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The Persistence of African Religious Beliefs and Practices as Cultural Resistance to Slavery in Pre-emancipation Colonial Tobago

Okokon Okon Essiet
Portland State University

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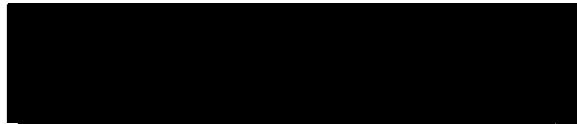
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THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Okokon Okon Essiet for the Master of Arts in History were presented April 29, 1998, and accepted by the thesis committee and the department.

COMMITTEE APPROVALS:



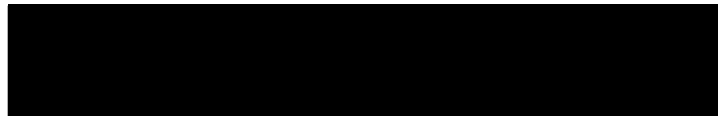
Candice Goucher, Chair



Friedrick Schuler



Shawn Smallman



Kofi Agorsah
Representative of the Office of Graduate
Studies

DEPARTMENT APPROVAL:



Gordon B. Dodds, Chair
Department of History

ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Okokon Okon Essiet for the Master of Arts in History presented April 29, 1998.

Title: The Persistence of African Religious Beliefs and Practices as Cultural Resistance to Slavery in Pre-Emancipation Colonial Tobago.

This thesis examines African religion as a form of cultural resistance to slavery in pre-emancipation Tobago. African religion was a tool of resistance to enslavement and oppression in pre-emancipation colonial Tobago. African religion acted as a source of empowerment, cohesion, and identity at a time when the colonial authorities in Tobago were attempting to strip the African of his/her Culture. This research examines the social dimensions of this struggle for religious/cultural supremacy between master and the enslaved African.

The purpose of this study is to show that the colonial authorities in Tobago, in order to sustain their basic economy had to “break” the Africans in order to make them obedient slaves who would ensure orderly production. Through indoctrination and physical bondage the “instruction of containment” was created by the colonial authorities. It was through that acculturation process that the master would bring about the total acceptance of the slave status by the enslaved African in Tobago. This process never fully occurred because the African resisted the process of acculturation through the dynamic process of religious adaptation syncretism and survival. The preservation of African

religion was essential to the physical and psychological resistance to slavery. Most historians have considered Tobago's military and/or economic experience as central to understanding the past. The author advances the position that the social dimensions of African religion in Tobago served as a form of cultural resistance to slavery.

**THE PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES
AS CULTURAL RESISTANCE TO SLAVERY IN PRE-EMANCIPATION
COLONIAL TOBAGO**

by
OKOKON OKON ESSIET

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for degree of**

**MASTER OF ARTS
in
HISTORY**

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SECTION ONE

STRUCTURE AND ELEMENTS OF ARGUMENT

INTRODUCTION

This study advances that African religion can be examined as a form of cultural resistance in pre-emancipation Tobago. The role of African religion as a tool of resistance to slavery and colonial oppression and as a source of empowerment, cohesion and identity was assessed by analyzing ethnohistorical, oral, and written historical research conducted on the Caribbean island of Tobago. The survival of African religious beliefs in modern day Tobago was used to assess pre-emancipation resistance to enslavement. Many of these religious beliefs have been mislabeled superstitions of Tobago. The author advanced the theory that if elements of African religion survived in pre-emancipation eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century colonial Tobago where land marronage was nonexistent, colonial control absolute, and the rate of conversion to Christianity (primarily puritanical Anglicanism and Methodism) almost one hundred percent, then African religion was an effective means of resistance to slavery and its importance should be examined in other slave colonies in the Caribbean. The slave populations nourished and developed their own autonomous cultural world which became the foundation, once slavery was over, of the Caribbean popular folk cultures of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Lewis 1980). The researcher examined the social dimensions of this struggle for religious/cultural supremacy between master and

slave, a topic that has been largely ignored by Tobago's colonial scholars. The focus of this research project was to examine African religious beliefs and practices as resistance to slavery, using ethnographic evidence.

Chapter I

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE INSTITUTION OF SLAVERY

Direct slavery, “ is much the pivot of our industrialism today as machinery credit cards etc. (Gordan Lewis, 1983). Karl Marx wrote in his important letter of 1846 to P.V. Annenkov, “Without slavery no cotton; without cotton no modern industry. Slavery has given their value to the colonies; the colonies have created world trade; world trade is a necessary condition for large scale machine industry” (Karl Marx 1846). Marx was referring to North American cotton- based slavery, but his observation applies more so to Caribbean sugar- based slavery. For the plantation was the perfect expression of the total Atlantic slave economy, with the cotton plantations of the South being little more than the pale echo of the sophisticated sugar plantations of the Jamaica, Saint Dominique, and Cuba. The main function of the system, as Eric Williams has shown in his study Capitalism and Slavery, was to provide the accumulated capital for European expansion. The main problem of the Caribbean planter and settler from the beginning was a labor problem: it was essential that they have at immediate command a large, regular, and plentiful supply of obedient labor. This problem was solved in the early period of colonialism by exploiting Indian labor and second , white indentured servant labor. But these were only temporary solutions. The enslaved Indian was unsuitable to the labor of the mine and encomienda while the indentured servant was too expensive:

the governor of Barbados had already discovered that the labor of three blacks was equal in financial cost to the labor of one white man (Eric Williams, 1944). The King Louis XIV of France stated, “There is nothing which contributes more to the development of the colonies and the cultivation of their soil than the laborious toil of the Negroes.” (King Louis XIV of France, August 26, 1670), “Without the Negroes the food needed for the support of the whole kingdom would cease to be produced, and America would face absolute ruin. Europe has seldom been as unanimous on any issue as it has been on the value of Negro slave labor”(Spanish Council of the Indies 1685).

The Indian labor force died out without the possibility of self-replacement while white labor fleeing from the legacy of serfdom in Europe emigrated to the New England colonies, where land was plentiful and where they could more easily work for themselves. In the face of these difficulties the Caribbean planter oligarchy turned to the African labor supply not because it was black but because it was cheaper. African labor possessed enormous advantages: as Cairnes pointed out, it possessed the most complete organization in terms of social unit and experience with sedentary agriculture; it could be combined on an extensive scale and directed by a controlling mind to a single end; and its cost never rose above what was necessary to maintain the slave health and strength (Cairnes cited in Neibohr 1971). Herbert Klein (1986) also identified the Iberian introduction of African slavery as a result of the shortage of available European workers due to high wages in Spain and low production in

Portugal and because of the demographic, cultural and political restraints on the American Indians. To all this was added the demand for tropical and semitropical crops such as sugar, tobacco, rice and cotton which could be more efficiently grown on large estates. Black slavery was thus the end result of an economic revolution in the Caribbean economy not the outcome of race- based preference for black labor. As Eric Williams put it, slavery was not born out of racism but racism was instead the consequence of slavery.

The enslaved African's mind was conditioned to follow the master's orders. Proponents of slavery such as Willie Lynch (1712) described seasoning as the breaking process. Lynch explained that if the planters were to sustain their basic economy then they would have to break both the horse and "nigger." Lynch further stated, "both horse and slave are no good to the economy in the wild or natural state. 2)Both must be broken and tied together for orderly production. 3)Both must be cross-bred to produce a variety and division of labor. 4)Both must be taught to respond to a peculiar new language. 5)Psychologically and physically instruction of containment must be created for both." Lynch stated that all the above principles must be employed for good economics and the orderly good of the nation (Willie Lynch,1712). Though rarely voiced in explicit detail, it is clear that the European colonists hoped for the "acculturation" of slave populations to total acceptance of the slave status. Many of them believed that proper methods and unrelenting discipline would bring this about. (Mintz and Price, 1974).

Location of Trinidad and Tobago

Trinidad and Tobago is located in the extreme southeastern Caribbean Sea 11 km off the coast of Venezuela. The total area of Trinidad is 4,828 square kilometers and the area of Tobago is 300 square kilometers. The nation of Trinidad and Tobago is slightly smaller than Delaware in the United States. Its past is inseparable from the rest of the Caribbean.

The history of Tobago would be incomplete without the mention of its first inhabitants the Amerindians who arrived on the island from Trinidad as early as the Archaic Age, i.e. the epoch in the prehistory of the Caribbean preceding the introduction of pottery and agriculture. They were small game hunters, fishers and collectors of wild vegetables foods, fruits and edible shells who lived close to the mangrove swamps of Bon Accord and Milford areas of Southwest Tobago. The previously accepted view that in the first century A.D. Tobago was invaded by Arawak-speaking pottery-making Amerindians has been seriously questioned by researchers. They came from Trinidad and the mainland of South America, but exactly when remains unknown.

Spanish sailors, in the wake of Columbus, called the island 'Tobacco' because they said it resembled a cigar. For four hundred years (1498-1889), the island of Tobacco, later called Tobago, saw a grand procession of Dutch, Latvian, French and finally British conquerors. For a long time Tobago was abandoned, inhabited only by

buccaneers, Maroons, and castaways.

In 1803 under British Colonial Administration, Tobago was neatly laid out into parishes and the land divided into plantations and in almost every bay a fortification was placed. Great houses were built and windmills or water wheels were constructed to provide the necessary energy for the grinding of sugar cane. Africans were enslaved and introduced into Tobago to work in the estate until their emancipation in 1838. Later in the 1850s freed Africans were transported there making Tobago their home and developing over the next century or so into possibly the most stable and landed peasantry in the Caribbean. By the 19th century, largely as a result of emancipation Tobago's plantation system collapsed, and the small island was forced to seek partnership with its neighbor Trinidad.

The establishment of European institutions was not intended to facilitate the assimilation of the enslaved Africans to a civil status similar to that of the Europeans, but rather to serve the needs of the Europeans themselves. Though the obligation to civilize the slaves was often perceived as real and at times morally requisite, it was rare that a colonial power supposed that this might be done by institutions that would simultaneously serve enslaved Africans and free Europeans (Mintz and Price, 1974). The desired effect of colonial slave indoctrination was to annihilate the people's belief in themselves, their culture, language. The enslaved African's religion were to be viewed as unimportant and the African's past was to be viewed as that of non-achievement. The

very forces that threatened the African's freedom were to be viewed by the enslaved African as the savior or his only hope. The slaver was justified by customary law or by the right of captivity in war or by ecclesiastical and civil law. Benefactors and philosophers of slavery knew only one routine; the amassing of wealth and lacked both taste and philosophy (Gordon Lewis, 1993). They knew two slogans: " the balance of commerce" and "interest of the nation."

In the case of Tobago in the 1800s, the African was often "seasoned" in Grenada and Barbados before being sent to a life of enslavement in Tobago. This seasoning consisted of the attempt to strip the African of his identity by removing him from his ethnic group and mixing groups at random. Such actions ensured that group identity and solidarity could not be maintained, and facilitated the destruction of the African's culture through indoctrination and the act of dissuading the African from speaking his or her language or practicing his or her religion. Once the African was seasoned the colonial masters thought he or she would become a more productive slave. A deculturized slave was viewed as a more productive slave (Interview with Fitz Baptiste, 1997).

Tobago was nominally a Spanish colony in which the first British settlers arrived in 1625. The Indians wiped them out but Britain claimed the island anyway. The Dutch landed settlers in 1628, but a Spanish and Indian force from Trinidad invaded in canoes and put them to the sword as Eric Williams explained, "Trinidad and Tobago went to war." The English landed again in 1639, and once again the Indians chased them

off. The British monarch gave the island to his infant godson, the Duke of Courland (Latvia), as a christening present, so another settlement was attempted in 1642 this time by the Courlanders. Indians chased them off along with a party from Barbados.

Courlanders returned in 1650, and again in 1654. The Dutch came again and suppressed the settlement of the Courlanders. Louis IV of France gave the islands to the victorious Dutch, who were expelled by the British who were in turn driven off by the French. The last bunch razed the settlement and abandoned the island.

By 1674, when Tobago was ceded to the Dutch, the island had changed flags over a dozen times. This change continued-Dutch, French, Latvian, English, Dutch, French, English- even the Americans took a chance in 1778 at capturing the half deserted undeveloped island which was for most part a nest of pirates.

European policy for Tobago focused on laying the island to waste in order to discourage settlement partly to appease other colonies fearing competition. The British began to encourage settlers once again in 1764. From 1764, when no European settlers had been found on the island to 1770 much progress was made in initial clearing and cultivation of the soil that by 1764, 23,000 acres of land were under cultivation and by 1770 sugar was being exported from the parish of St. Mary in Tobago (Archibald, 1995). By the 1770s , Tobago was producing 1,200 tons of sugar, 1,600,000 gallons of rum, 1,500,000 pounds of cotton, and 5,000 pounds of indigo. By the early 1770s the enslaved Africans outnumbered whites by 20:1. It was a ratio

higher than anywhere else in the British West Indies, and as a result, Tobago up until the 1774, experienced almost annual slave revolts on a small scale. In most cases a few blacks and a few whites were killed, and the rest of the rebels fled to Spanish Trinidad. One rebellion in 1774 brought savage punishments on the captured rebels, and after that there is no mention of rebellions for the rest of the eighteenth century. The French captured Tobago again in 1781 and proceeded to sponsor immigration from the other islands by offering incentives similar to those offered by the Spanish in Trinidad around the same time. Sugar production began in earnest: Tobago's population rose from 5,084 in 1771 to 15,020 in 1791; 14,170 of those were enslaved Africans. Only five Amerindians could be found.

The French captured Tobago again in 1781 and maintained possession of the island until 1793, when the British recaptured it. The British and French made Tobago productive and populous, an exporter of sugar and cotton at the expense of creating a typical West Indian slave colony.

The Slave Act of 1775 was among those laws revised in 1794 when the Tobago Assembly began to function again following the return of British rule. In May of the year, however, a new law was passed to reinforce the control of the slave population in the light of the prevalence of French revolutionary propaganda in the region and a fear that "Ideas of Equality and Liberty totally subversive to all good government" (C.O.285/16, ff 123-4). This same French Revolutionary propaganda had influenced

the Haitian revolution, where the enslaved African helped by revolutionary fervor and the strong belief in his religion (vodun) defeated the French army (Eric Williams 1969; Robert Thompson; 1995;Wade Davis, 1995).

The planters were pleased with themselves and had confident in their slaves. Early in 1801 Sir William Young, a local grandee, stated that, “ here the planters talk of their Negroes as their last resort to be depended on against either a licentious garrison, an arbitrary Governor, or the mad democracy of French huskers.” However this notion was dispelled when a Christian slave exposed a massive plan for insurrection, scheduled for Christmas Day 1801.

Martial law was declared and 200 suspects rounded up. The whole conspiracy lay exposed. The slaves of 16 estates were involved: Roger a driver at Belvedere estate, was the “governor” and Thomas, a cooper the “colonel.” There were five “captains” on various estates and five “chiefs” in Scarborough. These men had formed companies of slaves and the plan was to set alight five estates, killing any whites who came to control the fire. In town the Governor and the Commander in Chief of the garrison were to be assassinated. It was expected that the whole slave population would then rise up in rebellion. By January 4, 1802, sentences had been handed down and the whole affair was finished. Six rebels were executed. Four other rebels were banished, and the rest sent back to work after a severe flogging.

Earlier historians operated in the general sense that Europe was a superior

civilization with a manifest destiny to develop the New World. This belief was shared by all the colonial powers. In the case of the English this doctrine made its appearance in the eighteenth century with the writings of the settler historians such as Atwood in Dominica, Poyer in Barbados, Dallas in Jamaica and Sir William Young in St. Vincent and Tobago. These historians served as apologists for the slave system. They addressed British public opinion and emphasizing the vital role that the slave system played in the viability and of the political and social structure of the British colonial system and as the world as a whole.

Atwood described the island of Dominica as healthier than St. Lucia and more capable of planned economic improvement than Trinidad. He stated that a combination of English immigration and free grants of unappropriated Crown lands would put it ahead, in terms of commercial prosperity, of the old and exhausted sugar islands. Atwood described the island in glowing terms, as if he were a tourist agent emphasizing the watering spa for invalids. The only problem that the island had that threatened the island's development, according to Atwood, was the existence of runaway slave colonies. Atwood considered it an economic necessity to crush these settlements in so as to avoid the economic cost that the pacification of Maroon societies would cost the settlers. (Thomas Atwood, The History of the Island of Dominica, London, 1791, reprint ed. London: Frank Cass and Co.,1971).

Historians such as Young of St. Vincent had more broad, expansionist views

of the white settlement on the frontier. Historians such as Young felt that the Europeans had the right to control the islands of the Caribbean because they had conquered the islands and its aboriginals, in the case of St. Vincent, for the Crown. Therefore all rights of the indigenous peoples were forfeited to the Crown. In addition because the European was a “civilizing” agent the Caribs had to be subdued and eliminated because they were savages (Sir William Young, An Account of the Black Charaibs of the island of St. Vincent, London, 1795, PRO).

Settler historians, especially Atwood, were concerned with the image of the slave masters during the crucial period when colonial society was threatened by a hostile force of runaway slaves. They saw no alternative to the slave system and no chance of there being a compromise between plantation colonialism and free slave societies based on self sufficiency.

Even antislavery historians portrayed the African as a slave in total bondage reacting passively to forces beyond his control with a culture seen as deprived and a psyche seen as pathological. Abolitionists argued that the slaves should not be allowed to testify against the white man because they could be too vindictive and would give false testimony. They argued that the slave had “no sense of religion” and “no feeling of the moral obligation of an oath.”(Edward Long, History of Jamaica, London, 1774, Cass and Co., 1970). Even William Young who argued in favor of the good character of the slave referred to them as” primitive people”(Sir Willaim Young, An Account of

The Black Chairibs, London 1795.) The West Indian proprietor, Charles Ellis, proposed to the West Indian group in the House of Commons the King request the governors to “employ means as may conduce to the Moral and Religious Improvement of the Negroes, and to secure them throughout all the West India Islands the certain immediate, and active protection of the Law.”

The totality of the institution is often examined without attention being paid to the individual enslaved African or what Edward Kamau Braithwaite (1992) described as the inner plantation. Fogel and Engerman dealt with the enslaved African as if they were faceless statistics in the quantitative study of slavery and later day scholars such as B.W. Higman(1984) and John A. Meredith (1988) studied the demographic composition of the slave populations of the British Caribbean on a massive level. Higman relied heavily on slave registration returns to provide a detailed analysis of the demographic features of the British Caribbean slave population covering the period from the passage of the Slave Abolition Bill in 1807 to the General Slavery Abolition Bill in 1834.

Barbara Bush (1990), B.W. Higman (1984), Herbert Klein (1986), and John Meredith(1989) studied the institution of slavery in the Caribbean. John Meredith (1989) and Philip Curtin (1969) dealt with demographic history of the enslaved African. Meredith compiled statistical information about the institution of slavery. Figures such as slave mortality and fertility are Meredith’s main concerns. The main

problem with Meredith is that she engages in descriptive quantitative history of slavery and does not deal with analytical evaluation of the African's social history.

Demographic concerns are addressed and the social history once again overlooked .

However Meredith's research is valuable in terms of statistical records compiled.

Scholars such as B.W. Higman (1984) dealt with the material analysis of British Caribbean populations. Higman took the position that the differences in British Caribbean slave populations could best be explained by material conditions of life fashioned partly by the decisions of owners, partly by the actions of slaves. Greater similarities existed in the living conditions and experiences of sugar plantation slaves in different territories than between urban and rural slaves in the same territories. Higman (1984) has conducted one of the most comprehensive treatment of major characteristics of slave populations of any New World region. Higman's analysis of data is balanced, cogent and incisive. Higman provided a detailed table of findings for students of comparative slavery. However Higman relied extensively on existing colonial records and did not rely on ethnographic data that could bring new light to the subject although his work is of much importance. While Higman concentrated on material conditions and material analysis, the author's research focused on the psychological dimensions of the Africans actions under the institution of slavery. This is a dimension that has been largely overlooked by authorities from the colonial historians who were more interested in advocating the benefits of slavery to the later

historians of the twentieth century who took a macro and statistical approach to the institution of slavery.

Resistance and Religion

“The focus of African culture in the New World is religious”
(Edward Braithwaite, 1974:73)

“Unawareness is the basic character of a slave. Awareness is the minimum condition for attaining freedom”(Lamming 1984:138).

Historians such as Suzanne Blier(1995), Wade Davis (1995) and Robert Thompson (1995) all stated that religion was the most important feature of African culture. The preservation of African religious culture was essential to the resistance to slavery in the Caribbean during the colonial period. Religion was an essential component of African culture. The psychological dimension of religious resistance was an important dimension in the battle in ideologies between the master and the enslaved African in the Caribbean. Rebel leaders like Makandal and Boukman in Saint Dominigue practiced vodun rites as means of imparting faith and courage to their followers. Makandal was able to convince the masses of his own immortality conferred by the gods; and Boukman used the same vodun ceremonies to help initiate the first acts of the war for Haitian independence in 1791 (Jahn, 1961). Vodun helped bring about the synthesis of various African religious beliefs and thereby give a sort of unity to the operational ideology of the revolution in Saint Dominique. Followers of syncretic religions such as Vodun were able to practice their faith by employing dual religious symbols and rituals that often fooled plantation authorities into thinking that the enslaved Africans were practicing only

Christianity (Lewis, 1983). Much more than the new ideas from Europe that the plantocracy feared, it was the unifying force of vodun that nurtured the revolutionary drive. Its central ideas- the memory of Africa, unity against a cruel world, survival, the enthralling miracle of possession, the social warmth of the drum and the dance, the conviction of spiritual intercourse with the gods- provided the foundation of belief without which no revolutionary movement could succeed (Lewis, 1983). In Tobago the practice of Obeah was prohibited and seen as promoting rebellion. Among the enslaved Africans Obeah men and women operated in opposition to the white doctors and the slaves preferred herbalists and Obeah men and women over white doctors(Higman, op. cit., 272). There is the possibility that poisons intended to kill troops and slave owners during the rebellion of 1801 were made available by the herbalists and Obeah men(C.O. 318/29, Rattray to Beckwith, 16 January 1806, enc.in Beckwith to Castlereagh, 2 February 1806 no. 36)

Edward Seaga stated, "At the root of the whole problem lies the basic difference of religious thinking: on the one side stands Christian Monotheism, exclusive, guarded by a jealous God who condemns the worshipers of the Golden Calf and other idols. On the other side there is African Polytheism, all embracing and able to accommodate the Christian Trinity, the Angels and the Saints, the Prophets and the Apostles, combining this with the spirits including ancestral dead, and even with the diabolical host. Christianity, in particular Protestant Christianity, because of its exclusiveness and

reliance on the truth of doctrine based usually on the Bible alone has given rise to a host of interpretations of Scripture, and thus in turn has promoted the proliferation of a multitude of Christian denominations, none of which have really learnt in the finale analysis to co-exist in doctrine. The revivalist has no such problem. His Gods permit him free intercourse with the existing pantheon of spirits” (Edward Seaga, 1969).

Despite the attempts of colonial authorities to destroy African culture during slavery the African in many cases had a cosmological vision of things that he did not surrender. Caught within a collision between races from different cultural dimensions that they could not fully comprehend, enslaved Africans returned to that vision for sustenance. They did so by worshiping their Gods in secret under the guise of practicing Catholicism’s Saints, through the introduction of African religious practices into the Anglican church (as was the case in Tobago), and the secret practice of African religion from Vodun and Santeria to Shango (Wade Davis, 1997).

The religious element as part of pro-slavery ideologies was brought in of course by the official ecclesiastical forces. It encountered the stubborn resilience of the African culture and never really conquered it. Its greatest success came from the Jesuits, for example, before their expulsion; Laborie, in his book of 1798 on the Coffee Planter, testified to the respect that the Jesuit priests evoked in their slave congregations. (Laborie, 1798). But on the whole it was wasted effort when one examines Maloutes account that awaited the unfortunate monk that requested that his superiors send him to Saint

Dominique which he viewed as inhabited by simple minded Africans, corrupted by their absurd belief in magic and spirits and completely immune to metaphysical or philosophical dissertations (Pere Labat Nouveau Voyage, 1:166-67 cited from Lewis:195).

The writers of eighteenth-century Barbados, Oldmixon , Hughs, Madin described the elaborate mortuary rituals such as dirt eating of the slaves as essentially African (quoted in Handler, Plantation Slavery in Barbados: 208-9). The writers of nineteenth-century Trinidad of both pre-Emancipation and post-Emancipation periods Day (1828), Underhill, Joseph (1838) and Collens (1823) similarly described the various elements of Shango-Yoruba religious movement and Obeah movement in both the same shocked, denunciatory terms almost as if it were the West Indian embodiment of Macbeth's witches (Cited from Simpson, 1970: 13-16).

The point being made here is that anti-slavery ideology involves the study of the totality of slave life, thought, and experience, all adding up to a syncretic way of looking at complex relationships between individuals, society, and nature. Caribbean scholarship has been mainly concentrated on what Kamau Braithwaite called the "outer plantation" to the neglect of the inner plantation. The truths, whether religious or philosophical, that Europeans regard as universalist relate only in fact to European customs and experience. Scholars have concentrated on political, economic and political relationships on a material and massive scale to the detriment of local, individualist, social history (Interview with Edward Hernandez, 1997). When historians cover slavery in the

Caribbean they often reduce the slave to a commodity often speaking for him or her through the words of the missionary or the master. The coverage of the African once again becomes objectified or commodified. General stereotypes such as the African's passiveness, or powerlessness under slavery are not accurate when one examines the psychological dimensions of slavery. In contrast, this researcher seeks to establish a link between the individual and the institution of slavery, the physical and the psychological dimensions of slavery through the examination of African religion as a form of empowerment and resistance to the psychological dimension of slavery.

It was through religion that the Africans maintained their culture, their networks, and parts of their language, music, and mental freedom. Extensions of religious expressions included such practices as drumming, the consultation of Obeahmen (African mystics) and the retention of beliefs.

Methodology

The research methodology proposed for this study included the interplay of historical data derived from ethnography and oral and written historiography. Research was conducted among religious groups in Tobago with the intention of identifying African- based religion. Fieldwork was carried out between August and September of 1997. Research included ethnographic research and concentrated on the oral historiography of African religion as culture and resistance in Tobago.

My initial experiences will be briefly related because they affected my research methods and they revealed the relative advantages and disadvantages of being a foreigner with the knowledge of American spoken English in Tobago. I was at times said to be too “Yankee” because of the way I spoke English and thus I often had to repeat myself when speaking to the Tobagonians. They often spoke a Creole English that, at times, I could hardly understand. In order to get around this difficulty I often went to my interviews armed with an interpreter who would assist me in my interviews in making my questions clear to the interviewee. My American accent often opened up doors and conversations with people I might not have otherwise had the opportunity to talk to. As a result I was able to conduct some unexpected interviews with people who proved to be good sources of information.

The written historical phase of this research concentrated on the archival materials consisting of official records such as commerce records which detailed the points of

origin of the Africans who were imported to Tobago during the colonial era. In addition personal papers and newspaper articles were objects of research. Only a small portion of total primary source material has been published in print in even the richest of societies such as the United States. The same condition held true in Tobago as this research project demonstrated.

Oral History

The researcher employed a cooperative approach with his interviewees. While the interviewer initiated the process of interview, the interviewee was encouraged to think of the recording as a joint effort and take an active part in its execution. It was important that the interviewee be encouraged to emphasize what he or she thought important historically when dealing with the given topic without straying too far out off course.

The interviewee was informed about the purpose of the interview and the materials used e.g., audio tape or note pad.

Many people have limited the value of oral history and interviewing to anecdotes, to clues on where to search further, or to give them a mere feel for the historical event. Oral history helped get to the event itself. Reality is complex and many sided: and it is the merit of oral history that to a much greater extent than most sources it allows the multiplicity of standpoints to be recruited. (Thompson 1978).

Oral history provided the researcher with interactive historical approach to

African religious history. The researcher engaged in live research, exploring unknown ground. Oral history operates in a face-to face social world that has been ignored by historians in favor of economic and military history by colonial historians in Tobago. Oral history served as a link between written history and the community. It was the only source of social history the Africans of Tobago could draw upon to represent their historical experience.

Thad Sitton (1983) contended that part of the reason for our frequent neglect of community resources for the study of history can be the assumption (built into our classifications of curriculum) that community history can be only locally relevant and at most relevant only in relation to state history. This is an erroneous assumption. The study of the local community and the study of the larger world are not mutually exclusive. The history of Tobago is a link in the chain that binds all of world history. The history of the world affected the history of Tobago e.g., historical events in Yorubaland, London, Paris, and Madrid all affected Tobago's history. The history of Tobago would not be complete without including the history of the enslaved African. The examination of the pros and cons of written history which focused mainly on economic and military activities and the social history of the Africans as represented by the Africans was explored.

The interviewees were informed of the purposes and procedures of the oral interview and to the particular contribution the project was being made. The interviewer guarded against possible social injury to or exploitation of the interviewees. Each

interview was carefully chosen based on the importance of the information that he or she could offer. Each interviewee was informed of their rights and made aware that the interviewer in no way intended to violate the interviewee's confidentiality. The interviews were intended to cover the social history of the Africans from mainly religion and or religious beliefs to other cultural expressions relating to religion such as music, dance and customs. The interviews selected were appropriate in relation to understanding the retention of African religious beliefs and social history of the enslaved African. The oral sources interviewed were a useful source of historical and ethnographical information concerning the retention of African culture.

Written Material

Primary source material included published histories such as commercial, county, and city, records. Newspaper articles, census reports, and public records of all sorts were valuable research material. The author studied the colonial written material in Tobago and noted that it did not cover the social history of Tobago.

The colonial records reflected biases towards economic and military history with little coverage of social history of Tobago. Only in the twentieth century did things change resulting in a new awareness of the significance of exploring Tobago's social history. The point being made is that archival records have some value but one had to compare these records with the social histories (mainly in oral form) of the native and African peoples in order to begin to understand the social history of the enslaved Africans

and gain a complete picture of Tobago's history.

Participants

Ethnohistorical research was aided by intermediaries such as Mr. Edward Hernandez of the Tobago Museum, Mr. Malcolm Melville of the musical group Culture Barn a musician and drum maker, Professor Fritz Baptiste of the University of the West Indies (UWI), Mr. Reginald Clarke Humanities Librarian U.W.I. and Mr. Jerry Pope a native Tobagonian. The above named persons proved invaluable in introducing me to various religious groups in Tobago for the purposes of collecting oral history. Professor Bridget Brereton assisted me with valuable information on the history of Trinidad and Fitz Baptist further provided me with information on Tobago.

Data Sources and Collection Procedures

Historic documents, personal interviews, review of and focus groups constituted the data sources for this research project. The University of the West Indies Library was one of the most important sites that the researcher conducted preliminary research. Written documentation, including official commerce records, published sources, study of printed materials and private papers in archives were examined. While this source of information was mainly concerned with colonial, military and economic history it still offered a valuable source of information when balanced with oral sources.

Personal interviews.

Interviews were conducted with the drum maker Melville of the music group Culture Barn in Tobago . This was an important source when dealing with the Shouter Baptists . An interview was conducted with Mrs Umelda Cruickshank an 81 year old African drummer who is well versed in the knowledge of Yoruba songs and drums. Interviews were conducted in English with an interpreter who could better understand the heavily accented interviewees. In addition, Mrs. Eileen Guillaume, Mr. John Leacock, Robert Dillon and Huworth Leoce, Jean Marie and Henry Pope were important informants. All interviews were conducted in August and September of 1997.

Data Management

The researcher used notes and audio materials to compile data. An index system was developed and information compiled according to topic. All information received was categorized according to subjects and dates. Copies of this materials have been provided to the Tobago Museum and the University of the West Indies in Trinidad.

Summary

The researcher relied heavily on oral history interpretation and ethnological observation in a attempt to minimize the proslavery biases of written primary source material which often represented the colonial authorities perspective. An ethnological and oral historiography approach enabled the researcher to conduct research of local history on an individual level and determine its connection to Caribbean and world

history as a whole. The researcher attempted to examine the social history of the enslaved African through the oral history passed down from generation to generation.

Setting

Tobago is the smaller sister island to Trinidad which form the nation of Trinidad and Tobago. Tobago is comprised mainly of people of African descent unlike Trinidad which has a large population of people of East Indian descent. Tobago is less developed industrially than Trinidad and depends on its sister island for sustenance. However Tobago has rich Amerindian, European and African history. It is the latter two that the author focused on. Tobago has a social history that has been largely unexplored. The colonial and to a large extent post colonial writers focused on economic and military history while the social history was largely ignored. Scarborough, the capital of Tobago was the center of operation for the author's research which extended from Fort King George to other parts of the island such as Black Rock, Pembroke, and Roxborough. The author focused on one dimension of social history of the African's religion.

Chapter II

AFRICAN RELIGION

In order to examine the importance of African religion in pre-emancipation Tobago, the historical, cultural, anthropological and social contexts in which the presentation of African religion as resistance emerged had to be explored and determined through ethnohistorical, oral and written sources. The literature review deals with the portrayal of slavery and its relationship to religion as explored by various scholars and historians. Herman J. Niebohr's ethnographical studies on slavery (1971) characterized its prevalence in societies where there had been present a pattern of dominance and subordination between ruling and ruled groups, spanning from the Ottoman Empire to the pastoral tribes of the Pacific coast. Since the classic definition of slavery is that it constitutes a system of compulsory labor, in which the owner possesses not only right of property in the person of the slave but complete power over the will of the slave, Niebohr concluded that the social and political consequences of the system are not necessarily racial. Slavery is related to the growth of a class society. (Niebohr 1971).

Marx concluded that slavery was just as important as machinery, credit, etc. Marx stated that without slavery there would be no cotton and without cotton there would be no modern industry. Slavery made the colonies prosperous which in turn created world trade which Marx concluded was the necessary condition of large-scale machine industry.

Although Marx was referring to the North American cotton-based slavery his observation applies equally if not more so to the Caribbean sugar-based economy (Karl Marx cited from Lawrence and Wishart, 1941). The Caribbean historian and economist Eric Williams maintained that the main function of the slave system was to provide accumulated capital for European capitalist expansion (Eric William, 1969).

As a result of the enslaved Indian's unadaptability to the slave system African labor was brought in, not because it was cheaper. The need for black slaves resulted from a revolution in the Caribbean economy in which products of tropical agriculture were traded to Europe. These crops such as sugar required intensive amounts of labor on the more adaptable than North American large estates of the Southern America. Eric Williams stated that slavery was not born out of racism but instead racism was the consequence of slavery.

The heart of the Caribbean planter ideology went to justifying "Negro slavery." Slavery in the Caribbean could not be ignored yet it violated Spanish medieval precepts and the English common law and constituted a moral affront to all the principles on which Western Christianity was founded. The Machiavellian amorality could not be adopted by the apologists of the slave system because it was an obvious affront to the Christian belief in oneness of all human beings as created by God. The challenge of that contradiction between slavery and Christianity could not be avoided.

The general view of Europe as a superior civilization with a manifest destiny to

develop the New World was shared by all the colonizing powers. English made its appearance in the eighteenth century writings of the settler-historians and their like such as Atwood of Dominica, Poyer in Barbados, Dallas in Jamaica, and Sir William Young in St. Vincent. The early historians wrote openly as apologists of the system mainly addressing British public opinion in defense of the West Indian social order. The slave system was portrayed as being vital to the political and social structure of the British colonial empire in the Caribbean region. Historians such as Thomas Atwood of Dominica (Atwood reprint 1971) and William Young of St. Vincent (Young, 1795) portrayed the African's resistance to slavery as threats to the development of the colony. Young described the Maroons as "barbarous cruel savages" beyond reason or persuasion and sought to justify the oppression and repression of all African resistance to enslavement. R.C. Dallas portrayed the settlers as "battling against a hostile internal enemy" in his account of the Maroon wars. Dallas described slavery as a civilizing force. Dallas described the cause of the Maroon revolt as resulting from "mischievous effect" of the Enlightenment philosophy (Dallas 1803). Historians such as Bryan Edwards described Maroon resistance as lawless acts of cruel animals.

Most of the seventeenth century historians portrayed the Maroons (escaped slaves who established free communities) as initiators of horrible atrocities rebelling against legitimate authority. Three leading themes can be found in the acts of the settler historians. First that the absolute monopoly of the slave-worked plantation was necessary

and any other self sufficient Maroon or native system was not tolerable in any way.

Second the theme of divide and rule strategy devised to prevent the emergence of a united front was necessary. This strategy pitted one set of native interest against another. Dallas stated that had the Maroon struggle in Jamaica been a permanent opposition to the government it could have led to a dangerous condition in which other discontented slaves could have joined the rebellion thus spreading this rebellion across the island. As it turned out the rebellion was a temporary struggle and authorities were able to tolerate the Maroons so long as they served as hunters of runaway slaves. Some historians believed that had there been such a body in Santo Domingo the brigands would never have risen. This was the policy of divide and rule.

Thirdly there is a theme that all acts of resistance committed by the enslaved Africans were random and mindless acts of lawlessness and that the enslaved African did not possess the ability to think or administer themselves in a free environment. Atwood (Atwood, 267) wrote that none of the enslaved Africans in the West Indies ever arrived at any degree of perfection in the liberal arts or sciences. Dallas stated that the notion of a free black republic had no reasonable foundation (Dallas 1803).

Pro-slavery historians in the mid-eighteenth century and the latter part of the nineteenth century were centered in English Jamaica, French Saint Dominique and Spanish Cuba. They centered mainly on planter histories, colonial assembly debates,

metropolitan state papers, the correspondence of governors, and the vast literature of travelers as well as local newspapers. Pro-slavery historians became even more racist in their portrayal of the enslaved African suggesting that the enslaved African was inherently inferior. Edward Long claimed that the pre- Darwinite fixity-of species theory that the Blackman was closer to the ape and the Whiteman further up the top of the evolutionary ladder. Thus the “pure white homo sapiens” were fitted with more evolutionary tools to deal with matters of intelligence including religious thought. (Long, 1774).

Historians such as Bryan Edwards attempt to be more objective in their approach to the history of slavery in the Caribbean. Edwards stated that behavior patterns of the enslaved African were conditioned by culture forces and not genetic factors. However he wrote that the slave was rescued from a barbarous Africa into which Christian missionaries provided a civilizing force.

Most of the island based historians hinted at the economic necessity of maintaining slave populations and the need to contain attempts to resist slavery by the enslaved African. This social order was justified through claiming that the black was a menace to society and must be contained, unable to govern himself in a state of freedom and had to be led by the civilizing authority of the White man. Christianity was seen as inseparable from this civilizing mission. Elliot in Tobago tended to see what they described as a “correlation between heathenism and the blackness of the skin.” These

missionaries thought that blacks were intellectually inferior to whites and that they had to lead the slaves. Missionaries such as Elliot felt that his duty was not to deliver the enslaved Africans from bondage but through “divine assistance” to direct the poor Negroes how they might be delivered from the bondage of sin and Satan and teach them pure principle of Christianity which will teach the Negroes to be obedient servants and endear them not only to their masters but to all those who have authority over them.

(Elliot to LMS, 1808). R. C. Dallas, a Jamaican settler stated that enslavement of the African was not only God’s will but also necessary in light of the fact that the “negro character” could never itself operate the sugar economy without the help of the whites (Dallas, 1803). Acts of resistance by the enslaved African were often misrepresented as random and mindless acts of violence, accidents or ineptitude. This type of historical coverage of the enslaved African represented deliberate attempts to justify slavery as well as ignorance of the African’s social history and customs. Historians of the later half of the Twentieth Century began to cover the socio- religious complexities of African resistance in the Caribbeans.

Later twentieth-century authorities such as Melville Herskovits (1933), Monica Schuler (1979), Gilberto Freyre, Fernando Ortiz, George Ware, Suzanne Blier(1995), Gordon Lewis (1983), Wade Davis (1995), Robert Thompson (1983), Bridget Brereton, (1997), began to identify and study the cultural complexities of the enslaved Africans and their descendants. In addition these scholars began to shift interest from the institution of

slavery to the institutions of the enslaved Africans. Through art work, religion and music the resistance of the enslaved African pointed to the evidence that many acts of slave resistance were not senseless mindless acts but systemic and complex acts of resistance. Suzanne Blier and Robert Thompson identified the importance of syncretic African religions such as Vodun in the formation and execution of resistance to slavery by the enslaved African. Makandal and Boukman both used the religious influence of Vodun to create a revolutionary consciousness in Haiti. In Trinidad and Tobago, the groups termed Orisha or Shango have been religious movements that have been at the forefront of the struggle to retain African derived forms of religion. Rev. Eudora Thomas has identified the African characteristics of shouting, chanting and the pouring of libations -all integral parts of the religious exercises of the Shouter Baptist. The Congo, Igbo and Yoruba were consistently noted among the African peoples in mid and late nineteenth century Trinidad and Tobago. The Yoruba attracted attention because of their internal social organization, their dedication to commerce, independent occupations and land acquisition and their capacity for integration into civil society.

Anthropological data of a religious nature provide supporting evidence that the earliest Yoruba speaking migrants who probably arrived during slavery, derived from scattered populations outside the jurisdiction of imperial Oyo. Among these were apparently Yagba, and Ekiti as well as Nago, Ajase and Egbado from the Southwestern border of Yorubaland contiguous with Dahomey. A ceremony of reverence for family

ancestors, saraka, was the main religious ritual among the earlier wave. On the other hand the Yaraba-Oyo and the Yoruba peoples like the Igbomina, Ogbomoso, Owu, Ofa, Iseyin, Ikoyi and Illorin from within the centralized government of the Oyo Empire figured heavily in later exodus. This emigration began in the early nineteenth century thus predating but also including the post Emancipation migrations. The later migrants brought with them the “cult” worship of Shango that was institutionalized throughout the Yoruba Empire. This worship of Shango in Trinidad and Grenada superceded the observance of saraka. Common Yorubaland deities such as Ogun, Oshun Yemoja as well as those of Oyo origin such as Shango, Dada, Bayanni as well as an Ijebu deity adopted by Oyo, Enrile was also worshiped in Trinidad and Tobago.

One of the primary objectives of the Orisha belief system was to promulgate a way of life that enabled the enslaved Africans to improve themselves their character, their spiritual and moral potential, a cooperative spirit, goodwill, reverence for their ancestors, and fellowship among their immediate relations and all of mankind. Through this belief system the enslaved African was empowered to deal with the institution of slavery through the vision of their ancestors. This vision preserved the Africans cultural base in the face of the socio/political and cultural environments to which the enslaved Africans were exposed.

Unlike the earlier historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which ignored, misrepresented, misunderstood and trivialized the social histories of the enslaved

Africans the historians of the twentieth century started to identify the material, spiritual and psychological dimensions of the enslaved African's. All African religious beliefs and expressions were described as Obeah or evil black magic by colonial authorities.

However closer examination shows that the religions that the enslaved African worshiped were complex religions from West and Central African, just as complex as Christianity in its various expressions (Thompson, 1995; Wade Davis, 1995). Shango in Trinidad, Santeria in Cuba, Vodun in Haiti where all syncretic religions which resisted Christianity's ideological domination by adapting itself to combine African religions and religious beliefs with Christianity.

The social history of the enslaved African must be studied in more detail on a case by case basis given the colonial lack of concern, misunderstanding and misrepresentation of African syncretic religion. This study advances that the social complexities of African religion enabled the enslaved African to resist total domination and enslavement. The enslaved African had a measure of control over his life that this psychological or spiritual source of empowerment provided. In Tobago the second clause of the Slave Law of 1802 prohibited the practice of Obeah, specifically any pretense of supernatural powers to affect the lives or healths of others or to promote rebellion, under the pain of death or appropriate lesser punishment. The third clause declared that all slave funerals should take place before sunset, since the practice of holding them after dark had occasioned large gatherings of slaves from neighboring estates at which there was

commonly too much feasting, dancing and drinking which endangered the slaves' health and morals. In fact, the object was to prevent gatherings in the dark which were believed to have facilitated the planning of the conspiracy of 1801.

Chapter III

MARRONAGE AS RESISTANCE

Far more than the English model on which it claimed to be based the lawmaking process of the plantation colonies was dominated by the process of shaping and defending the socioeconomic order, in particular in controlling the mass of slaves (Craton, 1984). Elsa Goveia documented in the case of the Leeward islands, the legal horse that the plantocracy rode was a logical ass (Goveia, 1965). The existence of an elaborate code of laws defining slavery and policing slaves did not necessarily indicate a rigorously effective slave system but more likely the reverse, a system in which the intended order had broken down and the laws were necessary to remedy flaws. Whereas the slave was defined as chattel to be sold like any other good or commodity there were laws that treated him like a person while restricting his or her activities. One purpose of plantations was to facilitate social control. The economic imperatives reinforced the socio-political motivation. This point can be clearly understood by reviewing the Tobago Slave Code of 1801 in which the assemblymen of Tobago reacted to the threat of slave rebellion by clamping down on cultural practices.

However in reality the enslaved were not commodities but humans with desires, feelings and wills. Wherever there were slave plantations, there were runaways; wherever runaways banded together and sustained themselves in the wilds, they can

properly be called Maroons. True Maroons were found at one time or the other at every plantation colony, however small. Most Maroon colonies with the exception of the Maroons of Jamaica, Suriname and Brazil (Agorsah,1994) did not sustain themselves for a long time in one location or for generations. Within the British colonies the permanent colonies where achieved in the Maroons of Dominica, the British Honduras and the most outstanding Maroons- those of Jamaica, who set down roots long before the British conquest and who survived the British period of slavery and colonialism from 1655-1962. In Tobago any slave absent without leave or running away in a group of two or more “ for any space of time whatever” was to be flogged or otherwise punished and ringleaders might be executed. The governor (William Young) explained that the intention was not to deem every small group of slaves to be a “ mutinous gang”, but rather to direct magistrate’s attentions to the investigation of why slaves were “traversing” the country so that cases of conspiracy or public mischief could be dealt with(C.O. 285/12, ff. 114-5, Young to Castlereagh,23 July 1807).

What distinguished true Maroons from those engaged in what the French termed *petit marronage*- the running away of the individual or for a short period- was the organization of an effective band with the ability to defend, feed, and demographically sustain itself either by new recruits or ultimately, through natural increase. The runaways had to have the stomach as well as the arms and ability to defend themselves on the move and knowledge and ingenuity, and hardihood to live off the bush. Many Africans had the

toughness and were excellent fighters. All Maroon groups were doomed to impermanence unless they could settle down and form a community. However ingeniously they lived off the forest and the rewards of raiding plantation provision grounds they needed a settled agricultural grounds of their own. They needed homes and an adequate adult population with a balanced ratio of sexes. This balance had to be achieved in order for there to be a permanent Maroon community. Many Maroon communities did not endure the test of time partly due to this demographic imbalance. The Maroons of Nanny Town in Jamaica (Agorsah, 1994), survived until today partly because of the right demographic conditions. Many hundreds of escaped Africans were said to be lurking in the woods of Barbados in 1648, the Maroons of Antigua survived in the meager refuge of the Sherkerley mountains around 1685, and a small band of Maroons sustained itself in the Blue Hills of central New Providence, Bahamas, during the 1780s (Gasper, 1979).

Maroon communities were often forged by an alliance of convenience between the Amerindians and the escaped Africans to carry on the resistance to European colonialism and those formed more exclusively by African and Creole slave runaways who had either no contact with Amerindians natives or actively opposed them (Craton,1982). In the first category besides the island Caribs of Dominica and Saint Vincent , the chief examples in the Caribbean region, there were the Seminoles of Florida, the Moskitos of the Honduran shore, and the Trio in Suriname. The Bush Negroes of Guyana formed communities of Djuka, Sarmaka, Matawai, Aluku, Parmaka,

and Kwinti- that were as African in character as possible, given that the elements drawn from different parts of Africa had been transplanted on a different continent (Craton,1982).

All Maroon groups were initially homogeneous, either as a result of the alliance between the slaves and the natives or because of different cultural elements among the runaway slaves. Those less forced into alliance by topography or a common cause were more likely to remain culturally varied e.g. the Bush Negroes. As all Maroon communities developed, they melded militarily, politically, socially, and culturally as they were shaped by their environment. Most Maroons became effective guerilla fighters because they blended Amerindian with West African military methods (Agorsah,1994).

In the initial phase the roaming bands of Maroons lived at least partly by plundering the plantations for food, weapons, and female marron recruits, the creole runaways kept in contact with the plantations because of ties of kinship as well as for purposes of supply and intelligence gathering. The provision grounds and slave quarters were meeting places, crossing points. The Cimarrones of Panama took advantage of the rivalries between Spain and the Protestant nations, while the Cuban Maroons sided with the buccaneers and pirates against formal settlements, while the Maroons of Saint Dominique took advantage of the French Revolution and the rivalry between France and England to initiate the Haitian Revolution.

Often the Maroons established a truce with the free settlers, the small land holders

instead of the planters based on interdependence and the need for mutual tolerance. In other places the Maroons traded with those who were considered outsiders such as the Jews. The Maroons exchanged products of their hunting, fishing and gathering and their handicraft for salt and manufactured goods, cloth, needles, knives, rum and even guns powder and shot. In some areas Maroons were able to easily exchange stream panned gold for arms e. g. Saint Dominique. (Scott, 1992).

One thing is for certain where ever slavery existed in the Americas there was marronage which was the active resistance and defiance of slavery and colonialism on the part of the African and the native American. In later periods as the native Americans were increasingly absorbed into the African community it became a African phenomena such as was the case in Haiti were the African runaways mixed with the native American Indians and later absorbed them resulting in the emergence of a predominantly African culture. The Marroon was a product of adaptation not only on a physical level, but on a and mental and spiritual level.

Cultural Marronage

Five hundred years after the events that initiated the conquest and subordination of the Caribbean by the power centers of the world, the historiography of the region still suffers from failure to adequately disclose and discuss in integral and coherent manner the social processes successively imposed on the region. Since the sixteenth century a direct relation has existed between economic exploitation and disinformation, or between colonial rule and intellectual repression. It is hard to accept Mexico's Leopoldo Zea's (1992) argument that the discovery of historiography was the invention of the European in the sixteenth century; the same European who simultaneously suppressed historic knowledge of non-Europeans was the first to claim a right to invent their past. However Zea contended that the Caribbean along with Latin America suffers from a "unconsciousness of its own history." Eric Wolf (1972) took the position that the recovery of this lost and suppressed history is vital to the intellectual decolonization of its peoples and for what he called "false models of reality" which hindered Caribbean cultural identification.

The notion of cultural marronage as a phenomenon developed out of the enslaved African's need to survive physical and racial hostilities and has been used to describe the psychological level on which the African slaves resisted slavery through the preservation

and adaptation of the cultural forms which they brought with them to the New World.

History records many accounts of resistance to slavery on the physical level, which included subtle cases of sabotage and the more blatant forms of rebellion. Cultural marronage was effective as the various forms of physical resistance, in that it served to foster unity among the slaves and thereby confound and confuse the master. Physical Marronage which took the form of Land Marronage e.g. the establishment of free runaway slave societies and Sea Marronage which involved flight by sea and acts of piracy both had their roots in cultural marronage. Makandal and Boukman grounded their acts of defiance in spiritual culture. Additionally, these cultural forms provided comfort to the slaves amidst the cruelty and harshness of their oppressive situation, until emancipation. The belief that once slavery was over the African was free to practice his religious beliefs is not accurate in many cases such as in Tobago where the pre-emancipation and post emancipation colonial and post colonial authorities attempted to suppress African religious expressions e.g. Shouter Baptist (Thomas, 1987). This history of suppression is covered by recent Caribbean historians such as Hollis Liverpool (1994) who writes about the colonial attempts to ban carnival because it was perceived to be an expression of African culture. Other writers such as Warner-Lewis (1991), CLR James (1963), Robert Thompson (1994), and Suzanne Blier(1996) also have documented the persistence of African culture in spite of the legacy of slavery. According to Gordon

Lewis (1983) the slave population nourished and developed their own autonomous world of culture which became the foundation, once slavery was over, of the Caribbean popular folk cultures of later nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Cultural marronage enabled West Indians to maintain their special identity establish a means of resisting exploitation and oppression during the slave period. Janheinz Jahn (1961), James (1969), and Lewis (1983) both mentioned how the cultural solidarity formed as a results of the practice of vodun enabled the enslaved African in Haiti to overthrow the slavery and defeat the French Army considered to be the finest in the world at that time. Historians and anthropologists alike agreed that religion is the most important aspect of African culture. Moreover, it was to the religious beliefs and practices that survival of the enslaved African was most attributed, with the consequence that religion has been established as the most dominant component of the African heritage in the New World. African religions were syncretized with Catholic and Protestant forms, the African component was maintained as the dominant one Thomas (1987). Reverend Eudora Thomas described the Shouter Baptist religion and the dominance of African characteristics such as bell ringing, shouting chanting and the pouring of libation as integral parts of the religious exercise.

Language, music and art (other forms of culture) all associated with the African's religious belief. Although slaves originated in many parts of the complex ethnic and linguistic map of West and Central Africa some groups inevitably dominated the lists

of imports in any given time period since many slaves owed their status to their capture as prisoners of war. For example a number of Yoruba immigrants in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was due in part to a series of wars (after the disintegration of the Oyo Empire) in which Yoruba kingdoms and states participated.

The continued migration of Yoruba in the nineteenth century reinforced the earlier influence of the Yoruba religion. E.M. McClelland (1982), Robert Thompson (1983) and W. Abimbola (1977) have covered the Yoruba religion of Ifa where all things emanate from the spirit. All these activities took on religious significance. The Yoruba conceive the cosmos as consisting of two distinct yet inseparable realms -aye (the visible tangible world of the living) and orun (the invisible spiritual realm of the ancestors, gods, and spirits). The Yoruba conceive the past as a accessible and essential as a model for the present. They believe that persons live, depart, and are reborn and that every person comes from either the gods or one's ancestors on the mothers or on the father's side. In addition rituals are efficacious only when they are performed regularly according to tenets from the past and creatively represented to suit the present(Drewel, 1989). The Yoruba people form the largest and most widely dispersed group of Africans in Tobago. They are most definite about their traditional culture anchored in Ifa " where man began." They are the most African culture in terms of religion, food ways art, etc. They are outstanding for their religion Orisha or "powers" (gods and deities). The Yoruba peoples are concentrated on the margins of Port of Spain and on the suburbs of San Fernando the

southern capital in South Trinidad in Oropuche Valley. These are the main concentration points but they are widely scattered all over Trinidad although almost entirely absent from Tobago. However historians such as Baptiste (1997) and J.D. Elder (1984) contended that Orisha and the Yorubas were present in Tobago in the colonial period, but were not newly introduced in the twentieth century. Baptiste contended that the Yorubas and other believers in Shango came from Grenada and West Africa. Unlike Trinidad where there survived small pockets of religions in Tobago they were more dispersed. The spiritual Baptists and Shango were introduced to Tobago by the same Africans that went elsewhere. The thesis that Orisha religion was 'introduced' into Tobago is wrong. The introduction of Shango into Tobago was what Baptiste called 'waves of the same' a result of post emancipation -inter-island migration. For examples, the shouters migrated from St. Vincent to Trinidad and Tobago clearly strengthening the expressions that were already there. Some Africans who migrated from Grenada brought in Orisha thus renewing practices that had pre-existed in Tobago. The thesis that there was no Orisha in Tobago prior to twentieth century introduction in Tobago is inaccurate according to Elder and Baptiste. Baptiste described the introduction of African religion as a dynamic process that was continually reinforced by migrants coming from other islands.

Yoruba Orisha was introduced into Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, Cuba, St. Lucia, and Brazil with the coming of the Yoruba-speaking sub-groups from northern Yorubaland. The rise of this religion in the Caribbean appears to date from the early to

mid 19th century, because of the disintegration of the Oyo empire. The Yoruba originally were cradled in present day Nigeria spread right across the Benin republic and into Togoland. Basically, Orisha religion or Shango as some people in Tobago call it, involves the belief in a pantheon of male and female deities or Orisha.

The harmony of African philosophy did not prevent it from adjusting itself to new situations, especially since it included a tradition of assimilating foreign influences. At the approach of foreigners, possibly Europeans, it was reasoned that the newcomers were really different from the Yorubas, it meant that they had something by which the Yorubas could benefit and vice-versa. It was therefore decided that the foreigner should be welcome. This is the rationale of the Yoruba attitude towards foreigners. In no other country of the world, except perhaps Hausaland, are strangers whether black or white and new ideas however strange they appear at first, accepted and assimilated as in Yorubaland (Adesanya 1961). Practitioners of Yoruba religion are aware that ritual becomes static, when it ceases to adjust and adapt it becomes obsolete, empty of meaning and eventually dies out. They often express the need to modify ritual to address current social conditions. Sometimes change is the result of long deliberations; oftentimes it is more spontaneous. The ability of the religion to adjust and adapt was of critical importance in the survival of the religion in the Americas. In colonies such as Saint Dominique, African deities took on Christian names. Under conditions of enslavement the African had to adapt his beliefs and practices to survive the assault of the colonial plantation system.

Shango, a Yoruba deity, occupies a major position in the pantheon of the Yoruba people. Shango creates thunder and lightning by casting “thunderstones” down to earth. Yoruba believe that these stones have special powers, and they enshrine the stones in temples to the god. Olorun (the owner of the sky) or Olodumare (roughly translates as “the almighty), among other names. Unlike Shango, who has dozens of shrines erected to him, Olorun has not a single shrine. Other Yoruba deities include Orishala and his wife Odudua, as supreme creating deities. Obatala is the sculpture-god, who has the responsibility to shape human bodies. Olurun, however reserves the right to breath these bodies to life. Obatala rules over all of the Orisha or monor gods as king although subordinate to Olorun. The Yoruba explained to early missionaries that these minor gods descended from the single almighty god, just as Jesus was the son of the Christian God (Horton,1997). The faiths of the Yoruba peoples of Western Nigeria vary significantly from one region to another, the same deity may be male in one village and female in the next, or the characteristics of two gods may be embodied in a single deity.

The Yoruba, while an ethnic group, have cultural connotations for all those who belong to Shango, an Afro- Christian religion which cuts across ethnicity and ethnic categorization. Even those who term themselves “Hausa”, “Ibo” and “Congo” practice the Yoruba religion. At a Yoruba “feast” members of these non-Yoruba groups may be seen performing roles assigned to them by the “papa” (priest) i.e. cooking ritual food, drumming, singing, serving food to the devotees and performing other chores of a minor

nature on the compound. They are never allowed to sacrifice at the shrines of the “powers” however.

In Tobago, cultural marronage can be seen by the act of people embracing both the Christian faith and/or Shango, Shouter Baptist, and other African religious beliefs mainly Obeah. In most cases such as the Shouter Baptist, rituals of obvious African descent are syncretised with those of the Christian faith in the form of Anglican, Methodist, and to a lesser extent Catholic practices. Catholicism is more prevalent on the island of Trinidad than in Tobago. In the Shouter Baptist faith the bible is read while libations are poured and spirits possess the participant. The playing of drums is very important in conjuring up the spirits that possess the participants with a frenzy of activity. Christians of various denominations visit the Obeah man or bushman in Tobago.

Paulette Ramsey (1994) mentioned the notion of cultural marronage as a phenomenon which developed out of the need of the slaves to survive the physical and racial hostilities and to forge solidarities. Ramsey described cultural marronage as resistance on a psychological level. Cultural marronage allowed the slaves to resist slavery through the preservation of cultural forms which were brought with them to the New World. History records many accounts of resistance to slavery on a physical level, which included subtle cases of sabotage and the more blatant forms of rebellion. Cultural marronage was effective as various forms of rebellion and physical resistance in that it served to foster unity among the slaves and thereby confounded and confused their

masters. Additionally, these cultural forms provided comfort to the slave amidst the cruelty and harshness of their oppressive situation, until emancipation, when they were relatively more at liberty to practice them openly.

Unlike Trinidad, Tobago always had an overwhelming black population and a very small free colored population. Historians such as Bridget Brereton (1997) agree with this observation by the author. The overwhelming masses of people in Tobago were African slaves. The African nature of the population was very pronounced well into the nineteenth century unlike older British slave colonies such as Barbados where a great majority of the slaves were Creole, Barbadian born . Lots of slave imports from African were pouring into Tobago right up to the point when the slave trade was abolished.

This provides the context for a strong African religious influence in Tobago. A Christian missionary in 1810 stated that there were many African languages spoken in Tobago(document from Tobago Museum, 1997). Historians such as Bridget Brereton and Fitz Baptiste take the position that the massive imports of fresh African slaves contributed to the persistence of African culture in Tobago in spite of attempts to eliminate it in the slave period. Brereton compared African demographic patterns in Trinidad and Tobago and described the African presence in Trinidad as ‘diluted’. Brereton stated that in nineteenth century Trinidad many cultural influences contributed to the ‘dilution’ of African culture. Brereton quoted the importation of Creole and East Indian laborers as examples. Whereas in Tobago a few liberated Africans came to Tobago

and the Africans remained the overwhelming majority.

The culture of Tobago remained African and British and in terms of religion Catholicism was never important in Tobago and it was basically a Methodist, Anglican and Moravian Christian influence rather than a Catholic influence as was the case in Trinidad. By the 1850s, virtually every Tobagonian at least in a formal sense was a member of a church. The church and church membership were very important to social mobility in Tobago particularly the Anglican, Moravian and Methodist church. On the other hand there was a very strong African religious sub- strata of beliefs and ideas, cosmologies which existed or coexisted more or less with membership in the Protestant church and a core of African beliefs were widely shared by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Tobago. According to Brereton, African religious practices to some extent were accommodated in the Christian churches of Tobago. There were constant tensions between African religious practices and Christianity. If one reads the correspondence between the Methodist missionaries and the home office these missionaries thought they were fighting a non-stop war not only against 'pagan' religion but against all aspect of African culture dealing with sex and morality (Interview with Brereton, 1997). Historians such as Brereton (1997) took the position that the missionaries never won completely this battle of cultures in Tobago. There existed a substrata of African religion in Tobago similar to what one found in Haiti (although one could say African- Haitian religions were more intact) in which magic, Obeah, African

folklore and what has been mislabeled superstition coexisted with the virtually one hundred percent rate in converting Tobagonians to the Christian church. A identical scenario existed in Haiti in which the people were described as being eighty percent Catholic and one-hundred percent Vodou (Brereton, 1997) (Thompson,1995).

Brereton has argued that there were no survival of neo- African religious faiths in Tobago due to the fact that the society was small and the missionary efforts were so successful that there existed more a sub strata of beliefs. Other historians such as Baptiste disagree with the position that there were no neo- African religions in Tobago and claim that even Orisha is not new to Tobago. Baptiste claimed that the Orisha religion went through periodical cycles of increased and decrease in popularity. In addition Baptiste argued that the successive waves of Africans coming into the island reintroduced Orisha into the island of Tobago. Nineteenth-century Tobago was a battleground of cultures and cosmologies and the African religious traditions were one of the key cultural reference points around which people could resist European cultural domination. Religion allowed the African to maintain some form of solidarity even when he was taken from his group and mixed with enslaved Africans from other groups. The influence of the Yoruba culture became dominant, although they were never a majority numerically, due to its well developed culture. This position finds support in the survival of the eighty- one year old Umelda Cruickshank whose knowledge of Yoruba, religious rituals and drumming was passed on to her by her mother who received it from her

grandfather who came from Africa. What the African learned to do in nineteenth-century Tobago was move between orthodox Christian churches and neo-African religions, such that the joint membership became the norm.

In Trinidad people took part in the Catholic mass and Shango and in Tobago a sub-strata of beliefs existed even within the church. For example burial practices that were distinctly African such as the burying of Africans under the calabash tree were performed on Anglican church grounds. The survival of African religious beliefs and practices and the syncretic churches which developed as a result were really very important as a focal point for resistance to European cultural domination. In the economic and political field the Africa was largely excluded until the 1930 and 40s they were not significant owners of land and businesses, and they were shut out of the formal political processes.

Culture acquired great significance as an arena for resistance where ordinary non-white people had some chance of exerting themselves and establishing an identity that was different from and clearly in resistance to the dominant whites. This is why religious beliefs and practices such as music, dance festival an already important elements in African culture took on even more significance. Brereton (1997) argued that African religion took on an even more critical significance than it would have in a more homogenous society due to its cultural and other roles.

The battle of cultures took place in both pre and post emaciation Tobago and

some such as Eileen Guillaume (1997) argued that this cultural battle is still going on. Guillaume argued that the African was still emerging from the 'slave mind' in some cases where issues of cultural awareness were concerned such as awareness of African identity among the masses. However Guillaume stated that African culture was always present in Tobago even when frowned upon by creolized Tobagonian.

Part of the reason for the periodical unpopularity of African cultural awareness was due to various colonial measures in the post emancipation period which prohibited acts of African culture such as the English Language Act passed in 1840 and the Act which established the Anglican church as the official church of Tobago (Public Record Office London, UK.). Proponents of such measures started a string of legislation declaring African religion to be Obeah, a suspect and evil set of beliefs intended to bring harm (interview Fitz Baptiste, 1997). Obeah was described as a Trinidad form of Vodun and repressed by the colonial government, as were the Shouter Baptists of Tobago who were the target of colonial legislative and police repression during the World War I period. Other elements of African religious expression such as dance, song and festivals such as camboulay the "burning of the canes" were equally threatening to the dominant culture. It was a continuous process of repression by the colonial official to displace African religion. For example, the Emancipation day celebration in Tobago which signified the day the African was freed in Trinidad and Tobago was displaced by "Discovery Day". With independence and the emergence of spokesperson such as Eric

Williams the importance of Emancipation Day was once again recognized. The main purpose of post- emancipation repression of African culture was to create a middle class that was acculturated in British ways who would serve the interests of the colonial empire. Expressions of African culture such as religion survived by going underground. There has been a renaissance of African religious awareness among the masses of both Trinidad and Tobago although the struggle is ongoing. In 1997 Prime Minister Panday of Trinidad said he would look into legalizing traditional African weddings.

Chapter IV

THE NATURE OF AFRICAN RELIGIONS

To examine African art is to examine the thought process of its creator according to Blier, a premise that has a lot of validity due to the fact that religion has always been a vital part of black life and the impetus for material and artistic production in Africa and the Americas. In Africa religion was so pervasive that distinctions between it and other areas in life were almost imperceptible (Mbiti, 1970). Religion can be defined as thought belief and practice concerned with the transcendent and the ultimate questions in life. (Karenga, 1993). Although African religious traditions are complex and diverse, there are some general themes which tend to appear in all of them (Mbiti,1970); (Ray,1976); (Zahan, 1979); (Gyeke,1987). First there is the belief in one supreme God: Olodumare among the Yoruba, Nkulunkulu among the Zulu and Amma among the Dogon, etc. This God is the father in most societies, but also appears as Mother in matriarchal societies like the Ovambo in Namibia and the Nuba in Kenya. Moreover in Dogon religion, Amma has both male and female characteristics, reflecting the Dogon concept of binary opposition as the motive force and structure of the universe (Ray, 1976), (Griaule,1965).

In ancient African religion God is both immanent and transcendent, near and far. In this frame work then Africans engage in daily interaction with divinities, who are seen as God,s intermediaries and assistants (Mbiti, 1970). These divinities are both similar and

different from angels, Jesus, and the placement of Catholic saints as intermediaries and assistants in the worship of the Supreme Being. It is this difference and exchange with the divinities which made the less critical assume Africans were polytheistic rather than monotheistic. However evidence points against this assumption.

African religion stresses ancestor veneration. The ancestors are venerated for many reasons which reinforce the concepts of linkage, heritage and spiritual relevance according to Richard (1989). Mbiti (1970) also discussed the subject of veneration and came to the same conclusion. The Ashanti have a special Day of Remembrance of the ancestors called Awaidae in which ceremonies focus on the linkage between those who have passed, the living and the yet unborn. As Mends (1976) noted by participating in the ceremony to honor ancestors one is stressing “ the common bonds of kinship and association which make for solidarity among people.” It is also a way to reinforce the value and honor due those whose ethical life and service make them worthy members of the community.

Ancient African religion stresses the necessary balance between one’s collective identity and responsibility as a member of society and one’s personal identity and responsibility. Like religion itself a person is defined as an integral part of a definite community, to which she/ he belongs and in which he/ she finds identity and relevance. Summing up this conception, Mbiti (1970) stated that “ I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.” The Dinka have captured this stress on the moral ideal of

harmonious integration of self with the community in there word “cieng” which means both morality and living together. In this conception the highest moral ideal is to live in harmony, know oneself and one’s duties through others and reach one’s fullness in cooperation with and through support from one’s significant others. (Deng, 1977)

Nature is not only respected because of its association with God, but also because of its relevance to humankind. This respect is grounded in the belief that there is an unbreakable bond between the divine, the human and the natural and that therefore damage to one is damage to the other and likewise respect and care for one is respect and care for the other. The stress now is to show nature respect and not to abuse it in any way and to live in harmony with it and the universe.

The conception of death and immortality is an important theme in African religions. Death in African religions is seem in several ways. First it is seem as another stage in human development. Humans are born, live die and become ancestors. Suzanne Blier (1995) mention the cross as a African symbol signifying the cross roads between the human and the ancestor. Thompson(1983) also mentioned this philosophy. Death is thus not the end but a beginning of another form of existence, i.e. as ancestor and spirit. Therefore it is seen as a transformation in life rather than the end of it. After a period of morning there is celebration for the human conquest of death. For after the funeral, the dead are “revived” in the spirit world and as ancestors, are close and relevant. Secondly death is seen as reflective of cosmic patterns, i.e., the rising and setting of the sun, and

often graves are dug east and west to initiate this pattern.

Death is seen as a transition in life to personal and collective immortality. Personally one lives after death through four media: 1) children; 2) other relatives; 3) rituals of remembrance; and 4) great works or significant deeds. The living remember speak one's name and deeds, one's work speak of one's significance throughout all time. Thus without relatives to keep one's memory alive or significant achievements and deeds one is what Africans call "utterly dead" Collective immortality is achieved through the life of one's people or through what one means to them. For as long as they live on the person lives and shares in their life and destiny.

Black religion in the Americas began in Africa but its study was made difficult by European interpretations which exhibited a need to make Christianity seem superior and African religions primitive and by African Christian interpretations which strive to make African religions more "normal" by making them look more Christian or Western. (Karenga, 1993) Both ignorance and fear prevented the early historians from any semblance of accuracy in their portrayals of African beliefs or practices.

Much of what is mislabeled superstitions in Tobago are elements of African religion that have persisted in spite of a legacy of suppression spanning from slavery to the post independence period. Superstition is in all actuality religious belief. Superstition is a Eurocentric label. Historians such as Karenga (1993) concluded that if African stories of creation and divinities are myths then so are Christian, Jewish, and

Islamic ones. Karenga suggested that a better category for both African and other creation stories would be “narratives.” According to Karenga, Jehovah , Yahweh, and Allah are no more arguable than Nkulunka, Olodumare and Amma and the Orisha of the Yoruba are no less effective as divine intermediaries than Catholic saints like Jude and Christopher. Historians such as Karenga (1993) and Jahn Jaheinz (1961) took the position that although African religious traditions are complex and diverse there are some general themes which appear in all of them. There is a belief in one supreme God e.g., Olodumare among the Yoruba, Kalunga among the Kongo, Nkulunkulu among the Zulu and Amma among the Dogon, etc.

African religions stresses the necessity of creating a balance between one’s collective identity and responsibility as a member of society and one’s personal identity and responsibility. The African lived in a spiritual universe where he believes that everything that exists has religious relevance. The Kintu or things are forces without intelligence which stand at the disposal of man according to Jaheinz(1961). Blier (1995) stated that according to the Fon principle of gbe, humans are held not only to control life (gbe) through pursuits such as the hunt (gbeto is also the word for hunter) but also through interaction with other living things and supernatural powers through speech, bo (or Bochio) and other means.

“The whole world as God’s creation is alive with His/Her symbols and gifts to humans, and bears witness to His/Her power beauty and beneficence. Thus there are sacred trees, rivers mountains and animals (as in

Western religions).

To the African this respect is grounded in the belief that there is an unbreakable bond between the divine, the human and nature. To the African nature must be respected in order for harmony to be maintained because “there is one spiritual unity that joins us all...” (Karenga, 1993: 215).

In African religion that the concept of death and immortality is an important theme. To the African death is seen in several ways. First it is seen as another stage of development. Humans are born, live die and become ancestors. For some another stage follows the reincarnation of ancestors as newborn children. Death is not the end, but the beginning of another stage of development i.e., as ancestor and spirit. The African sees death as a transition in life rather than the end of it. After a period of mourning there is celebration for the human conquest of death. After the funeral, the dead are “revived” in the spirit world as ancestors and are close and relevant. Secondly death is seen by the African as reflective of cosmic patterns, i.e. the rising and setting of the sun and graves are dug east and west to imitate this pattern.

To the African death is seen as a transition in life to personal and collective immortality. Personally, one lives after death through children, other relatives, rituals of remembrance and great works or significant deeds. The living remember and speak the ancestor’s name and deeds, and one’s works speak of one’s significance throughout time. Thus without the relatives to keep one’s memory alive or significant achievements and deeds, one is what African’s call “utterly dead.” Collective

immortality is achieved through the life of one's people and through what others means to them. For as long as they live the person lives and shares in their life and destiny.

A great majority of the missionaries in the Caribbean colonies sought to replace African culture by Christianizing the enslaved African. The missionary enterprise's prejudice was clear. Instructions from London were always emphatic on the question of the economic condition of the slave; as the 1816 instructions given to missionary John Smith in his British Guiana mission field put it, he was sent out not to relieve the slaves of their servile condition but to afford them the consolations of (Christian) religion. Reverend Thomas Coke of Jamaica published his work in 1808 in which he stated that the slave was enmeshed in barbarism and ignorance, from which Christianization will emancipate him. But it will not emancipate him necessarily from his servile condition, since although slavery is contrary to the spirit of Christianity, the ultimate Christian virtues are those of obedience and subordination. Slavery is a part of the divine ordinance of things. The ways of God are inscrutable, but always in the long run, good according to Coke. It follows from all this, Coke concluded that what the Christian mission seeks to do in the West Indian society is not abolish slavery but rather by inculcating the general lesson of obedience to divine law, to help stabilize it.

In Africa, the slave trade and the ethnic wars it provoked, the coming colonial rule and the social changes which followed, resulted in the introduction of Christianity by the missionaries. The introduction of Christianity threatened the position of

authority in many African communities such as the chiefs in Ashanti areas of West Africa. Ancestor worship was the basis of the chiefs authority as well as the sanction of morality in the community. The chiefs was one who sits on the stool of the ancestors (Parrinder 1986:188). Religious authority among the traditional societies of Africa suffered as a result of the challenge to its authorities posed by the Christian missions in African under colonial authority. The process of fragmentation of West African cultures caused by civil wars, foreign influence, colonization, and missionary activity led to a loosening of relationships and favored the retention of particular details, the higher relationships of which became increasingly less perceptible to the participants. However as authorities such as Adesanya pointed out, the readiness of the Yoruba to assimilate foreign culture religion resulted in it being received everywhere with friendliness and good will. The Christian doctrine did not have the success the missionaries hoped for. Far from throwing off their own philosophy and religion and subjecting themselves to the foreign view, the African have again and again assimilated the foreign religion to their philosophy and attached it into their own system of thought. There has been a syncretization of religious beliefs in Africa combining Christian and African beliefs. For example, Ashanti chiefs who were both educated and Christian have been obliged to traditional ritual acts such as the pouring of libations to ancestors. African beliefs have persisted in Yorubaland in Nigerian and Dahomey. In eastern Nigeria (e.g. Iboland) Christianity has strongly influenced the inhabitants. The

influence of Christianity was stronger in the coastal regions of Africa which had a longer history of contact with the Europeans.

Syncretism in the Caribbean

While African religion was a great vehicle of resistance to slavery it was influenced by Christianity just as Christianity in the Caribbean was influenced by African religious practices. (interview with Edward Hernandez, 1997). The pioneering investigations of Strauss, Feuerbach, and Cumont have shown that Christianity owed much of its dogma and myth in large part to the older cult-religions like the Mithra cult of the pre Christian period. In similar fashion, African-Caribbean religions were syncretic belief systems combining the imported Christian ideas with earlier ideas, mainly African Shango, the formerly secret African religion in the Americas, Santeria with its esoteric amalgamation of Yoruba Gods and Catholic Saints, the Trinidadian version of Rada Shango tamboo bamboo and Camboulay, the Afro-Jamaican Rastafarianism and Kumina and Haitian vodun with its tremendous apocalyptic Afro-Haitian vision and Petro gods.

The continuance of African religious practices in the New World has been the focus of much scholarly attention. Haitian Voudou, Cuban Santeria, Trinidadian Shango have become examples of the persistence of African culture in the Americas. What are the relationships between Afro-American religious practices and those of Africa? Africans in the Americas created and maintained an intricate system of well-developed social institutions based in part on African practices that were influenced by their American experience. Scholars such as Patrick Polk (1989) , Robert Thompson

(1984), George Simpson (1978), Suzanne Blier (1995), Gordon Lewis (1983) and Wade Davis (1995) have pointed out that over the centuries African- American peoples in the New World have developed and maintained lasting forms of religious expression. They neither abandoned traditional African forms nor did they completely refuse to accept Judeo-Christian forms of expression. Instead they have created systems where both exist in a state of dynamic equilibrium. Blier, Thompson and Davis all explore the African cultural continuities in the Americas and how their new environment influenced African religion. The influence of African religion can be found throughout the Caribbean in spite of the legacy of slavery and colonial attempts to suppress it as the above authorities have been documented. Historians such as Gordon Lewis have pointed out that the planter class on the whole possessed little interest in religion, either for themselves or for their slaves. One visitor to Saint Dominique noted, they could not even be termed unbelievers; rather their general attitude in this of religious belief was one of profligacy than of philosophy. (Labat, *Nouveau voyage*, p. 66.) If there was any real religion in slave society it belonged to the African cult priest, the houngan, of vodun and the practitioner of Brujeria, and Santeria. Furthermore if there was any religious democracy in the society, it belonged to the African cults as Courlanders put it, in vodun there is no supreme individual or group to instruct or give direction to the local cults, no Pope or Dalai Lama. Preface to (Rochet, iv.).

As mentioned above there are many syncretic religions in the Caribbean. These

are religions that have both elements of African religion and Christianity. These religions may have a stronger African than Christian influence such as is the case with Voodoo, Santeria, and Shango. In other cases the Christian influence can be very dominant for example the Shouter Baptist and Shaker Baptist. Syncretic religions are found all over the Caribbean and Tobago is no exception. In Tobago one finds not only diverse and unorganized elements of African religious beliefs such as what has been mislabeled fishermen superstitions and local superstitions, but in addition others exist in the organized communities, churches, and shrines of the Shouter Baptists and the Shango religion. In order to understand the syncretic religions in Tobago one should examine the Caribbean region's rich historical spectrum of syncretic religions.

Santeria

Santeria is a complex religious system whose beliefs and rituals rest on the veneration of the Orishas of the Yoruba pantheon of Nigeria as identified with their corresponding Catholic saints. Santeria is based on the complex triumvirate of Olofi, Olodumare, and Olorun, who have authority over the rest but who are not direct objects of worship and adoration, as are the Orishas their direct subjects and messengers on earth.

In the sixteenth century large numbers of slaves were brought from Africa to work the coffee, produce, and sugar plantations in Cuba. These Africans were basically prisoners of war captured far inland, sold and traded on the coast. Few were kidnaped

from the coasts of the Gulf of Guinea and the Congo. The slaves were described as lucrative commodities in the most inhuman and cruel exchange in human history: the slave trade. The slaves taken from Africa would impose their culture on the island of Cuba in spite of slavery and the whip of the Spanish master and the Creole sugar autocrats. The West Africans particularly the Yorubas, wielded the greatest influence in the process of integration into Cuba's cultural and religious systems, succeeding most quickly in holding sway over other African cultures established here long before their arrival. Scholars such as Miguel Barnet (1997), Blier(1997) and Thompson (1983) offered the suggestion that it was Yoruba religion that was the center of religion in Cuba.

Barnet (1997) took the position that Yoruba culture was much richer than the other cultures and served as the paradigms for the birth and adaptation of transcultural expressions that are still a part of Cuban culture today. According to Barnet Yoruba mythology was comparable to the Greek in terms of philosophical richness and poetic values, is the only solid body of ideas about the creation that Cuba can boast as a legacy of traditional popular culture.

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century Yoruba religious philosophy underwent crucial alterations when it clashed against other African religious forms and Catholicism. A syncretism emerged spontaneously establishing new cosmographic values and merging Yoruba divinities with Catholic

deities.

Santeria or Ocha boasts of a wide range of divinities who must be frequently gratified and appeased with festive ceremonies. The respectful worship of orichas through veneration, feeding, and ritual observance of all consecrated dates of the liturgy is the focus of Santeria. This religion has its origins among the Yoruba or Lucumi, as these groups are known in Cuba, and is said to exert its strongest influence on the population of Havana and Matanzas.

The foundation of the Cuban Santeria, as in Nigeria is the stone (ota) where the magic attributes of the power (natural forces of deities) reside. The stones are polished river stones and are supposed to be the containers of each of the divinities and practitioners must have them in their possession at least during major rituals. The highest position in the hierarchy of Santeria is occupied by the oluo who must have passed the age of sixty. Barnett explained that today the oluo is almost nonexistent today. In the remote times they occupied the highest positions in the community of babalaos. In recent times the oluo's role was reduced to that of master in divination, the highest in the hierarchy. In the divination ceremonies the oluo conducts all public duties and has the last word.

The true ruler in Santeria is the diviner, babalao who execute the rituals of prophecy through tablero of Ifa, a series of configurations drawn on sawdust in accordance with the casting of the opele or okuluele, chain. The religion of the orochas

is linked to the notion of family-an extended and numerous family, originating in one sole ancestor, encompassing the living and the dead. Out of this system of familial lineage emerges a religious brotherhood involving grandfather and grandson in a kinship that transcends blood connections to form an all-inclusive and compact horizontal lineage. This family system has been one of the most genuine characteristics of Santeria in Cuba. The grandmother or grandfather become mother or father of a brood of children, forming a group popularly known as *linea de santo*, a line or lineage of initiates.(Barnet cited from Olmos 1997). This family system led to grassroots resistance to the intended domination of Catholic religious philosophy over African religious philosophy in Cuba. In Nigeria among the Yoruba, life is ruled by the will of the gods. The santo Elebwa is sufficiently powerful to open the path-that is to overcome the obstacles imposed on the dominated class by the dominating class (Barnet, cited from Olmos, 1997).

In the syncretic process that began the instant that the first African established parallels between African divinities and catholic saints, Yoruba traits of Santeria were decisive in fixing the conditions for such correlations. In the face of the repressive imposition of the Catholic church, which acknowledged no other religion, African blacks set into motion a most complex sociological phenomena when they syncretized their divinities with Catholic saints- a give and take of elements and attributes that did not alter the basic concepts transplanted from Africa (Barnet, cited from

Olmos,1997:87).

Vodun.

Robert Thompson(1983) pointed out that Vodun according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is “ a body of superstitious beliefs and practices including sorcery, serpent worship and sacrificial rites, current among Negroes and persons of Negro blood in the West Indies and Southern United states of African origin.” Vodun was feared and superficially understood by the European colonizers in the Americas and even today that legacy remains intact in Hollywood films such as James Bond’s “Live and Let Die.” The portrayal of Vodun by Hollywood has been for most part racist and vulgar. Vodun is actually one of the amazing achievements of people of African descent in the Americas. It was the synthesis of the traditional religions of Dahomey, Yorubaland, and Kongo with the introduction of Catholicism.

When France took possession of Hispaniola in 1697, indigo and sugarcane were introduced into the island and with the came the importation of Africans from whose seat the wealth of Haiti as created. Haiti became the wealthiest and most valuable of French colonies and possibly any European colony in the world. The men that populated Haiti came mainly from Kongo, and Angola but also from Yorubaland, Mande, Dahomey and Bamana territories in West Africa. To a lesser extent Igbo were brought to Haiti too.

Vodun is derived mainly from the Republic of Benin (Dahomey) and western Yorubaland. A pantheon of gods and goddesses under one supreme Creator. Deities who manifested themselves by possessing (“mounting” or “riding”) the bodies of the devotees. This aspect of Vodun was reinforced by contact with Roman Catholic saints who were said to work miracles.

Historians such as Robert Thompson (1995) and Suzanne Blier(1995) have described Vodun as Africa rebleded, the creolization of African religion. The religion has two parts: one called Rada, probably named after the slaving designation for persons abducted from Arada, on the coast of Dahomey. The other called the Petro-Lemba or Petro after the messiac figure, Don Pedro from the southern peninsula of Haiti and the northern trading and healing society called Lermba.

The practice of worshipping a variety of gods and goddesses under one supreme creator was likely to have been derived from Dahomey and Yorubaland. Deities manifested themselves by mounting the bodies of devotees. Catholicism reinforced the belief in deities with practice of paying homage to saints which were believed to work miracles. Chiefly from Kongo and Angola came the beliefs in the transcendental moral powers of the dead and in the effectiveness of figured charms for healing and righteous intimidation.

Rada and Petro cannot be traced to one African source but are a combination of different African ethnic influences. Rada is predominantly Dahomean and Yoruba, is

the cool side of vodun, being associated with the achievement of peace and reconciliation. Petro, predominantly Kongo, is the hot side, being associated with spiritual fire of charms for healing and for attacking evil forces. Vodun fused together similar religious aspects of different African cultures(Thompson 1983).

Vodun means spirit in Fon, a West African language. The belief in Vodun, mysterious forces or powers that govern the world and the lives of those who reside within it. Sculptures of the Vodun type function in conjunction with these vodun energies both in protecting humans and in offering avenues of individual empowerment and change (Blier, 1995). Vodun is rooted in the religious beliefs of the peoples of West and Central Africa who were brought as slaves to the Americas. The African's religion blended with Catholicism as Vodun quickly took root in the New World. Vodun originated in the Guinea Coast , the Slave Coast, or the western limits of the Bight of Benin. The people in this West African region share not only similar or common sculptural interests but also the belief in vodun, mysterious forces or powers that govern the world and all those within it (Blier,1995). Blier contended that Bochio (pronounced bow- chee- aw) found in the Guinea Coast, the Slave Coast, or the western reaches of the Bight of Benin function in conjunction with vodun energies both in protecting humans and in offering avenues of individual empowerment and change. Although Bochio sculptures are not the only art identified with vodun in this area and do not in any real sense symbolize or signify, they are closely identified with vodun

power religious tenets and philosophy vodun Bochio enabled the vodun initiate to transfer enormous power and feelings. Bochio, Blier explained is a form of empowerment in that it captures emotions and souls. Bochio protected the initiate from evil. Blier contends that vodun ceremonies were meant to invoke the spirit of dead ancestors. Vodun is very family oriented the dead were always present. Bochio sculptures function in conjunction with the vodun energies. They acted as sources of energy by both protecting humans and offering “avenues of personal empowerment.” Bochio, does not represent or symbolize vodun, they are closely identified with power, religious tenets, and philosophy. According to African philosophy, the metal the stone, the clay, out of which the smith, the stone-cutter, the potter moulds a piece of sculpture is a kintu and nothing more. Only the piece of wood that the wood- carver uses for his sculpture is something more than other ‘things’: it comes from the tree from the ‘road of the invisible ones,’ as they say in Haiti, from the vertical that unites the water Nommo of the depths of the cosmos (Jahn, 1961). Bochio played a key role in power relations, both constituting at once strategies of vigilance and designs for change. Works of this sort, constitute instruments of empowerment which both influence community and societal relationships (Blier, 1995).

The determination of a sculptor differs from nation to nation. A Yoruba chief is determined by a pointed crown; a Bochio, or protected spirit of Dahomey by the position of the hands. But this process of determination holds everywhere. It is through

the protected spirit the crown that the Muntu whose mark is the head, the seat of intelligence, of will, the sign of the self, express existence. It is the same expression that a worshiper goes through when he is ready to receive the god into his soul. The expression is one of concentration and expression at the same time. Every initiate into Yoruba worship must go through this experience which is called possession. This is when the spirit is said to ride the possessed. The result of this union between man and the divine is a complete harmony of the soul, an utter relaxation of the mind and balance of personality. In African philosophy this balance is critical to existence itself (Jahn, 1961). Bochio explained that it was through the art (e.g. Bochio) that the spirit lives. Bochio was empowerment art. The psychology and power of vodun were associated with bohio. (Blier, 1995) Through this art the enslaved African could control art, psychology and politics. The spirit was found in the art that transformed the Africans psychological, emotional and spiritual state. Through this expression of art the African resisted the attempted domination of the ideologies of the plantation system by maintaining control of his thought process and physical and mental well-being. Through the art of Bochio the enslaved African in the Caribbean could European dominance by gaining spiritual and material access to forces of empowerment.

Joan Dayan (1997) explained that although there are thousands of gods in Haiti any one god or loa can have multiple emanations depending on the location or particular ritual. Dayan further pointed out that any vodun initiate can, once dead be

turned into a god by a Vodoun priest. Dayan states that the African origins of gods is complex in Vodoun. Although Legba, “the master of crossroads” invoked first at every ceremony, comes from Dahomey, some loa are recognized as Kongo, Ibo, or Nago spirits while others can be traced to other parts of Africa.

Robert Thompson (1996) reported that in Vodoun the python is a link between the human and his ancestors. Thompson reported that the snake embodied tremendous power for good in contrast with the Judea-Christian religion in which the snake is the embodiment of all that is evil and loathsome. Gambala a snake is the god of health and prosperity. He nourishes the world through the falling of rain. Thompson revealed that the snakes of Vodoun are saints and stand in contrast with the snake of Christian literature which crawl. During slavery when Africans were forced to worship Vodoun in secret they concealed the worship of Dambala under the guise of Worshipping saint Patrick who is said to have banished snakes from Ireland.

Suzanne Blier (1996) pointed out that Vodoun is not a cult but a religion accepted by Africans. It was not outside the norm of African religion. The spiritual source of Vodoun is found in Africa where Vodoun was the God of kings and common people alike. Blier contended that there are an infinite number of gods or deities in Vodoun. One important deity is Ogun the God of iron. A birthday party is held every year in honor of Ogun.

Blier (1996) conceded that the deities take on human form in Vodoun. The loas

or gods are represented by different colors, wines etc., In the religion of Vodoun according to Kathy Brown (1996) mystical power can reside in any object e.g., a haystack. Any inanimate object can become animated by the gods. Spirit possession is the transcendent experience of Vodoun and all the African based religions of the world. Spirit possession is that moment of divine grace or possession.

Vodoun centers on trans-possession of the personality of the priest or priestess by that of the spirit. The personality of the priest or priestess is put aside and that of the spirit takes over their body and voice Robert Thompson said that Vodoun boast of no Cathedral like Catholicism, no Torah like Judaism, no Koran like Islam. Instead the crowning achievement of Vodoun is in the mystical grandeur of its rituals which both summon and celebrate the gods. (Thompson, 1995).

Thompson further explained that the drums summon the gods and are so sacred that only the initiated can touch them. Another significant symbol of Voodoo is the cross which Thompson pointed out is one of the oldest religious symbols in Africa. The cross signifies the crossroads between the spiritual and material world, the physical person and his ancestors. The conjunction of the natural and the supernatural, the visible and the invisible.

Thompson and Kathy Brown (1996) observed that Vodoun is a problem solving medium. Voodoo along with all other African religions share a profound interest in healing of the body and the spirit through the profound intermission of the gods. Brown

said that the healing is the center of Vodoun. Every bit of Vodoun is directed toward healing between people, between people and spirits, between people and ancestors. Brown contended that herbs are a very big part of all African based religions and figure prominently in Voodoo healing and ceremony. African based religion was seen as a threat by the slave masters who thought that slaves would draw on their magic to avenge the atrocities that had been committed against them. Vodoun demonstrated the possibility of spiritual and political freedom according to Wade Davis (1995).

Many scholars have contended that the success of the Haitian Revolution was made possible as a result the empowerment of Vodoun religion. Davis claims that Boukman a Voodoo priest gave the sign to start the revolt in Haiti. The gods of Africa empowered the ill equipped slaves to defeat the French army considered the finest in the world. After the Haitian revolution many Caribbean colonies banned the use of drums among the slaves in recognition of its religious significance and role in political revolution and empowerment.

Both Petro and Rada are African influenced but neither is traceable to one source. Both are African inspired and indigenously created. Rada, predominantly Dahomean and Yoruba is the “cool” side of Vodun and is associated with peace and reconciliation. Petro predominantly Kongo, is the hot side, being associated with the spiritual fire of charms for healing and for attacking evil forces. Andre Pierre, a vodun preist called Rada, “civilian” and Petro “military” (Thompson 1983).

The colonist/slave dynamic in its various New World forms was a significant factor in the development of African- derived religions. For example as explained earlier, Haitian Vodun in its “hot” or Petro aspects reflects the revolutionary and survival- oriented sentiments of its early adherents. The Petro loa or spirits and their corresponding rites are part of a complex of beliefs and practices that have been termed aggressive and potentially malevolent (Houk, 1995). The structure and organization of the secretive Vodun religion in Haiti toward the end of the eighteenth century provided the framework and foundation for a successful revolt (Laguerre 1989). It was the Petro cult that provided the moral justification and organizational structure for the successful revolt against the colonizing French, beginning in 1791 (Deren 1970, 62).

Orisha religion in Trinidad shares many traits with the “cool” or Rada side of Haitian Vodun. The relatively less violent relations between Europeans and the enslaved Africans was a contributing factor to the different development of vodun and Orisha: Haitians were forced to look outside the traditional African tradition characterized by centralization compromise, syncretism, and eclecticism, for a religious system that incorporated the principles of decentralization exclusivity, and malevolent aggression. In Trinidad and Tobago this was not the case.

One reason for the less violent relations between Europeans and slaves in Tobago was that the duration of slave labor on the island was relatively brief: colonists did not begin plantation style cultivation of sugar until the late 1700s (Hoetink 1979)

and complete emancipation occurred in 1838.

Shango Religion or Orisha

Scholars such as Melville Herskovits (1939), Maureen Warner-Lewis (1996), James Houk (1995), Ian Taylor (1995), Stephan Glazer (1993) Patrick Polk (1986), and G. E. Simpson (1980) have done research on the syncretic religion of Shango in Trinidad. The Alafin was a divine king representative of the deified ancestor, Shango, the Orisha controlling lightning. When he died he was believed to ascend into the sky like Shango to join his divine predecessors. For reasons of political control, links existed between religious organizations and the secular administrative system but in particular the Shango religion played a vital role in state administration and its influence spread to every town under Oyo influence and organized in an hierarchy centered in the palace at Oyo. The widespread and influential nature of the Shango cult in areas under Oyo control no doubt accounts for the prominence of this deity in overseas Yoruba culture areas, and for the application of their deity's name to Orisha observance in general in Trinidad. (Warner-Lewis, 1996). Ketu Yoruba men and women were captured by the Dahomeans and were brought to Haiti and Brazil while the Oyo and other captives of the Fulani were brought to Cuba, Brazil, and Trinidad somewhere between the late 1700s and the mid 1800s because of the disintegration of the Oyo empire(earlier enslaved Yoruba speakers appeared to have come from north-

eastern or coastal areas of Yorubaland, spheres outside the periphery of Oyo monarchical rule. Their religion appears to have been less dedicated to Oyo Orisha than to the localized Orisha and ancestor veneration). The differences in sub-ethnic religious ideas, and the differing interpretations to which these were subjected in overseas environments, are reflected in the proliferation of conflicts over practice displayed among Yoruba and Yoruba descended adherents of the religion in Trinidad and Tobago. This has led to contempt and misunderstanding among various groups of worshipers. Non believers also misunderstand this religion and have often viewed it with contempt.

The Orisha religion or Shango as it is known in Trinidad, involves belief in a pantheon of male and female deities or Orisha. These were created by a Creator deity, Olorun, the great deity that oversees the work of other spirits. While no sacrifices are offered to Olorun, liquid, food, and animal sacrifices are presented to the Orisha. The latter represent tempestuous wind, the ocean, particular rivers, and lightning. These energies may or may not be identified with persons who once lived. In Yorubaland in West Africa each Orisha is served by its own priest and priestess, but in the Americas all Orishas are worshiped at the same shrine with no centralized hierarchy to administer the religion(Hill, 1998).

The Orisha deities of the Oyo and Ketu city-states were introduced to Cuba, Trinidad and Brazil. Orisha (primarily African-derived gods and spirits) were derived from the Oyo region. The Yoruba influenced Ewe, Popo, and Fon slaves from territory

directly to the West of Yorubaland brought their cult and influenced the syncretism of the deities. Thompson concluded that a remarkable fusion of Orisha occurred in the Americas that was not possible in West Africa due to intra-Yoruba migration and civil war. The Orisha religion is African derived but includes in its worship complex the beliefs, rituals, and material culture not only of Orisha worship but of Christianity. In the case where the Orisha religion has encountered Catholicism, Orisha has been syncretized with Catholic saints resulting in dual names- one Yoruba and the other European, for each Orisha. For example Oshun is both a sea goddess and the Virgin Mary, the god Sango is St. John the Baptist, and Ogun is St. Michael. This duality of labels can be found throughout the Americas in other African derived religions such as Vodun. Well over 50 percent of Orisha worshipers are Spiritual Baptists and participate in the activities of both religions on a regular basis (Houk 1995). The Orisha are contacted in a dance possession in which the spirit of an Orisha “mounts” the believer’s head and then acts through the medium. Different spirits have different personalities such as drum rhythms, dance steps, postures, colors, food and icons.

It is most likely that Shango or Orisha developed in Tobago around the late 1700s to the early 1800s. Because ceremonies were held in secret, few reliable records exist. Shango or Orisha in Trinidad and Tobago has its roots in Yoruba religion. While some authorities claim that Shango in Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago developed independently of one another (Eltz 1992) the author does not agree due to interviews

conducted with the followers of Orisha and academicians. Africans were brought from Grenada to Trinidad and Tobago and it is very likely that they introduced Orisha beliefs in successive waves (Interview with Fitz Baptiste 1997).

The tempestuous mystic third King of the Yoruba, is a Yoruba deity. Shango is the thunder god, and his consort is the whirlwind, the goddess Oya, who is also the goddess of the River Niger (Thompson 1983). The icons of Yorubaland to the New World accompanied an affirmation of philosophical continuities. Fragments of liturgies remained alive in songs about the wonder-working blade atop the head of Eshu-Odara, a wonder working god with a knife erect upon his head (Thompson, 1983).

Although historians such as Bridget Brereton(1997) have stated that Orisha was introduced into Tobago recently other historians such as Fitz Baptiste (1997) have taken the position that Orisha existed in Tobago before recent times and that there has been a periodical wave of introduction of Orisha dating form the pre-emancipation slave period in Trinidad and Tobago and Grenada. Evidence points to the existence of Orisha on Tobago before recent times(Fitz Baptiste, 1997). In Orisha ceremonies the Yoruba language is often used, although not always understood and Yoruba deities such as Eshu, Shango, Ogun and Oshun are evoked by their devotees. It has been suggested that the arrival of Orisha into Grenada is directly linked to the arrival, in 1849, of over 1,000 indentured Yoruba laborers from Ijesha, Nigeria (Simpson 1970). These Nigerians settled in relatively closed communities and continued many of the

traditions of their homeland. Another school of thought claimed that Orisha was introduced into Grenada as a result of the slave trade and came to Trinidad and Tobago before emancipation (Interview with Fitz Baptiste 1997).

Chapter V

RELIGION AS MARRONAGE

Religion is an essential part of African cultural heritage. Religion is found in every area of African life. It dominated the African's thinking to such an extent that it shaped, individual identity and action, political organizations, activities, social life, and economic activities. African religion took the form of beliefs in God, spirits, human life, magic, practices and ceremonies such as making sacrifices and offerings and performing ceremonies and rituals, religious objects and places which are set apart as being holy or sacred, values and morals and religious officials and leaders. Of African-American culture the most studied element has been that of religious organization and expression. The major research on this subject have been carried out by anthropologists, historians, psychologists, and sociologists. Some of the earlier researchers included Meville Herskovits(1958), Alfred Metraux(1949), and Roger Bastide (1971). A number of contemporary scholars such as Suzanne Blier (1995), Robert Thompson(1983), Donald Cosentino (1995), Mbiti (1975), Lewis (1983) Higman (1994) and authorities such as the linguist Maureen Warner-Lewis (1991) have examined the importance of African religion as a form of culture, arguing that the African contribution to the Caribbean religious life had been over looked by many

colonial historians who were mainly concerned with commercial or economic and military history. Scholars such as Suzanne Blier (1994) and CLR James (1963) Wade Davis (1995) have identified vodun with the start of the Haitian revolution that led to the country's independence in 1791. The revolution is believed to have begun after a vodun ceremony held on August 14, 1791 by a Houngan (vodun priest) named Boukman. Suzanne Blier identified the empowerment art of vodun. Blier examined the psychology and power of vodun as associated with bo and Bochio. Blier examined bo and Bochio as an agent of socialization. It is through the art that the spirit lives and is expressed. Art, politics and psychology have interlocking importance according to Blier. Blier examines the spiritual dimensions of culture and how this translates into the physical. One good example of this translation can be found in her examination of Bochio in which she explains that the spirit is found in the art. Bochio captures the emotional expression. It is the spirit made flesh in the art (Blier 1995: 101-106).

C.L.R. James examined the political dimensions of vodun, how the religion empowered the African and galvanized them into an effective political and military force for independence. Spiritual culture created the conditions that made it possible for the slave to have a political culture by creating networks of Africans that became coordinated in their actions.

Coverage of Afro-American history in North America has overlooked the role of vodun in early American history. This is a point that Suzanne Blier made when she

identified the presence of objects similar to Bochio and bo (e.g. Salem witch trials).

Vodun reached a pinnacle in the middle of the nineteenth century with the famed New Orleans “Voodoo queen,” Marie Laveau. In New Orleans voodoo came to be identified as a source of “magical” power.

The Yoruba remained the Yoruba as a result of the fact that their culture provided the philosophical means of comprehending and ultimately transcending , the forces that periodically threaten to dissolve them. In spite of civil wars, the horrors of the Middle Passage and enslavement in the Americas the religion of the Yoruba did not perish. Some historians such as Robert Thompson (1983) believed that it was the strong Yoruba culture which enabled this cultural group to not only survive attempts to destroy it during slavery but in addition enabled this group to become a culturally dominant group throughout the Caribbean.

An amazing fusion of Yoruba Orisha occurred in the Americas. The Ketu and Oyo deities that had been separated by civil war in Africa merged in the Americas along with the deities of the Yoruba influenced Ewe, Popo, and Fon slaves from territory directly west of Yorubaland. All these groups Thompson stated influenced the syncretism of deities in the Americas. Thompson (1983) contended that the “New World Yoruba” were introduced to the cult of Roman Catholic saints, and worked out a series of parallels linking the Christian saints with their African deities. Thompson illustrated how the Roman Catholic saint John was linked to the small pox deity,

because the latter's wounds were illustrated in chromo lithographs. Thus Mary's face was sometimes equated with the sweet and gentle aspect of the multifaceted goddess of the river, Oshun. Thus Shango, the Yoruba thunder god, in Cuba was frequently equated with Saint Barbara, whose killers were struck dead by God with lightning. (Thompson, 1983, p. 18)

Yoruba-Americans, outwardly practiced Catholicism while secretly and inwardly following their traditional religion. Many elements of African religion remained internalized in the consciousness of the enslaved Africans in spite of what lip service they payed to Catholicism which was introduced to Orisha. During the time of slavery drums were permitted on the islands of Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago but in the nineteenth century they were forbidden in Trinidad because the authorities feared that Obeah might provoke revolts.

Robert Thompson (1983) identified religion as the center piece of African culture. Art, music dance, and food were centered around religious beliefs. From the battle fields of Haiti to the kitchens of Brazil African religion was central to the African's resistance to slavery. Thompson implied that religion was the center of the slaves culture. The religion was a binding force that preserved the ritual language for the Orisha work to the present day (Yelvington, 1983). The Yoruba "immigrants", were the core of a unified African tradition which lent cultural dynamism in the form of religious, cultural and self help influence to the whole black Trinidadian population.

Yelvington quoted one white Creole's writing in which he noted that 'the whole Yoruba race of the colony may be said to form a sort of social language for mutual support and protection' (de Verteul, 1858:175). Robert Thompson (1983) and Janheinz Jahn (1961) both mentioned the Yoruba and Kongo groups as the major contributors of African religion in the Caribbeans. Robert Thompson identified the Yoruba as the creators of one of the premier cultures of the world. He points to the fact that Yoruba culture had its origins in the spiritual realm when he writes 'the Yoruba believe themselves descended from the goddesses and gods from an ancient spiritual capital Ile-Ife.'

Janheinz Jan (1961) took the position that in the case of Yoruba thought faith and reason are mutually dependent. Olodumare an architectonic of knowledge was built in which the finger of God was manifest in the most rudimentary elements of nature. Philosophy, theology, politics, social theory, land law, medicine, psychology, birth and burial, all find themselves logically concatenated in a system so tight that to "subtract one item from the whole is to paralyze the structure of the whole." writes Jan. Kevin Yelvington (1993) supported the idea of African world view as essentially spiritual, Yelvington stated that the African saw no distinction between the sacred and the worldly. This unity, Jan claimed, holds not only for Yoruba thought but also for the whole of traditional thinking in Africa, for African philosophy as such. Jan stated that European scholars such as Levy-Bruhl labeled this unity of views and attitude

'non-logical.' James Houk (1995) wrote that the authorities responded to the slave's religion by banning its practice. James Houk (1995) claimed that the slave's adapted to the environment of bondage by altering his religious practices. African divinities according to Houk would survive mainly in syncretic Afro-Christian religions such as Cuban Santeria, Haitian Voodoo and Trinidadian Shango. Blacks would speak of African spirits without identifying their African names. Sometimes they were known by local names. In Suriname the "Bush Negroes" called the god of the woods Bamboo and that of the water Boembe. Robert Thompson (1981) explained that Africans arriving on the shores of North and South America did not forget their ancestors or their gods: "Covertly they honored them at points of reverence and honor." Thompson raised the issue of duality of religious worship and paraphernalia. In one example Thompson mentioned how Shango the Yoruba thunder god who abstracted the flash of lightning in the sharp diagonals of a double headed axe became associated with Saint Barbara the Catholic saint who was associated with the flash of lightning and gunpowder. In Cuba Shango adapted around Catholicism by associating Saint Barbara with the flash of lightning and gunpowder. Both Shango and Saint Barbara were placed on alters to be worshiped. Brereton (1993) reported that Afro-Cuban syncretic faiths emerged as a result of resistance to slavery. Syncretic faiths typically merged traditional West African beliefs and practices with those of Christianity whether in its Protestant or Catholic variety. In the Trinidad as elsewhere Afro-Christian religions

may be seen as a continuum moving from almost 'pure African religions like Shango (or the Orisha religion) or the Rada cult to the Shouter /Spiritual Baptists who were Christian but whose rights and cosmology included African elements. "It need hardly be said that all these faiths have something in common," Brereton (1993) concluded.

The conversion and indoctrination of slaves was intimately linked with controlling and creating slaves for Christianity stressed submissiveness on earth in return for the rewards hereafter. As Emancipation approached the slaves might have outwardly accepted Christianity but the content of their religion remained essentially African. Historians such as Ramsey (1994) contended that it was to the religious beliefs and practices that the survival of African slaves was most attributed, with the consequence that religion has been established as the most dominant component of the African heritage in the New World.

In Tobago religious culture can be found every where from fishermen beliefs to the syncretic religions such as the Shouter Baptists to the revived and increasingly popular Shango or Orisha religion. In the town of Pembroke the author visited an Anglican church that had traces of African religious influences such as the playing of the Congo drum and a burial practice that consisted of burying the African under a calabash tree. These are African religious practices that were influenced one of the most puritanical churches on the island. There is the Africanization of Christian churches in Tobago.

The same importance is attached to religion in Tobago. From birth ceremonies in which consultations with certain spirits were held to initiation ceremonies of children passing into adulthood to marriage and funeral wakes at every stage of the Africans life religion was central providing the ideological justification and the psychological empowerment which enabled the African to understand and adapt to life. During the pre- emancipation period there was a struggle to control the mind of the slave through the use of Christian religions in recognition of the fact that religious indoctrination would be critical in controlling the enslaved African's thought process. The suppression of the African's religion was an attempt to depersonalize the African the colonial masters understood that human beings are cultural beings and when you depersonalize and desocialized humans you render them easier for dominance and control. The African's religion was central to the knowledge and use of African medicine. Even up til the 1960s there were only three doctors in Tobago and what was relied upon in Tobago was traditional African medicine. African religion formed the bases of other technologies such as iron smelting and wood carving, music, agriculture, dancing all of which are manifestations of African.

The doctrines of Christianity taught to the slaves by the colonial official in Tobago were doctrines of obedience. The enslaved Africans were prohibited from practicing their own religion or in other words indulging in their own thought processes. In order to control manifestations of the Africans culture (material and

immaterial) the colonial authorities sought to control the African's religious manifestations. In recognition of the fact that African religion if left intact would result in the African's culture remaining intact the colonial authorities imposed severe sanctions on the practice of African religion. Africans were punished in pre and post emancipation period for practicing their religion. Punishment included floggings and imprisonment. The Anglican and Methodist church viewed the African religion as works of the devil. However Africans in Tobago practices their religion clandestinely.

Historians such as Gordon Lewis(1983) explored the ideological dimensions of the slave system. Lewis showed how ideology was used to justify culture. Capitalist culture justified slavery by advancing pro-slavery ideologies. As long as slavery was profitable there where justifications by proponents of slavery. It was only when the demand for labor coincided with the African supply that the racist component began to emerge as the main property of the planter ideology. The prejudices of the caste and religious belief finally joined together with the physiological prejudice to compose a more or less coherent view concerning black and white, which the planter class and its defenders promulgated in a growing literature after 1700 e. g. For example the curse of Ham in popular biblical anthropology, the distinction between the children of light and the children of darkness, the Puritan obsession with sexuality so easily transformed to black, the concept of the non-Christian stranger.

The challenge and contradiction between slavery and Christianity could not be avoided. No apologist for the slavery regime could dismiss the contradiction in an

openly contemptuous fashion. Being immersed in the value system of Western Christianity, he was forced to meet it more responsibly. This accounts for the large amount of literature on the subject which did not die until the system itself died (Gordon Lewis, 1983, p.99-100).

African Religions such as Vodun, Shango and Santeria were not only sources of mystical power for the enslaved African but proved to have social significance or function under slavery. For the three hundred years that Africans were brought to the Americas in chains their African based religions were viewed as a threat the colonial rulers feared that the enslaved African would draw on Vodun “magic” to avenge the wrongs committed against them by the masters under enslavement. On the plantation one of the few ways that the African was able to maintain their ancient traditions and practices was through spirituality such as Vodun, Shango, and other African based religions. Colonial masters always feared the power of African religion in demonstrating the possibility of spiritual freedom and political freedom.

Haiti has become a good example in the power of religion to overthrow oppressive system. Anthropologist Wade Davis (1995), and George Ware (1995) and David Cosentino (1994) identified voodoo civilization and compared it with the Christian and Islamic civilization. Davis and Cosentino mention the example of Haiti where the enslaved African fled the plantations and built Maroon societies united by the belief in vodoun. If one were to list examples of true social revolutions in the Americas and even in the world, the list would not be complete without the mention of

the Haitian Revolution. In Haiti vodun enabled the creation of a grass roots network of resistance that ensured the defeat of the French. Prior to the Haitian experience the French under Napoleon had never been defeated. The enslaved Haitian African slave rose and destroyed the Spanish, French and English army in succession. The binding and motivating force in the success of the Haitian revolution was the African's belief in vodun. A network of vodun priests coordinated the African masses into an effective fighting force that could be utilized by such later day leaders as Toussaint L' Ouverture and Christophe Dessilines.

The European colonialist recognized the effectiveness of African religion in coordinating African resistance to the system of slavery after the Haitian experience and in quick succession of one another banned African religious practices. All African religion became Obeah, dark, devilish or primitive superstitions. The African drum was banned and many manifestations of African religion such as dance, song, festivals and even choices of foods e.g. the eating of salt were banned.

In Tobago religious resistance took various forms such as cultural or intellectual marronage which was characterized by the retention of African religious festivals such as the harvest festival songs performed by Mrs. Umelda Cruickshank in Pembroke Tobago to the thanks giving ceremony of Mr. Malcolm Melville a Shouter Baptist in Black Rock Tobago. The Slave Act of 1802 prohibited slaves from the practice of Obeah, specifically any pretense to supernatural powers to affect the lives and healths of others or to promote rebellions. Missionary reports in pre- emancipation

Tobago indicate the intensity and frustration that faced the colonial authorities in their attempts to convert the Africans to Christianity. Colonial denigration of the Africans religion took the forms of labeling where the African religious beliefs were described a satanic and primitive. The reality about African religious beliefs in Tobago was that it was a strong and lasting source of resistance to European cultural hegemony. There has been periods of decline and revival; of African religions in Tobago such as Shango and the Shouter Baptist in addition to religious beliefs often mislabeled superstitions by the pre and post emancipation colonial authorities.

John Stewart's observation that "An Obeah man or woman is a very wicked and dangerous person on the plantation". Obeah was worked by individual priests who dealt in magic, poisons, herbs and folk medicines and were highly secretive. Bush supported her position by noting that Monica Schuler (1970) had pointed out that traditional African religious practice had lent itself quite well to organized rebellion; it was a unifying force to those who believed in it and also provided an acceptable excuse for the gathering of slaves. At the gathering in an aura of spirit possession orders to rebel could be given. John Stedman's (1795) observation in which he described in vivid detail how slave spiritual leaders, in this case women, subverted the slaves through the medium of 'pagan' ceremonies.'

The enslaved African never totally surrendered his African religious beliefs in Tobago. Obeah was and still is widely practiced in Tobago and many people of Christian faith practice these beliefs. The Orisha beliefs and Shouter Baptist faith are

religions that resulted from cultural marronage.

The Influence of Christianity

It is in the magico-religious field of Afro-American cultism that the enslaved populations developed and nurtured their own distinctive world view, their own distinctive ideology. It was a mortal struggle between Europe and Africa, waged as bitterly as any war of religion. European priest and African revivalist led opposing camps as hostile to each other as Catholic and Puritan. (Lewis, 1983).

Even in cases where Africans converted to Christianity, almost universally the white ministers in the West Indies exaggerated their role in the conversion of a quarter million slaves to Christianity during the period from 1799 to 1824. (Bridges, 1982). The ministers distorted the enslaved African's motivation for making what was essentially a voluntary transition. The parts played by Christianity in the creolization and slave resistance alike can therefore be truly assessed only by examining more closely the meaning of Christianity for the slaves themselves (Craton, 1982). The enslaved African worshiped his voodoo deities under the guise of worshipping Catholic Saints in Haiti (Davis, 1995). The African contribution to the Caribbean religious life of the Caribbean colonies must not be overlooked. The growth of Caribbean syncretic religions involved the mixing of Old World and New World religious and folkloristic traditions. As early as the 1680s the Bishop Thomas Mathews described the Corpus Christi festival in the streets of San Juan, Puerto Rico in bitter and scandalous terms about the way the mulattoes combined African fertility dances with the Spanish dance celebrating the Spanish-Moor wars. Mathews described the spectacle of the half naked

women and stated that so great was the scandal that the King of Angola would have been shocked by the indecency had he been in the procession. The complaint graphically shows how the Catholic religion was being compelled to adjust to the inroads of popular Creole traditions alien to its spirit. (Thomas Mathews, mimeographed San Juan, n.d.). The religious beliefs of the Shouter Baptists are directly influenced by West African concepts and procedures. Drums and shac-shacs forbidden in Christian rites are naturally absent, but the deficiency is compensated by handclapping and vocal rhythm from the individual person called "the doption." which in all forms have the vigor of the African ancestors (Thomas, 1987). Christianity rarely was fully understood or accepted by Africans. Its insistence on a sole deity forbade a part of African beliefs. It did not seem right to relinquish their old traditions entirely, so a religion grew up in Trinidad and Tobago, generally based on nature worship adding features of Christian teaching of prophets and apostles of old. The Christian practices and doctrines that have been adopted include baptism of the Holy Ghost, mourning, talking in tongues, healing preaching, and teaching of the gospel according to the diverse gifts manifested by the Holy Ghost. Some of these practices bear striking resemblances to the African concepts in their surviving forms. In this way the descendants of the slaves combined part of their cultural heritage with some aspects of Christianity (Thomas, 1987).

The result was the introduction of African religious beliefs into Christian religion. The highly Africanized Spiritual Baptist to the more European Catholic faith

have all been influenced by elements of African religion from music (e.g. the introduction of the drum into ceremony in some Anglican churches), dance (dancing in Catholic Churches), to burial practices (burial of the deceased under the calabash tree).

Summary of Literature Review

Cultural continuities between Africa and Black Caribbean societies can be established through ethnographic evidence and some authentic historical evidence such as written archival sources and travelers and missionary accounts. The process is still on going among historians and anthropologists. Following the introduction of Africans into the plantation system of the Americas and the colonial regime which followed” much of African traditional culture, more than the earlier skeptics had admitted has persisted especially in the islands of the Caribbean.” (J.D. Elder, 1984).

According to Mary Twining (1984) certain eminent students of the Black experience held that the Africans were stripped of their social heritage when they crossed the Atlantic as slaves. Herskovits (1966) and Frazier agree in some sense on the paucity of Africanisms in the Americas. Subsequent research has shown that there is more here in America in the way of Africanisms than either Herskovits or Frazier imagined.

On the other hand there are those who hold similar view with Herkovits that the culture of American Blacks is more American than African in an especially pure sense. For Herkovits it is the Suriname Blacks who are culturally African while the United States Africans had more departures from African modes of life. Frazier and Herkovits argued for the integration of the culturally naked Afro-Americans into the American mainstream.

J.D. Elder(1984) a cultural anthropologist and musicologist argued that there was not enough evidence to establish historical relations between culture traits. There was no sure way of telling whether an item of culture shared by two groups is shared because of diffusion, common origin and subsequent migration, or parallel and independent development. J. D. Elder's (1984) the Tobago House of Assembly produced sufficient evidence to establish cultural relations between Africa and Trinidad and Tobago without question and this was so, despite the fact that the Caribbean Community was exposed to Europeans and their culture since the 16th century. Whereas Suzanne Blier and Robert Thompson take the position that the African culture has largely survived and adapted to the plantation and colonial experience and Wade Davis takes the position that the religion the Africans followed (Vodun) in Haiti was essentially African.

In this section the author will examine the major features of certain culture areas in order to depict broad similarities between them and African traditional culture forms. The research will focus on religion and religious beliefs and expressions with some coverage of, social structure, organization and popular literature.

Several authorities in the field of demographic history such as Philip Curtin (1969) and Noel Deer (1949-50) have tried to determine the specific ethnic groups and nations from which enslaved Africans and indentured servants who came to the Americas originated. The studies of this sort are still in progress. Some workers have employed the techniques of physical anthropology with a measure of success. Others

have used linguistics and commercial records. Among the early pioneers was Melville Herskovits and the later pioneers such as Phillip Curtin and R.R. Kuczynsky. Later studies have been conducted by Herbert Klein (1984), and linguistics Maureen Warner-Lewis (1991) as well as the works of art historians such as Robert Thompson (1983) and Suzanne Blier (1995) who have conducted extensive research into the transfer of certain vital cultural and artistic traditions of African to the New World where they were elevated to the status of centerpieces in the popular culture of the New World societies.

Thompson(1984) concentrates on the Yoruba, Mende, Kongo and Ejagham peoples and cultural forms displayed in the African diaspora in the Americas. Thompson is the most anthropological of African art historians if we are to take anthropology not to be a body of data but a perspective which attempts to experience objects in a way they are intended to be seen and understood by the people for whom they are made. Thompson is best when providing precise analysis of the form and iconography of specific objects and their transformation in the New World. In his most successful comparisons he couples formal analysis with informants interpretations and linguistic and historical evidence. This information then provides the background that supports the internal evidence of the objects themselves. “For example the creation of the Yoruba fan created for rituals associated with the sea goddess. Are with one made for the Cuban goddess Yemaya easily establishes iconographical continuities between these two Old and New World art forms.” (Flash

Of the Spirit, 1983).

Suzanne Blier (1987) has examined African art and architecture as a cultural expression . Blier uses art as a medium through which culture is explained. Art becomes an adjective not a noun it is an expression of cultural beliefs. The basis of art and architecture Blier suggests lies, in the intellectual ideas of the time and place. Its significance is grounded in the experiences and intellectual explanations of its makers and users.

The linguist Maureen Warner Lewis (1991) documented African continuities in African religious beliefs such as Shango and the Rastafari belief system. Maureen has documented evidence of African and African derived words e.g. fufu Twi word for starchy food which is pounded and served in balls. Maurice is a specialist in African and comparative Afro-Caribbean culture.

Other authorities such as Patrick Polk(1992), James Houk(1996), Stephan Glazier, Donald Cosentino (1987) etc. have studied African cultural continuities in the form of religious beliefs in the last decade or so. While much progressed has been done in dispelling the mis-perception of the culturally naked African (stripped of culture as a result of the slave experience) there is much work to be done. The Caribbean is a diverse region with many local peculiarities even when there are social similarities. For instance Tobago has experienced a different history than Trinidad although both became British possessions. The religious histories of both islands are distinct. It is this distinction that must be further explored on a cases by case basis. In Tobago land

marronage was virtually nonexistent. The rate of conversion to Christianity was near one hundred percent. While land marronage did not exist in Tobago incidents of sea marronage can be found. In addition cultural marronage occurred in Tobago in response to different social forces than existed in Tobago. In Tobago African resistance was in response to puritan Protestantism while in Trinidad it was the resistant mainly to Catholicism. It is important to recognize that in illustrating certain theories of cultural diffusion and retention that peculiarities exist from island to island and even within islands. In addition it is important to understand the dynamic nature of religion. Many changes have taken place in Caribbean religions due to changes in time and location. How has the introduction of the African into Tobago the experience of enslavement and social oppression affected the Africans religious beliefs over the years. Frequently these changes are ignored in the academic study of Caribbean religions.

The review of literature presented in Section I, included research and scholarship related to the topics of slavery, marronage, the nature of African religion, syncretism in the Caribbean and religion as cultural marronage. Section II documents how African religious beliefs survived despite colonial attempts to suppress and destroy African religion under the slave and post emancipation colonial system.

The main aim of slavery was to provide economic wealth to the European powers and in the case Tobago in the 1760s wealth to Great Britain. The slave provided free labor which could be exploited at little or no cost in terms of wages to

the colonial authorities. The basis for slavery was economic. Karl Marx took the position that slavery was the force that produced industrialization. All other justifications for the imposition of this institution were secondary reasons according to Karl Marx and Gordon Lewis. (Gordon Lewis, 1983) Slavery to exploited cheap labor and filled the manpower shortage that plagued the colonies. The primary reason for the enslavement of the African (economic exploitation for the benefit of the European system) were concealed and pro-slavery ideologies used not only to justify slavery to the European masses but to convince the slave that subjugation was his proper position in life just as the Catholic church justified serfdom in Europe. Economic exploitation has always been the reason for the enslavement of peoples from the days of Egypt, Greece to the Rome.

Slavery existed in ancient Rome where the ideal slave was the blond hair, blue eyed Germanic or Celtic European. Within the last five hundred years the African became the stereotypical slave. Under slavery the European colonialists tried to make the enslaved African chattels dependent for their existence on the charity, generosity or benevolence of their masters. The slave had no intrinsic rights. The principles on which British West Indian slave laws were based were developed long before Tobago came to be settled in the 1760s and the Tobago legislature was able to adopt principles that were developed elsewhere. Slave laws in Tobago were very similar to all other British West Indian slave laws. The slaves were property but there was an attempt to regulate the Africans behavior who unlike other property could reason and thus had to be

controlled. The main aim of the slave code was to ensure that the slave remained property. This aim was ensured through various propaganda mechanisms such as racial ideologies which stated that the African was inferior to the European and that he was devoid of culture “ a savage.”

In order to control the African’s thought process proponents of slavery such as Willie Lynch understood that the African’s cultural heritage had to be undermined. And since religion is central to African culture this meant religious expressions. The colonial authorities attempted to eliminate the African’s culture by mixing ethnic groups at random, breaking up families and later on undermining the key to African culture his religion by making Christians of the African and banning African religion. In spite of pre colonial and post colonial attempts to eradicate all traces of African religious expression African religion remain in extreme cases such as Tobago where the rate of conversion to Christianity was ninety-nine percent.

While much scholarship has focused on the persistence of African religions in the Caribbean, from the works of Suzanne Blier (1995), Robert Thompson (1983), Wade Davis (1995)etc., little work has been done on the material or political impact of these belief systems. There is a need for research to be conducted on the persistence of African religion and religious expressions in Tobago. More data is needed in order to make broad generalizations about processes through which these institutions were made and maintained let alone the ways in which they empowered African actors in the Caribbean. This thesis is an abbreviated or specialized addition to our knowledge of

Afro-American religions and religious practices, their importance and persistency.

SECTION TWO

THE RELIGIOUS CULTURE OF TOBAGO: THE CASE STUDY

Chapter VI

TOBAGO'S AFRICAN DERIVED RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Research Findings

The analysis of the ethnographic, oral and religious history associated with Tobago allowed certain conclusions to be made concerning the interaction of European and African cultural forces. Clearly, the plantation system had an observable impact on the slaves of Tobago in terms of cultural practices and beliefs. The introduction of Christianity e.g. the Anglican church and the introduction of the English language are but two European cultural forms that have impacted the communities of Tobago. However the retention of African cultural peculiarities was undeniable and could be seen in the form of religious beliefs and in the retention to some degree of some African words from a certain West African language (Yoruba) that the author was able to identify.

The analysis of various religious beliefs found in the Caribbean island of Tobago allowed certain conclusions to be made concerning the retention of African based religions and religious beliefs associated with Tobago. In spite of ninety- eight percent conversion rate to Christianity on the island of Tobago there existed a dual belief in and practice of African -based religions from the highly African Shango or Orisha and Obeah to the more Christianized but still African based Shouter or Spiritual Baptist religion, to traces of African beliefs in Christian churches such as evidence of African burial practices found in the Anglican and Catholic churches. Many beliefs

some of which were labeled as superstitious by earlier historical writers, had at least part of their roots in African religious practices. As with the followers of Vodun who worshiped deities under the guise of worshiping Catholic Saints the Shouter Baptists of Tobago maintained their African beliefs and practices while having a dual belief in Christianity and its rituals. Bits and pieces of African religious beliefs and practices existed on the island of Tobago and had to be put together like a jigsaw puzzle.

Unlike the enslaved Africans of Haiti and the larger sister island of Trinidad, who had to adapt to Catholicism, the enslaved Africans of Tobago had to adapt mainly to the Protestant faith. The British were entrenched in Puritan values similar to that of the pilgrims which landed on Plymouth Rock (Interview with Robert Dillon, Scarborough Tobago, 1997). Anglican and Methodist churches viewed African religions as works of the devil. African religious practices and beliefs were labeled superstition. There was no evidence pointing to the fact that these spiritual beliefs were practiced within the Christian churches during the pre emancipation colonial period. This would have been highly unlikely given the laws against the practice of African religious beliefs. However colonial records show that the Africans practiced their beliefs and this often concerned the colonial officials who were afraid that African practices (especially the Obeah men) would incite rebellions. The second clause of the Slave Law of 1802 prohibited the practice of Obeah, specifically any pretense to supernatural powers to affect the health or lives of others or to promote rebellion, under the pain of death or appropriate lesser punishment. However, evidence pointed to the

fact that these beliefs survived the pre-emancipation colonial experience and are still practiced in modern day Tobago. The retention of African based religious beliefs and practices was found in the practice of Obeah, Shouter or Spiritual Baptists harvest ceremonies, house blessings burial practices, songs birth ceremonies, fishermen beliefs of the people of Tobago and even practices within the Christian church itself (e.g. Anglican and Catholic).

Umelda Cruickshank of Pembroke

The harvest rituals of Umelda Cruickshank of Pembroke is an example of the continuation of African religious practices in Tobago. Umelda Cruickshank is a eighty-one year old native of Pembroke, Tobago. Umelda Cruickshank's great grandfather was "kidnaped" from Africa and enslaved in Pembroke by William Hamilton. He retained his African religious beliefs and passed them on to his descendants who passed them on to her. Cruickshank plays the African drums and sings in Yoruba. She has knowledge and practices elements of Yoruba religion (e.g. the harvest festival) The author has identified Yoruba words in the ritual performances of the eighty one year old Umelda Cruickshank. Umelda also played the drums and spoke of African religious beliefs that she knew about.

Yoruba words Identified

The Umelda Cruiksaunk had knowledge of Yoruba, (a West African language) . This was the language that she sang in whenever she played the "congo" drums. Cruickshank explained that she performed in Yoruba whenever she celebrated her

harvest ritual. The Yoruba words spoken by Criuckshank were understood by modern day speakers of Yoruba that the author let listen to the tape suggesting that there might not be a considerable degree of phonological deterioration in this case. Although most all of the Yoruba words were retained in relation to religious songs they were discernable to modern day speakers of Yoruba. The following words have been identified as Yoruba:

Ade-crown

Gbadun-enjoyment

Ile Igbudun io da- you are at the place of enjoyment

Ile- Home/place

Iba io da- pay tribute

Bamijo- Dance with me

Umelda Criuckshank started playing the drums at the age of twelve. The knowledge of drumming was taught to her by her mother who in turn received it from her grandfather William Hamilton who was brought to Pembroke Tobago and enslaved around the early eighteen hundreds.(Oral interview with Umelda Criuckshank, 1997). The drums were used in the performance of religious songs. She played the drum in the West African style of call and response, best described as multiple rhythms that Yoruba people use to distinguish themselves from each other while they remain

dynamically related (Chernoff, 1979). Thompson suggested that multiple meter is in brief a communal examination of percussive individuality (Thompson, 1966).

Criuckshank is a member of the Anglican church of Pembroke Tobago and a devoted follower of African religious rituals and customs. She plays the drums in the Anglican church in Pembroke and also occasionally attends the Shouter Baptist church. The playing of drums in the Anglican church would have been very unlikely during the colonial period considering the social atmosphere at the time. The Africans were not even allowed into the Anglican Church which was overtly racist in its policies during the slave period in Tobago. (K.O.Lawrence,1995). In 1997 Pembroke this was not the case. Cruickshank who was a prominent member of the African church played the drums not only in the Anglican church but in the Shouter Baptist church as well.

In the yard of the Anglican church in Pembroke the author observed burial practices that were African in origin. The deceased Anglicans of Pembroke were buried under the calabash tree. The calabash tree(and its relative the gourd) is said to have supernatural powers because it is durable. It stores water and survives droughts better than other trees in Tobago and tropical West Africa. Both in West Africa and Tobago the calabash, silk cotton and baobab trees and several shrubs are sacred species.(Parrinder, 1969). The calabash tree is believed to ward off evil spirits. The calabash tree is also considered a place where spirits gather (Interview with Robert

Dillon, 1997). Mr. Edward Hernandez explained that the Africans in Tobago believed in the tree of life. People would join together around the tree of life which meant that everyone was connected together. The tree was symbolic as the tree of life. From the tree one received food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. The walking stick that the African chiefs in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa have represents the tree of life, the I am. Trees could not be cut down without certain rituals such as barking. (Oral interview with Edward Hernandez, Tobago museum, Scarborough, 1997).

Cruickshank explained that the calabash was used as a utensil for drinking eating and bathing. Plantain banana silk cotton and cassava were also planted in the grave site of the Anglican church. Whenever anyone wanted to evoke a spirit they would go to the silk cotton tree and give a sacrifice of rum, wine sweet water, plain water, white rice, chicken feet and gizzard. This sacrifice could be used to kill one's enemies. Whatever one wanted a person to do one could influence them to do it by evoking the spirits at the silk cotton tree (Interview with Umelda Cruickshank, Pembroke, August 1997)). Knowledge of the slavery days was passed on to Umelda Cruickshank by her mother, according to her. Umelda Cruickshank claimed that her mother practiced African religion played the drums and sang about the Obeah man.

Spiritual Healers

Spiritual healers treated their patients with herbs, prayers and messages. There was faith and belief in the validity of spiritual healing. (oral interview with Robert Dillon, Scarborough, 1997). Many healers are Shouter Baptists. Up until the 1960s there were only three medical doctors in Tobago and most of the people depended on spiritual healers. According to one informant, “These beliefs are from way back”(oral interview with Edward Hernandez, Fort King George Tobago,1997). According to colonial records obtained by Higman from 1819-21, slave “doctors” were considered more successful than white. They worked to some extent under white doctors but they used their own herbal remedies.(Higman, op. cit., 272.) Obeah men and women were also skilled in herbal remedies and made useful contribution to combating disease (Marshall, op. cit., 272), though they often operated in opposition to white doctors. The slaves for their part were commonly reluctant to accept the ministrations of white doctors and preferred the herbalists and Obeah men(C.O. 285/16, f. 105).

Birth and Death

When a child is born a navel string is buried by the tan tan a tree and that tree becomes the child’s tree. The trees were donated to the grandchild and this donation was done in such a way that everyone had trees. This practice was identified in West

Africa where the iroko tree was held to be sacred all along the coast. Called Loko in Dahomey it was one of the most ancient cults and has its special characteristics. Myths tell of how men and women descended to earth from the branches of a huge mythical Loko. A number of ancestral-divine shrines at Abomey and Porto Novo in Dahomey bear names compounded of Loko (Parrinder 1969). Some people consider that the spirit which inhabits the tree is particularly concerned with fertility of human beings. The souls of those about to be born may be said to live in trees. Women often pray to the spirits in trees such as the iroko, baobab, silk-cotton, acacia, mahogany and palm tree to bring them children to bring them fertility. All trees are thought to have souls but other and more powerful spirits than the essence of the tree itself may take up abode there(Parrinder, 1969). The iroko or the African oak is a sacred species all along the African coast and is a god. Loko, in Dahomey. Among the Ibo of Owerri and Aba in Nigeria the guardian Chi lives in heaven, and has one ward (Chi-child or child on earth). The genius is not to be confused with the supreme God, of the same name, but he is greater than his under- soul who comes to earth. The personal genius is represented by a tree in front of the house. It may be referred to as “my god” or “my genius”(Parrinder 1976). Ewe and Yoruba villages have their trees. These are often baobab trees. An assimilation of the souls of trees to those of men may be traced in the circumlocutions used when a prince or a king dies: “a branch has fallen,” “a mighty

tree has been uprooted". The tree is associated with birth and a childless mother will pray for children among the trees. When the umbilical cord of a baby is cut off it is buried under a palm tree. Harm done to the tree may injure the child as well. (Parrinder 1976).

In Tobago a gift offering was made to the home of the child and the master of ceremonies would preside over the baptism offering made at the home of the child. There would be bidding to have the master of ceremonies to stop talking. This was a way of donating to the child and his parents. During times of death the body of the deceased would be buried within twenty four hours of death using the tree that was dedicated to the deceased individual during time of birth to provide material for the coffin. The whole idea was that there was not to be a burden on the family in death birth or marriage.

These beliefs and practices are not as common as they once were as recently as the 1960s because many Tobagonians now live abroad. Today one could wait for one to two weeks because everyone is coming from abroad. Today death is the burden of the family. However, these practices can still be found in remote areas of Tobago such as Pembroke, where they continued until the 1960s when people began to claim the trees that were located on communal lands and were charged with trespassing. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed the breakdown of the extended family where grandmother

educated the children in the ways of African culture. Now the grandparent's average ages have gone down and they are often still working now. The result is that there are fewer people with time to pass down knowledge to the grandchildren.

On the occasions of funerals, the relatives of the deceased often go to considerable expense in providing a feast, in inviting a number of their friends to partake with them. A fowl which they select and which their superstition dictates must be either black or white, is prepared in a peculiar manner, as being intended entirely for the benefit of the dead.

Among the Yoruba of West Africa, a funeral is a critical time when the deceased's spirit lingers in the world disembodied. There is also the expectation that the spirit will eventually return in the newborn children. A funeral in this way marks an ending as well as a new beginning. (Drewal, 1992).

General Spiritual Beliefs

The enslaved Africans of Tobago had a variety of religious beliefs that were derived from their African ancestors. A Methodist missionary in Tobago in 1822 expressed the opinion that the Africans had "some belief in the transmigration of souls." This missionary believed that the principle reason for the slaves resistance to

Christianity was that accepting it would prevent the return of their souls to Africa, which was otherwise assured. Ancestors were recognized as active spirits and there was a belief in duppies, ghosts and jumbies, all spirits of the departed. (K.O.Lawrence, 1995). These spirits and native gods associated with water, sea and land had an important influence on the fortunes of every individual and religious practitioners mediated between the individual and the spirit world.

African tradition was also reflected in the persistent influence of Obeah (Lawrence, 1995). This practice involved the use of potions and spells designed to protect the user and his property or to inflict harm on his enemies or both. Obeah men and women were skilled in the use of herbs for medicinal purposes and poisons to cause harm. To the European the Obeah man was a witch doctor engaging in evil. In Africa the Obeah man was priest, philosopher and doctor and many sought to play that same role in the West Indies. Some achieved considerable influence over the slaves among whom they practiced even those who became Christians. (C.O. 285/16 .142 Young to Liverpool 18 December 1811).

Fisherman Beliefs

The fishermen of Tobago seemed to have been influenced by Obeah beliefs and have maintained traces of Obeah beliefs through practices. Tobago is rich in fishery

resources. There is a continuing belief in Obeah among the fishermen of Tobago. Many of Tobago's villages are located on the coast for example, Scarborough (the capital of Tobago), Charlotteville, Speyside, Casatra, and Black Rock to name a few. As a result many Tobagonians benefit from the efforts of Tobago fishermen. These practices point to the general African belief in the interaction of the spirit world and the individual and the spirit world. Deities associated with land and water are thought to control the fate of the fisherman and there is interaction with his ancestors. The author was only able to identify evidence that hinted to syncretic religious beliefs some of which have their roots in the belief of Obeah and Shango. (Interview with Peter, Black Rock, 1997)

Many of these beliefs are based on things that may bring good or bad luck to the fisherman's activities. The fishermen believe that other men can harm them. This was described to the author as rituals which are in keeping with Obeah beliefs. Obeah beliefs are a system of shamanism, magical curing and sorcery. The author observed a fisherman offer libations to the spirits which consisted of alcohol in a calabash. The following beliefs also indicated the intervention of spirits and deities or gods in the lives and affairs of the men of Tobago. The Yoruba believe that the goddess of the Sea (Olukun) dwells in the cool watery environment beneath the sea. Yemoja is the daughter of Olukun. Yemoja is the master of all the waters. The author was able to talk to a fisherman named Henry who discussed fisherman beliefs and practices as follows:

A fisherman should not wash his hands before going to sea. It is thought that by washing his hands his luck would be washed away. A fisherman should not play with animals such as goats, sheep, pigs, dogs, donkeys or cows before going to sea. Doing this is supposed to cause the fisherman ill luck during the fishing trip. Having sex before a fishing trip is supposed to bring bad luck. Touching chive before going to sea is supposed to bring bad luck. Some fishermen believe that spraying their boats with oils and ointments will bring them good luck when they go out to sea. Other fishermen believe in using bushes and limes to bathe their boats and their bodies. This is supposed to remove any bad luck attached to their boats or their persons. Some fishermen carry bushes and limes hidden away in their boat. This is supposed to keep away bad luck. Cursing the sea is supposed to bring bad luck to the fisherman.

Fishermen are very strong in their belief that certain persons tie their boats and seine. When the boat and seine are tied it is impossible for them to catch any fish. The only way that they can catch fish is to have their boats untied. Some fishermen believe that freshly caught fish should be cooked on the beach where they are caught on banana leaves. The fish is then eaten with the bare hands and any dog that comes around is fed. The belief is that the dogs may contain spirits of their ancestors. Eating food on the beach together with any spirits of ancestors is supposed to bring continued good luck in fishing. Henry could not really explain the significance of these practices

to the author although he claimed they were African beliefs.

The day of the blessing of the fisherman the boat is half on land and half in the water. The belief is that man belongs to the land and must offer half to the sea. It used to be common practice for the fishermen of Tobago to leave one side of the sandal on land and take another with them. This was to ensure the safe return from sea. This practice is declining in Tobago.

One fisherman named Peter claimed that he circled a school of fish with his net yet came up with only logs. He then offered libations consisting of alcohol in a calabash to the spirits and was able to catch fish. He also claimed that a rival fisherman caught frogs in the ocean although frogs don't live in the ocean (Interview, Black Rock Tobago, 1997).

In Tobago the fishermen believe that the sea belongs to god and that offerings must be made to the sea. This interaction between man and the deities are made through sacrifices of various kinds.(Interview, Black Rock Tobago, 1997). The belief in the presence of spirits and their power over the fishermen of Tobago is apparent. Just as the beliefs and practices surrounding Obeah and the Spiritual Baptists the moral code attached to the fishermen of Tobago requires that people appease the spirits so that they may not be offended. Just as with Obeah there was no particular religious affiliation. The relationship of man with the supernatural was recognized and forces

(spirits) such as deities and acts of Obeah beyond the fishermen's control were managed through rituals of obligations such as offerings. The general structure of the fishermen beliefs tended to hint towards African religious beliefs although the author was not able to specifically identify the ritual practices which suggested that a syncretic process had taken place between Obeah and Orisha beliefs and other beliefs yet to be identified.

The fisherman beliefs were passed on from generation to generation since the pre-emancipation period (Interview with Malcolm Melville, 1997). The practice of these rituals is declining in Tobago and there is room for much more research in order to document its beliefs and practices.

The study of the beliefs and practices of the African peoples leads to the theological observation that African traditional religion is a religion of salvation and wholeness. A careful analysis shows an emphasis on this-worldly salvation and wholeness as the reason of African traditional religion. Because the fishermen believe that life is a complex web of relationships that may either enhance and preserve life or diminish and destroy it, the goal of their rituals is to maintain those relationships that protect and preserve life. For it is the harmony and stability provided by these relationships, both spiritual and material, that create the conditions for well-being and wholeness.

Africanisms

Melville and Francis Herskovits recorded Yoruba ritual, Shango, fishermen and Shouter Baptist songs in Trinidad in 1939. The songs were key to Melville Herskovit's theories on the retention of West African cultural traits in the Americas. Such Africanisms together with syncretisms (traits that combine two cultural heritages) were important points in his theory of acculturation. Prior to Herskovit's controversial theories on West African retention, there had not been much field work done on these areas. The popular paradigm was that "barbarous" African culture "naturally" gave way to the "superior" culture of the white man.

Melville Herskovits was the first of the scholars to systematically record a accurate account of African-American culture in North America, the Caribbean, and South America. He showed how African culture adapted in its many forms (e.g. religion, music, etc.) in response to European influence.

Melville Herskovits published Trinidad Village in 1947. This book covered the culture of the village in Toco in northeastern Trinidad. Music was the central importance of their work. J. D. Elders work on the African heritage in the music of Trinidad and Tobago was influenced by Herskovits via Daniel Crowley and Andrew C. Pearse. Together with Fernando Ortiz, Elsie Clews Parsons, Laura Boulton, and Harold

Courlander, Herskovits laid the ground-work for all subsequent study and appreciation of Caribbean music.

Dr. J. D. Elder (1984) raised the issue of a constellation of cultural traits in Tobago clearly identifiable as African in of origin as evidence that there is cultural continuity between Africa and Tobago. Elders established cultural continuities between Africa and the Black Caribbean societies by introducing authentic historical and ethnographic evidence in the form of religious beliefs and practices and of music. J.D. Elders took the position that there were more Africanisms than even Herskovits or Frasier imagined. Elder argued because of the cultural continuities or commonality between Africa and the Caribbean nations closer cultural ties should be encouraged and maintained.

It is only in contemporary times that African religions were studied (Edward Hernandez 1997). Bits and pieces of African history have to be put together like a jigsaw puzzle (Huworth Leoce, 1997). All African religious practices were outlawed and no records kept. The duality of religious symbols and rituals can be found in Tobago. In Tobago African dances and religious ceremonies were common during the 1800s but they were hidden from authorities (Interview with Huworth Leoce). Most African religions were branded with the label 'Obeah' and prohibited. As far as the colonial authorities were concerned any African ritual was considered "black magic".

The African religion Shango was looked upon as heathen and demonic, a dark religion. Anything black was looked down upon. The master started sowing the seeds of inferiority by saying that the African needed to be saved. The drums, religion, and many other manifestations of African culture were suppressed even up till the 1960s. Most religious activities happened in secret. The Africans in Tobago preached the gospel according to the gospel that was never written and known.

The knowledge of African religion was obtained through oral history and ethnographic studies of religious practices in Tobago. From 1783 to the 1960s a families success was dependent on one's conversion to Christianity. During the slave period in Tobago which spanned from the 1780s to the 1830s the enslaved African was forced into Christianity (Eileen Guillaume, 1997). Following emancipation the emancipated Blacks entered Christianity in part to ensure social advancement in the form of education, work opportunities and social acceptance. Social advancement was rare in cases where the African did not convert to Christianity (Huworth Leoce, 1997). This is true in the case of the island of Trinidad where the East Indians were forced to convert to Christianity in order to obtain better opportunities for jobs and education. Success for the African often meant the conversion to Christianity while at the same time maintaining some African spiritual beliefs and practices.

These religious practices that the author has observed indicate the continuity of

African religious beliefs and rituals in Tobago even though in some cases adaptations have occurred. The author has observed Yoruba words and religious music (the harvest festival) being performed by an eighty-one year old master of the “Congo”, the lower range or “bass” drum. This native of Tobago says she got her knowledge of language and drums from her mother and fathers who got it from her great grandfather William Hamilton who came from Africa. She started drumming at the age of twelve. She also plays the chak chak and the steel drum. Mrs. Cruickshank narrated a story on how her great grandfather went down on the beach and a ship took them away and when they were brought to Tobago those who didn't eat salt flew back to Africa while those who ate salt were trapped in Tobago. Two members of the town Pembroke bought her great grandfather, they were William Hamilton whom her great grandfather was named after and bought the enslaved African. Umelda Cruickshank claimed that her grand father was kidnaped in West Africa and brought to Suriname and that her great grandfather was brought to Tobago to work on the estate of William Hamilton. Cultural marronage not only resulted in the preservation of African religion in pre-emancipation colonial Tobago but has resulted in the resurgence of African religion such as Orisha, which is now more organized than it has ever been probably at any time in both Trinidad and Tobago. Emancipation day which was mostly frowned upon by the Africans in Tobago has become very popular and now takes on religious and

cultural significance in the form of dances, music and customs.

Umelda Cruickshank explained that her great grandfather ate salt after he was captured and transported to Tobago suggests that links with Africa persisted in behavior and belief. Because he ate salt he could not fly back to Africa. Cruickshank explained that salt represented things of the earth, to enter the spirit no salt could be consumed. This belief was common among the inhabitants of Tobago who often claimed that their ancestors did not fly back to African because they had consumed salt. It was also believed that those who did not consume salt were able to fly back to Africa. (Oral interviews with Robert Dillon, Umelda Cruickshank and Malcolm Melville, Tobago, 1997).

Obeah and the Shouter Baptists Religion

Having been nurtured in the close bonds of an African society, the house slaves responded well to the patronage they enjoyed from their masters and an environment of intimacy and kinship bastard though it was. The white masters, with their powers and display, replaced the African chief or king, but the field slaves filled this culturally conditioned emotional vacuum with their adulation of and reliance on the rebel leader or more usually, the obeah priest. (Braithwaite, 1971).

Obeah is a system in which a person's actions are assumed to have practical or mystical consequences for himself and other humans or objects. Obeah (sometimes spelled Obi) is a term used throughout the West Indian islands to describe 1. A belief in

the presence of spirits and in the active participation of spirits in everyday lives and 2 the practice of human mediators(men and women) ritually manipulating the supernatural in order to obtain certain ends. Early missionaries complained of the belief that there are two spirits in a person, that after death one must send the dead off in a prescribed manner, and that the Obeah men (with magical power) must be consulted in order to rid a surviving or bereaved person of those spirits that are still present. Joseph J. Bell (a Catholic priest) presented evidence that Obeah originated in Africa and was brought to the Americas by comparing historical writings on eight West Indian Islands (Bell 1932). Blacks in Haiti believed that each person has two souls- one which at death returns to Africa while the other remains with the corpse until a priest is called to exorcize it (Leoderer 1936). Again it was believed that one's spirit returned to Africa after death(interview with Cruickshank, 1997).

Obeah is defined as every pretended assumption of supernatural power or knowledge whatever for fraudulent or illicit purposes or for gain or for injury to any person (Herskovits 1947). Price called Obeah “ black magic” by which sickness could be put on people and “evil spirits” could be put on people's “minds and homes”. These descriptions leave a lot to be desired because Obeah is also used for the puposes of healing. People clog the holes in their houses with rags in order to keep out the spirits. (Bell 1889). It is believed that a person is born with two spirits which exist in a balanced

relationship- a good spirit and a bad spirit. A person is born with a good spirit (which is given to him by God) and a bad spirit (which originates through one's mind) comes with maturity. These spirits manifest themselves through one's actions. Thus, if the bad spirit is stronger, the good spirit goes away and the person goes around doing wickedness (starting arguments, stealing, killing, raping not participating in community, etc.). However if the good spirit is stronger the person "lives well" with everybody (gets along with family and neighbors, does no harm to anybody, visits the sick attends church regularly, helps out at wakes, attends funerals, etc.)When a good spirit dies it finds a home in the spirit world after forty days. However when a bad spirit dies, it finds no resting place and wanders about forever.

It is primarily the bad spirits of dead people which are used by members of the community to cast spells on other people. Spirits of wicked dead people can be found in old houses, under trees near rivers and fires and on the road at nights. Idle spirits can cause all types of mischief in a community, they will move to another community if they are not used in one. Thus a spirit can be sent on a person from miles away. In Tobago individuals with personal problems (a troublesome neighbor, wandering spouse, sickness, court cases unsuccessful business, ill fate etc,) have the option of consulting the Obeah (otherwise called the bushman man in Tobago) manor women. The writer found Obeah people who were members of the Catholic and Protestant(Anglican) churches.

Many others were Spiritual or Shouter Baptist and practitioners of Orisha. Obeah work is deep Africa- an Obeah practitioner and a member of the Shouter Baptist church.

(Interview with a Bushman, Scarborough Tobago, 1997). Obeah people work with spirits in order to solve complaints in exchange for money or gifts. The treatment usually involves the removal of spirits from the home or person of the client. The belief in the presence of spirits and their effect on day to day life is strong in Tobago. The beliefs and practices surrounding Obeah are completely independent of any particular religious doctrine. Everyone weather condoning or not recognizes the presence of Obeah and proceeds to rationalize it in some way.

“It takes a spirit to fight a spirit- no particular religious affiliation.”(bushman, Scarborough, 1997).

Obeah is, on the one hand is a system of ideas articulating the relationship of man with the supernatural and through which occurrences beyond man’s control(e.g. death) are meaningful and manageable. On the other hand Obeah is a system of institutionalized activities which has at it’s center, public and private rituals which are expressions of beliefs in the existence and power of spirits and man’s obligations towards these spirits. The obligations are both moral (e.g. wakes) and social (e.g. visiting the sick).

The beliefs and practices of the Shouter Baptists are a version of the beliefs and practices surrounding Obeah but with special additions (e.g. Baptism and mourning) The

moral code attached to Obeah requires that people live in peace with others, be good neighbors and appease spirits which they have offended. Shouter Baptists, in addition to having the obligations connected to Obeah, must attend services, baptisms, and mournings, obey their “Leader” and those of higher status in the hierarchy go on pilgrimages and attend to the personal needs of members of the community.

The relationship between the belief in Obeah and the Spiritual Baptists is an intricate one. Baptists are called on to deal with troublesome spirits in the community but they get their power from within the church. Obeah as opposed to spiritual baptism is a secular religion without an organizational framework. The beliefs surrounding Obeah manifest themselves in both private and public rituals. Public rituals including events such as thanksgivings ceremonies. Private functions involve conferring with a spiritual person about personal problems(e.g. Illness, court battles, etc.). Enslaved Africans brought to work on the plantations were encouraged to become Christians, but many traces of African religions were allowed to remain. Plantation owners were no doubt content that their slaves were at least nominally Christian; other practices may have been of little consequence to them. Missionary accounts state that during the early days of Tobago’s settlement, slave-owners were so engrossed over the opening up and development of the virgin and fertile lands that they could devote no time whatever, nor were they even willing to towards the spiritual well-being of their charges. So long as the

Negroes refrained from too often rebellious uprising they were allowed to continue their customs and practices brought to them from Africa. (Moravian Mission 1787). However the practice of Obeah was outlawed because it was viewed as promoting rebellions. Anyone caught practicing Obeah was sentenced to death. However the practice of Obeah remained as well as other forms of African religious beliefs despite attempts to eliminate them. Many Obeah men still practice bush medicine in Tobago. The author was even told to visit a bushman (Obeah man), which he did, when he was having difficulties in Tobago. Until the late nineteen sixties there were only three doctors in the whole of Tobago and the Obeah man was often consulted because they practiced “bush medicine” including the use of native plants in potions or teas to prevent or cure various maladies. However bush medicine was not restricted to Obeah men. More importantly Obeah men were able to divine the cause of disease and prescribe the appropriate actions. Many persons today claim that Obeah still flourishes. Some Tobagonians even went as far as calling both Obeah man and clergy in time of need. The author has observed this practice first hand in the case of Karen Brown. In addition the author consulted a few Obeah men for research purposes.

The relationship between the Spiritual Baptists, specifically and the belief in Obeah, generally, is an intricate one. Spiritual Baptists are often called on to deal with troublesome spirits in the community, but they get their power from within the church.

They also get “signs” (via dreams) to both initially join the church and to do “works” (duties they are obliged to perform in order to please God) in the community. The “works” themselves and the necessity of fulfilling community obligations are justified in Biblical terms.

Obeah as opposed to Spiritual Baptism, is a secular religion without organizational frame work. The beliefs surrounding Obeah manifest themselves in both public and private rituals. Public functions (e.g. wakes, thanksgivings,—ceremonies of thanks for benefits received— and visiting the sick) are important social events which contribute to the continuity and cohesion of the society. These secularized rituals occur in times of trouble(wakes), in times of happiness(thanksgivings), or just anytime (visits to the sick). Private rituals involve conferring with a spiritual person about personal problems (court battles, getting and keeping a mate, illness, success in business, etc.). It should be noted that peoples of all races, social classes, religions and occupations participate in these private rituals. The most important and distinguishing ritual within the cultural system of the Spiritual Baptists is “mourning”; while the wake (the proper sendoff for the dead spirit) is the most significant ritual within the system surrounding Obeah.

Obeah is a generally known system of ideas and activities and exists independently of any particular religious institution. However all the rituals attached to

Obeah and involved with the appeasement of spirits are performed by the Spiritual Baptists. In addition Spiritual Baptists can play a major role in wakes (the most significant ritual in the cultural system of Obeah) even if the wake is being conducted by members of another church. A wake in Pembroke was observed by the author. After three or four hours of song and prayer, those leading the prayers either went home or sat down and the Spiritual Baptists continued to daybreak. Because the knowledge and/or belief in Obeah transcends much of Tobago's religious institutions and because the beliefs and practices of the Spiritual Baptists are a version of those of Obeah, the Spiritual Baptists are in a position to perform religious rituals for all the community.

Shouter Baptists

J.D. Elder (1972:8) noted that:

“The making of votive offerings is a predominant feature of the Yoruba religion in Trinidad-have been introduced into the Shouter Baptist religious system: the feeding of the Loa,” a Vodun rite finds place in the Spiritual Baptist religion modified into the feeding of the Saints.”

Most of the Africans imported to the New world originated more or less equally in West-Central Africa and the area stretching roughly from Ghana to Cameroon. Consequently, the stronger influence of ethnic or groups from Ghana to Nigeria on the African derived religions of the New World, relative to that of West-Central African cultures might be due to the fact that Kongolese, unlike Yoruba, Fon, Fanti-Ashanti, are

generally not polytheistic(Thompson 1983). The lack of a prevalent or salient Kongolese influence in African derived religions of the New World can perhaps be attributed to the absence of a complex and widely recognized pantheon of gods, an absence that precluded or at least impeded syncretism or association with Christian saints.

Some Spiritual Baptists contend that the present- day Spiritual Baptists are actually an offshoot or derivation of the “Shouters” who came from Africa. They note that some elements of Spiritual Baptist worship-for example, ebullient shouting and loud rhythmic breathing-are Kongolese traits. In addition the Kongolese-derived chalk drawings are also present. Mother Joan a member of the Orisha faith in Scarborough, claimed that Orisha, Shouter Baptist and Christianity are intertwined.(Oral interview, Tobago, 1997).

The Shouter Baptist might have some Yoruba influences. Yoruba influences have been very dominant in the syncretic religions of the Caribbeans and even in the methods of worship of the United States. Congolese, Ibos Dahomians and Mandingoes have been joined in faith. (Thomas 1987). Yoruba deities found in Nigeria that are also found in Tobago include Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron, steel, and war; Shango, the Yoruba god of fire thunder, and lightning; Odua (Oduduwa), the creator of the earth. Evidence exists that points to the fact that Yoruba deities were transported and worshiped in the Americas relatively unscathed.

Despite their diversity, all Afro-American religions exhibit at least some degree of syncretism involving African and European religious elements, and virtually all practice spirit possession. Syncretism and spirit possession are, perhaps, the two most important and salient characteristics of Afro-American religions in Tobago. Syncretism, in fact more than any other cultural process has been the mechanism behind the development of such a diverse religion. Some appear primarily Christian (the Spiritual or Shouter Baptists of Tobago) and some primarily African (Orisha). All, however can be characterized as at least somewhat African in form.

Center of the African life has been religion. From the most ancient of times the African enjoyed a well-organized pattern of behavior that has persisted in spite of the changes brought by modern development. (Kamal Braithwaite,1987). In the Americas Yoruba still retains much of its integrity despite the slave experience. Much Yoruba beliefs are still practiced in the Americas.

The beliefs of the Shouter Baptist have been mislabeled as superstition. The Shouter Baptist have combined the Christian traditions together with the African beliefs and experiences in the Americas to create a syncretic religion that has its basis in Yoruba culture.(Malcolm Melville, 1997). However the origins and early development of the Spiritual Baptist religion in Tobago is unknown and African sources are hard to document. In the spiritual ceremonies that the author observed the Shouter Baptist

practiced their faith through various religious practices that consisted of Baptism, thanksgiving and pilgrimages, preaching, prayer, shouting, spirit possession, healing and fasting.

The Shouter Baptists or Spiritual Baptists women wear head dresses over their heads during ceremonies much like the women in syncretic religions of Africa do. The head dresses in Africa are called wrappers in West Africa This practice was observed by the author in both Black rock Tobago and Calabar, Nigeria in West Africa.

Music played during Baptist ceremonies are essentially African employing the call and response method foundation of African music and many African derived musical forms in the Americas e.g. Jazz and blues. Spirit possession is brought about as a result of the frenzied beating of the drum which is a very important part of the Shouter Baptist religious ceremony. The spirit is said to ride the possessed person. Different spirits are said to possess people. (Interview with Malcolm Melville, Tobago, 1997). This is in keeping with the West African concept of multiple souls. The author observed that similar to the followers of Orisha and Vodun the Shouters seem to invoke the spirit possession. Different spirits with distinct personalities were said to possess the participants. The use of drums, hand clapping, rattles and dancing is in keeping with the West African concept of worship.

The Spiritual Baptist religion in Tobago shares many of the practices of African -

American spiritual and Pentecostal churches in the United States including loud and frenzied singing praising, and praying. The beliefs and practices of the Shouter Baptists resemble those of the Orisha religion: for example the libations of oil and water, the planting of flags for particular spirits, and the recognition of the Orisha as important spiritual forces. The Spiritual or Shouter Baptist religion in Tobago is flourishing (Interview with Robert Dillon, Sept. 1997).

The Christian Churches

Religious Membership in Tobago	
<i>Religion\Denomination</i>	<i>Membership Estimated</i>
Anglican	16,070
Methodist	1,172
Catholic	3,445
Moravian	2,556
Hindu	117
Muslim	65
Spiritual Baptists	12,273

Annual Statistical Digest. Central Statistical Office of Government of Trinidad and Tobago. No. 2

The Anglicans

The formal spiritual life of the Christians in Tobago fell within the jurisdiction of the bishop of London who was empowered to licence clergymen to preach. Throughout the period from the 1790s to 1815 Tobago was provided with a single Anglican clergyman holding the position of rector and resident in Scarborough.(Phillips,1984).

The single clergyman was responsible for all seven parishes in the island, though his practice seldom strayed far past Scarborough. The Anglican church was responsible for administering only to whites and perhaps to coloreds but not to slaves. It was a view that the church of England held throughout this period.

The work of the church of England in Tobago from 1793-1815 was mainly that

of a white supremacist institution administering mainly to the whites on the island. Even among the whites the work of the church was done in spasms and was commonly unsatisfactory. Of the smaller colored population several attended the Anglican services although they were often ignored thus the church limited its impact on the inhabitants. Although rectors such as Charles Newton did baptize slave children who can within his reach in Scarborough (C.O. 285/16, f. 142Young to Liverpool 18 December 1811). But for most part the established churches ignored the slave population in Tobago as they did in most Caribbean colonies and they were not allowed to receive sacraments.(Caldecott 1898).This condition made it easier for the nonconformist churches to come into the island and influence the free coloreds and the enslaved and even the whites populations of Tobago short of the clergy.

The Moravians

The Moravian church or the United Brethren was first established in Tobago in 1789 when the island was under French rule(B.A. Marshall, 1980). It had been encouraged by John Hamilton a planter in Pembroke who had believed that the church's work in other islands had brought about knowledge of the gospel among the enslaved Africans, which resulted in obedience to its divine precepts which in turn had made the enslaved Africans more "contented and happy with their situation and more faithful to their masters" (Cited in Marshall's Missionaries and Slaves:9-10). Christianization was

expected to make them more “faithful laborers”(M.M.S. letters from John Hamilton, 20 June 1798) though the official aim of the missionaries was to save the soul of the heathen.

The mission collapsed with the death of James Montgomery in 1790. However efforts were soon made by John Hamilton to revive it in 1798. Hamilton offered five acres of land and three hundred pounds to re-establish it and his brother promised another one hundred pounds for a school.(M.M.S. letters from John Hamilton, 20 June 1798). In March 1801 John Hamilton and four other planters testified that the mission “has contributed greatly to the enlightening and better government of the Negro slaves in this colony(M.M.S., Diary, 15 April 1802).

However in 1802 the churches returned to England because of John Church’s Poor health (M.M.S.diary, 15 April 1802). John Hamilton had died and the planters discontinued their subscriptions in response and two of his principle supporters returned to England After his death. Due to poor health and lack of funding from the planters and England as well as the transfer of Tobago to French possession the church left for England.

The Moravians always believed that their business was to do work among the slaves though they did pick up a few white followers. Moravian missionaries such as Elliot tended to see a correlation between heathenism and blackness of the skin. He

thought blacks were intellectually inferior to whites and as a result he was paternalistic to them(S.O.A.S., LMS, Folder 3, Jacket A. Elliot to LMS, April 1810). Missionaries such as Purkis took the position that the effects of slavery were responsible for the seeming ignorance of the enslaved Africans. He criticized segregation among the Anglicans and even his own congregation.(Ince, "The LMS Mission",).

The enslaved Africans in order to be baptized had to adhere to the doctrines of the church and thus were closely and often monitored The records of LMS missions did not show how they dealt with relapses but they did encounter them.(Protestant Missionary Activity).

Many who could not begin to qualify for baptism found their thinking and behavior affected in some measure by the things the missionaries said. The gospel message did comfort those in distress and that served as a powerful draw especially to the unfortunate. On the other hand the enslaved Africans knew very well that the missionaries were advancing the religion of the slave master and that there was a conflict between slavery and the gospel. Many missionaries saw the whole culture of the African as being as much an enemy as Satan. The enslaved African reacted to this combination of pressures in different ways.

"I am persuaded that it is neither my business nor in my power to deliver them from bondage of men. I have always considered it my duty, to endeavour thro' divine assistance to direct the poor Negroes how they may be delivered from the bondage of sin and satan and

teach them the pure principles of Christianity which will not only lead to sobriety, industry, and fidelity, but make them loyal subjects, obedient servants and children, loving husbands and wives of which principles are quite destitute. I not only endeavor to avoid every expression which might be misunderstood in this respect, but always endeavor to endear them to each other, and particularly to their employers, in fact all who have authority over them (S.O.A.S., LMS, Folder 1. Jacket B, Elliot toLMS 7 December 1808).

Christianity and African Religious Beliefs Observed

“I used to go to the Anglican church, but all you did is read out of books. I could stay home and do that. But the Pentecostal , I can listen to the singing and clap and sing. I just fell happy”(Oral interview with Henry Pope, Scarborough, Tobago 1997).

The English Act of 1840 established the Anglican church as the supreme church Tobago was not yet part of Trinidad but soon acquired its legacy declaring African religion as Obeah. The climate of suppression resulted in the Cultural Riots of 1880. Although the attack on African religion continued during colonial times African religious beliefs and expressions did not cease. Religious ceremonies and ritual were practices in secret. The Anglican and Methodist churches viewed African religious expressions and rituals as works of the devil. African religions such as Orisha were viewed by colonial authorities as heathen and demonic, according to Karen James(Oral interview Scarborough Tobago, 1997) The Africans were punished in pre emancipation and emancipation colonial Tobago for practicing their religion. Punishment included flogging.

During the colonial era in Tobago, the church and state operated as one. Under slavery the doctrine of Christianity as taught to the slave were doctrines of obedience. The slaves were prohibited from practicing their own religion. They often practiced

Christianity overtly and African ritual clandestinely. (Oral history with Robert Dillon, Black Rock, Scarborough, Tobago, 1997).

Umelda Cruickshank is both a member of the Anglican church and a devotee follower of African religious rituals and customs. Mrs. Cruickshank plays the drum in the Anglican church in Pembroke. after which she goes to Shouter Baptist services. At the same time Mrs. Cruickshank practices traditional African rituals. Her grandfather never practiced African religion with her it was passed down to her by her mother, she claimed, mother. In the yard of the Anglican church in Pembroke the author observed burial practices which were are distinctly African. The deceased were buried under the silk cotton and calabash tree. The calabash tree is said to have supernatural powers because it is such a durable tree. It stores water and can survive droughts better than most trees it is believed. The people of Tobago believe that the calabash tree could chase away evil spirits. Cruickshank said that, "Long ago you had to eat in the calabash (the fruit of the calabash tree that is used for pottery and other utensils). When you died you would be buried under the calabash or silk cotton tree. Sacrifices of rum , wine, sweet water and plain water and a plate of white rice, some chicken foot and gizzard were left as offerings at the silk cotton tree. This offering was used to invoke ones wishes. If you wanted somebody to learn, walk, drift, die etc. you would use this offering to ensure that this came about." (Interview with Umelda Cruickshank, 1997, Pembroke, Tobago). Plantain and cassava were also planted on the grave sites. The

calabash tree is believed to have supernatural powers because it is very a very durable tree. Among other ethnic groups in Nigeria, the bachama considered that if a man was killed in war his spirit would wander, until brought home to his family hut. A doctor would be sent off to the bush to find the ghost and bring it home. He would take a calabash of water and a stalk of grass to which to attract the attention of the ghost. When he spotted the ghost he would call it and invite it to enter the calabash so it might be taken home to join its departed relatives. If the ghost did it this, the doctor would hurry home and empty the calabash at the threshold of the burial hut of the family. A similar rite is performed in the Bornu, for recovering souls stolen by witches. (Parrinder 1976).

Umelda Cruickshank recounted how under slavery one couldn't stop working. There were two sugar mills, one in Pembroke and another in Lure estate. The mills were dangerous and the slaves hands were sometimes lost, she was told by her mother. Mrs. Cruickshank recounted how her mother told her stories about the slavery days, how they used to sing and play the congo drums. Her father was from Grenada and he played the congo drums and they (the enslaved Africans) sung about the Obeah man. Umelda Cruickshank started playing the drums at the age of twelve. She played the congo, chak chak and steel drums. She is the oldest women in Tobago to play the drums she claimed. Cruickshank claimed that her mom and dad were the king and queen of the drums. She has passed her drumming skills on to her children.

Robert Dillon told the author that even though he was Catholic it was a standard practice to put objects in the tomb during burial in order to assist the deceased in their next life. This practice was observed in New York City when the slave grave yard was excavated by Howard University archaeologists. Beads and objects were placed in tombs during burial rituals. These grave site were discovered in 1993(African burial ground project).

Robert Dillon pointed out that the enslaved Africans were not taught tender words under slavery. Many emotions and feelings were expressed in songs. Religion was disguised in music. Dillon described the experience of different groups in the community :

“In my Roman Catholic church the French Creoles in Trinidad are silent during religious ceremonies. They come to Tobago and they find it so amazing that the whole church is singing. They ask “ how come you all sing so much.” We’ve never known it any other way because Tobago is ninety-eight percent or ninety- seven percent African it doesn’t matter what the religion is there is a strong very strong impulsive overt sound and body expression in worship.” Although Dillon claimed not to know to what extent it was primarily African he claimed that even though they (Tobagonians) are Roman catholic “we make sure we put something in the tomb be it a rosary and whatever , you must give them (the deceased) something to work with.” (Interview with Robert Dillon, Scarborough, Tobago, 1997).

According to Dillon, the calabash tree was used for drinking, purification , drinking etc. It was considered the most all purpose and hardy of trees. During the dry

season it was the hardiest of trees. When all the trees around it would show signs of withering it would stand. It would not wither and always had green leaves. The gods were said to care for it. It was the tree used by the villagers to show their devotions to the gods. Every village had a calabash tree and every cemetery would have one planted there. The thing is that we never knew how the calabash grew. “We never saw anybody planting a calabash tree. All we knew was that the calabash tree was there in some places. We have a calabash tree in our catholic cemetery in Scarborough.”(Interview with Robert Dillon, 1997). This on closer examination is an adaptation to the use of the gourd plant in Africa which served an identical function. The calabash tree is native to indigenous tropical America. This tree became a substitute for the African gourd took on the religious significance given to the African trees in parts of West Africa. Both the gourd and calabash are used in making culinary instruments such as plates as well as musical instrument such as the chak chak. Organic materials are often used in spiritual practices. One used things that belonged to the earth. Robert Dillon mentioned the pull that the drum had on the children during his youth who would often gravitate towards the sound of the drummers regardless of their religious affiliations. Geoffrey Parrinder (1969) mentioned how in many ways religion entered into the lives of the people among the Ga of west Africa. “Although there were no obligations to attend weekly worship, yet the attraction of the arts of music and dance draws people to the temple.” (Parrinder, 1986).

Jean Marie Tolby explained that in the Shouter Baptist and the Orisha religion the

significance of color are the same. Red is symbolic to the deity Shango, Pink and blue is significant to the deity Emanja, Orange and white are significant to the deity Obatala (deity of creation). “What you will see is that certain individuals wear colors which signify the deity that manifests itself through them” (oral interview Jean Marie Tolby). Basically the significance of white is purification and spirituality whereas red symbolizes to being vigorous, strong and energetic, purple signifies royalty and high wealth. Light blue signifies harmony and softness, green signifies wealth. Some people signifies black as evil but to the Shouter Baptist and the practitioners of Orisha it signifies empowerment or strength. Brown signifies hospitality or care.

The Shouter Baptists wear different color clothes that symbolize different things. Red represents strength, brown represents taking care and hospitality, white is an all purpose color representing purity, black represents strength.

Jean Marie Tolby explained, “I have manifestations from the deity Emanja that water saint. Most of the time that I have these manifestations I have to perform the duty of cleaning.” (Interview Jean Marie Tolby, Scarborough Tobago, 1997). Tolby claimed that if she was in an unclean environment and the spirit came she could be used to perform a cleaning act. Other people manifest in different ways. As a child Tolby claimed to have had an experience and heard her grand parents stories explaining that if you wanted to know if a wedding would be successful, you had what was called a ‘real dance’ were a person would come who could manifest and see if that wedding should take place.

It might be revealed that the girls mother tried to “tie the guy” as we say that is to pin (cast a spell on) him by feeding him something so that he would willingly be at the whim of that lady. I understand that these things might still be practiced. “There was a wedding dance in Bucco and there was an older guy and he was just standing and he came and they brought an offering of food and this guy that was just standing next to me leapt about four feet in the air. In another incident when they had a celebration and a coal fire was made to for the branches to warm the tambourine one girl had a manifestation and stood in the fire and was unharmed. There was not a scorch or burn on her or her clothes and she held a young girl in the fire above her head with her , I was very scared.”

(interview with Marie Tolby, Scarborough Tobago, 1997). Tolby claimed that people would tell you what type of manifestation had come by the eyes and the movement of the person possessed. There was a belief in Shango in times past, even in the days of slavery because even in her village, Patience which is about two or three quarter miles from Scarborough, Tobago, “we had the Congo people.” There is an area in that village called Guinea Hill, where the Congo settled. In the past many practices were kept hidden because people were ashamed or afraid to practice them in public because the colonial authorities discouraged them. The Shouter Baptists were accepted in the village by everyone and once in a while there would be a preacher who would preach that the Baptists were evil and temporarily persuaded the villagers but what would happen was that after a couple of weeks people would start attending the Baptist ceremonies because

of its social and musical appeal. It served as a forum for interaction. People looked at them as evil because they did not understand the kind of possession.

Music

Music, singing and dancing play an important role in worship. Dr. Field made an interesting classification of the gods of the Ga based on the types of dance used in the festivals of the various divinities.

Among the Ga as with the Yoruba, Ibo and other peoples of West Africa there was much sound and singing in communal worship and even more on the annual festivals. Many instruments are used: the chief ones are drums of various kinds, gongs, bells, calabashes with beads tied to them, horns triangles and pieces of metals. Frequently spontaneous dance may occur under the inspiration of the moment, and the possessed medium gives a message from god.

In many ways worship enters into the lives of the people. Although there is no obligation to attend weekly worship, yet the attraction of the arts of music and dance draws people to the temple. It is said sometimes that African worship is only communal. The ordinary West African is a pious person and performs regular daily devotions. Before speaking to any one he worships at the shrine of his god and addresses the god directly seeking protection and giving thanks for past help. Music, singing and dancing play an important role in worship among the various ethnic groups of West Africa e.g. the Yoruba and the Ga. The drums of the Ashanti are famous and the talking drums of the

Yoruba. As with the worshipers of Tobago West African people use the calabashes with beads tied to them, and drums in worship. In addition spontaneous hymns of praise accompanied by clapping and stomping are the norm in worship in both west Africa and Tobago. Geoffrey Parrinder (1969) documented these methods of worship in West Africa that the author observed in Tobago.

The African drum has been used by such people as Umelda Cruickshank who is the recipient of African religious practices that were passed on by her parents. Umelda Criuckshank claims that her great grandfather came from Yorubaland in West Africa. The eighty-one year old Umelda Cruickshank plays the congo drum and sings in using some Yoruba words . She remembers that in times past her whole family would play and sing to commemorate the harvest. Mrs.Cruickshank even plays the drum, in the Anglican church in Pembroke, Tobago. Mrs Cruickshank plays sings using some Yoruba words in her songs. The Yoruba language was passed on to her by her mother who in turn was taught by her father. Mrs. Cruickshank stated that her grandfather used to play the drums in secret during the days of slavery so as to avoid punishment by the owner William Hamilton. (Interview with Umelda Cruickshank, Tobago, 1997).

The Congo drum is an African religious instrument and its introduction into religious services during pre-emancipation and post emancipation colonial Tobago was unthinkable. Malcolm Melville, a drum maker in Black Rock Tobago said that playing the outer drum enabled him to play the inner drum. Melville claimed that he was told to

become a drum maker in a vision. Melville claimed that all his thoughts were occupied with drum making. This constant obsession made him successful.

The African always adapted to the changing conditions in Tobago during colonial times. Once drumming was banned during slavery the African adapted by playing doing other things such as using bamboo to play or beating rhythms on parts of his body such as his chest or thighs.(Interview with Malcolm Melville, Tobago, 1997). The slave would take any opportunity he had to dance to rhythms e.g. the banana dance. When they could they would dance to the rhythm of the congo belly- African drum or African congo. (Interview with Henry James, Tobago, 1997). The drum appears to have been crucial to celebrations and ceremonies in Tobago during the colonial era as is the case today.

Robert Dillon told me that the role of the drum was felt in emancipation “ The Congo and Akan leaders had spiritual powers given to them by their people. They were part of the family structure, dance, songs and folk tales of the people. They organized the feasts and they used their drums.” Even though some of the music is influenced by European folk tunes and the words are in English, nothing of African purport or intent has been erased. Despite its non-African form this musical complex can be regarded as nothing less than a retention of the purist form.” (Interview with Robert Dillon, Tobago , 1997).

Some of the musical influences came from the Congo area of central Africa while other influences were West African in nature. Yoruba cultural influences can be found in

the lyrics and drumming patterns in Tobago. In Tobago as in other areas of the Caribbean the author has been to one can find the merging of different cultural characteristics such as the Yoruba, Akan and the “Congo people.”

Jean Marie Toby recalled stories of many Congo men who lived in Charlottesville not far from Scarborough and played the Congo drums when she was a young girl. She claimed to have attended a Shango ceremony in Tobago in which the drumming was so intense that one the participants of the ceremony walked on burning wood and was not burnt. “It scared me a lot,” she said.

Colonial Records

Very little colonial record exists on African religious beliefs in Tobago. Among the various records of slave inventories and slave codes exists hints of African activities such as clause 2 of the Tobago Slave Code of 1768 which states that the penalty for poisoning or attempting to poison any person is death.(P.R.O. C.O. 287, London). Clause 3 to clause 5 addressed the issue of runaway slaves or marronage. Clause 6 addresses slave violence towards the master. The rest of the clause is mainly concerned with the ownership of the enslaved African and the rights of the owner. This is another example of the emphasis on economic concerns of the colonial authorities.

Clause 19 prohibits “negroes” from different plantations assembling together.

This clause hints at the concerns of the colonial authorities in Tobago's concerns for the potential problem that this assembly, religious and otherwise, could cause:

“Whereas great mischiefs may arise from a number of Negroes belonging to different plantations assembling together. Be it.... enacted that if any overseer or other white person, having the charge and direction of a plantation in this island shall permit any slave or slaves belonging thereto to beat any drum or drums, empty casks, boxes, great gourds, or to blow horns, shells or other loud instruments upon such plantation or allow slaves belonging to other persons or plantations to assemble and mix with their own, for that or any other bad purpose, such person shall forfeit the sum of ten pounds.... (Clause 19 , Act for Good Order and Government of Slaves, P.R.O., C.O. 287/In I extracts)

This clause clearly covered the practice of African Religious practices because the drum is central to African religious practice. It was the drums that signaled the call to rebellion in Saint Dominique. The Vodou priests coordinated the grass roots rebels in Saint Dominique. (Wade Davis *Serpent and the Rainbow*, A&E,1995, New York, N.Y.) Because African religious beliefs and expressions had all been labeled Obeah or black magic, the work of the devil it would have been illegal to practice African religions such as Shango and Shouter Baptist religion at the time that this Slave Code was enacted. Therefore assembly for purposes of worshipping African deities would have been

author has conducted concerning the persecutions of the followers of African religious expressions in pre emancipation and post emancipation colonial Tobago such as the Shouter Baptists.

Tobago Museum Records indicate that large numbers of enslaved Africans started to arrive in Tobago in 1770 after the sale of lands by auction which started in the year 1765. Their arrival as a result of manpower demands in order that the lands be cleared.

The following indicates the rapid increase in the slave population particularly 1770 to 1780, which were the years of the fastest growth.

Year Imported	Number of Africans Imported
1770	3,093
1780	10,549
1788	12,639
1790	14,171
1805	14,883
1819	15,470
1833	11,621

Tobago Museum 1995

The newly arrived Coromantees of the Gold Coast of West Africa were held responsible for most of the slave rebellions in Tobago in the 1770s. It was a time in the islands development which required long and arduous toil clearing heavily forested land for planting. The following is the ethnic categories of the enslaved Africans that were brought to Tobago:

Mandingoes of the Sierra Leone and the Grain Coast as well as the Temmes, Timmanees, Kossos, Acoos, Mendis, Foulans, Jolloffs, Karankos. The Paw_Paw of the Slave Coast as well as the Awoonah, Agbosomahs, Flowohs, Popos, Dahomeans, Egbas, Yorubas, Whydahs and Nagoes. The Koromantyns or Coromantees_of the gold coast as well as the Atams, Ashanti, Fantii, Assin, Wassaw, Aquapim, Ahanta, Accra and Kalabari.(Tobago Museum, 1995).

During the critical period of the development of Afro-American culture in the New World, the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries, west-central Africa and the coastal areas of the Bight of Benin(extending roughly from eastern Ghana to western Nigeria) and the Bight of Biafra (from central Nigeria to western Cameroon) accounted for over 75 percent of the total number of the Africans shipped to the Americas (Lovejoy 1983). According to Lovejoy's figures approximately half of all enslaved Africans brought to the Americas arrived in the eighteenth century. Given that the Atlantic slave trade lasted approximately 420 years (1450-1870), this means that colonial powers transported half of the total number of slaves to the New world during one quarter of the slave trade period. It is not surprising that slave revolts reached fever pitch during the eighteenth century in Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, the Lesser Antilles, and elsewhere as colony demographics shifted to reflect the large influx of Africans.

The enslaved African who were employed in Tobago from the 1790s appear to

have come mostly from that area of the West Africa coast between Senegambia and Northern Angola. While their origins are not known precisely the Africans brought to the West Indies in the period came principally from Senegambia, the Bight of Biafra and Central Africa(K. Lawrence, 1994:39). But each colony contained many ethnic groups. Tobago contained people of many diverse origins and habits but they shared a set of common beliefs and traditions which were distinctly African in origin. (Young 1812). African tradition can be traced to music, dancing, dress and in their religious beliefs and customs. The slave culture did embrace many practices that came from non-African sources. Many were the products of the condition of slavery itself. Together they created a culture that was different from the cultures of the whites and the free coloreds who generally distanced themselves from the enslaved Africans during the slave period.

The pattern of what Sir William Young described as “promiscuous intercourse” might have resulted from the separation of relatives first by seizure and then by sale or transfer, and then the elimination of the original rights of the father and disorganization of African family patterns due to slavery (William Young 1804, cited from K. Lawrence, Tobago in Wartime 1994). However father-child links may also have played a significant role for the relationship between the parents frequently enjoyed some stability. In many cases the link between mother and child became paramount, if not the only family link of real substance. Yet there is good evidence that strong family ties

existed among the enslaved Africans and that family practices persisted or were recreated in modified form. There is no specific evidence yet in Tobago yet in Trinidad enslaved Africans were more likely to live in family groups in large holding than in small, and hence in country rather than in town.

Slave family households were of different types. Many were mother-children units, but there was a noticeable number of nuclear families in both town and country, most often on the larger plantations; and the father might have had a stable visiting status though living outside the family. Extended families and polygamous units were also known especially on the large plantations where the chances of forced separation were smaller than the larger holdings. Higman suggested that slave families were much more common in older than in newer slave communities and it is likely that in Tobago that slave families of one sort or another were more common than in Trinidad where according to one calculation 56 per cent of slaves were living in family units in 1813 (Reeves 1996).

Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

As the European colonizer built his world in Tobago so did the colonized African. Secret African cults flourished in Tobago. Shango, Shouter Baptists, and Obeah are some of the African religious beliefs that existed in Tobago. The imported African religious beliefs and practices were influenced by Christianity. The syncretizing process merged (in the case of Tobago) Protestant religious doctrines (and to a lesser extent Catholic doctrines) with West African and Central African religious beliefs. It was thus possible to look at the Tobago experience and identify a continuum in which, in various sects and denominations such as the Shouter Baptist and Orisha the African element predominates. In Christian religions in Tobago (e.g Anglican church in Pembroke Tobago) in which African religious burial practices and drums in religious worship were identified, evidence pointed to the conclusion that African religious practices survived the pre emancipation colonial era of Tobago in which many attempts were made to change the religious beliefs and thus the ideology the enslaved African and the later emancipated African in Tobago. African religious beliefs and practices instead of being destroyed persisted and in many cases were introduced into the practices of the Christian churches in some cases such as the case in Pembroke , Tobago. Not withstanding the differences in ethnic composition all enslaved Africans came from common West African and

Central African cultural areas with a commonality of basic ideas and concepts secreted in ritual myth, and folklore. The culture was not only reinforced by oral tradition, it was also reinforced by constant infusion of new African blood. An anonymous source described the slaves as newly imported from Africa". He stated that the slaves were "newly losing their freedoms and having no habits of obedience to the rules of slavery" (Douglas Archibald, 1995). Slave labor was used intensively to establish new plantations and build infrastructure around the period of 1771-1774. In the 1770s, Tobago was essentially a African population and fundamentally a slave society. The slave population grew approximately 30 percent a year from 1770 to 1790.

Although colonial authorities tried to eliminate and dissuade the practice of African religious beliefs through various colonial acts (e.g. the practice of Obeah was prohibited under the second clause of the Slave Law of 1802 framed by the Tobago legislature) many of these beliefs still remain in Tobago in various forms from Obeah, Orisha to the Shouter Baptist religions

The analysis of religious beliefs and practices associated with the people of Tobago allows certain conclusions to be made concerning the retention of African religious beliefs and practices. Clearly African religious beliefs and practices were retained by the inhabitants and descendants of the enslaved Africans of Tobago. Religious beliefs associated with the practice of Obeah, Orisha, and Shouter Baptists all have roots

in African religious beliefs and practices. The evolution of African religion in Tobago is apparent when one looks at the cultural continuities on the island. Some religious beliefs might have been introduced in successive waves from other islands (e.g. Orisha from Grenada and Trinidad) starting from the pre- emancipation colonial era. While there is controversy as to whether the practice of Orisha was found on the island during the pre-emancipation era (1700-1800s) the researcher found a interviewees who claimed that there were worshipers of Shango on the islands even during slavery. (Oral interview with Jean Marie Tolby, Scarborough, Tobago). One thing is certain, the presence of Obeah has been documented from the pre-emancipation era.

Retentions, adaptations and syncretism in Tobago have resulted in degrees of African religious beliefs and expressions from full or nearly full African retentions, to reinterpretations of African elements, to syncretisms, to European-borrowed traits and reinterpretations of European elements. Various elements of religious practices such as divinatory practices and religious beliefs are clearly separable but occur in both Tobago and West Africa in such intimate interrelationship that diffusion cannot be questioned seriously. There are both continuity and change.

Religious Practices in Tobago			
<i>Full or nearly full African retentions</i>	<i>Reinterpretations of African elements</i>	<i>syncretisms</i>	<i>European borrowed traits and re-interpretations of European elements</i>
Yoruba words and songs	the use of the Calabash Tree in burial an adaptation		the use of Christian text in Shouter Baptists ceremonies
The Congo drum chanting and drumming prior to the onset of possession trance	the <u>Chak Chak</u>	the steel drum	The use of Alcohol in Shouter Baptist ceremonies
the intervention of spirits in the lives and affairs of men	Burial practices at the Anglican church in Pembroke	dual meanings for saints and <u>Orishas</u>	Use of hymn books during services
clapping and dancing during worship	Shouter Baptist mournings	<u>Orisha</u> deities	
Chalk drawings	clapping		
<u>Orisha</u>	beating rhythms on parts of body	African words e.g. <u>Yoruba</u>	
call and response emphasis on rhythms polyrhythms e.g. <u>Shango</u> Spiritual Baptist.	Offerings to Christian saints by the Shouter Baptists	Mourning	

spirit possession e.g. <u>Orisha</u> and Spiritual Baptist possessions	the spraying of oil by fishermen and <u>Obeahmen</u>		
Transmigration and reincarnation	Fishermen beliefs		
<u>Obeah</u>	Shouter Baptist	Shouter Baptist	

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In defining syncretism, various scholars emphasize different aspects of the borrowing and blending process. (Herskovits 1948) viewed syncretism as the process whereby old and new meanings and forms are combined in contact situations. According to (Edwards 1980), "It is a process which involves the creation of an entirely new culture patterns out of the fragmented pieces of historically separate systems. A reasonable summary definition, then might be that syncretism is the integrating or blending of selected meanings (ideology) and /or forms (material culture) from diverse sociocultural traditions, resulting in the creation of an entirely new traditions, resulting in the creation of entirely new meanings (ideology) and/or forms (material culture) from diverse sociocultural tradition, resulting in the creation of entirely new meanings (ideology) and/or forms (material culture).

Although it would be misleading to talk of "an African religion" or even "a West African religion", those in West Africa, especially ranging from the area from Ghana to Nigeria do share a number of general or basic beliefs and practices. (McLeod

1986) Parrinder 1986) the Fon, (Parrinder 1986) and the Yoruba (Awolalu 1979 ; Ellis 1894), for example all share a belief in a withdrawn high god, intermediary deities, and lower or earthbound spirits. All three groups practice blood sacrifice, spirit possession (generally interpreted positively as the manifestation of a deity in the body of a worshiper), ancestor worship, and herbal healing based on similar beliefs and practices. All elements are found in the Afro-Tobago religions from Orisha, Shouter Baptist to Obeah. West African and Afro-Tobagonian religions are similar in many ways, even when specific elements are compared. The deities of southwestern Nigeria and Trinidad and Tobago are often virtually identical.

The notion of a supreme being is represented in the Yoruba religion by Olodumare. He is considered to be the creator or at least the oldest of the deities, but there is no specific shrine or group of worshipers associated with him.(Houk, 1995). The Yoruba believe that Olodumare has a particular sphere of influence and is not a force in areas thought to be out of his domain. They believe that Oshu can contact Olodumare on the worshiper's behalf. Olodumare is popular in Tobago among the Orisha worshipers I interviewed. As among the Yoruba he occupies a central position in the supreme godhead and is considered to be the first of the Orisha giving rise at least to indirectly, to other deities.

Other Yoruba deities found in Tobago included Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron,

steel, and war: Shango, the Yoruba god of fire, thunder and lightning; Odua (Oduduwa, Odudua), the creator of the earth and Oshun, the Yoruba water goddess. These were referred to in Tobago by the same names and were thought to have similar functions and abilities. The cultural persistence was apparent in Orisha religion in Tobago. In the case of Obeah the author had the realization that a relatively complex portion of culture can be carried substantially intact from one locus to another and even survive systematic attempts to eradicate or suppress its practice.

In the case of the Spiritual Baptist though certain substitutions of material and syncretisms occurred between Christianity and African religion occur and were obvious enough migrants needed only to have around them certain persons from the same or related society which the religious belief was practiced to have been able to ply their skills. Afro-Tobagonian religious practices, however show both continuities with both more than one West African culture and suggest that other groups besides the Yoruba contributed to the forms assumed to be exclusively Yoruba such as Orisha.

Some Spiritual Baptists and Orisha worshipers contend that the present -day Spiritual Baptists are actually an offshoot of the “Shouters” who came from Africa. They note that some elements of Spiritual Baptist worship such as loud shouting and loud rhythmic breathing are Kongolese traits. In addition there is the Kongolese chalk drawings. In addition spirit possession is the transcendent experience that is found in all

African based religions of the world. (Davis, 1995). The Spiritual Baptists are reported to have come from the Island of St. Vincent, but they were reported to have quickly incorporated the practices of the ex-slaves from the United States and the followers of Shango from Africa. Although there is still uncertainty about its origins the religion is most attributed to the Yoruba slaves and their form of worship. Kongolese, Dahomean and Mandingoe slaves are said to have also contributed to the formation of the Spiritual Baptists of Trinidad and Tobago.(Thomas, 1987). The Spiritual Baptist faith is a combination of Yoruba beliefs from ancient African tradition and concepts of Christianity. The handclapping and chanting are substitutions for the shac shacs (of African origin) and drum (which has been reintroduced into service in many cases). The calabash is also used as an implement of worship. (Thomas, 1987).

Melville Herskovits, who studied the Spiritual Baptists in 1939, theorized that it represented the reinterpretation of African worship into Europeanized patterns (Herkovits 1947: vi, 304). The beliefs and practices of the Spiritual Baptists are a version of the beliefs and practices surrounding Obeah but with special considerations (e.g. Baptism and mourning. The moral code attached to Obeah requires that people should live in peace with others, be good to neighbors (which also means attending thanksgivings and wakes) and appease spirits which they have offended (however inadvertently). Spiritual Baptists in addition have the obligation to attend services

baptisms and wakes, obey their leader, go on pilgrimages and attend to the personal needs of members of the community.

The relationships between the Spiritual Baptists and Obeah are intricate. Spiritual Baptists are called upon to deal with troublesome spirits in the community just like Obeah men but the Baptists get their strength from within the church. They get signs (via dreams) to do works. Although Obeah men also perform similar functions such as dealing with troublesome spirits they do so from a secular religion that is without organizational framework.

The European's religions, although imposed upon the African, were never really fully understood or adopted by the enslaved African in Tobago. The religious propagation, with, the stunning magical power of the African medicine man (Obeahmen), so strongly influenced the African inhabitants that they started to burrow from their own myths and religious practices until they established a variant form of faith, which became known as the Shouter Baptist(Thomas, 1987). The beliefs and practices of the Spiritual Baptist are a version of the beliefs and practices surrounding Obeah but with special additions (e.g. baptism and mourning).

Obeah (obi) was documented by the legislatures and early missionaries, who complained of the belief that there were two spirits in a person, that after death one must send the dead off in a prescribed manner, and that Obeah (men with magical

power) must be consulted in order to rid the surviving or bereaved person of those spirits that are still present. Joseph Bell (a Catholic priest) presented evidence that Obeah originated in Africa and was brought to the New World by comparing historical writings on eight West Indian islands (Bell 1932). Adequate documentation exist in Tobago proving that Obeah existed in Tobago from the pre-emancipation colonial era.(C.O.288). Obeah is still widely practiced in Tobago today throughout the island of Tobago. Obeahmen are consulted by people of various religious faiths on the island, suggesting the widespread survival of both Africanisms and the struggle in which they provided for the empowerment and security of African peoples across centuries.

Implications of Work For the Reinterpretation of Studies

Although earlier recognized by colonial authorities, Obeah has been historically portrayed as “superstition” “witchcraft” an “evil” or “negative” force which “promoted rebellion among the enslaved Africans. Obeah was portrayed as “black magic” an “immoral force” which endangered the enslaved African’s health and morals. Prior to 1791 when Vodun had not yet entered the English language, “Obeah” tended to signify whatever forms of supernatural beliefs and religious practices the British encountered among the enslaved Africans. The colonial authorities eventually recognized the political power specifically as relates to slave rebellions and the incursions and revolts of the West Indian Maroons (e.g. Haitian and Jamaican Moroons). The religious and social functions of Obeah were often intentionally and unintentionally misrepresented by pre-emancipation colonial authorities. Even in the 1900s scholars such as Price (1930) described Obeah practices as “black magic” by which sicknesses could be put on people and evil spirits can be put on peoples “minds and homes.”

Although the author’s research corroborates the earlier described practice of Obeah it diverges by describing Obeah as a secular religion without an organizational framework. The beliefs surrounding Obeah manifest themselves both in private and public rituals. These secularized rituals occur in times of trouble (wakes) in times of

happiness (thanksgivings) or just anytime (visits to the sick). Private rituals included conferring with persons about personal problems. In other words Obeah was a system of beliefs which contributed in the colonial period and still contributes today to the continuity and cohesion of the Africans in Tobago. All peoples of all social classes, religions and occupations participate in these private rituals in Tobago. The relations and distinctions surrounding the beliefs and practices between Obeah and Spiritual Baptists represent intricate beliefs that were not portrayed or represented accurately in colonial Tobago.

Research on pre-emancipation existence of Orisha beliefs and practices in Tobago remains to be performed. There is the possibility that Orisha beliefs and practices were present among the certain people in the Tobago such as the people described to the author as the “Old Congo” people. The origin and meaning of certain fisherman rituals could be the focus of another research project in the future. The key oral, cultural histories of Tobago’s African presence have not been supported by research on an archaeological level. Archaeological history needs to be explored in conjunction with Tobago’s social history in order to determine the presence of African material culture in Tobago. Archaeology in the form of African architectural, metallurgical, and agricultural technologies is yet to be examined to any appreciable degree in Tobago.

Participatory action research in which native people could participate in the analysis and explanation of cultural practices and experiences that a non-native historian could never really fully understand must be encouraged. Is it possible for a person brought up in the twentieth century with its contemporary political, moral, legal and economic value system to fully understand the minds and actions of earlier members of his own society? How much more complicated of a process is it to understand an ancient alien culture? Therefore the answer to questions of Tobago's African history lies largely within the explanation and interpretation by its people. Prior historical analysis of Tobago's African descendants by colonial sources were mainly biased by racist and ethnocentric portrayals of African culture as "evil" "primitive" or "illogical." However closer examination of Tobago's African legacy is proving that African culture was and is persistent and dynamic. Archaeology must be supported and complimented by oral history which has often been misunderstood and misrepresented intentionally and unintentionally by colonial authorities. Comparisons of archaeological, ethnographic, and oral evidence will allow for reassessment of pre-emancipation African society. Viewing the enslaved Africans simply as an exploited population with no social dynamic or power within the plantation system of colonial Tobago reflects more on the oppressor's (slave owner's or colonial official's) records or tactics and less on the social relations, history or realities of the Africans in Tobago.

In the historical context of their own beliefs, Africans in Tobago emerge as spiritually empowered survivors.

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