirituality in the Caribbean. Olokun is known as "the owner of great waters" and "symbolizes the most unfathomable depths of the ocean and the seas" (Asante & Mazana, 2009:489). Olokun is the keeper of mysteries and the unknowable (Asante & Mazana, 2009:490). Olokun's wealth of mysteries and knowledge are sheltered within the deepest parts of the sea, "suggesting the unfathomable nature of [this wealth], as well as the struggles and dangers associated with its attainment" (Asante & Mazana, 2009:490). Olive Senior's poem "Olokun: God of the Deep Ocean" (1994:130) represents the importance of Olokun as a tool for questioning and for the rediscovery of a lost history:

I
In the waiting room
beneath the sea
lies mythical Atlantis
or sacred Guinee

Who knows
save Olokun
master of the deep

guardian of
profoundest
mystery.

2
Shall we ask him?

Shall we ask him
where the world tree
is anchored?

Shall we ask him
for the portal
to the sun?

Shall we ask the tally
of the bodies
thrown down to him

on the crossing
of the dread
Middle Passage?

Shall we ask him
for secrets read
in the bones

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of the dead, the souls
he has guided
to his keep?

Will he reconnect
the chains of
ancestral linkages?

Send
unfathomable answers
from the deep?

3
Divine Olokun
accept the tribute
of your rivers

the waters of your seas
give back wealth
as you please

guard us from our innermost
thoughts; keep us
from too deep probing

but if we cannot
contain ourselves and
we plunge

descending
like our ancestors
that long passage

to knowing,
from your realm
can we ascend again

in other times
in other bodies
to the plenitude of being?

(Senior, 1994:130-132)

The tone of this poem is more reverential than that of Yemoja. Olokun is not addressed personally or with a second-person address at the outset. Instead, the speaker seems nervous to engage with the god and asks those around them whether they should ask Olokun any questions. Olokun's relationship with humankind is not one of familial love or of maternal connection. Instead, the god has a more distant and feared relationship with humankind because of the

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knowledge that Olokun has, and the elusive nature of the God. The poem demonstrates the desire for understanding and spiritual enlightenment, but also the deep-rooted fear that accompanies existentialism and the truth. The speaker is considering what questions to ask the god and wonders if they should ask "where the world tree is anchored" (ll. 13-14) or "for the portal to the sun" (ll. 16-17). The third option posed in ll. 18-23 by the speaker to ask the god is this:

"the tally
of the bodies
thrown down to him
on the crossing
of the dread
Middle Passage?"

By linking these three questions the speaker inserts the Middle Passage as an integral and overarching part of Afro-Caribbean life. The poem confronts the painful history of the Middle Passage and reveals the speaker's desire to know the extent of the suffering endured by their African ancestors. However, this desire is flooded with trepidation and fear. Olokun is described as the all-knowing "guardian of/ profoundest/ mystery" (ll. 8-10). This description functions on a dual level. Olokun is the protector of the truth about history, but also the protector tasked with shielding the Afro-Caribbean people from the potentially overwhelming impact of that truth. The speaker expresses uncertainty that the god will be willing to "reconnect/ the chains of/ancestral linkages" (ll. 30-32). The speaker acknowledges Olokun as a shield against the painful truth of the Middle Passage. By guarding these mysteries, Olokun acts as a protective force, shielding the Afro-Caribbean people from the full weight and emotional toll of confronting their history directly. The poem grapples with the weight of the atrocities that come with the history of Afro-Caribbean people. The speaker is aware that delving too deep into the traumatic past may disrupt the psychological well-being of the community. Finally, as a response to this fear, the poem takes on a prayer-like quality as the speaker begins speaking directly to Olokun. The speaker asks Olokun to "guard [them] from [their] innermost /thoughts" (ll. 42-43) and to "keep [them]/from too deep probing" (43-44) into the painful history. The speaker continues by telling Olokun that there may come a time when they cannot help themselves, and they "plunge" (l. 47) into the depths of Olokun's sea by uncovering the past. In Yoruba cosmology, the ocean floor where Olokun resides is "the source of all mineral wealth and the sea gate to orun or Heaven" (Asante & Mazana, 2009:491). Thus, the questioner delves into the past and prays for Olokun's guidance into the afterlife. The

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speaker prays for reassurance from the god that this action will not destroy them, instead hoping that Olokun's protection during the process will provide spiritual growth and transformation across lifetimes. The speaker is praying for the god to grant Afro-Caribbean people a cathartic journey through the past "to the plenitude of being" (l. 56). The Afro-Caribbean people descend like the slaves on the Middle Passage, undergo a metaphorical death, and Olokun then allows them to "ascend again" (l. 53) but "in other times/ in other bodies" (ll. 54-55). The poem acts as a prayer of protection for Afro-Caribbean people as they traverse the violent history of the slave trade and the journey made by their ancestors. Olokun is the ultimate symbol of catharsis, as the god can provide people with the knowledge that they seek and act as a guardian against the overwhelming trauma of the past. Olokun can facilitate the traversing of a painful past and allow the questioner to remain unscathed.

The reference to "sacred Guinée" (l. 4) refers to both the actual Guinea region in West Africa and to a broader sense of a place of origin and a source of cultural identity. This directly brings Africa into the forefront of the poem and highlights the important link between the diaspora and Africa. This reference is preceded by a reference to "mythical Atlantis" (l. 3) from Ancient Greek mythology. The reference to Atlantis reflects the collision and ultimate creolisation of mythology and cultural traditions that has occurred over time. This cultural creolisation is a defining aspect of the Afro-Caribbean identity. The speaker asks if they should ask "for secrets/ read in bones" (ll. 25-26) of the "souls/ he has guided/ to his keep" (ll. 27-29). Olokun is portrayed as a Charon-like figure that ferries souls into the afterlife. The poem portrays the fusion of Western mythology with African cosmology in the Caribbean as a result of the middle passage and the subsequent development of a creolised world view. Furthermore, contending that Olokun has power over Atlantis portrays Olokun as having dominion over both the African cosmos and Western mythology. This rejects the Christian notion of religious monopoly and of the idea of one true God by debunking the hierarchical structure of Christianity. In Yoruban myth, Yemoja and Olokun have a symbiotic relationship, as a result their roles in the Caribbean should be considered in the same way. Yemoja is portrayed with distinctly Christian references to reject a Christian monopoly over belief and Olokun is portrayed with reference to Greek mythology. This reflects the creolisation of the Caribbean people's understanding of cosmology and mythology; however, this also reflects the rejection of Western mythology as the dominant worldview. The connection between slavery and Christianity has been asserted. Therefore, Yemoja rejects the Christian monopoly over religion and Olokun heals the scars left from the history of slavery by replacing old knowledge with new awareness. The two water

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gods provide the tools necessary to move away from the Western hegemony over belief and to reconnect with the past despite the trauma.

Olokun and Yemoja are the restorative figures in the Afro-Caribbean spiritual space. However, a sense of rebellion and rage in response to centuries of oppression, exploitation, dehumanization, and cultural annihilation is an important facet to the post-colonial Afro-Caribbean experience. Decolonisation requires a level of resistance and confrontation. Frantz Fanon (1967:35) writes in *The Wretched Earth* that "decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon" because the first action of colonisation "was marked by violence" (Fanon, 1967:35). This is because decolonisation relies on the destruction of colonial structures and the reformation of a world order. Thus, decolonisation is a "program of complete disorder" (Fanon 1967:36). He shows that decolonisation is the "veritable creation of new men" in which the "colonised becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself" (Fanon, 1967: 36-37). This process by which the colonised free themselves is the violent substitution of one reality (that of colonised or oppressed) with another (Fanon, 1967:35). Therefore, Fanon (1967:37) claims that "the naked truth of decolonisation evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it". Sango (also referred to as Shango) and Ogun are the gods that are associated with rebellion and justice. These gods can also be linked to Fanon's idea of violent decolonisation.

Sango and Ogun both have judicial roles, however Sango is mainly retributive, and Ogun stands for "humane but rigidly restorative justice" (Soyinka, 1976:141). Ogun is the god of "creativity, guardian of the road, god of metallic lore and artistry […] [, and] god of war" (Soyinka, 1976:141). Ogun is also represented in traditional poetry as "protector of orphans" and "roof over the homeless" (Soyinka, 1976:141). Ogun's role as the god of both war and creativity represents the inherent paradox in decolonisation efforts. Decolonisation is a multifaceted endeavour that involves both violence, particularly in the rejection of colonial structures, and creation, in the quest for self-determination and a new national culture after colonisation. Furthermore, Ogun facilitates the process of decolonisation and paves the way for creolisation in the Caribbean. Ogun's origin story is "the story of the completion of Yoruba cosmogony; he encapsulates the cosmogony's coming-into-being" (Soyinka, 1976:26). The gods sought to reconnect with humanity because they had become "anguished by a continuing sense of incompleteness, needing to recover their long-lost essence of totality" (Soyinka, 1976:27). The gods had to complete a "journey across the void to drink at the fount of

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mortality" (Soyinka, 1976:28) but, after the long isolation from humanity, "the void had become impenetrable" (Soyinka, 1976:28). Ogun took over as the leader in this quest and "armed with the first technical instrument which he had forged" (Soyinka, 1976:29), he cleared the "primordial jungle" (Soyinka, 1976:29). Ogun is "the embodiment of challenge" and is "constantly at the service of society for its full self-realisation" (Soyinka, 1976:30). In Ogun's conquering of primordial chaos, he was "literally torn asunder in cosmic winds" but this sacrifice allowed the gods to follow him without harm (Soyinka, 1976:30). Ogun emerged from this having uncovered an undiscovered part of himself; "the will" (Soyinka, 1976:30). According to Soyinka (1976:150), "Ogun is the embodiment of Will, and the Will is the paradoxical truth of destructiveness and creativeness in acting man". Both of these origin stories reflect the substitution or evolution that accompanies Fanon's idea of decolonisation. Ogun represents the psychological or internal skills of war, while Sango reflects the more physical aspects of war. Sango's origin story is marked by violence and cruelty, and, through his suicide, he violently opposes his own cruelty and the fickleness of people. Sango is reborn as a god that doles out punishment for bad behaviour in order to protect the community. Ogun's disintegration and subsequent rebirth reflects the ideological process of decolonial substitution, which is necessary for the progression of a new national culture after colonisation.

The story of Sango's origin is "not merely an interesting episode in the annals of a people's history but the spiritual consolidation of the race through immersion in the poetry of origin" (Soyinka, 1976:56). Sango begins as a tyrannical chief that aims to stifle one, or both, of the two warlords in his kingdom that are becoming increasingly powerful (Soyinka, 1976:56). Sango charges the two men with keeping order in the same part of the kingdom, hoping that their egos and need to assert dominance would put them at odds (Soyinka, 1976:56). As expected, the two warriors meet and fight, but the winner spares the life of the loser, and they end up growing more powerful (Soyinka, 1976:56). At the advice of his people, Sango organises another dual between the warriors where the winner finally slays the loser, and turns to Sango, demanding his throne (Soyinka, 1976:56). Some frightened subjects begin to abandon Sango, and seething at the betrayal, Sango slaughters a portion of his people (Soyinka, 1976:56). This abomination and cruelty drive Sango into exile where he hangs himself (Soyinka, 1976:57). However, Sango is *Oba Koso*, meaning *the king did not hang* (Soyinka, 1976:57), and it is said that Sango climbed the rope into the heavens and joined the other deities of the Yoruba pantheon (Soyinka,1976:57). Sango maintains disgust for human fickleness and unfairness (Soyinka, 1976:57).

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Yet Sango has more than one origin story, and in the second version, the story accounts how Sango's kingdom was plagued by dearth and famine due to a crime committed, without Sango's knowledge, against a disguised god (Soyinka, 1976:8). When Sango discovered that the god causing the suffering was Olodumare, Sango challenged the god to a fight (Soyinka, 1976:8). In anger, Sango calls for the "thunders that [he] controls" to "explode", "attack the heavens", and to "set fire to the skies" (Soyinka, 1976:9). This is why Sango is regarded as a "functionalist" deity, where importance is placed on the symbols associated with the god when invoking connection (Soyinka, 1976:8); for Sango this symbolic representation occurs through lightning and other cosmic sources of retribution (Soyinka, 1976:9 Oxala (one of the most revered deities in the Yoruban Pantheon that is often associated with the creation of humankind and the restoration of balance in the universe), brings Sango under control and chastises the hubris and blasphemy of their actions (Soyinka, 1976:9). Sango has to bear responsibility for the crime, since the crime was committed in his land (Soyinka, 1976:9), and thus embodies the "awesome essence of justice", with symbols like lighting and the cosmos marking both aspects of retribution and divine balance that needs to be restored despite oneself (Soyinka, 1976:9).

There are some parallels between the Greek pantheon and the Yoruba pantheon, however, there is a "fundamental contrast" between the two belief systems in the portrayal of punishment in myth (Soyinka, 1976:14). The differences between the way punishments are doled out provides "clues to differences in the moral bias of the two worldviews" (Soyinka, 1976:14). In Greek mythology, punishments only occur when a crime encroaches on the mortal domain belonging to a more powerful or influential deity or when the scorned deity successfully appeals to Zeus, the head of the pantheon (Soyinka, 1976:14). In the Yoruba pantheon, however, after committing a mistake or crime, the gods are "placed under an eternal obligation of some practical form of penance which compensated humanity" (Soyinka, 1976:13). The Yoruban worldview prioritises a far greater sense of accountability and responsibility for the past, and towards humanity. Hence, in accepting responsibility for the crime committed in his land, Sango embodies unequivocal justice for the sake of communal harmony. Sango is exiled to the edge of the community, out of fear of his power and his temper. However, the power of retributive justice, and the fear that his power creates, ensures a harmonious and obedient community. Somewhat significantly, in the poem, Sango's punishment has migrated with him to the Caribbean which extends to a responsibility being placed over the Afro-Caribbean people. The praise songs about Sango also demonstrate his unrestrained power and fierceness (Soyinka, 1976:57). These praise songs that portray Sango as tempestuous, flawed, and violent

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act as a "post-climactic restorative for the race" (Soyinka, 1976:57). The tragic poetry of this nature "operates through the homeopathic principle, and it should cause no surprise to find the expression "praise-song" applied to such wanton savagery, or to find in performance that the lines are chanted with a non-critical, adulatory, and joyous involvement" (Soyinka, 1976:57). Soyinka says that Sango uses both his good and evil traits to confront "the symbolic abyss of transition" for his people (Soyinka, 1976:59). Sango's journey from man to *Òrìṣà* reflects the connection being forged between the people and the gods through the belief in a specific worldview and the poem "Shango: God of Thunder" by Senior reflects this fear and reverence for the god of retribution:

He come here all the time
sharp-dresser
womanizer
sweet-mouth
smooth-talker
- but don't pull his tongue is trouble
you asking
his tongue quick
like lightning
zigzagging
hear him nuh:
I SPEAK ONLY ONCE!

He well arrogant
is true but don't question
take cover
when his face turn dark
like is thunder
rolling
like is stone
falling
from on high
from the sky
is like rain

Just as suddenly
is sunshine breaking
is like water
in his sweet-mouth
again
Is so everything
swift with him
he don't stand
no nonsense (though
he likes to be
one of the boys)

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he'll roll in here
on his steed
(plenty horsepower
there) ride in
like a warrior
of old (you expect
him to be waving
some primitive tool
like a hatchet)
When he comes in
no matter what tune playing
they rev up the drums
as if he own them
to play that zigzag
syncopated beat
that he like

Everybody rushing
to salute him
do his bidding
for there's no telling
the state of his mind:
I SPEAK ONLY ONCE!

The girls like him
(though they say
he have three wife already)
he sweet-mouth them yes
have his way
give plenty children

If they want him to stay
they must do as he say
he prefers
hanging around
with the boys
anyway
woman must know her place
plus he swear
is only son
he can father

I tell you something:
If you want
to get anywhere
with him
act
like you tough
that is what he respect
work yu brains

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not sweat but cunning
win the fight
learn sweet-talking
be smooth

Just remember
he alone can strike
with his tongue
zigzagging
like lightning

Hear him nuh:
IS ONLY ONCE I SPEAK!

(Senior, 1994:123-125)

The poem opens with the assertion that "he come here all the time" (l. 1). The god is portrayed as regularly visiting the Caribbean, which establishes the level of familiarity that the poet is trying to establish between the diaspora and the African pantheon. This line provides a physical account of the god entering the Caribbean along with the symbols, praise, and relevance of Sango. The poem incorporates symbolic elements commonly found in traditional Oríkì praise poems, such as descriptions of ritual actions or specific musical instruments associated with the worship of the Òrìṣà (Lindon, 1990:211). These references to the emblems or ritual objects associated with the Òrìṣà are significant because they play a crucial role in identifying and representing the Òrìṣà within their respective cults (Lindon, 1990:211). The ritual emblems of Sango are the axe and the drum, and Sango's drum is believed to be the cause of thunder (Lindon, 1990:211). The speaker says that when Sango arrives "you expect/ him to be waving/ some primitive tool/ like a hatchet" (ll. 40-43) and that "no matter what tune playing/ they rev up the drums/ as if he own them" (ll. 45-47). These references transport Sango into the poem and into the Caribbean context. Secondly, the poem acknowledges Sango as the dispenser of justice in the African pantheon (Lindon, 1990:216). This role is reflected in the sentiment that "he don't stand/ no nonsense" (ll. 31-32). The speaker warns that "[Sango's] tongue is trouble" (l. 6), and that "his tongue is quick/ like lightening" (ll. 7-8). The god bares the reputation of quick tempered, impertinent, [the] obstinate, [and] quarrelsome" in his approach, but it is only "the liar [that] incur[s] his wrath" (Lindon, 1990:216). Sango is frightening to those who behave badly, he is undiplomatic in his fight against unjust action. The poem acknowledges Sango's ability to dole out acts of divine retribution in the form of lightning which, as the speaker emphasises, makes him dangerous. Yet the speaker warns against interacting with the god out of fear that the god will suddenly strike. The fear that the speaker expresses manifests

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in obedience and warns against hubris. Sango embodies passion and aggression (Soyinka, 1976:11). However, what becomes evident is the community's recognition of the need to harness and manage this intense energy that Sango possesses (Soyinka, 1976:11). This recognition stems from the understanding that Sango's untamed power can disrupt the harmony within the mortal community (Soyinka, 1976:11). By accepting this truth and acknowledging the necessity to control and direct his forceful nature, the community demonstrates their commitment to asserting their collective will for a harmonious existence (Soyinka, 1976:11). The ferocity of Sango is reflected in the constant warning from the speaker and the repetitive phrase quoted from the god: "I SPEAK ONLY ONCE!" (ll. 12, 56, 61). The speaker says that the god is "arrogant" (l. 12) but again warns against questioning the god. The speaker advises the listener to "take cover/ when [Sango's] face turn dark" (ll. 14-15). Just as quickly as the god becomes angry, the anger fades again and the speaker says that "everything [is]/swift with him" (ll. 29-30). Sango is unpredictable and the people do "his bidding" (l. 53) because "there's no telling/ the state of his mind" (ll. 54-55). The portrayal of Sango as tempestuous, flawed, and volatile in the praise poem cleanses the community of these attributes. The "self-destructive principles" portrayed in the praise songs to Sango "are purged from the community through the medium of the suffering protagonist" (Soyinka, 1976:57). Sango's "tragic excess and weakness fulfil the cyclic demand on, and provoke the replenishment of, choric (communal) energies and resilience" (Soyinka, 1976:59). The poem established the cult of Sango in the Caribbean and, as a result, allows the Caribbean to benefit from the homeopathic quality of the praise poems to Sango. The connection to an African worldview cleanses and heals the Caribbean community. Therefore, in the poet's endeavour to resurrect the African god into the Caribbean, the Afro-Caribbean community is cleansed through an African worldview.

The traditional *Oríkì* of certain individuals propagated the importance of the "self-aggrandisement of 'big men'" (Barber, 1991:4), which is particularly important in the cult of Sango because he is associated with masculinity and many of the dances of Sango are erotic and aim to demonstrate the size of the penis to demonstrate the hyper-masculinity of the god (Lindon, 1990:213). However, negative descriptions are not uncommon in *Oríkì* because "in Yoruba religion the gods are what they are warts and all" (Lindon, 1990:213). As a result, the traditional "*Oríkì Òrìṣà* do not gloss over qualities which might be considered less attractive, less complimentary" (Lindon, 1990:213). Sango embodies male dominance and the male ego that leads to hubris. The poem says that Sango prefers "hanging around/with the boys"

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(ll. 66-67). Sango is described as a "sharp-dresser" (l. 2), a "smooth-talker" (l. 5), and as having a "sweet-mouth" (l. 4), but also as a "womanizer" (l. 3). The depiction of the god as a "womanizer" (l. 3) portrays the god as promiscuous and masculine, possibly misogynistic, as in ll. 63-72:

woman must know her place
plus he swear
is only son
he can father

Sango is the embodiment of masculine energy and rage, but his power over lightning and unequivocal justice means that these flaws are also punished by Sango. Sango's punishment of the more destructive aspects of masculinity in the post-colonial Caribbean serves as a reminder that the decolonial struggle involves resisting external oppressive forces and also dismantling internalized oppressive structures and behaviours. The poem's warning against the petulance of the god highlights the need for holistic decolonisation processes that suit the post-colony. The poem underscores the need for a holistic decolonisation process that goes beyond mere political or external changes. Sango's role as a dispenser of justice while also being associated with hubris and male ego reflects the idea that true decolonisation involves addressing not only the external oppressors but also the internalized systems of oppression and injustice within the community. This internal struggle is depicted in the poem as individuals are urged to "act like [they] tough", "work [their] brains", employ "cunning", and "learn sweet-talking" to navigate their relationship with Sango. The poem urges a careful examination and re-evaluation of societal norms, values, and power dynamics. The cautionary message implies that true decolonisation requires a balanced approach that embraces accountability, responsibility, and a commitment to building a harmonious and just society.

Similarly, Ogun is a representation of immense contradiction in his position as god of both war and creativity, making him popular among the Caribbean people who are caught in an interstitial space between revolution against oppression and rejuvenation of a new creolised culture. According to Soyinka, it is only someone who has personally gone through the process of complete disintegration that can serve as a unifying force between opposing forces (Soyinka, 1976:150), as they can comprehend the gaps, and reconcile contradictions that exist within society or within oneself (Soyinka, 1976:150). Hence, Ogun's alchemical ability to extract raw materials from the earth and turn them into something else allows the god to facilitate the transcendence of a people into something better. Soyinka asserts that "Ogun, through his

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redemptive action became the first symbol of the alliance of disparities when, from earth itself, he extracted elements for the subjugation of chthonic chaos" (Soyinka, 1976:146). This journey is re-enacted in the ritual of Ogun (Soyinka, 1976:30). In the ritual of Ogun, the actor "prepares mentally and physically for his disintegration and re-assembly within the universal womb of origin" (Soyinka, 1976:30). In order to diminish the cosmic gulf between the gods and humanity the ritual of Ogun must be consistently performed (Soyinka, 1976:31), a ritual that Olive Senior's poem "Ogun: God of Iron" (1994:121) accounts for, thus marking the importance of Ogun to the Afro-Caribbean people:

1
Hand a' bowl, knife a' throat
our sacrifice dispatched
OGUN EATS FIRST

2
Iron in the blood feeds
your red-hot energy; fires
your metallurgy in the
cauldron or smelter,
transmits your power
to the forge, transmutes
carbon into diamonds,
expresses oil from rocky
strata, bends the centre
of gravity to your sword.

For the kill, you arm
battalions, beat
ploughshare into gun,
unleash atomic energy,
distil power from the sun
to shape our potential
for death or - if you
choose - life, for power
is your calling and manifest its ways:

You forge our
connections, you fashion
our handshakes, our
friendships you seal,
bind our oaths sworn
in blood; for the life
of the spirit is fuelled
by fire engendered where
our heartbeats
spark into life.

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Yet, heavenly transformer
of our weak impulses,
you allow our fevers,
the fire in our loins,
our burning desires
to consume us
while, knife in hand,
iron-hearted warrior,
you coolly
stalk alone.

(Senior, 1994:121-122)

Ogun's rituals typically begin with the sacrifice of his favourite animal, the dog (Soyinka, 1976:31). The poem reflects this as the speaker narrates the sacrificial slitting of the animal's throat, "Hand a' bowl, knife a' throat/our sacrifice dispatched" (ll. 1-2). Ogun enters the space once the sacrifice has been dispatched. The ritual from a Caribbean point of view reflects the diminishing of the cosmic gulf between the Afro-Caribbean people and the African gods. Furthermore, the Afro-Caribbean people were socially pressured to regard the practices, rituals, and customs of African belief systems as savage and disgraceful. The poem reintroduces the ritual of sacrifice and turns away from the colonial mindset of what is acceptable. The poem reflects symbols of Ogun in the second stanza and reflects the beginning of Ogun's journey to gulf the gap between the Caribbean people and the African gods. Ogun's original journey began with the forging of the first technical instrument. The symbol of Ogun's conquest of separation is iron-ore which is representative of "earth's womb-energies, cleaver and welder of life" (Soyinka, 1976:146). At the end of the poem, Ogun is referred to as "iron-hearted" (l. 40) reflecting this status. The speaker says that "iron in the blood" (l. 4) feeds/ [Ogun's] red hot energy" (ll. 4-5), "fires/ [his] metallurgy in the/ cauldron or smelter" (ll. 5-7), "transmits [his] power to the forge" (ll. 8-9), "transmutes/ carbon into diamonds" (ll. 9-10), "expresses oil from rocky/ strata" (ll. 11-12), and "bends the centre/ of gravity to his sword" (ll. 12-13). The poem highlights the potential for spiritual and cultural renewal through the imagery of Ogun's forge and the transformative qualities of iron. The poem reinforces the idea that by embracing their African heritage and reclaiming the rituals and practices deemed unacceptable by colonial influences, Afro-Caribbean people can bridge the cosmic gulf and restore a sense of wholeness and connection to their ancestral traditions. The invocation of Ogun reflects this endeavour towards a unified sense of self and the renewed sense of connection to the African gods in the Caribbean. Sango and Ogun share a role as heavenly witnesses in oathtaking (Lindon,

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1990:216). This role is reflected in the assertion that "[Ogun forges their]/connections" (ll. 23-24), "[fashions their]/ handshakes" (ll. 24-25), seals their "friendships" (l. 26), and "[binds their] oaths sworn/ in blood" (ll. 27-28). Ogun unites the Afro-Caribbean people and secures their bonds as a people and secures their connection to the African world.

Ogun's creation, however, relies on destruction of something else. This is how he "came to symbolise the creative-destructive principle" (Soyinka, 1976:28). Hence, just as he broke down his own life force to bridge the cosmic gulf, Ogun "transmutes/ carbon into diamonds" (ll. 9-10). Ogun will also guide the Afro-Caribbean people through the same process of disintegration and towards the discovery of a new part of themselves. The ritual will involve the rebreaking of the Afro-Caribbean people in order to facilitate the discovery of a new sense of totality within the African worldview. Hence the speaker opens the conversation with Ogun to call for power in the surge against that which oppresses and isolates the African diaspora in the Caribbean by saying, "For the kill, you arm/battalions, beat/ploughshare into gun" (ll. 14-16).

According to one of Ogun's praise songs, he rescued slaves through acts of war (Soyinka, 1976:26), and the rebellious and threatening tone of this poem reflects Ogun's cultural significance as the rescuer of slaves. The ploughshare functions as a metonymy for the slaves, condemned to servitude and physical labour. But the slaves revolted and went from servants to soldiers. The image of an agricultural tool being turned into a weapon mimics this transformation. Senior also subverts the common post-war, peace-time practice of turning weapons into agricultural tools as Ogun does the opposite to "shape [their] potential" (l. 19) and enact justice. Just as Fanon contends that "when the peasants lay hands on a gun, the old myths fade, and one by one the taboos are overturned: a fighter's weapon is his humanity" (1967), Ogun turns the ploughshare into a gun so the Afro-Caribbean people can begin the process of fighting through the ritual disintegration. Ogun guides them on the journey of disintegration that he himself traversed to allow the gods to connect to humanity. They will be consumed, disintegrated, and "literally torn asunder in cosmic winds" (Soyinka, 1976:30). However, they will achieve a sense of totality, and the gods will safely be able to reach the Caribbean.

Moreover, Ogun's technological proficiency and power in the modern context is reflected in the assertion that he could "unleash atomic energy" (l. 17). Ogun has power over the modern, and distinctly Western, tools of war as well as archaic weapons. By referencing atomic energy,

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the poem draws attention to Ogun's potential to harness immense power and manipulate forces that are emblematic of the modern era. Ogun's dominion extends beyond contemporary weaponry; he also retains authority over archaic weapons. This dual control exemplifies his comprehensive power and underscores his ability to navigate both the ancient and modern realms. Ogun's connection to traditional weapons symbolizes his rootedness in African ancestral traditions, while his command over modern tools signifies his adaptability and relevance in the present age. This synthesis allows him to function as a guide for the Afro-Caribbean community as they navigate the complexities of a post-colonial world.

The history of the Yoruban gods "is always marked by some act of excess, hubris or other human weakness" (Soyinka, 1976:13). After the journey in which Ogun led the gods across the cosmic gulf, the gods offered Ogun a crown and the position of ruler over the pantheon, but he reluctantly accepted after much insistence from the Ire people (Soyinka, 1976:29). Ogun and the Ire people were strong in battle and had grown in reputation (Soyinka, 1976:29). However, one day when Ogun was thirsty during battle "Esu the trickster god left a gourd of palm wine" (Soyinka, 1976:29). Ogun drank the wine, and he conquered the enemy quicker than usual (Soyinka, 1976:29). Unfortunately, the drunken god got confused between friend and foe and accidentally slaughtered all of the Ire men (Soyinka, 1976:29). Ogun, like Sango, is punished for this crime against the community and is stuck with a perpetual guilt that prevents the god from connecting to mortals. Ogun and Sango are both forced into isolation by their crimes against the social harmony. This punishment is reflected in the last lines of the poem, "while, knife in hand,/iron-hearted warrior,/you coolly/stalk alone" (ll. 39-42). Ogun comes to the aid of the Afro-Caribbean people but must remain isolated and continue to "coolly/ stalk alone" (ll. 41-42). Ogun is a figure that enacts justice and rebellion in favour of community. Ogun is a champion of the community while being forced into isolation due to his actions. Ogun and Sango reflect the paradoxical nature of decolonisation whereby colonial institutions must be overturned and rejected in order to facilitate the possibility of creolisation. However, in this act of destruction, Ogun affirms his ability to forge connections, seal friendships, and bind oaths. Ogun guides Afro-Caribbean people towards a unified sense of self that rejects a Western worldview in favour of the Yoruban worldview.

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, the final section of *Gardening in the Tropics* resurrects Yoruban gods in the Caribbean. Through Senior's poetry, Yemoja and Olokun emerge as figures of restoration and protection, while Ogun and Sango are portrayed as figures of

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rebellion and retribution. The decolonisation of faith creates a space in which the creolisation of Afro-Caribbean religious experience can occur. As I show in the next chapter, the representation of African mythology in poetry plays an important role in establishing a new national culture and is an essential ingredient in the process of an ever-evolving creolisation.

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Chapter 3:
Ananse's Web: Afro-Caribbean Belief Systems and Nationalism in John Agard's Poetry

John Agard's *Weblines* (2000) includes poems on what Agard refers to on the cover of the collection as the "three powerful Caribbean metaphors of transfiguration". These are Ananse, limbo, and the steelpan drum. In this chapter, Ananse is explored as the embodiment of creole transfiguration, a figure of cultural connection, and a symbol for the resilience of Afro-Caribbean people. Secondly, the ritual of limbo is explored as the process by which Ananse is physically invoked, and the limbo dancer is explored as the embodiment of Ananse. Thirdly, I explore the significance of the steelpan drum in the historic context of the Caribbean and its role as a tool in the process of creole transfiguration. The use of African folklore elements creates a cultural connection between Africa and the Caribbean. Furthermore, these elements adapt along with Afro-Caribbean people. These figures reflect the creolisation of West African culture that occurred as a result of the middle passage, and the process of creolisation that occurs as a result of the colonial culture that endures before and after colonisation has ended. Thus, these figures reflect the continued metamorphosis of Afro-Caribbean culture. In forming a connection to the past, Afro-Caribbean people forge a path forward towards a unified sense of self in the post-colony.

Ananse is a shapeshifting trickster figure that strings together Afro-Caribbean belief systems. Ananse defies social and gender conventions, and can transform into any animal, although usually a spider (Darroch, 2005:173). Ananse's origin can be traced back to Ashanti mythology of the Akan in West Africa (Darroch, 2005:153) that travelled to the Caribbean with the slaves that were transported from West Africa during 1662 and 1867 (Eltis, Behrendt, Richardson & Klein,1999). Ananse is portrayed as witty, cunning, and unwavering; characteristics which allow Ananse to triumph over adversaries that are often notably more powerful than the trickster (Darroch, 2005:153). Ananse's strength inspired the Caribbean people, but terrified the colonial settlers who prohibited these stories in fear that the trickster tales would inspire rebellion. The Ananse stories and other facets of Afro-Caribbean belief systems were rejected by colonial powers in favour of Western tradition and religious activities. The use of Ananse in literature weaves the Caribbean and Africa together and facilitates the connection of the African diaspora to a shared history. Ananse is also representative of a metatextual weaver that writes new worlds into reality.

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In addition to Ananse, the representation of the steelpan drum functions on many levels to create meaning and to act as a figure of transfiguration for the postcolonial Caribbean in Agard's poetry. The steelpan drum is a symbol of the creolised Afro-Caribbean culture and the physical product of Ananse's gift of creativity and a connection to Africa. Furthermore, the creativity involved in making music is also attributed to Ananse's power over storytelling, creativity, and artistic capabilities. Ananse is portrayed as a metaphor for the Caribbean and as the saviour of Afro-Caribbean people through writing and storytelling. Therefore, the writer, the drummer, and the dancer are given the power to build a creolised national culture after colonisation.

In Afro-Caribbean belief systems, dance is a way of connecting to the ancestors and a way of meditating with the gods (Fabre, 1999) in which "spiritual possession takes place" (Taylor & Case, 2013:10). The reverence for the ancestors is a unifying quality of African and Afro-Caribbean belief systems (Taylor & Case, 2013:11). Dance is also a means to embalm the ancestors and ensure the longevity of the connection between the living and the dead (Taylor & Case, 2013:11). During the dance "dancers go into a trance, taking on characteristics of particular ancestors" (Taylor & Case, 2013:127). If the ancestors are satisfied during the ritual dance "their presence and beneficence will bring healing to the individual and the community" (Taylor & Case, 2013:127). Limbo itself was said to be born from the Middle Passage as slaves were forced to find creative ways to stretch and exercise in cramped conditions. During the journey, slaves contorted their bodies and were said to resemble Ananse in the spider form. Limbo developed from African spiritual iconography and the role of movement and dance in African storytelling. Thus, Limbo itself reflects both the history of Afro-Caribbean people, and a specific connection to and enduring African presence. In contemporary times, limbo remains a physical embodiment of Ananse and serves as a veneration of those ancestors that traversed the Middle Passage.

The ritualistic embodiment of Ananse that limbo causes is not possible without the last symbol of transfiguration, the steel-pan drum. The drum is another physical representation of Ananse, or more specifically Ananse's web, and is essential in the ritual of limbo that transports the Afro-Caribbean people to Africa. The drum is "the foundation of Yoruba instrumental music" (Adegbite, 1988:15) and an important part of all rituals in African and Afro-Caribbean belief. In certain rituals, the drums "are intended to invite the presence of [their] ancestors' spirits" (Taylor & Case, 2013:633). According to Yoruba history and mythology, drums were used in

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ritualistic "songs and chants which the devotees of the *Orisa* use during ritual and ceremonial occasions" and "drums also provide the medium through which the worshippers are in constant ecstatic communication and communion" with Yoruba gods (Adegbite, 1988:15). The drumbeats establish a pace and a trance-like beat that the rituals are performed to. Furthermore, there is evidence that in Africa throughout history "drums were used for multiple reasons, from social events to secret society rituals, from planting the fields and pounding rice to life-cycle events such as naming ceremonies, initiations and marriages" (Price, 2013:231). The drum is important in ceremonies supporting community and social harmony, as well as in rituals that engage with ancestors and African gods. The steelpan is essential in the ritual of limbo and allows for Afro-Caribbean people to establish an authentic communion with African gods and African cultural history. The steelpan drum is portrayed as both an entity in itself as "Pan", as an entity born from Ananse, and as the womb or web of Ananse. Through a reading of selected John Agard poems from *Weblines* (2000), I show how representations of Ananse, limbo, and the steel-pan drum reflect on Afro-Caribbean belief systems and the creolised nation state.

Ananse survived with the slaves on the Middle Passage, and in some accounts the contorted bodies of slaves squashed together in the slave ships was said to resemble the spider character. Agard's poem "But did you think I'd desert you so easy" affirms the connection between slaves and Ananse:

But did you think I'd desert you so easy
my diasporic spiderlings
my siblings of the web

No I stowed away in the ceiling
of your big dreams whose waters
the ships could not chart

And in your utmost imaginings
I began new weavings

(Agard, 2000:42)

The poem starts with the coordinating conjunction "But", meaning that its function is to join two structures, and suggests that this poem is part of a larger structure. The implication of placing the poem in a larger structure is that African history holds a past familiarity that they assumed was lost but, evidently, is not. The speaker asks "did [they] think" (l. 1) that Ananse would desert them. This suggests that the coordinating conjunction joins the thoughts of the slaves and the speech of Ananse. Ananse also functions as the weaver that is stitching a

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connection between the Caribbean and Africa. In a sense, Ananse themselves is a conjunction joining two structures. Ananse refers to the Afro-Caribbean people as "diasporic spiderlings" (l. 2) and as "siblings of the web" (l. 3). The people in the Caribbean share a common ancestry, they are all "spiderlings" and are related by their connection to Ananse and "the web" (l. 3). "The web" (l. 3) itself represents the links between the "diasporic spiderlings" (l. 2); like a spiderweb the links are tentative, near invisible but abiding and far-reaching. Ananse is assuring the Caribbean people that the history of slavery and colonial ideals can be overcome as the Afro-Caribbean people embody the cunning, witty, and resilient trickster through imagination and creativity. This proves significant in light of Fanon's definition of national culture in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1967), which shows that after colonisation the indigenous people should look back but the connection to the past must be used to forge a new culture. Therefore, this ancestral connection must be affirmed in order to facilitate the formation of a new national culture, and limbo is one such expression of this.

In Afro-Caribbean belief systems dance is a physical representation of the journey that the deceased's soul will take and "that the steps are inspired by the spirit of the deceased itself" (Taylor & Case, 2013:20). Yet while dance is considered a means to resurrect the ancestors during the trance-like activity, the limbo dancer also morphs into a spider-figure. Therefore, Limbo is the embodiment of the ancestors and Ananse, and represents the retracing of the journey taken by the ancestors on the Middle Passage. Through the "limbo gateway" (Darroch, 2005:171) to Africa, the spirit retraces its steps between Africa and the African diaspora. Thus, the recollection of this dance in poetry acts as vehicle with which the past can be retraced in order to establish a shared history. The dancer becomes the spirited and cunning trickster figure and uses this identity to connect to a fractured history. Moreover, the limbo dancer is limitless and has the ability "to touch" Africa from anywhere. In the poem "Limbo Dancer's Morning" by Agard, the limbo dancer shows that "[their] limbs know no limit" (l. 3) and that "their fingers stroke sands of Africa" (l. 4). The Afro-Caribbean person has the ability to remove the constraints of space and connect with Africa in becoming the limbo dancer. Furthermore, the limbo dancer shows that this limitlessness through limbo is not an "idle boast" (l. 8). Rather, limbo and the symbolic travel to reclaim a lost identity is "merely survival" (l. 10). The limbo dancer says that "in movement [they] find rest" (l. 7) which shows that the dance provides peace. Through the removal of the constraints of physical identity and the body, the limbo dancer attains catharsis and a connection to the past. Furthermore, in connecting with the ancestors, the limbo dancer is reborn in the present

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through a creolised identity. In the poem "Why?", Agard further dismisses Western ideas of identity in favour of the Caribbean perspective:

I
In your plastic frenzy
you spend time & money
on sessions of therapy
to discover that education
begins in the womb

Why didn't you come to me?
I limbo dancer
could have told you so for free

II
According to one branch
of your psychology
the source of all energy
springs from the LIBIDO

Please let them know
that's not the way
to spell Limbo

(Agard, 2000:98)

The mention of "LIBIDO" (l. 12) links to the Freud's (1923) views of libido and the three-part structure of a person's identity. In Sigmund Freud's study of the Id, Ego, and Superego he defined libidinal energy in relation to the Id. He defined libidinal energy as all the psychic energy related to survival and sexual instincts (Freud, 1923). Libidinal energy is part of the Id that is the driving force behind behaviour and urges (Freud, 1923). The Id is controlled by the pleasure principle and demands gratification of all urges (Freud, 1923). The Superego refers to the ideals instilled by society and is dictated by societies view of morality (Freud, 1923). The Ego makes sure that libidinal urges are expressed in a socially acceptable way (Freud, 1923). In the context of a postcolonial society, morality and social ideals are skewed to favour Western culture and belief systems. Therefore, a person's actions are monitored by the Ego, and modelled to suit white-centred ideals governed by the Superego. In order to override this concept of identity, the poem insinuates that "LIBIDO" (l. 12) is actually "Limbo" (l. 15). Western cultures have an aversion to the body and place importance on the mind. However, Limbo places spiritual practice within the body and movement, and reflects a body knowledge that is likened to transcendentalism. Similarly, in the poem "How Dance and Sore Spread Far and Wide", Ananse asks an elderly woman to teach her how to dance. The description of limbo

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dancing as "mathematics" (l. 4) links to the Western canon but mathematics is subverted as something that has been "defied beyond daring" (l. 4). The defiance of mathematics establishes the dance as that of spiritual significance, as beyond logic and moving away from the world of reason. Furthermore, limbo is about using the body to morph and look outward, but Western ideas about identity force people into themselves for meaning. Limbo and the Afro-Caribbean subversion of the Western definition of identity allows people to escape into a cosmic identity and to form an ever-changing new identity. The driving force behind the identity of Afro-Caribbean people is portrayed as the creolised synthesis of culture, ideas, and ideals.

In this manner, Ananse weaves a connection between Western ideologies and the burgeoning Afro-Caribbean ideologies to facilitate the creolisation of identity and culture. Ananse's webs patch together different worlds, times, and concepts to form creole culture. Ananse has become a symbol for triumph and a metaphor for the Caribbean through tales that affirmed social cohesion amongst the colonised people of the Caribbean and acted as symbol of hope and remembrance (Darroch, 2005:153). This is shown in the poem "it's weaving time, my people":

It's weaving time, my people

Gather your fragments
Into fabrics

Gather your wanderings
Into webs

Gather your threads
Into tapestries

Gather your contradictions
Into cloths of wholeness

(Agard, 2000:54)

In this poem, Ananse commands the Afro-Caribbean people to stitch together their fragments and create a new identity that discards the dual lens in favour of a creolised culture. The new weaving is not broken, incomplete, or disconnected from history. Ananse announces that it is "weaving time" (l. 1) and in this weaving, healing and reshaping, a new identity can be achieved. Ananse encourages the Afro-Caribbean people to "gather [their] fragments" (l. 2), "wanderings" (l. 4), "threads" (l. 6), and "contradictions" (l. 8) in order to weave these "fabrics" (l. 3) into "webs" (l. 5), "tapestries" (l. 7) and ultimately "wholeness" (l. 9). Ananse acknowledges the struggle for identity in a post-colonial landscape as a culture has been torn

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to “fragments” (l. 2) and “threads” (l. 6) during the colonial period, and the Afro-Caribbean people remain caught in “wanderings” (l. 4) and “contradictions” (l. 8) in their search for a new national identity. The use of the words: “wanderings” (l. 4) and “contradictions” (l. 8) affirms Glissant’s theory of creolisation where the consensual sharing of cultures and the “meeting and synthesis of two differences” (Glissant, 1997:34) occurs. Ananse instructs the people to weave a creolised identity from the “wanderings” (l. 4) and the “contradictions” (l. 8), as Glissant’s (1997:34) definition of creolisation as a “limitless”, as an “explosion of cultures”, is represented in the portrayal of Ananse as having an unlimited ability to weave connections between different things.

Ananse is able to hold the tension of two worlds, as portrayed in the poem “How Ananse’s Waist Suffered a Double-Dine Dilemma” (Agard, 2000:22-23). The poem describes Ananse trying to be in “north town and south town” (l. 11) at the same time to dine in both. Ananse ties two ropes to his waist and instructs two of his sons to go to the different places and pull the rope when feasting begins. However, the feasting begins simultaneously and Ananse is pulled in two different directions. Ananse says that they “paid the price with [their] middle” (l. 38), however Ananse assures that their “middle” (l. 38) “lives on in legend and riddle” (l. 40). Ananse is able to survive the tension of holding two separate things together and furthermore, Ananse is kept alive and thriving in “legend and riddle” (l. 40). The poem affirms the idea that Ananse is capable of being the weaver of the worlds, but the writer is also important in conveying these Ananse stories to allow Ananse to live on and thrive. Glissant (1997:34) asserts that a person in the Caribbean exists within “a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open”. Ananse is the portrayal of this state and the representation of the connection between “there and elsewhere” (Glissant, 1997:34) that has formed in the “new and original dimension” (Glissant, 1997:34), and becomes the maker, and marker, of creole culture in the Caribbean.

Ananse is the vehicle with which writers have been able to weave together concepts, times, and places in order to come “in contact with everything possible” (Glissant, 1997:32). The multilingual intention of Caribbean poetry is portrayed through the representation of creole language, and the poem “Limbo Dancer’s Mantra” represents Ananse’s weaving through the use of creolised language:

LIMB/BOW

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Pronounce dem
two syllable
real slow
you hear me
real slow

LIMB/BOW

Savour dem
two syllable
till glow
spread from head
to tip of toe

LIMB/BOW

Savour dem
two syllable
in vertigo
of drum tempo

LIMBO

Contemplate dem
two syllable
calm as zero
vibrate to sound
let mind go

& forget the stick
I tell you
don't think about the stick

that will take care of itself

(Agard, 2000:109)

The incorporation and repetition of the creole word "dem" and the rejection of the traditional sentence structure and punctuation associated with the English language reinforces the limbo dancer's status as the incarnation of creole. The unstructured form, brevity of the lines, and the uncomplicated low-syllable words give the poem an oral and rhythmic quality that is reminiscent of the African oral tradition. The majority of the words in the poem are mono-syllabic which places emphasis on those words that exceed one syllable. The title shows that this poem is a mantra of the limbo dancer. The poem uses repetition and stresses the sounds of the words through the manipulation of syllables. The overt mention of the syllables in the word limbo and the commands related to the syllables of the word reinforces this. "LIM/BOW" (ll. 1,7, 13), and "Limbo" (l. 18) are extricated from the rest of the words and stand-alone which

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suggests that these are the most important and are given extra stress in the incantation. Furthermore, these words are linked to the multi-syllabic command words: "pronounce" (l. 2), "savour" (l. 8), and "contemplate" (l. 19). The dancer is saying the mantra and using this repetition of sounds and words to aid in concentration. The oral quality makes it seems as if the limbo dancer is speaking as they move. The rhythmic and drum-like quality to the poem suggests that the dance could be performed to the reading of the mantra. The limbo dancer needs to abandon the rigid structure of traditional poetics and the English language in order to perform the ritual that connects the limbo dancer to the past. Furthermore, the use of limbo in creating a creolised identity is portrayed in the poem "in sunweb of steel I squatted":

in sunweb of steel I squatted

and new melodies spiralled
from old drumbeats

in limbo I dismembered my godself

and from old brutalities
new beings emerged

(Agard, 2000:50)

The music to which the limbo dance ritual is performed is described as "new melodies" (l. 2) that have "spiralled/ from old drumbeats" (ll. 2-3). This reflects the creolised culture and identity of the Afro-Caribbean people. Furthermore, the poem reflects the rejection of otherness and the establishment of a new self-image in the creation of a new creolised national culture. The ritual allows the dancer to "[dismember their] godself" (l. 4) and as a result "new beings [emerge]" (l. 6) out of "old brutalities" (l. 5). The performance of the limbo ritual is a physical rejection of colonial belief systems so that Afro-Caribbean people can exist as "rooted and open" (Glissant, 1997:34), and as the "synthesis of two differences" (Glissant, 1997:34). Limbo and Ananse allow "new melodies" (l. 2) to form from "old drumbeats" (l. 3). The Afro-Caribbean people are afforded the ability to forge new connections to belief systems from Africa and form a creolised connection to Christianity in the Caribbean.

The use of creole language and the representation of a creolised relationship to Christianity and Afro-Caribbean belief systems is evident in the poem "Rainbow":

When you see

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de rainbow
you know
God know
wha he doing—
One big smile
across the sky—
I tell you
God got style
the man got style

When you see
raincloud pass
and de rainbow
make a show
I tell you
is God doing
limbo
the man doing
limbo

But sometimes
you know
when I see
de rainbow
so full of glow
and curving
like she bearing a child
I does want to know
if God ain't a woman

If that is so
the woman got style
man she got style

(Agard, 2000:110)

The Bible describes the origin of the rainbow in Genesis 8:18-22; 9:9-17. After God flooded the Earth because of the wickedness of man and Noah survived by way of Ark, Noah offered a sacrifice and God hung the bow that he used to pierce the firmament in the sky as a promise to never cause so much destruction. In the poem "Rainbow", the speaker is marvelling at the rainbow in the sky, but instead of linking this to the destructive origin story, the speaker wonders if the rainbow is a limbo stick under which God does the limbo. The description of God doing limbo, which is representative of the cathartic embodiment of Ananse and the slaves that traversed the Middle Passage, portrays the consensual sharing of Afro-Caribbean belief systems and Christianity in the creation of the creole. The rainbow is also compared to human features. The rainbow is likened to "one big smile/across the sky" (ll. 6-7) and the pregnant

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belly of a woman that is "full of glow" (l.2 4). The origin of the rainbow is associated with the positive connotations of a person's smile. Furthermore, the image of a pregnant belly invokes the idea of fruitfulness, newness, and creation. The rainbow is not a reminder of the flood and the promise that God will not invoke a punishment that wipes out humanity again. Instead, the rainbow is life-giving instead of destructive. The rainbow represents the regenerative nature of creolisation in the post-colony. Humanity's wickedness and God's violent rage is not included in creolised Christianity. Furthermore, Western Christian imagery clearly portrays God as male, and is flooded with sexist rhetoric. The poem dismantles traditional ideology associated with the strict constraints of traditional religion and this gendered view of Christianity. Referring to God as female is considered blasphemous and directly contradicts that which is written in the Bible. The tone of the poem is jovial and hopeful; however, the destruction of colonial ideals is a rebellious act. The blasphemies used in the poem portray the rebellious nature of the creation of creole Christianity. Creolisation highlights the idea of restoration, however there is also an element of necessary destruction in the process. The poem highlights both the restorative nature of Ananse's rewriting of the Bible, and the underlying rebellious nature of dismantling colonial ideals in a post-colony. Ananse is able to weave together seemingly opposing belief systems and reinforce the complex process of creolisation in the Caribbean.

While Ananse weaves together Africa, Western ideals, and the Caribbean, through its juggling of the past and the present, Ananse is essentially weaving a web that is representative of the creole. The birth of Ananse on the Middle Passage marks the start of the trickster figure's necessity as a metaphor for the Caribbean and as a connection between Africa and the Caribbean. In "The Word" (Agard, 2000:40), the Middle Passage is described as "a womb/of water" (ll. 4-5) in which "darkness pulled/ new growth" (ll. 6-7). The water is described as a "mixed blessing" (l. 24) because the slaves would be "by water dispossessed" (l. 25) but the Afro-Caribbean people would be "by water renewed" (l. 26). The "nameless ones" (l. 27) go "under/ a limbo of ocean" (ll. 27-28) "to reclaim lost limbs" (l. 29). The Afro-Caribbean people use Ananse and the limbo ritual to plunge into the water that dispossessed them, reclaim a connection to the past, and emerge renewed as a product of both the past and the present. The link between Ananse's webs and an umbilical cord is mirrored in the poem. The umbilical cord is likened to the limbo rod used in the limbo ritual. The connection between the Caribbean people and the slave trade, which fractured the Caribbean people from their African ancestry, allows for a return to the brutal history from a perspective that does not highlight victimhood

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and prioritizes healing. Similarly, in the “Limbo Dancer’s Wombsong” (Agard, 2000:86), the limbo dancer refers to the umbilical cord as an “extra limb” (l. 11) and would “revel dancing under” (l. 12) the umbilical cord. The umbilical cord tying the “diasporic spiderlings” (Agard, 2000:42) to the motherland is compared to a limb in the limbo dance. The limbo dancer can use the umbilical cord to reach back to a shared history while dancing. Hence, this umbilical cord is also likened to Ananse’s web in Agard’s poem “The Coin of Birth” (Agard, 2000:16) where the speaker details the birth of Ananse, and of the Afro-Caribbean person who is the “spider’s word incarnate on whose tongue/ stories shall be twinkling currency” (ll. 7-8). Ananse, and as a result the “incarnate” (l. 7) of the “spider’s word” (l. 7), is described as “the one with the never-ending navel string/ tying continents in umbilical knots” (ll. 9-10). Therefore, the writer reincarnates Ananse and facilitates the umbilical attachment and familial connection between Africa and the African diaspora. The reference to the webs of Ananse as umbilical cords also further reinforces the idea of rebirth through writing about Ananse and of the connection to the motherland that Ananse provides.

Furthermore, in John Agard’s poetry about Ananse, Ananse functions as a self-referential figure for the writer as a trickster, and references to Ananse reinforce the power of writing as an act that helps reconnect with a shared past. Ananse is specifically associated with writing and storytelling in Afro-Caribbean folklore. This cultural function is clear in the myth in which Ananse weaves a web between the earth and sky to ask the sky god for stories (Scheub, 1990:67). Previously, all the stories belonged solely to the Sky God and people on earth had no stories to share (Scheub, 1990:67). Ananse completes a number of tasks using wit, and upon returning, the Sky God proclaims that the stories shall henceforth be known as “Spider Stories” (Scheub, 1990:67). Ananse returns to earth and shares the stories with the world (Scheub, 1990:70). In the poem “in time’s cosmic courtroom” (Scheub, 1990:70), there are specific references to the act of writing and reading that links the writer to Ananse. Ananse proclaims that “[they] weave between the lines/ playing fool to catch wise” (ll. 4-5) and that they:

spin webs
to catch footnote-flies
that buzz
with more than eyes
could read
(Agard, 2000:51, ll. 7-11).

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The poem shows deliberate and obvious references to writing and reading that indubitably link Ananse to literature. Ananse is weaving these stories in "the rafters of history" (l.6) because writing is established as something that has political significance in recounting the experience of Afro-Caribbean people in the post-colony. Writing allows people to reconnect through Ananse to a shared history and facilitates the cathartic rebuilding of a national culture. The references to Ananse in Caribbean poetry allow the Caribbean to reconnect with the trickster and to enact the rebellion against colonial culture that Ananse stories inspire. Furthermore, in writing about Ananse, the writer engages with the storytelling that Ananse embodies, and the writer, in the process of writing, embodies the trickster figure themselves. The poem "the Word" by Agard describes the birth of "the word" (l. 1): "Ananse". The word was born on the Middle Passage to help "nameless ones" (l. 27) in their quest to "reclaim lost limbs" (l. 29). Ananse was born to facilitate healing through writing and weaving. Ananse specifically voices the motivation of encouraging storytelling amongst the African diaspora in the poem "When Water Was All in Goblet of Mouth" (Agard, 2000). Ananse's ability to bridge Africa and the Caribbean through storytelling is explored. Ananse says that "in the mouths of exile/ [they] will spin proverbs/ bridging two worlds" (ll. 1-3). In order to facilitate regeneration, Ananse teaches the "transplanted ones" (l. 4) the "weaver's way with words" (l. 5). Furthermore, storytelling is hailed as a means to invoke Ananse. The writer essentially embodies Ananse in the process of storytelling. The writer uses references to Ananse to connect with Afro-Caribbean folklore and in doing so invokes the actual embodiment of Ananse. Writing and storytelling acts as a ritual in which through the act of writing about Ananse, the writer takes on the power of Ananse. The writer becomes the figure of transfiguration and restoration. In the poem "it's weaving time my people" (Agard, 2000:54), Ananse affirms that with the storytelling that Ananse brought to the world, the Caribbean people can assert their strength and replenish their hope. When Ananse declares that it is "weaving time" (l. 1) the figure is imploring writers to begin the ritual of writing to enable Ananse to promote the interconnectedness of the African diaspora. Through the ritual of storytelling the writer has the ability to gather "fragments" (l. 2), "wanderings" (l. 4), "threads" (l. 6), and "contradictions" (l. 8) and to weave these into "cloths of wholeness" (1. 9). Ananse represents the resilience and longevity of African folklore in the Caribbean and the writer represents the vehicle with which Ananse can uphold the connections between Africa and the Caribbean. Therefore, writers and poetry play a highly significant role in establishing a new national culture and identity after colonisation. Writers are nation builders, just as Ananse is a weaver of webs.

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During the slave trade and colonial times drums were among the cultural, and spiritual aspects, that were banned among the slaves. Enslaved Africans would practice drumming in secret and found that the act of drumming and expressing rhythm connected the various West African cultural groups because the musical cultures of each place "shared enough features to constitute an identifiable heritage for Africans in the New World" (Southern, 1997:19). Separated by different language and other cultural, spiritual, and social aspects, the drum, accompanied by the connection of the drum to the various African cultures, allowed the separated groups of West African people to establish a common connection to Africa. The poem "Those drums!" by John Agard represents the importance of the drum to the Afro-Caribbean people's connection to African gods and the necessity for colonial powers to ban them:

Those drums!
Those drums!
Demonic sounds
of subversion

Obviously
their conversion
to Christian ways
was merely skin deep.

In their heathen sleep
and wildly mumbled praise
to savage gods…
Ogun Shango
whatever their name…

It's all the same
mumbo-jumbo

O no no
definitely
the drum
will have to go.

(Agard,2000:123)

The use of the word "those" as a very pointed demonstrator shows the separation of the African drum from other percussion instruments and drums from the Western world. The reason this drum is specifically singled out by the speaker is because it belongs to the African spiritual context. The poem is written as if it is the ramblings of a figure of colonial power that is lamenting the significant danger that "those drums" (l. 1) pose to colonial ideals. The speaker cries out: "Those drums!" (ll. 1-2). The repetition of this phrase and the use of exclamations

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points in ll. 1-2 highlights the urgency and panic that the drums cause for colonial powers. The drumbeats are compared to “Demonic sounds/ of subversion” (ll. 3-4). According to the history of Christian demonology, the first scribes that translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek referred to pagan gods, human-animal hybrids, and diseases as demonic (Martin, 2010:658). The New Testament starts to equate demons with evil spirits and demonic behaviour with evil, amoral, and sinful actions (Martin, 2010:658). According to the speaker, whose perspective is that of a coloniser, the drumbeats prove that the Afro-Caribbean’s “conversion/ to Christian ways/ was merely skin deep” (ll. 5-8). The spiritual rituals involving the drums are often described as becoming trance-like. The coloniser describes the ritual as being a trance-like “heathen sleep” (l. 9) in which the actors engage in “wildly mumbled praise/ to savage gods” (ll. 10-11). The description of the ritual as “heathen”, the chanting of praise songs as “wildly mumbled” (l. 10), and the African gods as “savage” (l. 11) shows the coloniser’s disrespect and abhorrence of African belief systems. The speaker attempts to push the rituals and the African belief systems into the realm of the farcical and illegitimate. The speaker recalls the names “Ogun” and “Shango” (l. 12) coming from the rituals. However, the speaker throws out the names of these Gods with casual dismissal and a disregard for their power or significance and says that it does not matter “whatever their [names]” (l. 13) are. This disrespect is contrasted by the urgency with which the speaker is contemplating the impact of the drums on the colonised. The speaker attempts to denounce the African gods invoked by the drums. Instead, the insecurity of colonial power in the face of African gods comes across. The speaker comes off as paranoid and farcical as if they are pacing and rambling about the drums. The poem mocks the colonial attitude to illustrate the trivial nature of the pursuit for colonial dominance.

The reference to the Yoruba gods of justice, both restorative and retributive, shows the motivation for the ritual. Shango is called for retributive justice against the perpetrators of injustice and Ogun is called as the defender of slaves and the god of war. The rituals are rebellious and calling for the prosecution of the colonisers and for help in achieving freedom from injustice. Furthermore, the drum is symbolically linked to Shango and the sound that comes from the drum is said to be thunder sent from Shango. Ogun is the god of metallurgy and creation and is therefore essential in the creation of the drums. The coloniser attempts to degrade the ritual and refers to the ritual, and what the ritual represents, as “mumbo-jumbo” (l. 15). The phrase has its roots in Africa and is often linked to the Madinka people of West Africa (Gandhi,2014). The Madinka word *Maamajomboo* referred to a masked male ritual performer (Gandhi,2014). The word has its roots in African heritage and develops in Western

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language to mean that which is nonsensical or gibberish. Again, the speaker denotes the ritual's importance and disrespects the African belief systems. However, the conclusion drawn from what the speaker has seen of the Afro-Caribbean rituals is that the drum will definitely "have to go" (l. 19). The speaker continuously tries to assert that the rituals are nothing more than inconsequential acts that include nonsensical gibberish. However, the speaker is so threatened by these rituals, and by the drum's significance, that the speaker resolves to get rid of the drum. The poem illustrates the flimsy basis from which colonial powers have justified the erasure of African culture and belief. The poem uses irony to discredit the colonial attitude and implies that the entire institution can be toppled by a drum. The mocking tone of the poem links the poem to Ananse's cunning trickery. The poem uses mimicry to undermine colonial voices and to subvert the idea of colonial power and omnipotence. Furthermore, the more the speaker attempts to discredit African culture and Afro-Caribbean development, the more the speaker actually undermines the confidence in colonial attitudes. To colonial powers, the drum facilitates the connection to Africa and breeds a sense of community among the Afro-Caribbean people. Thus, this powerful tool of transfiguration and rebellion must be controlled in order to maintain control of the Afro-Caribbean people. However, this act of banning drums led to the creation of the steelpan drum, a tool that is specifically Afro-Caribbean and a stronger object of creolisation and community. The poem reflects the trick that has been successfully volleyed against the colonial powers. The colonial powers in the Caribbean are consumed by the possible rebellion or sense of community that this drum creates that they must ban the use of drums. However, this action spurred the rebellious nature of the Afro-Caribbean people and led to the creation of the steelpan drum. The trickery preys on the insecurity of colonial powers and the flimsy sense of dominance that colonial attitudes are built upon. As a result, the sense of community and the growing discontent with colonial attitudes is strengthened amongst Afro-Caribbean people, and the drum is adapted to suit Afro-Caribbean people. In the poem "Pan Recipe" John Agard portrays the history of the steel-pan drum's creation in the Caribbean:

First rape a people
simmer for centuries

bring memories to boil
foil voice of drum

add pinch of pain
to rain of rage

stifle drum again

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then mix strains of blood

over slow fire
watch fever grow

till energy burst
with rhythm thirst

cut bamboo and cure
whip well like hell

stir sound from dustbin
pound handful biscuit tin

cover down in shanty town
and leave mixture alone

when ready will explode

(Agard, 2000:118)

The poem reflects the dark humorous satisfaction of Ananse at the success of the trickery that led to the creation of the steelpan drum. The speaker describes the series of events that led to the creation of the steelpan as a recipe. The recipe reflects the colonisers active engagement in the creation of the steelpan and the process of creolisation in the Caribbean. In the desperate attempts of the colonial powers to stifle and break the Caribbean's connection to Africa and quash rebellion, they instead ensured its success and development. The poem starts with the oppression or "rape" (l. 1) of the African people as the first step in creating the steelpan and the transformative and rebellious figure that is "Pan" or "spiderpan". The history of cultural cleansing during colonisation and slavery saw the banning of drums amongst the slaves and colonies. Drumming was detested by colonial powers for the connection to African spirituality, and the noisiness of drumming was regarded as primitive (Aho, 1987:30). The next instruction says that in order to make the steelpan one must "bring memories to boil" (l. 3) and "foil voice of drum" (l. 4). The poem reflects the stifling of African tradition as the next step towards the creation, and the necessity of the creation, of the steelpan. In order for the steelpan to be created the drum is stifled again (l. 7) and ingredients such as "pain" (l. 5), "rage" (l. 6), and violence in the form of "strains of blood" (l. 8). The pain and rage of Afro-Caribbean people simmers due to the ongoing injustice and violence and culminates in an "energy burst" (l. 11) of "rhythm thirst" (l. 12). The drum is so important to African culture and spirituality that after the drum is banned, Afro-Caribbean people can only sustain so much violence until the drum is a necessity. Afro-Caribbean people create their own drums from "bamboo" (l. 13) and then they

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"stir sound from dustbin" (l. 15) and "handful biscuity tin" (l. 16). The drums from Africa were generally made out of wood or animal hide stretched over wood (Price, 2013:231). The banning of drums often aroused rebellion and riots which included the violent protection of drumming (Aho, 1987:30). The drums made out of hide were hard to make and were not able to be used freely so Afro-Caribbean people started banging bamboo sticks together and eventually created the bamboo drum (Aho, 1987:30). Later, the steel drum was conceptualised in Trinidad after people began "beating on metal and tin" (Aho, 1987:31) to create a higher-pitched sound. Thus, the steel pan is distinctly Afro-Caribbean, and represents the creolised Afro-Caribbean culture. The poem reflects the history of the creation of bamboo drums and the steelpan in the Caribbean. The recipe then calls for Afro-Caribbean people to be separated from white society into "shanty towns" (1. 17) and excluded from the white-centred society and left alone (l. 18). The speaker says that the mixture of these historical injustices and the creation of the steelpan "will explode" (l. 19). The history of the creation of the steelpan drum is a recipe of the creolisation necessary to maintain a connection to Africa and the African belief systems. Furthermore, the recipe reflects the trickster sequence that Ananse waged against colonial powers in order to ensure the success of creolisation in the Caribbean. The music from the steelpan drum functions on the same level as Ananse references; the continuance of steelpan weaves a connection between Africa and the Caribbean. In a poem of the same name, Agard refers to the steelpan drum as a "spiderwheel of steel" (Agard, 2000:137) that is "spinning threads of sound/ through middlepassage memory" (ll. 2-3). The "spiderwheel" (l. 6) is "holding continents/ in hub of melody" (ll. 4-5). The steelpan drum is also portrayed as a regenerative tool that births the newly creolised Afro-Caribbean people. In the poem "Steelpan", by Agard the steelpan drum is portrayed as the web and womb of Ananse that has restorative and regenerative powers:

Steelpan
dark web
of Anancy

black pool
of ancient
memory

help break
this chain
of history

help beat out

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this pain
in yuh sweet womb

mek me
born again

(Agard, 2000:136)

Ananse references weave a connection between Africa and the Caribbean that is rooted in catharsis and strength instead of suffering. Furthermore, the ritual of limbo dancing allows the limbo dancer to travel back along the painful history of displacement and reconnect with an African history, again rooted in catharsis. In this poem, the steelpan drum is portrayed as the "dark web/ of Anancy" (ll. 2-3) and as the "the sweet womb" (l. 12) of Ananse. The steelpan drum was woven by Ananse by tricking colonial powers and undermining colonial attitudes. Thus, the drum is portrayed as the "dark web" (l. 2) of Ananse that ensnared the colonial powers, and led to their own demise. Furthermore, the steelpan drum's creation reflects the creolisation that occurred as a result of Ananse's trickery. The steelpan drum functions as an object of rebellion and trickery, and of creation and creolisation in the Caribbean. The speaker asks for the steelpan drum to "help break/this chain/ of history" (ll. 7-9) and to "beat out/ this pain" (ll. 10-11). The speaker asks the steelpan drum to free them from the shackles of a painful history so that they can find a connection to the past that is rooted in familiarity and restoration. The speaker compares the history of Afro-Caribbean people to a chain. This image portrays the colonial domination as a chain attempting to inhibit the progression of Afro-Caribbean people. The chain physically restrains Afro-Caribbean people and prohibits dancing or ritual. However, the steelpan drum can break this chain and encourage liberation through movement. Ananse, the ritual of limbo, and the regenerative ability of the steelpan drum allow Afro-Caribbean people to establish a connection to their African roots without being shackled to a history of suffering.

The steelpan is a representation of the physical presence and enduring connection of the Caribbean to Ogun and Shango, along with the rest of the Yoruba pantheon. Ogun's status as regenerative and as the guide to the gods across the cosmic gulf has been established previously. Ogun is the god of metal work and is therefore present in the creation of the steelpan. Ogun's physical connection to the steelpan drum is represented in lines 13 to 19 of the poem "God hear me is you I talking to":

God you know you smart bad
So long history had you on the run

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only now I know you is the one Ogun
hiding all this time in old oildrum
and living right here in Trinidad
When I want to pray they tell me lift up yuh head man
but all this time yuh throne right here inside a pan

(Agard, 2000:163)

The speaker in the poem addresses the Christian God's inattentiveness and poor communication. The speaker says that the Christian God is a "master of mamaguy" (l.3) which means the God deceives the people with flattery or empty promises. However, the speaker claims that the reason the Christian God is so silent and elusive is because they are looking for the wrong god. The god of the Caribbean is Ogun that was in "old oildrum" (l. 16) in "Trinidad" (l. 17). The god was not in the heavens hearing prayers, Ogun is within the steelpan drum. The poem positions Ogun as the true god as he is more authentic to the Afro-Caribbean people than the Christian God. As a result, the steelpan drum is also Ogun's "throne" (l. 19) in the Caribbean. The steelpan drum is used to physically bring the power of these gods into the Caribbean and into the steelpan drum player. The rebellious and more violent nature associated with the steelpan is represented in the gods that it invokes, both gods of war, punishment, and justice. Furthermore, Shango as a symbol of retribution has been established. Shango's symbol is a hatchet and the drum. The African drum represented the presence and worship of Shango and established a communion between the African people and their gods. The steelpan drum is the Caribbean development of the West African instrument and symbolises the creolisation and development that Afro-Caribbean people underwent. In the poem "On new ground we scatter old drum seeds", the speaker expresses incredulity at how the steelpan evokes the African drum as a symbol of Shango's presence:

Who would have dreamed that Shango heart
would beat this far would follow us
across strange water to stranger earth
rising to thunder from oildrum rust?

(Agard, 2000:120)

The steelpan drum is compared to the beating heart of Shango that was transported from Africa in the creation of the steelpan drum. Furthermore, the booming sounds of the steelpan are representative of Shango's thunder, as well as the symbolic connection of the drum to Shango. The creation of a new culture that united the West African slaves from varying regions was found in the connection of the use of drums, making the steelpan drum the ultimate symbol of

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creolisation in the Caribbean. Furthermore, as the poem suggests, the steelpan drum is not just a symbol of Shango, but a vital organ of the god. The steelpan drum is portrayed as a womb and a heart, two lifegiving organs. The creation of the creole and the connection to African gods is visceral and necessary for life in the Caribbean. The connection between Afro-Caribbean people and Africa is lifegiving and is necessary for their survival. Furthermore, Agard portrays the steelpan drum as a living entity in the poem "Born naked":

> we name you
> PAN
> bury your navel string
> in metal web of sound
> (Agard, 2000:129, ll. 6-9)

In this poem, Pan is born "in fountain of fire" (l. 3). The forging of steel drums requires the smelting and moulding of steel. The entity is born from the womb of Ananse in the steelpan drum and the "navel string" (l. 8) or umbilical cord is not cut, instead the cord remains tethered to the womb of Ananse and is buried inside the steelpan drum. Yet the entity born from the steelpan drum, Pan, is portrayed as being more rebellious and violent than Ananse. Pan is filled with "steelpain" (Agard, 2000:153, l. 9) and "steelrage" (Agard, 2000:153, l. 10), and playing the steelpan is referred to as a "theatre of the will to war" (Agard, 2000:151, l. 12). According to the history of the steelpan and steel band movement, "there was considerable violence in the movement" (Aho, 1987:37). There was violence between bands at times, but most of the violence occurred between the police and the steelpan players (Aho, 1987:37). The violence between steel bands is undeniably related to Shango's brand of retributive justice and his masculine prowess. The steel band movement was understood as one that did not waiver in the face of prejudice and violence from oppressors of Afro-Caribbean customs (Aho, 1987:39). Ananse is associated with cunning, trickery, and wit over brute strength in the face of adversity. Pan, born from Ananse, creates through a more violent and rebellious nature.

In playing the steelpan and connecting with these gods, through Ananse's weaving abilities, allows Afro-Caribbean people to explore their rage and the truth of the injustices within a cleansing ritual. The poem "Rivulets of melody" shows the Pan entity possessing the steelpan player:

> Rivulets of melody
> spread out
> like lines of destiny
> spread out

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from me palm
of flesh
to you palm of steel

Man to pan
ah feel
we grow as one
from root to sky
ah feel
we flow as one
when blood meet iron
in one suncry

(Agard, 2000:132)

The steelpan player describes playing the steelpan as "rivulets of melody/ [spreading] out" (ll. 1-2) from the "palm" (l. 5) of the player to the "palm of steel" (l. 7) of the steelpan. While playing the steelpan the player feels a physical connection to the drum and the "lines of destiny" (l. 3) connect the player and the drum like web lines from Ananse. The player grips the hand of the steelpan and Ananse's web weaves them together and turns "Man to pan" (l. 8). The steelpan player connects with Pan through Ananse's weaving and through the forgery of Ogun turning "blood" (l. 14) to "iron" (l. 14). Shango's thunder facilitates the connection through the creation of the sound of the steelpan. This allows the steelpan player to connect with the gods, represented by the "sky" (l. 11), and Africa, represented by the "root" (l. 11). In Ananse creating this connection between the steelpan player and Ogun and Shango, these gods of violence and war become the gods of the diaspora. Afro-Caribbean people are forged by Ogun and given a thunderous voice by Shango. During the ritual where man becomes Pan, Afro-Caribbean people can experience the rage and vengefulness that is not welcome in the quest for a new creolised national culture. In the ritual, the steelpan player is violently beating out the rage and pain of the diaspora cleansing Afro-Caribbean people of this rage. The praise songs to Shango explore the worst qualities of the god as a way of cleansing the community of these traits that go against social harmony. The steelpan rituals are equally cleansing and promote social harmony and catharsis from anger.

In the poem "Beat it out man" (Agard, 2000:167) the function of the ritual is portrayed as being to "beat out the hurt" (l. 2), to "beat out the rape/ of the whip" (ll. 13-14), "beat out the weight/ of history" (ll. 21-22), "beat out" (l. 23) the "scar/and/hate" (l. 22), to "beat out/ a new message/ from de middle/passage" (ll. 31-34), to "beat out the burden/ of history" (ll. 36-37), and finally to "beat" (l. 41), "heal" (l. 41), and "shape" (l. 41) the "wounds" (l. 43) of the past. The ritual allows for the safe expression of rage and violence to clear the way for the creole to take root.

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Furthermore, the ritual physically joins the Caribbean with the African pantheon and African spirituality. The steelpan cleanses the Afro-Caribbean community and transports the African gods into the Caribbean. The steelpan is a figure of transfiguration because it facilitates the appearance of Ogun and Shango in the Caribbean just as Christ transfigures in front of his disciples in Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2-3. The transfiguration of Jesus Christ marks the metamorphosis of the human body of Christ into a figure of divine glory, as evidence of his divine status as the son of God. Alternatively, Ananse, limbo dancing, and the cleansing steelpan drum allow Afro-Caribbean people to change form and transform into a more radiant and spiritually embodied beings/subjects.

As I have shown in this chapter, Agard portrays Ananse as a figure that is "weaving old continents in mythopoetic webs", the ritual of limbo and the limbo dancer as the embodiment of the "spider-limbed god spinning cosmic bridges", and the steeldrum as "spider-pan with its webbed concave belly". Ananse (as the embodiment of creole transfiguration) ideologically, geographically, and temporally weaves different worlds together. Thus, the ritual of limbo emerges as a vital process that is reflective of the process of creolisation. The dancer's trance like movements and contortions allow the dancer to embody Ananse and that which Ananse represents, becoming the limbo dancer. Furthermore, the steelpan drum's evolution is reflective of creolisation in the Caribbean and the enduring nature of Afro-Caribbean culture. These reflections are representative of creole national culture that continues to form in the post-colony. This resurgence of Afro-Caribbean belief systems in poetry paves the way for the representation of a creolised connection to Christianity in the Caribbean. However, as I argue in the next chapter, this requires both a necessary critique and reworking of Christianity in order to situate it within the creolised belief systems of the Caribbean.

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Chapter 4:
"*Child, Put Yu Ear to de Stones*": Christian Revivalism and the Reorientation of Christianity in Kei Miller's Poetry

Kei Miller is a Jamaican-born poet, and his poems are imbued with a specifically Jamaican approach to religion. Jamaica can be considered as one of the first examples of a creolised faith that meshed African traditional beliefs with traditional Christianity in the Caribbean (Taylor & Case, 2013:103). Miller uses poetry to engage with the broader religious creolisation that occurs in the Caribbean and to unpack the lasting impact of colonial Christianity on Afro-Caribbean people. The portrayal of creolised Christianity in Miller's poetry portrays Christianity as both historically harmful and as a site for resistance through reinvention.

In examining the historical accounts of Christian sects in Jamaica, the necessity for the reorientation and creolisation of Christianity in the Caribbean is clear. The Anglican Church, imbued with puritanism and evangelicalism, appeared in the Caribbean in the 1620s and was regarded as a "Church of England for Englishmen" (Taylor & Case, 2013:39). The Anglican Church came with the influx of colonial settlers in the area and "Anglicanism was an import that took root slowly in the new location" (Taylor & Case, 2013:39). Along with a history of racial intolerance, the puritanical Church in the Caribbean showed a distinct intolerance and hostility towards groups such as the Quakers (Taylor & Case, 2013:40) because they detested the kindness shown by Quakers to slaves, and their religious practices (Taylor & Case, 2013:40). When slavery was abolished and the Anglican Church undertook the education of ex-slaves, this schooling centred around the propagation of European values and puritanical religious ideas (Taylor & Case, 2013:46). The Anglican Church then established missionary plans to travel to Africa as "the token compensation of the West Indian Church" (Taylor & Case, 2013:44) for slavery. Similar protestant factions sprouted in the area, all retaining the same puritanical dogma and strict rules. From the mid-eighteenth century there was a popularisation of non-conformist Evangelical missionary groups known as the Moravians, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians (Gerloff, 2006:1). The Baptist Church was a popular choice amongst Jamaican slaves who developed a creolised Christianity that incorporated Myal and Obeah from the start. The African slaves that subscribed formally to the Baptist faith, but incorporated Obeah and Myal, were fighting for the complete freedom of society (Taylor & Case, 2013:106). However, the Anglican church had been established as the official Church of England. While the Anglican Church is associated with rigid and strict

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adherence to the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Taylor & Case, 2013:39), the Baptist Church was considered non-conformist in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Taylor & Case, 2013:103). The Baptist Church during this time focused their missionary work on the black population instead of being solely focused on the white population. The Baptist Church acknowledged the lack of impact that white missionaries had on the slaves and introduced black missionaries (Taylor & Case, 2013:103). Two of the most important preachers was George Lisle, an ex-slave from Virginia, and Moses Baker, another American ex-slave (Taylor & Case, 2013:103). The slaves embraced the Baptist faith because "the slave saw the Baptist missionaries as his allies against the planters in their fight for freedom" (Patterson, 1973 [1967]:214), and the Baptist faith was structured in such a way that influential slaves could become class leaders (Taylor & Case, 2013:103). George Lisle was converted into the Baptist faith in America because his "Master" was part of the Baptist faith (Hoyle, 1998). Lisle began preaching the teachings of the Baptist faith to his fellow slaves (Hoyle, 1998). Lisle was ordained as a missionary to reach the black population in 1775 and was "set free" by his "Master" in 1778 because of his work in the Baptist Church (Hoyle, 1998). During the Revolutionary War, Lisle sought out a loan and became an indentured servant to pay for the safe passage for himself, his wife, and his four children (Hoyle, 1998). This ship took them to Jamaica in 1783 and, after paying his loan, he began establishing the Baptist Church in the region. Lisle had many disputes with white missionaries and the government in Jamaica who accused him of being a leader in the abolitionist movement and for sparking a rebellious attitude amongst the slaves (Hoyle, 1998). Lisle was imprisoned multiple times for this offense; however, he never openly opposed the system of slavery (Hoyle, 1998). Critics say that Lisle was not a rebellious figure, but he paved the way for those who sparked the rebellion (Hoyle, 1998). The Baptist faith was less conformist than the Anglican Church and the slaves responded with support and by forming a creolised attachment to the Baptist faith. This formation of the creole was instrumental in uniting the slaves against oppression and was an important feature in the bolstering of the black slaves. Lisle's position of power while being black, and an ex-slave paved the way for other slaves to establish a confidence in their community and led to the eventual abolition of slavery. The non-conformist missionaries that followed Lisle were supporters of the abolition movement and fought for the emancipation of slaves in Jamaica. Thus, the Baptist faith is engrained in the history of abolition in Jamaica. However, the Baptist faith were not fighting for the total abolition of slavery to assert a free society. Instead, the Baptist faith proposed a "free-village system" (Taylor & Case, 2013:105) in which the slaves would become part of "Church-founded villages" and would be the Baptist

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Church's "captive congregations" (Taylor & Case, 2013:105). The Baptist Church thus heavily assisted the "postslavery peasantization" of the Jamaican ex-slaves (Taylor & Case, 2013:106). Hence, while the leaders of the Church were not abolitionists or revolutionaries, they can certainly be considered modest reformers (Taylor & Case, 2013:106).

Christianity is far from a dying religion in the Caribbean. On the contrary, oppressive puritanical and evangelical dogmas have experienced a resurgence in the Caribbean due to Christian revivalist Churches. The insurgence of these puritanical Churches retains the same level of intolerance and ignorance that were present during the colonial rule of the Anglican church and the quasi-revolutionary Churches that gained popularity in the Caribbean. Contemporary Evangelical missionaries are overwhelmingly white and privileged. These missionaries force a state of fragility onto non-white impoverished people and strip these people of respect and agency. Missionaries target areas decimated by the remnants of colonisation and continued economic and political strife. The poor, sick, and struggling are given the chance to be "born again", and to have their lives changed for the better. This hopeful promise comes with the adherence to the unshakeable rules laid out in the Bible. The rules laid out by evangelicalism are oppressive and unsuitable for the social, political, and economic climate of the post-colony. Arguably, the resurgence of evangelicalism in the Caribbean can be attributed to the lack of an unbiased corrective education after colonisation. The impact that colonisation and discrimination had on the previously colonised creates a form of "double consciousness". As already indicated, Du Bois coined the term "double consciousness" in 1903 (Moore, 2005:751), and defined it as the "sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" and of holding "two warring ideals in one dark body" (Du Bois, 1903). The theory suggests that indigenous people are caught between a self-image and the image that a white-centred society deems acceptable. The idea is that in order to assimilate into society, they must remain other to themselves.

Caribbean literature in the 1920s to the 1960s critiqued the Christian Church for "serving as an agent of colonialism" (Taylor & Case, 2013:131) and accused them of "closing its eyes to racial discrimination" (Taylor & Case, 2013:131). In Kamau Brathwaite's essay "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature" (1974) the impact of the middle passage on the slaves brought to the Caribbean is examined through literature from the Caribbean. The essay looks at the misconceptions of African religion and the damage that colonial Christianity had on

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African people in the Caribbean. Furthermore, Brathwaite (1974:73) shows that "the focus of African culture in the Caribbean was religious". Colonial agents perpetuated the argument that the African religions brought by the slaves was "already tending more to fetish and superstition than to theology and ethics, and therefore weak and unviable" (Brathwaite, 1974:74). Brathwaite asserts that when looking at African culture it is "based upon religion" and that in African society "there is no specialization of disciplines" (Brathwaite, 1974:74). Religion pervades every facet of African culture and is "the kernel or core of the culture" (Brathwaite, 1974:74). Brathwaite acknowledges a rebellion against Christianity in the culture of Afro-Caribbean people reflected in literature called "myalism" (Brathwaite, 1974:77). Myalism or Myal is "a fragmented form of African religion [expressed] through dreams, visions, prophesying, and possession dances" (Brathwaite, 1974:77). An early example of myalism and the rejection of Christian influence can be found in the novel entitled *Hamel, the Obeah Man* (1827) by Cynric R. Williams. This novel describes a slave named Hamel as a complex character (contrasting the typical portrayal of slaves at the time) and places Hamel in an African spiritual framework by portraying him as a priest or obeah in an Afro-Caribbean religious context (Brathwaite, 1974:79). Yet after emancipation, Brathwaite (1974:75) notices a distinct lack of this kind of representation due to the distinctly colonial education that was aimed at scrubbing African influence from the Caribbean. The ex-slaves were moulded through education depending on who owned the territory and were "'liberated' into a culture which was not theirs" (Brathwaite, 1974:75). Brathwaite (1974:75) is often critical of literature after slave emancipation because literature was imposed by these colonial education structures and "much of what we come to accept as "literature" is work that ignores or is ignorant of its African connection and aesthetic". Brathwaite (1974:78) argues that "the African presence in Caribbean literature cannot be fully or easily perceived until we redefine the term 'literature' to include the nonscribal material of the folk/oral tradition". This commitment to oral and folk tradition is evident in modern Caribbean literature and functions as the connective tissue that links the present Caribbean to the history of slavery and to African roots. The African literary hiatus due to the colonial education ended in response to the American occupation of the Greater Antilles in 1898 when "certain artists in Cuba and Puerto Rico began to develop distinctive literary and creative forms that have come to be called *indigenism* and *negrismo*" (Brathwaite, 1974:79). Brathwaite acknowledges this emergence of a Caribbean literary voice as interesting because these areas were predominantly ex-Spanish instead of ex-African like the rest of the Caribbean (Brathwaite, 1974:79). However, the literature that came out of these colonies was black and African-based because "they recognised that the only form of

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expression which could be used as a protest, or an authentic alternative, to American cultural imperialism, was ex-African" (Brathwaite, 1974:80). The black literature that emerged from the Caribbean in the 1800s thus became focused on Africa and the fracture that occurred because of slavery. This literature is regarded as a response to "white cultural imperialism" (Brathwaite, 1974:80) since references to African beliefs aimed to dismantle the steadfast claim that Christianity was the only true religion and African belief was merely fiction. Furthermore, in maintaining a connection to Africa, the literature about African religion rejected colonial powers and the Christianity they imported.

This trope survives in modern Caribbean poetry that attempts to reconnect with African belief systems and rejects the limited worldview that traditional Christianity forces on its subscribers. Yet while Christian beliefs and tropes are often blatantly dismantled in Caribbean poetry, Kei Miller's poetry facilitates a much more complex portrait of post-colonial Christianity. The selected poems reflect an overt rejection of certain aspects of evangelical Christianity, but also a loosening of the tradition that, in effect, grants Christianity a place in the Caribbean, which is again demonstrative of creole's "limitless" (Glissant, 1997:34) that can accommodate and allow for the "meeting and synthesis of two differences" (Glissant, 1997:34). Miller's poetry acknowledges the foothold that Christianity has in Jamaica's history, and in the contemporary Caribbean society, but unpacks the ways in which conventional Christianity is unsuited for the postcolonial Caribbean. Furthermore, Miller points out the hypocrisy and rejects the oppressive nature of Christianity, while working towards a more creolised Christian faith that is akin to the creolised faith that incorporated Myal and Obeah, and the Baptist faith in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Taylor & Case, 2013:105). In this way he draws on earlier forms of creole Christianity that served as a driving force behind the rebellion and revolution amongst the slaves (Taylor & Case, 2013:105). Historically, this rejection of strict conformist religions in favour of an Afro-Christian creolised faith led to the invigoration of Afro-Caribbean people against oppression. Miller thus affirms the need for the same processes in contemporary Jamaica and in the postcolonial Caribbean as a whole.

Miller's poetry reflects an anti-church sentiment that calls out the hypocrisy of Caribbean people supporting the structures that work to oppress and other them. He portrays how Caribbean people are engaged in an internal war of living in and fitting into a society, while being rejected and held in contempt by that society. This double consciousness has formed in reaction to indigenous people's devaluation in a white-oriented society (Moore, 2005:752) and

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the continued exploitation of previously colonised people, as is evident in Miller's poem "Tangent B". The Caribbean people clamour for a space in society, while certain industries exploit them and continue to oppress them. The speaker details the time a – presumably American – televangelist visited Jamaica and sick and desperate locals flocked to the event:

When the televangelist came to Jamaica,
Heroes Circle became one big tent, shivering
with tambourines, swollen with sickness
as if hospices had been emptied of the not-dead-yet.
In that awful congregation of yellow eyes
sunken faces, dirty bandages and deep
coughing, people were holding their faith
bigger than mustard seeds. And a blind woman
being pushed through on a gurney, shouted
'I believe, I believe!' to ward off the darkness.

When the televangelist left
and all of the well went home singing It Is Well,
they packed up the sick like rags; and a man,
blind to all the offence of his youth
told the blind woman he had pushed through
'Faith, sister. You never had enough faith.'

(Miller, 2007:25)

The diction associates the televangelist and the temporary congregation with illness and decay. The speaker refers to the church as "shivering" (l. 2) with music, and "swollen" (l. 3) with sick people. The church itself is not portrayed as a holy place, instead the church is imbued with rot and decay. The church is animated as resembling the illness of the congregants. The people are described as having "yellow eyes" (l. 5), "sunken faces" (l. 6), "dirty bandages" (l. 6), and as coughing deeply (l. 6). The black population in Jamaica, like in most ex-colonies, remains impoverished and the ex-colonies remain underdeveloped due to years of exploitation. Walter Rodney explores the impact that colonisation had on the development of Africa in his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1982). Rodney explores colonialism as a tool for underdeveloping the colonised country. Firstly, the notion that colonialism brought railroads, schools, hospitals, and other services that are considered positive impacts of colonialism is debunked as the infrastructure that was built was not meant to satisfy the needs of the entire population (Rodney, 1982:207). The colonial governments developed the area enough to benefit the white colonial population (Rodney, 1982:207). An important comparison is the medical figures from black and white people in previously colonised places in history. In Algeria the infant mortality rate among white settlers was 3.9% but the infant mortality rate

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among black Algerians was 17%. During the 1930s, the 4 000 European settlers were provided with 12 modern hospitals in well-furnished surroundings, while the 40 million Africans had the choice of only 52 hospitals (Rodney, 1982:207). European settlers were provided with twenty-three-thousand times the amount of hospital care in comparison to the African population. The figures conclude that the majority of medical, maternity, and sanitation services cater to white colonial settlers in a colony (Rodney, 1982:206-207). He points out that "one of the most important consequences of colonialism on African development […] is the stunting effect on Africans as a physical species" (Rodney, 1982:236): the conditions under colonialism produced "periodic famine", "chronic undernourishment", "malnutrition", and an overall deterioration in the health and wellbeing of the colonised people. Furthermore, the economic exploitation of the colonised population benefitted the coloniser and established a history of poverty among the colonised people that continues today. Hence, the illness depicted in Miller's poem is representative of a history of oppression and deterioration under colonial regimes. The televangelist and the church itself are symbols of false hope and performative religion. This is reflected in the description of the church as "one big tent" (l. 2). The church is not a permanent feature. The structure is flimsy and unsustainable, just as the preaching is. The use of personification in the portrayal of the tent as "shivering/ with tambourines" (ll. 2-3) and being "swollen with sickness" (1. 3) reflects the widespread suffering of the congregation. The enjambment of lines 1 to 4 further emphasises the extent of suffering as the descriptions spill over their lines. The tent itself becomes a reflection of the disease and suffering that the people are experiencing. However, the flimsy nature of evangelicalism means that the tent will be taken down and moved to the next location, while the congregation will remain permanently disadvantaged and underserved. The televangelist preaching about religious healing as a part of the performance does not impact the community because the root of the illness is oppression. The performance and the charisma of the televangelist is facile in the face of centuries of injustice. Miller portrays the performative Christianity as false and unhelpful in the face of true oppression and injustice.

In addition, evangelists often view the development of radio and television as "instruments sent by God to help them" preach the gospel (Hadden, 1993:114) because "like automobile and personal-hygiene manufacturers, [they] have a product to sell and the airways are a marketing instrument" (Hadden, 1993:116). The televangelists, however, require customers to pay for the airtime, which can be likened to "the high-pressure techniques of revivalism" (Hadden, 1993:117). In the revivalist tradition, a person "must acknowledge God's saving grace as a

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condition of salvation" (Hadden, 1993:117). In order to be saved or be worthy one must accept Christianity as the sole legitimate religion. The harsh message and necessity for funds means that televangelist ministries need a charismatic and likeable persona to be the face of the business (Hadden, 1993:123). These charismatic figures appeal to people and encourage support from the public. However, these charismatic figures often attain a quasi-celebrity status and have their own agendas. Many televangelists "[dress] their right-wing political messages in religious clothing and [use] the airwaves to promote their causes" (Hadden, 1993:125). This is self-serving and often accompanied by monetary gain for the televangelist who often use donations to fund their own lavish lifestyles (Hadden, 1993:130). These financial scandals and various public sexual scandals among televangelists have caused many people to lose faith in the televangelist movement (Hadden, 1993:130). However, with the progression of technology, these televangelists are afforded more opportunity to impact the world. In post-colonies, the televangelist churches harm the community because of their "religious orthodoxy, cultural intolerance, and unequivocal embrace of free-market capitalism" (Howley, 2001:26). One of the theories surrounding the popularity of the televangelist churches in poor communities is the televangelists' "ability to tap into the American mythos of hard work, rugged individualism, and eternal progress that helps capture the imagination of the telefaithful" (Howley, 2001:26). The televangelists successfully use the idealism associated with the "American Dream" of success to convince audiences that their suffering will end as long as they are willing to work hard enough (Howley, 2001:26). America is associated with success and a deliverance from suffering because of the popularity of Western media. Hollywood and various large new conglomerates have established America as a sort of "centre" of the world. Thus, the televangelist benefits from this fetish for America and the idealism associated with American success. The televangelist also benefits from the modern crises of identity in black audiences by manipulating their double consciousness and need for belonging; the Church promises societal inclusion and perceived connection to the society that otherwise alienates them. According to Quentin Schultze in his novel *Televangelsism and American Culture: The Business of Popular Religion* (1991) that "television amplifies the inherent drama of the faith, making Christianity a more sensational and extraordinary phenomenon than most believers ever experience for themselves" (1991:98). This amplification makes the televangelist seem especially powerful and meaningful, establishing them as a Christ-like figure. Televangelism has grown in popularity among the ex-colonies because of the outrageous promises these charismatic leaders make. Televangelists assert that everything that is wrong with society comes from a lack of faith or moral decay and only strong faith can resolve these issues.

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Furthermore, the struggles of the people are attributed to Satan instead of a history of suffering, which leads to strict conservative moral values and a stringent prescription to traditional rules of Christianity (Hadden, 1993:125). These churches preach the same controlling agenda as the colonial Christianity that justified the oppression of black and indigenous people (Hadden, 1993:125). The manipulation and exploitation of the previously colonised is evident in the Church's incessant collection of funds and the assertion that their suffering is caused by their immorality and can be alleviated by the subscription to the evangelical and fundamentalist faith. As televangelists become more popular in post-colonies, largely due to the people's urgency to escape the suffering that colonisation trapped them in, more and more televangelist leaders have become associated with faith healing. The idea comes from the stories of Jesus Christ healing people of illness by touching them. Televangelists are known to perform prayers and rituals that are supposed to cure many different ailments. The history of the underdevelopment of the Caribbean due to colonisation has led to an impoverished black population that does not have access to reliable healthcare. This population is further extorted by televangelist and evangelicalism as they donate money to these churches and subscribe to the strict Christian dogma in a facile attempt to end their suffering. The poem "Tangent B" (Miller, 2007:25) depicts this extortion as the "televangelist" (l. 1) preaches to a dying congregation that desperately "[hold] their faith" (l. 7) in an attempt to escape their illness and suffering. The comparison of faith to a "mustard [seed]" (l. 8) is an allusion to the Bible story Matthew 17:20 in which Jesus remarks: "For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you". The sickly congregation cling to their faith that is "bigger than mustard seeds" (l. 8). However, the level of suffering in the African congregation is insurmountable. This preaching does not suit the truly oppressed congregation. The tone takes on a sarcastic and critical tenor as the inability for evangelicalism to impact a place ravaged by colonialism is portrayed. A blind woman attempts to prove the strength of her faith, shouting that she believes in order to "ward off the darkness" (l. 10). The people desperately try and achieve the strength of faith that the televangelist claims will heal them and their communities, however this is an unattainable ideal. The community has been ravaged by colonialism and a history of oppression that can only be improved through meaningful reparations and the uplifting of previously disadvantaged people.

After the televangelist's sermon the speaker says that "all of the well went home singing It Is Well" (l. 12). The hymn "It Is Well" was written by Horatio G. Spafford (Hawn, 2013) in the

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late eighteenth century as a song about accepting your lot and remaining faithful in the face of suffering. The performance of the song reflects the message of the televangelist church about accepting God even if you are suffering. Furthermore, the hymn glorifies the reward after death for those that keep their faith strong even if their suffering does not subside. This message is a tool of manipulation and ensures the continued efforts of the suffering to maintain a blind trust in Christianity and in the Church itself. The blind woman that desperately sought healing is let down, but the hymn promises that another prize is in heaven where "faith shall be sight" (l. 23). There is repetition in the woman's proclamations: "I believe, I believe!" (l. 10). This repetition reflects the urgency with which she displays her faith and ironically portrays the level of hopelessness of the congregation. The young man maintains that the blind woman was not healed because she "never had enough faith" (l. 16). The woman's desperation is juxtaposed with the young man's dismissive response. This emphasises the superficial nature of this performative faith. The poem portrays the hypocrisy of missionary churches and televangelist churches that exploit ex-colonies and perpetuate oppression. Furthermore, the Church acts to shift blame away from the colonial Christian Church and the history of missionary involvement in oppression. The blame is attributed to a lack of Christian faith amongst the people instead. This represents the fallacy of performative faith and the Church's inability to explain or remedy the malevolence in poverty-stricken post-colonies. By showing how the miracles described in the Bible are not afforded to those that are impacted by a life dominated by racial oppression and poverty, the poem establishes traditional Christianity as ineffective in consolidating life after colonisation and establishes the evangelical and fundamentalist Church as exploitative and oppressive. Similarly, in "the church woman visits a hospital", the inability of Christianity to heal the post-colony is explored:

> She goes from bed to bed and preaches, hope
> in Jesus cures all ills however vile.
> Some lift their gowns to show the awful scope
> of cancers; they receive her holy oil.
>
> For what? They die anointed just the same;
> the touch of olive oil upon their heads
> will not make that fierce angel suddenly tame
> as doors in Egypt did, splashed with red.
>
> (Miller, 2007:36)

The poem portrays a woman that attempts to heal people and propagates the message that having faith will cure anything. The woman spends her time going "from bed to bed" (l. 1) preaching that "hope/ in Jesus cures all ills however vile" (ll. 1-2). The run on sentence from

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the first line to the second line is constructed in such a way so that the first line ends with “hope” (l. 1). The woman is not portrayed in the same way as the Church, instead of being exploitative, she is hopeful. However, the word “hope” (l. 1) and “scope” (l. 3) are joined through rhyming. This juxtaposition shows the irony of hope in the face of a truly malign condition. The woman absorbs the sentiment of the Church and hopes that her faith and the ritual of anointing someone with holy oil will heal the people in the hospital. However, they “die anointed just the same” (l. 5). The “awful scope” (l. 3) of their “cancers” (l. 4) is too great to be healed by the idea of blind faith in evangelicalism or performative religion. The “cancers” (l. 4) is representative of colonially induced decay in post-colonial communities. The “awful scope” (l. 3) of the decay that has resulted from a history of oppression cannot be fixed by evangelicalism or fundamentalism. In the face of colonial violence, “holy oil” (l. 4) turns to plain “olive oil” (l. 6). This represents the inability of the oppressive Christianity to heal the post-colonial community. The speaker says that using this “olive oil” (l. 6) will not “make that fierce angel suddenly tame/ as doors in Egypt did, splashed with red” (ll. 7-8). The allusion to painting the doors red to appease a “fierce angel” (l. 7) refers to the ten plagues sent to Egypt in Exodus in the Bible. In Exodus 7 to 12, an Egyptian Pharaoh claims to be a god himself and denies the omnipotent power of the Christian God, as well as refuses to release the Israelites that are being kept as slaves. God sends ten plagues to the Egyptian people to demonstrate his omnipotence and force the pharaoh to release the Israelites. In Exodus 12, the Israelites are instructed to paint the blood of Passover lambs on their doors and when the Angel of Death passed, he would ignore the houses that were painted with blood. The story in Exodus affirms Christianity’s monopoly over the one true God and displays the omnipotence of the Christian God. This links to the teachings of the evangelical Church about the ability of faith to prevent suffering. However, the angel of death is not “[tamed]” (l. 7) by the belief of the church woman or the ill.

Just like the well-intentioned, but delusional, women in “the church woman visits a hospital”, the speaker in “Tangent C” describes a woman that has said that her faith in God saved her from a natural disaster. However, the woman is then described as having to run after her small house that was destroyed:

I used to pray for hurricanes. I had never seen one
but could imagine how, in the wonderful
non-meter of its rhythm, the freeness of its verse,
houses could be picked up and turned
into nothing. One June, a woman standing in mud

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confessed to news cameras that during the storm
she lit candles in each corner of the house
and prayed; that's why she was spared.
But while announcing her faith
a small pile of zinc and board sailed
down the gully. She turned around to run,
to chase her house, to chase her god.
It's the same thing.

(Miller, 2007:26)

The house is described as "a small pile of zinc and board" (l.10) that floats away as the woman chases her sense of belonging. The house is made of flimsy material that gives way to pressure and disaster. The house is compared to "her god" (l. 12), comparatively they are flimsy and unable to protect her from disaster. The caesura of the line emphasises the comparison as "her god" is portrayed as an exact equal to "her house" (l. 12). The lowercase "g" in "god" (l. 12) emphasizes the powerlessness and incapacity of the Christian God in the Caribbean. The woman's declaration of faith is undermined by the natural environment in which she lives, as well as her underprivileged status. The woman reflects the desperate believers praising God for alleviating their suffering, while the evangelical Christian Church exploits and misleads the congregants. This desperation is emphasised by the repetition of "to chase" (l. 12). The image of chasing her "god" (l. 13) portrays faith as a concept or creature that is to be pursued, found, or even questioned on some level. However, the woman's blind faith does not allow her to capture creature as to catch faith, is to subdue and own it. The evangelical concept of faith does not leave room for questioning or capture. Therefore, it is unattainable and unmanageable. The woman is also portrayed as impoverished living in a makeshift house of "zinc and board" (l. 10). She lives in squalor, which is a criticism of evangelicalism and its perpetuation of the political and economic structures that negatively impact the poor. Evangelicalism has ties to a right-wing and capitalist political agenda which is opposed to reparations and prioritises the wealthy in society. Thus, the evangelical Church forces the blame for suffering onto the community for their lack of faith and on the influence of Satan. This successfully quashes any need for reparations or the uplifting of previously colonised communities. Miller portrays this brainwashing in the poem as the woman proudly boasts of her faith and describes the efforts that she went to in order to be saved. Nevertheless, the woman loses her belongings and her home, and yet she believes she was spared. Again, in the poem "Book of Numbers" Miller mocks the people's loyalty to evangelicalism and points out the exploitative nature of the evangelical Church:

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He bought his book of numbers
in Half Way Tree where they are sold to the empty-bellied
who believe God will give signs to the sleeping-coded prophecy
of what numbers to play, combinations that unlock the safe,
a promise of fat cows and plenty, the hopeful end
of hungry.

(2007:59, ll. 10-15)

The Book of Numbers is the story of the 38-year period in which Israelites were wandering in the desert following the establishment of the covenant of Sinai. God had redeemed the Israelites from slavery, but instead of responding with gratitude and strengthened faith, the people responded with anger and repeated acts of rebellion. The redeemed people therefore forfeited their right to the promised land and their punishment included their banishment to the desert. The story intends to warn against rebellion and expressing anger towards God's will. The Caribbean people, after slavery and colonisation, are often compared to the Israelites yet the message that establishes suffering as a product of sin, is not applicable to places decimated by colonisation. In the poem the faith of a poor man is described. The poem highlights the irony of the Bible preaching miracles for the faithful, while "the empty-bellied" (l. 2) spend money on the Bible instead of food hoping, in vain, for a miracle or a blessing. The "numbers" (l. 4) to which the poem refers are lottery numbers, a plan for a perfect crime, as the man is searching for "combinations that unlock the safe" (l. 4). There is parallel structure in the two phrases "a promise of fat cows and plenty, the hopeful end/ of hungry" (ll. 5-6). This juxtaposes the promise of plenty with the reality of lacking. Furthermore, the enjambment in ll. 5-6 highlights the inability of evangelicalism to remedy the situation. The line ends on the words: "hopeful end" (l. 5), however, this is contrasted by the unending line that spills unchecked into the next line. There is a separation between "hopeful end" (l. 5) and "hungry" (l. 6) reflecting the disparity between hope and the reality of unending suffering. This creates a sense of irony as the poem reflects the unlikelihood of faith having any impact on the actual suffering of Afro-Caribbean people. People look to the evangelical message for reprieve, but the socio-economic situation in the Caribbean is a product of a history of racism, and capitalistic oppression. Ultimately, evangelicalism is portrayed as deeply harmful in the Caribbean. The fact that people continue to believe in the colonised evangelical message is portrayed as delusional "double consciousness" that perpetuates one's "otherness" in contemporary times. Through the history of discrimination and identity erasure, the Caribbean people have been forced into the perpetuation of racial violence against themselves. They accept the status of scapegoat and the unwavering suffering associated with blindly accepting God's will.

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However, in the poem "what the evangelist should have said" Miller introduces the idea that there is space for Christianity in the Caribbean:

> An American evangelist, preaching salvation,
> said it was like being on one side of a river, Jesus
> on the other, arms long as forever reaching
> to lift you over. But we only knew hope river,
> sally waters river – only knew rambling brooks
> running through the cane as river, a thing
> you could jump over, or make a way across
> on stones. We had no imagination of Mississippi
> or Delaware, rivers so wide they held ships.
> A saviour with magic arms was pointless.
>
> What the evangelist should have said, was:
> is like when de river come down just like suh
> and you find yuself at de bottom,
> slow breathin unda de surface, speakin
> in bubbles, growin accustomed to fish
> and deep and dark and forever – salvation
> is de man with arms like a tractor
> who reach in fi pull you out of de river,
> press de flat of him hands gainst your belly
> and push de river out of you.
>
> (Miller, 2007:40)

The first stanza is written in regular English, but the saviour described "was pointless" (l. 10). The second stanza is written mainly in creole, and this saviour, more notably, pulls people out of a river when they are drowning. This insinuation shifts away from the rejection of the Church to a reinvention of Christianity through the process of creolisation. The Jamaican people need a messenger that is relatable and is undeniably Caribbean. Furthermore, the transportation of modern evangelicalism from America will not suit the Caribbean because the American Church is so involved in the politics, society, and ethos of America. Modern American Churches are undeniably linked to specific political parties and are often imbued with messaging that conveys specific ideals that align with the political views of the Church (or church leader). Furthermore, American Christianity is becoming increasingly involved in the specific laws that govern states. The idea of religious freedom is replaced by a push for strict adherence to Christian values and the rejection of the creole accepting Christianity that Miller is working to form into the Caribbean. Certain American Christian Churches are rooted in control, violence, and in conforming to backwards ideals that are not inclusive. Kei Miller is a gay man from Jamaica and is therefore critical of this type of restrictive Christianity and the rejection of

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homosexuality. This brand of modern Christianity does not suit the Caribbean. The poem shows that the Caribbean people have no ability to connect with these restrictive modern Christian Churches because they are so far removed from the society in which this restrictive Church thrives. The speaker says that the Caribbean people "[have] no imagination of Mississippi/or Delaware" (ll. 8-9). The saviour from America is "pointless" (l. 10) in the Caribbean. Furthermore, the American saviour is portrayed as having "magic arms" (l. 10) that can pull a believer over huge masses of water. In the Caribbean the landscape is completely different and there are no rivers as wide as those in America. The Christian god, from the perspective of the American evangelist, is unsuitable in every aspect of the Caribbean. Instead, the Creolised Caribbean Christian god is portrayed in creole language and is a figure that saves people from drowning (ll. 11-20). There is no necessity for the American Christian god in the Caribbean, but there is space for a saviour that is creolised and undeniably authentic to the Caribbean. Miller deconstructs the necessity of the strict Christian faith that Western media portrays. Instead, the Caribbean saviour is rooted in openness and is removed from the oppressive Christofascism of American religious entities.

Through the process of creolisation, the Afro-Caribbean is not "rooted" geographically, and ideologically. Similarly, its expression of Christianity is not rooted in Western ideals and a strict adherence to the colonial interpretation of the Bible. This makes it possible for Christianity to merge with Afro-Caribbean cultures in a way that suits the consensual synthesis of creolisation. In the poem "An allowance for Ula May", the strict rules of traditional religion are dismantled to make way for new freedom:

Ula-May, keeper, interpreter and dispenser
of rules, read the book of Leviticus once a month.
She believed only in laws that forbade,
none that allowed, so she did-not
more than she ever did.
Consider, that on quiet days
bowed on her red floor and committed
to the slow shining of a coconut husk-
even in that safe holiness she did not
let go of things inside. She did not hum,
no spiritual, no sankey, no complaint
of arthritis ever passed her lips.
Consider, that even when dying
from unknown sickness,
she would not consult the obeah woman.

Ula-May, great-grandmother,

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I write for you now an allowance
as rules that once were have withered.
The page of this poem is a space
on which you may throw rice grains as divination,
use up the magic that only rotted
inside you. Between these words,
a rhythm, that you may tie your head tonight,
probably for the first time, let your hips go
where they have wanted. The heart of this
is love, Ula-May, which you may take whole,
turn it towards your awful self. Such things,
like the love of skin, the love of what we bring
to this world, are no longer forbidden.
They are permissible, they are allowed; you may.

(Miller, 2007:76)

The repetition of the word "consider" (ll. 6, 13) emphasises the reflective tone of the poem and shows the speaker's contemplation over the life of Ula-May. Furthermore, the speaker repeats Ula-May's name in ll. 1, 16, 26). This highlights the personal nature of the poem and forces the focus onto Ula-May. The speaker remarks that Ula-May "read the book of Leviticus once a month" (l. 2). The *Book of Leviticus* is notoriously restricting and is one of the sections of the Bible that modern Christians take issue with. The *Book of Leviticus* outlines the rules by which good Christians should live. The speaker describes Ula-May as "keeper, interpreter and dispenser/ of rules" (ll. 1-2). Ula-May is described as having restricted her life to fit into the rules, even in private and to the point of absurdity. When Ula-May got sick, she would not consult the "obeah woman" (l. 15) because Leviticus 19:31 reads: "Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God." Obeah is an important feature of Afro-Caribbean spiritual beliefs and is "especially important in discussing healing and curing in Caribbean societies" (Taylor & Case, 2013:15). The practice of Obeah and the consultation of Obeah men and women was considered "devil worship" and "represented a form of resistance to slavery and therefore was outlawed by legislation" (Taylor & Case, 2013:115). The poem thus mocks Ula-May for refusing to see an Obeah woman even though she was dying of an unknown disease. The speaker judges the fact that, even in death, Ula-May did not abandon her strict faith. Ula-May's life is portrayed as small and constrained to suit the rules set out in Leviticus. The poem reflects condemnation for the negative impact that evangelicalism and colonial institutions have caused in the Caribbean. In the second stanza the speaker unchains Ula-May and posthumously creates a space in which Ula-May is not restricted. Ula-May is allowed to use "up the magic that only rotted" (l. 20) inside her. This is

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a paradoxical idea as there is the promise of rejuvenation using that which has rotted and decayed. Furthermore, the use of the word "magic" (l. 20) is linked to the practice of Obeah which is sometimes associated with "black magic". Ula-May is representative of all those that died while living in the shackles of traditional and archaic interpretations of Christianity. Here we see that creole Christianity allows the Afro-Caribbean person to connect to their roots and use their "magic" (l. 20). Ula-May's status as "awful" (l. 27) can be attributed to the "double consciousness" that colonial institutions and evangelicalism has created within her. The speaker posits that love can heal the person from their status as "awful" (l. 27), a status that comes with evangelical Christianity's view of humanity as inherently evil or flawed. Moreover, the poem specifically references the allowance of "the love of skin, the love of what we bring/ to this world," which "are no longer forbidden" (ll. 26-27). The Bible says in 1 John 2:15-16 that people must "not love the world or the things in the world". However, in creole Christianity bodily and worldly desires are not forbidden; Ula-May is also given permission to dance, which is established as having spiritual importance in Afro-Caribbean belief systems and ritualistic practices. Furthermore, in creole Christianity dance is perceived as a viable form of ritual and prayer. The deconstruction of the stringent traditional Christianity is represented in the rewriting of the Biblical origin story of Genesis in the poem "Book of Genesis" by Kei Miller:

Suppose there was a book full only of the word,
let – from whose clipped sound all things began: fir
and firmament, feather, the first whale- and suppose

we could scroll through its pages every day
to find and pronounce a *Let* meant only for us-
we would stumble through the streets with open books,

eyes crossed from too much reading; we would speak
in auto-rhyme, the world would echo itself- and still
we'd continue in rounds, saying *let* and *let* and *let*

until even silent dreams had been allowed.
(Miller, 2007:55)

The poem starts with the word "suppose" (l. 1) and the first stanza also ends with the word "suppose" (l. 3). This reflects the hypothetical tone of the poem. There is enjambment throughout the poem reflecting the longing of the speaker and emphasising the unconstrained nature of the hypothetical book. Genesis is the story of creation in which God created the world from darkness and then created the idyllic garden of Eden in which Adam and Eve lived. However, Adam and Eve disobey God's one rule that they would not eat the fruit of the tree of

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the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve are expelled from the idyllic easy life in Eden and are condemned to a life with an understanding of hardship and corruption. Genesis is the story of the beginning of everything. The creolised Christianity's Genesis and creation story is defined by the discovery of a "*Let* meant only for [Afro-Caribbean people]" (l. 5). The word "let" is positioned as a sort of key that unlocks any shackles and granting permission. The creation of creole Christianity is rooted in allowance instead of restriction. The speaker says that the allowances would not end "until even silent dreams had been allowed" (l. 10). The book of Genesis in the creole Bible includes creation and allowance and excludes the betrayal and the condemnation of Adam and Eve to a life of hardship. Creole Christianity turns the Caribbean into an Eden for Afro-Caribbean people in which they are never restricted and from which they are never expelled.

Miller's poems challenge the traditional definition of praise and of a holy existence. The poem "Book of Proverbs" (Miller, 2007:62) is part of a collection of poems named after books in the Bible and the title shows a deliberate and literal attempt at rewriting the Bible. The *Book of Proverbs* in the Bible is a guide to life for Christian people. The proverbs were written to give "prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young" (Proverbs 1:4) and to urge readers to choose a life of wisdom and shun the ways of folly. The proverbs are wide-ranging and shun all temptations from sexual pleasure outside of marriage to keeping anger in check. The good Christian is advised to live "in the fear of the Lord" (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10), a Lord who is wisdom personified. However, this does not suit the Afro-Caribbean experience. In turning away from this guidebook, the Afro-Caribbean person is afforded the ability to construct a creolised identity. The poem exemplifies the creolisation of Christianity and the rewriting of the *Book of Proverbs:*

One time
I see a man on a big stage
like him dodge the security
like him did escape from somewhere
like Nuttall or Bellevue
I know him did mad
the way him was holding two rockstone
one to each ear
and him was dancing and him was humming
a tune only him could hear

and him was dancing
and him was humming and I wish
I could hear the music stones make

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for I get the understanding
while him was dancing
sometimes the mad understand
more than those with understanding

in most everything
there is a deep meaning
in every stone, a proverb,
every river bottom is like a book

and him was dancing and him
was humming and I was wondering
what is the end of this story,
the jack-mandora-
mi-nuh-choose-none?

Maybe *when it feel that God is no more*
Like he leave you alone
Child, put yu ear to de stones.

(Miller, 2007:62)

The man in the poem is portrayed as "mad" (l. 6) because he is not in the pursuit of wisdom in accordance with the *Book of Proverb*, but is dancing to the music provided by stone. Nature is portrayed as providing understanding and sanctification in the eyes of the Lord that the *Book of Proverbs* promises. Wisdom and guidance are linked to nature and the speaker declares that "in every stone, [there is] a proverb,/every river bottom is like a book" (ll. 19-20). There is very little punctuation and the poem is flooded with enjambment and almost chaotic spacing. The structure of the poem reflects the freedom and fluidity of the man that the speaker is describing. The line: "the jack-mandora-/mi-nuh-choose-none?" (ll. 23-24) is sung at the end of an Ananse story and means "no blame should be attributed to the listener, storyteller or writer". The intertextuality of the insertion of Ananse into the *Book of Proverbs* shows that creole Christianity expresses itself through an interconnectedness between Christianity and Afro-Caribbean belief systems and folklore. The Ananse references create a link – or a web – between Afro-Caribbean folklore and the Christian God. The "mad" man is portrayed as wholly relinquishing himself to folly, and yet the man is described as being able to "understand/ more than those with understanding" (ll. 16-17). The poem suggests that he is more enlightened than those that pursue wisdom using the *Book of Proverbs.* Finally, the poem ends with a proverb that can be likened to the commands and guidelines of the *Book of Proverbs*.

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The moral of the story or the proverb is that "*when it feel that God is no more/Like he leave you alone/Child, put yu ear to de stones"* (l. 27). The insertion of nature and specifically stones into the context of proverbs and spiritual connection facilitates what Harry Garuba refers to as *animism* and its use in the "re-enchantment of the world" (Garuba, 2003:261). Garuba argues that "animism is often simply seen as belief in objects such as stones or trees or rivers for the simple reason that animist gods and spirits are *located* and *embodied* in objects: the objects are the physical and material manifestations of the gods and spirits" (Garuba, 2003:267). The use of animism in the poem reflects creole Christianity's connection to the animist gods of Africa. Within the creolised connection to Christianity there is a "religious consciousness of the material world" (Garuba, 2003:268) that links Christianity to Afro-Caribbean spirituality. The malevolent universe that is associated with colonial times is associated with an unreachable God, and a God that does not explain suffering. Instead, the creole God is reachable in nature, dance, folly, and the human body.

The Christian colonial God is portrayed as omnipotent and as the only true god. This oppressive God is portrayed as violently asserting his strength when questioned and as being whole and undeniable. However, the creolised Christian God is not forceful and unwavering. In establishing a connection to the creolised Christian God there needs to be a rejection of wholeness and stringent definitions. Afro-Caribbean people need to dismantle their ideas about God and about themselves to be able to exist in the creolised Caribbean with a creolised Christian God. Moving towards the creole is a process of accepting differences and brokenness to establish a self-image that is representative of the creole. The creolised Christian God is accepting of African influence in Afro-Caribbean culture which fosters an acceptance of brokenness or doubleness and leads to the birth of a creolised and oppression-free self-image and connection to Christianity. Instead, Afro-Caribbean people, in creating creole, and accepting their brokenness, are made newly whole in the image of the creolised Christian God. In the poem "I" in the chapter entitled "IV: The Broken (II)" by Kei Miller the fracturing of the community during slavery and colonisation is acknowledged and, in this brokenness, there is space for creolisation:

A worm broken in two will become two.
Broken in a hundred, it shall become a hundred.
Then, are we not like worms
that started whole, but have become
multiple, legion, broken.
(Miller, 2007:45)

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While most worms will not regenerate if cut into pieces, a worm called the planarium flatworm has evolved into an amazing regenerative invertebrate (Castro, 2013). The creature regenerates when cut into slivers and once that sliver regrows its head, "the creature remarkably keeps all of its old memories" (Castro, 2013). The planarium flatworm is used in the poem as a metaphor for the diaspora that have been fractured from each other, from Africa, and from a holistic sense of self. However, in creating the creole these fractured parts regenerate and maintain their connection to the past and to their collective experiences. The creolised diaspora is described as "multiple" (l. 5), a "legion" (l. 5), and also inherently "broken" (l. 5). The acknowledgment of brokenness leads to the creation of a new sense of wholeness. The poem "III" in the chapter entitled "IV: The Broken (II)" by Kei Miller portrays this acceptance of the body's brokenness:

Or maybe broken is the way we love.
As if meeting someone else, one soul searches
the other for openings- a way to enter.
Even God's limbs had to be torn
before the world could sing him

(Miller, 2007:47)

The poem contends that God had to be broken and changed in order to suit creole context. God's body is acknowledged as "broken", and creole found an opening in which to enter. The poem maintains that God had to be broken before "the world could sing him" (l. 5) which highlights the fact that in breaking the traditional image of God and creating a creole faith, Christianity becomes a viable and authentic belief system for the African diaspora as well. Furthermore, people were said to be created in God's image when God created Adam and Eve. The idea of a fragmented and broken god, as shown in the description of God's limbs as having "to be torn/ before the world could sing him" (ll. 4-5), is also representative of creole identity at large. Therefore, the creole God is a mirror of the creolised Caribbean people. In the process of creolisation, these fragments and differences are merged to form an amalgamated identity that allows them to regain agency in the recovery of identity.

Evangelical missionaries claim to provide an end to the suffering experienced by the people. However, evangelism does not account for the experience of black people. Evangelical Christianity cannot end the suffering in the Caribbean because the oppressiveness and hypocrisy of white evangelicalism cannot account for the socio-economic effects of colonisation. Creolised Christianity, however, directly addresses suffering as an innate feature of its practice, thus providing the spiritual fortitude needed by many. The selected poems in

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there is an anger that moves by Kei Miller uses poetry to reject evangelicalism and oppression associated with Christianity. Yet, in doing so, Miller's poetry rewrites the Bible and reframes Christianity in the creolised Caribbean space. This necessary critique of traditional colonial structures of Christianity is developed further in the next chapter, as the patriarchal structures that are embedded in Christianity stand to be challenged in poetry by Tanya Shirley.

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Chapter 5:
Finding "Our Water Selves": Female Agency, Sexuality, and Spiritual Practice in Tanya Shirley's Poetry

Tanya Shirley is a Jamaican poet that has achieved notoriety for her poetry about black women's spiritual experiences as she foregrounds its connection to nature and the female body. These poems include various references to the sexuality of women; women as shamans, the psychic abilities of women, feminised nature as a connection to Africa, and other specific gendered allusions to Jamaica, post-colonial Caribbean culture, and Christianity. More sensationally, there is Shirley's poetic equation of the erotic as spiritual; the Christian binary between immorality and morality is stripped away to make room for women in creolised Christian practices in the Caribbean. Shirley's poetry thus engages with the personal and political agency of women as they are portrayed as sexual beings, spiritual beings, and rebellious beings in tandem. Shirley's writing aims to combat the historical abuse of black women during slavery, and their ongoing denigration under Christian teaching by providing a creolised space in which black female sexuality can coexist with morality and spirituality. The representation of black female sexuality in poetry is thus an act of rebellion that unshackles black women from a history of oppression and exploitation based on gender, as well as race. Furthermore, the portrayal of women as seers, shamans, and as spiritually important, portrays women as figures of transfiguration that connect the Caribbean to an African cosmology. This further dismantles the historical gender-based denigration of black women, by creating a healing space for black women in the creolised Afro-Caribbean community.

In the poem "Grace" by Tanya Shirley, the speaker is a woman speaking about her own sexual gratification and her relationship to God:

Grace

On days when I worship you
more than I should,
when your mouth is my only altar,
and time
is measured by how long
you spend between me,
or the width of your absence;

on days when I cannot distinguish our bodies
and even mirrors deceive me,

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when I remember God
only on the cusp of coming,
when His name is your name
and the afterlife is a place
we create;

on days when all sounds lead me
to your voice,
the night jasmine carries your smell,
when everything is your skin
and I tongue books
and trees and strangers;

on days when longing is a form of madness
and the sun inside me swells,
when faith is knowing you'll return
for more of this
and naked we are our water selves;

on days when I worship you more
than I should, I am glad
God is merciful, benevolent,
full of grace.

(Shirley, 2015:68)

The use of personal pronouns conveys a strong sense of identity and sense of self that is reflected in the "I". The female speaker does not slip into passive voice or shift from her perspective. The poem centres on a black female experience in both the sexual and the religious experience it conveys, which speaks back to a history of colonial abuse.

The Victorian obsession with eradicating the immoral aspects of society prompted a war on female sexuality and, as a result, female independence. Anne McClintock (1995:33) claims that "a characteristic feature of the Victorian middle class was its peculiarly intense preoccupation with rigid boundaries" and with this came the Victorian preoccupation with "the cult of domesticity" (McClintock, 1995:34). In ascribing a moral value to marriage and chastity, while ascribing the status of sexual deviant to black women, Victorianism pushed black women further into the status of "Other" in society. As a case in point, McClintock points to Saartjie Baartman who "became the paradigm for the invention of the female body as an anachronism" (McClintock, 1995:42). The female body, represented here by Baartman, became perceived as something that existed outside of its proper historical context, something primitive. Baartman's body was exoticized and she was taken and paraded around the West

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like an object or zoo animal. In 1810, the body of Saartjie Baartman and her "supposedly excessive genitalia […] were overexposed and pathologized before the disciplinary gaze of male medical science and a voyeuristic public" (McClintock, 1995:42). This violation of privacy and "Othering" secured the female body as a site that can be conquered in order to show superiority. Furthermore, the assertion of the immorality of Black female sexuality became a tool with which colonial ideals and Western superiority were affirmed.

These perceptions about Black sexuality translated across to the Atlantic and similarly became a "defining feature of American slavery" (Collins, 2006:87) where "slaveowners relied upon an ideology of Black sexual deviance to regulate and exploit enslaved Africans" (Collins, 2006:87). By casting black people into the role of the deviant, slave owners maintained a basis and justification for the "othering" and exploitation of black people. Furthermore, the sexual exploitation of black people, particularly black women, during slavery was blamed on the "natural deviancy" of black people. During colonisation and slavery, the black body was literally and metaphorically shackled and controlled. Furthermore, black women experienced specific gender-based struggles under racist regimes. The black female body was sexualised, and subsequently sexually exploited as colonisation propagated "the myth that it was impossible to rape Black women because they were already promiscuous" in order to "mask the sexual exploitation of enslaved Black women by their owners" (Collins, 2006:101). Furthermore, this sexualisation precluded black women from assimilating into the society into which they were forced to exist. Black women experienced a specific form of oppression in which they were subjected to both racism and patriarchal oppression. Patricia Collins asserts that racism, sexism, and homophobia share disciplinary practices that perpetuate these ideas through patriarchy. The weight of these institutions on women, specifically black women, can be seen "in the enormous amount of attention paid both by the state and organized religion to the institution of marriage" (Collins, 2006:96). Black women experience a compounded form of oppression as they are impacted by racism and sexism, as colonisation relied on patriarchal ideals to further subjugate black women.

The double-colonisation of black women is thus rooted in Western ideas of spirituality and in colonial Christianity's definitions of morality. In contemporary literature from black women, there is a challenge in portraying black women as sexual, when historically black women have been condemned for being sexual deviants (Weir-Soley, 2009:2). According to Donna Weir-Soley in her book *Eroticism, Spirituality, and Resistance in Black Women's Writings* (2009),

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"black women's responses to charges of sexual immorality resulted in further institutionalization of the separation between the sexual and spiritual spheres" (Weir-Soley, 2009:2). In black women's writing during the nineteenth century the black female characters that "adhered to strict moral and sexual standards of propriety were forced to repress their sexuality, while those who did express themselves sexually were denied legitimate claims to the redemptive and liberating potential of and empowered and empowering spirituality" (Weir-Soley, 2009:2). Twentieth century black writers have attempted to bridge the gap between sexuality and spirituality that "is central to black women's identities" (Weir-Soley, 2009:2). Weir-Soley maintains that "they have done so by relying on the inscription of a symbolic, discursive, literal, and theoretical framework based on the spiritual precepts and epistemology of West African belief systems" (Weir-Soley, 2009:2). In Western ideas of spirituality, there is a distinct opposition between the secular and the sacred (Weir-Soley, 2009:1). However, there is no such opposition in African worldviews (Weir-Soley, 2009:1). In the context of Christian morality, there is "very little latitude for the full exploration (either discursively or ritually) of human sexual expression" and "any engagement with the subject of sexuality in Western literature is necessarily shaped by ideas that coalesce around concepts of 'sin' and 'immorality'" (Weir-Soley, 2009:1). In many West African belief systems, however, sexuality and sexual expression are integral to rituals and are not considered immoral (Weir-Soley, 2009:1). Certain gods in the Yoruba pantheon are associated with sex and sexual expression. Shango dances, for example, are often choreographed to demonstrate the size of the penis. Weir-Soley explores the "specifically gendered effects of mental, emotional, sexual, and psychological trauma" (Weir-Soley, 2009:4) associated with racial oppression and colonisation and explores the similarity in black women's writing that is derived from the creolised belief systems in the Caribbean (Weir-Soley, 2009:5). As he/she argues, these texts often portray "female intuition, knowledge, sexual power, spiritual agency, and psychic and spiritual redemption" (Weir-Soley, 2009:5) in order to uncover a collective sense of self for women within the creolised spiritual plain in the Caribbean.

The poem "Grace" by Tanya Shirley is a sensationalist poem that undermines nationalistic and hegemonic conceptions of black women's bodies and reclaims the narrative about sexuality and morality from the West. The poem is also reflective of the meeting between Christianity and African belief systems as the speaker embraces Yemoja and Olokun while connecting to a creolised Christian God. The sexual partner is portrayed as male due to the implication that during intercourse he is "between [her]" (l. 6) and the reference to male genitalia reflected in

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the "width of [his] absence" (l. 7) once he removes his phallus from "between [her]" (l. 6) legs. The speaker seems to be allocating power or submitting to the male conquest by equating sex with an act of worshipping the male partner (l. 1). However, the speaker takes ownership of the man's body in the sexual encounter and refers to his mouth as "[her] only altar" (l. 3). This brand of worship is equated with the worship Shirley has established in her poetry that centres female gratification and allows for female empowerment through sexuality and spirituality. Therefore, the reference to the act of worshipping the sexual partner is not an act of submission or female subjugation. Instead, the worship refers to the male partner as a tool for sexual and spiritual gratification. This is echoed in the implication that his mouth is an "altar" (l.3) which is a tool for worship. The speaker envelopes the man during sex and says she "cannot distinguish [their] bodies" (l. 8). The speaker says that she "[remembers] God/only on the cusp of coming" (ll. 10-11) and that during sex God's name becomes morphed with the name of the sexual partner (l. 12). The speaker's climax signals a deep connection to God and the male partner morphs from the altar, a mere tool for worship, into a vessel of God. In the poem the speaker absorbs her partner, and God, and becomes a single entity. This is reflective of the process of creolisation insofar as she turns god into flesh. The image is created of the speaker engaging in sexual activity with God himself. This image is an overt rejection of the colonial Christian values and would be considered blasphemous and the epitome of sin. However, in creole Christianity this act establishes a deeper connection between the speaker and God. The speaker says that in this euphoric state of worship "the afterlife is a place/ [they] create" (ll. 13-14). The deep spiritual connection that is established between God and the speaker is pushed further in the assertion that during sex and the female climax there is a possibility to rewrite the traditional understanding of heaven and the afterlife. Heaven is an Edenic paradise that is promised to good Christians after death. This expression of sexuality, specifically female sexuality, goes against the Christian outlawing of sex before marriage and the perpetuation of forsaking the urges of the flesh. The speaker would be excluded from the traditional Christian heaven and would be condemned to hell. Instead, in creole Christianity there is space for black female sexuality without condemnation or the threat of eternal damnation. Creole Christianity is rooted in progression and creation. The speaker describes her and her partner as being their "water selves" (l. 25) when they are naked together. The naked body is the epitome of the religious idea of the sinful and evil flesh that must be controlled and rejected. Modesty and morality are often associated with how clothed the body is, specifically the female body. The speaker rejects this notion of the sinful body and the war on the flesh in favour of an embodied spirituality. Creole Christianity that centres a black female experience and does not call for the

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rejection of the desires of the flesh and allows for a connection to African spirituality. The colonial Christian God is a figure of destruction, oppression, and patriarchal ideals. This colonial Christian God does not suit the Caribbean and would reflect the oppression and exploitation of black women in the name of morality. However, the creole Christian God does not reject the speaker for lust or sexual gratification. Instead, the creole Christian God is "merciful, benevolent, / [and] full of grace" (ll. 28-29). The societal implication of women as cheapened or as tarnished by sexual activity is subverted and female gratification is posited as a form of worship. The female body is portrayed as a spiritual site that facilitates connection to God.

The erotic nature of Tanya Shirley's poetry about faith in the Caribbean portrays the body as sexual and still sanctified. Shirley's poetry invokes the abject and frequently challenges the notion of morality in relation to colonial societal values. The concept of abjection is explained by Julie Kristeva in her book entitled *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Kristeva positions the abject as an opposition to the superego, meaning that the abject challenges the moral standards and boundaries of civilised society by which the ego operates. The idea of morality is heavily influenced by the society in which one resides. In the racist colonial society, blackness is abjected because society deems blackness as outside of the boundaries of civilised society. The abject threatens the idea of what is considered acceptable, social order, and the construction of the idealized sense of self in relation to society. In civil society, the abject must be perpetually rejected in order to affirm a sense of self that is in line with the morals of the society in which one exists. For example, loathed foods, bodily products and expulsions, and the corpse are examples of the abject. The idea of the abject can be applied to blackness in colonial society. Through poetry, Shirley invokes the abject and dismantles the constraints applied to black women through the ordinary. In the poem "Let This Be Your Praise" the speaker attempts to define praise for the Afro-Caribbean woman:

And what is praise but the offering up of one's self,
the daily rituals: waking to the stream of light seeping in
under the bedroom door, dressing slowly, humming Marley's
'Three Little Birds' or a made up melody,
cursing the traffic and the heat—the unbearable brazenness
of the morning sun—punctuating your profanities
with pleas for forgiveness. When you were a child
your mother threatened to wash your mouth with soap.
You have not forgotten how a mouth can sully everything,
its desire to be perfect and how often it fails.
At work you smile with the girl who asks stupid questions,

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you imagine she has unpaid bills, a wayward child,
you imagine you are more alike than different.
You cut your nails at your desk, laugh when someone falls,
eat lunch too quickly, take Tums for the indigestion.
In the evening you drink peppermint tea, watch TV and
when your eyes grow heavy you say a quick word
of prayer, a thank you for another full day, a request that you
not be killed in your sleep. Perhaps, you squeeze in an orgasm.
And if this is not praise, this simple act of living, if this is not
enough, then let us lie here and do nothing and see
what God has to say about that

(Shirley, 2015:65)

The title of the poem removes the pressure and performance of traditional praise, and instead introduces the idea that praise can be found in the ordinary activities of everyday life. The speaker says that praise is the "offering up of one's self" (l. 1) and that praise could take the form of "daily rituals" (l. 2). However, the speaker maintains a level of distance from the activities as if they were little more than a passive observer. This passivity is contrasted by the in-depth and intimate knowledge that the speaker has about the daily activities of the subject. This creates a sense that although the speaker is challenging the traditional idea of praise and spirituality, the speaker is still hesitant to claim ownership of behaviour that excludes them from societies idea of acceptability. Furthermore, the use of "you" as if to address someone seems as if the speaker is recounting actions undertaken by a figure that reflects the female experience. The allusion to Bob Marley, a popular figure associated with the Caribbean, inserts the praise of God into the modern Caribbean context. The speaker describes the use of profanities followed immediately by "pleas for forgiveness" (l. 7). The poem uses alliteration of the "p" in ll. 6-7: "punctuating your profanities/ with pleas". The opposing ideas of using profane language and the idea of asking for forgiveness are tied together as if they fit into a specific linguistic structure. A sentence is not correct without punctuation just as, to the speaker, profanities must be followed by pleas for forgiveness. This attitude alludes to the speaker's encounter with societal expectations and definitions of acceptable behaviour. The speaker says that the conditioning stems from being raised in a household that accepts the traditional binaries of moral behaviour. These rules are especially pushed onto women and girls to suit the patriarchal idea of "ladylike behaviour". The speaker describes how parents teach children that a mouth "can sully everything" (l. 9). The body and that which exits the body has been taught to be sinful and the "desire to be perfect" (l. 10) is engrained in people, but the body fails often (l. 10). This is reflected in the constant juxtaposition of conflicting actions.

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The perpetual "othering" and abjection of black women reflects the specific problems that arise for black women due to the dual oppressive structures, sexism and racism. Following the logic of W.E.B Du Bois, (1903a) black women develop a third level of consciousness in relation to an oppressive society. In order to assimilate into society, they must reject that which makes them black *and* that which makes them black women. The black female body becomes a site of unparalleled "othering" and rejection. Thus, the black woman becomes alienated from her own body, which is the representation of sexual deviancy and sin. Shirley's poetry thus attempts to reground black women in their bodies and reclaim a sense of bodily autonomy in retaliation to the hyper sexualization and rejection of the black female body.

The speaker describes a gesture of empathy towards a colleague "who asks stupid questions" (l. 11), however in the next line the figure "[laughs] when someone falls" (l. 14). The figure causes her own indigestion by "[eating] lunch too quickly" (l. 15). The imperfect actions of the figure cause a bodily response that is remedied through medication. The immediate remedy to the ailment reinforces the mundane quality of these actions described as praise. It also undermines the idea of long suffering for improper behaviour that is propagated by a patriarchal and colonial society. Furthermore, the image of ingestion and bodily functions invokes a sense of the abject in a more overt way. The mundane actions of the speaker can also be considered abject in relation to the hypersexualisation placed on women and the policing of their behaviour. The hyper-sexualization of black female bodies and black features solidified black women as amoral and the abject in comparison to the Christian white woman. The black female body as sinful is compounded with the colonial war on blackness and the establishment of blackness as inferior. In establishing black women as the amoral antithesis to colonial society, there is an emphasis on controlling the black female body and trying to destroy that which represents blackness. Black women were labelled as specifically promiscuous and as abject in relation to Christian Victorian women. Black female bodies were hyper-sexualized to further this idea of abjection and "other". However, the abject is further invoked in the expressions of certain body focused activities that would be considered taboo. The figure "cuts [her] nails at [her] desk" (l. 14) and experiences indigestion which often leads to bloating, flatulence, and burping. The figure does not hide or seek privacy to cut her nails, nor does she take much notice of the indigestion. By invoking the abject, societies expectations and rules are unravelled. The female body is portrayed as ordinary and mundane as opposed to hypersexual or on some quest for purity. The complexities of human nature cannot fit into the patriarchal definition of what a woman should be. The figure is said to "say a quick word/ of prayer" (ll. 17-18) that is both

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a "thank you for another full day" (l. 18) and a request not to be "killed in [their] sleep" (l. 19). The juxtaposition of life and death as well as the existential and the mundane reinforces the idea that the simple act of living without constraint is significant. Furthermore, the violence of the image created by the speaker of an assailant physically murdering the figure during the night as opposed to peacefully dying during sleep is the ultimate form of the abject as the corpse and the idea of death erases the sense of self that is created in rejecting the abject. The prayer is directly followed by "an orgasm" (l. 19). The orgasm is not described as a monumental event or decision and is rather something the figure might "squeeze in" (l. 19). The orgasm is as normal to the figure as the action of having a cup of peppermint tea. Prayer and sexual gratification are juxtaposed, and neither is given more power than the other. The prayer is described as a "quick word" (l. 17) and the orgasm is rushed and "squeezed in" (l. 19) to the nightly ritual. The speaker affirms that activities like the prayer, and the self-gratification are all considered praise and are of equal importance. The "simple act of living" (l. 20) is enough praise, a person does not need to devote their lives to altering behaviour according to the rules of the Bible or a societal construction of morality. Furthermore, the speaker challenges God to disprove this. The tone of the last three lines of the poem is confrontational and assertive. This is reinforced by the speaker's sudden use of "us" (l. 21) to refer to the actions of the figure. The speaker joins the figure in the abject and dares the Christian god to undermine them. The poem challenges the traditional definition of praise and of a holy existence and is sure in the redefinition of praise. The erotic content of the poem subverts and rebels against what traditional religion says about sex and the value of the body. However, the rituals and praise of God are still celebrated. The poetry loosens the rules and affirms a new creole understanding of sexuality and Christianity. The female body is portrayed as a site of resistance, transcendence, and spirituality. This is not negated by sexuality. Instead, female sexuality is akin to prayer.

Tanya Shirley reclaims female sexual agency and rejects the social stigma surrounding the expression of female sexuality and the poem "Said by a DJ at a downtown dance" reflects the skewed power dynamics between men and women in relation to sexuality and the way society objectifies and vilifies the female body:

Big up yuhself if yuh pump um tight like mosquito coffin!

I want mine lined with purple velvet. I want the men I have killed
to rise again, to sing halleluiahs in praise of this sweet spot,
smaller than a melon seed, a discarded tooth, a dew drop.

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Smaller than an eyeball's socket, a screw, the space between seconds.
Smaller than a candle wick, an atom, a fly. Perhaps a needle's eye?
Tight like starched linen, a market bus, a single mother's budget.
Tight like a tightrope walker's rope, a strangler's hand on the throat.
Tight like a child's grip on a candy stick, an inner city gang.
I read that long ago women in parts of Africa lined their pump ums
with toothpaste. Their men loved the friction, the fire small sacrifice
for a return customer, happy breadwinner, bloated ego.
The other day I heard a man dis a woman: "Gwey, u pump um long like…"
We are measured by the length and width,
the colour and texture, the dryness and the wetness.
Oh, how we pray as women for resilience, to bounce back
in the face of dicks and pricks and big-headed babies.
And in the dance, surrounded by men, we flash up our lighters,
point our fingers in gun salute, shout "RAAEEE" in case
we are mistaken for women whose pump ums could hold
the coffin, the congregation, the choir, the hearse.

(Shirley, 2015:75)

The speaker of the poem is responding to a DJ's call to celebrate women who have vaginas that are tight and small like a coffin for a mosquito. Men have adopted the term "loose" as an insult for women that degrades them. The insult is based on the idea that the vagina stretches due to sexual penetration. Thus, the more sexual encounters a woman has, the less value she holds. The poem engages with the objectification of women and the unfair treatment of female sexuality in society. The juxtaposition of female genitalia, which is usually associated with life and birth, with death – a coffin – reflects the mistreatment of female bodies in society. The poem starts with the speaker declaring: "I want mine lined with purple velvet" (l. 1). The speaker snatches agency away from others and asserts her own wishes in relation to her body. Purple is associated with royalty, status, and luxury in the Bible and in society. Purple velvet is used in the coffin of the monarchy in England, and at one time was reserved solely for the monarchy. The speaker's choice of purple velvet reflects the commodification of female bodies in society and the lack of value typically ascribed to women. The speaker says that she wants "the men [she has] killed/ to rise again" and "to sing halleluiahs in praise of" (ll. 1-2) her vagina. The metaphor of the vagina as a coffin shifts from portraying the vagina as a passive holder of the corpse to having the ability to kill the men that enter the coffin. Furthermore, the reference to singing halleluiahs links to the resurrection of Christ. The image subverts the traditional power dynamics at play during sex between a man and woman. Women are typically passive, and the act of sex seemingly tarnishes and degrades their value. Men are instead bolstered by sexual encounters, and their value in society increases. Typically, Men

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symbolically "kill" a woman's value during sex. However, in this poem the woman's vagina has the power to kill the man instead. The poem insinuates that there have been multiple men that the speaker has had sex with, and yet the vagina retains its value and power. Conversations around the vagina and female sexuality are taboo in a moral Christian context. The use of the abject in this instance undermines this devaluation and vilification of the black body. Furthermore, the violence in the description emphasises the abject and arouses a sense of fear in relation to the vagina. The speaker lists a number of things that her vagina is smaller than including "an eyeball's socket" (l. 4) "a screw" (l. 4), "a candle wick" (l. 5), "an atom" (l. 5) and "a fly" (l. 5). These things are small and seem insignificant, but are actually incredibly important. The eyeball socket has evolved to improve sight. The screw, while small, holds furniture together and are specifically durable. A candle's wick is necessary to light the candle. The atom is small and yet everything in the world is made of atoms. The fly is an undervalued small insect, but the fly plays an important role in the ecosystem, and function as scavengers consuming rotting organic matter. The vagina is compared to "the space between seconds" (l. 4) which is a seemingly small and insignificant thing but technically the space between two second is the time that passes between the two points. The vagina is compared to something that seems insignificant and devoid of value when, in actuality, this space is significant and powerful. The vagina is also compared to "a needle's eye" (l. 5) which has biblical connotations. In the synoptic gospels, Jesus compared the entrance of heaven to a needle's eye and says that it would be easier for a camel to fit through the needle's eye than for a rich man to enter heaven. These descriptions subvert the narrative surrounding female bodies and the objectification of women in society. The speaker references a story in which women in Africa put toothpaste in their vaginas because the "men loved the friction" (l. 10). The toothpaste caused a burning sensation and was unpleasant for the women, but they would make this "small sacrifice" (l. 10) to ensure a "return customer" (l. 11) and a "happy breadwinner" (l. 11) with a "bloated ego" (l. 11). This act is purely for male benefit and is distinctly uncomfortable for the women. This reflects the power imbalance between men and women in society and in sexual encounters. These dynamics are perpetuated by a society, that perpetually devalues women and female sexual gratification. The discourse surrounding sex that centres the male experience and dehumanizes women perpetuates these power dynamics. Furthermore, the vagina is conflated with weakness and fragility and the penis is a symbol of strength and prowess. The speaker laments the fact that the value of women is conflated with their sexual organs that are meant to display a kind of morality. The speaker says that women are "measured by the length and width" (l. 13) "the colour and texture," (l. 14) and "the dryness and the wetness" (l. 14) of their

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vaginas. The women in the club "point [their] fingers in gun salute" (l. 18) and shout "RAAEEE" (l. 18) so that they are not "mistaken for women whose pump ums could hold/ the coffin, the congregation, the choir, [and] the hearse" (ll. 19-20). The use of gun salutes and a war cry to ensure the men surrounding the women know they carry value, and that their bodies do not have the physical markers of being tarnished or "loosened". The women engage in this performative display to affirm their value in relation to the patriarchal standards that women are judged against. The speaker makes reference to the "congregation" (l. 20) and the "choir" (l. 20), and the metaphor of a funeral service continues, as the women shout to ensure they fall into the category of women with vaginas that can only hold a mosquito's coffin. However, the assertion that a sexually active women that has been deemed "loose" holds the congregation of a church and the church choir links to the Christian idea of morality that underpins the control of female sexuality and bodies. The use of creole in the DJ's initial call places the poem in a specifically Caribbean space which shows the way in which colonial Christianity is perpetuated in post-colonial Caribbean culture. The poem highlights the pressure faced by women in society and the objectification of women based on the same colonial Christian values that justified the enslavement of black people. In the poem "Flower girl" by Tanya Shirley the female body is portrayed as a site of resistance and anger against a society that perpetuates the erasure of blackness and bodily autonomy:

Her mother placed two red cushions
on a dining room chair, lifted her high
into the air, then settled her atop with
a firm hand and a kiss on the forehead.

The hot comb began its virgin trek
through tangled coils; the brown child
knitted her brows and before the comb
could straighten a new tuft of tight curls

she released a howl, the kind that scares
the prey and shatters ribs on its way
out the body—the body skilled in contortion—
pushing the limit of limbs and restraints.

You can't be a flower girl with nappy hair.
You want to spoil your aunty's wedding?
Is shame you want to shame we?

How much more shame could this child cause?
Wasn't it enough that now they knew
she was part animal, capable of breaking

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atoms and dreams with her screams?

The hairdresser cooed and cajoled,
but she was no match for this child
who had not yet learned that vanity
will make women walk through fire.

The child threw herself to the ground,
yanked off her yellow dress, heaved
and heaved, rolled and spun her eyes
into half moons, the room growing red.

Give the pickney two good lick!
Is them kind of pickney turn round box
them own mother and father.

But the poor mother was transfixed.
Each convulsion a rip in the umbilical cord.
Where did a child like this come from and how
do you mother this?

The child spewed vomit
on to the rug then gasped for air.
The army of aunts swooped down, carried her
into the tub, turned on the cold water full-force.

We rebuke you Satan! Jesus! Jesus!
We cast you out Satan! Jesus! Jesus!
Devil come out! Jesus! Jesus!

The child gripped the side of the tub, looked up
to the heavens hidden behind the ceiling,
then fell asleep, the aunts wondering,
What do we do with her hair?

(Shirley, 2015:14-15)

The speaker in the poem describes a scene in which a young black girl is being prepared for a wedding. The girl is being forced into painful beauty treatments in order to look "neat" and "pretty". The straightening of her hair also reflects a rejection of black features in favour of whiteness. Furthermore, the scene resembles a kind of ritual sacrifice whereby the young girl learns the price of social acceptance, which is self-annihilation. The poem engages with the idea of a triple consciousness as both a rejection of blackness *and* a rejection of the black women's body. The tone of the poem is frantic and rebellious as the young girl violently tries to reject the destruction of her natural curls. The frequent use of enjambment mirrors this unhinged tone. The child is described as releasing a "howl […] that scares the prey and shatters

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ribs on its way/ out" (l. 9). The use of this word invokes an animalistic context and portrays the child as a predator that is to be feared. This is ironic as the menagerie of women are essentially leading her like a lamb to slaughter. The poem describes the young girl as untamed, the opposite of what a black woman needs to be. Furthermore, the use of animalistic terms to describe black people has historically been used to denigrate and render black people abject in order to exclude them from participation in society, and justify the oppression of black people. This "othering" of black people was constructed by colonial forces to reinforce the necessity for the erasure of blackness and all aspects of black identity. In the poem "Flower girl" the young child is born into a society that continues to promote the rejection and erasure of blackness, and forces the violent containment of the female body. The women also act as a synecdoche and metaphor for the historical war against blackness and black women. The girl struggles against the other women that have internalized the colonial denigration of black women and she contorts; "pushing against the limit of limbs and restraints" (l. 12). The women scold the child and say that she cannot go to the wedding with "nappy hair" (l. 13). Nappy hair is a term that is rooted in anti-black rhetoric and colonial rejection of black features. The women ask the girl if she is trying to bring "shame" (l. 15) to their family. The women have internalised the colonial and patriarchal notions about black women and are perpetuating this condition of triple consciousness onto the young girl. They been conditioned to accept the colonial war on blackness, and they connote blackness with shame. The speaker asks "how much more shame could this child cause" (l. 16) and whether it "wasn't [...] enough that now they knew/she was part animal, capable of breaking/atoms and dreams with her screams?" (ll. 17-19). The girl is portrayed as a theriomorphic figure capable of destroying Western concepts such as the scientific belief that everything is made up of atoms. The girl, in her rebellion, represents the ultimate abject and induces fear as she has the ability to destroy the carefully constructed worldview. In embodying the abject she becomes subhuman and ferocious. The run-on lines from l. 17 to l. 19 creates a literal spatial separation between the girl's description as "part animal" (l. 18) and the insinuation of scientific terms that subscribe to Western logic such as "atoms" (l. 19). The girl has not yet been coerced by the colonial society to reject that which links her to blackness. This is evident in the distance between the theriomorphic rebellious girl and the insinuations of a Western worldview. The anger and rebellion against the cultural erasure of blackness and of a society dominated by a Western worldview is represented through the physical outburst of the girl.

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Furthermore, Shirley invokes the use of abjection through the portrayal of the girl's physical symptoms during her outburst. The child begins "[heaving]/ and [heaving]" (ll. 25-26), her eyes "[roll] and [spin]" (l. 26), she convulses, and "[spews] vomit" (l. 35). Her body physically revolts against control, and she leans into the abject instead. She becomes a representation of that which is rejected and expelled from the body, that which is pushed away to form a cohesive sense of self. The image of the girl vomiting while simultaneously refusing to fall into the collective societal abjection of blackness acts as a tool to deliberately invoke and challenge the idea of abjection and the binary between "self" and "other". In addition, the juxtaposition of creole language used by the women in stanzas 4, 8, and 11 and the surrounding English creates a sense of tension between languages and the histories associated with both languages. This tension is reflected in the tension between the mother, who has contorted and acquiesced in order to be accepted, and the daughter, who refuses to acquiesce to the sexist and racist structures that are imposed by a colonial society. Each act of rebellion is a "rip in the umbilical cord" (l. 32), and enhances the tension between the mother who has been conditioned to accept that which society has forced upon her, and the child who maintains a distance from colonial society and, in turn, maintains a connection to her body. The child is carried by "the army of aunts" (l. 37) and cleaned up while they cast her behaviour onto Satan and ask Jesus to help her (ll. 39-41). The act of rebellion and engaging with the abject is portrayed as sinful and demonic possession. The act of rebellion against the patriarchal constraints is regarded as satanism because blackness is associated with sin and the black woman is regarded as the epitome of deviancy. The innocent young black girl is juxtaposed with the black women that have been exposed to years of racism and ethnic cleansing through societal standards of morality, and in the end, the "army of aunts" (l. 37) is too great a force and the girl is subdued. The poem ends with the aunts wondering: "*What do we do with her hair?*" (l. 45). This reflects the strength of the malign force that perpetuates the rejection of the black woman's body in society. The poem portrays society's persevering war on black women through religious discourse.

As an alternative to the historical mistreatment of black women under Christianity and the role that society has cast onto black women, Shirley's poetry also offers reaffirming alternatives where the female body is portrayed as a sight of transfiguration and a site that facilitates a connection to Africa and to the creole Christian God. The treatment of black women in a society that centres a colonial mentality is unpacked and discredited in favour of the reverent position that black women hold in the creole Caribbean. Furthermore, in the expression of worship

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through the acceptance and reverence of black female sexuality, the woman acts as a figure of connection between the Caribbean and Africa. In Shirley's poetry, women are positioned as figures of intense spirituality and transfiguration that often occurs through the cathartic medium of water. In the poem "Grace", discussed earlier in this chapter, the speaker says that the nakedness of herself and her partner reflects their "water selves" (l. 25). The poem reaffirms the idea that reclaiming sexual agency reflects the shift towards watery spaces. The Afro-Caribbean experience is intrinsically linked to both land and water, with the Caribbean itself being an archipelago wedged between the Atlantic and the Caribbean Sea. This offers an immediate response to colonial discourses surrounding the conquest of indigenous spaces that gendered these spaces as "women [who] are the earth that is to be discovered, entered, named, inseminated and, above all, owned" (McClintock, 1995:31). These gendered discourses sought to establish a dominion over indigenous spaces framing them as territories to be conquered, claimed, and controlled. This mirrors the way in which women were viewed in colonial society with notions of submission, possession, and exploitation. The portrayal of land as feminine reveals the deeply problematic and dehumanising perspective on women. The discourse surrounding women and land endures, and it often functions as a means of imposing cultural symbols tied to respectability politics. In such instances, women are expected to embody and represent cultural values and virtues. Furthermore, women are commodified and dehumanised in the process of ascribing gendered terms to land such as the idea of a "motherland". This expectation, while seemingly positive on the surface, can also be constraining, limiting women's agency and reinforcing oppressive traditional norms. Victoria J. Collis-Buthelezi (2022:430), however, explores water as a feminized space that "[represents] Black female subjectivity in excess of the national". She argues that water, in place of land, can be seen as a "source of shared histories and contemporary communities for Black women" (Collis-Buthelezi, 2022:423). The women in these novels she analyses grapple with rootedness in a diasporic context. The women struggle with becoming conquered land masses because of the infiltration of men in their lives. Instead, black women cast away from land and towards watery spaces to seek refuge from imperial and/or patriarchal structures that seek to conquer and domesticate them. In the context of spirituality, it is important to acknowledge the connection that this action undoubtedly establishes between Afro-Caribbean women and gods like Yemoja and Olokun. The act of casting oneself into the water reflects the shedding of patriarchal and colonial confines and embracing the watery deities as well. Furthermore, embracing the watery spaces allows women to shed the patriarchal idea that women are devoid of sexual agency, and need to be conquered and redeemed through ownership, like a "virgin land". In this way tropes

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of water in Shirley's poetry come to be associated with weightlessness and freedom, But also precarious conditions of "statelessness". In forging a new territory that brings freedom from patriarchal structures, the black female subject enters a space of alienation from the nation and from society. This is reflected in the way rain is used to liberate the speaker in the poem "Immaculate" by Tanya Shirley (2009:56):

> There were many days when it rained. There were many days that
> found me unprotected. There was one particular day, when I was
> wearing my uniform—white blouse, white pleated skirt over white
> full slip, over white cotton brassiere, white cotton panty—and it
> rained. I walked slowly in the rain—exactly what we were told not
> to do. *Ladies, walk briskly, move on, move on. Remember rain is an enemy*
> *of chastity. Walk briskly ladies.* But that particular day I walked the way
> I thought a lady would. She would wear the rain. I could feel myself
> moving in this rain—moving in such pure patterns. I lay on the grass
> and dared it to grow, in such pure patterns. The grass opened like a bed of a thousand
> scissors and held me up most dangerously from the place I thought
> this grass would cut again over and over in lady-like slices. I floated
> outside my clothes, outside whiteness, goodness, crosses, confes-
> sions. I prayed for rain and expulsion.

The poem directly engages with the historical oppression of the black female body. The first line spills into the second, and the phrase "found me unprotected" (l. 2) is left to stand alone, and exposed. This use of enjambment in the first two lines reflects the vulnerability and exposure that the rain brings. This exposure extends past the literal exposure of the speaker's body and reflects the societal expectations imposed on female bodies. The use of the word "found" portrays the rain as an almost personified figure that seeks out the speaker. The speaker generally evades and flees from this figure that is "the enemy/ of chastity" (ll. 6-7). The repetition of "many days" in line 1 reflects the frequency of the threat of (or opportunity) for exposure that rain brings. This repetition continues in the speaker's descriptions of her uniform as being a "white blouse,/white pleated skirt over white/full slip, over white cotton brassiere, white cotton panty" (ll. 3-4). The hyperbolic repetition of the word white reflects the tension and expectation that the speaker feels in the face of the rain. The whiteness of the uniform reflects the societal pressure for purity and the containment of the black female body. Furthermore, the speaker's black skin is cloaked in whiteness on order to be seen as acceptable. However, the rain will make the fabric see-through and cause it to cling to her skin. This will expose her naked, black body and nullify this white mask of purity. The instruction given to the speaker and the other students is to "walk briskly" (ll. 6) in order to avoid this exposure. This phrase is repeated at the start and end of the speaker's recollection of the catholic nun's

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instruction, and this instruction both starts and ends with the word "ladies" (ll. 6-7). The nun seems adamant, and almost frantic in the assertion that they must "move on" (l. 6) because "rain is an enemy/ of chastity" (ll. 6-7). This is sandwiched in-between the word "ladies" to emphasize the weaponised weight that this word holds for women. To be a lady is to be chaste, demure, polite, and obedient. However, the speaker plucks the word out of the nun's mouth, and out of the societal context, and redefines it. The speaker says that on "that particular day" (l. 7) she "walked the way/[she] thought a lady/would" (ll. 7-8). The speaker allows herself to be embraced by this "enemy of chastity" (ll. 6-7) and sheds this white straitjacket of constraint and female oppression. Instead, the speaker says that a lady would "wear the rain" (l. 8). The speaker begins to move in "such pure patters" (l. 9) in the rain. The shedding of societal expectations of chastity and the patriarchal idea of purity in relation to chastity allows the speaker to attain true purity of self. The idea of moving in "patterns" (l. 9) reflects an almost ritualistic trance-like performance. The speaker lays down on the grass and "dares [the grass] to grow, in such pure patterns" (l. 10). The speaker defies the rules, confronts the worldview she has been taught, and challenges her surroundings. In response, the Edenic sprawling lawn "[opens] like a bed of a thousand/ scissors" (ll. 10-11) and holds her out of reach of the place in which the speaker thought the grass "would cut again over and over in lady-like slices" (l. 12). Nature is portrayed as something violent and threatening instead of idyllic and heavenly. However, the grass is also protecting the speaker from that which would cut her. This contrast is also reflected in the oxymoron in the description of that grass as a "bed of a thousand/scissors" (ll. 10-11). Nature is both comforting and beautiful, as well as violent and dangerous. Nature itself reflects a lack of decorum and a rejection of the idea of purity and control that the patriarchy ascribes to women. In this state, the speaker "[floats]/ outside [her] clothes, outside whiteness, goodness, crosses, conf es-/sions" (ll. 12-14). The speaker casts off the constraints imposed on women, especially black women. The juxtaposition of the words "whiteness, goodness, [and] crosses" (l. 13) reflects the oppressive structures that are inflicted on black women. Both whiteness and religion are associated with morality and goodness. However, by embracing the rain these oppressive structures are invalidated. The speaker "[prays] for rain and expulsion" (l. 14). This expulsion refers to the catholic school in which the speaker is shackled to these oppressive structures and also an expulsion from this heavenly garden of Eden in which Nature is just as demure as women should be. This expulsion signals the alienation of the speaker from her peers and from the community in which she currently exists.

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In embracing the rain, Nature is unmasked and sheds the superficial tranquillity that the Bible forces onto her. However, she is ejected from the comfort of the group and cast into isolation. The speaker and Nature shed the weight of binary definitions in favour of complexity and freedom from expectation. Not even the garden can live up to the idea of Eden. But, in the rejection from Eden, as Adam and Eve endured, invokes a trail of suffering and reconfiguration for the pair. Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden and gain the weight of sin and suddenly have the ability to feel shame. Thus, the representation of the speaker wishing to be expelled reflects the precarious nature of becoming stateless through water. There is a sense of loss in both actions. Without exiting the land and the patriarchal structures that entrap women, women are alienated from themselves and forced into a state of triple consciousness. However, moving towards a watery sense of self also means losing a sense of community and rootedness. This creates and alienation from the community and the nation that cannot hold space for black women. This portrayal reflects the dilemma facing black women in the post-colony. Afro-Caribbean people are forging new connections to their roots and forming a new national culture. However, black women have to contend with both racist structures and patriarchal structures. There is a sense of warring ideals as black women try to reclaim a sense of belonging and culture after colonisation, but also scramble to rid themselves of the shackling landscape in favour of the freeing watery spaces.

In the poem "Immaculate" (2009:56), rain exposes the black female body, and the speaker emerges having shed the weight of expectation and shame. The speaker describes the experience of being caught in the rain as a cleansing ritual that liberates her from patriarchal notions and societal expectation. Water is given transcendental powers for the black woman even when physically or metaphorically landlocked. Furthermore, the connection to nature and, specifically, the cleansing property of rain moves away from the traditional rules of faith and towards the interconnected creole God. Rainwater and stars are given mythical and holy power to sanctify a person after that which is deemed misconduct has occurred. Similarly in the poem "waiting for rain" by Tanya Shirley begins with instructions on making a douching liquid and narrates the story of a woman who was unfaithful to her husband, brings together an opportunity for redemption from sexual transgression in water:

> *Cleanse and massage this organ… with very warm rain-water into which a "brown" bar of soap has been generously lathered. Repeat the process continually until vaginal virtue is attained and maintained.*

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Sylvester Ayre, *Bush Doctor: Jamaica and the Caribbean's Almost Forgotten Folklore and Remedies*

Milton was returning from
work on the Panama Canal.
She had been busy in his absence.
Two days after he left, Trevor

Who used to work with him
at the mattress factory stopped
in to bring a small token:
sugar, rice, condensed milk

for her and the children.
How else to repay him?
Then there was Pierre,
French on his tongue—

born of a father who docked
long enough to plant his seed
in the black belly of a woman
in the closure of cane fields—

she liked the way his brown
hands and awkward intonations
took her to distant lands.
There were others who came

drawn by her scent: sugar burnt
in the heat of the earth.
They were nameless, faceless,
wounded bodies: calloused palms,

soil-stained nails; limp, broken, scraping
for home in the hut of her thighs.
Milton used to love her hold on him
no matter how he swelled she cradled

him there, until his penis wept
in the narrow lane of her love.
When she heard the first roll of thunder
she ran home, put the yellow basin

she soaked white clothes in overnight
in the middle of the yard.
In the morning she called down the sun
to warm the brew of brown soap suds

and stale rain water. That night, in the light
of curious stars she lowered herself into

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the open mouth of the basin, cupped the water
and baptized her vagina, sure in the belief

that God restores all to virtue
and the only true sin
is the lack of repair.

(Shirley, 2009:55)

The speaker narrates the details of the life of a woman who performs the ritualistic cleansing of her vagina after sexual transgressions. The narrator describes the various sexual transgressions without judgement and in a nonchalant tone. The first man, Trevor, brought "sugar, rice, [and] condensed milk" (l. 8) for the woman and her children. The woman has sex with Trevor as a form of gratitude for the "small token" (l. 7). Pierre is the product of the exploitation of a black woman, as his father "docked/long enough to plant his seed" (ll. 13-14) in a black woman "in the closure of cane fields" (l. 16). The rest of her lovers are described as "nameless, faceless,/wounded bodies" (ll. 23-24) with "calloused palms" (l. 24) and "soil-stained nails" (l. 25). The narrator describes them as "scraping/ for home in the hut of her thighs" (ll. 25-26). The vagina is portrayed as a site of cleansing and repair. Gender roles and patriarchal ideas of gender are challenged in the poem as Trevor fulfils a kind of gatherer role and also provides some sustenance to the woman and her children, who are not his own. The narrator speaks of Pierre through the benefit he gives to the woman. The men are portrayed as broken and fragile, while the woman is able to restore them to a sense of "home" (l. 26). Again, the narrator describes Milton's role in sexual encounters with the woman as a more passive and emotional state. Milton is "cradled" (l. 28) by the woman while he is inside her until "his penis [weeps]" (l. 29). Men are infantilised in their encounter with the woman.

More significantly, the woman possesses the same cleansing and restorative power as the baptism itself. The poem begins with an excerpt from a book on Jamaican and Caribbean folklore and traditional remedies. This excerpt details a cleansing ritual and a recipe for a traditional douching liquid that restores the vagina to virtue. The ritual does not describe douching in the technical sense. Instead, the performer is instructed to massage and cleanse the vagina. The performer in the poem uses her hands to cup this liquid over her vagina mimicking a priest baptising a baby. According to Richard E. DeMaris (2013:11), "baptism appears as the accepted way of entry into the Christian community". Furthermore, he found in his exploration of the history of rituals in Christianity that "the emergence of baptism was essential for Christian identity formation" (DeMaris, 2013:11). Baptism also functioned as a tool in the

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cleansing of African religion as African slaves were baptised into the Christian faith and given English names. At times, baptism marked the destruction of African beliefs and the identities of Africans. Furthermore, the ritual of baptism is described as an overall rejection of the body; Colossians 2:11-12 states: "In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism". As such, baptism replaced circumcision in the movement towards a Jesus centred faith (DeMaris, 2013:11). Circumcision as a ritual practice has been adopted by various religions and cultures across the world. According to Peter Aggleton (2007:16), "male circumcision is linked to a covenant with God dating back to Abraham", and there are also references to the practice being done to "limit sexual intercourse and to weaken the organ of generation as far as possible" and that "circumcision simply counteracts excessive lust" (Maimonides, 1956). The fact that baptism comes to replace circumcision as an induction into the Christian faith signals at an ongoing commitment to reject the sexual urges of the body. However, in the poem "waiting for rain", the ritual of baptism does not try to erase and destroy the past, but is an act of repair and restoration. Furthermore, the woman's sexual encounters themselves are rituals of restoration and repair. As the woman begins the cleansing ritual the narrator describes the stars as "curious" (l. 38). Nature is personified and portrayed as being invested in the woman and the ritual. The woman "[lowers] herself into/ the open mouth of the basin" (ll. 38-39) to begin the baptism. The ritual itself is laced with sexual innuendo as the woman is portrayed as being consumed by the cleansing water. The poem portrays female sexual encounters as transformative and powerful. The speaker claims that "the only true sin/ is the lack of repair" (ll. 42-43). The baptism occurring in the poem does not reflect the Christian rejection of the body and of sexuality. Instead, the baptism and cleansing are reflective of the restorative nature of the creole, Christian God and the restorative nature of water for black women. The woman engages in the baptism and rejects the idea that engaging in sexual acts is sinful.

The specific terminology and descriptive diction provide a visceral image of the scene. Shirley uses these terms to invoke the abject and dismantle the limitations attached to the female body. Douching and talking about the vagina is considered a taboo topic in moral society. Shirley subverts the immoral associations that traditional Christianity conflates with female sexuality. There is an overt rejection of modesty and chastity in women, and the vagina is given a cleansing and healing power. Furthermore, these sexual transgressions are easily cleansed using water. The recipe calling for brown soap to be soaked in the natural rainwater is

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significant as there is an element of the rejection of whiteness and colonial ideals. The douching is established as a ritualistic cleansing of the sins, similar to that of a confession of guilt. Instead, creole Christianity does not include guilt or shame for sexuality. The woman takes control of her body and the value of her body after sex, and this establishes the rule for women in creole Christianity. Sexuality is not a sin; it is celebratory and in some cases functions as a prayer-like ritual. Water provides the Afro-Caribbean women with the opportunity to be cleansed from colonial Christian ideas of propriety and to shed the weight of patriarchal control over women's bodies. The use of water and nature imagery connects the Afro-Caribbean woman to indigenous beliefs, African folklore and belief systems, and reflects the creolisation of belief systems in the Caribbean.

However, the perversion of black female sexuality is still a core part of traditional Christianity, which means that women are generally excluded from having any religious power or any significant role in worship. Christianity is, at its core, a patriarchal belief system that has historically been used to exclude and control women, in particular, based on a constructed idea of morality. For example, Ephesians 5:24 says: "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands." There are numerous instances[2] where the Bible affirms the necessity for women to be submissive, chaste, and 1 Corinthians 11:3 proclaims that women should be passive absorbers of religion instead of active participants. This is in direct opposition to African traditional belief systems where "women have always played a crucial role [...] as priestesses, mediums, diviners, or prophetesses" (Asante & Mazana, 2009:288). African belief systems include female Gods, and the figure of a mother is important throughout African folklore (Asante & Mazana, 2009:125). In Yoruba cosmology, "the role of diviner/healer is held by either men or women" and is regarded with "awe and respect" in society (Asante & Mazana, 2009:180). Yet belief systems throughout Africa are not immune to sexism and patriarchy; the idea of one supreme God that sits at the head of the various pantheons is evident in African cosmologies (Asante & Mazana, 2009:288), and many

[2] Titus 2:3-5 says: "Older women likewise are to be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled." 1 Timothy 2:11-15 states: "Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control." 1 Corinthians 11:3 advocates: "The women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."

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perceive this chief god as being male in many regions, despite the fact that "there is a significant tradition that presents God as Mother" (Asante & Mazana, 2009:288). In her chapter "God", in *The Encyclopaedia of African Religions*, Katherine Olukemi Bankole writes:

> In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Bakongo ethnic group, which still practices the matriarchal system, explicitly refers to God as 'Mother.' Elsewhere, God is referred to as 'Nursing Mother' (among the Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania), 'Great Mother' (Nuba of Sudan), 'Mother of People' (Ewe of Benin, Ghana, and Togo), and the 'Great Rainbow' (Chewa of Malawi and Zambia). (In Asante & Mazana, 2009:288)

It has been established that women assumed roles as diviners, shamans, and seers in African traditional religions. But Christianity rejected female divination as "harmful superstitious ignorance" (Asante & Mazana, 2009:207) and denounced diviners as witches (Asante & Mazana, 2009:207). However, divination and seers are still present in Africa and popular in the Caribbean and African American societies (Asante & Mazana, 2009:207). In the poems "She who sleeps with bones" (Shirley, 2009:11) and "Inheritance" (Shirley, 2009:16), the role of women as diviners is explored, as well as the toll that this role takes on black women in the post-colony. The weight of inheriting this gift is explored in the poem "Inheritance" in which the speaker shows her mother's experience with the gift of divination:

But nakedness is my identity/ and fear, the red yes of my existence.
Claudia Rankine, *Nothing in Nature is Private*

We have learned to live with the inheritance of fear,
the weight of her hugs, her mouth like a prayer
on our cheeks, each kiss, a talisman against
what she has seen in her sleep:

her two daughters drowning in a pool of blood;
planes have crashed over the Atlantic,
our limbs lost to the sea.
She knew I was no longer a virgin
the night she dreamed me in acrobatic splendour
suspended by the tip of a tongue, a curious finger.

She knew there was a man dressed in camouflage
walking down our driveway way past the hour of visiting.
She woke the neighbours and Christ when she bawled out,
"Where the hell you think you going?"

She was chased by lions in Africa, hit by lightning
in an orchard in France, thrown from a moving vehicle
in Cockpit Country and no one came to her rescue.

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Her mother who discovered the gift of insomnia
would watch wrestling during those ungodly hours,
pounding her fists into the carpet as if she were ringside
and coaching. After her championship bout she'd vacuum
till the sun came up, singing "It is Well with My Soul"
to the hum and sputter of the dust-eater.

Anything not to sleep. Anything not to see
the lives of her seven children stretched out in prophecy.
And poor me—after laughing for years with my sister
at our mother's far-fetched visions—I have come to know
that the people I love will always be slaughtered in my dreams.

At a basic level, these women are symbolic of creole Christianity in which these women are unable to ignore the spiritual connection to Africa but have an established connection to Christianity and the Caribbean. The portrayal of female diviners in the Caribbean portrays black women as figures of transfiguration that connect Africa and the Caribbean. However, the poem acts as a kind of cautionary tale as the speaker recounts the experiences of her mother who had visions. The speaker remarks that she has "learned to live with the inheritance of fear" (l. 1) because of her mother's prophecies. The speaker's mother sees prophecies of death in her dreams and has nothing but a kiss to give her children as a "talisman against/ what she has seen in her sleep" (ll. 3-4). As a result, the speaker's mother is engulfed with anxiety for the well-being of her children. As well as anxiety over that which is uncontrollably wedged into her life. The ability of being a diviner is thrust upon the woman without giving her any say in the matter. This was the case with the speaker's mother, which was preceded by her mother, who instead refused to sleep in order to avoid the visions and prophecies. The mother's mother would watch wrestling in the night to stop herself from sleeping and she would vacuum until morning (ll. 19-23). While she vacuumed, she would sing "It is Well with My Soul" (l. 22), a Christian hymn that professes the importance of remaining steady in the face of suffering or uncertainty. Hence, this gives the impression that the woman who is cursed with divination, is caught between day and night, between the conscious and the subconscious. She desperately clings to that which is acceptable and explainable by Western systems of logic. She sings the Christian hymn as a "Hail Mary" attempt to ward off the visions that explode in her dreams. The act of divination pushes the woman away from her body and towards an inexplicable spiritual plain, one that has been devalued and denied by Western society. This gift comes from their African ancestry and reflects a tangible pull from the motherland, but to the mother, and the grandmother, Christianity is a safe and common belief that society has presented as acceptable. These women exist in a constant state of tension. There is an argument to be made for the

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significance of the visions happening during dreams. The dreamscape can be considered the subconscious and the waking state, the conscious. There is an idea of a war between day and night. In the night, they fight to reject their status as diviner and sever the tether to the ancestral gift of divination. In the day, they cling to Christianity and Western modes of logic. However, a Jungian perspective of the poem unveils a deeper connection to the spiritual world through an acceptance of dreams and the subconscious. From a Jungian perspective, dreams are the personal expression of the unconscious (Freeman, 1964:11). To Jung, the human unconscious is a guiding tool that has its roots in spirituality and that should be embraced. Carl Jung (1964:93) believes that the Western world is experiencing an existential crisis because of the pressure to reject their "primitive" selves. He argues that "modern man does not understand how much his 'rationalism' (which has destroyed his capacity to respond to numinous symbols and ideas) has put him at the mercy of the psychic 'underworld'" (Jung, 1964:94). The West has freed itself from what they have coined illogical "superstitions", but "in the process [they have] lost [their] spiritual values to a positively dangerous degree" (Jung, 1964:94). He explains the uneasiness and the dehumanization of the Western world as a result of man becoming isolated from the cosmos and "because he is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional 'unconscious identity'" (Jung, 1964:95). In the poem "She who sleeps with bones" (Shirley, 2009:11), the speaker reflects this sense of uneasiness as she tries to reject her connection to the cosmos and her "unconscious self" in order to belong in the Western world. The speaker laments the fact that, "after laughing for years with [her] sister" (l. 26), she inherits the same gift that they mocked. The speaker recounts her own experience gaining divination from her mother:

I've now become an unwilling seer
who will grow old and appear
to be a shaman to the unbelievers;
a tattered woman who smells
of feculent potions.

My mother could see from the back
of her head, the enemy approaching.
She deciphered the codes of dreams
and scared children with her prophecies
of parents drowning.

I decided long ago I would never
grow into her. To be sure, I slept
with one eye open and never ate past six
in the evening: full belly causes dreaming.

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Dreams give deep meaning.
But still the curse chose me
and I see:

water means longing;
the long buried relative visiting the living
is old dead come for new dead;
lizards are enemies or pregnancy;
a wedding is a death; a funeral a birth;
a fish means there'll soon be a baby;
shit is money and prosperity.

Already I know too much.
It will kill me to give this up.
Dead people breathe down my neck.
Their bones creak when I roll over in my sleep.
Last week my man left.
I do not remember his name or how we met.
I belong to the land of my mother and look behind.

The speaker refers to herself as an "unwilling seer" (l. 1) and "a tattered woman who smells/ of feculent potions" (ll. 4-5) that will appear to be "a shaman to the unbelievers" (l. 3). A shaman has roots in African mythology and is a healer of physical and spiritual ailments. This branch of healing was denounced by colonial powers and Western empiricism as false and ineffectual. Thus, the speaker is labelled a shaman by those who do not believe in or understand her powers. The speaker says that her mother had this gift and "deciphered codes of dreams" (l. 8) and she inherited this gift. "Inheritance" reflects the war of the conscious and unconscious through the images of light versus dark. The speaker refers to night as "ungodly hours" (l. 19) and refers to insomnia as a gift (l. 18). The women in "Inheritance" (Shirley, 2009:16) and "She who sleeps with bones" (Shirley, 2009:11) are terrified to accept their role of diviner that shines through at night in their dreams. Divination is positioned as a terrifying and inescapable pull that the women attempt to escape by avoiding the darkness. The women reflect the Jungian idea that the West pushes for the rejection of the unconscious in favour of the waking conscious. However, this condition causes the uneasiness and dehumanization of the Western man. These women have an intense pull towards the spiritual plain of their ancestors and a pull towards their ancestral selves. Similarly, the speaker in "She who sleeps with bones" (Shirley, 2009:11) acknowledges her inability to divide herself from her unconscious spiritual self. She says that "it will kill [her] to give this [gift] up" (l. 26). The speaker gives up the fight against her unconscious self and declares that she "[belongs] to the land of [her] mother and [looks] back" (l. 31). In allowing a connection to her African ancestry and divination, she moves

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towards a more unified sense of self. The woman accepts her spiritual and ancestral unconscious alongside her modern and "logical" conscious mind. Thus, spirituality, ancestry, logic, and modern understanding enmesh to reflect the process of creolisation.

As I have suggested in this chapter, Tanya Shirley uses poetry as a tool of resistance and rebellion against the historical mistreatment of black women under Christianity and the role that society has cast onto black women. The female body is portrayed as a sight of transfiguration and a site that facilitates a connection to Africa and to the creole Christian God. The treatment of black women in a society that continues to centre colonial ideologies is unpacked and discredited in favour of a more reverent reading of black women, and the space they hold in the Caribbean. In portraying black female sexuality as spiritual, Shirley dismantles the idea of traditional Christian morality that justified oppression and makes way for a creolised relationship with Christianity, that is associated with greater freedom and personal autonomy. Furthermore, the deconstruction of the sinfulness of feminine sexuality found in creole Christianity allows Caribbean women to detach from patriarchal ideals; women reclaim agency over their bodies and their identities in the spiritual space by portraying female sexuality as sanctified. In the reclamation of Afro-Caribbean religions that were nearly extinguished poets have created a cathartic relationship to history and religion and, of course, contemporary poetry.

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Chapter 6:
Conclusion

The selected poems from Olive Senior's poetry collection *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994) show the African gods, Olokun, Yemoja, Sango, and Ogun in the Caribbean. The poems reflect the meeting of ancient African gods and the modern Caribbean context. Throughout my study, I have showcased how these poems are akin to ceremonial incantations, resurrecting these forgotten gods in the contemporary postcolonial Caribbean landscape. These gods followed the African slaves across the Middle Passage and have become important figures of restoration and retribution in the Caribbean. I have shown how these poems act as praise poems, which ritualistically resurrect the gods in the modern postcolonial Caribbean. The gods function on various levels to serve the Afro-Caribbean people in the postcolonial Caribbean. Yemoja and Olokun act as protectors of the past, while Sango and Ogun act as cleansers of the community and forgers of the future. The evolution of the gods in the Caribbean reflects the creolisation of West African culture, and the continued creolisation of Afro-Caribbean culture. The poems invoke the gods and allow Afro-Caribbean people to form a relationship with the past without ignoring the present and the future. Through these poetic verses, we engage in a conversation between history, present struggles, and future aspirations.

In the selected poems by John Agard from his collection, *Weblines* (2000), the use of Ananse and limbo as a tool in forming a new creolised national culture was explored. Here I examined how Ananse's ability to weave different worlds together, facilitates the connection of Afro-Caribbean people to a culture from which they were fractured. My analysis underscores the profound significance of Ananse's intricate weaving, serving as a reconciling force that reconnects Afro-Caribbean people to their fragmented ancestral heritage. The embodiment of this shape-shifting figure, I have argued, features as a cathartic and escapist technique as this trance-like activity is literally about leaving the body behind to assume or merge with a cosmic identity. Moreover, in representing Afro-Caribbean folklore in poetry, Agard "has attempted" to "restore the African character to his history" (Ngũgĩ, 1972:43), and "has turned his back on the Christian god and resumed the broken dialogue with the gods of his people" (Ngũgĩ, 1972:43). Ananse, from whom limbo dancing and the steelpan drum are derived, are all shown as vessels through which Afro-Caribbean people can journey back to the Middle Passage and reclaim a national culture in relation to the shared history of displacement. Ananse, the art of limbo dancing, and the resonating beats of the steelpan drum become more than just art forms;

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they are vessels that facilitate the journey back across the Middle Passage, reclaiming a shared identity that was once torn apart.

Furthermore, the status of the Caribbean as a US Territory has interesting implications for the connection between Afro-Caribbean people and the African American people. This raises the questions: How far does Ananse's web spread? Ananse has appeared in literature from the African diaspora in North America and has infiltrated America's prime global export; this being Hollywood entertainment. In the drama series, *American Gods* (2017) based on the book of the same name (2001) by Neil Gaiman, Ananse is introduced as Mr. Nancy, a suave old god in a stylish suit that appears on a slave ship heading to North America after a slave prayed to Ananse for help (Ratcliffe, 2017). Mr. Nancy appeared and instead of using some kind of vengeful magic, he spoke to the slaves and empowered them to rebel (Ratcliffe, 2017). Mr. Nancy declares that "angry gets shit done" and the slaves destroy the ship (Ratcliffe, 2017). Mr. Nancy is strengthened by the slaves' belief and arrives in North America (Ratcliffe, 2017). This is just a small example from popular culture that illustrates that Ananse's impact is far-reaching and has become stitched into the fabric of African American culture. The impact of trickster politics and African spirituality on African American culture and the history of the struggle for civil rights is an interesting space for further scholarship.

Kei Miller's poetry from his collections *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (2014) and *There is an Anger That Moves* (2007) reflects indignation towards puritanical evangelical ideals. Furthermore, the use of poetry in creating the creole is reflected in the ability to rewrite the Bible through poetry. His poetry uncovers a nuanced and embracing Christianity; a departure from the restrictive dogma that has haunted post-colonies. My analysis highlights how Miller's poetry allows us to look back, to reconcile with the past, and to dismantle the oppressive colonial norms embedded in evangelicalism. The Bible portrays Christianity and morality as a state of being at war with the body, as the Christian colonial view of sexuality and the body deems them immoral and evil in nature. Similarly, contemporary forms of evangelicalism in the Caribbean maintain the idea that a good Christian is someone who readily battles the body's desires to remain sanctified. In these verses, we witness the emergence of a creolised Christianity – a belief system that thrives on questioning rather than dictating, accommodating complexities instead of stifling them. The Christianity represented in Miller's poems, however, is accepting of differences, and allows the Afro-Caribbean person to look back and reclaim the connection to the past. Miller's poetry reflects the Caribbean's unceasing

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metamorphosis of belief systems – a testament to Afro-Caribbean people's ability to grow and adapt while retaining their essence.

In an extension of this research, I would include an in-depth look at the religious history of each separate Caribbean island and how this has impacted literary traditions. The Caribbean has always been a melting pot of religion. The creolisation of West African religion and Christian influences has been explored in this dissertation. However, the spiritual plain in the Caribbean is far more extensive than I could unpack in this study. The different factions of Christianity separate the Caribbean into what I consider religious "territories" that each have their own specific religious histories. Furthermore, the introduction of Hindus and Muslims as indentured workers into the Caribbean has an impact on the spiritual beliefs in the region. Between 1838 and 1917, around 500 000 indentured workers were brought from a colonised India to the Caribbean (Taylor & Case, 2013:315). This group was made up of intensely diverse groups within India. These were Indians from the north who spoke Sanskritic languages, Indians from the south who spoke Dravidian languages, people from the Chota Nagpur in Bihar, Muslims from Bengali, Afghani, and Middle Eastern ancestry, and the Indo-Chinese people from the Nepalese borderlands (Taylor & Case, 2013:315). The integration of varying castes is also notable amongst the group of Indian indentured workers. There are also notable influences from factions such as the Lutheran Church, Jehovah's witnesses, Judaism, and Chinese belief systems. Each island has a unique experience with religion and belief systems. Thus, the literature from these places will vary in some ways and remain the same in others. This is a viable avenue for further research.

The poems from Tanya Shirley's collections *The Merchant of Feathers* (2015) and *She Who Sleeps Wit Bones* (2009) are a bold assertion against patriarchal norms that have alienated black women from their bodies. Through spirituality and religion, Shirley crafts a narrative that reclaims agency, depicting black women as resilient beings capable of transcending societal constraints. Her verses echo the potential for black women to rewrite their narratives, dismantling the notion of inherent sinfulness. Thus, we bear witness to the potency of creolised worship, a force that empowers women to reshape their stories and reclaim their bodies as sacred spaces of personal autonomy. Centuries of sexist discourse and control have alienated black women from their bodies and cast them into the role of deviant. However, I have shown how Tanya Shirley's poetry defiantly wrestles with Christianity's patriarchal structures and reimagines the black woman as sexual, embodied, and spiritually whole. Through the language

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of religion and spirituality, Shirley portrays black women as being able to transcend the constraints placed on them through the expression of sexuality. This connection to a creolised worship allows women to reclaim agency over their bodies and expel the narrative of sinfulness.

In the exploration of belief-systems in postcolonial Caribbean poetry, the significance of poetry in nation building becomes clear. Furthermore, the specific dilemma of black women in the post-colony is evident. Black women teeter on the edge of belonging and of rootlessness in an attempt to strangle the hold that colonialism and patriarchy have maintained in the post-colony. There is no balance between alienation from the body and alienation from the community. In rejecting patriarchal ideals, the black women re-enters her own body but casts away from the community. In finding solace in the community, she must be alienated from her body to suit the patriarchal role that women have in society. Women are carving out their space in the post-colony through an exploration of their bodies, their sexuality, and their role in the household and in broader society. This process is unfolding in real time. There is merit in looking back at the female writers that have emerged from the Caribbean. Furthermore, with poets like Tanya Shirley actively adding to the literary and scholarly canon the possibility for further research is expanding rapidly. In a post on her personal Instagram on the 25 August 2022, Tanya Shirley declared her departure from lecturing to focus on writing. Thus, the potential for research into her writing, past and future, is expansive. Furthermore, looking at the links between modern female poets from Africa, the Caribbean, and the diaspora in relation to spiritual and patriarchal oppression of the body is an under-researched area of scholarship.

Furthermore, this study does not include an in-depth look at queer studies and how queerness impacts spirituality in the post-colony. In the exploration of Kei Miller's poetry there is a gap in looking at his treatment of religion and spirituality in relation to his own queerness. Miller portrays his struggle with identity in relation to faith from the perspective of a black man, as well as a queer man in the post-colony. The Bible portrays a disdain for queer relationships and deems them sinful. Thus, those that are queer and black face a similar triple consciousness dilemma as black women in the post-colony. Furthermore, black women who identify as queer will face an extra prong of oppression and societal rejection, especially in relation to spirituality.

The literature from the Caribbean and the diaspora is constantly evolving and growing. Thus, the potential for further study grows in tandem with the canon of literature. There is space to

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apply my research to other forms of literature on similar topics. Furthermore, there is space to compare and contrast poetry from different writers to achieve a more far-reaching study of belief systems in postcolonial Caribbean poetry. The possibilities grow by the day, which positions the spiritual plain of the Caribbean as a space for further scholarship and poetic exploration.

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