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Research Article

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Mediating the Sacred between Junkanoo and the Church in Contemporary Bahamian Society

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Abstract: It can be argued that theology in the Caribbean has, until recently, been reticent in engaging cultural studies, and particularly in using African Caribbean religiocultural heritages and art-forms such as carnival, reggae, stickfigting, Obeah and Myal, as examples, as sites for theological reflection. Undergirding this reticence is a colonially inherited belief in a dichotomy between the sacred and the secular; between the church and culture; and consequently, between theology and the social sciences. This paper argues that despite popular mis-conceptions, Junkanoo, a mainly Anglophone Caribbean street festival fundamental to Bahamian identity, has always functioned as a new and liberative way of doing theology in that context. Its complex relationship with the church deeply challenges concepts of sacredness, secularity, profanity, and idolatry as they are lived out in contemporary Bahamian life. This insight is important not only for theological research and discourse, but also for cultural studies and various forms of social research, since accessing the dynamic truths of such African Caribbean religiocultural productions and experiences require such an interdisciplinary approach.

Keywords: junkanoo, theology, cultural studies

Introduction

It can be argued that theology in the Caribbean has, until recently, been reticent in engaging cultural studies, and particularly in using African Caribbean religiocultural heritages and artforms such as carnival, reggae, stickfigting, Obeah and Myal, as examples, as sites for theological reflection. Undergirding this reticence is a colonially inherited belief in a dichotomy between the sacred and the secular; between the church and culture; and consequently, between theology and the social sciences. This article argues that despite popular mis-conceptions, Junkanoo, a mainly Anglophone Caribbean street festival fundamental to Bahamian identity, has always functioned as a new and liberative way of doing theology in that context. Its complex relationship with the church deeply challenges concepts of sacredness, secularity, profanity, and idolatry as they are lived out in contemporary Bahamian life. This insight is important not only for theological research and discourse, but also for cultural studies and various forms of social research, since accessing the dynamic truths of such African Caribbean religiocultural productions and experiences require such an interdisciplinary approach.

To help this discussion, this article is organised in the following way: Firstly, it discusses methodological assumptions between theology and cultural studies as they play out in a specifically Caribbean context. Secondly, it introduces Junkanoo in the Bahamian context and specifically my own research into its relationship with the Church. Finally, it discusses two colonially inherited dualisms that require both theological and cultural analysis.

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Methodological Considerations

In simple terms, theology can be defined as literally 'God-talk', or a rational conversation about God and God's involvement with the world. Western or classical 'Christian' theology was born out of encounter between European Christianity and its insistence on Greek philosophical thought.¹ There have been pros to this. Firstly, during the first centuries of the Church's existence it helped to provide clear defense of Christian doctrine and traditions, particularly during second century Hellenism where Christianity was marginalized and thought of as one of the many mystery cults. Secondly, it helped to root the truths of the Christian faith in the intellectual realm. This can be seen through Thomas Aquinas and the scholastics during the Middle Ages, with their establishment of formal schools of theological thinking, all based more or less on Platonic and Aristotelian thought. While it gives conceptual cogency to what is ultimately a mysterious and supremely complex reality, God, it has come to do so as the only, or standard way of reflecting upon that which cannot be so easily systematized.

After Vatican II the 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of Liberation and Third World theologians who contested Eurocentric approaches to reflecting on the mystery of God and God's involvement in the world. From the Latin American context, Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, Clodovis Boff, and Juan Luis Segundo, amongst others, have used Marxist historical-analysis to critique classical theology as philosophically dualistic, insisting on 'thinking' about God, rather the liberative actions of God. Meeting in Dar Es-Salaam, Tanzania in 1976, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) was created to specifically and continually reject Western modes of theological reflection, deciding that it had failed to meet the needs of people in the developing world, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. They would chart a new course, looking to their own indigenous philosophical and theological thinking for mediating Christ, the Bible, and conceptions of God, and God's plans for human life and flourishing. Theology was to now arise from one's culture, since God and the mystery of God had already been present there.

The title of Robert Hood's work, *Must God Remain Greek? Afro Cultures and God-talk*, expresses the problem succinctly. In charting a way out of Graeco-Roman philosophical approaches to thinking about the divine within African and African Caribbean churches and societies, Hood writes:

Examples of the Graceo-Roman legacy that we in the West take for granted abound. We assume uncritically that there are fundamental, unchanging "principles" that anchor humanity and cultures. We speak of "truth" as a natural given in human affairs and discourse. It is customary to think of "action based on one's principles" and to speak of the "spiritual" being dissimilar to the "material," of "essences" in contrast to "becoming." Theologians and other intellectuals like to talk about "being" and "God as the ground or source of being," about "Jesus Christ as the Logos," about "God as the alpha and the omega," about "essences and accidents," and about "form and matter." All of these demonstrate the conquest of Greek metaphysics and philosophical patterns of thought in our ordinary and conceptual lives. They are commonplace and "natural," so much so that we have determined that such is the most appropriate way to preach and interpret God and Jesus Christ in other cultures. (5)

Theology in the Caribbean

From inception, Caribbean Theologians have been critiquing the Caribbean's acceptance of Euro-American approaches to theology. In his contribution to Caribbean Ecumenical Consultation for Development in 1971, the event which effectively became the beginnings of an ecumenical tradition of Caribbean Theology, Idris Hamid criticizes the default theological methodology in the region. He asserted that its Eurocentric predominance needed to be broken, that it was too dualist, essentialist, hierarchical and colonial. Some years later, Stephen Jennings would distinguish between two kinds of theology in operation in the Caribbean, Western theology, and secondly, African Retentions and their reinterpretations of Western, colonial or missionary theology. For Jennings, the former always served to suppress the latter, constantly

¹ The point being made here is that Christianity is not the only religion or system that does theology. In the western world the descriptor 'Christian' is assumed and therefore left unstated.

promoting the idea of a distinct binary. This is still the case, and the region has yet to wrestle with the possibility of multiple approaches to theological methodology.

But, the Caribbean has still to develop its own theological methodology, which deeply engages with the Bible and the history of Christian tradition and doctrine, using the same for concrete praxis. Caribbean theologians are aware that contextual theologies outside the region, Black Theology for example, or Liberation hermeneutics, are not exactly adequate for the region since they cannot speak for, or adequately express the realities of Caribbean life. Allan Kirton explains that the "sociology of the poor in the Caribbean is markedly different from that of the Latin neighbours," and a direct application of the Latin American analysis or their methodology cannot work in the Caribbean context (102). Similarly, Charles Jason Gordon has critiqued the Latin Americans and African Americans as not being able to provide an adequate theology for the Caribbean context. While the Latin Americans are concerned with classism and poverty, and the African American context with racism. Caribbean territories are concerned with colonialism. He writes:

... Latin American Liberation Theology has often acted as a norm for New World Theology. Thus this theological method, and not the context of the region, has often been the norm for evaluation. This constitutes a new imperialism. Although the Caribbean takes inspiration from Latin American Theology, the context of the Caribbean is very different from that of Latin America. The region, and the theology produced there, must be seen as a creation in its own right, and thus, evaluated in the light of its context. (37)

One particular way that theological reflection in the Caribbean can find a fruitful conversation partner to more deeply understand and converse with Caribbean daily realities, would be to engage cultural studies.

Cultural Studies and Theology

Generally speaking, cultural studies, cultural criticism, or cultural analysis are terms that involve multiple disciplinary lenses for describing, interpreting, and defining everyday experiences. In the British context where I now reside and teach, Stuart Hall is influential. His assertions that culture is a dynamic space in which meanings are continually contested and negotiated, and that popular cultural productions are sites in which issues of power and sociopolitical boundaries and interactions become apparent, have helped to ensure the emergence of cultural studies in British universities. In many ways, this has become a basic consideration for the field of Contextual or Practical Theology. Scholarship in this field, Robert J. Schreiter, Stephen Bevans, John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, and Kathryn Tanner to name but a few, contest the notion that theology is somehow a-contexual, or that truth is somehow a-cultural; every field of theology has a context, and is culturally influenced. In arguing that any transmission of the Gospel, or of theology, into a another cultural context, Schreiter asserts that it cannot avoid imperialism and colonialism. The posture needed would be one of listening to a culture. For this he depends on cultural studies, particularly semiotic understandings of culture articulated in the works of Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, and Mary Douglas. This semiotic understanding of culture is found as the foundation of Bevan's work. He too depends upon a semiotic understanding of culture and sees symbolic interactionism at the heart of one of his modes: the anthropological model of contextual theology. In this model, culture is the space in which God's truth is revealed. It is mined or discovered as one seeks a treasure. In order for this to take place, deep listening to the complexities of culture must take place. Swinton and Mowat, on the other hand, look particularly at the interplay between Practical Theology and Qualitative Research. Practical Theology is concerned with the practice of faith in local contexts. Their work argues for the use of social research more broadly, and qualitative research methodologies more particularly, asserting that such an approach brings about deeper theological insights into everyday cultural and religious experiences and practices. Finally, Kathryn Tanner critiques structuralist and functionalist concepts of culture in favour of post-modern approaches, in order to allow cultural participants and situations to speak with their own voices. Moreover, in the edited work, Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism, Tanner, along with Delwin Brown and Sheila Greeve Davaney, argue for a critical but conscious theological shift towards cultural studies and analysis, and away from philosophy which has served to keep theology static and elitist.

Cultural Studies and Theology in the Caribbean

More recently, theological research in the Caribbean context has turned to cultural studies through specific research into African Caribbean religiocultural productions. George Mulrain uses Vaudou in Haiti or Calypso in Trinidad as the starting point of his theological method. In speaking of the viability of the music of the Caribbean for doing theology he explains:

... the concept of *universal theology* is a misnomer. Theology does not emerge in a vacuum. The experience of God arises in context. What I have noted about music that has surfaced in the African Caribbean region is that although worthy of being used as a theological tool, there is still a long way to go before such a dream becomes a reality. (Mulrain, The Music of the African Caribbean 10)

In the published version of his doctoral thesis Mulrain urges western approaches to theology to take note of the ways in which indigenous methodologies help deepen our understanding of the mystery of God.

It [is] therefore of paramount importance that western theologians in particular take Haitian Folk Religion and Culture more seriously than they are inclined to do. They must seek to explore beyond the surface. It is only when they penetrate the superficial barrier that they may obtain fresh insights, which would facilitate the truly intercultural approach to theology. (*Theology in Folk Culture* 370)

Michael Jagessar uses the pan-Caribbean trickster, Anansy, as a way of mediating a culturally authentic, liberative theology. He suggests that the ambivalence Anansy employs, and is, and the way he/she moves in-between worlds, allows for multiple perspectives, for critiquing and liberating biblical and theological truth from long held colonial chains. Anansyism as trickster theology leaves space for the imagination, a place long denied within classical theological circles. He writes:

Having inherited Christianity with all its Western Eurocentric baggage, I suggest that we have become locked into a largely Protestant theological mindset that has relegated the act of imagination to the realm of 'hocus-pocus' which is viewed with suspicion. While, Black theological discourses (and contextual theologies) emphasize experience, there is still much to be done in the area of imagination. (134)

Women theologians have engaged cultural studies through their research into the theological significance of African Caribbean religiocultural productions such as dancehall, or Myalism. In line with Carolyn Cooper's research into dancehall and its cultural, sociopolitical and even theological meanings, Anna Kasafi Perkins has centred her theological investigation on Jamaican Dancehall, particularly the work of Tanya Stephens. She sees Stephen's use of dancehall as the theological posture of 'talking-back', meaning that it is a way of critiquing oppressive practices such as colonialism, patriarchy, and religion. Perkins states the following:

Tanya rejects a certain self-important contradictory religion, but not spirituality. In fact, as you have probably already realised, her music is rife with biblical allusions in an almost unconscious fashion. Perhaps this is to be expected having grown up in a society like Jamaica, which is saturated with Christian influences. At the same time, her thoughts are flavoured with dreadtalk and the striving after a spirituality, which is universal and all inclusive. (Perkins)

Similarly, Anette Brown looks at dancehall as an opportunity for the church in Jamaica to engage the lives of its young people, thus seeing it as a potential but denied resource for mission. Unfortunately, this very powerful religiocultural production is seen as low culture, and unfit for dialogue with the Church (1). Whether one talks of Rastafarians, Vaudou, Calypso, or Carnival, these, as suggested by Anthony Reddie, are Caribbean dialectical spiritualties, which function in context of slavery and colonialism to constantly expose and resist the colonial myth that there is a standard, universal way of doing 'God'; a way which just happens to be European (Reddie). Junkanoo is one of these dialectical spiritualties.

Junkanoo and the Church in the Bahamas

Junkanoo is a New World carnival-like Street festival of West African origin. While francophone and Hispanic Caribbean territories enjoyed their carnivals which coincided with the Church's Lenten Calendar, Junkanoo (Jankunu/Jonkonnu/John Canoe in Jamaica; Junkanoo/John Canoe in the Bahamas; and among the Garifuna (Black Caribs) of Belize, John Canoe in English and Yancunú in Spanish, and known as Wanáragua in their own language; Goombay in Bermuda; Jumbies in Barbados; and John Kuner in the Carolinas) appeared in Anglophone colonial territories and were associated with the two days during the Christmas period I which slaves were given a holiday. Currently, Junkanoo in the Bahamas has become a national and economic phenomenon, being a symbol of national identity as well as attracting visitors from all over the world. From about 1 am to 9 am Boxing Day morning, and about 2 am to 9 am New Year's Day morning, the main thoroughfare of the country comes alive to a spectacle of dance, colour, costuming and pulsating music. But these two days of competition do not adequately sum up the festival, since it has become one of the more prominent symbols for Bahamian indigenous self-identification, and finds expression at funerals, weddings, and even political rallies or demonstrations. Moreover, thousands of people prepare for Junkanoo all year round, and there is now a 26 year-old primary and secondary school version of the festival that takes places just prior to the two major parades. But while it is deeply ingrained in the soul of the majority of Bahamians, it has yet to be embraced and explored by the Church as a potent means of doing theology. Frankly, it is seen as inappropriate and secular.

My own research explored this festival in the Bahamian context, using qualitative research methods to tease out the complex relationship between the Church and this Junkanoo (Turner). As contextual theological research, I was more concerned with critiquing church practices in order to find ways to bring wholeness to what I had problematized as a dissonant cultural situation in which both the Church and Junkanoo play their part. Using concepts of DuBois' double-consciousness and Fanon's self-hatred, it was clear that there was a colonially informed belief that African religious and cultural heritages and missionary Christianity were incompatible (Black Skin, White Masks; The Wretched of the Earth). This incompatibility is further complicated by the fact that Bahamians carry this dissonance daily, since they are deeply Christian and deeply lovers of Junkanoo, both in their identity and their participation.

Coloniality, Theology and Junkanoo

We cannot underestimate the power of colonial concepts over everyday life in the Caribbean, past and present. Usually coloniality presents itself through dualistic thinking, that one would be either Black or White; slave or master; civilized or heathen; or, sacred or secular. These concepts are both cultural and theological and thus need exploration from both fields of analysis, theology and cultural studies. In my research into the Junkanoo festival the following two interrelated cluster of ideas become apparent.

Sacred Vs Secular

During my ethnographic research into the relationship between Junkanoo and the Church, I came to the conclusion that one cannot make a rigid separation between the two (Turner). Firstly, there are at least four self-identified Christian Junkanoo groups whose groups and shack act as Christian ministries.² Secondly, there are various pastors, some prominent, who are heavily involved in their groups. In fact, one of the two historic rival groups, the Valley Boys, grew out of the Anglican Church and was mentored by an Anglican priest who went on to become the first Black Bahamian Bishop, Michael H. Eldon. Thirdly, most groups make it a habit of having yearly Church services, usually one of the Churches in their communities. Fourthly,

² A 'shack' is the place where Groups build and store their costumes. It is usually a large open building at the heart of different communities, and acts as the hub of a group's activities. It is a place of belonging for various groups.

a lot of the music in Junkanoo are church hymns and worship songs, and perhaps almost half of the themes presented are scripturally based or theological in some way. And finally, most people involved in *rushin* are also heavily involved in some Church or the other, be that musicians, dancers, or even Junkanoo group leaders. Nonetheless, despite these facts, Junkanoo still stands on the fringe of ecclesiastical and liturgical life. Christian Junkanoo groups are very much in the minority, and often belittled by their associated denominational communities. Many pastors are involved in Junkanoo in some form or the other, but most would not dare promote it from their pulpits. While Junkanoo groups attend Church, they have to do so dressed for the occasion, leaving behind their goat-skinned drums, cowbells and whistles. And, while, for the most part, Bahamians are involved in Junkanoo to the extent that they are involved in their respective churches, there is a common understanding that the two should not be mixed.

The myth that Junkanoo (as other indigenous religiocultural productions) is irreligious and secular has been in operation from Europe's first encounter with the New World. It is interesting that Columbus' first landfall in 1492 was a little island called *Guanahani* by the indigenous Arawaks, a place he renamed San Salvador, meaning Holy Saviour. *Guanahani* was part of a chain of islands that eventually came to be known as The Bahamas. Having encountered the native people, he wrote the following in his diary:

It appears to me, that the people are ingenious, and would be good servants and I am of opinion that they would very readily become Christians, as they appear to have no religion. They very quickly learn such words as are spoken to them. If it please our Lord, I intend at my return to carry home six of them to your Highnesses, that they may learn our language. I saw no beasts in the island, nor any sort of animals except parrots." These are the words of the Admiral. (Columbus et al.)

With the decimation of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, Africans were brought in as replacement labourers for the accumulation of European capital. They were equally viewed as non-persons who had no legitimate religiosity. They were heathen, uncivilized, and secular, and their religious practices were a direct affront to the sacredness of the Church.

This dualism and othering remain today. One of my interview participants recalled one of her experiences of the Church's vilification of Junkanoo:

It was the Boxing Day Parade, 2008. I was going down to the parade, walking from the shack on Young Street to Bay Street. From one of the churches on the way I heard this lady pastor say that the young people of the country need to be educated that Junkanoo is demonic. That made me so mad. And it showed me how ignorant some people are about themselves and where we came from and what we are supposed to be as a people. (Interview, 2009)

But secularising Junkanoo and promoting it as incompatible with official religion – the Church – is also an academic occurrence, particularly in the social sciences. Kenneth Bilby critiques the scholarship on Junkanoo for surprisingly not making the connection between the religious roots of the festivals and their present articulations. He critiques Judith Bethelheim who asserts that the festival is secular because it does not have any readily identified deities. Michael Craton doesn't escape his observation either, since he, too, describes the festival as secular (14). He then looks at the work of Clement Bethel, perhaps the most prominent Bahamian Junkanoo Scholar, who furthers this secularity when stating: "However attractive the theory that John Canoe was the relic of some deeply religious African ritual," he argues, "it must be discounted … [The] suggestion of a religious origin of John Canoe must be laid aside" (*Junkanoo: Festival of the Bahamas* 12-14).

But is this so? Kirkley Sands, a Bahamian theologian whose specialisation is what he calls Bahamian slave spirituality, makes the point that what one finds in Junkanoo is a reformation of colonial or missionary Christianity. He writes:

The slaves also used the feasting and merriment associated with Christmas for their religious purposes, as the Christians of the fourth century did in the case of the Roman Saturnalia. Could it be that the slaves chose to celebrate Junkanoo at this time not only because of the free time the masters afforded them but also because of the Messianic implications of the *sabab*? Could it be, too, that they were challenging the Church after the manner of "Sir, we wish to see Jesus," i.e. the Jesus whom the Church proclaimed as Mashiah (Messiah) and with whom so many slaves readily identified?" (73)

But this reformation, this ease of connection with the biblical Jesus, was precisely because of a profoundly pneumatological African religiosity and spirituality that insisted God would be present within the very Junkanoo act. A closer look at the term *rushin* reveals that it is not play and excitement, but in anthropological terms, it is a contemporary manifestation of West African rites of trance/possession. The underlying spirituality within Junkanoo is Myalism, also found among the diffusion of Anglophone Junkanoo festivals. Dianne Stewart explains that in her Jamaican context Revivalist and expressive forms of Christianity were, in reality, means of masking ancestor visitation, and possession rituals, normative within West African religiosity (160). Likewise, Barry Chevannes speaks of the Myal religious trajectory in Jamaica as pneumatologically reinterpreting Christianity. It challenged Western preoccupations with the Trinitarian persons of the Father and the Son, an instead asserted the person of the Spirit. He writes:

Where Christianity is transfixed on Jesus as mediator Myal was transfixed on the Spirit as possessor and sought [the Spirit] in dreams and secluded retreat. Whereas Christianity placed its emphasis on transmitted knowledge (doctrine, Bible, catechism) for conversion, Myal placed its emphasis on the experience of the Spirit. When followers found [the Spirit] it was to be filled by [the Spirit], to be possessed. Possession by the Spirit thus became the quintessential experience of myalized Christianity. (18-19)

It then makes sense that the very terminology, rushin, came out of the Africanized Churches on the Family Islands. This observation has been made by E. Clement Bethel in his research into grassroots religiocultural expressions across the Bahamian archipelago ("Music in the Bahamas"). Subsequent research into Cat Island, one of the more rural islands of the Bahamas, has made a comparison between what was happening simultaneously in the Church during the Christmas celebrations, and what was taking place outside its doors in Junkanoo (Bilby 197-98). Worship took place inside and outside the doors of the Church. I encountered this spirit-possession phenomenon in my research into the experiences of Junkanoo. One prominent leader and Junkanoo icon explained that the Junkanoo music had the power to take control over you, and it had to be put in check. Another informant explained that when she wanted to worship, she did so more easily with Junkanoo music than with her Anglican forms of worship. Another Junkanoo leader explained how he saw someone become 'slain' in the spirit while at Junkanoo practice.⁴

To the persistent myth that Junkanoo is a secular, god-less activity, experiences in Junkanoo tell a different story. It is fundamentally an act of worship, and should be seen this way. In fact, it is perhaps the most culturally appropriate means of worship for people in contemporary Bahamian society as they continually attempt experiencing God in everyday life. Theologically, Junkanoo represents a liturgical rejection of the idea that the movement of God's Spirit conforms to a sacred/secular divide. It mediates the Biblical truth as seen in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan in John 4, that worship is not confined to a particular place, Samaria or Jerusalem. Though both places are important, true worship of God is done "in spirit and in truth" (verse 24).

Playful vs Harmful

Colonial control saw the activity of slaves as either playful mimicry, or bold and bloody testing of colonial authority. There was no in-between. To the former the response was to laugh and downplay its significance, to the latter, the response was to wage all-out war: the policing of slave customs; the legislation of religion; and the branding, beating, and killing of the Black body. Either way, a binary existed. This either/ or conceptualization of the African Caribbean person and their ancestral traditions, like Junkanoo, has persisted. In the colonial mind-set, either Africans were jesters and jokers, or they were warring savages. What they were not, were human beings seeking liberation. Likewise, either Junkanoo is harmless fun, or, it

³ Family Islands refer to the more rural islands of the Bahamas from which many people in the cities of Nassau or Freeport originate.

⁴ The term slain in the Spirit is popular within North American/Caribbean Pentecostalism to refer to the phenomenon of trance/possession. One loses control of one's self and is completely under the control of a spiritual power, or process.

is wild and dangerous. What it is not seen as, is a dignified, theological way of confronting personal, social, and national injustices.

In the Caribbean we *play mas*; *play* or *jump* Carnival; *wuk-up* at Kadooment; and we *rush* Junkanoo. We are a people of rhythm, often a complex rhythm all our own that cannot be so easily replicated. Such descriptions of the dancing and merriment in Caribbean street festivals suggest that they are means of play and diversion. One of the earliest and most enduring anthropological theories about these street festivals was that they were means of letting off steam. Max Gluckman's ritual of rebellion and rite of reversal, which theories the mimicry inherent in continental South-eastern African tribal life, highlight the fact that steam was being let off, a way of managing conflict and stress. Robert Dirks further refines Gluckman's theory, applying it to the context of New World slavery and the Junkanoo phenomenon, highlighting the fear of violent uprising, and the need to blunt such imminent violence. His novelty was in linking such surge in energy, and the need for such release in a society in which sugar was cultivated and consumed as explanatory of the Christmas agitations and the need for a Black Saturnalia. But did this play simply let off steam? Is there not a deeper theological significance when Bahamians, and by extension Caribbean people, *rush*, or *jump*, *whine*, *wuk-up*, or *play*? Before this is answered we must further investigate this colonial myth concerning African Caribbean play.

The anthropological emphasis on *letting off steam* current in Gluckman and Dirks as described above, would come under critique by Orlando Patterson, who emphasized the subversive nature of the festival, explaining that they functioned to protest against the established order, not preserve or strengthen it, as in the case of the Roman Saturnalia. Acts of rebellion and revolutions across the Caribbean had been steeped in African traditional religiosity, and were always seen by the oppressed Caribbean people as acts of God's restorative justice. Barry Chevannes explains that Caribbean liberators, the likes of Sam Sharpe, Paul Bogle, Alexander Bedward and Nanny of the Maroons, have always held a this-worldly orientation; meaning that their rebellion had theological and spiritual foundations, and their this-worldly understanding of salvation and human flourishing precipitated their need for rebellion (49). He further states:

Throughout the history of African-Caribbean religions many leaders have either claimed or been accorded the status of Godhead: Bedward, Howell, Prince Emmanuel, Henry; and many more, religious and secular, have been attributed with divine power: Nanny, Taki, Garvey, Bustamente, Hibbert, Hinds, Planno, Gad and countless spiritual healers and leaders who provide counsel, insight and leadership, and are alleged to have performed or be capable of performing feats such as disappearing from the midst of enemies, healing, reading and prophesying (all feats performed by Jesus). (48)

One cannot overlook the theme of warfare embedded within African Caribbean religiocultural productions, for they have been sites of concrete resistance. Junkanoo has functioned this way in Bahamian society as well. It is commonly thought that the Bahamas had a peaceful slave history and that slave owners were benevolent. Gail Saunders has contested this myth asserting that slaves in the Bahamas vigorously and physically resisted their oppression. Along with passive means of resistance such as feigned illness, refusal to work, inefficiency, running away and even suicide, a number of key violent uprisings took place coming to the end of Loyalist slavery in 1834 (185). From 1829 to 1834 there were 7 slave revolts, 3 on Exuma, one on New Providence, one on San Salvador, one Cat Island, and the other on Eleuthera. These were due to lack of food and clothing; indignation over the hanging of a slave; opposition to the mis-treatment, and flogging of slaves; and the removal of slaves from one island to another (187). This spirit of resistance would find its way into the Junkanoo festival during the Great Depression. Since poor Blacks in the Bahamas became doubly poor and dispossessed, Junkanoo took the form of violent gang clashes. Trans-Caribbean labour protests in the 1930s led to the famous 1942 Burma Road Riot where Black Bahamians stormed the commercial centre, smashing windows and looting shops. For fear of the protesting nature of the Bahamian masses, Junkanoo was banned until 1947, resurfacing in a controlled and managed form.

This latent violent or martial predisposition becomes problematic in the way that expressivism becomes problematic in worship. In Caribbean life, as well as Caribbean Theology, notions of cultural, political and religious radicalism have been of great concern for not only Caribbean governments, but also the ceaseless eye of interested international, political and economic powers. As an example, in the formative years of Caribbean Theology the influence of Black Power and the Marxist historical analysis used by the Liberation

Theologians brought the nascent discipline under heavy attack; both from governments in the region and former colonial powers. The 1983 invasion of Grenada and the deadly flexing of the Regan Administration's political muscles against the Churches responses, left no doubt that any talk of political, economic, religious, and even theological rebellion would be met with swift and effective responses. Allan Kirton, explains that the Santa Fe document at the time functioned to suppress any dissident theological thought and the Caribbean Council Churches became its target. He writes:

... the Document, recognizing the vital rile [sic] of the church in this region in shaping the concept of political freedom, judged that "Marxist-Lenninist forces have utilized the church as a political weapon against private property and productive capitalism by infiltrating the religious community with ideas that are less Christian than Communist. (103)

But, in the case of Junkanoo, what is the violence/rebellion against? Is it the cause of something, or is it a response to something? Nicolette Bethel explains that Junkanoo signifies the latter:

Junkanoo has the quality of an occupation, an invasion of the centres of authority; it occurs at the heart of the commercial power of the white Bahamian elite. This symbolism is still implicit in the parades. Although today they follow a circular route, Bahamians still refer metonymously to the act of attending or participating in the parades as "going to Bay Street" - the focus of anti-black discrimination, the site of legislation, and the heart of commerce - and until 1998 the subversion of the everyday state of affairs was emphasized by the fact that the Junkanoo parades ran counter to the normal one-way traffic system of the downtown area. For many black Bahamians, then, Junkanoo embodies their best response to the dehumanization of slavery and its aftermath. (122)

The reality is that Junkanoo for contemporary Bahamians is a powerful means of protesting injustice; but this power is latent. It surges to the surface as a popular chant that one can hear from free dancers . . . "Warrior . . . Warrior . . . Warrior!" Furthermore, the traditional rushin movement was martial-like. In my interview with Nicolette Bethel, she recounted this martial component in Junkanoo both in the names of Junkanoo groups, Junkanoo dancing, and her grandmother's fundamentalist Brethren worship style:

In the mid 20th century when the first groups started to rush they always called themselves something martial; something that had to do with some kind of warrior. I don't know where that comes from but its deep and there are still some Junkanoo fellas who talk about going to war, going to Bay is going to war. But I say that its martial, it manifests itself in Junkanoo, but I saw it in my grandmother who as a Brethren, was, as I said before there are many things that Brethren are not permitted to do or certainly were not permitted to do, and one of them was dance at all sexually suggestive. So, when my grandmother used to dance she had a very specific kind of movement, which was, and it very much was... and the core of the Junkanoo movement had a very similar kind of thing: the upper body was rigid, you could see it in Quadrille as well, this is one of the things, the upper body does not move, the lower body moves . . . you could do all kinds of fancy footwork, in my grandmother's case she didn't do fancy footwork, she just did a little shuffle, a little step moving forward, and I think it's the rushing movement. Only in her case she was always perfectly upright, whereas in rushing around the church you might actually have a little lean to move you around, but you keep your whole body very stiff, and the movement comes in the lower part, and my grandmother had that same kind of movement. (Interview, 2011)

Kirkley Sands' provides theological explanation of this in his explication of Sabab within African Bahamian slave spirituality. Sabab, which translates as circle in the Old Testament, refers to marching in a circle as was done in the book of Joshua during the fall of the Walls of Jericho. This Old Testament spirituality involving war cries and circular marches are very much central to the Junkanoo Festival. He further states:

Bahamian Junkanoo embodied the slaves' prophetic voice. It constituted a demand for dialogue with their ancestral faith, and a call for social justice in the kind of democratically free society which that faith and their Baptist religious experience proleptically held out to them. (65)

Conclusion

African Caribbean religiocultural productions are very complex phenomena that require critical attention from multiple perspectives. Contextual Theology is predicated upon the idea of interdisciplinarity or

specifically a deep engagement with social research or cultural studies. In the Caribbean context, festivals such as Junkanoo reveal how, in fact, both fields need each other to discover deeper insights into such religious and cultural phenomena and how they function. In this article it is clear that theologising around Junkanoo requires the depth of insights offered by cultural studies and analysis in particular, and social research more broadly. In the same vein, cultural studies and analysis require the theological sensibilities to see a deeply engrained theological methodology within such religiocultural productions. Because of both, we discover more about the sacred in ordinary life.

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