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Mystic Medicine: Afro-Jamaican Religio-Cultural Epistemology and the Decolonization of Health

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by

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Table of Contents

Abstract

The underlying motivation for this thesis is the position that colonialism, or coloniality, continues to thrive as an ideological and institutional framework all over the world, to the detriment of the majority of the population of the earth, and particularly of indigenous peoples and the African diaspora. Thus, what is sought here is a decolonization both of mind and institutions. Looking at the case of Jamaica, one can see how coloniality continues to undermine the beliefs, behaviors, institutions, and overall well-being of the majority African-descended population of the island in many ways both culturally and economically. I narrow my focus in this thesis on the official biomedical healthcare system and its relationship to indigenous Afro-Jamaican healing practices and the people it theoretically seeks to serve; as attested to by many scholars, this healthcare system is failing the majority population of the Caribbean region as a whole, and Jamaica is no exception.

To show the ways in which this is true, I analyze Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural epistemology (looking specifically at conceptions of self, community, environment, and health) for how it contrasts with dominant Western-derived epistemology, which generally serves as the intellectual basis for biomedicine. This is useful because indigenous Afro-Jamaican healing practices stem directly from the religio-cultural traditions found on the island, and it will be shown how their underlying epistemology can contribute to the process of decolonization. Along with other scholars in the field, I

argue for an integration of indigenous healing practices and biomedicine in Jamaica and beyond.

All of the research informing this thesis was secondary, having been conducted entirely through relevant literature. What I show is that Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural epistemology and its healing focus provides a holism that is crucial for viewing sociocultural and structural change – which is what I view as the goal of decolonization – as essential to the health and well-being of all. The African roots of this epistemology are showcased, and related its holism is a generally cooperative interepistemic manner of interacting with diverse epistemologies, which is conducive to integration and innovation of knowledge systems and institutions. As I will show, Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural epistemology and healing practices have great potential to inform many fields and disciplines, including religion and philosophy, medical anthropology, development and decolonization, as well as globalization.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Increasing scholarly scrutiny of the development project worldwide has revealed deep flaws in current mainstream approaches to such an undertaking as well as deeply held and seemingly conflicting values of diverse peoples across the globe. In light of this fact, the idea of a single universe has begun to be challenged in favor of what might be called a *pluriverse* (Reiter, 2018). Such a concept is important in revaluing historically oppressed indigenous epistemologies around the world and attempting to implement them in the pursuit of *decolonization* and *indigenization* of knowledge. This is especially true in light of the fact that the Global North, the same dominant colonial powers who first established a global system of Euro, or Western, supremacy that includes genocide, slavery, and epistemicide, are also the ones who are most inclined to engage in such developmental activities.

As the “first world” seeks to “develop” the “third world,” many development projects seem at their core to be a product and agent of coloniality – in reality, a continuation of the colonial mentality worldwide. As an extension of coloniality, the development project engages in sustained efforts towards the Westernization of the non-Western world, which includes a certain glorification of Western society to the detriment of indigenous epistemologies. Just as in the colonial era, this system attempts to make the third world more first-worldly in many ways besides actually curbing Global North-South inequality. Thus, crucial questions arise about what it means to be

developed or underdeveloped – terms that were themselves created by Western civilization.

It seems that the above-mentioned attempt to Westernize Non-Western peoples and societal structures, a process that has been ongoing for hundreds of years, is intimately intertwined with competitive economic strategy that functions to preserve privilege, the sole cause of underprivilege. The imposition of a Western epistemology onto non-Western peoples seems to be the root not just of economic, but ideological inequality, injustice, and dysfunction (from the individual to the structural level) around the world. In light of this fact, I argue along with many other scholars and activists that a true development project requires a decolonization and indigenization of epistemology particular to the people and the place where it is being undertaken. This paper applies the ideal of decoloniality specifically to healthcare in Jamaica, which I argue is useful for the decolonization of the concept of health – especially considering the increasing globalization now taking place, of which the Caribbean region is an important part (Boatça, 2018).

The argument of this thesis is that dominant Western-centric biomedical healthcare in Jamaica is not effectively meeting the needs of socio-economically disadvantaged African-descended Jamaican people, and a decolonization of epistemology as it pertains to the theory and practice of healthcare can provide a framework for the development of a more effective healthcare system. To argue this point, I will explore aspects of Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural healing traditions and the way in which they serve the Jamaican population. This will be accomplished by analyzing, more specifically, the conceptualizations of self, community, environment,

and health that are observable within Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural epistemology, especially as they contrast with the Western-derived biomedical healthcare system. It is my hope that this study may enable the pursuit of a more "*integrative health model"* (Crawford-Daniel and Alexis, 2017, p.38) in Jamaica, the wider Caribbean region, and even extending more broadly to any place on the globe where the effects of coloniality are detrimental to the health of the local community. As I will demonstrate, an indigenized concept of health in the case of Jamaica represents a more holistic approach to health, including its physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, and environmental dimensions of individual and collective well-being.

My examination of religio-cultural thought in the case of Jamaica takes direct aim at the deeply embedded perceptions of reality within and among all people that guide their individual and interpersonal behaviors, including healthcare. While much credit is traditionally given to the concrete, material concerns of a society and their development – such as economics – I argue that the enormous impact of subtler aspects of society – such as religion, spirituality, culture, and emotion – get overlooked, and therefore problematic and unequal circumstances are perpetuated. Along these lines, religion in general seems invariably to deal with both *development of self* and development of society. I argue that the distinct biopsychosocial etiology of Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural healing traditions provides a framework for understanding decolonization as a matter of health. In other words, this paper seeks to promote not only the decolonization *of* health, but the idea of decolonization *as* health.

While many current ideas of development seem to focus on material prosperity, an analysis of Afro-Jamaican value systems represents a turn inside; that is a shift in

focus from the external, material aspect of well-being to the notion of an internal, personal and inter-personal conceptualization of health and happiness, which in theory then naturally extends to the external. This was the genius of Mahatma Gandhi's political thought, an iconic opponent of the British colonial system. While British colonizers sought unquestioningly to "civilize" their colonial subjects*,* Gandhi redefined civilization by questioning the notion of personal fulfillment and civilizational progress; for him, the bedrock of civilization was essentially delayed gratification – a personal ability to subdue selfish desire for immediate, temporary satisfaction in pursuit of a greater fulfillment, which is inherently mutual among all people (Samnotra, 2018). This was of course embedded in an indigenous Indian epistemology based on ancient religio-cultural teachings – particularly those of the Bhagavad Gita – applied to his current situation. Viewed through this lens, it is no wonder why Gandhi considered the expansionist British Empire the least civilized nation in the world – considering in particular his idea of violence as radical abandonment of the nobler pursuit of Truth and civilizational progress, or what we might call *development*. Capitalist British imperial civilization during the colonial era sought so intensely external sources of fulfilment that they set out and colonized the globe, never thoroughly turning inside enough to question even their own extreme brutalization of countless people to achieve their goals. This turn inside – towards the affective and the spiritual – as demonstrated in this paper, represents the beginning point for genuine fulfillment, development, decolonization, and human progress in general, or as will be explained, towards health in its most holistic and absolute form.

Chapter Overview

While this thesis represents a critique of Western-derived biomedical science, what is often referred to as “modern” medicine has certainly proven some incredible theoretical and practical benefits of breaking down a subject into its most basic and narrowly defined aspects for the purpose of treatment. To examine the molecular level of knowledge itself becomes essentially an exercise in *linguistics*. That is to say that the very most basic level of our human understanding – at least of the type that is capturable in a written communication such as this – is formed by our symbolism, our language. As such, this paper seeks explicitly to question and begin a significant redefinition of a few important concepts mentioned above – “self,” “environment,” “society,” and “health.” In a sense, this paper intends to translate certain elements of Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural epistemology into an academic mode of communication, since ultimately such radically distinct epistemology and religio-cultural practice must be experienced first-hand for a true understanding thereof. Herein lie the limitations of this thesis, being written based solely on second-hand research. Nevertheless, following this introduction, there will be two primary chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 2 deals with the historical development of the Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions in focus, namely Obeah, Myal, Kumina, Revival, and RastafarI. This historical and literary context provides an understanding of the religio-cultural traditions themselves, but also of their relevance to the people and place of Jamaica. The dominant Western-derived ideological tendency to place indigenous or non-Western epistemologies and cultures in the past functions to negate their relevance and to promote their ultimate abandonment in the name of “progress.” Thus, I consider this

chapter necessary to my argument, and I will focus in particular on the indigenous African derivation of these traditions.

Chapter 3 contains two sections, each of which may be considered an exploration of possible definitions of terms going forward with development both of knowledge and medicine. This is done from within the theoretical framework of decolonization and indigenization, in this case applied to healthcare. The first section of this chapter deals with the decolonization of self, community, and environment. While these concepts are explored together in Chapter 3, I will elaborate below on the significance of each of these terms.

In the conclusion, finally I situate my argument within broader scholarly and social contexts and explain the potential for future research and social progress based on the concepts explored here. In particular, the broad, interconnected roles of emotion, religion and spirituality, and Southern theory, in academia and popular thought, are described as important in achieving a more successful interepistemic, decolonial globalization and development. This is not to advocate, necessarily, for globalization, but for a competent and productive approach to it, assuming some degree of globalization was rendered virtually inevitable by colonization. Ultimately, since interepistemic cooperation on both sides of the colonized-colonialist spectrum is imperative for achieving any measure of mutual benefit in the interaction and integration between various worlds and worldviews, a primary demand should be that the West, and the colonialist more generally, begin to engage interepistemically with the rest of the world; especially given that many colonized peoples around the world have long been forced to employ such an approach to life for the basic purpose of survival, it

should be no wonder why their voices deserve center stage in this new form of civilizational progress.

Defining the Terms

Decolonization of "Self"

In decolonizing self, I will demonstrate how an indigenous Afro-Jamaican sense of self counters the affliction that is coloniality. To give a brief example of what this is about, the African-derived religio-cultural epistemology of the Jamaican peasant class that is represented in the Revival tradition considers the human individual to be composed, beyond the physical, of a spirit or shadow that is often implicated in the etiology of Revival healers (Murphy, 1994). It is not hard to see how mental health practitioners trained in the Western scientific tradition may struggle to deal effectively with a patient whose understanding of their self and their state of health is informed by such a belief. This represents just one example of such a potential discrepancy between health practitioner and patient in the case of Jamaica.

Additionally, although RastafarI has its origins in the Jamaican pleasant class, it is quite distinct in its understanding of self. Like Revival, it is a Biblically centered religious tradition, but it diverges quite significantly in its conception of self from both Revival and Western rationalist thought in that it considers the core of the individual to be identical with God, or *Jah.* This is typical of what we may call a *mystical* tradition and has significant implications for both individual and community health and well-being, especially for the ideological uplift of the Black African on the continent and in the diaspora, which is central to RastafarI.

The ideas of what comprises an individual, and more specifically one's own *self*, that are revealed in this section's analysis of indigenous Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural epistemology shed light on the potentially large discrepancy in understanding between Western-trained medical professionals and their patients of an Afro-Jamaican background. This is especially problematic within the field of mental health, and in this sense indigenous healers have much to contribute to an integrative health model. Ultimately, the adherents of an Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural epistemology not only combat the West's "anthropological poverty" (Mveng, 1983 as cited in Stewart, 2005, p.4) but also are self-empowered to critically consider their relationship to the worlds around them, thus leading naturally to a decolonial attitude.

Decolonization of "Community"

The decolonization of community will address indigenous Afro-Jamaican ideas of socio-cultural healing and of what constitutes community and socialization. First of all, the idea of social healing is distinct from a mainstream Western conceptualization of health. While the idea of community health does exist in Western vocabulary, I argue that the social healing found in RastafarI and throughout the history of African-derived religious epistemology and practice in Jamaica is distinct from this. It would seem that this is at least in part because of African philosophical *collectivism,* which contrasts with Western *individualism.* The work of Bamikole (2012; 2017) will be useful for this section's argument. Along these lines, I argue that this philosophical distinction is employed in the RastafarI emphasis on *structural sin* (Perkins, 2012), as represented by

the terms "*Babylon"* and "*Zion*," which is essentially an indigenous Afro-Jamaican manifestation of the concepts of social health and illness, or function and dysfunction.

History is also important to this section's argument. Orally maintained history of the African-descended communities of Jamaica is a source of pride and communal uplift that can be seen among all of the traditions discussed here. Similarly, the history of Obeah being used by the African slaves of colonial Jamaica to recover a sense of autonomy and for retribution against the British plantation authorities will be discussed for its importance as a religio-cultural decolonial weapon. Furthermore, in traditions such as Revival, Kumina, and Obeah, spirits and Ancestors are believed to be in virtually constant, intimate interaction with living humans. Thus, I argue that part of what constitutes community in an indigenous Afro-Jamaican epistemology are spirits of deceased individuals, often Ancestors, biblical prophets, or angels. This analysis will serve to highlight the contrast between the dominant Western understanding of community, which I argue is particularly significant for health because of indigenous Afro-Jamaican emphasis on social or communal health as affected by the spirit-world.

Decolonization of "Environment"

I will also explore the relationship between humans, the supernatural or divine, and nature. As will be discussed, indigenous Afro-Jamaican epistemology generally considers human beings themselves to be more intimately connected to nature than does dominant Western epistemology. This challenges the historically observable Western concept of the environment as something entirely external and separate from the all-important individual that should be dominated and manipulated for human

material benefit. The interconnectedness of humankind and the natural world is represented by the African-derived belief that flora and fauna are endowed with their own spirits which interact with humans and their spirits. It should furthermore be recognized that this mirrors indigenous religio-cultural beliefs around the world. The argument here is that an indigenous Afro-Jamaican epistemology as it pertains to the natural environment is distinct from that of the West and may prove to be another area of misunderstanding between biomedical professionals and their patients. Additionally, this aspect of Afro-Jamaican epistemology provides an ecological understanding that is more conducive to sustainability and the health of the earth itself, which naturally extends to the creatures that inhabit it – very much including human beings.

More specifically, this section will address the RastafarI practices of *livity*, including their *Ital* diet, which is essentially vegan. This is quite relevant to current debates in the West regarding sustainable and healthy food consumption and general lifestyle choices. Herbalism, which pervades Jamaican culture, will also be addressed. Herbalist practices, whether derived from the native Arawak, Africa, India, Europe, or possibly even China (Payne-Jackson and Alleyne, 2004), are observable among adherents of all of the religio-cultural traditions addressed in this thesis as well as the general population. These practices have proven to be useful particularly for rural and socioeconomically disadvantaged Jamaicans for whom biomedical facilities and medicines have not been accessible, whether due to cost, location, or epistemological difference.

Decolonization of "Health"

Much can be said about the cultural particularity of biomedicine and the epistemology which informs it, as well as its universalist claim and its clash with non-Western and indigenous peoples and epistemologies. Two very significant and interrelated issues are at the core of this section, these are a lack of *holism* and a similar lack of recognition of spirituality or religion in biomedicine. It will also be explained how these issues of healthcare fit into the broader context of coloniality and the pursuit of decolonization. In the case of indigenous Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions, the decolonization of health may include to some degree a decolonization of religion or spirituality. This is due especially to the fact that healing and religion in indigenous African epistemology on the continent and in the diaspora are practically synonymous.

In a sense, ideas of religion, health, community, environment, and self that are observable within indigenous Afro-Jamaican epistemology could all be considered more holistic than in Western epistemology. The bottom-line for health in indigenous Afro-Jamaican thought rests essentially on the ideal of a relational balance, harmony, or equilibrium between human, natural, and spiritual realms. I argue that the holism that is evident in indigenous Afro-Jamaican approaches to the above-mentioned concepts is particularly useful to a *holistic decolonization.* In this sense, the critique of the biomedical healthcare system in Jamaica and elsewhere that is found in this thesis represents a practical application of the ideals of decoloniality. Thus, the intellectual pursuit of the decolonization of knowledge is shown in this thesis, as it is elsewhere, to be practically applicable for the improvement of the lives of the people by whom such

decolonial ideas are generated. In writing this thesis I do not to claim to own much of the ideas put forth in this paper, but to place them within the context of academia. Following the logic of RastafarI, as a U.S. American academic, I hope that this thesis may be an example of the destruction of Babylon, the oppressive system of coloniality, from within.

Chapter 2: Literature Review, Methods, and Historical Background

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to situate the Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions of Obeah, Myal, Kumina, Revival and Rastafarl in their historical and scholarly contexts and provide the reader with a basic understanding of important social and epistemological issues surrounding the traditions and their nature as systems of healthcare. This is important for the argument that decolonization in Jamaica would mean the development of an integrative health model that draws on these traditions. First, I will briefly review the colonial history that led to the African peopling of Jamaica. Then, I will look at the development of the above-mentioned religio-cultural traditions with a particular emphasis on their parallels and continuities, interrelated nature and fluidity, and penchant for innovation, all of which may be best exemplified in their character of resistance and important role as systems of healthcare. Throughout this section, the stigma that has long been attached to Afro-Jamaican religions will be highlighted for its roots in coloniality and the Jamaican plantation slave system. Dianne Stewart's 2005 book, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, is central to this section, and the work of Barry Chevannes, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, Leonard Barrett, and others are important as well. Regarding the importance of healing within Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions, which will be further discussed in the following chapter, the 2014 book, *Caribbean Healing Traditions*, edited by Sutherland, Moodley, and Chevannes, as

well as Payne-Jackson and Alleyne's (2004) *Jamaican Folk Medicine* are primary sources of inspiration.

All of the research for this thesis has been secondary. While it is important to recognize that such a methodology is generally problematic in the study of Afro-Caribbean religion, given the fact that the traditions examined therein are largely ritual-based, orally transmitted and often shrouded in a secrecy that is the response to hundreds of years of persecution, I believe the arguments presented here will prove to be useful and grounded in observable written evidence. The material to which this thesis responds is the product of distinguished scholars in the field of Afro-Jamaican religion, written over multiple decades. While much important scholarly work was done on Afro-Jamaican religion throughout the latter half of the 20th century, I have made a conscious effort to include that which has been produced in the 21st. This was done to ensure that this thesis was relevant and up-to-date, and also to show that the scholarship on Afro-Jamaican religion is still producing important and insightful developments. It is my hope that this thesis may enable further research that explicitly deals with the intersection of religion, decolonization, medicine, and development – especially in Jamaica and among the African and Caribbean diaspora and indigenous communities throughout the Americas and elsewhere.

Jamaica's Colonial History

This section will briefly present the reader with the history of the colonization and plantation system of Jamaica that led to its African peopling. This will provide the foundational context in which Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions developed. This is

important to understanding how the diverse religio-cultural traditions found on the island relate to each other historically and epistemologically, as seen in their propensity for resistance and healing.

The origins of coloniality in Jamaica date back to the voyages of Cristobal Colón, or Christopher Columbus, in the fifteenth century. Despite the British colonial character of Jamaica, its colonization began as a Spanish endeavor, and according to Stewart (2005), they established the importation of enslaved Africans to the island as early as 1517. Murrell (2010), however, gives the even earlier date of 1509. In any case, as noted by Stewart (2005, p.16), "Jamaica remained a region of localized pastoral farming during its Spanish occupation" due to their preoccupation with gold, which was not present in Jamaica. It was not until the 1670 Treaty of Madrid and the British institutionalization of the plantation system on the island that massive numbers of African slaves, in all of their ethnic diversity, began to be taken to Jamaica, primarily for sugar production. It should be mentioned that one reason for the importation of Africans for slave labor was the fact that the native Arawak population of the island was rapidly diminished due to European importation of disease and perpetration of genocide – an unfortunate history that rings all too true in the broader Caribbean region. It is in this context that the unique Jamaican heritage, including its prominent character of resistance,[1] began to develop. It is important to note here that Africans in Jamaica enormously outnumbered Europeans, which meant a heavily African-derived culture on the island.[2] The heterogenous ethnic origins of African religio-cultural continuity are important to understanding the development of Afro-Jamaican religion.

The geographic origin and ethnic makeup of the slaves who arrived in Jamaica from Africa varied, and changed throughout the era of slavery and amongst immigrants following emancipation. While the majority of the slaves brought to Jamaica during the early period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade came from the Gold Coast of Africa (modern-day Ghana), they later were taken from further South and further inland. Perhaps most notably, large amounts of Kongo and BaKongo peoples arrived in Jamaica from Central Africa during the latter part of the slave trade, as well as after emancipation as indentured servants. Stewart (2005) describes the important and often overlooked role of Kongo culture in the development of Afro-Jamaican religion. The prominence of West African-derived language and culture has been well documented throughout the history of scholarship on the African ethnic origins of the Jamaican population. Regarding the West African element, Akan heritage of Jamaica is particularly prominent. Murrell (2010) describes a “huge representation of Akans from the Gold Coast,” and Aborampah (2005) highlights some important epistemological and religio-cultural continuities between Akan people and Jamaicans that persist today. Stewart herself also recognized this fact: “On the surface, the ethnic origin of African-Jamaican culture during the slave period was conspicuously Akan.” (p.23). Akan linguistic and cultural continuities in Jamaica are partially explained by Alleyne (1988) who Stewart (2005) quotes as stating that despite some diversity of African arrivals to Jamaica during the early and middle periods of the slave trade, “Gold Coast Africans who came to Jamaica in this period [1607-1808] had a stronger group identity than Africans of other ethnic affiliations and more cultural resources, even if we cannot be sure of their exact numbers” (p.23). Thus, Akan culture may have dominated not simply

due to their greater numbers, but because of their solidarity, which was largely the result of the difference in how the slaves were procured.[3]

Another example of this Akan dominance can be seen in Jamaican language and names of historical figures, as described by Barrett (1976a). More recently, however, there is an increasing recognition of Central African heritage in the Caribbean, as exemplified by Warner-Lewis' 2003 book, *Central Africa in the Caribbean*. Besides the Akan of modern-day Ghana, other West African cultural influences, such as that of the Yoruba (derogatorily called Nago in Akan language), have also been documented by scholars. In any case, while such ethnic distinctions are important in accurately recording the history of the island and some elements of its contemporary reality, especially as it regards language and religion, the aim of this chapter is rather to highlight the interethnic dynamism and pan-Africanism, largely the product of oppression and resistance, that characterize Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions. RastafarI, even in its deliberate separation from many African-derived religio-cultural practices, explicitly and religiously (and rather successfully) promotes pan-Africanism, especially as a means of unified decolonial resistance, although Chevannes (2011) highlights the inconsistent nature of this doctrine. In looking at the development of Obeah, Myal, Kumina, Revival, and RastafarI, it must be considered that interethnic or pan-ethnic interaction is of great significance and has generally been the product of a common situation of colonial oppression. It should also be kept in mind that all of these ethnic groups brought with them their own healthcare practices and religious beliefs, which often overlapped or intertwined with each other, but which creolized, hybridized, and evolved in accordance with their context.

Development of Afro-Jamaican Religio-Cultural Traditions

In examining the development of Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions, there are three particularly important avenues of interethnic religious exchange: 1) that between the various African ethnic groups present on the island; 2) that between British Protestant Christianity and these diverse African religio-cultural traditions; and 3) the interaction between Indians (especially Hindus) and the African-descended Jamaican majority. Depending on which tradition is in question, any combination of these three historical interactions may be observed to varying degrees. Thus, the most important characteristic of Jamaican ethnicity in the examination of Afro-Jamaican religion may be the island's history of interethnic exchange itself. To quote Besson and Chevannes (1996), "The unification of disparate ethnic groups was accomplished and sustained by an integrating network of communication and exchange that we believe has come to characterize the religious and secular life of Jamaicans right through to the present." (p.212-213). Despite the Christianization, Christian "*masquerading,"*[4] and exclusivist Afrocentricity of the early Nyabinghi house of RastafarI and its erasure of the Hindu legacy from the movement's memory (Lee, 2003), this general Afro-Jamaican tendency to incorporate diverse cultural and epistemological elements into their own worldview, particularly as it regards religiosity, may itself be characteristically African. To quote Stewart, "even on the continent, African religions were dynamically innovative and interpenetrable, symbolically and theologically open to universalisms." (p.89). Additionally, "scholars of African religions have identified consistent patterns of thought, organization, purpose, and practice in the religiocultural traditions among diverse peoples in sub-Saharan Africa." (Stewart, 2005, p.23). This means that there was a

good amount of overlap between the religio-cultural traditions of the diverse African peoples on the continent even before having been enslaved and brought to the Caribbean, or elsewhere for that matter. Having shared one general geographical location and precarious social situation in their enslavement on Jamaican plantations, these traditions further coalesced on the island, especially for the purpose of resistance.

Another important fact to note is that Africans in Jamaica, under the authority of the British, did not encounter European Christianity until much later than those who were enslaved by the Catholic Spanish, French, or Portuguese, where in some cases slaves were supposedly baptized before even beginning the middle passage. Stewart (2005) describes this well: “In large part, there was no sustained encounter between classical African religions and Christianity until the later decades of the slave era. In Jamaica, between 1655 and the early 1800s, religious exchange occurred primarily among the sundry religious traditions of classical Africa, as the enslaved populations struggled to create coherent institutions in an exilic and highly pluralistic cultural context. The end products of African people’s encounters with each other were Pan-African syntheses of religious and cultural practices that could serve the needs of individuals and communities at large.” (p.27). In other words, interaction 1, described above, in some ways seems to have been more significant in Jamaica than interaction 2, especially in comparison with other, Catholic Caribbean colonies. Indian indentured servants would not arrive in Jamaica until after emancipation.

That interethnic exchange occurred primarily among Africans in Jamaica during the greater part of the era of slavery meant, for one thing, an extreme importance of religious thought – in all of its philosophical, metaphysical, and social dimensions – for

the bulk of the Jamaican population. As Stewart (2005) explains, “In classical African cultures, religiousness and a sense of the sacred permeated all dimensions of culture and human behavior.” (p.18). The pervasive nature of religion and its applicability to all life situations, without strict separation therefrom, is what is known as the *non-fragmentation* of religion and daily life, and stands as a sharp distinction between dominant Western and African religious epistemologies, and an important issue to consider in the study of Afro-Jamaican religiosity from Obeah to RastafarI and perhaps even including more orthodox Christianity on the island. As has been shown by many scholars, African religiosity is a major cultural element that has not been lost in the diaspora or on the continent, despite the brutality of the colonial experience, and although it may have evolved, creolized, or *masqueraded* as acceptable (Christian) religion in the eyes of white European society. As Barrett (1976a) explains regarding especially Afro-Jamaican religion and the epistemological core around which it has developed, “The world among the folk is a sacred world at the centre of which is a spiritual force, power, or will…Whether this power be benevolent or malevolent, it is still a daily concern in folk societies. This vital force manifests itself in all aspects of life. It may manifest itself in humans and beasts and also in things such as stones, trees, herbs, and the elements.” (p.102). Interestingly, this quote seems to point to a direct connection between the non-fragmentation of religion and the belief in an all-pervasive *mystical power*, or *cosmic energy* or *force,* which stands as the epistemological basis for practices of divination, sorcery, and all those dreaded manifestations of what may often be referred to as *witchcraft* or *magic*, most evident in Jamaica in the form of *Obeah*. However, Chevannes (2011) explains that even the Revival religions, described

by Murrell (2010) as the most creolized Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions, exhibit this African cosmology "in an identical way," which he also insightfully illustrates: "the spiritual world is seen as pure power, which human beings can manipulate in the way we manipulate electricity" (p.571).

To further pinpoint important commonalities among the various strains of African religio-cultural thought and practice that landed in Jamaica via slavery, Stewart (2005) lists six characteristics of belief and practice: 1) *communotheism*, or the belief in a community of deities and invisible beings; 2) *ancestral veneration* – these ancestors would be included in the previously mentioned community; 3) *possession trance and mediumship* – this should serve to highlight a prominent method of interaction between humans and the above community; 4) *food offerings and animal sacrifice* – this may be seen as another form of social interaction with the spirits; 5) *divination and herbalism*; and 6) a belief in *neutral mystical power* (p.24). Most important for this thesis is the fact that all of these six characteristics revolve around human interaction with the supernatural world for the achievement of certain ends, which cements the indigenous African religious experience, in all of its diversity, in the category of *mysticism*. It is this mysticism that is the basis of the healing practices and character of resistance found within Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions. Below, we will see how some of these features do or do not factor into the epistemologies and healing practices observable in Obeah, Myal, Kumina, Revival, and RastafarI. While RastafarI is well-known for having departed from these six African religio-cultural characteristics, I argue that, with its intensely innovative character and distinct context of origin, it has retained the

underlying epistemology that informs these beliefs and practices while replacing their forms.

Obeah and Myal

The Africans who were enslaved and taken to Jamaica have been described by Leonard Barrett (1978) as “culture bearers” who brought along with them the religio-cultural practices and beliefs native to their homeland. In Jamaica, these were broadly labeled *Obeah* by British observers, who dreaded and outlawed its associated practices and paraphernalia.[5] Murrell (2010, p.235) explains that “colonists conveniently but erroneously labeled all African religious practices in the Caribbean as Obeah, whether they understood them or not,” and identifies their active resistance against the plantation system as the motivation for their conflation and demonization. However, with the Taki Rebellion in 1760, which Chevannes (1994) described as the first instance of organized pan-African resistance in Jamaica, white observers became aware of a religious phenomenon known as *Myal*. While there appear to be important distinctions between the terms Obeah and Myal, Stewart (2005) argues that the more recent scholarly tendency has been to erroneously dichotomize the two as entirely separate religious institutions, describing them as “dynamic and symbiotic paradigms of African religiosity” (p.30). Finally, Murrell (2010) describes the current state of scholarship on the two: “Our revisionist view of Myal has come full circle: preemancipation colonialists conflated it and Obeah *via negative*; postemancipation colonials and modern scholars placed them in antagonistic roles; now, we have brought them together again with a new idiosyncratic formula” (p.253).

The West African origin of the "religio-magical" practices known in Jamaica as Obeah are clear, although by its very nature, the tradition is highly versatile and incorporative of varying components of belief and practice; in the words of Murrell (2010), "The results of that versatility are creole practices and cultures that draw on a rich variety of religious traditions." (p.238). To highlight its West African origin, however, Murrell (2010) describes the word Obeah as rooted in the Twi word *obeye*, which is associated with a "malicious spirit of the Rada or Dahomey sacred powers" (p.230). He also gives the alternate possibility of its origin in the Ashanti word *obayifo*, or "child-snatcher," which is consistent with the apparent belief that part of the training of an Obeah practitioner is to take and kill a child with magic. Both of these are clearly rooted in a sense of evil and reflect the essentially derogatory nature of the term Obeah. The West African origin of these words also corroborate Murrell's point that the immoral designation of Obeah is "influenced by both European and African views" (p.228). That being said, Murrell himself references Stewart's (2005) conclusion that *obeye* is the most likely root word for Obeah – which she describes most simply as "the capacity to use energy dynamically" (p.41) – because of its emphasis on moral neutrality. In fact, Stewart directly challenges the dominant popular perception of Obeah as evil: "the weight of testimony contests characterizations of Obeah as evil and Myal as good and suggests that the most striking distinction between Obeah and Myal is not moral but possibly structural" (p.48). By this, the author intends to point out that while Obeah was typically practiced individually and in secret, often in the home of the practitioner, Myal was practiced in groups and, as evidenced by its above-mentioned role as the source of pan-African unification, mirrored a more Western concept of religion.[6] Nevertheless,

Obeah has also historically been used “to achieve communitarian and life-affirming aims, such as political and social solidarity” (Stewart, 2005, p.41) and healing, with which Myal is more commonly associated.

Myal is described by Murrell (2010) as “a religious institution with a belief system, a dance ritual, an initiatory rite tradition, and a pharmacopeia for herbal and spiritual healing” and a “creole version of an ancestral West Central African traditional religion” (p.251). Stewart (2005) locates the origin of the term Myal in the Kikongo language of Central Africa, in which *miela* is the plural form of “breath.” This is reflective of the Myal emphasis on healing and herbalism and further observable in their ritual gatherings around the silk-cotton tree, since they believed the healing power of nature to be due to the cosmic life-giving breath that works through plants to heal people. The emphasis on a life-giving breath is only one of many correlations between Myal and Christianity. Given the long history of Christianity in the Kongo,[7] the Central African origin of Jamaican Myal only further complicates attempts to discern where European Christian influence and indigenous African religiosity end or begin, and where pure innovation comes in – an issue even more relevant to contemporary religio-cultural traditions such as Revival and Rastafari.

In Jamaica, North American Baptist Missionaries George Lisle and Moses Baker – themselves former slaves – were the first to proselytize the African slaves. Despite the “anti-Africanness” (Stewart, 2005) that inhered in the Missionary Christianity that they were exposed to, many Africans in Jamaica adapted the Bible and some dimensions of Christian theology to their own worldview and social situation, although the missionaries themselves generally understood this as a rejection of true Christianity. This led to the

formation of what was known as the Native Baptist tradition. This is explained by Stewart (2005) as follows: “a great number of Africans managed to subvert European attempts to exterminate Black values. They authenticated themselves within a context of censorship by identifying their illicit African religious imperatives with legitimate Christian religious imperatives and formed independently led congregations, which came to be known as ‘Native Baptist sects.’” (p.89). Thus, despite their relative Christianization, Native Baptists were by no means more submissive to the plantation system, as evidenced for example by the religion’s role in the Sam Sharpe Rebellion – alternatively known as the Great Slave Rebellion – of 1831. The impact of Christianity upon Myal – which may be considered the antecedent to the Afro-Christian Revival traditions – was certainly more pronounced than in Obeah. However, due to its dynamic, highly adaptable, and thoroughly non-fragmented nature, Obeah too has incorporated Christian elements into its practice, as noted by Murrell (2010): “Obeah practitioners ‘Africanize’ and reinterpret Christian scriptures with the help of other religious experiences that speak to Afro-Caribbean spirituality.” (p.238).

Ultimately, Obeah and Myal – historical terms which have been shown to often be imprecise, uncertain, and partially the result of a colonial epistemology that has sought to construct a hierarchy of social and moral status largely based on similarity to Europeanness[8] – represent the earliest practices and beliefs that form the foundational African-derived religio-cultural background in Jamaica. An analysis of these traditions points to the fact that Afro-Jamaican religiosity has always prominently featured a character of inter-ethnic synthesis and resistance to coloniality, for which it has been vehemently denounced. The epistemological flexibility that is characteristic of

indigenous African religiosity makes it exceedingly difficult to attempt to separate out and label all the various ethnic dimensions of the Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural experience. Beyond these important considerations, however, is the fact that all Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions are essentially healing traditions and have historically played a crucial role in the healthcare of the Jamaican population. This is precisely the aspect of these traditions that this thesis intends to address, as it is this religious healing role and its psychosocial emphasis that I argue may be the basis of Afro-Jamaican healers' roles in decolonial resistance. Before moving on to a review of the development of Kumina, the dual role of Obeah practitioners as healers and restorers of social justice will be briefly analyzed for its importance to the argument of this thesis, although this will be the primary focus of the following chapter. Since Myal has essentially evolved into Revival traditions and is also featured prominently in Kumina, more specifics on it will be discussed later with these traditions.

While Obeah is commonly considered witchcraft, associated with divination and harmful spells, poisons and *duppies,*[9] it is increasingly recognized as a source of communal and individual healing. Murrell (2010) notes that "Since the 1960s, Edward Seaga, Maureen Warner-Lewis, George Eaton Simpson, Ivor Morrish, Barbara Bush, Joseph Murphy, Barry Chevannes, Kenneth Ramchand, Werner Zip, Dianne Stewart, and others have raised awareness of the many misconceptions and prejudices against Obeah in colonial and popular literature" (p.237). In his chapter on Obeah in the 2014 book, *Caribbean Healing Traditions,* edited by Sutherland, Moodley and Chevannes, Murrell describes the religio-cultural practice as having been an *"indispensable defensive medicine weapon"* (p.67) during the days of slavery; this point of view is

corroborated by Stewart's (2005) description of the tradition, especially regarding colonial authorities' fears of Obeah poisons, which resulted in it being outlawed. Furthermore, the element of fear that surrounds Obeah is the basis for Barrett's (1976a) explanation of "functional witchcraft," which "serves as a social control": "The possibility of witchcraft retaliation acts as a curb in community relationships; it tempers one's extreme behavior toward others." (p.82).

While Myal has often been seen as antagonistic to Obeah[10] and more strongly associated with herbalism, Stewart shows that Obeah practitioners were also masters of herbalist techniques as seen both in their creation of poisons and potions. Murrell (2014) explains that "Practitioners blend their practical knowledge of pharmacopeia with beliefs in divine powers and psychological conditioning as a means of securing physical well-being and social justice." (p.65). The divination, herbalism, duppy-work, and general psychological manipulation[11] utilized by Obeah practitioners may all be considered methods of healing. Both Murrell and Stewart describe in detail Obeah practitioners' historic and contemporary role as healers and freedom fighters. The single Obeah practitioner's simultaneous embodiment of these multiple roles is an illustration of a primary argument of this thesis, which is that resistance to coloniality functions on the level of the individual as well as the communal as physical and psychosocial healthcare that cannot be separated from religious belief. This is further reflected in the religio-cultural traditions to be described below.

Kumina

The origins of Kumina have been debated among scholars over the years. Its West-African origin, posited by Barrett (1976), was challenged by the findings of more contemporary scholars such as Warner-Lewis (2003), and Stewart (2005). These authors show that Kumina in fact represents the religio-cultural traditions brought to Jamaica primarily by Kongo-descended indentured servants from Central Africa. While this particular ethnic lineage is important to Kumina practitioners' strong African identification, Stewart (2005) shows the tradition's distinctly pan-African inclination toward the unity of Black people in the face of a long history of White oppression. As a healing tradition, Kumina displays the anti-oppressive psychosocial etiology that forms the basis of RastafarI theology, as observable in the Babylon-Zion dynamic that informs the Rasta worldview. As we will see, the notion of community and the practice of spirit possession (in the form of myal) that is seen in Kumina represent important avenues of decolonial resistance and healthcare.

Barrett (1976a) argued that Kumina was West-African partially based on his proposed Twi origin of the word, which he rendered as *akom ana,* translated as *to be possessed by ancestors*. He also explicitly stated that Myal and Kumina were "one and the same" (p.69). However, Stewart (2005), based on her own fieldwork and the work of Bilby and Bunseki (1983) and Warner-Lewis (2003), shows that indentured laborers brought the tradition to Eastern Jamaica from Central Africa throughout the 1840s and 1860s. On the surface, this argument seems to contradict Stewart's own findings that all of her Kuminist interviewees "identified their heritage in Jamaica with the period of African enslavement" (p.145), which is the source of their anti-colonial sentiment.

Nevertheless, she goes on to describe a strong pan-Africanism within Kumina, as well as the oppressive, involuntary nature of Jamaican indentureship, and some potential interethnic mixing and exchange which all contribute to Kuminists' identification with the broader African-Jamaican society. In any case, the connection of Kumina to Myal is important to this thesis because it informs both the healing practices for which the tradition is renowned in Jamaica as well as its ancestral veneration and historical memory that serves as a means of resisting the anti-Africanness of coloniality.

The healing connection between Myal and Kumina can be seen both in their expert herbalism and their ritual dance in which practitioners become possessed by ancestral spirits who enable the mystical healing of individuals and the collective community, physically or otherwise. Murrell (2010) explains that "After 1860, Myal was identified with possession trances and a special dance that was important to the Kumina ritual; its spirit possession catalepsy is still referred to as 'catching the Myal spirit.'" (p.252). The author also notes that "By the 1830s, the Myal religion had instilled certain ethical and moral codes in Afro-Jamaicans that continued in Kumina and the more recent Rastafari." (p.258). Additionally, Stewart (2005, p.154) relates the fact that "In Kumina rituals, the term Myal is used to describe the most powerful manifestations of ancestral possession" for the purpose of healing, and highlights the KiKongo linguistic origin of the term Kumina itself, which she relates to *lusakumuna* (blessing) or *sakumuna* (to bless). This blessing, as described by Stewart, is the transferal of a certain *cosmic energy* from the ancestral spirits to the one who "catches the myal," or becomes possessed, and ultimately to the patient who is to be healed by it through physical touch. It should also be noted that this healing energy may be considered to be

derived from the Supreme Deity in Kumina, known as *Zambi* or *Nzambi*: “The Ancestors are the departed who achieve spiritual status as members of the Divine Community and as Nzambi’s messengers in the invisible and visible world domain. They acquire power and use it to assist their living descendants in the visible world domain.” (Stewart, 2005, p.144-145).

Descriptions of the state of spirit possession and the *chain of transferal* of the cosmic energy that enables Kuminists to heal their patients are important for an analysis of Afro-Jamaican epistemology as it pertains to conceptions of self and community, and the herbalism that permeates both of these traditions also offers insight into the Afro-Jamaican conception of environment. All of these epistemological elements will be elaborated upon in the following chapter. It is interesting to consider that this same dynamic energy or force is also present in the religio-cultural tradition of Obeah, although it may be utilized therein for malevolent or morally neutral purposes, as opposed to its exclusively benevolent healing role in Kumina. In any case, Kumina, like Obeah, is also stigmatized by the public and by orthodox Christianity in Jamaica, likely due to the anti-Africanness that is central to coloniality (Stewart, 2005). As a (renowned) healing tradition, this psychosocial affliction is also countered by Kumina practitioners through African pride and historical memory.

Both Murrell and Stewart describe the sociohistorical memory that Kumina communities maintain of their oppressive past and current conditions. The connection between the social, physical, and spiritual dimensions of affliction and health are explicit, and central to the tradition. Stewart relates interviews with Kumina practitioners and adherents that showcase the importance of the oral record-keeping of these

communities' traumatic historical experiences, which is exemplified by their reverence for ancestors, seen especially in the form of myal possession. This reverence for their ancestral past can also be seen in certain linguistic aspects described by both authors: "Kumina followers refer to themselves as 'Bongo' or the 'Bakongo nation'; an ethnic designation for Kongo, as well as Bakongo thinking, is central to Kumina tradition." (Murrell, 2010, p.260). Likewise, Stewart describes a strong self-identification among Kuminists as 'Africans' and a romanticization of 'Africa,' the ancestral homeland, that resembles that of RastafarI. Also similar to RastafarI, the pan-African sentiment within Kumina is linked by Stewart (2005) to a denunciation of racism: "Kumina practitioners are convinced that White supremacy is the dominant factor in African people's chronic suffering worldwide." (p.147). These Kumina-RastafarI parallels may not be coincidental by any means, as Bilby and Leib (2012) show strong Kumina influences in RastafarI that remain important today. Before moving on to RastafarI, however, we must first review the development of the Afro-Christian Revival tradition, out of which it grew.

Revival

In 1860-61, a religious revival in England, Ireland, and North America also reached Jamaica, where it resulted in the Afro-Christian religio-cultural tradition known as *Revival*, or *Revivalism*. Chevannes (1994) explains that there are two main branches of the tradition – Revival Zion, which is known as "Sixty" for its emergence during 1860, and Pukumina, or Pocomina, [12] known as "Sixty-one." Revival Zion and Pukumina differ in that Zion is considered more Christian, whereas Pukumina retains a more clearly African religiosity. The African character of Pukumina has perhaps earned it more of a

stigma from the public, and both Chevannes (1994) and Murrell (2010) make note of some similarities between it and Vodun, but even Revival Zion may be looked down upon, as explained by Murphy (1994): “The word ‘revivalism’ has become associated in middle-class Jamaican discourse with lower-class and ‘primitive’ religious expression, and thus with a pervasive ambivalence toward the island’s African heritage.” (p.125). In discussing decolonization, it is important to note that public and scholarly tensions regarding Revival’s “genuine” African- or Christian-ness persist today in many ways, which may be considered the ongoing effect of coloniality. Ultimately, what is most important for this discussion is that there is a good deal of religio-cultural overlap, exchange, and cooperation between practitioners of Obeah, Kumina, and Revival, particularly when it comes to healing.

The dominant narrative that depicts Revival traditions as having been the product of an incomplete Euro-American Christianization of African-Jamaicans was challenged by Barrett as early as 1976, in his book, *Soul-Force*. More recently, Stewart (2005) and Murrell (2010) supported his claim that in reality, the Great Revival of 1860-61 was more of a revival of African religiosity than a Christianization. As noted above, Stewart explains this as followers of African-derived traditions in Jamaica *“masquerading”* their religiosity as Christian for the purpose of self-preservation in an anti-African colonial situation. This brings to light what may be an important element of the larger African and diasporic African religious evolution in response to coloniality worldwide, which should prove useful for any formation of a *Black Theology of Liberation* (Cone, 1970 as cited by Stewart, 2005). Stewart’s argument is further supported by Revival’s roots in the Native Baptist tradition, or “Christian Myalism” which shows its resistant African-derived

character: “The chief characteristics uniting traditional Myalism, Native Baptist Christian Myalism, and Revival traditions remain prominent in contemporary Jamaican Revival Zion religion. The most significant are divination, visions, prophecy, and healing.” (p.108); and also: “Other characteristics which can be found uniformly in traditional Myalism, Native Baptist Christian Myalism, and Revival Zion traditions include the beating of drums; a community of spirits, which are linked with the elements of nature; possession trance; animal sacrifice; ancestral veneration; and a strong belief in neutral mystical power.” (p.109). Stewart links Revival and Myal with a particular emphasis on the influence of Kongolese religiosity – which is an important development in the scholarship on African heritage in the Caribbean in general – and deemphasizes its syncretism with Christianity. However, what is important for this section is that Revival traditions display the religio-cultural exchange and innovation (masquerading included), and the healing proclivity and character of resistance that have characterized Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural tradition throughout history.

The *community of spirits* in Revival Zion mentioned by Stewart differs from that which is found in Kumina and Obeah in its Biblical character. While Kuminists are possessed explicitly and exclusively by ancestral duppies, Revival Zionists use their own unique, biblically inspired logic to legitimate spirit possession that some orthodox Christians and the general public may deem illegitimate, immoral, or primitive. According to Stewart, “Revival Zionists see no contradiction between the Holy Spirit attested to as the third person of the Trinity and the community of spirit messengers they venerate. In their theology, the spirit messengers are legitimate manifestations of the Holy Spirit, just as the Holy Spirit is a legitimate manifestation of the Creator God.”

(p.111-112). The importance of the Holy Spirit in Revival Zion is also attested to by Chevannes (1994) as a sort of Africanization of Christian teaching, and Joseph Murphy's 1994 book, *Working the Spirit,* provides many intriguing insights into the spiritual epistemology observable in Revival Zion. Murphy explains that for Revival Zionists, "The name of the spiritual world is Zion, and its imagery derives from the Zion of the Psalms" (p.141). Furthermore, according to Murphy (1994), adherents of Revival Zion consider themselves as being children of the mystical world of Zion, which is considered as "at once distinct and at the same time engulfing the temporal one" (p.142), and "literally the world of the ancestors: the ancestors of the past in Africa, the ancestors of the present in ceremony, and the ancestors to come in the eschaton." (p.144).

Chevannes (1994) explains that among Pukuminists, in contrast to Zionists, even malevolent spirits are revered for their ability to possess and generally influence the lives of humans. Likewise, the author makes the general point that "Zion is associated with healing, Pukumina with *obeah*" (Chevannes, 2011, p.571). Murrell (2010) also notes this fundamental difference between followers of Zion and "*Poco"* (another name for Pukumina): "Both religions show belief in the existence of evil spirits, but Poco followers respect good and bad spirits alike. Adherents of Poco seek the help of earth-bound spirits, while Zionists invoke Christian saints, angels, biblical prophets, and the Holy Spirit." (p.272). Murrell (2010) also explains the negative perception of Pukumina among not just the public, but also Revival Zionists who "disassociate themselves from Poco followers and are proud to be Sixties instead of Sixty-ones" (p.271). In any case, as noted by Stewart, both Pukumina and Revival Zion show an enormous degree of

innovation in their religious symbolism and practice, and place great importance on healing, often utilizing the services of Kuminists and Obeah practitioners. Also, like the earlier Native Baptist tradition, Revival too has displayed anti-colonial resistance, most obviously in the Bedwardite movement of the late 19th century – led by the prophet-healer Alexander Bedward – which is memorialized today and described by Besson and Chevannes (1996) as an important antecedent to RastafarI for its "merging of identity between humanity and God" and emphasis on socioeconomic inequality and resistance: "Bedwardism also reflected the culmination of the antagonistic class dynamic, which would later give rise to Rastafari" (p.217).

Wedenoja and Anderson (2014) note the development of the tradition's healing function: "Revival flourished for several decades after the Great Revival, with healing becoming increasingly prominent due to chronic distress, rampant disease, and lack of medical care." (p.132). This healing may take place individually or in groups, and many scholars document the importance of the *balm-yard,* where the various healing methods often take place. Healing activities commonly include *readings,* or mystically obtained diagnoses (see *clairvoyance*), and herbal medicines and baths used for a great variety of ailments. Leonard Barrett (1973) gives a personal account of his own consultation with the famed healer Mother Rita, who reportedly intuited his own physical malady. Similarly to other Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions regarding the mystical power described above, Revival healing is accomplished by accessing it, either through communication with the divine or otherwise, as explained by Chevannes (2011): "In Revival, spiritual force is called power, and is sought through prayer, fasting, blood sacrifice of goats or white fowls, rosaries, rings and other charms. Believing in spiritual

causation of illness, disaster and misfortune, Revival has had, throughout its history up to the present, a reputation among the Jamaican people for divination, healing and prevention." (p.571). Lastly, while the possession trance that Zionists practice seems to emphasize prophecy and mystical revelation, Stewart makes the observation that Zionists may often participate in Kumina ceremonies, renowned for their effectiveness in trance healing when they 'catch the myal.' Furthermore, the author also relates the case of a vehemently anti-Kumina orthodox Christian preacher who himself consulted Kumina practitioners – by whom he was healed – when Western medicine had failed to cure him of his ailment. This is an apparently common pattern that can also be seen in regard to Obeah, Revival, and other healers and reflects colonial anti-Africanness.

Revival healing will be an important point of interrogation for scholars and medical professionals who seek the formation of an integrative health model. This is particularly true because it has stepped up and tended to the healthcare needs of socioeconomically disadvantaged Jamaicans for whom there has been a serious lack of access to, and efficacy of, Western medicine, both of which are rooted in the ideological and economic inequality that represent the foundation of coloniality; forty-six years ago, Leonard Barrett described in his 1973 *Portrait of a Jamaican Healer,* the importance of the Revival or balm-yard healer to Jamaicans for these very reasons, and yet the issue persists. The links between all of the religio-cultural traditions described in this chapter thus far are important to note as they show direct African continuity between them and the most recent Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural movement, RastafarI, which has become by far the most recognized within academia and global popular culture. While much of the particular forms of RastafarI theology and practice have departed from these earlier

African-derived traditions, many aspects of their epistemology remain rooted within them. Below, some of these similarities and contrasts between RastafarI and its antecedents will be explained in light of its general development and purpose.

RastafarI

To be clear, it is true that RastafarI does not retain nearly the same degree of indigenous African religiosity as do the other traditions discussed above. Chevannes (2011) addressed the seeming paradox that is Rastafari pan-Africanism: "in its belief and ritual structures, Rastafari mutes its African religious pedigree…This presents us with a paradox: the most vocally Pan-African religion in Jamaica is the least 'African' in appearance" (p.573). Similarly, Stewart makes the point that RastafarI is simply not an African-derived, but rather a Jamaican-derived religion, even as she downplays the creole character of Revival and emphasizes its African roots. While these claims appear to be true in one sense, I argue that RastafarI displays the characteristic Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural penchant for synthesis, exchange, and innovation, as well as emphasis on health, community, the natural world, and the non-fragmentation of religion and daily life, all of which may be traced back to indigenous African religiosity and are manifest in its religious decolonial resistance to Babylon. One well documented difference between Rastafari and Obeah, Kumina, and Revival, is the context in which it developed. A brief description of this context and the function of RastafarI may help explain some of its distinct doctrines.

As documented by many scholars, such as Chevannes (1994), Rastafari originated in the urban context of Kingston in 1930, among the poor masses who at this

time were migrating in unprecedented numbers from the countryside due to increasingly difficult socioeconomic circumstances. Leonard Howell, a return migrant from the United States, is credited as the first to preach the RastafarI message of the divinity of Haile Selassie upon his coronation in 1930. Selassie's divinity, along with the repatriation to Africa of Black people in the diaspora and general pan-African resistance to the White supremacy and Black oppression that inhere in coloniality are central tenets of RastafarI. The teachings of Marcus Garvey, who RastafarI consider a prophet, are highly influential to the religion's philosophy and priorities, which may be seen in its parallels to Garvey's Back-to-Africa Movement, pan-Africanism, and emphasis on Black people's intellectual and sociocultural self-development. Garvey's Afro-centric readings of the Bible may also be credited, in part, for RastafarI's innovative biblical hermeneutics. Likewise, the geopolitical focus of Rastafari likely stems largely from Garvey, and Selassie himself was a leader who prioritized international relations. This global vision in particular represents Rastafari's distinct purpose from Obeah, Kumina, or Revival, and may be part of the reason why it distances itself from some aspects of these traditions.

Above, it was shown how the healing focus of Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions and the oppressive circumstances in which they have long operated contributed to a distinct psychosocial etiology and general predisposition of resistance. Since such conditions of violence, destitution, and abuse played a primary role in the mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, and social ailments suffered by African-Jamaicans throughout the island's history, it logically follows that any health care practitioner who genuinely seeks the holistic and complete healing of their client would recognize this

social dimension as a cause of illness to be countered. This social proclivity is the basis for RastafarI theology, worldview, and praxis. Virtually none of the beliefs and activities found within RastafarI are unrelated to resistance of coloniality; thus, it truly is a religion of decoloniality. Rastafari geopolitical awareness also has given the faith a character that perhaps more closely resembles the function of religion in the West throughout history, and particularly as seen during the colonial era, which is that of national identity, or nation building. This RastafarI priority has also affected Jamaican politics, as explained by Chevannes (1990b): "by electing to lead a life based on the affirmation of being black, without at the same time being racist, the Rastafari have seized hold of one of the main springs of national development, namely a sense of national identity." (p.71). While it was previously mentioned that the very word *religion* stems from the Latin *re-ligare*, or "to unite" (Mignolo, 2005), it should be recognized that nation building has also historically involved the process of exclusion, whether based on race, religion, language, or otherwise. Thus, I argue that it is partly RastafarI's seeking of a united, global nation of Africans – a clear Rasta-Garvey parallel – that has led to its rejection of certain elements of African-derived religious practice, such as spirit possession.

Chevannes (1994) explains that the Dreadlocks, an internal movement of the 1940s and 50s characterized by its aggressive anti-establishment sentiment and Afrocentricity, sought to further distance themselves from both Revivalism and "*Babylon*," the biblical name given to the international establishment rooted in coloniality. It was the Dreadlocks who instituted the famous hairstyle and beards, ganja smoking sacrament, "I-talk," and other features that have come to characterize the Rasta *livity,* or religious-based lifestyle. Another doctrine that emerged with the

Dreadlocks, however, was the strict avoidance of death. In this RastafarI worldview, as explained by Chevannes (2012), “The truly faithful would never see death” (p.20), and Rastas have tended to avoid funerals, even of important figures within the faith. This Rasta stance on death, although it seems to have softened over the years (Chevannes, 2012), was based in their decolonial insistence on the improvement of immediate living conditions and alleviation of oppression, here and now in this world. In the words of Bob Marley, in his song, *Get Up Stand Up*, “preacher man don’t tell me heaven is under the earth, I know you don’t know what life is really worth.” To quote Chevannes (1991, p.49), “The Rastafari have brought the this-worldly orientation to new heights, in their critique of the complicity of traditional religions peddling pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die, while the white man selfishly appropriates the wealth of this earth. The idea of salvation in some other world after death is scornfully ridiculed and rejected.” As explained by Barrett (1977), Rastafari viewed the “native religions” of Jamaica “as unreal in the presence of formidable sociopolitical forces.” (p.28). Stewart also explains that Rastas’ rejection of suffering during this life for the attainment of a better life after death was a response to missionary Christian teachings historically offered to slaves as the “bright side” of their oppression. For the RastafarI, religion was to serve the purpose of effecting widespread change in the name of Jah, or God. In this way, Rastas have seen missionary Christianity as lacking in credibility, directly challenging their exclusive claim to religious capital.[13] The Rasta redistribution of religious capital, stripping it from the agents of Babylon and giving it to the poor black masses, is most clear in their use of the word “I,” as seen in the first person plural pronoun “I-and-I,” which represents their belief that God inheres in man. In the words of Edmonds (1998b), “Since the basic

notion of 'I-an-I' is that the principle of divinity inheres in each individual, truth is equally accessible to all." (p.352). While this concept has been utilized in an innovative and effective way by RastafarI to decolonize the religious landscape, or field, of Jamaica, it is by no means an entirely new idea, as it is also seen in Hinduism, for example. The Hindu influence of RastafarI represents another important distinction in the historical development of RastafarI as compared especially to a more localized tradition like Kumina.

Hélène Lee's 2003 book, *The First Rasta,* about Leonard Howell, describes the RastafarI founder's "innumerable borrowing from the Indians" (p.100), partially based on the 1980s work of Laxmi and Ajai Mansingh, before whom these Indian influences were "the most neglected of all the Rasta influences" (p.98). The author notes that Howell grew up in Clarendon, Jamaica, an area in which there was a sizable Indian population, wrote *The Promised Key,* an important early text for the Rastafari, under the pen name "Ganga" or "Gangunguru Maragh,"[14] had children by an Indian woman, and was an admirer of Mahatma Gandhi. Indeed, many parallels can be seen between Rastafari and Hindu theology and practice, including also the generally non-violent resistance to colonial British authority. According to the author, the ritual smoking of ganja is another Hindu-Rasta commonality, and the Rasta exclamation "Jah RastafarI!" may have been derived from the Hindu expression "Jai Kali!" or "Jai Krishna!" often heard at pujas. Lee further explains that "Indian thought—karma and rebirth—provided [Howell] with a system that resolved the western dichotomy of heaven and hell, Jesus and Satan, black and white, spirit and flesh…The flowing concepts of Indian thought allowed transformation from one state to another, from slave to king. This helped heal the

injuries of slavery's Middle Passage, and reconciled black and white, God and man" (p.100-101). The author also goes on to explain the Rasta worship of the "God-King," Selassie, as potentially inspired by Hinduism, quoting Joseph Hibbert's explanation to Mansingh and Mansingh (1995): "after learning about the Hindu-God-incarnates Rama, Krishna, and Buddha, [Howell] was convinced that every nation had its own God—Jesus for the whites, Rama, Krishna, Buddha for the Indians, and someone in Africa (about whom he did not know) for the Africans." (p.101). Thus, the coronation of Halie Selassie I as King of Kings in Ethiopia was immediately ceased upon by Howell as the rise of the African God. Similarly, the "I" found in Selassie's title, as used by RastafarI, represents perhaps the most significant continuity between Hindu and Rasta thought – that of the inherent divinity of the Self. The Bhagavad Gita, the scripture so dear to Gandhi, teaches that Brahman, or the "infinite Godhead" is the truest *Self* of all creatures, and it is through the practice of meditation and good works in the world that one realizes this Self within. This Hindu conception of self and of righteousness is mirrored in striking detail by RastafarI belief and practice, although this should not negate its simultaneous indigenous Afro-Jamaican continuities and Biblical inspiration.

Despite Chevannes' and Stewart's worthwhile points that RastafarI is the least African of the Afro-Jamaican religions, we will see in the following chapters that there remain important philosophical elements, as noted by Bamikole (2012; 2017), that could certainly be said to be – and that are explicitly claimed by Rastafari adherents to be – African-derived. Additionally, Barnett and Onuora (2012), based on the work of Asante (1991), have argued that RastafarI displays an authentically Afrocentric paradigm in its cosmology, epistemology, axiology and aesthetic. Bilby and Leib (2012) explain the

influence of Kumina heritage upon the development of reggae, the music of the RastafarI, noting that many of the original Howellites themselves came from a Kumina background. Additionally, Chevannes (1994;2011) has explained how RastafarI developed from Revival, and in fact retained a good deal of the beliefs and practices, despite their intentional separation therefrom. Thus, while it is true that Rastas outwardly reject many foundational practices of other Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions, as do many others, it would seem that they retain and promote a greater deal of the underlying epistemology than this fact may indicate. This is important for this thesis – which argues that the psychosocial element of indigenous Afro-Jamaican etiology and healing necessitates and empowers decolonization and development – because RastafarI, especially through reggae music, is by far the most vocal, effective, and widely recognized Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural proponent of decolonization, pan-Africanism, anti-racism, environmental sustainability, spirituality, and international structural morality.

Conclusion

The links between RastafarI, Kumina, Revival, Myal, and Obeah highlight the extreme degree to which exchange of ideas and shared priorities permeate the history and development of Afro-Jamaican religiosity in general. The centrality of the healing focus, with its distinct social concern and particular emphasis on maintaining a harmonious equilibrium is evident in RastafarI's doctrine of an inevitable and desirable restoration of normalcy – the natural *livity* that characterized pre-colonial African life – upon the apocalypse discussed in the Bible. Thus, the underlying notion of illness and

health found in Afro-Jamaican epistemology has both formed and been formed by a character of resistance which was a response to the harsh Jamaican experience of coloniality. RastafarI's internationally preached religious decolonization, then, can be considered as having its roots in this Afro-Jamaican inclination towards health as a matter of religion. It is also important to recognize that this inclination is rooted in indigenous African religiosity, as is the theological and practical dynamism that readily and creatively incorporates non-African epistemology into itself in order to strengthen its function.

The ongoing effects of coloniality continue to neglect and degrade Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions, despite the efficacy of their healing functions. A potent example of the illogical, hypocritical, and inconsistent nature of colonial anti-Africanness can be seen in the simultaneous public denunciation and private utilization – even by upper class Jamaicans – of the healing services of Obeah practitioners, Kuminists, balm-yard healers, and the general herbalism on the island that itself has its roots largely in indigenous African medicine. In the following chapter, it will be shown how the epistemology and healthcare practices seen within Obeah, Kumina, Revival, and RastafarI both necessitate and have enormous potential to contribute to an integrative health model that could better serve the entire Jamaican population, regardless of socioeconomic class, religious or ideological leaning, or anything else for that matter. Such a development could also have practical implications for similar processes in regard to African diasporic and indigenous communities throughout the Americas and the world.

Notes

[1] According to Stewart (2005), “Resistance and nonconformity characterized every stage of African-European relations in Jamaican slave history…Over several centuries, Jamaica registered more rebellions and uprisings than any other British colony.” (p.18).

[2] This means not just African-descendants born in Jamaica, but also a particularly large population of African-born people on the island due to its high rate of slave mortality and importation. [see Stewart, 2005]

[3] Stewart (2005, p.23), citing Alleyne (1988) explains that “interlopers,” or independent slave traders, eventually took control of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the monopoly that was Britain’s Royal African Company, the former having established a permanent port on the Gold Coast, while the latter “procured captives from the most convenient and accessible regions in Africa…” Thus, the slaves traded by the Royal Africa Company during the earlier part of the trans-Atlantic slave trade tended to be more homogenous, and primarily West African.

[4] Stewart (2005), in a nod to the masquerading rituals seen among African tribes such as the Yoruba, describes the inclusion of Christian elements into African-derived religions in Jamaica not as syncretism, but as masquerading for their own preservation in the face of colonial persecution: “The institution of masquerading provided enslaved Africans in Jamaica with an aesthetic mode of concealment and protection that allowed them to preserve Obeah, Myal, and other African-derived religious traditions in variegated forms masked as Christian traditions.” (p.221).

[5] Murrell (2010;2014) and others (Stewart, 2005) note the passing of legislation against the practice of Obeah and the possession of items commonly associated with it beginning in the mid- to late 1700s, through the 1800s, and even into the twentieth century. Wedenoja and Anderson (2014) note that the Obeah Act is officially still in effect in Jamaica and could possibly hinder even the study of Obeah.

[6] Walter Mignolo (2005) reminds us that the word *religion* is derived from the Latin *re-ligare*, which means “to unite.”

[7] Stewart notes that “The Kongo kingdom’s early promotion of and official conversion to Christianity during the late fifteenth century was more influential and infused with Kongo culture during the period of the transatlantic slave trade than many scholars in Caribbean and African American religious studies were previously aware.” (p.107).

[8] Stewart (2005) considers that “The tendency to characterize Obeah as ‘bad magic’ and Myal as ‘good magic’ or as Obeah’s nemesis might well be founded upon Western Christian moral theology, which conceives good and evil as contradistinctive forces.” (p.61).

[9] "Duppy" is the common Jamaican word for ghost, or an active spirit of the deceased.

[10] To be clear, there does seem to be some truth to this, as Stewart herself admits that it appears "Myalists were distinguishing themselves from practitioners of Obeah even before the 1840s, when the anti-Obeah Myal campaign gained widespread attention in the island." (p.258n140). This anti-Obeah Myal campaign was one in which some Myalists attacked and/or ran Obeah practitioners out of town, viewing their practice as antisocial and evil.

[11] Barrett (1976a) posits the following regarding the Obeah-man: "It is my opinion that 50 percent of the cases he encounters are dispensed with in a make-believe fashion. In this way, he diffuses his clients' aggression without doing any real harm to his clients' opponents." (p.82).

[12] Murrell (2010, p.269) gives a number of possibilities regarding the origin of the name of Pukumina (or Pocomina – Poco for short), including: *Pocomania*, a Spanish-derivation amounting to something like "a little crazy"; *pukka*, a Hindi word for "real" or "reality"; a combination of the Twi words *po*, "shaking," and *kom*, "dancing wildly"; and, as argued by Stewart and others, the Kikongo word *mumpoko*, which is "one of the most powerful components in the Kongo pharmacopeia used in the rituals of healing and blessing."

[13] Terry Rey (2007), based on the work of Bourdieu, explains the concept of *religious capital* as it relates to the social "field" and any individual's or group's position therein: "Society is a multidimensional space, each of whose dimensions is a 'field,' in which individual and institutional agents struggle over the production, administration and consumption of forms of 'capital' specific to the field in question (e.g. political capital in the political field, religious capital in the religious field, and so on)" (p.56).
Put another way, "The term 'religious capital' is adopted from Pierre Bourdieu, who describes the 'religious field' as an arena of struggle, wherein orthodoxy and heretical movements compete over the consumership of the laity…The legitimization of the social order (or of the struggle to change it), the sanction of wealth and power (or of the struggle to redistribute it), and the sense of meaning religion brings to one's life certainly all rank among the most highly coveted forms of religious capital." (Rey, 1998, p.367n60).

[14] According to Lee (2003, p.100), *Gangunguru Maragh* is derived from Hindi: "*gyan,* knowledge; *guna,* virtue; *guru,* teacher; and *Maharadj*, King"

Chapter 3: Decolonization of Self, Community, Environment, and Health

Introduction

In the introduction to this thesis I mentioned that the decolonization and indigenization of epistemology are important for true global development. *Epistemology*, or the conceptual framework upon which knowledge itself is built, is primarily what is addressed in this chapter. The position taken here is that interepistemic cooperation may lead to more effective and equal social systems, such as that of official healthcare. While it may be assumed that all individuals have their own unique experience of reality, it certainly is also the case that one's culture plays a primary role in the shaping of their interpretation of it. There are particular socio-cultural traditions and trends, constructed, reconstructed and transmitted between generations throughout history based on virtually infinite factors that contribute to the development of any social group's way of encoding their experience into memory, or forming knowledge. Epistemology refers precisely to this issue of knowledge formation. In the previous chapter, we saw that ethnic diversity and the harsh colonial experience played significant roles in the development of Afro-Jamaican epistemology, which has generally displayed a remarkable capability for interepistemic synthesis and exchange. In contrast, the broader worldwide experience of coloniality, globalization, and the contemporary development project reveal just how distinct the epistemologies of diverse cultures can

be. The deep and ongoing material and ideological oppression, typically along perceived racial lines, that has been fundamental to the global system of coloniality has proven how devastating the consequences of epistemological rigidity and interethnic antagonism are. In the case of coloniality, this rigidity has taken the form of Euro- or Western-centrism. Decolonization in the case of Jamaica and beyond must include countering the anthropological poverty of the West, which, together with deeply unethical macroeconomic strategy, has produced a clear anti-Africanness. This anti-Africanness has proven to be a potent example around the world of such antagonism and injustice. This is particularly unfortunate given the extreme degree to which African thought and spirituality may assist a truly productive development project in the context of globalization.

The term *decolonization*, by its prefix, implies a negative action – that of removing the many deeply harmful aspects of the experience of coloniality from the minds, bodies, spirits, social structures and lived realities of peoples and their respective governments and societies everywhere. This is particularly urgent for those who have been most victimized by such a system, and who in many cases adhere to an epistemology that is distinct from that of the West, the historical hegemonic powers of coloniality. *Indigenization,* on the other hand, refers to the reformulation of dominant ideas and social systems – indeed, *realities* – in a way that emphasizes the epistemologies and aims of indigenous people. It must be recognized that social groups everywhere have their own way of seeing and rightly acting within the world, and the idea of a pluriverse (Reiter, 2018) allows for their coexistence and cooperation. The enslaved and indentured people brought from Africa to Jamaica and their descendants

are here considered indigenous, as they included people who brought their native cultural systems with them from the continent to the island, and not as a colonizing force, but as victims of the colonial system. Additionally, the *environment* of the island of Jamaica has been deeply internalized in many ways by practitioners of Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions, who in many cases have claimed to receive knowledge of the medicinal properties of the local plant-life from the supernatural, in dreams or visions, and who have ritualized their collection and consider as sacred much of the natural landscape. While both decolonization and indigenization serve their own important purposes in certain contexts, the term decolonization is used in this chapter in a way that assumes a simultaneous indigenization. This is for the purpose of clarity and brevity, but also should imply that they are not sequential or entirely separate processes – to indigenize is to decolonize, and if the effort is genuine, the inverse is also true. Reconsidering, or decolonizing the concepts of self, community, environment, and health, as this chapter aims to do, consists not necessarily of negating the aspects of them that may coincide with Western standards but *extending* them to include a more in-depth, wholistic, relevant, and potentially meaningful understanding.

Decolonization of Self, Community, and Environment

Two quotes of Stewart (2005) pinpoint what this section intends to address. Regarding the importance of the conception of self, especially for Africans facing slavery and the anthropological poverty of the West, the author says that “African bondage entailed not only physical but psychological and cultural exile from the familiar institutions that signified *what it meant to be human* and provided occasions for Africans

to create and recreate extended meaning out of being human." (Stewart, 2005, p.18, emphasis mine). This section will explore some of these creations, recreations, and their origins. Essential, however, to understanding the individual is understanding their place within their greater perceived reality via an examination of their relationship to the community and the environment. The following quote is a useful starting point for such an examination, as it lays out the nature of such relationships:

> "Enslaved Africans, in general, did not relinquish their belief in the world as comprised of both visible and invisible domains with corresponding beings; humans occupying the visible space, and the Ancestors, spirits, divinities, and a Supreme or remote Deity occupying the invisible. In this cosmological outlook, well-being and fulfillment are contingent upon constant communication among all beings in the visible and invisible world domains. And this communication is enhanced by matter, the natural environment: animals, plants, minerals, elements, vibrant colors, and other material which become vehicles for revelation, power, energy, and capacity." (Stewart, 2005, p.59).

This understanding of reality, which so intimately links the individual self to their surrounding natural, social and spiritual worlds, may be considered in a certain sense reflective of the African philosophical tendency towards collectivism that I argue is the foundation for the social healing proclivity found within all of the Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions discussed here. This is perhaps the most important single common

thread that links the traditions of Obeah, Kumina, Revival, and RastafarI in their basic beliefs and practices, especially regarding the understanding of health and well-being and how to achieve and maintain it. Furthermore, that one's very self is so deeply affected by their surroundings may inform many other aspects of indigenous African and Afro-Jamaican religiosity, such as the characteristic penchant for innovative incorporation of various perspectives on truth and spirituality that I argue represents a model for interepistemic engagement in the globalizing world. This also sheds light on the necessity of discussing the categories of self, community, and environment together in the case of Afro-Jamaican epistemology; while to separate them into distinct subsections may speak more to an academic language, it would seem to misrepresent the reality of the people I seek to represent.

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that Obeah practitioners are known to work with *duppies*, or the active spirits of the deceased. However, they also work with the detachable, invisible aspect of living persons, known as the *shadow*. This duppy and shadow work of Obeah practitioners highlights the Afro-Jamaican *dual soul*, or *multiple soul concept*, described by Murphy (1994) as follows:

> "In Afro-Jamaican psychology, the human person is often seen to be composed of two invisible dimensions, sometimes called 'shadows,' or 'spirits.' There is a 'soul' or 'good shadow' or 'good *duppy,'* which survives the body and goes to God after death. There is also an 'evil shadow,' a 'trickify *duppy,'* which, after the death of the body, lingers around the gravesite and its former home…Uncontrolled by community

> ritual sanctions, this *duppy* can disrupt human lives by its own willfulness or it can be captured by *obeah* workers to carry out aggressive commissions" (p.143).

Conceivably due in part to the ethnic diversity of the Africans who arrived in Jamaica, the oral nature of much of African tradition and lack of a single scriptural canon, as well as the disruption of daily life and tradition of the Africans who were victim of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, there seems to be some variation of this concept as it is found on the island. However, the basic idea is still conveyed in, for example, Chevannes' (2012) description of the multiple soul concept:

> "The human being is a composite of spirit, body, shadow, and soul. The soul is the life principle, and the shadow the personality, which is subject to the malign influence of obeah. The spirit is the eternal part of the human that cannot die, that is capable of extracorporeal existence, and that lives on after death as an ancestor. Immediately after the departure of life, the spirit exists as an uncontrolled and dangerous entity, until the transition to ancestor status is properly enacted and complete." (p.18).

This is especially significant to mental healthcare practice because affliction by the mischievous duppy, whether they were set on an individual by an Obeah practitioner or otherwise,[1] often results in what Payne-Jackson and Alleyne (2004, p.101) describe as "duppy-sickness," the symptoms of which are typically mania or depression, but which

may also result in physical maladies or even death. Mania and other maladies may also be the result of one's shadow being separated from their body or otherwise manipulated, typically by Obeah practitioners, which exemplifies the distinct understanding of any given person's mental, emotional, and physical faculties between indigenous Afro-Jamaican and Western scientific epistemology as seen in biomedicine. In the words of Murphy (1994), "A shadow is seen as the outer form of an invisible dimension of the human person which is separable from the whole, vulnerable to spiritual attack, and survives the body after death." (p.16). These understandings of sickness and the individual also illustrate the broader Afro-Jamaican conception of the world as made up of both the visible and the invisible, or the temporal and the spiritual, which informs the non-fragmentation of religion and daily-life and belief in an accessible mystical power, or spiritual force, which characterize indigenous African spirituality.

The idea of a certain detachable spiritual element of an individual may be seen in other indigenous epistemologies around the world, and Barrett (1976a) shows the West African parallels of the multiple soul concept in the following quote:

> "Among the people of West Africa there is a belief in two or more souls. Among the Yoruba of Nigeria and the Fon of Dahomey, four souls are enumerated. The first is the *life-soul* which enters one at birth and comes directly from the hand of the Supreme Being. Next, there is the *personality-soul* which determines the kind of person one is to be…Third is the *guardian-soul* which may be considered one's protecting spirit or conscience. Lastly, there is the *shadow-soul.* The last two are almost

> indistinguishable. At death, the soul that comes from God goes back to God. The personality-soul is reborn in a child of the family; the guardian- and/or shadow-soul remains around until after all funeral rites are completed" (p.108).

While this may highlight the West African origins of Afro-Jamaican conceptions of self, it also is clearly related to what can be observed in Central African spirituality. This is true not only in the basic fact that it is a categorical elaboration of the various physical and spiritual elements of any individual which shape their personhood and destiny, but because it relates the very composition of an individual, the *self,* to the visible community of the living and the invisible spiritual community in a direct and intimate way. The Kongolese BaManianga categorization of multiple visible and invisible aspects of a person are seen in the following quote by Bockie (1993): "a living person consists of three basic elements: *nitu*, the physical body, or 'death-body,' because it dies…*kini,* the invisible body, a shade or reflection of nitu, looking exactly like it (sometimes this invisible body may be seen as an apparition after someone's death); and *mwela,* soul, which has no bodily form." (p.129). It may be useful to recall Stewart's (2005) relation of the term *miela*, the plural form of mwela ("breath"), to Myal, especially as it pertains to the cosmic life-giving breath that runs through plants as well as people. This common feature of the natural environment and human individuals seems to be the most essential aspect of any given person, and life itself: "Mwela is the key to survival of both nitu and kini. Like kini, mwela is invisible. But unlike kini, it cannot be seen by any living being. It lives in and from itself, without any help from either nitu or kini. But without help

from mwela, neither nitu or kini can survive. Mwela is therefore the most important of the three, for it gives life to both of the others." (Bockie, 1993, p.130). The conception of self that is found within the Kongolese-derived Jamaican Kumina tradition further highlights the continuity between the community of the living and dead and the individual both spiritually and physically, especially in terms of living kin and Ancestors.

While I have not found in my research any account specifically of the terms nitu and kini being applied to individuals in Jamaica, examples of this basic idea of the multiple souls or multiple visible and invisible elements of an individual abound. The variation of this concept found in Kumina highlights this tradition's emphasis on kin and the Ancestors. According to Stewart (2005), Kuminists "believe that each human being is essentially who she is due to the unique combination of her *kanuba* (spirit), *deebu* (blood), and *beezie* (flesh)…The *kanuba*, *deebu*, and *beezie* are the umbilical cord unifying the individual with his specific *nkuyu* (Ancestors) and unifying the larger community with the entire ancestral community." (p.144). This framework for understanding the composition of any given individual highlights the Kongolese influence of Kumina especially in the ultimacy it attaches to community. Furthermore, the temporary loss or radical alteration of one's self-awareness, as seen in Kumina in the form of "catching myal," may be considered as the culminating, active representation of the African conception of the living individual's and the community's connectedness to the invisible, spiritual community. The healing that occurs in such a state epitomizes the assisting, life-affirming role that the Ancestors play in the experience of the living. Bockie (1993) further describes the importance of community (both living and dead) in Kongo spirituality:

> "The community itself is viewed as the embodiment of spiritual reality, a reality present everywhere, at all times. Each person realizes his or her nature through relationship with others in the community rather than through transcendence. This community furthermore extends through all life to include not only the visible beings but also those who are unseen." (p.1).

Although such a connection between the living and the dead is rejected by RastafarI, they do maintain an African philosophical collectivism, or "communitarianism" (Bamikole, 2017), as I will show below. I maintain that this rejection itself has its roots partially in the life-affirming emphasis of indigenous African religio-cultural tradition. As explained again by Bockie (1993) regarding Kongolese religiosity, "The fundamental value of existence is life, life here and life in the realm beyond death." (p.10). These life-affirming African roots may be traced in the healing practices from the continent through Obeah, Myal, Kumina, and Revival. Additionally, the eternal life after death described in the Bible represents one parallel between Christian and indigenous African spirituality that was readily assimilated into Afro-Jamaican religiosity as seen especially in the Revival Zion tradition and its Native Baptist antecedent.

To delve more deeply into the Christian (or at least Biblical) adaptations and innovations of Revival, it is instructive to review the ideas of the spirit community and the spirit world (or environment) that is found in the tradition, especially as they impact the meaning and capability of the individual, or the self, as well as what it means to

succeed or fail in the all-important spiritual pursuit. I explained in the first chapter that the "*communotheism"* described by Stewart (2005, p.111) as being characteristic of indigenous African spirituality took on a Biblical character among Revival Zionists in Jamaica, who "see no contradiction between the Holy Spirit" and the spirit community. As Murphy (1994) explains, "'The spirit' in Revival Zion is both the particular spirit who guides the individual in his or her work and also the more general power and breath of God, the Holy Spirit," and he adds that "The Holy Spirit underlies and empowers all the work of the particular spirits" (p.130). These particular spirits are usually prophets, saints, or angels, who reside as a community in the invisible world of Zion, and according to Murphy (1994), "One works with these spirits not only for the personal fulfillment brought by the power of the spiritual life, but also to develop the gifts of healing and prophecy for the service of the community." (p.130-131). Furthermore, "When the children of Zion speak of 'my spirit,' they may be referring to the guardian angel who guides them, or to a particular faculty of the human person." (Murphy, 1994, p.143). These lifelong guiding spirits are often encountered in visions, dreams, and trances,[2] or to put it more generally, in altered states of consciousness brought on by any number of factors or combination thereof, such as drumming,[3] whirling, dancing, or otherwise. Revival Zionists (children of Zion) are known to rather permanently possess such spiritual sensitivity or insight after their first encounter. In these altered states, as Murphy (1994) describes, "the self is no longer identified with the self of waking life, but with another faculty which is capable of 'journeying' beyond the confines of the body and seeing what ordinary eyes cannot." (p.128). This journey is to the spirit world of

Zion, where Ancestors, prophets, angels, saints and generally venerable spirits reside and have the divine power to assist humankind in the “temporal” world, the highest goal.

The Revival conception of Zion clearly mirrors, with Biblical language, the Kongolese spirit world described by Bockie (1993) where the honorable who live righteous lives go after death, and which is in constant communication and interaction with the world of the living. This may not be so different from Akan conceptions of Ancestorhood and the afterlife, as explained by Aborampah (2005). Furthermore, the extreme importance of community for the living and the dead in Revival Zion is illustrated in the following quote by Murphy (1994) regarding those who do not go to Zion after death: “It is the community which offers salvation, deliverance from evil, and life everlasting. The ‘bad’ *duppies* are those who lack community, who have no one to pray over them and no one to guide them into the everlasting life of Zion.” (p.144). Being “three-eyed” or “four-eyed” individuals, capable of seeing and journeying through this spirit world, Revival Zionists conceive of it in an immediate, interactive, and detailed way, rather than as some nebulous, mysterious, faraway destination to be reached only intellectually in this life, and physically only after death. As related by Murphy, the spirit world of Zion is seen “as at once distinct and at the same time engulfing the temporal one.” (p.142). Here, the RastafarI location of God (Haile Selassie I) and Zion (traditionally Ethiopia, or Africa[4]) in this very world of the living may be seen as an innovative extension of this Revival conception of Zion. And just as Zionists distanced themselves in beliefs and practices from Pukuminists, who “seek the help of earth-bound spirits, while Zionists invoke Christian saints, angels, biblical prophets, and the Holy Spirit” (Murrell, 2010, p.272), RastafarI distanced themselves from both Revival

traditions for their dealing with the dead, which Rastas saw as ineffective in the struggle against the structural evil of Babylon and out of line with Biblical teaching. The RastafarI rejection of dealings with the dead, although it is justifiably seen by Chevannes (2011) as being a clear departure from African religiosity, is however simultaneously rooted in the life-affirming, health-promoting purpose of African religiosity and the innovation and resistance to oppression that have characterized Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural tradition since the days of slavery.

As I explained in the previous chapter, the RastafarI *"this-worldliness"* is largely a response to colonial oppression and the Christian missionary "theology of suffering" that Rastas view as a means of perpetuating their harsh, unequal conditions. This is particularly important considering the fact that RastafarI – although in actuality this is not entirely different from the other Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions discussed in this thesis – view the idea of living righteously as necessarily meaning battling evil wherever it may be found; one cannot be inactive or neutral in their resistance to "*downpression*" and claim to live a life in line with God. In Jamaica, this evil was most obviously present in the form of coloniality and anti-Africanness, which denied Africans social and religious capital and placed it exclusively in the hands of White Christian colonialists. Thus, the RastafarI religion has from its very inception sought to reclaim social and religious capital for Africans on the continent and in the diaspora via a very public rejection of coloniality and critique regarding what they perceived to be the lack of a focused, coherent religio-cultural resistance to it. Being rooted in Garveyism, this has largely taken the form of historical reeducation and the decolonization of the mind, and reggae music has been an important means of accomplishing this goal around the world.

Having grown out of the broader Jamaican religio-cultural backdrop of the twentieth century, RastafarI wields the scripture to which is attached the most religious capital in their social context, the Bible, to help accomplish their redistribution of religious capital, claiming that it is a book rooted in African, rather than European, civilization. The social healing of the wounds of coloniality that RastafarI religiously undertakes via a redistribution of religious capital has also been accomplished via a redefinition of the self, taking direct aim at the West's anthropological poverty.

RastafarI commonly use the pronoun "I" instead of *me* (first-person singular) to refer to themselves, and "I and I" in place of *we* (first-person plural). This is meant to refer directly to their belief that God – the supreme God of the Bible, embodied in the Living God Haile Selassie I – dwells within all humankind, particularly Africans. Such a conception has the function of claiming Truth to be as accessible to poor Black Jamaicans as to the White, Black, or Brown "upper-class" and Christians. In fact, Babylon may be seen as lacking in religious capital.[5] In this sense, the Rasta *I concept* represents their claim to religious capital. This linguistic innovation is likely derived from a number of places, including the "I" in the title of their Ethiopian God-King, Haile Selassie I. Besson and Chevannes (1996) locate the origins of this RastafarI claim to inherent divinity in their Revival background, especially in the famed prophet-healer-rebel leader Alexander Bedward: "Bedward was a charismatic leader who almost believed himself to be God, telling Beckwith that he could set the date for the end of the world. This merging of identity between humanity and God (which would subsequently evolve within Rastafari with the conceptualization of 'I and I') was a variation on the Revival possession theme." (p.216-217). In this quote one can see that the authors

relate the *I concept* of RastafarI not only to Bedward, but to the "possession theme" of Revival, which is also present in the broader Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural landscape, as seen in the catching of myal in Kumina, as well as in indigenous African religiosity in general. Thus, while RastafarI generally view this form of spirit possession as taboo, their *I concept* may be seen as a reformulation thereof, especially in terms of a *this-worldliness* and an important temporal distinction. According to Stewart (2005), "The chief distinction between Rastafari and African-derived religious anthropology is that of temporality. Divine incarnation is a permanent phenomenon in Rastafari, recurring in each individual," whereas "in African-derived religions, manifestations of divine incarnation occur randomly among devotees for a limited period of time." (p.133).[6] Furthermore, Stewart attributes this distinction to RastafarI's "biblical Christology": "Just as Jesus shared in Jah's divinity, Rastas and, to be sure, all Africans share in Jah's divinity." (p.133). This argument for the Biblical, Christological derivation of the *I concept* is supported by Chevannes (1991), who explains that RastafarI interpret the passage of the Gospels "'I am in the Father and the Father is in me', as a common existential condition of every man. To the Rastafari, that God created man in his own image can only mean that every man is like God, which means divine." (p.48). Thus, RastafarI appears to have emerged out of the broader Jamaican religio-cultural background with significant influence from Revival, but it has also been shown that they have been influenced by other religious forms found in Jamaica.

In the first chapter, I mentioned the Kumina contribution to the early development of RastafarI that was documented by Bilby and Leib (2012). These authors show the importance particularly of one of the central elements of Kumina culture, drumming, to

the development of reggae music. They also report, regarding Leonard Howell's Pinnacle commune during the younger years of the RastafarI movement, that "A number of informants state that the original group at Pinnacle was composed primarily of persons originally from St. Thomas, the parish where Kumina is most strongly represented." (p.264). Along these lines, the famed Rasta drummer Count Ossie is known to have been connected to Kumina culture. I also mentioned previously, based primarily on the work of Lee (2003) that Hindu religiosity was influential to Howell, and likely has played a role in the shaping of some aspects of RastafarI that are important even today. While more research is called for in this area, it would seem that the RastafarI *I concept* parallels the conception of the "Self" that is found, for example, in the Bhagavad Gita, an important scripture to Hinduism generally.[7] Throughout this text, one can find its central message that any person's truest identity (Self) is that of Brahman, the "infinite Godhead," or the supreme Creator from whom all of reality is manifested. Thus, access to or knowledge of this inner Divinity, synonymous with Truth, represents the fundamental goal of the mystical spiritual pursuit, and can be achieved (and is lived out after its achievement) through selfless service in the world for the good of all. While I do not intend to downplay the African or Biblical influences of RastafarI – these are clearly foundational – such parallels between RastafarI and Hinduism may reflect its development in a less isolated manner than traditions such as Revival and Kumina. The worldliness that has characterized the religion, also inherited in part from Garveyism, can be seen in the RastafarI worship of a geopolitically focused Ethiopian Emperor, as well as their pursuit of nation building and religious capital, to which their

idea of community is central. Furthermore, as Bamikole (2012) argues, one may find in the RastafarI approach to community an African epistemological inheritance.

The above conceptions of self and community as they appear in indigenous African and Afro-Jamaican religiosity may be considered reflective of a philosophical tendency towards collectivism, as opposed to Western individualism.[8] Spirit possession, particularly in the Kumina form of *catching the myal,* may be seen as the ritual practice of this overarching aspect of Afro-Jamaican epistemology. But if trance and spirit possession are so representative of this collectivist spirituality, what can be made of the RastafarI rejection thereof? According to Bamikole (2012), "one can easily see that it is the collectivist's position that has been embraced by Rastafari." (p.133). This argument finds support in the work of Barnett and Onuora (2012), who explain that "collectivism is a value advanced and embraced within the Afrocentric paradigm. This perspective can quite easily be seen in the Rastafari movement" (p.163). As mentioned above, the RastafarI *this-worldliness* – which I connected to the life-affirming aim of indigenous African spirituality and the historical Afro-Jamaican character of resistance against coloniality – can be seen in the conception of community which focuses exclusively on the (living) international community of Africans on the continent and in the diaspora. Beyond this point, Bamikole (2017) addresses the inherent element of unity that is reflected in the above-mentioned *I concept* seen in Rasta language: "This 'I', which linguists have referred to as an honorific pronoun, is an individuating as well as unifying notion of identity and it is easily identified with communitarian social philosophy, for which the African belief system and by implication the Rastafari belief system are noted." (p.458). This connection between self and community – and potentially

extending to include environment – can further be seen in the Bhagavad Gita, which posits that the enlightened individual sees the Self in all creatures, and all creatures in the Self. Additionally, Perkins (2012) highlights the RastafarI conception of sin as being primarily structural, or social, rather than solely individual:

> "For many Rastafari sin is not simply an individual moral problem but also has political and social dimensions…Human beings live in a world of sin—personal, inherited, and corporate sin. Perhaps the key sin is corporate sin that is reflected in a Babylon system that practices racial, economic, and cultural domination, particularly against the African. To overcome the Babylon system requires not just individual redemption and liberation but also social redemption and liberation." (p.252).

This concept of sin highlights the collective nature of RastafarI epistemology, but also is important specifically to health because Rastas have traditionally believed that one would literally never die if he does not sin, staying true to the *livity*. Bamikole (2017) has also addressed the social aspect of RastafarI *livity*, or religious way of life, as indicating their "communitarian" philosophy and its likeness to "African personalism," which he describes as follows: "African culture encourages the politics of consensus rather than the politics of exclusion. A politics of consensus recognises the rights of all persons to participate in the politics of serving and protecting the interests of members of the community; these members are not only persons, but also plants, animals and the divine." (p.462). This African-derived worldview has the potential to empower the

construction and maintenance of the pluriverse (Reiter, 2018), and sheds light also on the environmental aspect of Rastafarl livity.

The argument that Rastafarl generally adheres to an African view of the natural world is also supported by Barnett and Onuora (2012), who explain that one aspect of the “Afrocentric paradigm” that Rastafarl displays is the “cosmological dimension,” which is “encapsulated by a metaphysical perspective on life that emphasizes living in harmony with nature and the cosmos.” (p.162). Murrell (2010) describes livity as “an attempt to model a life that honors Jah while living in harmony with the natural order of things” and “a path to true spirituality and holistic health” (p.307). This view highlights both the character of resistance and natural health-centered ethic of livity. The rebellious Rastafarl reverence for nature may be seen in the herbalism that they practice, especially in their use of ganja, as well as in the symbolism of their dreadlocks and their secluded retreats to the wilderness. The latter of these points is found in the work of Chevannes (2011): “Rastafari promotes asceticism, including the physical withdrawal from the world of Babylon to live among and off nature” (p.573). Regarding the dreadlocks, Edmonds notes that “since they connect Rastas with earthforce, the shaking of the locks is thought to unleash spiritual energy that will eventually bring about the destruction of Babylon” (1998a, p.32). The Rastafarl conception of the apocalypse, derived from the Bible, also illustrates their emphasis on the importance of harmony with the natural environment, as well as God’s will being manifest in nature. According to Edmonds (1998a), “Rastas believe that Babylon’s predatory and exploitative relationship with the environment will eventually precipitate this ecological backlash. Furthermore, Babylon’s refusal to live naturally and its commitment to

artificiality are out of sync with the divine principle in nature and hence must ultimately self-destruct." (p.29). This Rasta insistence on harmony with the environment is preached around the world, as seen in the work of Sibanda (2012;2017), who documents the impact of the Rastafari ecological ethic in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the environmental aspect of livity is also seen in the Rastafarl *Ital* diet. This diet typically is vegan or vegetarian,[9] and consists of organic, unprocessed foods and abstention from artificial or Babylon-made products such as alcohol. In the words of Edmonds (1998b), "Central to the ideal of ital living is the belief in herbal healing. Rastas believe that the entire universe is organically related and that the key to health, both physical and social, is to live in accordance with organic principles" (p.354). Ultimately, the Rastafarl commitment to the natural environment is undeniable, despite its departures from the specific understandings of nature that are found in the more clearly African-derived religio-cultural traditions of Jamaica.

Stewart's (2005) account of her experience accompanying Kuminists on a ritual journey into the mountain wilderness of St. Thomas to collect healing plants illustrates the reverence for the natural environment found in Kumina. First of all, this journey was seen not just in mechanical terms, simply collecting plants that happen to contain medicinal chemicals, but in deeply spiritual terms, as an integral part of the healing activities that are central to the Kumina tradition. As Stewart (2005) explains, "collecting medicinal plants is a *religious* activity of supplication, libation, and absolute reverence for the natural elements in creation, the invisible forces that pervade the elements, and the person or persons seeking help." (p.151). In this quote one can see that in Kumina epistemology it is not only people that consist of or are in intimate contact with both a

physical and spiritual, visible and invisible dimension, but plants as well; this is key to Kumina herbalism. The intimate and meaningful relationship that exists between Kuminists and the natural environment is evident in the following prayer that collectors of the medicinal plants offered before picking each plant, as recorded by Stewart (2005):

> "*Good morning, whosoever lives here, we come asking for health and protection. We come in peace; and we take life so as to give life to* [the person for whom the medicinal plant is sought is named in full]. *We seek not to destroy but to bless and uplift so that love and goodness will be spread throughout the nation. We ask for your help in this work. Let it be done."* (p.152).

The agency that Kuminists clearly attach to plant life, as well as the relationship between the divine (Ancestors) and the natural environment, can also be seen in their pouring of rum onto or around the plant and its roots. This is because, as explained by Stewart (2005), "rum has medicinal properties that, along with the prayer, help to wake up the sleeping plants," and furthermore, "rum is the sacrifice that must be offered to the Ancestors who might be buried directly below the trees and plants from which leaves are removed. This is done as a sign of respect for the sacred space occupied by the Ancestors." (p.152). All of this is reportedly done with genuine respect through which the healing properties of the herbal medicine may be activated. It should also be noted that Kuminists regard the natural environment as a sacred space, particularly as it is related

not just to the spirits of the Ancestors, but also to their lived history. According to Stewart (2005), Kuminists “treat particular streams, rocks, bushes, and mountainous hiding spaces as shrines that provided safe haven for their African Ancestors when they were escaping from plantation slavery. They often recount stories of oppression and the emancipation provided by the natural surroundings as they travel along the same paths in search of therapeutic plants for their clients.” (p.152). I regard Kuminists’ oral maintenance of the history of their oppressed Ancestors as a form of illness narrative for social healing similar to that which is central to RastafarI, who strive for the reeducation of Black people for the purpose of freeing them from their continued ideological bondage (especially in the form of anti-Africanness) and lack of proper recognition (in the form of anthropological poverty) under the system of coloniality.

The indigenous African-derived reverence for the earth and its connection to the spirit world can be seen throughout the history of Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions and is embodied in the symbol of the Kongo cross. Stewart (2005) explains that this cross “symbolizes the holistic spiritual and philosophical orientation regarding the visible-invisible sacred cosmos, which is normative for many classical African societies.” (p.158). The author also highlights this symbol’s importance to the practice of oath taking that is found in indigenous African religio-cultural tradition, and while it cannot be verified that this particular symbol was ever used in Jamaica, she explains that “Obeah oath rituals, which scholars maintain were enacted before every African rebellion, might very well have been influenced by classical Kongo cosmology, which uses the cross as its icon.” (p.158). Basically explained, this Kongo, or *Yowa* cross represents the intersection between the world of the visible, or living (represented by the

horizontal line), and the invisible, the dead buried beneath the ground, and God, or Nzambi Mpungu, above (both represented by the vertical line). Stewart (2005, p.160) explains that “In Kumina, Myal ancestral possession dramatizes the sign of the cross as the crossroads where the invisible meets the visible,” and that “The vertical pole, marking the invisible domain, is physically represented by the centerpole in Kumina ceremonies and signifies the sky and the locus of disembodied life. The horizontal pole marks the visible domain, encapsulating the earth and embodied life. The point of penetration, the crossroads, symbolizes the event of incarnation.” Furthermore, the author points to the importance of this ritual process as “the basis for a valuation of the body as an indispensable spiritual medium” (Stewart, 2005, p.160), a point that sheds further light on what it means to be a human being, which is particularly relevant to peoples who have historically been degraded and abused (especially on the basis of physical attributes) by coloniality.

As mentioned in the first chapter, many beliefs and practices between West and Central Africa may overlap. One can see a similar importance of Ancestors and the natural environment, as described above, in West African religio-cultural tradition. I also explained in the first chapter that the Akan element was particularly important to the African peopling of Jamaica. Regarding society and nature, Aborampah (2005) has the following to say about indigenous Akan religion: “Akan groups believed that human beings live not only in a religious universe where natural phenomena, things, objects, and so on, are imbued with a life force emanating from the Supreme Being, they also believed that humanity and nature should exist in harmony.” (p.130-131). It has already been shown in this thesis how this *life force*, or *mystical power* factors into Afro-

Jamaican religio-cultural traditions, but the Akan emphasis on harmony between the human and non-human worlds in the achievement of proper living also remains important to Afro-Jamaican healing. Along these lines, the author also explains that among the Akan, diviners were consulted “to bring things back to harmony,” and that “Akan indigenous religious practices involved rituals that often were intended to counteract evil motives or to put a person or community back in touch with God or a particular spirit,” and in which “There often was a medical component.” (Aborampah, 2005, p.124). This description of Akan religiosity sounds much like the descriptions that can be found of Obeah in Jamaica, and Aborampah explicitly relates the two: “In both Ghana and Jamaica, obeah was a method of personal and social control that allowed individuals to take charge of their circumstances and those of their communities.” (p.135).

That such a dual function of community regulation and healing can be found in the same religious practitioner in Africa and in Jamaica may help to explain my argument that these practices are not separate; that is, social functionality and physical, mental, and spiritual health and wellness are highly interrelated and are placed on the same spectrum, in which an equilibrium or harmony between the various elements of reality (particularly between living and dead individuals and communities and the natural environment) is sought. This clearly differs from a Western medical conception in which religion, medicine, and governance or justice generally represent separate institutions with separate professionals dedicated to their specific practice. Even within medicine we can see, for example, a clear distinction between mental and physical healthcare, and even much further specialization therein. While there certainly is good reason for this,

such an understanding of reality clearly does not align with an indigenous Afro-Jamaican epistemology. In the following section, regarding the *decolonization of health,* I will show how this may result in a case of ill-functioning healthcare service. This should serve to highlight not only points of dysfunction, but ways in which indigenous Afro-Jamaican epistemology may be useful in the development of an integrative health model.

Decolonization of Health

In their 2004 book, *Jamaican Folk Medicine*, Payne-Jackson and Alleyne cite Benoist (1993, p.29) in their claim that the socio-cultural context is an important area of analysis regarding the study of healthcare practices:

> "What goes on around an ill person and his illness speaks more about the realities of a society than any other discourse…Health, like illness, is not a domain reserved to medicine or medicines, but concerns society in its entirety. The most advanced technologies, as well indeed as traditional practices, are not independent of the culture which constructs categories of knowledge and which directs perceptions and expectations, nor independent of the social organization which structures the distribution of roles, power and access to resources." (p.4-5).

Likewise, the authors argue, citing Kleinman (1980, p.25-26) that healthcare practices must be studied "in a holistic manner as socially organized responses to disease that constitute a special cultural system" because "the health care system is…a system of symbolic meanings anchored in particular arrangements of social institutions and patterns of interactions" (Payne-Jackson and Alleyne, 2004, p.5). This situates the healthcare practices of Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural healers squarely within the investigation of epistemology that this chapter undertakes, and places biomedicine within its own particular sociocultural context. It also highlights the causes of the denigration of many healers as rooted in coloniality, since even (or especially) medical professionals trained by Western standards often reject the legitimacy of Afro-Jamaican healing and neglect the social and epistemological context of their counterparts and patients. This is especially problematic in the case of mental health, as seen in the 2014 book, *Caribbean Healing Traditions*:

> "Historically, mental health counseling has been part of the philosophical traditions of European religion and spirituality. Richards and Bergin (1997) argue that psychology as a whole located itself within a 19th-century naturalistic science that is based on deterministic, reductionist, and positivist assumptions that viewed religious and spiritual beliefs and practices negatively. Hence, spirituality has frequently been overlooked as a representation of diversity in health and mental health care systems…many health and mental health care practitioners persistently choose to maintain their historical ambivalence over cultural

competence in this important area of client diversity" (Sutherland, Moodley and Chevannes, p.2-3).

This reality may be further understood in regard to its position within the context of development through Nelson Maldonado-Torres' (2008) claim that secularism – the "religion of the modern world" (p.360) – is dependent upon a Western-centric notion of linear temporality in which the West has reached the future, while the rest are stuck in the "primitive" past.[10]

That many adherents and practitioners of Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions, from Obeah and Kumina to Revival and RastafarI, have identified Eurocentricity, or White supremacy, and coloniality as the underlying cause of the precarious holistic health conditions of the socioeconomically disadvantaged African-descended population of Jamaica is evidence of their etiological competence. Such a competence, which has enabled many to pinpoint this complex and deeply embedded ideological or epistemological ailment, is especially noteworthy given the general lack of access among the poor to the privileges of social mobility and "higher" formal and overseas education afforded by "upper" or even "middle" classes. That such an important element of an effective development theory may be derived from the common epistemology and practice of the Afro-Jamaican healer points to the importance of the study and recognition of him or her (and indigenous epistemologies in general) in the pursuit of development and decolonization. The integrative health model for which this thesis argues is exemplified by the theory and practice of the healer in Jamaica, since "From their own point of view, their relationship with the biomedical system is in no way

confrontational or antagonistic." (Payne-Jackson and Alleyne, 2004, p.9). This interepistemic cooperative integration of healthcare practices may be considered part of the more general Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural and epistemological flexibility and knack for innovation that was described in the previous chapter, since, as is further noted by Payne-Jackson and Alleyne (2004), "The folk medical system, like all other aspects of Jamaican folk culture, is characterized both by continuity and by change." (p.10).

As I have shown throughout this thesis, colonial attempts to suppress and discredit African religiosity have not altogether succeeded, as evidenced by the continued practice of Obeah, Kumina, Revival, and RastafarI. However, this colonial attempt can be seen to have had some impact, as evidenced by the popular stigma against many African-derived traditions. The continuation of indigenous Afro-Jamaican religiosity may be partly explained by the necessity of the healing services they have long provided to the Jamaican population. According to Payne-Jackson and Alleyne (2004), "If the conditions of slavery inhibited or prevented the practice of certain aspects of African culture, it could be argued that in the case of medical practices they encouraged, required and allowed slaves to rely on their own devices to heal themselves." (p.15). While colonialists' regard for African life was minimal, as evidenced by their overall brutality and the high mortality rate of Jamaican slaves, it certainly benefitted the plantation operation that they were able to heal and maintain themselves. But as colonial authorities accepted or possibly even promoted indigenous healing practices, they also promoted the cultural devices that spawned rebellion. This is because indigenous African religiosity may be considered synonymous with healing and has prominently included an etiology that focuses specifically on social conditions and

relationships. The social imbalance of conditions between slaves and colonialists in the plantation system (and later between Black, Brown, and White, or wealthy and poor) in Jamaica were, and in many ways continue to be obvious. Furthermore, it is the "philosophy of holism" (Sutherland, 2014, p.19) that links all dimensions of being to sickness and health in the Caribbean. The following quote by Sutherland (2014) illustrates the general background of beliefs and practices regarding healing that this section seeks to address:

> "At the heart of the collection of hybrid or creolized healing traditions in the Caribbean is the worldview that everything in the universe is of one source and will, and that the world is animated by numerous ancestral spiritual entities, gods, and deities that frequently intervene in the everyday lives of individuals. For example, it is believed the body, mind, and spirit are all interconnected and whatever effects one, impacts the other. From this perspective, illnesses and disorders may derive from many sources including natural, social, spiritual, or psychological disturbances that create disequilibrium which can be expressed in the form of physical, social, or mental ill health" (p.19)

The author continues, recognizing that in response to the extreme conditions of oppression in the Caribbean, "traditional healers understand ailments and, therefore, their cures as encompassing the social realm." (p.19-20). This is quite distinct from the treatment found in biomedicine, which generally seeks to cure a patient of a specific,

biomedically defined ailment while remaining uninvolved in the whole picture of their life and suffering. In the words of Frank (2013), “the master text of the medical journal article needs the suffering person, but the individuality of that suffering cannot be acknowledged.” (p.12).

The epistemology that informs biomedicine differs from that of an indigenous Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural adherent not only in the separation between the social, the environmental, and the individual, but also in the separation of any given individual into mind and body and the general lack of recognition of the spiritual element. Sutherland, Moodley, and Chevannes (2014) recognize in biomedicine both the lack of acknowledgement of spirituality, as well as the “compartmentalization of the individual,” which “is a legacy of the dualist Cartesian paradigm which claims that the body and mind are separate entities” and “is in sharp contrast to the Caribbean worldview which is based on holism, collectivism, and spirituality.” (p.3). The domination of biomedicine and the denigration of indigenous Afro-Jamaican healing practices is certainly reflective of the overarching narrative of coloniality, in which the Western way of thinking, acting, and being represents the most advanced and enlightened way. In biomedicine, this may be seen in the universalist supposition of total scientific objectivity; claims that remove even scientific findings from their cultural context and regard them as universally appropriate are reflective of the human tendency of epistemological inflexibility, a limitation that lies at the core of coloniality. Sutherland (2014) explains how such an understanding has led to the lowly status of healing practices in the Caribbean:

> "The power and authority of the natural science paradigm from which biomedicine draws its legitimacy are incontrovertible and the rhetoric of scientific objectivity is alluring. Consequently, the universality of its model is often speciously accepted in the assumption that it is or ought to be appropriate in the assessment of the effectiveness of traditional healing systems in spite of divergent epistemologies regarding illness and health…What is at issue here is that the hegemonic practices of conventional medicine have distorted conceptualizations of the efficacy of traditional healing rendering it rejected knowledge to be scoffed at by the larger society, condemned on the pulpits of established churches, demoted by the education system, and, at times, prohibited by the authorities." (p.22-23)

If the reader remains unconvinced of the cultural particularity of Western biomedical standpoints, it would perhaps be useful to consider that slaves who attempted to escape their harsh conditions in the past were diagnosed with the mental disorder of *drapetomania*, "the impulse to run away" (Sutherland, 2014, p.23). Obviously, such a diagnosis reveals much more about the positionality of the colonialists than it does about the people who attempted to escape the extreme horrors that pervaded plantation slavery.

The strongly naturalistic emphasis of Western medicine puts it at odds with the indigenous Afro-Jamaican healer in that while the healer's etiology certainly recognizes the naturalistic element, it also places a great importance on the *personalistic* as a

cause of illness. In explaining a personalistic medical system, Payne-Jackson and Alleyne (2004, p.80) cite Foster (1976, p.775), who identifies illness within such a system as “due to the active purposeful intervention of an agent which may be human (a witch or sorcerer), non-human (a ghost, an ancestor, an evil spirit), or supernatural (a deity or other very powerful being).” This differs from naturalistic systems, which “explain illness in impersonal systemic terms” and in which “Disease is thought to stem not from the machinations of an angry being” (Payne-Jackson and Alleyne, 2004, p.80), but instead “from such natural forces or conditions as cold, heat, winds, dampness, germs, and, above all, by an upset in the balance of the basic body elements” (Foster, 1976, p.775 as cited by Payne-Jackson and Alleyne, 2004, p.80). The personalistic etiology and healing focus displayed by Afro-Jamaican healers reflects the logic in which the social dimension becomes directly and explicitly a matter of health, and thus decolonization an extension of medical practice. It should be reiterated, however, that an indigenous Afro-Jamaican understanding of health includes both naturalistic and personalistic etiologies as “part of a multi-level causation system in which the two categories may account for the same illness in the same individual – at different levels of the system, or in terms of two levels of consciousness” (Payne-Jackson and Alleyne, 2004, p.82). This is reflected in the example of a naturally caused illness as ultimately having been directed by the supernatural.[11] This “multi-level causation system” helps explain the simultaneous utilization by many Jamaicans of both indigenous healing services and Western biomedicine (a process typically facilitated by healers), but is also observable exclusively within indigenous Afro-Jamaican healing itself, for example in herbal vs. “occult” medicine (Payne-Jackson and Alleyne, 2004).

The significant cultural and epistemological differences between biomedical professional and patient in the context of Jamaica and the broader Caribbean (and also extending into the “developed” world) ultimately represent issues of access. This lack of access is also an issue in terms of finances and geography, particularly for poor, rural Jamaicans. Payne-Jackson and Alleyne (2004) explain that “The economic situation in Jamaica has created a serious decrease in the availability and accessibility of modern health-care services and personnel” (p.30), which has resulted in an increased utilization of indigenous healing services. This matches the historical trend in Jamaica, and the authors also note that in the days of slavery, even planters themselves had in some cases utilized (particularly the herbal) medicine of the slaves for its availability and “undeniable effectiveness” (Payne-Jackson and Alleyne, 2004, p.21). All of these material, epistemological, and sociological factors remain important issues in the functionality of the healthcare system in Jamaica. The paradox of RastafarI’s simultaneous departure from the various African-derived religions in Jamaica and explicit pan-Africanism (Chevannes, 2011) can only be explained, counterintuitively, in terms of their shared emphasis on treating the colonial disease that has resulted in this institutional dysfunction. RastafarI’s insistence on immediate structural improvement is a direct response to its Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural antecedents’ etiology.

Sutherland (2014) explains that “The belief that the etiology of adversity is with demons and spirits, regardless of whether the adversity is within the family or the society at large, serves two functions. First, it positions the healer as the one with the power to detect, eradicate, or placate the offending spirit, and second, it creates a sense of order in the context of instability and insecurity.” (p.19). RastafarI, as embodied

by their I concept, formed a rejection of claims of exclusive access to the mystical forces of assistance by both colonialists and healers, insisting instead that all had the power to detect and eradicate evil, since this evil existed in plain, this-worldly form in the Babylon system. Additionally, RastafarI are unsatisfied with simply a *sense* of order; instead they demand significant changes in the official institutions and the dominant ideology of "modernity." The decolonization of health and the development of an integrative health model that this section undertakes is inspired especially by this RastafarI sentiment. To be clear, many aspects of Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions that preceded RastafarI and still exist today also may contribute significantly to such an endeavor. I do not take the position that one or the other religio-cultural tradition is inherently more or less effective than the other in this pursuit. However, the case of RastafarI and mental healthcare in Jamaica, which I will briefly discuss below in light of the work of Morgan (2014) and others, serves as a clear example of dysfunction between biomedicine and patient.

To quote Morgan (2014), "After almost 500 years of colonialism, erasing the blueprint of Eurocentrism is almost impossible. However, very often, the answer lies within our awareness of our African ancestry, the establishment of our personal and collective identity from which an acceptable, possibly integrative model can be generated." (p.165). This recovery and implementation of African tradition and identity has been the primary aim of RastafarI since its development in the 1930s. Thus, RastafarI have wielded African-derived epistemological and cosmological standpoints to outwardly reject the encroachment of hegemonic Western-centrism wherever it is found; this is the purpose of the livity. Above, I presented the RastafarI conception of self,

community, and environment, and the following quote by Morgan (2014) helps explain how these combine in the formulation of a distinct conception of health:

> "Rastafarians, like our African ancestors and compatriots, believe in the monistic concept of mind and body and have rejected the idea of Cartesian dualism, which has sought to divide the elements of the human mind from the body and therefore juxtaposing us against ourselves, providing an imbalance which at its extremities causes pain and suffering. Therefore, from the Rastafarian perspective of universal oneness, one's diet (vegetarian or vegan) and livity become critical in maintaining a totally healthy system (mental, physical, and spiritual)." (p.167).

The livity, or "totality of one's being in the world" (Morgan, 2014, p.166) exemplifies the philosophy of holism mentioned by Sutherland (2014), as it represents a daily lifestyle-based healthcare system which emphasizes the connection between one's body, mind, and soul, as well as one's connection to their surrounding community and natural and spiritual environment. This holistic approach to health also contrasts with biomedicine in that it is largely preventative, while biomedicine tends to so one-sidedly emphasize curative measures that it can in some cases be detrimental to patients' overall health and well-being.[12] The Ital diet, use of bush teas and general herbalism practiced by RastafarI are central to their livity. This herbalism is perhaps most notable in the RastafarI use of ganja, or marijuana. In their reasoning sessions and Nyabinghi

ceremonies, the ritual use of ganja is considered at once medicinal and spiritual, on both the individual and communal level, as it is thought to be helpful in reaching “the heights of meditation,” and “assisting the process of energizing the mind-body connection to its ultimate good for the Rastafarian community and for the good of the entire nation.” (p.167). Music, and particularly drumming, is also central to a Nyabinghi ceremony and Rastafarl culture in general. Bob Marley is famously quoted as saying that “the herb (ganja) reveals one to oneself,” and while ganja use represents one area of contention between official mental healthcare and Rastafarl spiritual healing, this quote exemplifies the parallels between psychotherapy and reasoning, noted by Morgan (2014).

As further explained by Morgan (2014), for many Rastas “there is no place for psychotropic medication, which allows one to further lose control of one’s faculties, diminish one’s personality, while becoming dependent on the prescribed drug and ignoring the causative factors.” (p.170). Thus, the biological basis of psychiatry is clearly at odds with the Rastafarl livity. This issue is reflected in the work of Hutchinson (2014), regarding the broader Caribbean population: “These principles while rooted in the biopsychosocial model emphasize the biology of the brain as the main focus of intervention, thereby diminishing the community context in which he or she functions” (p.206). The author also goes on to say that “there is sorely lacking a more whole person approach and interventions that focus more specifically on psychological and social issues rather than medical and psychiatric ones.” (p.207). Amuleru-Marshall, Gomez and Neckles concur with this position, noting also that Frantz Fanon, himself a psychiatrist, argued that “the goal of psychotherapy must be to rebuild the identity,

culture, and a progressive sociopolitical trajectory of people in these former colonies through a liberating praxis," and that "His legacy is the quest for a psychology that de-emphasizes individualism and seeks, instead, to nurture sociality and collective liberty." (2014, p.219). As Morgan (2014, p.172) puts it, "The techniques of the health psychologist, developmental psychologists, clinical and counseling psychologists are in line with strengthening the mind and are therefore more in line with RastafarI" than is psychiatry. In this same vein, the author suggests that "The psychologist can be perceived as part of the community, an elder" (p.171). Young and Rees (2011) also note that there has been a similar grievance within medical anthropology regarding psychiatry's reduction of complex social and mental issues to biochemistry, and, along these same lines, Panter-Brick and Eggerman (2018) note that many medical anthropologists have "come to oppose the biomedicalization of life" and "engage in a broader vision of 'social medicine.'" (p.234).

Clearly, mental healthcare in particular represents an area in which decolonization and indigenization is desperately needed, especially in the Caribbean. It is also an area in which, like all of medicine, trust, communication, and relatability are central to its function. Understandably, just as it would be hard for RastafarI to relate with a psychiatrist who views the mind as entirely separate from the body, or the soul as irrelevant to his well-being, so too might the Rasta I concept seem nearly schizophrenic by the standards of psychiatry. Morgan (2014) recognizes this clash: "What the average mental health professional may term grandiosity (delusions of grandeur) can sometimes be explained as the reasonings of the 'normal' Rastafarian." (p.171). But to disregard the history of anti-Africanness and the development and function of the I concept,

removing it from its real context and examining it with what Foucault (1989) might call the medical “gaze,” as a biologically explained disorder, would be a failure to authentically serve the RastafarI patient for his own health. RastafarI have developed their own diagnosis for the troubles they have faced, *“downpression,”* and this captures the whole of the situation from their characteristically Afro-Jamaican epistemology regarding health and sickness, including larger social structures rooted in historical processes and their immediate effect on the thoughts and emotions of the RastafarI who is/are affected thereby.

Conclusion

What are perhaps the primary differences between biomedicine and indigenous Afro-Jamaican medicine, which largely result from a distinct approach to spirituality, are represented by their conceptualizations of the self (or individual), community (or society/socialization), and environment (or nature, also including a social dimension). Besides the primacy of spirituality to indigenous Afro-Jamaican epistemology – and the contrasting relative disregard for it within biomedicine – there is also a significant recognition of historical and structural circumstances within Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions that disallows a non-personalized, compartmentalized approach to health and necessitates a holism that remains open to implicating any number of agents in its etiology, including the practitioner him or herself. Such an approach to health has significant implications for development and decolonization broadly, and decolonization of health in Jamaica would mean a genuine integration into official medicine of such epistemological perspectives, practices, and even of the healers themselves; as these

healers and their patients have proven, cooperation and integration is fully possible. Perhaps the very first concrete step to be taken towards this end is to repeal the Obeah Act in Jamaica.

The interepistemic capability that is characteristic of Afro-Jamaican religio-cultural traditions and their associated healing practices allows for a nuanced and flexible diagnosis and treatment, as well as cooperation with a distinct healthcare system. Furthermore, the practice of many healers also highlights the importance of relatability and accessibility to patient in terms of communication as well as material concerns such as finances and geographic location, since many healers operate in more remote areas of Jamaica, where economic structures have proven detrimental to the development of biomedical facilities. Additionally, indigenous Afro-Jamaican healing could have significant implications for a society's approach to the environment, especially since it is not only the chemicals within the biology of the plants themselves that are thought to have healing properties, but also the respectful intentions of the collector, prescriber, and user of said medicinal plants. The social dimension of healing in Jamaica also represents one of its most important intersections with medical anthropology, which could very well serve as an intercessor between healers and biomedical practitioners. Ultimately, despite not typically wielding the same credentials of those "formally" educated in Western-styled institutions, it is not inconceivable to consider the development of an integrative health model in Jamaica and beyond as another form of integration of Southern theory into academia and broader global knowledge structures. As globalization increases in intensity, it would serve all to take

lessons from those who have proven capable of productive interepistemic engagement in the form of simultaneous integration and innovation.

Notes

[1] Duppies may also decide on their own to attack or otherwise haunt or disturb a living individual, or even may simply be bumped into.

[2] These trances are described by Murphy (1994): “Here an initiating spirit takes full control of the individual’s consciousness and lead him or her on a spiritual journey.” (p.129).

[3] Barrett (1976a) explains the concept of “photic driving” as it pertains to Kumina: “In the Kumina cult, the drummer is indispensable. It is he who sets the mood and controls the spirits that possess people; and it is he who controls the movements of people under possession. The same is true of Haitian Vodun. The drummers prepare the human bodies to receive the spirit; they are the mechanism of control. The bombardment of the drum on the human brain ‘empties the head’ and leaves one without a center around which to stabilize oneself…” (p.106-107).

[4] A central doctrine of the RastafarI is that God’s apocalypse is coming to Babylon, which will eradicate evil from the earth and leave it to be inherited by the righteous, the RastafarI and other enlightened peoples who have been “downpressed” and displaced by coloniality. For Rastas, this inheritance will occur via their repatriation to Zion, which they have traditionally considered to be Ethiopia – a title that is sometimes used to refer to the entire African continent. However, it has been shown that this repatriation is beginning to be considered an internal, rather than a geographical return (Bamikole, 2012).

[5] Babylon is the name given by RastafarI to the international, especially Western-derived structure of immorality and unrighteousness, basically reflective of *coloniality*. One example of a RastafarI counter to the religious capital to which the West illegitimately claims exclusive rights is observable in the fact that Rastas have tended to view missionary Christianity’s compulsion of the love and worship of Jesus Christ as a corruption of Biblical teaching. This can be seen, for example, in the lyrics of Peter Tosh’s *Stand Firm: “Another one come tell I say…To be in the light…Got to check Jesus Christ…He talkin’ like gladness...But that is madness I say…And all you got to do…Live clean…Let your works be seen.”*

[6] It might be useful to note, however, that ganja smoking is believed to heighten one’s sensitivity and direct access to the divine “I” within. Reasoning sessions that often surround this activity mirror the trance ceremonies such as those found in Kumina or Revival in that they represent a ritual communal gathering for the purpose of

approaching and making manifest this inherent divinity and assisting those in attendance via prophetic messages and the decolonization of the mind, the cure for the colonial social affliction.

[7] This scripture is known to have been important to Mahatama Gandhi, who I mentioned in the first chapter had inspired Leonard Howell (Lee, 2003).

[8] Bamikole (2012) explains that "the kind of identity involved in the Rastafari belief system is not the atomistic one that has been embraced by modern Western philosophy. The modern Western perspective of the self is exemplified by René Descartes's 'cogito ergo sum' (I think therefore I am), whereas the African (RastafarI) perspective is encapsulated in John Mbiti's view that 'I am because we are and because we are therefore I am.'" (p.134).

[9] This is another area in which the RastafarI avoidance of death may be seen. As explained by Chevannes (2011), "the Rastafari eschew the ingestion of all flesh, as ingesting death." (p.572).

[10] Due to its position "within a 19th-century naturalistic science that is based on deterministic, reductionist, and positivist assumptions that viewed religious and spiritual beliefs and practices negatively" (Sutherland, Moodley and Chevannes, 2014, p.2-3), I locate dominant Western-derived psychology and mental health care (as a reflection of the same phenomenon in the broader context of Western-derived biomedicine) within the overarching secular epistemology, or worldview. Maldonado's (2008) explanation regarding secularism's dependence upon Western temporality is summarized as follows: "According to the traditional and widely accepted conception of secularism, the birth of secularism is contemporaneous with the emergence of modern philosophy and with the first decisive steps of modern science (e.g. René Descartes and Galileo Galilei). A new rationality was claiming a space of its own in a world mostly understood and defined according to the teleological and metaphysical views of European Christianity. Secularism, as its literal meaning conveys, became in this context a call 'to live in the century,' that is, a call to leave the past behind and conform to the new standards of meaning and rationality. This temporal reference made secular discourse useful for the articulation of the transition from the pre-modern (metaphysical and religious) world of feudalism and aristocracy to the modern world of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. Secularism was thus intrinsically linked with the legitimization of a split or historical divide in reference to which the criteria of modernity, civility, and rationality could be clearly established. The need for a clear historical divide emerged out of the very ideals and values that undergird the unconditional defense of modernity and rationality, that is, the ideas of progress and development. The subject of the progress and development in question is certainly none other than European societies. Modernity, civility, and secularism gradually came to be seen as the present of Europe and as the possible future of everyone else. Part of the claim of modernity and secularism is that the future is already here among us, that the future has found a place in the present. Secularism thus rests on a discourse that merges temporality and

spatiality in innovative ways. A critical investigation of secularism needs to begin by challenging the conception of space and time on which it rests." (p.361-362).

[11] Payne-Jackson and Alleyne (2004, p.82) note that the personalistic may also sometimes be seen among more religious Westerners: "In the aetiology of many Westerners, illnesses are ultimately explained by the will (or the wrath) of God, and similarly, many cures are 'placed in God's hands', or God's intervention is formally sought through 'faith healing'."

[12] see Atul Gawande's (2014) *Being Mortal: Medicine and what Matters in the End*

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This thesis has proceeded very basically from the principle that, in seeking a decolonial development, the strategy of self-development – turning inward rather than always outward for *better* – should not only be considered a legitimate, realistic pursuit, but in fact a prerequisite for improving external circumstances. This is in stark contrast with an ideology that measures development levels based purely on economic factors such as GDP. Along these lines, this thesis could be seen as representing a "soft" approach to decolonization – seeking primarily to reform knowledge – while clearly a "hard" approach is needed, particularly for those who live the most dreadful consequences of coloniality in their daily reality. However, to consider these two approaches as existing in black and white is to disregard the reality of the larger picture for the sake of increasingly fragmented and specialized, narrow images of dysfunction and how to treat it. In this way, the broader development project mirrors the biomedical system, which Fanon recognized in the case of psychiatry as not assisting, but actually negatively affecting colonized peoples. By focusing on the decolonization of health and official healthcare institutions, I have attempted to push this "soft" approach into the direction of a "harder" decolonization, since, in the spirit of RastafarI, I acknowledge that more is needed than simply a *sense* of order or progress in the decolonial pursuit.

Perhaps it is this same lack of a bigger, more holistic vision – observable in Foucault's idea of a "medical gaze" – that has contributed to the long-standing

anthropological poverty of the West, since, if the whole of the picture is irrelevant to finding a solution, than so too are the diverse interpretations of that picture generally considered. As I have attempted to show here, these interpretations can vary dramatically from one epistemology to the next, and thus simply recognizing the existence of a *pluriverse* – breaking free from the impulse towards universalism that has been perpetuated by structural socioeconomic privilege – is a basic step that allows for a more genuine and useful consideration of diverse understandings of reality, a prerequisite for productive interepistemic interaction and integrative innovation. In this sense, the *mystic medicine* of Jamaica, given genuine consideration, may serve as a *structural medicine*. I have focused here on what I consider to be some of the most fundamental building blocks of a human interpretation of reality, that of self, community, and environment, with the hopes that, if nothing else, it would inspire some degree of genuine contemplation on the nature of reality and our place within it.

The question *'Who am I?'* is one that is fundamental not only to human understandings of reality, but to mysticism around the world. Thus, the timeless Sufi poet Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī writes "Who is it now in my ear who hears with my voice? Who says words with my mouth?" And, similarly, the Hindu sage Ramana Maharshi is known especially for his philosophy regarding the question of "Who am I?" For many such mystics, the basic fact is that in seeking to discover an answer to this question, one only ever finds their own particular perspective, which is necessarily context-dependent and limited. Perhaps this is what the Buddha's doctrine of *anatman,* or "non-self," pointed to, since even the idea of inherently existing was just that, an idea, a product of mental activity.

The African-derived collectivism and human relation to the natural and spirit worlds which have been addressed in this thesis may, in a sense, be considered a way of relinquishing claim to a right to an individually generated notion of concrete and universal truth regarding this very most basic fact of reality, the identity. Bamikole (2012;2017) approaches this idea in his work based in the field of philosophy. But such questions and ideas have also been on the table and undergone the processes of debate, reform, innovation, and continuity that are generally considered indicative of intellectual credibility since time immemorial, and thus age-old ideas about the nature of life and reality and how to operate within it, which can be found in systems of thought, including spirituality, throughout the world, ought to be considered legitimate sources of academically pursuable knowledge.

On this note, the all-too-recent uptick in integration of Southern theory into the academically accredited world seems to increasingly push the boundaries of what constitutes legitimate knowledge production, focusing, among many other things both “hard” and “soft,” on topics such as love and emotion. The place of emotions in the human experience is undeniable, and thus it would seem again reflective of an uncooperative, colonially generated sense of superiority to disregard this foundational element of reality in the pursuit of a greater understanding of our life and world. Rodolfo Kusch (2010), speaking about the “indigenous thinking” of the Aymara of South America explains the following:

> “Emotion is what drives one in the face of reality. The indigenous person takes reality not as something stable and inhabited by objects. Rather

> he takes it as a screen without things but with intense movement in which he tends to notice the auspicious and ominous sign of each and every movement before anything else. The indigenous person registers reality as the affect it exercises on him before registering it as simple perceptual connotation." (p.11).

Thus, it is not only academically trained theorists and professionals that may have so much to contribute to the ongoing and collective human search for meaning and understanding. Furthermore, it is not only Afro-Jamaican spirituality that may align with basic principles of psychotherapy and contribute to a more effective, integrative approach to its practice, but the worldview and epistemology of various indigenous peoples across the globe. I suspect that the investigation of conceptions of self, community, and environment, or identity, agency, and being (life vs. death for example) may be useful potential avenues by which to examine indigenous or simply non-Western or historically underappreciated knowledge systems around the world.

Perhaps most importantly, more genuine consideration of diverse knowledge systems, as I attempted to show in this thesis, has the potential, if implemented, to directly contribute to the more authentic and complete well-being and health (in all of its dimensions) to more people around the world. Again, such knowledge must be actually applied to official institutions, such as those of biomedicine, to truly begin to discontinue to the tendency of hegemonic universalism of Western thought. And this of course would not be in the service only of non-Western peoples, but may serve the West and its institutions themselves.

One example of how particularly the social institution of biomedicine is not even entirely functional among people of thoroughly Western descent may be seen in the contemporary anti-vaccination trend. While biomedical professionals, somewhat understandably, tend to place themselves in directly antagonistic roles relative to “anti-vaxxers,” this public distrust of official medicine may also be seen as a medical failure. Medicine cannot fully function on the person without also acknowledging their personhood, and simply expect total, perfect compliance, especially given a history of systemic immorality, injustice, and deception by larger social institutions with which biomedicine is so closely associated. The practice of many healers in Jamaica exemplifies the importance *and direct effect* of trust and relatability between patient and healer. Such healers are often considered fully a part of the community they serve – a neighbor, an elder, a leader, kin. They do not live in a community that is walled off from the world of their patients. They do not commute from their distant hilltop privilege. They speak the language of their patient and they see themselves as existing ultimately of the same elemental substance. And this substance is immediately perceivable, even accessible. And this highlights the perspective behind this thesis that, even within the pluriverse, a genuine commitment to a certain oneness on some fundamental level of the experience of reality – perhaps just the common search for health, well-being, fulfillment, meaning, or purpose – or the recognition of the possibility of mutual benefit, is essential to achieving harmony with the totality of existence, a useful intention in the face of globalization.

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