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*Shadow worlds and “superstitions”: an analysis of Martha
Warren Beckwith’s writings on Jamaican folk religion,
1919-1929*

by

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Declaration and Inclusion of Material from a Prior Thesis

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

Included in this thesis is a citation in chapter 3 from my M.A. dissertation (unpublished), “The Bishop and the “Warrior”: The Relationship Between Protestant Christianity and Perceptions of Africa in Late Post Emancipation Jamaica, 1880-1914”, (MA dissertation, University of Warwick, 2007). The citation is referenced in the relevant footnote.

Abstract

My doctoral research is an examination of the pioneering nature of Martha Warren Beckwith's writings on Jamaican folk religion. Beckwith, an American anthropologist and folklorist, visited Jamaica four times between 1919 and 1924. During her visits she recorded aspects of African-Jamaican folk life ranging from stories, songs and proverbs to rites of passage, children's games and plant lore, as well as various forms of folk religion. She is regarded as pioneering in choosing Jamaica for her fieldwork at a time when the Caribbean was overlooked by many American and British anthropologists. In this thesis, I argue that in her methodology and treatment of her subject matter she was also ahead of her time.

Beckwith is still often cited in modern writings on African-Jamaican religions with little or nothing in the way of background or context. Using close textual analysis, I examine both the nature of Beckwith's research and exactly how ground-breaking it was when compared to those commenting on African-Jamaican spiritual beliefs in the same era. Although a variety of people wrote about African-Jamaican folk religions, my focus is on the way these faiths were covered by anthropologists and folklore collectors as a distinct group. This was also a period when both anthropology and folklore studies had moved away from being the preserve of amateurs and were developing as academic disciplines. An analysis of the works of late post-emancipation researchers such as Beckwith gives an insight not only into how African-Jamaican folk religions were practised and perceived at that time but also how changes in folklore and anthropology theory and practice impacted on such perceptions.

Introduction

In late December 1920, thousands of people flocked from all over Jamaica to August Town hoping to witness the ascension into heaven of Alexander Bedward, a prominent black Revivalist preacher, scheduled to take place at the end of the month. One of those caught up in the “ascension fever” was Martha Warren Beckwith, an American anthropologist and folklorist, who was on her first round of fieldwork in Jamaica researching the folk life of the African-Jamaican peasantry. On December 26th 1920, she interviewed Bedward who told her that, because his pastors still were being denied licences to perform marriage ceremonies, he had decided to bring this world to an end.¹ Bedward insisted that he be addressed as “lord”, referred to himself as “Jesus Christ” and stated that his ascension was to be accompanied by the destruction of whites and the reign of Bedwardism on earth. In this new world, Bedward told Beckwith, his hands would be as white as hers.² Beckwith’s interview with the preacher is significant.³ Not only does it provide an insight into the mindset and beliefs of Alexander Bedward who is now viewed as a proto-black nationalist and an influence on both Garveyism and the early Rastafari movement but it is also part of what was

¹ Martha Warren Beckwith, *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaica Folk Life*, (reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969, of orig. edn, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1929), p.169.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 168-170.

³ It is not just Beckwith’s interview that is noteworthy here. Her photograph of Bedward (*Black Roadways*, p. 170) is still extensively used in works on Revival religion. Leonard Barrett comments that Beckwith was ‘the only person to leave us a physical description’ of the preacher – Leonard E. Barrett, *Soul-Force: African-Heritage in Afro-American Religion* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday & Company Inc., 1974), p. 126.

described by Melville Herskovits as ‘a pioneer ethnological account’ of African-Jamaican folk culture in the early twentieth century.⁴

The account in question is Martha Warren Beckwith’s 1929 book, *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folk Life*. The book was the culmination of her Jamaican research which also included a number of articles and monographs: “Some Religious Cults in Jamaica” (1923), “Christmas Mummings in Jamaica” (1923), “The Hussay Festival in Jamaica” (1924), *Jamaica Anansi Stories* (1924), “The English Ballad in Jamaica: A Note Upon the Origins of Ballad Forms” (1924), *Jamaica Proverbs* (1925), “Notes on Jamaican Ethnobotany” (1927) and *Jamaica Folk-Lore* (1928).⁵ The material was gathered over the course of four trips Beckwith made to Jamaica between 1919 and 1924, accompanied on some occasions by the ethnomusicologist Helen Heffron Roberts. As indicated by the titles, Beckwith’s fieldwork took in wide-ranging aspects of the culture of the African-Jamaican peasantry. However, my doctoral research is focussed specifically on her writings on Jamaican folk religion. In part, this is because I am particularly interested in how African-Jamaican religious beliefs were used to contest and challenge colonialism - the writings by folklorists and anthropologists provide some of the main sources of information about African-Jamaican folk religion in this era. However, my main aim is to examine Beckwith’s research into these religions In light of Herskovits’s view of Beckwith as a pioneer in the field of Caribbean anthropology. Beckwith wrote about African-Caribbean religions and cultures at a time when, with the possible exception of Vodou, they were largely ignored by anthropologists. A prevalent contemporary belief held that the

⁴ Melville J. Herskovits, review of *Black Roadways*, *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 43, no. 169 (Jul.-Sept., 1930), p. 338.

⁵ N.B. “Christmas Mummings in Jamaica”, “Jamaica Proverbs”, and “Notes on Jamaica Ethnobotany” were all compiled in *Jamaica Folklore*.

traumas of the process of enslavement and the Middle Passage meant that enslaved Africans had brought no cultural heritage with them to the New World. Any folk cultures that they did now possess had been created in the Americas and were considered as poor imitations of white practices. Another reason behind the lack of study of African-American and African-Caribbean cultures in the era can be attributed to the influence of a racist strand of evolutionary theory which maintained that African cultures were inferior to western ones. This line of reasoning also held that even if enslaved Africans had been able to maintain their own cultural practices, they would have shunned them in favour of “superior” European ones.⁶

Beckwith’s Jamaican fieldwork was ground-breaking in another sense. Those folklorists who did study African-American and African-Caribbean folk cultures tended to focus on folklore, stories, proverbs and songs, whereas Beckwith’s research encompassed folk life and the material arts as well as the oral traditions.⁷ A few earlier collectors of North-American folklore collectors had started to look beyond the boundaries of what was typically regarded as African-American culture. For instance, in the mid-nineteenth century, a journalist and folk song collector Lafcadio Hearn, had written a series of essays on the folk life of Cincinnati’s black underclass. Hearn’s graphic detailing of the lives of urban African-Americans was a world away from the more typical emphasis by Gilded Age folklorists on ‘plantation nostalgia or the wholesomeness of spirituals’.⁸ However, the fact that Hearn’s approach was still considered exceptional in the

⁶ Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (reprint, with a new introduction by Sidney W. Mintz, Boston: Beacon Press, 1990, of orig. edn, New York: Harper, 1941), p. 296.

⁷ Robert Redfield, “*Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folklife* by Martha Warren Beckwith”, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 35, no. 4 (Jan., 1930), p. 673.

⁸ Simon, J. Bronner, *Following Tradition: Folklore in the Discourse of American Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998), p. 107.

early twentieth century is illustrated by the anthropologist Robert Redfield's review of *Black Roadways* for the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1930. Redfield felt that the book represented 'an advance into the field of folk ethnography' because of Beckwith's attempts to examine folk culture as a whole.⁹ Beckwith's other writings on Jamaica cover such topics as proverbs and Anansi tales, but *Black Roadways* examines aspects of the island's folk life as well as its folklore, ranging from styles of house building, fishing and agricultural techniques to festivals and crafts.

Aside from her choice of area of study and research material, I also argue that Beckwith was pioneering in her writings on African-Jamaican folk religions because she took an approach to them which at times differed considerably from the pervading contemporary discourse. This is perhaps most noticeable in her writings on Obeah. At a time when it was frequently dismissed by commentators as a form of negative witchcraft or sorcery. Beckwith saw that it could also be used for healing purposes and described it as 'sympathetic magic' – a phrase which encompasses its use for both positive and maleficent ends.¹⁰ However, just as Beckwith emphasised that her research was the outcome of fieldwork done at a particular time and in a particular environment, her own writings should not be divorced from their historical context. I aim to show both how new theories in the developing discipline of anthropology impacted on Beckwith's work and contributed to its pioneering nature, but also how older ideas concerning race still impacted on her writings. This combining of old and new produced in *Black*

⁹ Redfield, "*Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folklife* by Martha Warren Beckwith", p. 673.

¹⁰ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 106.

Roadways and Beckwith's other Jamaican texts, a complexity which her straightforward writing style often belies.

Martha Warren Beckwith in the academic scholarship

Martha Beckwith was born in 1871 in Massachusetts but her family moved to Hawaii a few years later and she grew up on the island of Maui. She returned to the States for her higher education and, after graduating, took a number of teaching jobs at American establishments. Beckwith then continued her studies, studying English and anthropology at the University of Chicago, Old English at Cambridge University, and French and German at the University of Halle an der Saale. In 1905, Beckwith went to study anthropology at Columbia University under the supervision of Franz Boas. Boas had a 'reputation as a mentor of brilliant women students': former pupils of his included Ruth Bunzel, Zora Neale Hurston, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict.¹¹ After Columbia, Beckwith returned to teaching, working in the States and Hawaii before becoming Research Professor of the Folklore Foundation and Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at Vassar College in 1920.¹² This appointment made Beckwith America's first chair of folklore, a post which she held until 1938.

The post was significant as it is a milestone in the development of folklore as a subject of academic study in its own right. The collection and study of folklore had been growing since the 'late sixteenth century and developed, as part of a widespread enthusiasm for "antiquities" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries'.¹³ During the nineteenth century, folklore studies gained a new impetus

¹¹ Simon J. Bronner, "Martha Warren Beckwith, America's First Chair in Folklore", *Folklore Historian*, vol. 9, (1992), p. 12.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹³ Bob Trubshaw, *Explore Folklore* (Loughborough: Heart of Albion Press, 2002), p. 5.

when it was perceived that older, rural traditions were dying out as a result of European industrialisation.¹⁴ By the early twentieth century, folklore studies had moved away from being the preserve of amateur collectors. However, folklore studies at university level were based in either anthropology or literature departments. Boas believed folklore should remain part of the discipline of anthropology.¹⁵ Beckwith disagreed with this, considering folklore to be a subject worthy of study in its own right and, under the auspices of Vassar's Folklore Foundation, Beckwith was able to bring literature and anthropology together in the study of folklore as a distinct subject.

The Folklore Foundation was funded, as was all Beckwith's research and fieldwork, by her friend Annie Alexander, the American naturalist, philanthropist and founder of two natural history museums at the University of California, Berkeley. Aside from her personal closeness to Beckwith, another reason for Alexander's funding of the Foundation was because she was impressed by the originality of Beckwith's early fieldwork in Jamaica. By being given 'all the backing possible' from Alexander, Beckwith was able to continue her varied research without the need to obtain outside sources of funding.¹⁶

Beckwith's research interests were wide-ranging and included American regional folklore, Gaelic literature, Amerindian and African-Jamaican cultures. Nevertheless, she is perhaps best known for her work on Hawaiian folklore and mythology: for example, "The Hawaiian Hula Dance" (1916), "Hawaiian Shark Aumakua" (1917), *The Hawaiian Romance of Laieikawai* (1919), *Hawaiian*

¹⁴ Bronner, *Following Tradition*, p. 22.

¹⁵ Bronner, "Martha Warren Beckwith, America's First Chair in Folklore", p. 10.

¹⁶ Barbara R. Stein, *On Her Own Terms: Annie Montague Alexander and the Rise of Science in the American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp.17, 118; Letter from Alexander to Beckwith, "Letters to Martha", September 1919, Joseph Grinnell papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, cited in *ibid.*, p. 118.

Mythology (1940) and *The Kumulipo, A Hawaiian Creation Chant* (1951). Her interest in Hawaiian folklore stemmed from her upbringing on Maui where she had become fascinated by the islands' folk culture and mythology. The importance of Hawaii to Beckwith is also illustrated by the fact that, after her death in 1959, her ashes were buried in Makawao cemetery on Maui.

Her methodology

According to Desley Deacon, Boas's students started to move anthropology in a new direction, away from his emphasis on empiricism to a greater focus on the individual and the psychological.¹⁷ Although at times Beckwith touched on psychological explanations for events, her methodology was more in keeping with Boas's ideas of empiricism; for example, by collecting as much material from a distinct folk group as possible, and analysing it within its historical and geographical context in order to understand its culture. Beckwith strongly believed that the methods of analysis used in anthropology should also be applied to the study of folk cultures. Her monograph, *Folklore in America: Its Scope and Methodology* (1931) outlined her aim that, above all, folklore should be studied as a 'scientific discipline'.¹⁸

Folklore in America also detailed Beckwith's expansive definition of folk culture. Since the publication in 1812 of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children's and Household Tales*), a widespread association of folk beliefs with a rural peasantry had developed.¹⁹ However, Beckwith held that the

¹⁷ Desley Deacon, *Elsie Clews Parsons: Inventing Modern Life* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 246, 150.

¹⁸ Martha Warren Beckwith, *Folklore in America: Its Scope and Methodology* (Poughkeepsie: Publications of the Folklore Foundation, 1931), p. 65.

¹⁹ Bronner, *Following Tradition*, pp. 244, 187.

study of folk culture did not have to be confined to those in remote rural districts or peoples in non-industrialised (in the western sense of industrialisation) countries. She cited examples in North America, where folklore could be found amongst immigrants in large cities, college students, church groups, and families, writing that:

Every social group preserves bonds of fixed group observance whose preservation does not depend upon their practical but their traditional and aesthetic value.²⁰

Furthermore, Beckwith argued that modern forms of folk culture were as equally worthy of study as those believed to have a long historical provenance: for example, she used a nineteenth-century Hawaiian newspaper serial based on an older oral narrative as the subject for her anthropology thesis at Columbia.²¹

Earlier anthropologists such as Edward Tylor and James Frazer did not carry out field studies, relying instead on the accounts of people such as missionaries and travellers. In contrast, Franz Boas and his students conducted fieldwork themselves and used native informants to gain information. The Boasians' standard technique for collecting ethnographic material was '[t]he use of one individual to tell about his or her own culture'.²² An emphasis on individual testimonies is apparent in Beckwith's Jamaican writings. She usually named her informants and provided other data about them such as their ages and occupations. For example, *Jamaica Anansi Stories* contains an index of informants. Sixty-six people are listed, frequently with their place of residence, age, and, occasionally, occupation. From the index, it is apparent that Beckwith interviewed a wide variety of the African-Jamaican peasantry. Informants for her Anansi stories included

²⁰ Beckwith, *Folklore in America*, p. 5.

²¹ Bronner, *Following Tradition*, p. 244.

²² Judith Schachter Modell, *Ruth Benedict: Patterns of a Life* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), p. 170.

hotel staff, Maroons, estate workers, small settlers, prisoners, school children and entertainers. Their ages range from 11 to ‘over 80’.²³ For her work on African-Jamaican religions, she interviewed Obeah practitioners (somewhat inadvertently as will be seen in chapter two), Myalists, Revival leaders, Pukkumerian shepherds and governesses.

How Beckwith found her informants led to criticism from one of her contemporaries, the American anthropologist and Jesuit missionary, Joseph John Williams. Beckwith believed that:

The approach to the confidence of the Negro peasant is won through the ruling class, to whom the folk look for initiative and whose introduction they always respect.²⁴

As a result, she was put in touch with the majority of the informants for her Jamaican fieldwork through the staff at the hotels where she stayed or by the white families she lodged with. Williams argues that Beckwith’s choice of residence during her fieldwork created a detachment from the people she was studying. Although not directly naming Beckwith in *Whisperings of the Caribbean*, he alluded to the methods of collecting folklore used by a female ‘beneficiary of some folklore foundation’ and her assistant who followed:

the ordinary tourist route through the Island, with an occasional short excursion off the beaten path. They only stop where hotels and other suitable lodgings can afford them all the comfort of home. They do not even penetrate the “bush”.²⁵

²³ Martha Warren Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories* (reprint, with music transcribed by Helen Roberts, Charleston: Bibliobazaar, 2007, of orig. edn, New York: The American Folk-Lore Society, 1924), pp. 365-374.

²⁴ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. viii.

²⁵ Joseph John Williams, *Whisperings of the Caribbean: Reflections of a Missionary* (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: Benzinger Bros, 1925), pp. 195, 194.

Williams argued that by staying in these sorts of places Beckwith lacked the experience to make adequate value judgements about the folklore she collected.

Such criticism may be justified. However, even though Williams himself lived and worked in rural Jamaica, much of his writings are compilations of material from other sources or anecdotes related to him by Jesuit missionaries who had worked in the island. Therefore, in the case of his books on African-Jamaican religions, his first-hand experience of living and working in rural Jamaica does not seem to have provided him with much in the way of source material which is superior to Beckwith's.

Williams also criticised the way Beckwith found random informants along the roadsides, often children who were prepared to tell her a riddle or sing a song for a small payment.²⁶ He felt this led to the informants providing whatever material would 'net the most financially' with little or no concern as to its authenticity and:

is probably a Jamaican rendition of some fairy tale or goblin story once learned in the country school from textbooks "Made in England". A little local coloring is being added for effect, and the story must be drawn out by an active imagination to a presentable length.²⁷

At that time, however, the practice of anthropologists paying their informants was not unusual. For example, the Boasian-influenced anthropologist, Elsie Clews Parsons 'engaged some of the people whom she met during her fieldwork as correspondents'.²⁸ In return, they would receive payment for the 'stories, proverbs, riddles, and folk beliefs' which they mailed to her'.²⁹

²⁶ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. vii.

²⁷ Williams, *Whisperings of the Caribbean*, pp. 194, 196.

²⁸ Rosemary Levy Zumwalt, *Wealth and Rebellion: Elsie Clews Parsons, Anthropologist and Folklorist* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 190.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

Other than paying some informants for their songs, Beckwith does not appear to have engineered any of the events she recorded in her Jamaican fieldwork. This was in contrast to a wild hog hunt with the Jamaican Maroons detailed by a fellow student of Boas, Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston received Guggenheim awards in 1936 and 1937 to study Obeah and Vodou in Jamaica and Haiti. In *Tell My Horse* (1938), her account of this fieldwork, Hurston wrote of her experiences of camping out in the bush on the wild hog hunt. Although she had been adamant that she did not want the Maroons to perform the kind of dances and rituals for her which they did for tourists, the hunt appeared to have been orchestrated by Hurston as she wrote that she ‘kept on talking and begging and coaxing until a hunting party was organised’.³⁰

The Maroons may have been forthcoming in putting on the hog hunt for Hurston but Beckwith experienced some difficulties when trying to gain examples of certain aspects of Maroon folk culture. A neighbour of her guide in Maroon Town ‘violently opposed my [Beckwith’s] taking any Maroon songs on the phonograph’.³¹ As well as not being permitted to record material deemed important to certain communities, another problem facing Beckwith and those researching Jamaican folk religions was the difficulty in finding Obeah practitioners who were prepared to be interviewed. This was partly because Obeah had been outlawed in Jamaica since 1760 and legal measures against its practice had been regularly strengthened throughout the nineteenth century. At various points during the post-emancipation period, penalties for transgressing the Obeah laws had included floggings, imprisonment with hard labour, and fines. Another

³⁰ Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (reprint, with a new foreword by Ishmael Reed, New York: Harper & Row, 1990, of orig. edn, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincourt Inc., 1938), pp. 22, 31.

³¹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 192.

difficulty for outsiders in finding Obeah practitioners to interview was that ‘the term *obeah* was hardly ever used by those accused of practising it’.³² In her work on Obeah and the law in the Caribbean, Diana Paton notes that those taken before the courts were often described by themselves and others involved in their cases as “doctors,” “professors,” “one-eyed men,” “doctormen,” “do good men,” or “four eye men”.³³

Williams admitted to being thwarted in his attempts to improve his knowledge of contemporary Obeah as he found the practitioners he tried to quiz on such matters less than forthcoming.³⁴ However, on one occasion Williams managed to get round this problem by ‘surreptitiously’ watching from behind bushes an Obeah man he accidentally encountered preparing a charm for a client.³⁵ Beckwith appears to have been somewhat more successful in gleaning information from Obeah people; for example, in “Notes on Jamaican Ethnobotany” she wrote how she got her information from both ‘obeah- and myal-men’.³⁶ Tellingly, in regard to one Obeah practitioner whom she interviewed, Beckwith only found out some time later that he was an Obeah man after she had interviewed him in regard to his role as a Pukkumerian shepherd.³⁷ He had been arrested for practising Obeah and ‘in defense cited my [Beckwith’s] visit as a “consultation”’.³⁸ In the case of

³² Diana Paton, “Obeah Acts: Producing and Policing the Boundaries of Religion in the Caribbean”, *Small Axe*, 28 (Mar. 2003), p. 10.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁴ Joseph J. Williams, *Voodooos and Obeahs: Phases of West Indian Witchcraft* (reprint, Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, date unknown, of orig. edn, New York: L. MacVeagh, Dial Press, inc., 1932), p. xvii.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 215. ‘I was returning late one night to my residence high up in the mountains, when suddenly my companion who was leading the way shrank back and... whispered almost inaudibly: “Obi, Sah!”... I drew my reluctant companion behind a shrub to watch the process which is so seldom vouchsafed to the eye of the white man.’: *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

³⁶ Martha Warren Beckwith, “Notes on Jamaican Ethnobotany” in Martha Warren Beckwith, with music recorded in the field by Helen H. Roberts, *Jamaica Folklore* (New York: The American Folk-Lore Society, 1928), p. 5.

³⁷ It is unclear whether these are the ‘obeah- and myal-men’ alluded to above.

³⁸ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 180.

James White, a Maroon Medicine-Man (also described as a Myal man in *Black Roadways*) Beckwith said he had a ‘reputation for knowledge of herb medicines and of songs to raise the dead’, both qualities linked to Obeah practitioners.³⁹

Aside from finding practitioners prepared to talk about Obeah, another difficulty faced by anthropologists and folklore collectors in obtaining material was their informants’ self-censorship.⁴⁰ Hurston believed that she was denied information by Maroon men about the sexual connotations of a particular form of duppy because she was female.⁴¹ Beckwith also experienced problems with censorship when attempting to find examples of Maroon culture. When she interviewed an elderly Maroon woman ‘who had once served in one of the best families on the island’, Beckwith found that the woman was happy to relate “‘tea-meeting songs”, but would not speak of the “days of darkness” and even reproved the girls when they danced a *shayshay*’.⁴² Beckwith described the *shayshay* as an ‘erotic dance to jazz music’, danced with a single partner and believed to have originated in Africa.⁴³ Therefore, it is hard to tell whether the Maroon woman’s refusal was because of her own disapproval of the past customs and beliefs of her community and the close bodily contact involved in the dance, or because she felt uncomfortable telling a white middle-class academic about such practices at a time when they were frowned upon in wider Jamaican society.⁴⁴

³⁹ Ibid., p. 145; Martha Warren Beckwith. “Christmas Mummings in Jamaica” in Beckwith, *Jamaica Folklore*, pp. 4, 49-50.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Zumwalt, *Wealth and Rebellion*, p. 200.

⁴¹ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 26.

⁴² Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 192.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 214.

⁴⁴ ‘[T]he cultural elites were very critical of any perceived displays of sensuousness and “indecenty” among the black population.’ - Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, “*They Do As They Please*”: *The Jamaican Struggle for Cultural Freedom After Morant Bay* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2011), p. 223.

As well as informants being cautious about what material they revealed to outside observers, some anthropologists and folklorists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries censored their own research. For example, in his collection of African-Jamaican songs and folk tales, Walter Jekyll explained that '[h]ere and there, but very rarely indeed', he had made 'slight' alterations but only because he 'thought the volume might find its way into the nursery'; as a result, "Stinking-toe" became "Tumpa-toe" in Jekyll's version.⁴⁵ However, Franz Boas believed in the meticulous recording of information during fieldwork and the importance of transcribing material given by informants in the informants' own language. This influence appeared in the subsequent ethnographic research of his students and others he mentored. For example, Rosemary Zumwalt notes that for Elsie Clews Parsons, '[t]he text, . . . was paramount, and as such had to be respected. Editing . . . was not permissible'.⁴⁶ Martha Beckwith made clear her attempts to get the folk tales and testimonies gained from her informants down in a form as close to the one the teller used as possible. In *Folklore in America*, Beckwith stressed the importance of reporting information given by informants in their 'exact language'.⁴⁷ Any variants found in folk stories or songs had to be recorded and 'attention must be paid even to single details'.⁴⁸ The stories, music and lyrics collected by Beckwith were either transcribed by Helen Roberts at the time or from a phonographic recording which Roberts made on site.⁴⁹ Although Beckwith stated that changes in tone and pace were missed by 'the slow process of dictation', she

⁴⁵ Walter Jekyll, (collected by and ed.), *Jamaica Song and Story: Annancy Stories, Digging Sings, Dancing Tunes and Ring Tunes* (reprint, with new introductory essays by Philip Sherlock, Louise Bennett, and Rex Nettleford, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1966, of 1907 edn, London: David Nutt), p. liii.

⁴⁶ Zumwalt, *Wealth and Rebellion*, p. 196.

⁴⁷ Beckwith, *Folklore in America*, p. 50.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 40.

⁴⁹ Anansi stories frequently contain songs as part of the tales, often as a device to move the plot along.

believed that ‘the stories were set down without polish or adornment’.⁵⁰ She also found that, because of a mixture of vocal techniques used in their recitation, some Maroon songs sung in the Kromanti language were ‘exceedingly difficult’ to record.⁵¹ Occasionally, though, she admitted that she altered the structure of the oral testimonies given to her. For example, in her interview with a female Revivalist in Lacovia, Beckwith said that she changed the order in which the information was given to her because it was initially provided in response to the anthropologist’s questions.⁵²

Despite the fact that she aimed to make sure that any data collected from her informants was written in their own words, problems with transcription did appear in Beckwith’s research. According to the Jamaican musicologist and anthropologist Olive Lewin, the transcriptions of song lyrics and proverbs made by Beckwith (and Roberts) contain ‘many misconceptions and misspellings’.⁵³ In the case of the folk songs, Lewin believes that this may be because the music was written down as it was being performed. This, coupled with Beckwith and Roberts’s ‘lack of familiarity with Jamaican pronunciation’ and their ‘informants’ probable attempts to help her by anglicizing their speech’, led to errors in transcription.⁵⁴ The fact that Beckwith’s field trips were usually of a maximum of five or six weeks at a time would not have aided the women’s problems with understanding African-Jamaican dialects and pronunciation.

⁵⁰ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, p. 7.

⁵¹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 192.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁵³ Olive Lewin, *Rock it Come Over: the Folk Music of Jamaica* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2000), p. 47.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Secondary literature

Outside of the field of Hawaiian studies, virtually all of the secondary literature on Martha Warren Beckwith concerns her contribution to the development of folklore as an academic discipline in the United States. Folklore historian Simon Bronner includes a chapter on Beckwith's work as a folklorist in *Following Tradition: Folklore in the Discourse of American Culture* (1998). He has also written an article on Beckwith's academic biography, "Martha Warren Beckwith, America's First Chair in Folklore" (1992), celebrating her achievements in that post. Bronner's article is in part reliant on Katherine Luomala's introduction to Beckwith's *Hawaiian Mythology* (1940). Luomala, a research student of Beckwith, and Bronner both include some information about Beckwith's childhood and education, as does the article by Luomala in commemoration of Beckwith's death, "Martha Warren Beckwith: A Commemorative Essay" (1962).

However, Beckwith's personal life as an adult remains elusive. The Vassar web page for prominent alumni lists her early biography and later academic achievements, in conjunction with her relationship with the college.⁵⁵ Some traces of Beckwith's life beyond the purely academic are to be found in Barbara Stein's biography of Annie Alexander. In *On Her Own Terms: Annie Montague Alexander and the Rise of Science in the American West* (2001), Stein reveals Alexander's fondness for Martha, her hopes that their friendship would develop into a closer relationship, and the extent to which she aided her financially.⁵⁶ Although

⁵⁵"Martha Beckwith", *The Vassar Encyclopaedia*, 2005.

<<http://vencyclopedia.vassar.edu/faculty/prominent-faculty/martha-beckwith.html>> (1 August 2013).

⁵⁶ Stein, *On Her Own Terms*, p. 17. 'Annie frequently presented Martha with gifts including... shares of stock in the Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Company' and numerous gifts – *Ibid.*, p. 118.

Alexander expressed concern that Beckwith was lonely and her advice that she should ‘find somebody to love’, there are few other clues to Beckwith’s personal life.⁵⁷ While letters exist from Alexander to Beckwith, none of Martha’s correspondence to Annie survives.⁵⁸ Beckwith also receives brief mentions in the biographies of some fellow students of Boas with whom who she was friendly: for example, Desley Deacon’s biography of Elsie Clews Parson, *Elsie Clews Parsons: Inventing Modern Life* (1997), and Judith Modall’s *Ruth Benedict: Patterns of a Life* (1983).

Most of Beckwith’s trips to Jamaica were made in the early 1920s. The late post-emancipation period in Jamaica, a timescale roughly from 1865 to the start of the Second World War is ‘a period which has thus far received scant scholarly attention’.⁵⁹ However, the cultural history before the interwar years is not so neglected. For example, Brian Moore and Michele Johnson have written comprehensively on Jamaican culture, with a particular emphasis on that of the African-Jamaican population in *Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865-1920* (2004) and “*They Do As They Please*”: *The Jamaican Struggle for Cultural Freedom After Morant Bay* (2011). Patrick Bryan’s *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902: Race, Class and Social Control* (2000) also examines the culture of this earlier period. Both Moore and Johnson and Bryan cover Jamaican religious practices in the era. However, the former’s predominant focus is on African-Jamaican faiths and spiritual beliefs, whereas Bryan covers more mainstream religions.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 327, n. 27.

⁵⁹ Henrice Altink, ““I Did Not Want to Face the Shame of Exposure”: Gender Ideologies and Child Murder in Post-Emancipation Jamaica”, *Journal of Social History*, Winter (2007), p. 355.

W.F. Elkins examines *Street Preachers, Faith Healers, and Herb Doctors in Jamaica, 1890-1925* (1977), however this is something of an exception. Although there are numerous books on African-Caribbean folk religions, the majority of modern (twentieth-first century and late twentieth century) studies of African-Jamaican religions in the late post-emancipation era tend to be located as chapters in books rather than entire books devoted to the subject. Much of the writing is by anthropologists: for example, Barry Chevannes' researches into Rastafari, *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews* (1998) or Jean Besson's *Martha Brae's Two Histories: European Expansion and Caribbean Culture-Building* (2002).

There are fewer texts which concentrate on specific individuals involved with folk religions in the late post-emancipation era. Elkins has written articles on the Revival leader Charles Higgins, and the American publisher of esoteric and occult literature used in the Caribbean, William Lauron DeLaurence.⁶⁰ Stephan Palmié considers Joseph John Williams's contribution to ethnologists' constructions of Obeah as something exotic and alien in "Other Powers: Tylor's Principle, Father Williams's Temptations, and the Power of Banality".⁶¹ Kenneth Bilby and Jerome Handler mention Williams in "Obeah: Healing and Protection in Caribbean Slave Life" (2004) and *Enacting the Power: the Criminalization of Obeah in the Anglophone Caribbean, 1760-2011* (2013) because of his contribution to portrayals of Obeah solely as a form of sorcery or bad magic.

⁶⁰ W.F. Elkins, "Warrior Higgins: A Jamaican Street Preacher", *Jamaica Journal*, vol. 8, no. 4 (1974) pp. 28-31; W.F. Elkins, "William Lauron DeLaurence and Jamaica Folk Religion", *Folklore*, 97 (1986), pp. 215-218.

⁶¹ Stephan Palmié, "Afterword. Other Powers: Tylor's Principle, Father Williams's Temptations, and the Power of Banality" in Diana Paton and Maarit Forde (eds), *Obeah and Other Powers: The Politics of Caribbean Religion and Healing* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2012), pp. 316-333.

Possibly because of his notoriety and his important role as a forerunner to black nationalists such as Marcus Garvey and the Rastafari movement, the life and work of Alexander Bedward have been somewhat more comprehensively covered with essays including “Religion and Socio-political Protest in Jamaica: Alexander Bedward of the Jamaica Native Baptist Free Church, 1889-192” by Veront Satchell and Rupert Lewis’s article, “Garvey’s Forerunners: Love and Bedward” (1987).⁶² Ken Post’s work on the 1938 labour rebellion, *Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and Its Aftermath* (1978) also covers Bedward’s ministry in the context of Bedward as a challenge to colonial authority and racial injustice. An amateur ethnographer, Herbert Thomas, a white Jamaican policeman who presented a collection of Obeah materials at the Jamaica Exhibition of 1891, features in Diana Paton’s essay, “The Trials of Inspector Thomas: Politics and Ethnography in Jamaica”.⁶³

My methodology

Martha Warren Beckwith is still often cited in modern writings on African-Jamaican religions and folk culture, usually with little or nothing in the way of the background or context to her writings. An alternate approach to Beckwith is that of Diane Austin-Broos’s albeit brief critique in *Jamaica Genesis: Religions and the Politics of Moral Order* (1997). Here, any validity Beckwith’s work may have had is omitted because of Beckwith’s contribution to the voyeuristic ‘construction’

⁶² Satchell’s essay appears in Annie Paul (ed.), *Caribbean Culture: Soundings on Kamau Brathwaite* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), pp. 342-366; Rupert, Lewis, “Garvey’s Forerunners: Love and Bedward”, *Race & Class*, vol. 28, no. 29 (Winter, 1987), pp. 29-40.

⁶³ Diana Paton, “The Trials of Inspector Thomas: Politics and Ethnography in Jamaica” in Paton and Forde (eds), *Obeah and Other Powers*, pp. 172-197.

of Revival religion ‘as both nativized and exotic’.⁶⁴ My thesis intends to examine both the positive and negative aspects of Beckwith’s research into African-Jamaican folk religions. In order to demonstrate the pioneering nature of her Jamaican fieldwork and also to highlight problematic areas in her studies, I will be looking at how the works of Beckwith compared with those of other anthropologists and folklorists working on African-Jamaican folk religions in the same era. Although Beckwith’s Jamaican fieldwork took place between 1919 and 1924, with *Black Roadways* being published in 1929, I have also included some texts from the last decades of the nineteenth century in my research. This is not to give the assumption that African-Jamaican folk religions had remained unchanged between the late nineteenth century and the 1920s though there were some continuities of practice. Rather these texts, for example, *Jamaica Superstitions: or the Obeah Book: A Complete Treatise of the Absurdities Believed in by the People of the Island* (1895) by Thomas Banbury are included because they were both influential on, and frequently cited by, Beckwith and others writing on Jamaican folk cultures in the early decades of the twentieth century. Using close textual analysis, I examine exactly how ‘pioneering’, to borrow Herskovits’s description of *Black Roadways*, Beckwith was when compared to other folklorists and anthropologists writing on the same subject. These are Thomas Banbury, Abraham Emerick, Herbert G. De Lisser, Zora Neale Hurston, Bessie Pullen-Burry, and Joseph John Williams. The works of others, who include Melville Herskovits, Elsie Clews Parsons, Henry Hesketh Bell, Alice Spinner and Walter Jekyll, I cover to a lesser extent. Herbert De Lisser and Henry Hesketh Bell are exceptions to this

⁶⁴ Diane J. Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis: Religions and the Politics of Moral Orders* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 76-77.

list of anthropologists or folklorists as they were neither. However, De Lisser's interest in, and writings on Jamaican folk cultures were influential on later ethnographers. The same qualification is applicable to Hesketh Bell even though he wrote about Obeah practice in Grenada rather than Jamaica. His book, *Obeah: Witchcraft in the West Indies* (1889), has proved very influential both then and now for those writing about Obeah in the Anglophone Caribbean in general.

Whilst few academically-trained anthropologists considered the West Indies as a field of interest in the early twentieth century, Caribbean folk religions, especially Obeah and Vodou, attracted a sizeable amount of attention from journalists, novelists, social commentators and travel writers. However, my focus is on the way African-Jamaican folk religions were covered by anthropologists and folklorists/folklore collectors as a distinct group. In part, this is because in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both anthropology and folklore studies were developing as academic disciplines rather than being the preserve of amateurs. An examination of the works of these late post-emancipation period researchers gives an insight not only into how African-Jamaican folk religions were practised and perceived at that time but also how developments in the study of folklore and anthropology helped to mould these perceptions.

When it comes to who the anthropologists and folklorists were writing for, there is a certain amount of crossover between works aimed at an academic readership and those intended for travellers and tourists. Bessie Pullen-Burry's books were aimed at both markets. She was an anthropologist but *Jamaica As It Is, 1903* (1903) was also intended to inform the 'British public... [of] the charms of tropical scenery some of the features which tend to make one of our older

colonies, Jamaica, a delightful winter resort'.⁶⁵ Like *Jamaica As it Is*, Hurston's *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938) was aimed at both a general and a scholarly readership. Some works, like *A Reluctant Evangelist and Other Stories* (1896) by Alice Spinner, were written for the popular market. Spinner, a British novelist who lived in Jamaica, had a strong interest in Jamaican folk culture and *A Reluctant Evangelist and Other Stories* includes a collection of folklore. Other texts were aimed at a very specific readership. For example, Emerick's essays were written for a Jesuit newsletter, *The Woodstock Letters*. Its contents relayed the mission's activities to a readership predominantly of clerics, missionaries and nuns based at Woodstock College in Maryland.

Beckwith used an empirical, scientific approach with regard to her analyses of Jamaican folk cultures, although her own, less than objective, views of the subject do break through at times. This posed the problem, which is still relevant today, of how experiences such as religious beliefs can be evaluated by scientific methods when the only concrete "evidence" of religions is down to an individual's own faith. A purely scientific approach can result in the reduction of what - for those who believe - is a very real experience. In the introduction to *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (2002), Palmié recounts an incident during his fieldwork when he was told by two of his Cuban informants that he was being watched and protected over by the spirit of a dead slave called Tomás. Palmié argues against rationalising away Tomás's existence

⁶⁵ Bessie Pullen-Burry, *Jamaica As It Is, 1903* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), p. ix.

by attributing it to ‘faulty reasoning’ or ‘projections of mental states’.⁶⁶ Instead, he suggests treating his informants’ belief in the power of the dead to interact with the living as ‘pertaining to a discourse on history merely encoded in an idiom different from the one with which we feel at home’.⁶⁷ In a similar vein, the anthropologist, Susan Greenwood, who writes on modern British witchcraft and neo-paganism found that phenomenology was the best form in which to try to understand experiences of ‘otherworld’, a spirit realm which is accessed by witches and magicians. Greenwood employed ‘a radical suppression of the analytical categories of normal rationalistic social science’.⁶⁸ This methodology enabled her to find a means of analysing witches’ and neo-pagans’ experiences in a non-reductionism way. Whilst I am in no way linking African-Jamaican religions and spiritual beliefs with Wicca or other forms of British paganism, when considering religions and spiritual beliefs in late post-emancipation Jamaica - whether those of mainstream churches or folk religions - I am following a phenomenological approach, whereby no one particular construction of reality is more “real” than any other.⁶⁹

The sources for my research are primarily Martha Beckwith’s books, monographs and articles on Jamaica folk culture. As I am considering Beckwith in comparison to other anthropologists and folklorists writing on African-Jamaican religions in the same era, sources also include books by Joseph John Williams, Thomas Banbury, Abraham Emerick, Bessie Pullen-Burry, Alice Spinner and Zora Neale

⁶⁶ Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002), p.3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁶⁸ Susan Greenwood, *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld: An Anthropology* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2000), p. 13.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 42.

Hurston. Where applicable, I have also included reviews of Beckwith's work, either from newspapers or from academic journals. However, the amount of information in these varies considerably. Some provide a useful insight into how Beckwith's Jamaican research was received at the time, whereas in others little can be gleaned. For example, one reviewer in the journal *Folklore* wrote that *Black Roadways* contained some 'mistakes and omissions' but failed to mention what the errors were.⁷⁰

Thomas Banbury is the only one of the folklorists who was African-Jamaican. Although collections of folk songs and stories were made in the late post-emancipation era by Jamaicans, little was written by the people who actually took part in the various African-Jamaican spiritual belief systems. If Banbury's experience at the hands of the book reviewers in Jamaican newspapers was not unusual, then it is feasible that some African-Jamaicans were cautious of writing about their folk culture for fear of derision, or as in Banbury's case, scathing reviews. The *Gleaner's* reviewer considered *Jamaica Superstitions* as a well-intentioned work but one that could have an 'evil' effect since it might influence the gullible. The argument given for this critique was that Banbury detailed Obeah practices and duppy beliefs without the examples 'being sufficiently qualified by expressions of disbelief or ridicule'.⁷¹ As the full title of Banbury's text is *Jamaica Superstitions: or The Obeah Book: A Complete Treatise of the Absurdities Believed in by the People of the Island* and, in his opening description of Obeah he described it as 'wicked, immoral, disgusting, and debasing,' this criticism seems

⁷⁰ A.R. Wright, review of *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folk Life*, *Folklore*, vol. 42, no. 1 (Mar. 31, 1931), p. 98.

⁷¹ "Jamaica Superstitions", *The Daily Gleaner*, Tuesday, Jan. 15, 1895, p. 4. [consulted at <http://gleaner.newspaperarchive.com> (3rd January 2008)].

rather misplaced.⁷² There may be more than a grain of truth in a letter Banbury sent to the *Gleaner* to complain about a similarly disparaging review in *The Jamaica Churchman*:

Had it been a “Buckra” that had done the book every white editorial in the land would have blazed forth its praise and glory.⁷³

Another reason why little was written by African-Jamaicans on their folk religions was that those most likely to follow folk religions, with the possible exception of Obeah, were drawn largely from the working classes. Although the education system was slowly improving, there were still high rates of illiteracy amongst working-class Jamaicans, especially in rural areas. Much of what has been written by those from a working-class background tends to reflect the biases of the Jamaican education system which was based on British ideas and values or the beliefs of the various Christian denominations which ran many Jamaican schools until the First World War. The result of this is that the majority of material actually written by Jamaicans on African-Jamaican folk religions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, though by no means all negative, comes from the classes of Jamaican society unlikely to practise it. There is one notable exception in the case of Alexander Bedward, since a *History of Bedwardism or The Jamaica Native Baptist Free Church*, a pamphlet detailing the preacher’s life, conversion and ministry, was written by one of Bedward’s followers, A.A. Brooks.

⁷² Rev. T. Banbury, *Jamaica Superstitions; or the Obeah Book: A Complete Treatise of the Absurdities Believed in by the People of the Island* (Kingston: Mortimer Co. De Souza, 1894), p. 5.

⁷³ “Rev. F. (sic) Banbury and the Jamaica Churchman”, *The Daily Gleaner*, Friday, Mar. 22, 1896, p. 4. [consulted at <http://gleaner.newspaperarchive.com> (3rd January 2008)].

My terminology

In their introduction to the religions of the Caribbean, Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert describe Obeah as a compound of ‘creolized beliefs’ that manifest themselves in two ‘very distinct categories’: healing and the casting of spells to achieve an individual’s own desires.⁷⁴ This description covers the wide-ranging functions of Obeah, whereas earlier descriptions limit its meaning to “witchcraft” or “sorcery”.⁷⁵ However, I am choosing to define Obeah as a religion, as something more than simply a spiritual practice, although it encompasses that term as well. In this choice, I am adopting Dianne Stewart’s view that Obeah should be classed as a form of religion. Whilst Stewart acknowledges that it ‘encompasses unlimited operative meanings’, she goes on to argue that ‘Obeah is a religious practice’ because, alongside spiritual beliefs, it includes, or has included, ‘oath taking, divination, [and] healing’.⁷⁶ Stewart’s evidence for Obeah as a religion rather than a neutral spiritual power is predominantly based on its practice in pre-emancipation Jamaica.⁷⁷ A post-emancipation example of the religious aspect of Obeah can be found in the article “William Lauron DeLaurence and Jamaican Folk Religion”. Its author, W.F. Elkins, alludes to *science*, an urbanised form of Obeah as having religious properties because of science’s use of the occult works from William Lauron DeLaurence’s publishing house. Since DeLaurence’s writings combined ‘magical procedures’ with ‘the immanence of

⁷⁴ Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo* (New York & London: New York University Press, 2003), p. 131.

⁷⁵ Even well into the twentieth century some commentators were still describing Obeah purely in terms of its magical aspect – see, for example, *Obeah, Christ and Rastaman* where Morrish describes Obeah as ‘essentially a magical means whereby an individual may obtain his personal desires’: Ivor Morrish, *Obeah, Christ and Rastaman: Jamaica and Its Religion* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1982), p. 40.

⁷⁶ Dianne M. Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 41.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

God', Elkins argues that the religious aspect of DeLaurence's works had an appeal in Jamaica firstly because of its resonance with Jamaican folk religions and secondly, because it gave science 'greater prestige'.⁷⁸ Therefore, I feel "religion" is an appropriate definition of Obeah in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as Obeah in that era still included belief in a spirit world and the use of 'ritual invocation'.⁷⁹ However, I also believe that any definition of Obeah is partly personal and down to the individual intentions of the practitioners and their clients.

I am using the phrase "folk religion" to describe the religious practices studied by Martha Warren Beckwith and other anthropologists and folklorists in the late post-emancipation period. For some this terminology is contentious. Diane Stewart argues that the labelling African-Jamaican religions as folk culture trivialises the faiths and reinforces the idea that they are 'peripheral' to mainstream Christianity and 'respectable culture'.⁸⁰ Whilst not dismissing this argument, at the time of Beckwith's research such faiths *were* considered by external commentators and many in Jamaica itself to be outside the mainstream religious belief systems. In my use of the word "folk", I am also following Mervyn Alleyne and Arvilla Payne-Jackson's usage of the term in their work, *Jamaican Folk Medicine: A Source of Healing*. Although they acknowledge that "folk" can have pejorative associations, such as something quaint, unchanging or stuck in the past, they nevertheless opt for it as a descriptor for forms of cultural practices that are traditional or have traditional roots in order to differentiate it from "popular" which has wider reaching interpretations.⁸¹ Prior to the late nineteenth century "popular"

⁷⁸ Elkins, "William Lauron DeLaurence and Jamaica Folk Religion", p. 217.

⁷⁹ Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*, p. 131.

⁸⁰ Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, p. 176.

⁸¹ Arvilla Payne-Jackson and Mervyn C. Alleyne, *Jamaican Folk Medicine: A Source of Healing* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2004).

had been used instead of the word “folk” in studies or collections of folk cultures. Bronner argues that the shift in terminology from “popular” to “folk” put the emphasis on the customs and beliefs of groups of people rather than the whole of the people.⁸² As African-Jamaican folk religions, with the exception of Obeah, were followed largely by a specific socio-racial strata of Jamaican society, the narrower description of “folk” rather than “popular” seems the most apt.

Chapter plan

In chapter one I examine the Jamaican background to Beckwith’s writings. A sense of the social and historical context Beckwith was working in is important as attitudes towards race, and to some extent working class cultures in general, in Jamaica and the United States contributed to how the folk religions of those of African heritage in the New World were perceived by ethnographers and folklorists. Starting in Jamaica, the involvement of Native Baptist leaders in the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865, left a legacy which had a significant impact on the way African-Jamaican faiths were viewed and how their followers were treated by the colonial authorities and the Jamaican government in the late post-emancipation period. As the majority of followers of African-Jamaican religions were from the peasantry and working classes, the focus in this chapter is on events in the late post-emancipation period that particularly impacted on this sector of society: for example the toll of the depression in the sugar industry in the late nineteenth century. The era was also one of growing radicalisation, fuelled in part by the racism experienced by black migrant workers and soldiers returning from the First

⁸² Simon J. Bronner, *American Folklore Studies: an Intellectual History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), pp. 21-22.

World War. An expanding black middle class meant that well-educated African-Jamaicans also began to challenge the racial status quo. An increasing of a sense of national identity amongst middle-class Jamaicans of all ethnicities led to a re-evaluation and reappraisal of the island's African-Jamaica folk culture. Developments in the way folk culture was perceived and collected were also occurring in the United States. Since Beckwith was a folklorist trained in anthropology, this chapter therefore examines the significant changes which took place in these disciplines in the early twentieth century. As the study of anthropology both reflected and contributed to the way the concept of race was treated in the United States, the chapter also examines American attitudes towards those of African heritage during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the time Beckwith had returned to the States from Hawaii and was developing as an academic. A belief in its racial and cultural superiority contributed towards the United States' relationship with the Caribbean during this period so there is also a consideration of how the former's increasingly imperialist behaviour may have affected the views of American anthropologists towards Jamaica.

The following three chapters cover the African-Jamaican folk religions studied by Martha Beckwith during her fieldwork. Each chapter focuses firstly on how the faiths were practised in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and then moves on to how they were perceived and written about by Beckwith and her contemporaries. In *Black Roadways*, Beckwith devoted a chapter each to Obeah, Myal, Revival, Pukkumina and the African-Jamaican spirit world. I am following this pattern although I have grouped Myal, Revival and Pukkumina into one chapter covering her approach to Jamaica's African-Christian religions. Chapter two focuses on Obeah and examines the contemporary arguments

surrounding it: for example, whether it was a form of religion, witchcraft or fraud; whether Jamaican practitioners performed human sacrifices, and how widespread were Obeah beliefs amongst the African-Jamaican population. Since, by the late post-emancipation period, some Obeah practitioners were using synthetic materials and modern occultist texts, I also consider in this chapter how “modern” elements in Obeah and its changing nature were viewed by anthropologists.

In the third chapter I examine Myal, Native Baptists, Revival, and Pukkumina, those faiths researched by Beckwith which fall within the African-Christian spectrum of beliefs. The chapter considers how attitudes to race affected anthropologists’ and folklorists’ perceptions of African-Jamaican folk religions including a common discourse in late post-emancipation Jamaica that Revival religion was associated with hysteria, insanity and superstition. Beckwith’s pioneering approach to her research is demonstrated through an analysis of her interviews with Bedward and other leaders of syncretised faiths. These interviews also demonstrate how Beckwith was both forward-thinking in her research but also accepting of some older stereotypes with regard to black Jamaicans and their culture. Chapter four looks at discourses surrounding the African-Jamaican spirit world during the late post-emancipation period since the belief in a multitude of spirits and their invocation and manipulation played an important role in Jamaican folk religions. There is an examination of how evolutionary racial theories affected perceptions of the cosmologies of non-monotheistic faiths and folk religions. I argue that beliefs in a spirit world consisting of a variety of spirits of different orders (for example, nature spirits, demons, ancestral spirits, angels and deities) transcended race and class boundaries in the late post-emancipation era, not just in the Caribbean but in parts of Europe and the Americas as well. I examine to what

extent this idea was acknowledged by Beckwith, and other early anthropologists writing on African-Jamaican folk religions. Finally, in the conclusion I consider Beckwith's contribution to the field of African-Jamaican anthropology and her legacy today.

Chapter 1: Jamaica: folk culture, race and identity

Martha Beckwith's Jamaican research and writings took place between 1919 and 1929. This chapter focuses on Jamaican society at the time of Beckwith's visits and how societal developments influenced Jamaicans' conflicting attitudes towards their folk culture. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Jamaica had been undergoing significant changes - changes which laid the foundations for Jamaica's twentieth-century search for its own national identity. As part of this quest, Jamaican folk culture came to be regarded by some sections of society as a source of identity and heritage. However, this was also an era when the island's ruling classes were promoting the adoption of middle-class British values and ideas. Therefore, many aspects of Jamaican culture, folk or otherwise, were deemed (at best) uncouth and unruly. As Beckwith was studying the folk beliefs of the African-Jamaican peasantry, and because Jamaican folk culture was usually associated with the lower classes, there is a particular emphasis on conditions that affected the rural black population.⁸³

Between 1905 and 1918, Martha Beckwith trained as an anthropologist under the tutelage of Franz Boas. In America, a new academic approach was being applied to the study of the folk culture of Africa and the African diaspora. However, the early twentieth century also witnessed the re-emergence of the Ku Klux Klan and a number of serious race riots in American cities. Therefore, this chapter also examines how race relations in the United States impacted on contemporary discourse in American anthropology and folklore scholarship at the time of Beckwith's postgraduate studies in these subjects.

⁸³ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. vii.

Jamaica as it was

During the late post-emancipation period ‘[the] vast majority of black Jamaicans remained at the bottom of the social hierarchy’ and ‘desperately poor’.⁸⁴ In part, poverty in Jamaica was a result of the island’s continued concentration on sugar production after emancipation as competition from cheap European sugar beet in the mid and late nineteenth century caused sugar prices to fall. The introduction of new machinery to improve efficiency on sugar plantations in turn led to a loss of jobs. Moreover, until the 1880s, the Crown Colony government’s economic policies had favoured the plantation sector over small farmers as it was loathe to encourage an independent peasantry, taking the planters’ view that this would reduce the supply of labour to the estates. However, this opinion started to change in the 1880s when, throughout the West Indies, a fall in tax revenues, problems in reducing public expenditure and the decline in sugar meant that ‘colonial governments, as well as individual planters, were faced with financial ruin’.⁸⁵ In 1883, a Royal Commission was established to look at the finances of Britain’s most poorly performing Caribbean colonies. It found that black West Indians were ‘becoming prosperous peasant proprietors, and already in many islands... [were] appreciably increasing the exports’.⁸⁶ Therefore, the Commission argued that every colony should make Crown lands available for peasant smallholdings. In light of this, in 1895, a land settlement scheme was implemented by the Jamaican government in an attempt to relieve the island’s worsening economic conditions

⁸⁴ Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865-1920* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), p. 11, p. 10.

⁸⁵ Richard S. Lobdell, “British Officials and the West Indian Peasantry” in Malcolm Cross and Gad Heuman, (eds), *Labour in the Caribbean: From Emancipation to Independence* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Caribbean, 2004), p. 198.

⁸⁶ Report of the Royal Commission to Enquire... C 3840, Feb 1884, Parliamentary Papers 1884, Vol. XLVI quoted in Lobdell, “British Officials and the West Indian Peasantry”, p. 199.

and growing unemployment. The Jamaican Agricultural Society was also founded in the same year ‘to help the black people to establish and maintain themselves on such lands’.⁸⁷

Despite this new support for smallholders, peasant agriculture began to decline in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The census of 1921 shows that 64.1% of working class Jamaicans worked in agriculture compared with a figure of 72.61% in 1891.⁸⁸ Between 1921 and 1943, an estimated 2,750 peasants were forced off the land every year.⁸⁹ A major cause of this decline was the government’s encouragement of large companies, both Jamaican and foreign, to invest in land for agricultural purposes. These companies’ investment in the sugar industry, combined with a revival in the Caribbean sugar market because of the effects of the First World War on European sugar beet production, meant that by 1930, ‘the average size of [sugar] estates had increased by four-fifths’.⁹⁰ Big corporations such as the United Fruit Company and the Atlantic Fruit Company also came to control the cultivation and trade of bananas, a crop initially developed in Jamaica on a small scale by peasant farmers. By 1928, the United Fruit Company and the Atlantic Fruit Company ‘had more land under their control than the total acreage allotted’ under the land settlement scheme.⁹¹

Furthermore, measures to encourage investment and help restore Jamaica’s finances actually helped create and maintain the poverty the government was striving to counteract. Peasant farmers often now had to rent land from the big

⁸⁷ Sydney Olivier, *Jamaica: The Blessed Island* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1936), p. 317.

⁸⁸ Glen Richards, “Race, Class and Labour Politics in Colonial Jamaica, 1900-1934” in Kathleen E.A. Monteith and Glen Richards (eds), *Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom: History, Heritage and Culture* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2002), p. 342.

⁸⁹ Ken Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and its Aftermath* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1978), p. 132.

⁹⁰ Marleen A. Barley, “Land Settlement in Jamaica, 1923-1949” in Monteith and Richards (eds), *Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom*, p. 326.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.326.

corporations which made them vulnerable to high rents and short term leases. To ensure there was a supply of land available to new investors, existing land legislation was more rigorously enforced. As a result many smallholders were 'effectively displaced'.⁹² Squatters were more efficiently ejected and lands whose annual quit rents, a form of feudal tenancy, had been in arrears for a long period were repossessed.⁹³ Other settlers lost their lands because land transactions had not been properly conveyanced.

In addition, some of the schemes implemented to help working-class Jamaicans possess land proved to be less than adequate. For example, the 1895 plan to sell Crown lands to small settlers at affordable prices focussed 'on the quantity of land allotted, not on quality' as by this time the government had already leased or sold the better quality portions of land; what was left for sale was either 'largely inaccessible, mountainous or infertile'.⁹⁴ After the First World War, a landownership scheme established to provide employment for ex-soldiers from the British West India Regiment (BWIR) also proved unsuccessful. The former servicemen were given a free allotment of five acres, and loans were made available to purchase more land if the veteran had at least £10 in savings and a means of support until his first crop had been harvested. However, the scheme collapsed, due in no small part to the fact that the main area provided for settlement in Portland was too isolated from main roads and government promises to improve the transport infrastructure failed to 'materialise'. Veterans' groups also

⁹² Ibid., p.326

⁹³ Tenants could have their grant of land repossessed by the Crown if the quit rent had been in arrears "for a continuous period of 20 years". Veront M. Satchell, *From Plots to Plantations: Land Transactions in Jamaica, 1866-1900* (Mona: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1990), p. 67.

⁹⁴ Barley, "Land Settlement in Jamaica, 1923-1949", p. 324. Satchell, *From Plots to Plantations*, p. 2.

complained that applications for land were either lost or took a very long time to be processed.⁹⁵

The lack of suitable land available on which to establish smallholdings led to rural workers migrating from the countryside to find employment either in towns or overseas - usually to Latin America, Cuba and the United States. At the time of the sugar boom in Cuba in the early twentieth century, nearly 24,000 Jamaicans went there in 1919 alone.⁹⁶ Internal migration to towns caused the populations of the two largest cities, Kingston and Montego Bay, to rapidly increase in size: between 1921 and 1943 the population of Kingston and the neighbouring parish of St Andrew grew from 117,000 to 237,000.⁹⁷ Such rapid urban growth gave rise to a number of new social problems as many of those who migrated to Kingston and Montego Bay found that their hopes of finding well-paid employment and achieving a better standard of living were 'quickly dashed', and they ended up living in squalid conditions in shanty towns and slums doing a variety of low paying jobs in order to survive.⁹⁸

Levels of wages and under- and unemployment were further affected by the importation of foreign labourers who were brought in principally to work on the plantations. Indian workers came to Jamaica after emancipation as indentured labourers in 1838, Africans between 1841 and 1865, and Chinese workers in 1854. Whilst African-Jamaicans had been eager to leave the plantations after the ending of slavery, many continued to work on them to supplement their income. However,

⁹⁵ Richard Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, Masculinity and the Development of National Consciousness*, (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 156.

⁹⁶ Hugh Thomas, *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971), p. 540.

⁹⁷ O. Nigel Bolland, *On the March: Labour Rebellion in the British Caribbean, 1934-39*, (Kingston & London: James Currey, 1995), p. 28.

⁹⁸ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, p. 11.

since plantation owners had access to a supply of foreign labourers indentured to work on their estates, they had less need for “casual” creole labour. Poverty levels were also affected by an increase in taxation in the aftermath of the rebellion at Morant Bay to cover the cost of suppressing the uprising and pay for the social reforms introduced in its wake.⁹⁹ Working-class Jamaicans were subject to disproportionate levels of taxation. For the colonial government, customs and excise duties and property tax were ‘the most important source[s] of revenue’ - both of which hit the poorest the hardest.¹⁰⁰ Items taxed by Customs included smoked fish and meat, flour, salted beef and pork, soap and salt, whereas books, diamonds, fresh meat, fish, and peaches were exempt.¹⁰¹ Customs and excise duties were especially onerous at times when crops were destroyed by drought or other natural disasters. Then people had to purchase more imported foodstuffs, leading to a situation whereby ‘distress among the poorer classes actually swells the public revenue, because they have to... pay more import duties on flour, rice, cornmeal and other imported necessities...’.¹⁰² By the late 1890s, arrears on property taxes were becoming so frequent that it was decided that a new tax based on the real value of property should be introduced to make the system more equitable and rectify losses to the Treasury. However, more taxes were put on land in 1901.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ For instance, a new police force was created and district courts replaced the old parochial courts. New roads and bridges were built, irrigation schemes introduced and public utilities expanded and improved.

¹⁰⁰ Gisela Eisner, *Jamaica, 1830-1930: A Study in Economic Growth* (reprint Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974 of orig. edn, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), pp. 367-68.

¹⁰¹ Graham Knox, “Political Change in Jamaica (1866-1906)”, in F.M. Andic and T. G. Mathews (eds), *The Caribbean in Transition: Papers on Social, Political and Economic Development* (Rio Piedras: Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico, 1965), p. 150.

¹⁰² Olivier, *Jamaica*, p. 408.

¹⁰³ This new tax was eventually introduced in 1903.

For properties outside Kingston, tax was again increased by 50% after the First World War to cover the cost of improvements to public services.¹⁰⁴

Poverty combined with the lack of an adequate medical service and the ‘often atrocious’ living conditions of many of the urban migrants meant that health problems associated with insanitary conditions and overcrowding, such as tuberculosis and yaws, were rife, thus undermining a number of measures to improve public health which had been made since 1865.¹⁰⁵ These included the establishment of a public medical service, improved sanitation, quarantine and vaccination programmes. However, it could be argued that for the poorest African-Jamaicans, there had been more adequate health care provision under the slave system as then a doctor would visit plantations once or twice a week. In the post-emancipation era, the sick now had to find a doctor themselves, a task made more difficult by a lack of doctors on the island.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, as medical services tended to be based in towns and ‘large parts of the hinterland remained relatively isolated from ‘civilized’ society well beyond the First World War’, transportation was a factor in the level of healthcare which could be accessed by those in rural areas.¹⁰⁷

Hookworm and other medical conditions associated with malnutrition and a diet lacking in protein were common amongst working-class Jamaicans.¹⁰⁸ Malnutrition especially affected children and babies since ‘few received proper

¹⁰⁴ Olivier, *Jamaica*, p. 410.

¹⁰⁵ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, p. 11. Yaws is a contagious disease which causes the growth of ulcers all over the body.

¹⁰⁶ In 1900 there were only 100 doctors in Jamaica. Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902: Race, Class and Social Control* (reprint, Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press, 2000, of orig. edn, London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1991), p. 166.

¹⁰⁷ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Hookworm is exacerbated by a diet of ‘coarse, bulky, non-nutritious food’ – Richard B. Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves: A medical and demographic history of slavery in the British West Indies, 1680-1834* (Cambridge & London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 216.

food... after breast feeding had stopped'.¹⁰⁹ Whether deaths were caused by poor nutrition or by other factors, infant mortality did not begin to fall until the 1920s when there were 160 deaths per 1000 live births in the period 1926-1930 as opposed to 192 deaths per 1000 in the period 1906-1910.¹¹⁰

The effects of a poor diet were further exacerbated by a number of natural disasters such as droughts, earth tremors and hurricanes to which Jamaica is prone. Sydney Olivier, governor of Jamaica from 1907 to 1913, noted that in areas vulnerable to recurrent droughts, the conditions for the working classes 'deteriorated' through malnutrition.¹¹¹ The island was hit by five hurricanes between 1903 and 1921.¹¹² Anthropologist and travel writer Bessie Pullen-Burry, noted that '[a]ll the banana fields for miles appeared utterly destroyed' by the hurricane of 1903. In Port Antonio, 'the peasants' homes were lying flat on the ground: hundreds of them were homeless'.¹¹³ A serious earthquake in 1907 resulted in the deaths of over 800 people.¹¹⁴ In Kingston, a fire lasting four days followed in the wake of the quake, resulting in the city having to be substantially rebuilt.

Growing radicalisation

Alongside the changes in land ownership, the effects of poverty contributed to another significant change in the late post-emancipation period - the growing

¹⁰⁹ Bridget Brereton, *Social Life in the Caribbean 1838-1938* (Kingston & London: Heinemann Educational, 1986), p. 35.

¹¹⁰ Eisner, *Jamaica, 1830-1930*, pp. 138-39.

¹¹¹ Olivier, *Jamaica*, pp. 292-93.

¹¹² Diane J. Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis*, p. 23.

¹¹³ Bessie Pullen-Burry, *Ethiopia in Exile: Jamaica Revisited* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1905), p. 73.

¹¹⁴ Rebecca Tortello, "Pieces from the Past: Disaster – The Earthquake of 1907", *Daily Gleaner*, 14 January 2002. < <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/pages/history/story0017.html>> (13 March 2008).

radicalisation of Jamaica's black population. Radicalisation was also fuelled by exposure to the ideas of emerging black nationalist movements. In its early phase, the North American black nationalist movement focussed on ideas of self-defence and bringing about 'a new economic and political order in the United States based on the political solidarity of the working class, both black and white'.¹¹⁵ By the mid-1920s its 'literary and artistic counterpart', the Harlem Renaissance, had come to the fore with a belief that large-scale recognition of black artistic achievements 'would naturally lead to the reformation of the American social order' and '[d]estroy claims of black inferiority'.¹¹⁶ The Pan-African movement, founded in 1897 by Sylvester Williams, a Trinidadian of Barbadian parentage, 'advocated the strengthening of Pan-African linkages, urged resistance to oppression and encouraged a deeper identification with Africa'.¹¹⁷ After the first Pan-African conference was held in London in 1900, the Pan-African Association was formed which tried to 'redress the grievances of black labourers within the empire'.¹¹⁸ Even though it has been argued that, because of the middle class nature of the movement, '[t]he Pan-Africans were not representative of most blacks', it was still influential. For example, Pan-Africanists Pixley Seme and Sol Plaatje were among the founders of the African National Congress.¹¹⁹

Disenfranchisement contributed to the increasing radicalisation of many African-Jamaicans in the era. When Jamaica became a Crown Colony in 1866, the

¹¹⁵ Tyrone Tillery, *Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p. 89.

¹¹⁶ Tony Martin, "African and Indian Consciousness" in Bridget Brereton (ed.), *General History of the Caribbean: Volume V: The Caribbean in the Twentieth Century* (Paris: UNESCO & London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2004), p. 236; Tillery, *Claude McKay*, p. 91.

¹¹⁷ Martin, "African and Indian Consciousness", p. 236.

¹¹⁸ Kim Blake, "T.E.S. Scholes: The Unknown Pan Africanist", *Race & Class*, vol. 49, no. 1 (2007), p. 73.

¹¹⁹ Judith Stein, "The Ideology and Practice of Garveyism" in Rupert Lewis and Patrick Bryan (eds), *Garvey: His Work and Impact* (Mona: University of the West Indies, 1988), p. 202.

voting rights of all male Jamaicans were initially removed.¹²⁰ In 1884, the Colonial Office bowed to Jamaican pressure for constitutional change and allowed limited elected representation based on ‘males paying direct taxes of ten shillings or earning a minimum salary of fifty pounds per annum’; however, a further amendment of 1893 imposed a literacy test in order to be able to vote.¹²¹ Governor Henry Blake’s justification for this was that illiterate voters were ‘venal’ and ‘easily led astray’.¹²² The new literacy requirements, coupled with economic hard times which made it difficult for some prospective voters to pay their taxes, reduced the number of voters from 42,266 in 1887 to 16,256 in 1900-01.¹²³ Joyce Lumsden notes that under Crown Colony rule, ‘contemporary opinion’ held that the mass of working-class black Jamaicans were either too disinterested or apathetic to be concerned with politics. For example, in 1895 Henry Blake stated that the black population had ‘no political aspirations and they take no interest in matters outside their immediate surroundings’.¹²⁴ A black Baptist minister, interviewed by Lumsden on his memories of the early twentieth century, told her that: ‘I agree that there was very little interest in politics in those days’.¹²⁵ However, a rising number of strikes, labour riots and other forms of industrial action in the late post-emancipation period demonstrate that working-class black Jamaicans were prepared to fight for social change, just in ways other than through the ballot box. In 1901 riots over wage rates occurred in St Mary.¹²⁶ Another riot

¹²⁰ Women were denied the vote until 1919 when it was extended to middle and upper class women.

¹²¹ Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902*, p. 42.

¹²² Jamaica Archives, 1B/5/18, Vol. 47. Blake to Ripon No. 197, 16 May, 1893 cited in Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902*, pp. 14-15.

¹²³ H. A. Will, *Constitutional Change in the British West Indies, 1880-1903* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 63-64.

¹²⁴ Blake to Ripon, Confidential, April 29 1895. 8454. CO137/565 cited in Joyce Lumsden, ‘Robert Love and Jamaican Politics’ (PhD thesis, University of the West Indies, 1987), p. 4.

¹²⁵ Personal letter to Lumsden, April 23 1977 cited in *ibid.*, p. 5.

¹²⁶ Bolland, *On the March*, pp. 7-8.

occurred in Kingston in 1912 after clerks boycotted trams because of a 14% increase in fares.¹²⁷ There were further labour rebellions throughout the 1920s.¹²⁸

In part, such unrest was caused because British labour unions had sought to encourage affiliates in the Caribbean.¹²⁹ The experiences of those Jamaicans who had gone as migrant workers to Central America, Cuba and the United States were also a contributing factor. Diane Austin-Broos observes that leaders of contemporary black radical movements, such as Marcus Garvey and Alexander Bedward, had often had the experience of travel in Latin America or had worked there as migrant labourers on projects such as the building of the Panama Canal.¹³⁰ Whilst workers on the Panama Canal could earn good wages, labour conditions were deplorable. Rates of disease and mortality were high; in addition, black labourers encountered racism from white overseers and had to live separately from white workers. In Ecuador where, in 1900 over 5,000 Jamaicans had gone to build a railway, a number were ‘indiscriminately shot for trying to run away’.¹³¹

A major catalyst for the labour unrest in both Jamaica and the British Caribbean in the early twentieth century was the First World War which ‘prompted anti-colonial sentiment, a critical reassessment of the class and racial hierarchy associated with colonialism, and early stirrings of nationalism’.¹³² Because of wartime economic conditions, basic consumer goods spiralled in price and, for many of those who served as soldiers, the First World War left them disillusioned

¹²⁷ Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War*, p. 35.

¹²⁸ Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings*, p. 240.

¹²⁹ Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (2nd edition, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 297.

¹³⁰ Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis*, p. 26.

¹³¹ Knox, “Political Change in Jamaica (1866-1906)”, pp. 153-154.

¹³² Howard Johnson, “The British Caribbean from Demobilization to Constitutional Decolonization” in Judith M. Brown and Wm Roger Louis (eds), *Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV: The Twentieth Century* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 597.

by the racism they experienced.¹³³ At recruiting rallies, Britain was often portrayed ‘as the emancipator of slaves and the guardian of freedom’.¹³⁴ In spite of this, those who had joined to fight for liberty found that they could not hold commissions and were frequently deployed as labourers or used for the particularly dangerous task of carrying ammunition. Black troops were poorly treated compared to other soldiers: for example, being quartered in damp huts which gave rise to high levels of sickness. Once ill or injured, they were often treated in hospitals established for non-white labourers rather than for military personnel.¹³⁵ In *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War*, Richard Smith notes that the treatment of the black servicemen reflected the dilemma Britain felt in regard to its non-white troops during the war: British authorities did not want the fact that the enemy was white and Kaiser Wilhelm was Queen Victoria’s grandson to ‘lead to criticism of white races in general’.¹³⁶

Black soldiers’ anger at racial discrimination came to a head at Taranto in Italy in 1918. Italian civilian labourers had been given improved pay and other bonuses such as clothing allowances and meat rations but the British West Indies Regiment (BWIR) labour battalions had not. On 6th December, the unpopular white commander of the 9th battalion had his tent slashed with bayonets by a number of men from the BWIR after he had ordered them to clean the Italian labourers’ latrines. The following day, men from the 9th and 10th battalions went on strike. They were disarmed but unrest spread to the extent that plans were made for the demobilisation and dispersal of the BWIR.¹³⁷

¹³³ Ibid., p. 600.

¹³⁴ Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War*, p. 39.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 123.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 130.

In 1918, fifty or sixty black sergeants formed the Caribbean League to fight discrimination. They said ‘they were prepared to use force to that end, and to strike for higher wages after demobilisation’.¹³⁸ The Colonial Office was so worried that these men would cause disruption when repatriated that it sent out a warning to the West Indian governors.¹³⁹ The government was right to be concerned as the following year, a wave of strikes and riots swept through British West Indies which authorities blamed on the ‘influence of returning soldiers with their heightened awareness of class and racial injustice’.¹⁴⁰ Black soldiers serving in Britain were exposed to Pan-African ideas and radical African-American thinking. Moreover, in 1919, former BWIR servicemen waiting to return to Jamaica were caught up in a spate of race riots which erupted in London and a number of British seaports. Once back in the Caribbean, Jamaican veterans who had experienced the riots led demands in Jamaica in 1919 that the colony’s wartime contribution be recognised and for ‘the losses they had suffered in the Metropole to be made good’.¹⁴¹

Jamaica’s labour riots again reflect the idea that ‘[a] rise in class consciousness’ was appearing alongside an ‘increasing racial consciousness’ in the British Caribbean in this period.¹⁴² The embodiment of this mix of class and racial consciousness can be seen in the figure of the Jamaican black nationalist, Marcus Garvey played a major part in radicalising black Jamaicans as well as others of the African diaspora in the first three decades of the twentieth century, advocating that they should put “race first” ‘in historical writing,... religion, self-reliance, and...

¹³⁸ Bolland, *On the March*, p. 28.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁰ Johnson, “The British Caribbean from Demobilization to Constitutional Decolonization”, p. 599.

¹⁴¹ Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War*, p. 143.

¹⁴² Bolland, *On the March*, p. 6.

political self-determination'.¹⁴³ In 1914, Garvey formed the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Its objectives included the uplifting of the black race through a message of race pride and independence and plans to develop Africa, since Garvey believed that a powerful and united Africa would help 'the economic advancement and liberation' of those of the African diaspora worldwide.¹⁴⁴ By the early 1920s, there were about 1,200 UNIA branches in over forty-one countries.¹⁴⁵ After returning to Jamaica in 1927, he founded the People's Political Party, the island's 'first anticolonial political party'.¹⁴⁶

Religion and resistance

Religion also played a part in the growing black radicalism of the late post-emancipation era. In particular, the popular Revivalist preacher Alexander Bedward became notorious for his use of anti-white rhetoric as did his fellow preacher Charles Higgins, who said that white people would be damned by God 'for their wickedness' for murdering Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁷

Although never a minister of religion, Marcus Garvey often made use of Biblical language in his speeches and the UNIA had its own catechism, the "Universal Negro Catechism" which contained a "Course of Instruction in Religious... Knowledge Pertaining to the Race".¹⁴⁸ Chaplains were present at

¹⁴³ Tony Martin, "Garvey, Marcus Mosiah (1887-1949)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, May 2007 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/60164>> (2 September 2007).

¹⁴⁴ Barry Chevannes, "Introducing the Native Religions of Jamaica" in Barry Chevannes (ed.), *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews* (Basingstoke: Macmillan in association with the Institute of Social Studies, 1998), p. 10.

¹⁴⁵ Martin, "Garvey, Marcus Mosiah (1887-1949)".

¹⁴⁶ Satchell, "Morant Bay Rebellion and Crown Colony Rule", <<http://www.hartford.hwp.com/archive/43/130.html>> (31 July 2007).

¹⁴⁷ W.F. Elkins, "Warrior Higgins", p. 29; *Daily Gleaner*, Jan. 22, 1902, cited in *ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁴⁸ Robert A. Hill (ed.), *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* (10 vols, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), vol 3, p. 302. The "Catechism" was written by George Alexander McGuire, at one time the UNIA's Chaplain-General.

UNIA meetings and hymns were sung.¹⁴⁹ Some people even regarded Garvey as a prophet, since it was believed that he had foretold Haile Selassie's coronation as Emperor of Ethiopia in 1930 when he said: 'look to Africa for the crowning of a King to know that your redemption is nigh'.¹⁵⁰

Black religion in the late post-emancipation era also had a radicalising effect because of its message of racial pride and pride in an African heritage at a time when black skin colour and black culture were being equated with being lower class or "barbaric". One illustration of the linking of religion with black pride can be seen in the doctrine of Ethiopianism which has been described as the 'religious embodiment' of Pan-Africanism'.¹⁵¹ Ethiopianism looked to certain phrases and passages in the Bible to demonstrate the past (and future) glories of Africa, the term "Ethiopianism" being used interchangeably to either describe the country itself or the whole continent of Africa. Psalm 68 v. 31 which decrees: 'Princes shall come out of Egypt, and Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hand unto God' had a particular resonance. For example, anthropologist Barry Chevannes was told by an informant, who had heard Revival preacher Charles Higgins preach, that Higgins had said that black Jamaicans should 'turn them eyes and them heart to Africa... and stretch forth them hand to Africa'.¹⁵² In 1921, Marcus Garvey used the psalm in a speech saying God:

had his plan when he inspired the Psalmist to write: "Princes shall come out of Egypt, and Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hand unto God". Tonight in Chicago I

¹⁴⁹ Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion* (Metuchen and London: Scarecrow Press, 1978), p. 29.

¹⁵⁰ Chevannes, "Introducing the Native Religions of Jamaica", p. 10.

¹⁵¹ Satchell, "Morant Bay Rebellion and Crown Colony Rule".

¹⁵² Chevannes, "Introducing the Native Religions of Jamaica, p. 90.

can see Ethiopia stretching forth her hand unto God. You young men of Chicago,
I can see in your eyes that princes shall come out of Egypt.¹⁵³

The black middle classes

Another development in the late post-emancipation period which challenged racial injustices and contributed to the development of a Jamaican National identity was the growth of a black middle class. The Jamaican middle classes that had predominately consisted of coloured and white people were now ‘increasingly joined by educated and upwardly mobile blacks’.¹⁵⁴ This new black middle class consisted of ‘professionals, salaried employees, colonial public officials, clergymen, [and] teachers’.¹⁵⁵ Success in small business, farming or as skilled artisans helped some African-Jamaicans to move into its lower ranks. Education was another major aid to black social mobility. Black education had been largely neglected in Jamaican society as, prior to emancipation, the planters wanted to keep the black population submissive and one way of achieving this was by keeping the slaves illiterate. In 1870, the Anglican Church was disestablished in Jamaica and money which once would have funded the churches was now redirected into state education. However, as the Jamaican education system was primarily designed to create an educated workforce and provide the mass of the populace with ‘the ideological tenets to become civilized, loyal British colonial

¹⁵³ Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol III, p. 51.

¹⁵⁴ Richards, “Race, Class and Labour Politics in Colonial Jamaica, 1900-1934”, p. 341.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

subjects', there was little governmental encouragement for black Jamaicans to be educated beyond primary level.¹⁵⁶

Whilst the government recognised that a small number of more highly educated black creoles was necessary to fill lower and middle administrative work or to train as teachers, Brian Moore and Michele Johnson argue that 'there were not sufficient high schools' to create a large number of 'highly educated persons who might constitute a nationalist opposition to British rule'.¹⁵⁷ Despite this, some of the main challengers to racial injustice and inequality were those African-Jamaicans who had received an education to secondary level or above. For example, the Bahamian-born Robert Love worked to promote the participation of black Jamaicans in electoral politics, and founded and edited the *Jamaica Advocate* journal that frequently challenged the colonial government. In 1889, he supported the election of Alexander Dixon, the first black candidate on Jamaica's Legislative Council, and won a seat there himself in 1906.

Another such challenger to racial inequality was the physician and political commentator, Theophilus Scholes. His two books, *The British Empire and Alliances: Or Britain's Duty to Her Colonies and Subject Races* (1899), and *Glimpses of the Ages or the "Superior" and "Inferior Races", So-called, Discussed in the Light of Science and History* (1905-1908), 'effectively challenged the prevailing racial theories and stereotypes of the times and did much to vindicate Africans and peoples of African descent from the defamation of their race'.¹⁵⁸ Scholes was also influential in the Pan-African movement. Jomo Kenyatta of

¹⁵⁶ For example, in 1899, Joseph Chamberlain, as Colonial Secretary, ordered West Indian governments to 'transfer funds allocated for general education to agricultural education': Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, p. 205.

¹⁵⁷ Pullen-Burry, *Ethiopia in Exile*, p. 244.

¹⁵⁸ Blake, "T.E.S. Scholes: The Unknown Pan Africanist" p. 78.

Kenya and Caribbean nationalist T. Ras Makonnen, ‘prominent radical Pan Africanists of the 1930s’, visited Scholes to thank him for the inspiration his writings had given them.¹⁵⁹

Evolution of a national identity

Political changes in Jamaica following the Morant Bay revolt of 1865 contributed to feelings of discontent with colonial rule amongst some sections of Jamaica’s population. Tensions over landownership in the parish of St Thomas-in-the East and the difficulties blacks had in obtaining fair treatment in the courts culminated in a group of about 400 black people led by Paul Bogle, a small landowner, marching from Stony Gut to the parish capital of Morant Bay to demand social justice. Rioting broke out, lasting for several days, and was only quelled after the Governor declared martial law.¹⁶⁰ Even though the uprising at Morant Bay seems to have been a largely local affair, rumours abounded that it was part of a larger black plot to remove all whites and coloureds from the island. Jamaica’s House of Assembly, fearful of further revolts, was easily persuaded to cede power to Britain and in 1866 Jamaica became a Crown Colony. The Jamaican elite soon came to regret the decision to move to Crown Colony rule as virtually all the powers of decision-making now lay in the hands of the colony’s governor. Whilst theoretically they should have been able to have some influence on the governors through the Council’s nominated members, ‘they found the early crown colony governors... highly autocratic and unwilling to be guided by their interests in all matters’.¹⁶¹ The constitutional changes of 1884 allowed the Legislative Council to

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁶⁰ Gad Heuman, “*The Killing Time*”: *The Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica* (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1994), p. 170.

¹⁶¹ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, p. 4.

include nine elected members, ‘any six of whom could veto financial proposals’.¹⁶² However, these could be overruled by the Governor in ‘exceptional situations’.¹⁶³ A decade later, upper and middle-class Jamaicans lost more of their influence in the political process after Joseph Chamberlain came to the Colonial Office in 1895.¹⁶⁴ Chamberlain did not believe in the West Indian colonies ruling themselves as he felt this would mean ‘the rule of a local oligarchy of whites and half breeds – always incapable and frequently corrupt’.¹⁶⁵ He therefore abolished the financial veto and reasserted a right of the Governor to appoint the full quota of nominated members.

Nevertheless, despite the white elites’ loss of political power, most statements made in favour of self-government in the period were by black spokesmen rather than white. The reasons behind this were firstly, up until the end of the nineteenth century, there were fears that a repeat of the events at Morant Bay would occur and support from Britain may have been needed to quell any potential unrest. For example, in 1866 an (unsubstantiated) report claimed that some people intended to celebrate the first anniversary of Paul Bogle’s march into Morant Bay. Another suggested that people from Bogle’s home village of Stony Gut were planning to come to Morant Bay to set fire to the town. Ten years later, the constabulary of St Thomas in the East had to be reinforced and a gun ship stationed in the harbour because of protests amongst some of the black community there.¹⁶⁶ In the twentieth century, the movement of large numbers of Jamaicans

¹⁶² Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-190*, p. 13.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁶⁴ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁵ Will, *Constitutional Change in the British West Indies, 1880-1903*, p. 253, p. 232.

¹⁶⁶ A number of estates in the River Garden district were burned, and there were protests over lack of justice for black people at the district court and the fact that East Indian indentured labourers were offered better health care than African-Jamaican workers. Heuman, “*The Killing Time*”, p.179; Robert J. Stewart, *Religion and Society in Post-Emancipation Jamaica* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), p. 184.

into Kingston in 1920 to witness Bedward's ascension attempt also invoked for some the spectre of events at Morant Bay.¹⁶⁷

Secondly, 'the local elites and imperial officials' believed that black Jamaicans 'had demonstrated their incapacity to govern by their "barbarity" at Morant Bay'.¹⁶⁸ The historian and imperialist James Anthony Froude sums up the British imperial viewpoint in his book, *The English in the West Indies*, writing that, under black rule '[t]he islands [the West Indies] would run wild again' and how, no white English governor, 'not even a bankrupt peer', would countenance ruling over a West Indian Council which consisted of 'a black parliament and a black ministry'.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, because the majority of the Jamaican population were black, fears that self-government would mean *black* government invoked the spectre of Haiti where whites had been expelled from the island and white rule overthrown after the revolution of 1791-1804.

Finally, the black and brown middle classes objected to Crown Colony rule as it blocked their chances for upward mobility. Senior appointments in the colonial administration tended to be given to white expatriates, and the unofficial members on Jamaica's governing Council were largely chosen from the same class of wealthy white merchants or planters who had made up the old House of Assembly.¹⁷⁰ This frustration at the lack of a political voice is illustrated by the number of reform organisations, such as the Jamaica League and the Jamaica Reform Club, founded in 1913 and 1922 respectively, which were established by

¹⁶⁷ One of Beckwith's elderly informants told her that he remembered 'the St. Thomas rebellion (in 1865) and the revival in 1860... Now today there is Bedward'. Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 168.

¹⁶⁸ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies or the Bow of Ulysses* (reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969, of orig. edn, London: Longmans, 1888), p. 285.

¹⁷⁰ Johnson, "The British Caribbean from Demobilization to Constitutional Decolonization", p.601; Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, p. 3.

black and coloured middle class Jamaicans in the early twentieth century. The creation of these organisations also reflects the growing nationalist feeling amongst this section of society. The Jamaica Reform Club used the motto “Jamaica for the Jamaicans” and advocated universal adult suffrage. In 1936, the Women’s Liberal Club was founded, one of the objectives of which was the ‘fostering of a national spirit’.¹⁷¹ Two more groups, the Jamaica Progressive League and the National Reform Association, which both had nationalist agendas, were established in the late 1930s.

One outcome of the growing nationalist feeling amongst the Jamaican upper and middle classes was an increased sensitivity to European and American portrayals of the island. This is illustrated in the writings of Herbert De Lisser, novelist and editor of the *Daily Gleaner* newspaper, who, according to Matthew Smith, was ‘a leading member of the first generation of brown intellectuals to assert their identity as interpreters of their own reality’.¹⁷² For example, De Lisser commented on how British interest in the West Indies had deteriorated since the eighteenth century. He noted that ‘[t]he West Indies hardly occur to the memory, so insignificant they seem as compared with other lands of vast extent and varied resources’.¹⁷³ He, like the British administrator, Henry Hesketh Bell and the Trinidadian author J.J. Thomas, also reacted to Froude’s portrayal of the area as one of decay, disorder and ‘devil-worshipping’ black populations.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Johnson, “The British Caribbean from Demobilization to Constitutional Decolonization”, pp. 603-4.

¹⁷² Matthew J. Smith, “H.G. and Haiti: An Analysis of Herbert G. DeLisser’s “Land of Revolutions””, *The Journal of Caribbean History*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2010), p. 186, p. 189.

¹⁷³ Herbert G. De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica* (Kingston: The Jamaica Times Ltd., 1913), p. 11.

¹⁷⁴ Froude, *The English in the West Indies*, p. 234; De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, p. 201. See also for example, J.J. Thomas, *Froudacity: West Indian Fables by James Anthony Froude Explained*, (with an introduction by C.L.R. James and a biographical note by Donald Wood, London: New Beacon, 1969), and Henry Hesketh J. Bell, *Obeah: Witchcraft in the West Indies*

Jamaica and the United States

In *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, De Lisser suggested that Jamaicans now had a specifically Jamaican identity, regardless of ethnicity or place of birth:

One does not read the same paper that all one's fellows read... come into close contact with all other classes of the people, eat the same food, and enjoy the same recreations, without one's mind becoming assimilated to the minds of one's countrymen.¹⁷⁵

The developing of a distinct Jamaican identity, forged in part by the sharing of customs and cultural references, was given an added emphasis in the early twentieth century when 'new understandings' of Caribbean identity began to develop as the United States replaced 'European nations as the hegemonic imperial power in the region'.¹⁷⁶ Martha Beckwith became fascinated with Jamaican folk cultures after holidaying there in 1919. She then undertook subsequent research trips in 1920, 1922 and 1924.

This was a time of increased American imperial expansion in the Caribbean. American imperial expansion, which was achieved by military and political intervention and through economic investment, had begun a century earlier. In the early nineteenth century, the Monroe Doctrine had expressed American concerns about increased European influence in the Caribbean. Drafted in 1823 under the presidency of James Monroe, the doctrine stated that 'the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintained, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for

(reprint, Westport: Negro Universities Press, 1970 of 1889 edn, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1889).

¹⁷⁵ De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, p. 48.

¹⁷⁶ B. W. Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 250, 196.

colonization by any European power'.¹⁷⁷ By the early twentieth century, American fears of European encroachment were heightened as some Caribbean governments had borrowed heavily from European banks to finance infrastructure projects and were now in debt to their creditors. This indebtedness led to the possibility that the creditor states would intervene in the Caribbean to protect their financial investments. In response, in 1904 the United States issued the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine which justified U.S. intervention in the Americas where '[c]hronic wrongdoing' or disorder took place as a means to prevent European powers from interfering in those countries.¹⁷⁸

Examples of American intervention include the occupation of Haiti between 1915 and 1934 to quell social and political unrest after the murder of the fourth Haitian president in two years. Control was imposed through martial law and a client government.¹⁷⁹ U.S. Marines were sent to Nicaragua in 1912 to quash civil wars between Liberals and Conservatives. They remained there until 1925, and returned again in 1927. U.S. forces also occupied the Dominican Republic between 1916 and 1924, again following a period of political unrest. The United States was already involved in the country's financial affairs. In 1905, it had taken control of customs collections in order to pay off debts owed to Germany after the Dominican Republic had borrowed money to build railways.

In the case of Cuba, which had been ceded by Spain to the United States in 1898, the Platt Amendment, (added to the Cuban Constitution in 1901) allowed

¹⁷⁷ Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin America* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 323.

¹⁷⁸ Theodore Roosevelt's annual message, 1904 - *Theodore Roosevelt, Presidential Address and State Papers*, 8 vols, (New York: Review of Reviews Company, 1910), vol. III, pp. 176-77, cited by Serge Ricard, "The Roosevelt Corollary", *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 36, no.1 (Mar. 2006), p. 17.

¹⁷⁹ The new president, Henri Dartiguenave was chosen by the US Navy. Heuman, *The Caribbean* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006), p. 134.

the U.S. to intervene ‘to protect life, liberty and prosperity’ and to establish a naval base at Guantanamo.¹⁸⁰ U.S. forces were sent to Cuba in 1906 for three years after a rebellion following the re-election of Tomás Estrada Palma as president and again after a rebellion by African-Cubans in 1912.¹⁸¹ They returned once more in 1917 and occupied it until 1922.

As well as attempting to settle civil unrest, U.S. military intervention was also used to protect the rapidly growing American interests in sugar and other commodities such as bananas. For example, during the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic, marines guarded sugar plantations from attacks by angry peasants who had been displaced from their land by the growth of plantations owned by multinational corporations.¹⁸² In Honduras, the US Marine Corps guarded banana plantations.¹⁸³

Barry Higman comments that the United States’ interest in the Caribbean was confined largely ‘to the greater Antilles’ and it had ‘little concern’ with British, French, or Dutch colonies.¹⁸⁴ However, American commercial interests did have an impact on Jamaica. For most of Jamaica’s colonial history, sugar had been the island’s main crop, but, from the 1880s the growing and export of bananas came to be equally important. The ships used to export the island’s banana crop also brought with them American tourists, and the American-owned United Fruit Company had a wagon on its railway there especially for tourists to view its banana

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁸¹ The rebellion occurred after a law was passed ‘banning political parties based on religion or race’. This law meant that the African-Cuban Partido Independiente de Color would no longer be legal. Heuman, *The Caribbean*, p. 133.

¹⁸² Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, p. 224, 227.

¹⁸³ Stephan Palmié and Francisco A. Scarano (eds), *A History of the Caribbean and Its Peoples* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 429.

¹⁸⁴ Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, p. 197.

plantations.¹⁸⁵ Krista Thompson argues that the boom in American tourism in the Anglophone Caribbean brought with it a widening of ‘racial fissures’ as ‘local elites capitalized on what they identified as the American tourists’ racial preferences to justify widespread segregation’. For instance, in Jamaica, Kingston’s prestigious Myrtle Bank Hotel was open only to white visitors and black people were not allowed on some of the island’s beaches which were popular with tourists.¹⁸⁶

The imperialist activities of the United States in the Caribbean also had a cultural impact on the area: for example, in ‘sport, cinema, and literature’.¹⁸⁷ Higman notes that U.S. occupations ‘were typically accompanied by increased investment in education’.¹⁸⁸ In the case of religion, American Christian sects such as the Pentecostals began to establish themselves in the Caribbean in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Migration within the Caribbean itself also played a part in disseminating American cultural influences as people moved around the region to work at American-owned fruit plantations, sugar estates, mines and oilfields.¹⁸⁹

These inter-regional migrations meant that those within the area itself came into contact with different Caribbean influences. For example, because of the rapid growth of the “American sugar kingdom” since 1898, thousands of workers from the Anglophone Caribbean travelled to Cuba and the Dominican Republic in search of employment.¹⁹⁰ Consequently, as Higman argues, American imperialism

¹⁸⁵ Krista A. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 58.

¹⁸⁶ Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, p. 15.

¹⁸⁷ Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, p. 247.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 242-243.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 247, 196, 250.

¹⁹⁰ The expansion of sugar production in the Spanish Caribbean after 1898 was formidable...in a short span of two decades, sugar production increased by a remarkable 1,062%’. César J. Ayala,

contributed to the development of distinct Caribbean identities as, through contact with a ‘wider imperial world’, the peoples of the Caribbean became aware of ‘the uniqueness of their own particular experiences’.¹⁹¹

Race and anthropology in the United States

American attitudes towards Jamaica and the wider Caribbean at the start of the twentieth century were influenced partly by its relationship with its own black and ethnic minority populations. Writing in 1911 about the United States’ growing interest and activities in the Caribbean, De Lisser noted the concerns amongst Jamaica’s black and brown population about being annexed by America because of the state of race relations there.¹⁹² The early decades of the twentieth century were a time when the United States was undergoing a period of rapid modernisation and social change coupled with heightened nationalism and fear of radicalism. Its population was becoming increasingly urban.¹⁹³ New technologies, means of communication, and industries were developed, such as ‘automobiles, movies, radio, and home appliances’.¹⁹⁴ New ways of thinking appeared. In the field of science, Albert Einstein put forward the theory of relativity, and in the 1920s, Sigmund Freud’s teachings ‘spread rapidly’ in the United States, accompanied by a gamut of books and articles on psychoanalysis.¹⁹⁵

“The American Sugar Kingdom” in Palmié and Scarano (eds), *A History of the Caribbean and Its Peoples*, p. 440.

¹⁹¹ Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, p. 250.

¹⁹² De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, pp. 11ff, 26-27.

¹⁹³ Data from the 1920 census showed that for the first time over 60% of people now lived in towns. Nathan Miller, *New World Coming: The 1920s and the Making of Modern America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2004), pp. 63- 64.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 216-217.

After a post-war slump, an economic boom helped to create ‘a full-blown consumer-oriented economy’.¹⁹⁶ The feeling of economic optimism contributed to a flurry of get-rich-quick schemes and a craze for investing in stocks and shares amongst sections of the population who would not normally have involved themselves with the stock market. Wild speculation caused the stock market to spiral out of control. Warnings that stock prices would inevitably drop and attempts to quell speculation were ignored.¹⁹⁷ In 1929, stock prices fell and in October of that year, the stock market crashed.

One major catalyst for the social changes that occurred in the United States during the early twentieth century was the effect of the First World War. A labour shortage created by men going off to fight coupled with the wartime stopping of foreign immigration meant that women were encouraged into previously male-dominated industries. During the 1920s, the number of women working outside the home decreased from wartime levels but a steady increase of women in the workforce continued throughout the decade.¹⁹⁸ African-Americans were also used to fill the wartime shortfall in the labour market and ‘hundreds and thousands’ of southern blacks migrated to work in northern industries.¹⁹⁹

Growing numbers of black people in the north contributed to a new spirit of protest amongst African-Americans, expressed culturally through the Harlem Renaissance and politically through organisations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. A more radical stream of black nationalism also developed after Marcus Garvey’s move to New York in 1916.

¹⁹⁶ Michael E. Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1925-1941* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), p. 150.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 229, 251-252.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 140-141.

¹⁹⁹ Miller, *New World Coming*, p. 48.

The United Negro Improvement Association became ‘the first mass movement aimed at working-class blacks’ in the United States.²⁰⁰ Under its auspices, Garvey established a number of other enterprises including the Black Star Line Steamship Corporation and the *Negro World* newspaper.

Whilst aspects of the Harlem Renaissance, such as its literature, drama, art and jazz, attracted whites, the social changes of the war years gave rise to racial tensions which triggered a number of riots across America. For example, over forty African-Americans were killed during an uprising at a defence plant in Texas in 1917. Another riot in Chicago in 1919 led to thirty-eight deaths and 537 people injured.²⁰¹ Racial unrest continued after the war with one of the worst cases occurring in Tulsa in 1921. After an accusation that a white woman had been assaulted by a young African-American man, the black district of Greenwood was attacked and set on fire by a white mob. Hundreds of homes, ‘schools, churches and businesses’ were razed and over one hundred people were killed.²⁰² .

Aside from the socio-racial changes in northern cities, other factors contributing to the wartime and post-war race riots were increased unemployment, rising prices and a general disillusionment that wartime sacrifices had not resulted in a better quality of life. President Woodrow Wilson ‘had made no plans for demobilisation’.²⁰³ Therefore, those who had been employed in wartime industries suddenly found themselves out of a job. Unemployed ex-servicemen searched for work still wearing their old uniforms as they had nothing else to wear.²⁰⁴ Economic unrest and the lifting of wartime restrictions on industrial action gave rise to an

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 113.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 890.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 95.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 38.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 39.

upsurge in labour stoppages: in 1919 alone, over four million workers went on strike.²⁰⁵ A new militancy in the trade union movement after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 led to fears that American trade unions had been infiltrated by foreign-born communists and anarchists.²⁰⁶ One result of this “Red Scare” was an increase in restrictions on immigration. In 1921, the Emergency Immigration Act was introduced which limited the number of immigrants from Europe per annum to ‘3 percent of the number of nationals who resided in the United States a decade earlier’.²⁰⁷ The act was altered in 1924 to further reduce immigration from central and southern Europe.²⁰⁸

These European immigrants, along with blacks, Jews and Catholics, became targets of the Ku Klux Klan which had re-emerged during the war. The Klan’s new remit included support for the white Protestant working classes, farmers, and Prohibition and as the ‘guardian of the purity of Christian women’.²⁰⁹ Its strongholds were small rural towns and the mid-West. The Klan rapidly grew throughout the immediate post-war years, reaching a peak of five million by the mid-1920s.²¹⁰ In 1925, 25,000 Klan members marched in Washington.²¹¹ However, stricter immigration restrictions and the involvement of the Klan leadership in a number of high profile scandals led to a wane in both its membership and influence.²¹²

²⁰⁵ Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, p. 6.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁰⁸ The amount of European immigration was now based upon 2 per cent of any nationality as appeared in the 1890 census as this census included fewer central and southern Europeans. George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History* (5th edition, New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2000), p. 896.

²⁰⁹ Miller, *New World Coming*, p. 144.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

²¹² For example, the number of lynchings declined from eighty-six in 1919 to nine in 1929. *Ibid.*, p. 292.

In *From Savage to Nero: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*, Lee Baker tracks how changes in race relations in the United States both mirrored and affected developments in the study of anthropology.²¹³ After the Civil War, the growing discipline of anthropology was employed to help explain concerns about social and racial inequalities in the United States. Following rapid post-bellum industrialisation and the loss of Native American lands, growing numbers of Americans became aware of ‘the contradictions between industrial capitalism and the democratic ideas of equality, freedom, and justice for all’ as espoused by the constitution.²¹⁴ Social Darwinism, an interpretation of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859), was used to explain such disparities.²¹⁵ According to this line of thinking it was a natural part of the evolutionary process for ‘the fittest individuals or races’ to advance whilst the ‘the inferior’ declined.²¹⁶

By the end of the nineteenth century, evolutionary anthropology was also used to gain public support for imperial expansion (for instance, the annexing of Hawaii and the Philippines, segregation legislation and challenges to the Radical Reconstruction anti-discrimination legislation of the 1860s. Anthropological ideas of race based on Social Darwinism appeared in ‘magazines, museum exhibits and world fairs’.²¹⁷ At the same time, American anthropology was developing as an academic discipline. By the end of the nineteenth century, it had moved away from

²¹³ Lee D. Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*, (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1998), p. 3.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²¹⁵ Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 91.

²¹⁶ Baker, *From Savage to Negro*, p. 29. In the United States, poverty was also considered an indicator of evolutionary “progress” with the poor being placed at the bottom of the scale. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

being something akin to a leisure pursuit to having its own departments in universities and professional journals. Here, too, Social Darwinism was influential. The prominent American anthropologists of this era, Daniel Brinton, Lewis Henry Morgan and John Wesley Powell, all followed the evolutionary hierarchical model of anthropology.²¹⁸

Folklore studies also reflected contemporary theories on race. Firstly, the discourse of the time placed African Americans both racially and culturally at a low level in the hierarchy of evolutionary progress. Therefore, as Bronner argues, ‘black folklore was more likely to be comically distorted on the stage than analytically reported in print’.²¹⁹ Secondly, because of post-slavery concerns over how African Americans fitted into U.S. society, collectors of black folklore were closely scrutinised in order to find out whether there was any indication in the material they accumulated of any ‘challenge to the social order’ and to ascertain whether blacks could be integrated fully into American society.²²⁰

The first examples of African-American folk culture to gain popular acceptance were spirituals. Their Christian forms and ‘re-orientation of African-American performances toward white audiences’, meant that spirituals were not regarded as threatening to the status quo.²²¹ Rather, they were seen as examples of how blacks could successfully adopt white culture. As the songs had been sung on antebellum Southern plantations, for some white Americans the spirituals formed part of a wistful reminiscence for a lost way of life. Early collections of African-American folk tales were also framed to evoke a nostalgic response. For example,

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 22, 27, 52.

²¹⁹ Bronner, *Following Tradition*, p. 100.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 100.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 103.

Joel Chandler Harris's Brer Rabbit stories first appeared in 1879 in the *Atlanta Constitution* newspaper as part of its remit for including articles which provided 'a reassuring nostalgia for the Old South before the Civil War'.²²²

Many early writings on black folk culture were by whites. However, during the late nineteenth century, more African Americans started to collect and write about their own folklore. This was partly a way for black Americans to demonstrate that they had their own, distinct culture and also because of fears that these traditions might be lost in a rapidly changing society.²²³ There was also a desire amongst African Americans to reclaim their folklore, not only to challenge prevailing stereotypes, but also to demonstrate that their traditions and culture could be seen as a source of identity, African heritage, and pride.²²⁴ For example, in *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), rather than presenting spirituals as a form of nostalgia for a bygone era or as an example of how African Americans had assimilated white culture, the black sociologist W.E.B Du Bois used them 'as a metaphor for black experience' and as examples of 'a resistant enslaved culture'.²²⁵ He also looked to Africa for the origins of the songs thereby acknowledging that black cultural forms which had existed before Africans were enslaved and transported to the New World, continued to survive and develop in the Americas.²²⁶

By the 1920s, new approaches to anthropology and folklore studies had emerged which challenged evolutionary theories. The carnage of the First World

²²² Ibid., p. 111.

²²³ Ibid., p. 118.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 121.

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 126.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 126; W.E.B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (reprint, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994, of orig. edn, Chicago: A.C. McClung, 1903), p. 158.

War had shown flaws in the Social Darwinist argument of white “Anglo-Saxon” superiority. Scientific developments in the first decades of the twentieth century, like the theory of relativity, which proposed that measurements of space and time were not absolutes but relative to the position of the observer, had an impact on anthropological theory in the form of Franz Boas’s concept of cultural relativity. The ascendancy of Boas as a leading figure in American anthropology also had an impact on the way African-American cultures were studied. Through his establishment of an anthropology department at Columbia University, editorship of the *Journal of American Folklore* from 1908 to 1924, and theories such as cultural diffusion and cultural relativity, Boas challenged Social Darwinist ideas of links between race and culture.²²⁷

Students of Boas, like Martha Beckwith, Melville Herskovits and Zora Neale Hurston, who researched African and African-American/African-Caribbean societies and folk life, also contested evolutionary theories and the contemporary “myths” surrounding these cultures. As will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapters, elements of the discourse which considered white western culture as superior to that of other races and of non-western societies appeared in Beckwith’s Jamaican work, despite her aim to record data and analyse her research findings in a scientific manner.²²⁸ She was not alone in this. For example, Maarit Forde and Diana Paton comment that even though Herskovits examined Vodou in his Haitian research, he failed to mention the nineteen-year occupation of the country by the United States, despite the persecution of Vodouists during that time

²²⁷ For example, in *The Mind of Primitive Man* Boas argued that culture is ‘the result of innumerable interacting factors and there is no evidence that the differences between human races... have any directive influence upon the course of development of culture’. Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, (revised edn, New York & London: The Free Press, 1965, of 1938 edn, New York: The Macmillan Company), p. 179.

²²⁸ This aim is mentioned on a number of occasions in her book *Folklore in America*.

and the subsequent impact the occupation had on the practice of Vodou.²²⁹ In *Tell My Horse* (1938) Zora Neale Hurston did comment on the Marines' occupation of Haiti but only from the perspective that their presence had been necessary to restore order in the country and had generally been accepted by the Haitians without much resistance.²³⁰ At times she also made sweeping statements about the character of the Haitian people; for example, writing that 'unconscious cruelty' and self-delusion were widespread throughout all levels of Haitian society.²³¹ Other instances of Hurston's belief in the cultural superiority of Americans resulting in her essentialising whole groups of people appear in her chapter "Women in the Caribbean". Here, Hurston compared the treatment of women in the United States to that of women in the Caribbean, with the lot of American women being superior.²³² Whereas in America, '[t]he majority of men' believed that women 'ought to have law and privileges and pay and perquisites', in the Caribbean, 'all women are inferior to all men by God and law'.²³³

Folk culture and national identity

Whilst the majority of Boas's students were white, the interwar years saw a growing interest in folklore and anthropology amongst black artists, writers and scholars. Again the study of anthropology was used to challenge the negative stereotypes which still dominated white ideas of African-American culture. For instance, Zora Neale Hurston overturned prevalent ideas that the folk culture of non-urban blacks was somehow less advanced or unsophisticated. In *Mules and*

²²⁹ Maarit Forde and Diana Paton, "Introduction" in Paton and Forde, *Obeah and Other Powers*, p. 18.

²³⁰ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, pp. 85-87.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²³² *Ibid.*, pp. 57, 58.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

Men (1935), she presented the folklore of African Americans in rural Florida as ‘complex and expressive’ and of African origins.²³⁴

The idea that folk culture could provide a people or nation with a sense of identity was becoming of growing interest in Jamaica in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Jamaican elites started to look afresh at their folk culture as a means of demonstrating ‘an awareness of the existence of “local colour”’.²³⁵ Moore and Johnson have argued that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this “local colour” was becoming more and more ‘Afro-creole’ despite the continuing attempts of the ruling classes, the education system and churches to impose British middle-class cultural forms.²³⁶ The interest in Jamaican folk culture was not confined to the upper classes. Hurston, who visited Jamaica in the 1930s, noted an increased interest in African-Jamaican folk culture, commenting that ‘the black people of Jamaica are beginning to respect themselves. They are beginning to love their own things like their songs, their Anansi stories and proverbs and dances’.²³⁷ Her argument is illustrated by the growing number of collections of African-Jamaican folk tales, songs and proverbs made during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, the first instance of Anansi stories appearing in print in Jamaica occurred in Matthew Lewis’ *Journal of a West India Proprietor, 1815-1817* (1845), and there are then no recorded versions until “Tom’s Nancy Story” was published in 1877. However, by 1900,

²³⁴ Baker, *From Savage to Negro*, p. 162.

²³⁵ Patrick Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902*, p. 85.

²³⁶ Brian L. Moore, and Michele A. Johnson, “*They Do As They Please*”, p. 412.

²³⁷ Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 9.

forty different Jamaican Anansi stories had been published and collections continued to appear throughout the early twentieth century.²³⁸

Some of the stories, such as those that appeared in Walter Jekyll's 1907 compilation, *Jamaica Song and Story: Annancy Stories, Digging Sings, Dancing Tunes and Ring Tunes*, were transcribed in the previously denigrated Jamaican creole dialect. De Lisser's early writings were published in "The All Jamaica Library Series" which was established by the editor of *The Jamaica Times*, Thomas MacDermot (aka the poet Tom Redcam) between 1904 and 1909. MacDermot's aim with the series was to produce Jamaican writings on Jamaican subjects for Jamaican readers. Early works by Claude McKay and W. Adolphe Roberts were also featured.²³⁹

Poems in creole by Tom Redcam and Claude McKay were also published and De Lisser included it in his writings. The use of creole by some Jamaican writers was in part a desire to preserve what were regarded as "vanishing" cultural forms in an age of rapid industrialisation and technological progress. However if, as Moore and Johnson argue, '[l]anguage lies at the core of a people's culture', then the use of creole language is significant. Even though the Jamaican upper and middle classes at times spoke creole, they regarded it as the language of the uneducated and lower classes. Even though he received a gold medal for his poetry from the Institute of Jamaica, McKay stopped using the Jamaican dialect in his poetry after he moved to the United States.²⁴⁰ He defended the change in style as, despite the praise he received for his early dialect poems, he believed that

²³⁸ Laura Tanna, *Jamaican Folk Tales and Oral Histories* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica Publications, 1984), pp. 21-22.

²³⁹ Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh (eds), *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 27-28.

²⁴⁰ Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902*, p. 84.

Jamaicans ‘thought I was not serious’.²⁴¹ Yet because creole was used in literature and in the collections of stories and songs made by folklorists, it reinforces the theory that by the early twentieth century, Jamaican cultural identity was influenced by African-creole forms.²⁴²

Nonetheless, Patrick Bryan believes that ‘[t]he evolution of a national consciousness was expressed through a recognition of a folk-idiom which could be appropriated without violating the principle that Jamaica’s culture was British’.²⁴³ The idea that ‘Jamaica’s culture was British’ was reinforced in the late post-emancipation era by the British government’s attempts to impose British culture and ideals on the colony in the wake of the Morant Bay rebellion. The scale of the rebellion at Morant Bay and the harsh reprisals of its aftermath had shocked both Britain and Jamaica. In the process of suppressing the uprising nearly 500 people were killed, eighty-five without a trial, and 1,000 homes burned down – including an entire black village.²⁴⁴ As a consequence, the British Government felt that the answer to keeping order and improving Jamaica’s prosperity was by ‘transforming the beliefs, values, customs, character and behaviour of the Jamaican people themselves’ as it was hoped that British rule would become more palatable to an anglicised African-Jamaican population.²⁴⁵

Moreover, by the start of the twentieth century, the British Government wanted to create a unified empire sharing a common culture based on British middle-class values and ideas. The optimism and race pride of the mid- and late

²⁴¹ Mervyn Morris (ed.), *My Green Hills of Jamaica and Five Jamaican Short Stories* (Kingston: Heinemann Educational Books (Caribbean), 1979), p. 87.

²⁴² Moore and Johnson, “*They Do As They Please*”, p. 82.

²⁴³ Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902*, p. 85.

²⁴⁴ Heuman, “*The Killing Time*”, p. 170; William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment 1830-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 389.

²⁴⁵ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, p. 315.

nineteenth century was now somewhat quelled by fears that Britain's white dominions, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa, wanted to break free from Empire. Confidence in racial superiority had been badly dented by the South African War of 1899-1902 where 'an imperial army of a quarter of a million men had taken three years... to subdue an amateur backwoods army' and the recruitment of soldiers revealed an alarmingly poor state of health amongst the British working class: 3,000 young men had to be invalided out of the army because of acute dental problems.²⁴⁶ There were also fears of increased economic competition from America and Germany, emerging players on the world power stage.²⁴⁷ Consequently, it was felt that to compete with larger powers, Britain itself needed to expand and this could be done by 'drawing its colonies into a closer, more personal relationship'.²⁴⁸ Measures aimed at not only strengthening Britain's position but also improving imperial unity were considered, as was encouraging displays of loyalty to the British monarchy and empire. For example, from 1902, Queen Victoria's birthday was designated "Empire Day": a day intended by its creator, the Earl of Meath, for people throughout the empire to reflect on 'their privileges and responsibilities as British subjects'.²⁴⁹

Aside from fears of a new Morant Bay, many of the Jamaican elites supported the "civilising mission" because of a desire to promote Jamaica both as modern and progressive in order to encourage investment in the country and as a tourist destination. Tourism promoters wanted to portray Jamaica as an island that

²⁴⁶ Ronald Hyam, "The British Empire in the Edwardian Era", in Brown and Louis (eds), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume IV*, p. 50.

²⁴⁷ For example, in 1880 the United States made up 14.7% of the world manufacturing output compared to Britain's 22.95; by 1900 it had risen to 23.6% compared to Britain's 18.5%. Andrew S. Thompson, *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics c.1880-1932* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), p. 23.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁴⁹ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, p. 294.

was simultaneously tropical and exotic, yet unthreatening. Travel writers helped to disseminate this message to potential visitors. For example, in magic lantern lectures of her travels, Bessie Pullen-Burry would include the fact that she had visited the island's 'prisons, hospitals and asylums' to reassure her audience that African-Jamaicans were being disciplined and punished.²⁵⁰ Postcards sold to tourists also became a means to dispel notions of Jamaica as disease-ridden and uncivilised. In her work on representations of Jamaica for the tourist industry, Krista Thompson argues that postcard images of black Jamaicans washing or doing laundry were used to demonstrate the island's cleanliness and 'the civilization of the natives'.²⁵¹

Some of the most susceptible to the adoption of British bourgeois values and ideas of culture were the black middle classes, or those who aspired to social mobility and respectability. The effectiveness of British cultural hegemony in Jamaica can be illustrated by those like Theophilus Scholes who, on the one hand had great pride in their African heritage and fought against racism, yet on the other, had 'thoroughly internalised' the notion 'of the superiority of western civilization'.²⁵² Despite writing on the achievements of black people and condemning the British Empire's treatment of its non-white subjects, some of Scholes' views on civilization were akin to those held by white imperialists and social Darwinists. He felt that contemporary Africans, though making progress, lagged behind white Westerners: 'in their early histories – political, social, and religious – the most

²⁵⁰ Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, p. 69.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁵² Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902*, p. 239, p. 254.

forward nations of today were in a condition precisely similar to that in which most African tribes are now found'.²⁵³

Marcus Garvey presents a similar duality. In 1936, he criticised the black Jamaican middle classes for having 'developed more of the white psychology than of black outlook'.²⁵⁴ Yet, some of his ideas on progress and civilization reveal the effectiveness of the process of cultural hegemony that was taking place in Jamaica. For example, in 1914 Garvey wrote that one of the objectives of the UNIA included: 'To Assist in Civilizing the *Backward* Tribes of Africa'.²⁵⁵ In a speech made in 1921 Garvey stated that:

Three hundred years ago forty million Negroes were taken from Africa as slaves to the Western Hemisphere and the time has come for the Negro to use his civilization and Christianization to redeem the motherland.²⁵⁶

This echoes the views of white imperialists such as Enos Nuttall, Bishop of Jamaica from 1880 to 1893, who regarded slavery as an act of Divine Providence which provided Africans with 'a period of transition from African savagery to modern civilization'.²⁵⁷

The duality of attitudes to be found amongst the black middle classes is not surprising, given that even those black Jamaicans who had risen socially to positions such as doctors or lawyers were still not regarded with the same degree

²⁵³ Theophilus E.S. Scholes, *The British Empire and Alliances: Or Britain's Duty to Her Colonies and Subject Races* (London: E. Stock, 1899), p. 282.

²⁵⁴ Garvey, *The Blackman*, Sept/Oct 1936 cited in Rupert Lewis, "Garvey's Perspective on Jamaica" in Lewis and Bryan (eds) *Garvey*, p. 233.

²⁵⁵ Marcus Garvey, *A Talk with Afro-West Indians: The Negro Race and its Problems* (Kingston, 1914) in Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 1, p. 62. My italics.

²⁵⁶ Speech printed in the *Daily Gleaner*, 26 March 1921, cited in *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 280.

²⁵⁷ Nuttall's biographer, Frank Cundall, describes the bishop as 'a keen imperialist'. Cited in Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902*, p. 50; Enos Nuttall, "The Negro Race", in H. H. Montgomery (ed.), *Mankind and the Church, by Seven Bishops* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1907) [consulted at <http://anglicanhistory.org/aus/hhmontgomery/mankind1907/nuttall01.html> (12 May 2007)].

of respect as whites of equivalent status.²⁵⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, social status came to be defined by ‘British-derived’ culture, as well as race and colour.²⁵⁹ Black Jamaicans with social and political aspirations ‘did their utmost to acquire the essentials of British culture’, values and morality, even if, in the case of the members of the black intelligentsia such as Scholes and Garvey, it meant distancing themselves from the cultural and religious practices of the mass of African-Jamaicans whose rights they fought for.²⁶⁰

Consequently, by the time of Martha Beckwith’s first visit to Jamaica, although there was the championing by middle-class Jamaicans of some kinds of Jamaican folk culture such as songs and stories, other types, like African-Jamaican religions, were still considered by many elite or educated Jamaicans as forms of a lower class culture in need of reform or eradication. As the majority of working-class Jamaicans were black, folk religions were also part of a popular and academic discourse which held that African or African-creole spiritual beliefs were either primitive or degenerate. However, the following chapter examines Beckwith’s views on one folk religion, condemned by its detractors as sorcery, which transcended the boundaries of both race and class: the practice of Obeah.

²⁵⁸ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, p. 10.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Chapter 2: Obeah: ‘religion of the shadow world’

Obeah and Obeah lore

Buckra lost him sheep, boy, said-a Michael,
You hear it say La Morris a Tom-fool man, now what can he do,
E-od-e-e, e-do, e-do-e-e, e-do, e-e-do-e-e-i,
You hear it say La Morris a Tom-fool man, now what can he do!²⁶¹

In this extract from a song entitled “Buckra Lost His Sheep”, the singer suggests consulting La Morris, ‘a famous obeah practitioner’, to see if he can detect the sheep or the person who stole them. La Morris is called upon again in “I Walk the Road With Your Bread Basket” to give the singer protection from an enemy, Dalfus, who is trying to bewitch him:

Me a walk a road wid you bread basket,
Me a walk a road wid you bread basket,
Oh, if you heah me dead come tak’ up Dalfus.

You heah it say La Morris a Tom-fool man, now what can he do!²⁶²

Both songs, collected by Martha Beckwith in the 1920s, give an indication of some of the roles Obeah men and women played in early twentieth-century Jamaica: in this case detecting theft and offering protection from curses and spells. This chapter will explore Obeah practice and attitudes towards it in the late post-emancipation era with a particular focus on Beckwith’s belief that it was a system of beliefs which could be used for either good or evil.

²⁶¹ Beckwith, *Jamaica Folklore*, pp. 26-27.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

Enslaved Africans were unable to bring any religious artefacts with them from their homeland, but their priests and religious and spiritual beliefs could still travel.²⁶³ These beliefs initially re-emerged in Jamaica in the forms of Obeah, Myal and Convince.²⁶⁴ There is evidence of Obeah practice in the Anglophone Caribbean since at least the early eighteenth century as research by Kenneth Bilby and Jerome Handler shows that the word “Obeah” was being used in Barbados to describe a certain set of practices from the 1710s. The term first appeared in the Jamaican historical record in 1760 when Obeah practitioners were linked to the slave rebellion of that year and the Jamaican Assembly passed a law banning its practice.²⁶⁵

Obeah: questions of etymology and origins

Whilst mentions of Obeah and its practitioners are included in Beckwith’s collections of African-Jamaican proverbs, Anansi stories, Christmas customs and plant lore, it is in *Black Roadways* where she considered the subject in the greatest detail. Beckwith first examined its etymology and provenance, looking at the idea put forward by a number of earlier writers that the term derived from an Ancient Egyptian word for a serpent, *ob*. She wondered if the role snakes play in Vodou may have had an influence on this theory since one of the major loa in Haitian Vodou is Danbala/Dambala, who is typically represented as a serpent. Visiting

²⁶³Edward Seaga, “The Folk Roots of Jamaican Cultural Identity”, *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 2 (June, 2005), p. 90.

²⁶⁴ Whilst one definition of Convince is a term used to describe the experience of possession by the Holy Spirit during Native Baptist meetings, an actual Convince sect existed. Donald Hogg, “The Convince Cult in Jamaica” in Sidney Mintz (ed.), *Papers in Caribbean Anthropology* (reprint, New Haven: Human Relations Area Press, 1970, of orig. edn, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 4.

²⁶⁵ J.S. Handler and K.M. Bilby, “On the Early Use and Origin of the Term ‘Obeah’ in Barbados and the Anglophone Caribbean”, *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2001), pp. 88-89.

Haiti in the 1930s, Zora Neale Hurston noted how live snakes were kept at hounforts with altars to Dambala.²⁶⁶

Another possible influence on the link between serpents and Obeah that Beckwith considered was the behaviour of the Jamaican yellow snake which ‘eats eggs and sleeps in hollows of fig and cotton trees...’.²⁶⁷ A number of commentators on Obeah in the late nineteenth century mentioned that snakes were used in Obeah. Thomas Banbury noted that Obeah practitioners at times would “set” snakes upon people. These snakes would then be able to seek out and kill their victims.²⁶⁸ Writing about Obeah practice in Grenada, Henry Hesketh Bell noted how a harmless black snake called a criboe was supposed to become poisonous when used by Obeah people.²⁶⁹ Both cotton trees and eggs also have associations with Obeah practice since spirits or duppies are believed to inhabit the roots of the silk cotton tree and eggs are part of the Obeah man or woman’s repertoire. For example, the egg of the Cuban nighthawk was used ‘to put obeah on another, for he alone knows how to break it so as bring out sores all over the other’s body.’²⁷⁰

However, whilst Martha Beckwith did not expressly disagree with Obeah’s etymology deriving from *ob*, she felt that serpent worship did not seem to tally with Obeah as it was practised and understood in Jamaica in the early twentieth century.²⁷¹ Some of her contemporaries also felt that there was no connection between any kind of serpent worship and Obeah. For example, the editor of the *Daily Gleaner* newspaper, Herbert De Lisser, who wrote about African-Jamaican

²⁶⁶ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 118.

²⁶⁷ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 104, 122.

²⁶⁸ Banbury, *Jamaica Superstitions*, pp.15-16.

²⁶⁹ Bell, *Obeah*, p. 5.

²⁷⁰ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 89, 120-121.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

folk practices both in his novels and some of his articles, dismissed any links between serpents and Obeah, arguing that, after having read works on West African religion and witchcraft, he could find very little about snakes in them.²⁷² Anthropologist Joseph John Williams also disagreed with any links between serpent worship and Jamaican Obeah.²⁷³

In his influential writings on the etymology of Obeah, Williams ascribed its origins to West Africa where it was a form of Ashanti witchcraft - its name deriving from the Ashanti word *obayifo* meaning “witch”.²⁷⁴ He reasoned that the similarity between the word *obayifo* and the name of a malevolent deity, Obboney, were suggestive of a connection between the two.²⁷⁵ Williams’s definition was derived in no small part from eighteenth-century sources such as Edward Long’s *History of Jamaica* (1774) and Bryan Edwards’s *History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies* (1793).²⁷⁶ Williams was also influenced by the contemporary writings of Africanist and anthropologist, Captain R.S. Rattray. In *Religion and Art in the Ashanti* (1927), Rattray wrote that the *obayifo* was the “servant” of a Gold Coast and West African forest monster called Sasabonsam.²⁷⁷ Similar to Obboney in its malicious nature and desire for human and animal sacrifices, Williams believed its name derived from *obonsam*, an evil spirit who ruled over the souls of the wicked dead.²⁷⁸ Such linking of Sasabonsam with

²⁷² De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, p. 108.

²⁷³ Williams, *Voodooos and Obeahs*, pp. 119, 132.

²⁷⁴ On Williams’s influence throughout the twentieth century, see J.S. Handler and K.M. Bilby, “Obeah: Protection and Healing in West Indian Slave Life”, *The Journal of Caribbean History*, vol 38, no. 2 (2004), pp. 157, 163.

²⁷⁵ Williams, *Voodooos and Obeahs*, p. 200.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 108. ff and Joseph John Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica* (reprint, date unknown, Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, of orig. edn, New York: The Dial Press, 1934), pp. 23-49.

²⁷⁷ Robert Sutherland Rattray, *Religion and Art in the Ashanti*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), cited in Williams, *Voodooos and Obeahs*, p. 130.

²⁷⁸ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 61.

Jamaican Obeah could perhaps also be supported by a West African belief that Sasabonsam, like Jamaican duppies, inhabited the roots of the silk cotton tree.²⁷⁹

However, Bilby and Handler have challenged Williams's idea of the Ashanti origins of Obeah and it being a form of sorcery or maleficent witchcraft. They argue that because whites used "Obeah" as 'a catch-all term' for non-European spiritual and supernatural ideas and practices of which they strongly disapproved, those seeking its origins tended to look for African words and references which had similarly negative meanings.²⁸⁰ Instead, for Bilby and Handler, the origins of Obeah's etymology could lie in Igbo or a related language spoken by those in the Niger Delta where it has a morally neutral or positive meaning: for instance, words such as *dibia* meaning "healer" in the West African Ibibio language or *abia* whose meaning encompasses 'esoteric knowledge, including knowledge of herbal healing'.²⁸¹

Beckwith had also examined the idea of a West African link to Obeah. Like Williams, she cited the eighteenth-century planter and historian Bryan Edwards's view that in the Kromanti religion of West Africa, there was a deity called Obboney who could only be placated by human sacrifice, and she considered if this god had provided the origins for Jamaican Obeah. However, Beckwith took a different stance to Williams. Even if the etymology of Obeah could be traced back to Obboney, she did not believe that Obeah in early twentieth-century Jamaica possessed 'any ruling character or spirit of evil in Edwards' sense of the word'.²⁸²

²⁷⁹ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* (reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 2003, of orig. edn, London, 1897), p. 509.

²⁸⁰ Handler and Bilby, "On the Early Use and Origin of the Term 'Obeah' in Barbados and the Anglophone Caribbean", p. 87.

²⁸¹ Handler and Bilby, "Obeah: Protection and Healing in West Indian Slave Life", p. 163.

²⁸² Bryan Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (3rd edn, London: John Stockdale, 1801), pp. 106-7 cited in Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 105-106.

Obeah practice

Alongside the manipulation of spirits, a variety of charms, plants, and animals were utilised in Obeah, for both benign and malevolent purposes. These included healing and protection from evil, divination, love spells, detection of stolen property, the swaying of court cases, and ways of getting revenge or harming one's enemies. In *Black Roadways*, Beckwith, like many other writers on Jamaican folk religions, recorded the various materials connected with the working of Obeah. Her list included objects often associated with death such as 'little carved coffins, bones... teeth, blood, and grave dirt'.²⁸³ As well as parts of animals' bodies being used in Obeah practice, live animals were also regarded as having associations with Obeah. Beckwith found that goats, pigs and cows were the most commonly feared mammals. The most frequently recurring birds in Obeah lore were the white cockerel, the sensay fowl, the Cuban nighthawk, and the peel-neck.²⁸⁴ Small reptiles such as toads, frogs and lizards were also 'the common tools of the Obeah-man'.²⁸⁵ Unusual pets were believed to be kept 'for obeah purposes': for example, a baker was suspected of keeping a mongoose 'to lick his bread and make it sell well' and a shopkeeper kept a ground dove in his pocket in the hope of retrieving some money he had lost.²⁸⁶

Human hair and finger nail parings, parts of animals such as eggs, feathers, skulls, horns, hooves and shells, along with dried plants and seeds, could be found in the bundles made by Obeah practitioners. These bundles, or bottles containing similar substances, would be either buried or placed near the person that Obeah

²⁸³ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 109.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122,

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

was to be worked on. For example, Beckwith recounted the case of a foreman of the public works in Port Antonio who saw a man burying something in the ground near his office. When the object was dug up, it was found to be a bundle containing some seeds. The man who buried it confessed that he had done so because he wanted to get money from the foreman.²⁸⁷

Obeah practitioners had long held a reputation for causing death, whether by killing a victim themselves or selling materials to those who wished to kill.²⁸⁸ Beckwith heard from one of her informants, Mercilla Hopkins, that on his deathbed, an Obeah man called John Taylor had confessed to killing ‘many people’.²⁸⁹ Obeah practitioners were especially renowned for their skills as poisoners: poisons would be added to food or were ingested through the skin as detailed in one technique mentioned by Thomas Banbury.²⁹⁰ A person would give the underwear of their intended victim to an Obeah man or woman who then soaked it in a poison. When the toxic underwear was worn, the poison would be absorbed through the skin.²⁹¹ The Obeah practitioners’ reputation as poisoners was still around in the 1920s. Lewis Peart, another of Beckwith’s informants, would not grow bitter cassava despite its value as a food plant, as he feared accusations of poisoning. Juice from bitter cassava was believed to be so poisonous that a small amount under a finger nail was enough to prove fatal. Peart also kept ‘a nut of the antidote vine’ in case of poisoning.²⁹²

²⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 109, 114.

²⁸⁸ ‘The Obeah Man is perhaps oftenest sought by one who nurses a grudge and wishes revenge’ - Ibid., p. 135.

²⁸⁹ Martha Warren Beckwith, “Some Religious Cults in Jamaica”, *The American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1923), p. 37.

²⁹⁰ Banbury, *Jamaica Superstitions*, p. 7.

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁹² Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 137-138.

One of the most common methods of setting Obeah was through manipulating the spirits of the dead to harm the living. Beckwith was told that duppies, a form of spirit distinct from the soul, could be caught by tempting them from their graves with a meal of eggs, rice and rum.²⁹³ Duppies of the living were also vulnerable to capture by Obeah practitioners, and illness could be caused by Obeah men or women working magic on a person's captured duppy.²⁹⁴

The practitioners

Along with lists of the materials used in Obeah, physical depictions of Obeah practitioners often appeared in ethnographical accounts. These descriptions of Obeah men and women can provide an insight into how they were viewed by commentators on the practice. One predominant description, in texts both old and relatively modern, is of someone aged and/or having some kind of physical deformity or particularly distinctive features.²⁹⁵ For instance, Bryan Edwards described Obeah practitioners as 'old men' with 'hoary heads and a somewhat peculiarly harsh and forbidding aspect'.²⁹⁶ In "Something About Obeah" (1891) by Herbert Thomas, a white inspector in the Jamaican constabulary with an interest in the subject, Obeah practitioners were divided into two classes. The first type being 'dirty, ignorant, and deformed in some way' and who genuinely believed they had preternatural powers. The second type was the charlatan.²⁹⁷ Visiting

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 136.

²⁹⁴ Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994), p. 27.

²⁹⁵ See, for example, Leonard Barrett, *The Sun and the Drum: African Roots in Jamaican Folk Tradition* (Kingston: Sangster's Book Stores in association with Heinemann, 1976), p. 75.

²⁹⁶ Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, cited in Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 107.

²⁹⁷ Thomas, "Something About Obeah" (1891) cited from May Robinson and M.J. Walhouse, "Obeah Worship in the East and West Indies", *Folklore*, vol. 4, no. 2 (June, 1893) by Beckwith in *Black Roadways*, p. 107.

Jamaica at the start of the twentieth century, the British travel writer and anthropologist, Bessie Pullen-Burry, was told that the Obeah ‘man’ was ‘generally a most forbidding-looking person’.²⁹⁸ Seventy years later, Leonard Barrett described an Obeah man of his acquaintance as having a ‘somewhat deformed’ left hand and extremely hairy eyebrows and ears.²⁹⁹

Particularly distinctive eyes were another feature indicative of an Obeah person. Joseph Williams attributed this to damage done to their optic nerves as children where, as part of the training for their ‘vocation’, they forced themselves to stare at the sun for long periods at a time.³⁰⁰ Inspector Thomas mentioned Obeah practitioners may have ‘a wall eye’, and the one encountered by Leonard Barrett possessed ‘shifty’ eyes.³⁰¹

Although she interviewed some Obeah people during the course of her Jamaican research, Beckwith’s take on the physical appearance of Obeah practitioners was fairly brief, consisting mainly of a couple of passages in *Black Roadways* citing the depictions by Bryan Edwards and Herbert Thomas mentioned above. She focussed more on the second class of Thomas’s divisions of Obeah people. According to Thomas, these were smartly dressed and ‘intelligent’, well aware their powers were fake, and with expectations that they would be well-paid for their services.³⁰² The idea of practitioners of beliefs that were classed as “witchcraft” or “magic” being regarded as charlatans was not new and transcended the Anglophone Caribbean. In Britain, an Act of 1736 repealed existing statutes against witchcraft and introduced a new law which classified the practice of magic

²⁹⁸ Pullen-Burry, *Jamaica As It Is, 1903*, p. 135

²⁹⁹ Barrett, *The Sun and the Drum*, p. 75.

³⁰⁰ Williams, *Voodooos and Obeahs*, p. 217.

³⁰¹ Thomas, “Something About Obeah” cited in Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 107; Barrett, *The Sun and the Drum*, p. 75.

³⁰² Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 107.

as no longer something which could potentially be real but as plainly fraudulent.³⁰³

A similar downgrading took place in Jamaica where it moved from being a capital offence to ‘a form of fraud.’³⁰⁴

As illustrated by Thomas’s classifications, the idea of Obeah practitioners as charlatans continued to have an influence on external commentators on folk religions in the late post-emancipation period.³⁰⁵ Beckwith described Sam Thompson, one Obeah man she was introduced to, as ‘an undoubted fraud, fully aware that he was playing tricks,... and that he was employing them to cheat the people and get their money.’³⁰⁶ Banbury likened Obeah practitioners to Simon Magus, the sorcerer encountered by the apostles in the New Testament.³⁰⁷ Bessie Pullen-Burry described them as ‘champion swindlers’.³⁰⁸ For De Lisser, the Obeah man was ‘not so much a terror as a fraud’.³⁰⁹

As well as the dishevelled unfortunate or the slick fraudster, another depiction of Obeah practitioners was of someone who was an African rather than a creole. For example, the planter and historian Edward Long mentioned an Obeah man involved in Tacky’s rebellion who was ‘an old Coromantin’.³¹⁰ Monica Schuler notes that in the early decades of the nineteenth century, Africans, especially those who were elderly and working in solitary jobs, were suspected of

³⁰³ Owen Davies, *Popular Magic and Cunning Folk in English History* (London and New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), pp. 20-21.

³⁰⁴ Diana Paton, “Obeah Acts”, p. 6.

³⁰⁵ For example, Pullen-Burry, *Jamaica As It Is, 1903*, p. 134; De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, p. 111, 119.

³⁰⁶ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 180.

³⁰⁷ Banbury, *Jamaica Superstitions*, p. 7.

³⁰⁸ Pullen-Burry, *Jamaica As It Is, 1903*, p. 134.

³⁰⁹ De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, p. 111.

³¹⁰ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica or General Survey of Ancient and Modern State of that Island: With Reflections on its Situations, Settlements, Inhabitants climate, Products, Commerce, Laws and Government* (with a new introduction by George Metcalf, London: Frank Cass & Co. ltd, 1970, reprint of orig. edn, London, T. Lowndes, 1774, 3 vols, vol. II), p. p. 451.

being Obeah practitioners.³¹¹ This image continued in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sir Henry Hesketh Bell, a Briton who worked in Grenada's Inland Revenue Department during the 1880s, described an Obeah man he encountered as 'a wizened-up old African.'³¹² A late nineteenth-century tract detailing the exploits of an Obeah man, George Elleh, described him as an "African" and an article in the *Gleaner* on the popularity of a healing spring in Williamsfield in 1895, noted that the father of the woman who ministered at the spring was 'an African said to be learned in the mysteries of Obeahism'.³¹³ One of the main protagonists in Herbert De Lisser's novel, *The White Witch of Rosehall* (1929), a book in which African-Jamaican folk beliefs play a central role, is an Obeah practitioner called Takoo, who is described as an African from Guinea.³¹⁴

Although Beckwith mentioned that her informants on Obeah were black or brown, she did not say whether they were African (as opposed to creole). However, when writing about the Maroons whose culture was strongly associated with Africa, she commented that they knew:

"stronger obeah" than any other group; they are more cunning in herb magic; ... and they know old songs in this speech "strong enough to bewitch anybody"; they employ old arts which deal with spirits.³¹⁵

A caveat should be applied to Beckwith's use of the phrase "stronger obeah" as she may have been using it to cover all types of Maroon spirit work. Although one

³¹¹ Monica Schuler, *"Alas, Alas, Kongo": A Social History of Indentured African Immigration into Jamaica, 1841 – 1865* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 36.

³¹² Bell, *Obeah*, p. 2.

³¹³ "The Full Confession of the Great Obeahman, Old George Elleh: A Native of Hampton Road in Porus, National Library of Jamaica, MST 1842, no. 2, cited in Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led nor Driven*, p. 22; "Bedwardism in S. Catherine", *Daily Gleaner*, October 26, 1895 [consulted at <http://gleaner.newspaper.archive.com> (28 August 2008)].

³¹⁴ Herbert G. De Lisser, *The White Witch of Rosehall* (reprint, London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1982 of orig. end, London: Ernest Benn, 1929), p. 75.

³¹⁵ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 36, 191.

of Beckwith's informants was a Maroon 'Medicine-man' who had a 'reputation for knowledge of herb medicines and of songs to raise the dead', she made little detailed mention of any kind of Maroon spiritual beliefs.³¹⁶ As well as their own form of Obeah, practised by Maroon *feteman*, or Kromanti ritual specialists, Maroons also followed Kromanti spiritual practises.³¹⁷ Beckwith noted the Maroons' use of Kromanti a number of times in *Black Roadways* but only in its context as a secret language or in other types of culture such as songs.³¹⁸

Some commentators believe that because of the Maroons' relative isolation and their ability to maintain their own law, elements of African culture remain, if not in a "purer" form in Maroon settlements, then at least less diluted by other contacts than elsewhere in Jamaica. Maroons were escaped slaves who had formed settlements in some of the less accessible areas of the island and had fought a series of wars against the English until the early eighteenth century. Unable to defeat them, the English signed treaties with two of the major Maroon groups in 1739. These granted the Maroons tracts of land and local jurisdiction over their communities. Maroon villages were closed to new runaways and were largely self-contained societies until Christian missionaries started to establish mission stations there in the late 1820s.³¹⁹ Visiting Accompong in the 1930s, Zora Neale Hurston commented that there seemed to be an 'utter unconsciousness of what is going on in the world outside' the Maroon settlement.³²⁰ Beckwith believed that this separateness was cultural as she noted that:

³¹⁶ Beckwith, *Jamaica Folklore*, pp. 4, 49.

³¹⁷ See Kenneth M. Bilby, *True-Born Maroons* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), p. 289ff for examples of the Maroon *fete*-man's utilisation of Obeah.

³¹⁸ 'They command a secret tongue (the so-called Kromanti)' - Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 191.

³¹⁹ Barbara K. Kopytoff, "Religious Change among the Jamaican Maroons: The Ascendance of the Christian God within a Traditional Cosmology", *Journal of Social History*, vol. 20, no. 3 (Spring, 1987), p. 465.

³²⁰ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 23.

[t]he Maroons today represent a kind of secret society isolated from other blacks not only politically but by the tradition of mystery with which they continue to surround themselves.³²¹

African elements in Maroon culture can be traced in both their language and their spiritual beliefs. According to the Jamaican linguist Mervyn Alleyne, Maroon language is largely based on Twi-Ashanti.³²² Their spiritual traditions also have strong African roots. Donald Hogg argues that such traditions were kept strong in early Maroon communities because of their belief that ‘Christian spirits favored the enemy’.³²³ One element of Maroon religion which indicates African origins is their belief in a Supreme Being who was remote from day-to-day affairs. The spirits of the dead were the ones involved in everyday life and thus supplicated.³²⁴ A further link of Maroon religion with Africa is illustrated by the idea that Maroon religion is believed to be the basis of Convince, another early Jamaican spiritual practice.³²⁵ Convince mixes strong African elements such as possession by ancestral spirits and the sacrifice of animals alongside Christian forms of spirituality; the anthropologist Donald Hogg noted that, in his opinion, only Kumina ‘shows a more African character’.³²⁶ When studying Convince groups in the 1950s, Hogg was told by his informants that it had originated in the Maroon communities of the Blue Mountains. It then spread to non-Maroon communities after the treaty of 1739 when settlers established villages in areas

³²¹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 191.

³²² Mervyn C. Alleyne, *The Roots of Jamaican Culture*, (London: Pluto, 1988), p. 122.

³²³ Hogg, “The Convince Cult in Jamaica”, p. 20.

³²⁴ Though the amount of involvement God has in human lives varies between different ethnic groups in Africa, some, like the Ashanti, ‘have a pantheon of divinities through whom God manifests himself’. - John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (reprint, 1999, Oxford and Portsmouth: Heinemann of 2nd edn, Oxford and Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1989), pp. 44, 75.

³²⁵ Hogg, “The Convince Cult in Jamaica”, p. 4; Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736-1831* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 201.

³²⁶ Hogg, “The Convince Cult in Jamaica”, pp. 6, 17.

close to Maroon territories and some Maroons began to migrate from their strongholds to the surrounding villages. Obeah plays an important part in both Convince and Maroon religion. Hogg found that Convince leaders practised Obeah and in Maroon communities, the power to manipulate these spirits 'lay in the hands of certain ritual specialists called obeah men and women'.³²⁷

Regardless of whether aspects of Maroon culture were more purely African or had become a blend of a variety of influences, what matters here is the idea that Maroon culture was strongly linked to Africa. If their Obeah was indeed considered to be more powerful, then this connection with Africa reiterates the idea of Obeah being linked to Africa and African practitioners.

Despite the association of Obeah with Africa and, in the case of some practitioners, those who were at the margins of society, there is some evidence that people from a variety of socio-racial classes either practised Obeah or consulted Obeah men and women. For example, in 1893 a brown school teacher and Christian preacher, David Elisha Bates, was found guilty of practising Obeah. For a charge of £3.00, Bates had offered to help a woman being plagued with duppy attacks by, amongst other means, killing a cockerel and trying to get her to drink its blood.³²⁸ George Parkes, one of Beckwith's informants, told her that "French women" were reputed to be extremely accomplished in Obeah practice and were 'the most to be feared.'³²⁹ *The White Witch of Rose Hall* provides a literary example in Annie Palmer, the "White Witch" of the title. In the novel, she is shown to manipulate duppies and use other forms of malevolent Obeah to achieve her own ends.³³⁰

³²⁷ Ibid., p. 6 and Kopytoff, "Religious Change among the Jamaican Maroons", p. 467.

³²⁸ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, p. 18.

³²⁹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 106.

³³⁰ De Lisser, *The White Witch of Rosehall*, p. 128.

Pullen-Burry commented that white planters were not averse to using Obeah practitioners as a way of stopping petty larceny. For a fee, an Obeah man would ‘mutter some mystic formula in the orchard requiring his protection and will hang bottles ... on the branches of trees’.³³¹ The use of the bottles containing substances both natural and manmade was an Obeah charm intended to scare off potential thieves. Pullen-Burry’s description is similar to the account of the usage of Obeah by whites given by Hesketh Bell. Bell wrote that he had accompanied a planter friend who was having his garden ‘dressed’ by an Obeah man as a means of preventing plantain theft.³³²

Beyond employing Obeah as a means to prevent petty larceny, there is little else in the writings of early ethnographers concerning white usage of it. Neither Bell nor Pullen-Burry made any mention of whether the white planters actually believed in Obeah, although the non-supernatural fear of Obeah poison was still prevalent amongst some whites. At one of her stays at an estate, Beckwith was told by her hostess ‘that she never had served on her table any dish which was not also shared in the kitchen’.³³³ However, in *Black Roadways*, Beckwith also included a case of white belief in the negative spiritual power of Obeah. In an account she obtained from the victim’s widow, Beckwith was told that an Obeah woman had cursed a white man who had caused her to be sent to prison. His fate was to die within a year of her release. One of his black workmen also involved in the woman’s incarceration was cursed to die within three months. The two deaths occurred within the stated time frame: the black worker dying of a ‘violent chill’ and his employer from a long-standing heart problem.³³⁴

³³¹ Pullen-Burry, *Ethiopia in Exile*, p. 165.

³³² Bell, *Obeah*, pp. 1-2.

³³³ Beckwith, *Jamaica Folklore*, p. 10.

³³⁴ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 139.

Anthropologists, Folklorists and Obeah

Fear and Obeah

The account above is interesting because of the way Obeah is described as preying on the white man's mind; in the weeks of 'intense pain' leading up to his death, he believed that he was being 'tormented by ghosts'.³³⁵ It goes against a recurrent theme of black fear of Obeah by commentators on the practice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Overwhelmingly, this fear was accredited to the superstitious nature of Africans and those of African heritage. For example, Pullen-Burry described Obeah as 'the working of magic by the Obi-men, charlatans trading on the childish, superstitious, credulous West Indian negro'.³³⁶ Hesketh Bell commented that 'the negroes especially imbue with terrible powers anything which they fail to understand and which appeals to their imagination'.³³⁷ A little figure of a man decorated with sensay fowl feathers in a display of Obeah objects put together by Herbert Thomas for the Jamaica Exhibition of 1891 was reported by May Robinson in *Folklore* journal to have been removed because African Jamaicans regarded it as such powerful Obeah that 'no negro would willingly touch it or be in the room with it'.³³⁸ A report on the Exhibition in the *Gleaner* newspaper stated that Thomas's entire display of Obeah implements (items he had confiscated from Obeah people he had arrested) had been removed as it may have deterred rural people from visiting.³³⁹

As well as causing death as a means of gaining revenge or controlling the fearful, Beckwith was told by one of her informants Wilfred Bonito, to whom she

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

³³⁶ Pullen-Burry, *Ethiopia in Exile*, p. 164.

³³⁷ Bell, *Obeah*, p. 8.

³³⁸ Robinson and Walhouse, "Obeah Worship in the East and West Indies", pp. 212-213.

³³⁹ "Exhibition Notes", *Gleaner*, Feb. 11, 1891, p. 6 cited in Paton, "The Trials of Inspector Thomas", in Paton and Forde, (eds), *Obeah and Other Powers*, pp. 177-178.

was ‘especially indebted’, that a true Obeah practitioner must kill one of their family members, possibly ‘an infant’.³⁴⁰ Williams totally disagreed with this, and denied that Obeah practitioners in contemporary Jamaica performed human sacrifices. Instead, he believed that Wilfred must have ‘been amusing himself at her expense’.³⁴¹ However, it is possible that Wilfred had given Beckwith the information in good faith as the idea that adherents of religions or spiritual practices associated with Africa conducted human sacrifices, especially of children, was circulating in the late post-emancipation Caribbean and beyond. In 1889, Spenser St John’s *Haiti: The Black Republic* contained some graphically detailed accounts of Vodouists ritually killing and, in one case, eating children. In the equally notorious *The English in the West Indies or the Bow of Ulysses* (1888), James Froude wrote that ‘child murder and cannibalism have reappeared in Hayti’.³⁴² In an early twentieth-century guide for British visitors to Jamaica, Bessie Pullen-Burry noted that she had been told by mariners waiting to sail to Haiti that, ‘the killing and eating of small children is quite a common thing’ and that they were sacrificed ‘according to the Voodoo rites’.³⁴³

Details of the trials of two notorious cases appeared in the *Gleaner* newspaper in 1904, both of which, as Lara Putnam has shown, had a great degree of influence on how ideas of child sacrifice appeared in the print media. The first happened in Monchy, St Lucia, where a young boy was strangled, his heart was cut out and his hands cut off, and then his body placed in a pot. Montoute Edmond, the leader of those convicted of the boy’s murder, said they needed the hand of a strangled corpse in order to successfully rob money from a bank. If a candle was

³⁴⁰ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 108.

³⁴¹ Williams, *Voodoo and Obeahs*, p. 208, fn. 101.

³⁴² Froude, *The English in the West Indies or the Bow of Ulysses*, pp. 234-23.

³⁴³ Pullen-Burry, *Jamaica As It Is, 1903*, pp. 4, 23-24.

placed in the palm of the preserved hand, it was believed that thieves could enter buildings at night without waking any sleeping inhabitants. The second case was in Cuba where a black woman was persuaded by ‘witches’ that her dementia could be cured by the blood of a white child which led to a witchcraft scare on the island.³⁴⁴ Beckwith herself cited a couple of later cases where children had been ritually murdered, one in Demerara in 1918 and another in Cuba in 1922, the later incident also being reported in the *Gleaner*.³⁴⁵

Although detailed descriptions of the mutilated bodies of children were present in popular sources such as newspapers and guide books, Putnam has argued, there were counter arguments at the time to the belief that Vodou or Obeah practice involving human sacrifice was somehow commonplace in the West Indies. She cites an 1888 article by the folklorist William Newell, who argued that any evidence for ritual murder in Haiti was at best weak and Henry Hesketh Bell’s influential account of Obeah in the British Eastern Caribbean has no mention of human sacrifice.³⁴⁶ Looking specifically at Jamaica, De Lisser could not find ‘any reference to human sacrifices’ on the island.³⁴⁷ Even Joseph Williams disputed the idea that the Monchy murder was in any way associated with Obeah or witchcraft, believing it to be ‘cold-blooded murder’ and any element of witchcraft was influenced by borrowings from white ‘medieval superstitions’.³⁴⁸ Even though in *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica* Williams contradicts his earlier criticism of Wilfred by citing a number of Obeah peoples’ tracts in which the practitioners

³⁴⁴ Lara Putnam, “Rites of Power and Rumors of Race: The Circulation of Supernatural Knowledge in the Greater Caribbean, 1890-1940” in Paton and Forde (eds), *Obeah and Other Powers*, pp. 254, 258-260.

³⁴⁵ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 134 – 135.

³⁴⁶ William W, Newell, "Myths of Voodoo Worship and Child Sacrifice in Haiti", *Journal of American Folklore* vol 1, no. 1 (1888), pp. 16 - 30. cited in Putnam, “Rites of Power and Rumors of Race”, p. 257.

³⁴⁷ De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, p. 107.

³⁴⁸ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, pp. 112-113.

claim to have killed people, there is no mention in any of the tracts quoted that the killings were in anyway ritualistic or sacrificial.³⁴⁹ Beckwith herself did not challenge Wilfred's assertion of human sacrifice in Jamaican Obeah practice but, later in the chapter, commented that she could not find any evidence of the use of human sacrifice on the island.³⁵⁰

African Jamaicans' real and perceived dread of Obeah practitioners' abilities to harm and kill contributed to a belief that people could die purely from fear of Obeah charms if they knew that one had been set for them. However, some more cynical commentators were of the view that even though these deaths had been attributed to the power of Obeah, they were in fact caused by the secret administering of poison by the Obeah man or woman.³⁵¹ In *Black Roadways*, Beckwith examined whether deaths attributed to the skilful application of poison could instead be caused by the fear of Obeah preying on someone's mind. She heard of a few cases 'in which the evidence seems to preclude actual poisoning and the coincidence appears too close to be merely fortuitous', citing the example given her by the widow of the white man cursed by an Obeah woman.³⁵²

However, this idea of being literally frightened to death by Obeah was more commonly associated at the time with African Jamaicans. Because of racial stereotyping which held Africans and those of African ancestry to be "naturally" prone to superstitious beliefs, those in the elites and other 'social superordinates (including anthropologists)', as Stephan Palmié has argued, often had the

³⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 124-127.

³⁵⁰ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 134.

³⁵¹ See, for example, John Stewart, *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica; with Remarks on the Moral and Physical Condition of the Slaves, and on the Abolition of Slavery in the Colonies*, (reprint New York: Greenwood Press, 1969, of orig. edn, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1923), p. 277; Pullen-Burry, *Jamaica As It Is, 1903*, p. 136; De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, p. 111.

³⁵² Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 138.

conviction that ‘slaves, peasants, and workers’ were going to believe in religions and spiritual practices such as Vodou and Obeah.³⁵³ The planters in the accounts given by Bell and Pullen-Burry were certain that black people had a strong belief in ‘a dread’ of anything associated with Obeah.³⁵⁴ This attitude is epitomised by Pullen-Burry’s comment that ‘[t]he dread of supernatural evil which he [the African Jamaican] is powerless to combat, acts upon what nervous system he possesses, so that sleep becomes an impossibility, his appetite fails him, his light-heartedness disappears as the ever-growing fear possesses his imagination more and more, and he generally dies’.³⁵⁵

From the information provided in Beckwith’s writings on folk religions, it is possible to attain only a sketchy picture of the attitudes of her informants towards Obeah practitioners and depths of belief in their powers. There is always the strong possibility that they were telling Beckwith, a white middle class academic, what they thought she wanted, or expected, to hear. For example, Hannah French, a black housekeeper, condemned Obeah, telling Beckwith that black Jamaicans used the Obeah practitioner’s powers as a means of getting revenge on those they believed had wronged them and that ‘[w]icked people’ would raise and manipulate the souls of the dead to harm others.³⁵⁶ However, Beckwith noted that despite this, Hannah ‘had her share of superstition in the matter’.³⁵⁷ However, a dual attitude of scepticism and belief is frequently reiterated. Wilfred Bonito was described by Beckwith as one of ‘the sceptical today’ who ‘admit the powers of the Obeah Man but ascribe them to the Devil’.³⁵⁸

³⁵³ Stephan Palmié, “Afterword. Other Powers”, p. 326.

³⁵⁴ Bell, *Obeah*, p. 5.

³⁵⁵ Pullen-Burry, *Jamaica As It Is, 1903*, p. 135.

³⁵⁶ Beckwith, “Some Religious Cults in Jamaica”, p. 36.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁵⁸ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 105.

Simon Falconer's opinions on Obeah give another insight into the multiple ways it was viewed by African-Jamaicans. Of Beckwith's informants, Falconer was perhaps the most overtly sceptical of the genuineness of the Obeah practitioner's powers. He had witnessed a healing session by an Obeah man which had very short-lived results, since the patient ended up having to see a regular physician to be cured. He had also encountered an Obeah man Sammy Look-up, who was later imprisoned for nine months for claiming that he could detect the names of thieves by looking in a mirror. Like the white planters, Falconer, a smallholder himself, used Obeah technologies to prevent petty larceny. He planted a flag over a booth containing a small coffin which he pretended contained a duppy. Falconer said the flag would remain still if a thief was present in the field. To ensure this outcome, he had stiffened the flag with tar.³⁵⁹

In some ways, even though Beckwith took a more broadminded approach to Obeah than some of her contemporaries, she, too, was of the opinion that African Jamaicans were in awe of the Obeah man or woman. Despite citing examples of her black informants cynicism towards Obeah, Beckwith still wrote in sweeping terms about African-Jamaicans' fear of Obeah and of the 'extraordinary influence' Obeah practitioners had 'in a Negro community'.³⁶⁰ Her comment that the 'hold which sorcerers have over the imagination of the negro in Jamaica' is not so far removed from that made by the virulently critical Banbury, who felt that '[n]o one can imagine the amount of mischief this superstition is capable of except those who are acquainted with the amount of influence which it has amongst the people'.³⁶¹ Such generalised statements by Beckwith ignored any

³⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 133, 126.

³⁶⁰ See for example, the interview with Hannah French in Beckwith, "Some Religious Cults in Jamaica", p. 36; Beckwith, *Black Roadways* p. 107.

³⁶¹ Beckwith, "Some Religious Cults in Jamaica", p. 36; Banbury, *Jamaica Superstitions*, p. 6.

varying strengths of belief in Obeah, even though she had described Wilfred Bonito, Simon Falconer and George Parkes, her principle informants in *Black Roadways*, as taking a ‘skeptical interest’ in folk religions whilst at the same time ‘admitting firm belief in the spirit world’.³⁶²

Beckwith’s views on Obeah

Just as her informants had varied views on Obeah, Beckwith’s own take on the practice is split. On the one hand, she seemed to have had an open mind as to the effectiveness of the Obeah practitioner’s powers and that it could be used for beneficial as well as maleficent purposes. Despite this, in his review of *Black Roadways* for *The Journal of American Folklore* in 1930, Melville Herskovits criticised Beckwith for her tacit acceptance of Obeah being ‘synonymous with evil magic’.³⁶³ He suggested an alternative provenance for “Obeah” which had no connections to either sorcery or serpents. He believed that Caribbean Obeah derived from ‘the tutelary water spirit of the river “Bia” in ‘the Ashanti country’ which could both protect and harm.³⁶⁴ Herskovits’s criticism seems problematical. He appears to have overlooked that as well as denying the connection of Obeah with Obboney, Martha Beckwith *had* stated a belief that Obeah was a form of ‘sympathetic magic’.³⁶⁵ She further emphasised her belief that it could be used for either good or evil purposes in a published rejoinder to Herskovits’s review where she stated that her ‘analysis has certainly shown convincingly that the obeah "doctor" is regarded as a healer whose power is used for good’.³⁶⁶

³⁶² Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. vii-viii.

³⁶³ Herskovits, review of *Black Roadways*, p. 337.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

³⁶⁵ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 106.

³⁶⁶ Martha Warren Beckwith, “*Black Roadways: A Rejoinder*”, *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 44, no. 172 (Apr.-Jun., 1931), p. 222.

Beckwith and Herskovits were not alone in stressing that Obeah power could be used for positive as well as negative ends. J.B. Ellis, the author of a history of the diocese of Jamaica, argued that Obeah was ‘a strange compound’ which, in rituals ‘indescribable and terrifying’, could be used to poison and kill; yet the same power could also be used for healing purposes, to detect and prevent crime, or to ‘concoct a harmless and sentimental love-philtre’.³⁶⁷ However this view on Obeah as a morally neutral power with the capacity to both heal and harm is in contrast to the majority of writings on Obeah, both by anthropologists and folklorists and other commentators on Jamaican folk culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

These tended to define Obeah in extremely negative terms. For example, the folklore collector Walter Jekyll, an English aristocrat who had lived in Jamaica for thirty-four years, described Obeah as ‘the dark blot upon this fair island of Jamaica’.³⁶⁸ Other common descriptions were of Obeah as either a harmful “superstition” or as witchcraft. For example, Banbury called Obeah ‘[a] superstition the most cruel in its intended designs; the most filthy in its practises; the most shameful and degrading in its associations’ and the Obeah practitioner was ‘the agent *incarnate* of Satan’.³⁶⁹ Williams called it ‘the Black Man’s witchcraft’, believing that Obeah had become ‘a form of devil worship in the Christian sense’, and that Sasabonsam, with his links to Obboney, could be regarded ‘as the Evil One... or one of his satellites’.³⁷⁰ Although the Obeah man or woman could not control any diabolic influences they invoked the assistance of

³⁶⁷ J.B. Ellis, *The Diocese of Jamaica: A Short account of its History, Growth and Organisation* (London: Society of Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1913), [consulted at Project Canterbury, <http://www.anglicanhistory.org/wi/jm/ellis1913/02.html> (8 July 2011)].

³⁶⁸ Jekyll, *Jamaica Song and Story*, p. 241.

³⁶⁹ Banbury, *Jamaica Superstitions*, pp. 5-7.

³⁷⁰ Williams, *Voodooos and Obeahs*, pp. xvii, 200.

Satan, which, in Williams's view classified their actions as 'communication with the Devil'.³⁷¹

As Thomas Banbury was an Anglican clergyman and Joseph Williams a Jesuit priest, their linking of Obeah with the Devil is perhaps in some ways understandable. However, their stance was typical of a prevailing secular as well as religious ideology that categorised Obeah as a form of diabolic witchcraft. From the late medieval period, there had been an increased belief in Europe that the Devil was behind all forms of magic however benign, and this belief was influential on the Jamaican elites and the mainstream churches' attitudes towards Obeah.³⁷² For instance, since 1760 the Jamaican legal system had defined Obeah 'in relation to Christian theological understandings of witchcraft in which witches were human beings... who communicated with the devil and evil on his behalf.'³⁷³

Martha Beckwith disagreed that the Obeah practitioner's powers came from the Devil as, in her opinion, this simply meant an exchange of 'pagan for Christian folklore'.³⁷⁴ Williams was extremely critical of Beckwith's downgrading of Obeah from full blown worship of Satan and his minions to 'sympathetic magic'. He ascribed it to a lack of knowledge caused by the brevity of her time in Jamaica (four visits between 1919 and 1924). Williams, who first visited Jamaica in 1906 and had lived there on and off for six years, commented 'If these four short visits had been lengthened out into four full years, she would not have been so ready to settle off-hand the difficult question of just what is Obeah, and her

³⁷¹ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 107.

³⁷² Owen Davies, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 45.

³⁷³ Paton, "Obeah Acts", p. 5.

³⁷⁴ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 105.

conclusions would have unquestionably differed greatly from what she has written.³⁷⁵

Yet, despite Beckwith's opinions on the efficacy of Obeah people in their role as healers and the absence of the Satanic in her interpretations of Obeah, she still regarded the practice as something shady and negative. This is demonstrated by her description of it as 'the religion of the shadow world, the religion of fear, suspicion and revenge', a description which leaves little room for her idea that it was sympathetic magic, since this form of magic encompasses rituals and techniques used for good purposes as well as malevolent ones. Her somewhat contradictory take on Obeah is further illustrated by her opinion on Maroon religion. Despite describing the Maroons she visited in Accompong as 'intelligent', and being impressed by 'their stories and songs' and 'their folk art [which] has a grace and spirit rarely to be found in any folk group', to Beckwith their religion was nothing but 'degrading superstition'.³⁷⁶

At times, especially in some of her earlier writings, she used the terms *sorcery* and *sorcerer* to describe Obeah and its practitioners which implies a negative view of the subject since sorcery has strong associations with black or maleficent magic.³⁷⁷ When commenting on the content of songs used in Jonkonnu performances in Lacovia, Beckwith wrote that they were 'strongly impregnated with ideas of idolatry and sorcery'.³⁷⁸ Again, "idolatry" not only has connotations of false beliefs but also implies that Christianity is the bench mark religion against

³⁷⁵ Williams, *Voodoo and Obeahs*, pp. xvii and 208, fn. 101.

³⁷⁶ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 106, 197.

³⁷⁷ 'Sorcery... the art, practices, or spells of magic, esp. black magic...', Patrick Hanks, (ed.), *Collins Dictionary of the English Language* (2nd edn, London & Glasgow: Collins, 1986), p. 1456.

³⁷⁸ Beckwith, *Jamaica Folklore*, pp. 17-18. See also Martha Warren Beckwith, *Jamaica Proverbs* (reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1970, of orig. edn, New York: Publications of the Folk-lore Foundation, 1925), pp. 17, 31, 78, 91, for her frequent use of *sorcerer/sorcery* to describe Obeah and Obeah practitioners.

which other spiritual beliefs are judged because it has echoes of the second commandment from God to Moses which explicitly prohibits the worship of idols.³⁷⁹ Diana Paton, in her essay on how policing influenced ethnography in Jamaica, argues that Beckwith ‘approvingly’ quoted May Robinson’s citation of Herbert Thomas’s two classes of Obeah people in *Black Roadways*, divisions which both portray the practitioners in a disparaging way.³⁸⁰

Nevertheless, it is hard to tell whether Beckwith approved of Thomas’s ideas because she had the tendency to cite material without any comment. Even when the citation is read in the context of the rest of the chapter on Obeah and Beckwith’s other writings on African-Jamaican folk beliefs, her acceptance or otherwise of Thomas’s types of Obeah practitioners is still unclear. On the one hand she wrote of the superstitious nature of African Jamaicans leaving them vulnerable to fraud. On the other, she undermined Thomas’s image of the Obeah practitioner as a charlatan duping the gullible in her comment that ‘there is no reason to suppose that the practitioner is in every case more intelligent than the great mass of people who employ his skill’.³⁸¹

Nevertheless, Paton’s comments demonstrate a problem when reading Beckwith’s writings on Jamaica. Even though Beckwith’s choice of language to describe Obeah indicates some prejudices, the fact that she included wide-ranging uses of the practice, some of which had positive functions, makes it more difficult to gauge her beliefs. In an article on American anthropology in the first four decades of the twentieth century, another former student of Franz Boas, Robert Lowie, wrote that American anthropologists gave the impression that they were

³⁷⁹ *Exodus* 20, verse 4.

³⁸⁰ Paton, “The Trials of Inspector Thomas”, p. 180.

³⁸¹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 108.

mainly ‘collectors of raw data’ who were scornful of more theoretical approaches.³⁸² Lowie’s critique holds true of Beckwith’s methodology. She applied the scientific methods of analysis that Boas believed should be used in anthropology to the study of folk culture. This included the methodical collection of as much material as possible before any evaluation of it was made and the avoidance of speculation.³⁸³ In her view, the folklorist was ‘first of all a collector of verified data’.³⁸⁴ The result is that Beckwith’s Jamaican fieldwork contains many examples of African-Jamaican folk religions and folk life which are presented with little or no analysis. This lack of analysis was noted by one contemporary reviewer of *Black Roadways*, A.H. Gayton. Although otherwise enthusiastic about the book, Gayton hoped that because the chapters on religion contained ‘material with theoretical implications’, Beckwith would remedy this at a later date by writing more analytically on the subject detailing the processes of acculturation.³⁸⁵

“Civilising” Jamaicans: the Obeah practitioner versus education, the churches and the law

Beckwith was recording African-Jamaican folk culture at a time when the authorities, both in Jamaica and Great Britain, were trying to dissuade the Jamaican people from folk practices believed to have African roots in an attempt to “civilise” the colony and quash potential rebellions. The idea of something strongly associated in elite minds with superstition and witchcraft ran contrary to

³⁸² Robert H. Lowie, “American Contributions to Anthropology”, *Science*, New Series, vol. 100, no. 2598 (Oct. 13, 1944), pp. 321-322.

³⁸³ Beckwith, *Folklore in America*, pp. 50, 65.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁸⁵ A.H. Gayton, review of *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folk Life*, *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 32, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1930), p. 697.

governmental and elite attempts to promote the country as modern and progressive in order to attract tourism and trade. Diana Paton suggests that this played a part in the removal of Herbert Thomas's collection of Obeah materials and charms at the 1891 Jamaica Exhibition. She argues that the organisers' concerns over Obeah causing lack of attendance amongst the rural population actually masked 'wider anxieties about the image of Jamaica presented to the outside world'.³⁸⁶ As the exhibition's *raison d'être* was to show a modern country, safe for tourists and ready for investment opportunities, to the outside world, a display of such objects, with their contemporary connotations of "superstition", could have been regarded as detrimental.³⁸⁷ The idea of Obeah being associated with a lack of progress is illustrated by Banbury's lament that '[t]he people of Jamaica would, no doubt since emancipation have advanced further in civilization, in morality and religion, had it not been for this accursed superstition'.³⁸⁸

After Morant Bay, 'the combined effect of religion, education, and law' in "civilising" Jamaica led to the belief by some social commentators such as Herbert De Lisser that Obeah no longer had the influence it once did.³⁸⁹ Frank Cundall, in the introduction to a compilation of folklore collected from black students at a Jamaican teacher training college in 1896, praised the 'great work of education and religion' in diminishing 'some of those evils' and 'false beliefs'.³⁹⁰ The black Presbyterian minister and social activist C.A. Wilson noted that '[s]uperstition is

³⁸⁶ Paton, "Obeah Acts", p. 178.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

³⁸⁸ Banbury, *Jamaica Superstitions*, p. 5.

³⁸⁹ De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, p. 119.

³⁹⁰ Frank Cundall, "Folklore of the Negroes of Jamaica", *Folklore*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Mar. 25, 1904), p. 87. Cundall was the secretary of the Institute of Jamaica from 1891 to 1937. The Institute's remit was to promote education in Jamaica. Cundall's use of terms such as 'evils' to describe African-Jamaican spiritual beliefs fit in with Moore and Johnson's argument that part of the Institute's remit was to 'anglicize the emerging intelligentsia' – Moore and Johnson, "*They Do As they Please*", p. 117.

dying by degree... public opinion is being directed against the evil'.³⁹¹ Similarly, in 1915, Emerick commented that because of an increasingly educated population, 'the work of the churches' and 'the strong English colonial government', and harsher punishments Obeah was beginning to slowly disappear.³⁹²

In the case of religion, since the 1880s Protestant Christianity had been regarded by the British government, the mainstream churches and those of an imperialist frame of mind, as a means to bring imperial subjects into line. Froude epitomised this viewpoint in *The English in the West Indies*:

At one time we heard much of the colonial Church and the power which it was acquiring, and as it seems unlikely that the political authority of the white race will be allowed to reassert itself, it must be through their minds and through those other qualities which religion addresses that the black race will be influenced by the white, if it is ever to be influenced at all.³⁹³

The Church of England, which had been disestablished as the official church of Jamaica in 1870, started to reassert itself in earnest in the 1880s over concerns about the growth of African-Christian sects and links between nonconformist missionaries and black unrest. Moreover, Protestant Christianity was increasingly seen in imperial terms as a means to impose British culture and thereby encourage a unified empire. Under Enos Nuttall's leadership as Bishop of Jamaica, the number of Anglican churches grew from 92 in 1884 to 212 in 1900.³⁹⁴ De Lisser,

³⁹¹ Charles A. Wilson, *Men with Backbone and other Pleas for Progress* (Kingston: Educational Supply Co., 1905), p. 64.

³⁹² Emerick was also of the opinion that folk beliefs were waning amongst younger African-Jamaicans because they were believed to have their origins in slavery and the current generation wanted to distance itself from 'slavery associations'. - Abraham J. Emerick, "Obeah and Duppyism in Jamaica", *The Woodstock Letters: A Record of Current Events and Historical Notes Connected with the Colleges and Missions of the Society of Jesus*, vol. XLIV, (Woodstock College, Maryland: privately published, 1915), p. 190.

³⁹³ Froude, *The English in the West Indies or the Bow of Ulysses*, p. 204.

³⁹⁴ Bryan, *The Jamaican People, 1880-1902*, p. 61.

writing in the early twentieth century, commented on the amount of church-going that now took place:

No more complete change has taken place in any aspect of the life of Jamaica than in the observance of Sunday. Eighty years ago it was the popular market day, church-going was out of the question as a general rule.³⁹⁵

Other commentators noted the success that Christianity was having in ‘promoting the development of Jamaica into a civilised human community’ and lessening the impact of folk religions, Obeah in particular.³⁹⁶

Education, another factor believed to have played a part in dissuading African Jamaicans from practising folk religions, was heavily imbued with Christianity. Even though it had been agreed in 1895 that no more denominational schools, with the exception of Roman Catholic ones, would be built, the mainstream churches still played a major role in the Jamaican education system until at least 1914.³⁹⁷ By 1910, only 68 out of 693 schools were government-run since both ‘government education officials and the clergy shared the view that religious instruction was an absolute necessity’.³⁹⁸ Moreover, regulations pertaining to the curriculum in 1900 and 1902 required elementary school children to be taught Old Testament history and the lives of Christ and his apostles.³⁹⁹

The legal system also played a part in dissuading Jamaicans from becoming involved in Obeah. Acts against the practice of Obeah continued to be introduced and some existing ones strengthened throughout the post-emancipation period and into the twentieth century. For example, legislation passed in the 1850s made both

³⁹⁵ De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, p. 144.

³⁹⁶ Olivier, *Jamaica*, p. 85.

³⁹⁷ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led nor Driven*, p. 243.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

practising Obeah and visiting an Obeah man or woman punishable by flogging and imprisonment (with hard labour in the case of the former). In 1898, the penalty for consulting a practitioner was raised from a fine of 40 shillings and thirty days in prison to a £50 fine and twelve months imprisonment with hard labour. The writing, publication or distribution of Obeah literature was put on a par with the publication of obscene material in order to quash the trend in the 1890s of pamphlets detailing the exploits of Obeah men and women. Obeah law was amended the following year making it ‘sufficient in the charge to state that a person was practising obeah’.⁴⁰⁰ Another amendment was made in 1903 whereby those convicted of Obeah who had served twelve months with hard labour would have to be under police supervision for seven years after their sentences had ended.⁴⁰¹

One illustration that the ruling classes’ mission was successful in eradicating or sanitising African-Jamaican folk customs, especially those believed to have African origins, was the decline in Jonkonnu festivities. Jonkonnu, a Christmas parade of dancers wearing animal masks, horned headdresses, and dressed as characters from English mummers’ plays like Jack-in-the-Green and the Doctor, contained elements believed to be African. These include the animal masks and headdresses as well as a house/houseboat headdress worn by the lead dancer. In the case of the latter, Judith Bettelheim cites the example of mini wooden-framed houses with paper walls which are carried in some parades in Senegal, Gambia and parts of Sierra Leone.⁴⁰² After a measure in 1865 requiring

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁰² The name Jonkonnu is believed by some to be a derivation of John Conny a black merchant who ran trading ports on the Ghana coast in the eighteenth century. However, it is unclear the significance of the African merchant to Jamaicans. Judith Bettelheim, “Jamaican Jonkonnu and Related Caribbean Festivals” in Margaret E. Crahan and Franklin W. Knight (eds), *Africa and the Caribbean: The Legacies of a Link* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 98.

a special licence in order for revellers to parade on public streets the dance was mainly performed in rural areas.⁴⁰³ In the 1920s, Beckwith found Jonkonnu festivities still surviving in ‘some remote districts’ but the ox head mask had ‘been forbidden because of the fear it inspired’.⁴⁰⁴

Not only did Jonkonnu contain African elements but Beckwith also encountered parades which had direct links to African-Jamaican folk religions. She noted that ‘[a]n examination of the John Canoe songs recorded from Lacovia and Prospect shows that a good deal of obeah practice... is mixed up with the words of the songs’.⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, the leader of the John Canoe parade in Lacovia had the reputation of being ‘a notorious *myal* man.’⁴⁰⁶ Beckwith believed it was because of these associations with Obeah and Myal that ‘the better element among the colored people of Lacovia dislike the John Canoe mummings and seek to put an end to them.’⁴⁰⁷

However, exactly how effective the reforming trinity of religion, education and the legal system were in quashing African-Jamaican folk customs and spiritual practices is questionable. The fact that existing anti-Obeah legislation was continually being strengthened and new acts introduced during the late post-emancipation period suggests that, in the eyes of the legal system at least, Obeah was still considered a force to be reckoned with. Jamaican lawmakers were not the only ones who believed that Obeah still played a significant role in some

⁴⁰³ Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, “Celebrating Christmas in Jamaica, 1865-1920: From Creole Carnival to Civilized Convention”, in Monteith and Richards (eds), *Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom*, p. 164.

⁴⁰⁴ Beckwith *Black Roadways*, p. 150.

⁴⁰⁵ Beckwith, *Jamaica Folklore*, p. 11.

⁴⁰⁶ However, Beckwith noted that this connection between Myal, Obeah and Jonkonnu was very localised - *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18. Dianne Stewart notes that in the 1990s, Kenneth Bilby found such a link between Myal and Jonkonnu performances in the Jamaican parishes mentioned by Beckwith. Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, p. 51.

Jamaicans' lives. For example, in 1894 Banbury stated that Obeah was 'now more rife in Jamaica than ever it was'.⁴⁰⁸ Nine years later in a handbook for those intending to visit Jamaica, Cundall somewhat contradicting his earlier comments in "Folklore of the Negroes of Jamaica", bemoaned the fact '[t]hat superstition is still prevalent amongst the negroes, is unfortunately evidenced by the cases of obeah, or witchcraft, that came before the courts'.⁴⁰⁹ In a similar vein, Jekyll noted that 'there is not a Black man who does not believe in his [the Obeah man's] powers'.⁴¹⁰ Moreover, despite ever harsher penalties appearing in the 1890s for the practice of Obeah, at the same time a trend for Obeah people and their followers to circulate pamphlets detailing the practitioner's exploits emerged.⁴¹¹ Unlike the Jonkonnu festivities which had been largely relegated to rural areas by the end of the nineteenth century, these pamphlets were circulated in towns and, in the case of tracts relating to the activities of a John Nugent, '[a]ll over the island'.⁴¹²

Brian Moore and Michele Johnson argue that even though the elites' civilising mission was successful as certain aspects of social mores and activities considered respectable by the elites were accepted, overall the cultural behaviour of a sizable section of the working-class African-Jamaican population did not change.⁴¹³ In 1907, Nuttall, writing on the effectiveness of the Christianisation of the African-Caribbean population in the British West Indies, lamented that '[n]ot more than half the population is effectively reached by religious and educational influences'.⁴¹⁴ That education had not been as wholeheartedly effective in altering

⁴⁰⁸ Banbury, *Jamaica Superstitions*, p. iii.

⁴⁰⁹ Frank Cundall, *Jamaica in 1905: A Handbook of Information for Intending Settlers and Visitors* (Kingston: Gleaner & Co. Ltd. and London: H. Southern & Co., 1905), p. 30.

⁴¹⁰ Jekyll, *Jamaica Song and Story*, pp. 239, p. 241.

⁴¹¹ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led nor Driven*, pp. 22-23.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴¹³ Moore and Johnson, "Celebrating Christmas in Jamaica, 1865-1920", p. 203.

⁴¹⁴ Enos Nuttall, "The Special Influence which the African or Negro Race May Exercise on the Future of Developments of Christianity", in H. H. Montgomery (ed.), *Mankind and the Church*,

folk beliefs and practices is indicated by some of Beckwith's comments. She believed that the education system had the potential to stop Obeah 'more quickly... than all the devices of fines and imprisonment' but she was sceptical about how successful it had actually been.⁴¹⁵ In part she put this down to increased poverty on the island since the First World War, meaning that education was only available for 'a few able [students]'.⁴¹⁶

She also felt strongly that lack of interest and support from whites and 'educated colored' people had caused poorer African-Jamaicans to turn to 'the emotional outlet of religious orgies'.⁴¹⁷ Her comments imply that elite desires for cultural change were not only less than successful but also somewhat half-hearted. However, despite Beckwith's opinion that British colonial rule in Jamaica had left large sections of the population neglected and in poverty, her solution to eradicate what she considered the more undesirable elements of Jamaican folk culture was a dose of British paternalism which she believed 'would do more to wipe out obeah than all the court proceedings on the calendar'.⁴¹⁸ Such paternalism would take the form of organising social activities for the Jamaican peasantry such as orchestras, choirs and drama groups. Beckwith also put forward the idea of 'festival days' whereby each neighbourhood would tidy and repair their houses, fences and yards with the provision of 'prizes, bands, and feasting' as an added incentive.⁴¹⁹

by *Seven Bishops* (London, 1907) [consulted at <http://anglicanhistory.org/aus/hhmontgomery/mankind1907/nuttall01.html> (12 May 2007)].

⁴¹⁵ Beckwith, *Jamaica Folklore*, p. 10.

⁴¹⁶ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 223-224.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

Obeah and change

Obeah practice may have experienced periods of decline and resurgence during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but it was also changing in other ways. These changes contributed to the way the practice was reported by late post-emancipation era anthropologists and ethnologists. One of these changes was the utilisation by Obeah practitioners of modern elements such as cigarette cards and household chemicals such as Epsom Salts, alongside the use of natural materials like plants, grave earth, feathers, eggs, hair and nails.⁴²⁰ Hesketh Bell found that the liquid in vials placed by the Obeah man hired by his planter friend to discourage petty larceny contained ‘sea-water, with a little laundry blue in it’.⁴²¹ Contemporary pharmaceuticals were also used; in *Jamaica Folklore* Beckwith noted that Obeah practitioners were getting ‘prescriptions’ from pharmacies to ‘drive away “duppies”’.⁴²² The use of Western occult and sacred literature was another feature of Anglophone-Caribbean Obeah practice in the post-emancipation period. Beckford Davis, Clerk of the Peace of St George’s, in his testimony before the Royal Commission inquiry into the events at Morant Bay, spoke of an Obeah man in his district who was found to possess ‘a book full of strange characters’.⁴²³ Hesketh Bell mentioned that a fifteenth-century devotional text, *The Imitation of Christ*, was used for divinatory purposes in Obeah in Grenada.⁴²⁴ However, perhaps the most frequently employed occult and esoteric texts in Anglophone-Caribbean Obeah were those such as *The Sixth and Seventh Book of Moses* from

⁴²⁰ J.S. Udal, “Obeah in the West Indies”, *Folklore*, vol. 26, no. 3 (Sept. 30, 1915), p. 265; W.F. Elkins, “William Lauron DeLaurence and Jamaican Folk Religion”, p. 215.

⁴²¹ Bell, *Obeah*, p. 4.

⁴²² Beckwith, *Jamaica Folklore*, p. 10.

⁴²³ *Report of the Jamaica Royal Commission, 1866* (London, 1866), vol II, p. 521, cited in Williams, *Voodoo and Obeahs*, pp. 195-196.

⁴²⁴ Bell, *Obeah*, p. 66.

William Lauron DeLaurence's Chicago publishing company.⁴²⁵ The use of synthetic materials and techniques gleaned from DeLaurence's publications were especially common in urban areas where the blend of lore from both grimoires and Obeah was called "science".⁴²⁶

Palmié has noted how 'ethnographers working in the British Caribbean since the 1940s have tended to give "science" or "book magic" short shrift as a symptom of acculturation'. However, dismissive or hostile attitudes to the addition of modern elements or those not considered "African" in Obeah (and other African-Jamaican spiritual beliefs) were already present in the works of some anthropologists and folklorists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴²⁷ For instance, in *Psychic Phenomenon of Jamaica*, Williams warned readers about the difficulties they may experience in telling the difference between 'real' Obeah and what he described as 'pseudo-obeah'.⁴²⁸ Williams's definition of "real" Obeah was a 'continuation of Ashanti witchcraft', and 'a form of Devil worship'.⁴²⁹ 'Pseudo-obeah', however, was merely 'applied magic', a hotchpotch of Vodou, elements from European and North American occultism and, what Williams described as 'other superstitious practices'.⁴³⁰

Williams seemed particularly concerned with the intrusion of materials or practices into Obeah which he considered had come from Western esoteric beliefs and magic lore. He wrote scathingly of urban Obeah practitioners who sought 'to master the more modern forms of pretended magic that are being widely advertised

⁴²⁵ Elkins, "William Lauron DeLaurence and Jamaican Folk Religion", p. 215. Moses had long held a reputation as a magician. Owen Davies cites the example of a Greek writer, Celsius, in the second century AD, who said that the Jews had been taught sorcery by Moses. - Davies, *Grimoires*, p. 228.

⁴²⁶ Elkins, "William Lauron DeLaurence and Jamaican Folk Religion", p. 215.

⁴²⁷ Palmié, "Afterword. Other Powers", p. 207.

⁴²⁸ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 109.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

by “fakers” in the Press abroad’.⁴³¹ For Joseph Williams, these forms of Obeah were synonymous with charlatanism. Although conceding that practitioners who used grimoires and the like genuinely believed that the Devil was behind the effects of their Obeah, he argued that:

Obeah as practised in Jamaica to-day, especially in the Metropolis and the larger towns, might well be regarded for the most part as obtaining money under false pretences,...

⁴³²

In contrast, in rural areas where natural materials like plants, grave earth, feathers, eggs, hair and nails predominated in Obeah practice, Williams believed that there were ‘still many of the craft who ply their trade along the time-honored lines’ in a way that was in ‘direct descent’ from their ancestors in Africa.⁴³³ When considering if Obeah was the ‘direct cause’ of the poltergeist and other paranormal activity he detailed in *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, Williams felt it was significant that all such occurrences took place in rural areas away from Kingston: ‘in neighbourhoods where [what he described as] genuine obeah was being practised’.⁴³⁴

He was not unique in his belief that two types of Obeah existed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the one, a purer form linked with Africa and traditional practices, and the other, inauthentic and associated with western occultism, charlatanism and modernity. Other commentators on Jamaican folk religions made similar observations. Sydney Olivier described contemporary Obeah as ‘sordid blackmailing quackery that masquerades in dark corners in the

⁴³¹ Ibid., p. 105.

⁴³² Ibid., pp. 249-250.

⁴³³ Ibid., p. 250.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., p. 252.

rags of African mask'.⁴³⁵ Writing on the state of Christianity in early twentieth-century Jamaica, Ellis reassured those back in Britain that Jamaican-born Obeah people 'never had the same power or dire influence' as the 'original' African practitioners.⁴³⁶

On a trek to Nanny Town to find a swivel-gun used in the Maroon wars to take as a 'trophy' for the pending Jamaica Exhibition, Thomas noted that '[i]f Jamaica can be said to possess any folk lore, it is, I think, to be found in close, inseparable connection with the history of the Maroons'.⁴³⁷ Guns, ammunition and other items used in the war were supposed to litter the route to Nanny Town and folk belief held that these were all enchanted and would vanish if any 'sacrilegious hand' tried to remove them.⁴³⁸ As Maroon culture was regarded as being truer to African forms than other types of African-Jamaican cultures, by considering the Maroons as the repository of the island's folklore, Thomas was simultaneously linking what he considered to be genuine folk culture with both the historical past and Africa.

This is also reflected in the collection of Obeah materials Thomas displayed at the Jamaica Exhibition of 1891. Paton details how he presented objects used in Jamaican Obeah alongside what he described as 'fetish charms' from West Africa.⁴³⁹ The two sets of items were displayed together since Thomas believed that Jamaican Obeah had originated from Sierra Leone. In the pamphlet which accompanied his presentation, Thomas wrote of the 'superior quality' of the African items in his display which were crafted from natural materials. The

⁴³⁵ Olivier, *Jamaica*, p. 6.

⁴³⁶ Ellis, "The Diocese of Jamaica".

⁴³⁷ Herbert T. Thomas, *Untrodden Jamaica* (Kingston: Aston W. Gardiner & Co., 1890), p. 37.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 32, 36.

⁴³⁹ Paton, "The Trials of Inspector Thomas", p. 176.

Jamaican objects, which Thomas dismissed as ‘rubbish’, included some natural substances but also mass-produced items like a mirror and a pack of cards.⁴⁴⁰ Nearly four decades later, Hurston echoed this idea of natural materials being associated with Africa. She found that poisons used in Jamaican Obeah and Haitian Vodou tended to be of animal or plant origin and were utilised in a way which, according to Hurston, ‘follows the African pattern rather than the European’.⁴⁴¹ In contrast, mineral poisons or ones bought from a pharmacy tended to be used by Europeans.⁴⁴²

The White Witch of Rose Hall provides another example critical of European influences in Obeah. The “White Witch” Annie Palmer, is a plantation owner, born in Ireland and trained in mystical arts in Haiti by a Vodou priestess. Her powers are pitted against those of the African Obeahman Takoo.⁴⁴³ Obeah associated with Western influences, in this case as embodied in the figure of Annie Palmer, is portrayed in a more negative way to the Obeah powers of Takoo. Although Takoo had at times collaborated with Palmer, unlike her, he utilises Obeah to protect others as well as himself. In comparison to Takoo who, Joyce Johnson argues is portrayed as a shamanic figure, Palmer is merely a ‘sorceress’ who uses maleficent forms of Obeah to achieve her own ends: for example, by summoning up duppies and transforming herself into an Old Hige, a vampire-like creature, to attack a rival.⁴⁴⁴

One possible explanation for the preferencing by some commentators of African elements in Obeah as opposed to European ones could be attributed to a

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 177.

⁴⁴¹ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 229.

⁴⁴² Ibid., p. 229.

⁴⁴³ De Lisser, *The White Witch of Rosehall*, pp. 128, 75.

⁴⁴⁴ Joyce Johnson, “Shamans, Shepherds, Scientists, and Others in Jamaican Fiction”, *New West Indian Guide*, vol. 67, no. 3 & 4 (1993), pp. 221-238, p. 227.

distaste for syncretism in some aspects of Jamaican cultures. Sidney Mintz has commented that in the early twentieth century, many cultural anthropologists were disinterested in the Caribbean. He gave the reason that it was considered ‘too much like a culturally burned-over, secondhand, unpristine world’.⁴⁴⁵ Examples of a dislike of the ‘unpristine’ appeared in many of the works on Jamaican folk culture in this era. For instance, when writing on African influences in Jamaican folk music, Jekyll, bemoaned the difficulty of finding a tune’s African origins because of ‘the contaminating influence which the Arabs and Portuguese have exercised upon primitive music’.⁴⁴⁶ In *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, Williams set out that his intention was to investigate phenomena which was ‘distinctly Jamaican’.⁴⁴⁷ For him, this meant omitting:

such occult practices as have been acquired through contact with the Whites as well as European superstitions... For these latter cannot be regarded as peculiarly Jamaican, either in origin or in practice. They are ingrafts and nothing more.⁴⁴⁸

In contrast, Beckwith did not consider modern or Western elements in Obeah, and other African-Jamaican folk religions as problematic. In *Black Roadways*, she stated that her aim was to study a culture which was both a product of acculturation and which blended African, Indian, Spanish and British elements to create what she described as a ‘fresh product’; a cultural form that was distinctly Jamaican.⁴⁴⁹ She emphasised that her study of African-Jamaican religions was based on how they were at the time of her fieldwork in the 1920s. Moreover, she disagreed with Melville Herskovits over his wholesale ascribing of African traits

⁴⁴⁵ Sidney Mintz in Jean Besson, *Martha Brae’s Two Histories: European Expansion and Caribbean Culture-Building in Jamaica* (with a foreword by Sidney Mintz, Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. xv.

⁴⁴⁶ Jekyll, *Jamaica Song and Story*, p. 283.

⁴⁴⁷ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 22.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴⁴⁹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. xi.

to African-Caribbean cultures, as she believed he failed to consider not only contact with Europeans in the Caribbean, ‘but also with Portuguese, Dutch and British traders on the coast of Africa itself’.⁴⁵⁰ In her collections of songs, proverbs, and Anansi stories, Beckwith did focus on trying to find the point of origin of the material. However, when it came to religion, rather than searching for the history of Obeah and Myal, Beckwith tended to either accept the specific origins given by earlier commentators, for example, by citing Edwards’ etymology of Obeah as deriving from the ‘Kromanti’, or she simply ascribed their roots as being generically “African”.⁴⁵¹

However, another explanation for the preference for African culture over Jamaican is that it could equally have been a form of nostalgia. At a time when mass-production and synthetic materials were western symbols of modernity and progress, Herbert Thomas valued the hand-made items created by African craftsmen from natural materials more highly than the mass-produced ones which he had confiscated from Jamaican Obeah practitioners. Therefore, in an era of increased industrialisation and social change, the lure of a way of life which appeared untouched by modernity, may have had an appeal. The idea of Africa which permeates Williams’s writings is of a continent permanently fixed in the past and hermetically sealed to outside influences – its cultures and beliefs being exactly the same in the twentieth century as they were in the fifteenth.

This was also a time when anthropologists were concerned with recording cultures that they believed were likely to become extinct in the modern world, so the potential vulnerability of African cultures may have increased their appeal to

⁴⁵⁰ Martha Warren Beckwith, “*Black Roadways: A Rejoinder*”, p. 223.

⁴⁵¹ For example, Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 106, 143.

some ethnographers. Rural folk cultures in westernised countries were also viewed by some anthropologists and folklorists as both vulnerable to loss through modernisation and as being less adulterated by contemporary influences than urban ones. Certainly, there is a feeling in Williams's work that he believed that the ceremonies and rituals he recorded in rural Jamaica would disappear or change drastically under the march of progress. For example, when writing on African-Jamaican funeral rituals, he noted that the 'old-time customs are rapidly dying out' as a result of road building and the growth of car ownership in Jamaica.⁴⁵²

Williams's phrase 'old time customs' also hints at another reason why African cultures were regarded as superior to African-Jamaican culture. Some nineteenth-century and early-to-mid-twentieth century anthropologists and folklorists were preoccupied with the idea of cultural "survivals".⁴⁵³ Western folk beliefs and ways of contemporary life considered to be "primitive" were deemed to be remnants of cultures which had existed many centuries before. For example, the British folklorist George Gomme argued that European forms of witchcraft were relics of 'the culture of a non-Aryan people' and faeries were a memory of an ancient pygmy race.⁴⁵⁴ The theory of survivals continued into the twentieth century. In his work on the origins of medieval and early modern English seasonal rituals, Ronald Hutton has noted that until the 1970s, there was a trend amongst scholars to date rites like the wassailing of trees and activities surrounding festivals such as May Day to antiquity.⁴⁵⁵ For example, mummers' plays were once

⁴⁵² Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 180.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴⁵⁴ George Laurence Gomme, *Ethnology in Folklore* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1892), pp. 63, 62.

⁴⁵⁵ Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year, 1400-1700* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 61; Ronald Hutton, "How Pagan Were Medieval English Peasants?", *Folklore*, vol. 122, no. 3 (Nov. 2011), p. 236.

considered a relic of a ‘prehistoric ritual’ whereas more modern research has found no evidence of their existence prior to the early eighteenth century. In the case of folk religions, the idea that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century witchcraft was a survival of a pre-Christian pagan religion, put forward by the folklorist Margaret Murray in the 1920s and 1930s, proved influential throughout the twentieth century.⁴⁵⁶

Given the prevailing attitude towards Africa, that it had yet to progress into, what was considered in western thinking as the “modern age”, the idea that African religions were survivals of ancient practices and beliefs could have influenced Williams. Furthermore, if African cultures were perceived to be still in their original ancient forms, then they could potentially have provided the Holy Grail of those seeking cultural survivals - the *ur*-form, or genesis, of a cultural practice. As the absorption of new practices and change was associated with African-Jamaican religions rather than African ones, then the former could in no way be considered as a point of origin for any particular cultural trait.

Beckwith as a forerunner to modern writings on Obeah?

By regarding Obeah as able to absorb new elements but still be as worthy of ethnographic study as religious forms deemed to have “purer” origins, Beckwith’s views are more in keeping with modern definitions of the practice than those of her contemporaries such as Williams or other post-emancipation commentators like Banbury. In particular, her view that Obeah was a power which could be used for good *or* evil purposes tallies with the views of twenty-first century writers on Caribbean religions. For example, in *Creole Religions of the Caribbean* (2003),

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 237.

Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert define Obeah as ‘a set of hybrid or creolized beliefs’ which include the casting of spells both for benign or malevolent purposes and the use of ‘African-derived healing practices’.⁴⁵⁷ Paton notes that ‘obeah is and was often used for protection rather than to cause harm’.⁴⁵⁸ Bilby and Handler describe the forces which Obeah practitioners ‘attempted to control or guide’ as ‘essentially neutral’ and its use in the British Caribbean before emancipation ‘was largely defined as [being for] socially beneficial goals such as healing, locating missing property, and protection against illness and other kinds of misfortune.’⁴⁵⁹

Nonetheless, Beckwith did omit some important aspects of Obeah which were beneficial to the African-Jamaican community. However, this seems to have been because her focus was on African-Jamaican folk practices as she found them at the time of her research from 1919 to 1925, so the ways in which Obeah and other African-Jamaican folk religions were practised in earlier times were covered only briefly. For example, in the pre-emancipation period an Obeah oath had been a means by which enslaved Africans could prove loyalty to a group or cause. In Edward Long’s eighteenth-century description of Obeah oath-taking, an Obeah man took some blood from each person present and mixed it in a bowl of gunpowder and grave earth. The group then made an oath of fidelity and took a sip of the mixture.⁴⁶⁰ A later pre-emancipation description of Obeah oath-taking stated that once made, the oath bound the oath-taker ‘by ties most sacred’.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁷ Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou to Santería* (New York & London: New York University Press, 2003), p. 131.

⁴⁵⁸ Paton, “Obeah Acts”, p. 1.

⁴⁵⁹ Handler and Bilby, “On the Early Use and Origin of the Term ‘Obeah’ in Barbados and the Anglophone Caribbean”, p. 87.

⁴⁶⁰ Long, *The History of Jamaica*, pp. 474-473.

⁴⁶¹ Stewart, *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica*, p. 277.

A further important function of Obeah omitted by Beckwith was its use as a weapon against slavery. Aside from Obeah poisons being used against whites and the subsequent fear which that generated in the white community, Obeah provided both a means to ensure group loyalty (as illustrated by its use in oath-taking rituals) and a way of bolstering the morale of the heavily outnumbered rebels by providing ideas about their leaders' invincibility in the rebellions and wars against the English in the eighteenth century.⁴⁶² For example, Nanny, the renowned female leader of the Windward Maroons was an Obeah woman and the use of Obeah gave her the power to deflect bullets. Similarly Tacky, who headed a rebellion of enslaved Africans in 1760, was believed to have Obeah powers.

Another reason why Beckwith omitted examples of Obeah being performed for the social good may have been because she did not regard as it having that sort of positive communitarian function. This is indicated by her use of terminology like "sorcery" to describe the practice and her endorsement of methods to extirpate it. It may also have been because at the time she was investigating Jamaican folk religions, Obeah practice took the form of a one-on-one transaction between an Obeah man or woman and his or her client, rather than an act participated in by a group of people. Nevertheless, the idea of Obeah being used to counteract social ills does appear in her writings: the majority of her focus in *Black Roadways* is on Obeah as a means of detection, divination and healing.⁴⁶³ For example, Beckwith's informant, Simon Falconer, told her of a number of techniques either performed by Obeah men and women, or associated with Obeah, which African-Jamaican cultivators used to protect their crops. One method was

⁴⁶² Heuman, *The Caribbean*, p. 64.

⁴⁶³ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 125.

to use a plant called wangla which was believed to have Obeah power. If a field was robbed, earth from the thief's footprint was mixed with seeds from a wangla plant growing in the provision ground and then the concoction was put into a pot on a fire. The suspected thief's name was called and, if they were guilty, the same number of 'bumps' or swellings would appear on their foot as the number of seeds which popped in the jar on the fire.⁴⁶⁴

Beckwith also included examples of how mirrors were utilised by Obeah practitioners for benign and positive functions. A mirror specially treated by an Obeah person hung by the back door of a house was believed to shield householders from unwelcome guests. If a visitor 'who is suspected of treachery' looks at him or herself in the mirror, then their ability to harm is neutralised.⁴⁶⁵ Simon Falconer told Beckwith that Sammy Look-up claimed he could see thieves in a piece of mirror glass he had attached to a stick. Look-up would ask the victim of the theft to list the names of those he or she suspected of the crime. Then, looking into the piece of glass, he would stop them at the eighth name saying that that person was the guilty party.⁴⁶⁶ Although Look-up was convicted of fraud, the fact that people came to him for information about items lost or stolen implies that Obeah was regarded by those who believed in its powers as providing a useful social function in this respect.

Mirrors were also used to ascertain the cause of illness or misfortune and foretell the future, sometimes being sewn onto turbans to enable the Obeah man or woman for that purpose. Aside from divination and detection, other more positive uses of Obeah covered by Beckwith were for making protective amulets and love

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 129.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 112.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 130.

charms, and for healing purposes. Her inclusion of these is in contrast to the Jesuit ethnographers Williams and Emerick, who saw nothing but Satan's work in any form of Obeah practice. For Williams, the use of Obeah 'to control ghosts, to prosper some love affair, or assist in legal disputes' was all done with 'the underlying conviction' that the Devil was aiding the practitioner to achieve these aims. For example, a visit to an Obeah practitioner to obtain a love charm would entail 'a nauseating process' with diabolic undertones.⁴⁶⁷ Abraham Emerick, a Jesuit missionary with an interest in ethnography who had worked in Jamaica for ten years, commented that the manufacturing process of a form of love potion, 'Turn him yeye', was 'unspeakably filthy and disgusting'⁴⁶⁸

The exoticising of Obeah

In 1936, Sydney Olivier wrote disparagingly of novelists and journalists who visited Jamaica looking for titillating 'romantic material' about the practice of Obeah.⁴⁶⁹ It would be hard to lay this charge at Beckwith's door. In a review of *Black Roadways* for the *Saturday Review of Literature*, folklorist Newbell Niles Puckett praised Beckwith for showing 'no sense of distortion for the sake of sensationalism'.⁴⁷⁰ Despite Beckwith's belief that African-Jamaicans needed to be diverted from 'the excesses of witchcraft and of religious and political excitement' by more wholesome communal activities, overall Beckwith's account of Obeah appears far less sensationalist than those presented by a sizeable number of other

⁴⁶⁷ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 106.

⁴⁶⁸ Abraham J. Emerick, "Obeah and Duppysm in Jamaica", *Woodstock Letters*, vol. XLIV, (Woodstock College, Maryland: privately published, 1916), p. 190 ff, cited in Williams, *Voodooos and Obeahs*, p. 206.

⁴⁶⁹ Olivier, *Jamaica*, pp. 6, 11.

⁴⁷⁰ Newbell Niles Puckett, "Negro Life and Lore", *Saturday Review of Literature*, November 1929, p. 339.

contemporary writers on the subject.⁴⁷¹ Although Beckwith was writing thirty years on from St John and Froude, accounts of Obeah even by professional anthropologists and folklorists were still frequently couched in the same hyperbolic language as these nineteenth-century depictions of Vodou. For example, Emerick called Obeah ‘a cancerous growth... rotting and eating away the vitals of the religious, social and even physical life of the people’ and ‘the demon of wickedness’.⁴⁷² The ardent evolutionist Pullen-Burry mixed Social Darwinism with exoticism in her view that ‘[e]very savage race... at one particular stage of its development dabbled in mystic and bloody rites...’.⁴⁷³ Williams’ usually refrained from more extreme language in his accounts. Nevertheless, his repeated emphasis of his belief that contemporary Obeah had become a form of devil-worship and his frequent references to the involvement of the Devil and the Satanic in contemporary Obeah practice both exoticise and sensationalise it. Whilst Williams was likely to have been condemnatory of perceived Satanic elements present in Obeah because of his religious vocation, there seems to have been an expectation on the part of travel writers, journalists, novelists and folklorists writing on Caribbean folk religions that sensationalised accounts were what their readers, academic or otherwise, wanted. For example, one reviewer of *Black Roadways* described the chapter on Obeah as one to which the ‘readers will turn with particular interest’.⁴⁷⁴ The examples from the chapter which he flagged up were the cases of child murder in Cuba and Haiti. He then included a list of items associated with death used in Obeah practice such as ‘grave dirt’, ‘cat’s blood’, ‘human fat’ and ‘kid’s skin’, and quoted a source detailing the exploits of

⁴⁷¹ Beckwith, *Folklore in America*, p. 64.

⁴⁷² Emerick, “Obeah and Duppyism in Jamaica”, *Woodstock Letters*, vol. XLIV, pp. 189-90, 190.

⁴⁷³ Pullen-Burry, *Ethiopia in Exile*, p. 164; *Jamaica As It Is, 1903*, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁷⁴ Wright, review of *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folk Life*, p. 97.

a notorious eighteenth-century Obeahman, not mentioned or referenced in any way by Beckwith.⁴⁷⁵

Perhaps more surprisingly, Beckwith's work also appears far less sensationalist when compared to Zora Neale Hurston, a fellow pupil of Boas. As well as being the basis for her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Hurston's Caribbean research is detailed in her non-fiction book, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938), a work criticised at the time of its publication for its sensationalistic approach to Haitian Vodou.⁴⁷⁶ Jamaican culture, which makes up about a third of the book, received less contemporary critical attention but certain aspects of it, such as the ritual of preparing young brides for their wedding night, at times appear exoticised.⁴⁷⁷ Hurston did not cover Jamaican religions beyond attending a Nine Night observance and an encounter with the chief 'medicine man' of the Accompong Maroons.⁴⁷⁸ In the account of her meeting with Medicine Man, she mixed an uncritical acceptance of his supernatural powers alongside an emphasis on his use of poisons. Like the Maroon medicine man interviewed by Beckwith, he had a wide knowledge of the curative and poisonous effects of plants. He also demonstrated a technique to prevent his enemies from harming him and how he was able to use his powers to manipulate nature. After Hurston complained about tree frogs making a 'fearful din', Medicine Man

⁴⁷⁵ The extract cited by Wright was from *A Treatise in Sugar* by B. Moseley and concerned the exploits of Three-fingered Jack - Wright, review of *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folk Life*, p. 97.

⁴⁷⁶ Harold Courlander 's review of *Tell My Horse* described it as a 'curious mixture of remembrances, travelogue, sensationalism, and anthropology'. Harold Courlander, "Witchcraft in the Caribbean Islands", *Saturday Review of Literature*, 18 (15 Oct. 1938) p. 6, cited in Gloria Cronin (ed.), *Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), p. 141. Valerie Boyd presents an opposing point of view in her biography of Hurston. She argues that Hurston presented Vodou as 'a sophisticated and legitimate religion'. Valerie Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York & London: Scribner, 2004), p. 320.

⁴⁷⁷ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, pp. 19-20.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25

silenced them instantly by a movement of his hand and a deep inhalation of breath.⁴⁷⁹

Even though she described Medicine Man as ‘a wonderful doctor’, Hurston focused as much on his knowledge of poisons as on his healing powers.⁴⁸⁰ Furthermore, she devoted a chapter of *Tell My Horse*, “Graveyard Dirt and Other Poisons” to the animal, vegetable and mineral sources of poison found in Jamaica and Haiti. In contrast, though Beckwith detailed some plants and minerals used for poisoning, it was in the context of her chapter on Obeah and an essay on the herbal medicines and other plant lore of Jamaica. In *Black Roadways*, poisons are just one aspect of many others on Obeah. In “Notes On Jamaican Ethnobotany”, there is as much information about the curative or duppy-driving properties of plants as there is on their use to injure or kill.

The sensationalist aspects of *Tell My Horse* are partly down to its structure. Unlike *Black Roadways* which presented African-Jamaican folk culture in a detailed context of the participants’ lives, Hurston’s book is consists of a mixture of snapshots of anthropology, legend, and anecdote. This lack of context places a heightened focus on the events Hurston chose to record. In comparison, Beckwith’s inclusion of Obeah in the context of a book which examined a wide range of aspects of African-Jamaican peasants’ lives, such as styles of house building, fishing and agricultural techniques, crafts, festivals and rites of passage such as marriage, birth and death, shows the practice to have a logical meaning and function. It becomes, as Robert Redfield noted in his review of *Black*

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

⁴⁸⁰ From Medicine Man, Hurston said she ‘learned of the terrors and benefits of Cow-itch and of that potent plant known as Madame Fate. “It is a cruel weed”, he told me, and I found he had understated its powers’. - Ibid., pp. 25, 27.

Roadways for the *American Journal of Sociology*, part of a ‘pattern of integrated parts’.⁴⁸¹

Conclusion

Despite at times being imbued with contemporary cultural negativity towards the practice, in *Black Roadways* Obeah becomes something other than an exotic rite which fascinated tourists and folklorists, and troubled the governing elites and churchmen. Bilby and Handler describe *Black Roadways* as the first ‘serious study of Obeah among Jamaican peasants’.⁴⁸² This is demonstrated by Beckwith’s treatment of Obeah in the context of the lives of the African-Jamaican peasantry and her belief that it could be used for positive as well as negative functions. Her acceptance that syncretism and cultural change did not produce *lesser* forms of culture is also important in her handling of Obeah. This acceptance of cultural change not only differentiates her work from her contemporaries when writing about Obeah but, as will be seen in the next chapter, in her examination of those African-Jamaican religions which blended Christianity with African spiritual beliefs.

⁴⁸¹ Redfield, “*Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folk Life* by Martha Warren Beckwith”, p. 673.

⁴⁸² Handler and Bilby, “Obeah: Healing and Protection in West Indian Slave Life”, p. 162.

Chapter 3: “Call Shepherd Taylor to come bear me over

Jordan*⁴⁸³: *Myal, Revival and Pukkumina

Myal, Revival and Pukkumina

One of Martha Beckwith's aims in going to Jamaica to study the folk culture of its black population was to examine cultures that were the product of syncretism, not just of British culture with African, but also of East Indian, Spanish, Muslim (for example, the Hussay festival) and Christian influences.⁴⁸⁴ As noted in chapter two, by the late post-emancipation period Obeah in Jamaica had become such a product, a mix of cultural practices and beliefs from a variety of sources. Other African-Jamaican folk religions researched by Beckwith followed a similar pattern. This chapter focuses on Myal, the Native Baptist movement, Revival and Pukkumina all of which blended, to varying degrees, aspects of Christianity with elements derived from African religions and spiritual belief systems. Myal was first recorded in Jamaica in the 1760s by Edward Long.⁴⁸⁵ He noted that some enslaved Africans had ‘introduced what they called the *myal dance*, and established a kind of society, into which they invited all they could’.⁴⁸⁶ What Long described as a ‘lure’ to encourage initiation into Myal was the belief that it would prevent death at the hands of white people.⁴⁸⁷ Central to Myal was the idea that humans possessed two types of spirits, the shadow and the duppy.⁴⁸⁸ Duppies are akin to the idea of a soul which leaves the body at death, whereas the shadow is associated with the living, a form of essence of the person it belongs to. Both were vulnerable

⁴⁸³ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 181.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

⁴⁸⁵ Schuler, “*Alas, Alas, Kongo*”, p. 32.

⁴⁸⁶ Long, *The History of Jamaica*, p. 416.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 416.

⁴⁸⁸ Jean Besson and Barry Chevannes, “The Continuity-Creativity Debate: The Case for Revival,” *New West Indian Guide*, vol. 70, no’s 3-4 (1996), p. 212.

to being trapped and manipulated by Obeah practitioners. Therefore, together with propitiation of the spirit world, Myalists also located buried Obeah and restored spirits stolen by Obeah practitioners.

Although she believes that it developed in Jamaica, Monica Schuler sees links between Myal and some Central African religious movements because of their shared aims to hunt out sorcery and prevent community misfortune.⁴⁸⁹ The idea of Myal's African origins is present in some late nineteenth and early twentieth-century ethnological writings. Beckwith felt that it was 'directly African in origin', a view shared by Abraham Emerick and Joseph Williams.⁴⁹⁰ Williams believed that Myal was dying out since the advent of Revival in the 1860s but it still seems to have been a presence, albeit muted, in early twentieth-century Jamaica. In 1916, Emerick noted that even though Myal was not often referred to, Myalists were 'still there'.⁴⁹¹ Beckwith interviewed one Myalist leader and was told of contemporary Myal practices by other informants during the course of her fieldwork.⁴⁹² She was therefore able to give an indication of how Myal was practised in the late post-emancipation period. For example, one informant Elmira Barrows, said that there was a distinction between two types of Myalist. Barrows had been part of a Myalist group in Portland parish that held communal meetings to summon the spirits. She 'intimated' to Beckwith that the 'true' Myalist did not work in such meetings but instead worked in a solitary fashion by silk cotton trees.⁴⁹³ Another Myalist told Beckwith that in the Cockpit country, the *panya* and

⁴⁸⁹ Monica Schuler, "Myalism and the African Religious Tradition" in Crahan and Knight (eds), *Africa and the Caribbean*, p. 66.

⁴⁹⁰ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 142; Williams, *Voodoo and Obeahs*, pp. 145, 154.

⁴⁹¹ Abraham Emerick, "Jamaica Mialism", *The Woodstock Letters: A Record of Current Events and Historical Notes Connected with the Colleges and Missions of the Society of Jesus*, vol. XLV, (1916), p. 42.

⁴⁹² Williams, *Voodoo and Obeahs*, p. 215.

⁴⁹³ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 147.

gombay drums were needed for the Myal dance. Beckwith believed it was the *gombay* that was used to draw the spirit into the proceedings. The spirits called up during the dance only manifested themselves at night and would be visible only to Myalists.⁴⁹⁴ Beckwith was told by the Lacovian Myal man James White that during this dance, Death would present the Myalists with a talisman which would enable them to see where Obeah had been buried or shadows hidden.⁴⁹⁵

After the arrival of dissenting missionaries in the eighteenth century, Myal absorbed some elements of Christianity. Myalists were also influential in the formation of another religious sect, the Native Baptist movement, which developed out of the ministries of the early black Baptist preachers from America such as George Lisle, George Lewis and Moses Baker who arrived in Jamaica in the late eighteenth century. Native Baptist groups ranged from those that modelled themselves on the mission churches to ones which repudiated such churches outright but still associated themselves with Christianity.⁴⁹⁶ Again, great emphasis was placed on possession by the Holy Spirit and until the Spirit had appeared to them in a dream or vision, Native Baptists could not be born again.⁴⁹⁷ Just as Christ had been led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, so before baptism Native

⁴⁹⁴ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 145-148. N.B. Elsewhere, James White is also described by Beckwith as a Maroon Medicine Man. See, for example, Beckwith, "Notes On Jamaica Ethnobotany", p. 4.

⁴⁹⁵ This talisman had originally been an amber bead but glass marbles were also used at the time Beckwith did her fieldwork - Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p.144.

⁴⁹⁶ Mary Reckord, "The Jamaica Slave Rebellion of 1831", *Past and Present*, no. 40 (1968), p. 112.

⁴⁹⁷ Chevannes, *Rastafari, Roots and Ideology*, p. 18. The Methodist minister James Phillippo noted that a certain number of dreams had to be dreamt before membership into a Native Baptist group was permitted. James M. Phillippo, *Jamaica: Its Past and Present State*, (reprint, Westport: Negro Universities Press, 1970, of orig. edn, London: John Snow, 1843), p. 272.

Baptists would go out into the fields or bush and lie down whilst still keeping alert in order ‘to observe what way the Spirit would come to them’ too.⁴⁹⁸

The Native Baptists took on a new form after a major religious revival swept through Britain, Ireland and the United States in the late 1850s, arriving in Jamaica in 1860. To the alarm of missionaries, what started off as more ardent evangelical forms of worship soon developed African traits such as possession and ecstatic dancing. The Great Revival left in its wake a flurry of new sects including Revival Zion and Pukkumina (also known as Pukumina/Pocomania) which mixed elements from both Christianity and African belief systems. Visions were necessary for conversion, as were other Myalist and Native Baptist practises such as the beating of drums, possession by spirits whilst in trance and the veneration of ancestors. Circle dances, similar to the Myal dances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were performed to induce the spirits to descend and enter the Revivalists’ bodies. Prophecy was used by Revivalist street preachers, or “warners,” to urge people to turn from sin and alert them to future dangers.

Popular Revival leaders such as Alexander Bedward and Charles Higgins could attract large crowds. Bessie Pullen-Burry, who attended one of Bedward’s Hope River baptismal meetings in 1904, noted that ‘thousands... were assembled’ to watch the immersion of 300 people.⁴⁹⁹ An illustration of Charles Higgins’s popularity (or notoriety), is indicated by the numbers who attended his funeral. Higgins, known as “Warrior” Higgins because of the naval sword he carried and his militant denunciation of mainstream churches and the colonial authorities, died in 1902. Hundreds of people watched his funeral procession, and the crowd

⁴⁹⁸ Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: A Review of Missionary Work and Adventure, 1829-1858* (reprint, with a new introduction by G.I. Jones, London: F. Cass, 1970, of orig. edn, London: T. Nelson, 1863), p. 26.

⁴⁹⁹ Pullen-Burry, *Ethiopia in Exile*, pp. 144, 146.

numbered into the thousands by the time the cemetery was reached.⁵⁰⁰ Crowds again gathered for his Ninth Night commemorations, with *The Daily Gleaner* reporting that street vendors were doing a roaring trade selling to those waiting outside in the street.⁵⁰¹

Higgins had been a street preacher but Revivalist ceremonies and rites could also be held in halls or in the leader's own balm-yard if the particular leader was a healer. Revival bands would also march into towns and villages and hold services there, though by the mid-twentieth century these marches seem to have become mainly an occurrence in rural areas.⁵⁰²

Graveyards were the location for some of the rites and ceremonies of Pukkumina, the other variant of Revival which emerged after the Great Revival of 1860/61. Although Pukkumina and Revival Zion both use the Bible, hymns, Christian symbols, and have a belief in the triune Christian God, they differ in which spirits they choose to worship. In Revival, Jesus, the Holy Spirit (or Dove), angels, archangels and the prophets take centre stage, whereas in Pukkumina all spirits are regarded as powerful and given respect, including Satan, the fallen angels.⁵⁰³ As their respective spirit worlds may suggest, Revival Zion is closer to the Baptist Christian end of the spectrum of African-Caribbean folk religions whereas Pukkumina is the most associated with African traditions and is regarded as being closer to Obeah and early Myal.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁰ W. F. Elkins "Warrior Higgins", p. 30.

⁵⁰¹ *Daily Gleaner*, 26 July 1902, [consulted at <http://gleaner.newspaper.archive.com> (28 August 2007)].

⁵⁰² Chevannes (ed.), *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews*, p. 3.

⁵⁰³ Chevannes, *Rastafari, Roots and Ideology*, p. 20.

⁵⁰⁴ Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, p. 271 n. 53; Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories*, p. 243.

Beckwith believed Pukkumina to be a mix of Revivalism and Obeah, a theory reinforced by the fact that one of the Pukkumerian shepherds that she interviewed was later arrested for Obeah.⁵⁰⁵ She also thought the etymology of the sect's name came from "pick-them-here" meaning "dig here for buried Obeah".⁵⁰⁶ Melville Herskovits disagreed with this interpretation, suggesting instead that its origins had more in common with the Suriname idea of a type of small spirit called "Apuku". He made this connection since the Apuku are guardian spirits of the bush and the Pukkumerians Beckwith interviewed lived in a remote rural area of Jamaica. Another correlation is that the Apuku speak a language not understood by the uninitiated and, according to Beckwith, the Pukkumerians spoke an esoteric language which only they and the spirits could understand. Such similarities led Herskovits to conclude that Pukkumina 'constitutes a vestigial Apuku cult'.⁵⁰⁷ Beckwith agreed with Herskovits on this point, noting that 'a colony of Dutch Guiana negroes were settled in Jamaica from whom comes the name "Surinam poison" for a means of drugging fish'.⁵⁰⁸

Zora Neale Hurston, who attended a Pukkumina ceremony in the 1930s, described it as 'a mixture of African obeah and Christianity enlivened by some very beautiful singing'.⁵⁰⁹ She was told another, more enigmatic meaning of the term by Brother Levi, a Pukkumerian leader or shepherd, whom she met during her fieldwork. Levi said that "Pocomania" meant "something out of nothing" because the cult had 'started in a joke but worked on to become something more important'.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁵ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 180.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁵⁰⁷ Herskovits, review of *Black Roadways*, p. 338; Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 176-177.

⁵⁰⁸ Beckwith, "Black Roadways: A Rejoinder", p. 223.

⁵⁰⁹ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 4.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

Although not mentioned by Beckwith, Pukkumina has links with Kumina, a highly localised Jamaican religion with a strong African influence which grew up amongst the indentured labourers from Central Africa living in the parish of St Thomas-in-the-East in the mid-nineteenth century.⁵¹¹ The ritual of Kumina was used for the invocation and worship of ancestral spirits. Pukkumina too placed great emphasis on working with spirits of the dead as indicated by records of its practice in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵¹² One of anthropologist Jean Besson's informants, who had witnessed Pukkumina rites in his youth in the 1930s, told her that 'Pukkumerians work with the dead. They work at grave-place...'⁵¹³ This resonates with Beckwith's visit to Mr Mighty, a Pukkumerian shepherd, in the 1920s where she saw a burial ground not far from his house. In the case of Sam Thompson, another Pukkumerian shepherd (and Obeah practitioner), there was no obvious evidence of a graveyard near his home, but posts set with animal skulls adorned the walls of a booth erected in front of his house.⁵¹⁴ A song sung by Thompson and his female assistant for Beckwith to record referenced the use of the dead in early twentieth-century Pukkumina ritual:

Call Shepherd Taylor to come bear me over Jordan,

Heavy rain fall...

Call Shepherd Nugent to come bear me over Jordan,

Call Shepherd Wyant to come bear me over Jordan,

Fall, rain, fall, what a heavy rain fall!

⁵¹¹ For example, followers of Kumina are organised into nations called after African ethnic groupings such as Kongo, Ibo and Yoruba and African deities such as Shango appear in its pantheon. Alleyne, *Roots of Jamaican Culture*, p. 92.

⁵¹² An alternative starting point for Pukkumina or "Pocomania" is given by Ivor Morrish who puts its beginnings in the 1920s. Morrish, *Obeah, Christ and Rastaman*, p. 51.

⁵¹³ Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories*, p. 247.

⁵¹⁴ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 181.

In the song Taylor, Nugent and Wyant, the spirits of deceased Pukkumerian shepherds are called to come to the meeting.⁵¹⁵

Anthropologists and Folklorists on Myal, Revival and Pukkumina

Perhaps more so than in her writings on Obeah, when examining Pukkumina and other Jamaican religions in the African-Christian complex, Beckwith moved away from her role as detached collector of information and voiced her own opinions in a more overt manner. For instance, Pukkumina's use of cemeteries and practice of working with the dead seems to have coloured Beckwith's descriptions of it. She felt Pukkumina was both 'Absurd' and 'inexpressibly sad' because of its 'culling amongst graves' for 'narcotic herbs' and its consultation of the dead for answers to the ills of life.⁵¹⁶

However, this does not mean that her views were always critical. She described a Revival meeting she attended in Lacovia as being 'orderly' and the Revival prayers being 'dignified and moving'.⁵¹⁷ After meeting the female Revival leader Mammy Forbes, Beckwith concluded that she was 'an honest religious mystic'.⁵¹⁸ Beckwith also reported that during his pre-ascension interview, Alexander Bedward's opinions were 'gently, even reasonably spoken'.⁵¹⁹

Despite this, the anthropologist Diane Austin-Broos believes that Beckwith has contributed to a discourse of African-Jamaican folk religions lacking integrity as religions in their own right by her unquestioning acceptance of the idea that they

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., p. 181.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., p. 182.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., p. 162.

⁵¹⁸ Beckwith, *Jamaica Folklore*, p. 9.

⁵¹⁹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 170.

were something ‘other’.⁵²⁰ In the case of Revival, Austin-Broos argues that Beckwith ‘assured her readers that most Revivalists also attended the Baptist Church, thereby proving they were truly religious’.⁵²¹ Austin-Broos’s argument could be also illustrated by the fact that on a number of occasions, Beckwith stressed links between elements of Revival she particularly approved of and mainstream church worship. For example, she described Mammy Forbes’s chapel as resembling ‘an English chapel in miniature, very tasteful in effect’.⁵²² The Isaiahs, a Revivalist sect in St Ann’s, had ‘a tasteful church of English pattern’.⁵²³ Again, Beckwith made references to mainstream churches when she described another service she attended, this time in Lacovia. The leading mammy there carried ‘a rod of supplejack twisted into a loop at the end much like the shepherd’s crook borne in front of the officiating clergyman in the English church’ and ‘[t]he exercises differed in no way from those of an ordinary prayer meeting in a free congregation’.⁵²⁴

However, Beckwith’s habit of finding similarities between Revival and more mainstream forms of Anglicanism could also be interpreted as an attempt, albeit in somewhat condescending language, to provide a balanced view of Revival at a time when it was often sensationalised or demonised. Beckwith may have been trying to make the faith seem less alien by pointing out, what would have been to a sizeable majority of her readership, familiar features.

⁵²⁰ Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis*, p. 77.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵²² Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 165.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

Women as Revival leaders

A number of Revival groups were matriarchal or, as in Pukkumina, had female “governesses” as assistants to the male “captains” or “shepherds”. In other groups, the mammy would assist a male leader. Beckwith encountered a few women leaders, or “mammies”, in the course of her fieldwork. Aside from her interview with Alexander Bedward, Beckwith’s accounts of attending female-led services, and the testimony by one mammy of how she became possessed by the Holy Spirit and gained the gift of prophecy, make up the most indepth accounts of all preachers and religious leaders featured in Beckwith’s Jamaican fieldwork. It could be argued that her focus on mammies and governesses was because they were the ones with whom she had been able to set up interviews. For example, Mammy Forbes was a well-known healer at the time of Beckwith’s visit so it would have been logical for Beckwith to visit her balm yard. Nevertheless, Beckwith’s focus on women in Revival fits in with more general comments made by Simon Bronner on Beckwith’s contribution to women’s role in folklore studies, both in her writings and in her support for female scholars. Bronner argues that Beckwith opened up the idea that gender could be ‘a significant social category for the production of folklore in America’ using the example of a collection Beckwith made of superstitions and omens used by North American female college students.⁵²⁵ Commenting on Beckwith’s Jamaican fieldwork, Bronner feels that *Black Roadways* is ‘unusual’ for the amount of attention it pays to women’s lives and roles.⁵²⁶ Bronner’s argument is illustrated not only by the book’s chapter on “The Family Life” but also in some of Beckwith’s language and general tone when

⁵²⁵ Bronner, *Following Tradition*, p. 25.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

writing on women in Revival religion. Beckwith wrote especially favourably about her encounter with Mammy Forbes:

I became aware of a large, dark, benignant face under a spreading white turban trimmed with natural white flowers, The Mammy made, in fact, a very good little talk indeed of a simple kind and prayed fervently.⁵²⁷

Pukkumerian leaders, or shepherds, also had female assistants called “shepherdesses” or “governesses”. Despite Beckwith’s conviction that the shepherd Sam Thompson was a charlatan, she wrote favourably of his governess:

The woman who was his confederate gave me much information about herb medicines, and when a neighbour came to the house for a bit of clean rag for binding about a sore, it was instantly forthcoming.⁵²⁸

Revival and mental health

Beckwith’s language in regard to female Revivalists contrasted with other contemporary descriptions of Revival by writers on Jamaican folklore. Abraham Emerick believed that any episode of demonic possession he had previously encountered ‘seemed tame’ in comparison to the events he witnessed at a Revival meeting in the Dry Harbour Mountains:

Every now and then they go through abdominal contortions, just as if some infernal spirit... gripped them and threw into convulsions every fibre of their being. Their eyes and faces with the demon of possession looking from them made a horrible sight to see.⁵²⁹

When writing on the island’s religion in *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, Herbert De Lisser separated its practices into what he called ‘the gold’ and ‘the mud’: ‘[t]he

⁵²⁷ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 172.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁵²⁹ Williams, *Voodooos and Obeahs*, p. 158.

gold' being the work of the mainstream churches, 'the mud' those faiths, like Revival, which mixed 'the most wretched superstitions with Christian rites'.⁵³⁰ Like Emerick, he seemed particularly uncomfortable with the possession and trance aspects of Revivalist ceremonies, describing how he became 'cold with horror and disgust' at one such ceremony he had witnessed.⁵³¹

A perhaps more surprising description of Revival practices was made by Helen Heffron Roberts, an ethnomusicologist and fellow pupil of Franz Boas, who accompanied Beckwith on some of her Jamaican trips in order to record African-Jamaican folk music. The Revival hymns Roberts heard in one rural area she likened to loud 'barking... which resembled nothing as much as that of a pack of dogs'.⁵³² Another song had 'a positively savage sound executed as it was with barks and grunts in the dead of night'.⁵³³

Hurston gave a mixed report of a dance she witnessed where the participants were driven by the beat of the drums, the speed of the rhythm, and swigs of rum to a near trance state. It took place at what she called a 'Koo-min-ah', a ritual which was described to Hurston as a form of Nine Night which was held after a person had been dead for a year and a half.⁵³⁴ The dance was to prepare those attending for the sacrifice of a goat in order to ensure the duppy of the deceased was safely ensconced in its new home. Although Hurston found beauty in some parts of the dance, for example, in the 'asymmetric' manner with which the dancers circled round tombs, she described one set of drummers as becoming

⁵³⁰ De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, p. 133.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁵³² Helen H. Roberts, "Spirituals or Revival Hymns of the Jamaica Negro", *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 33, no. 3 (Autumn, 1989), p. 411.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

⁵³⁴ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 52.

‘fiends from hell’, with ‘their faces turning into ferocious masks’.⁵³⁵ A woman leaping through the group of dancers was ‘like a lioness’.⁵³⁶ Hurston may have been using such language to convey the anticipation, pace and tempo of the occasion but her terminology both distances her from and dehumanises the participants.

The anthropologist Edward Tylor believed trance states which occurred in religious practices were firmly rooted in physical or mental disorders. In *Primitive Culture* (1913) he listed ‘[h]ysteria and epilepsy, delirium and mania’ among a number of medical conditions that were once believed to be signs of spirit possession.⁵³⁷ This theory continued to have influence throughout the early twentieth century. For example, Ruth Benedict, writing on anthropology and religion, also linked possession states with physical illness (for instance, epilepsy) or some kinds of psychological problems. Benedict, a student of Boas, went on to argue that ‘forms of mental abnormality... are made use of’ as a means to induce trance states.⁵³⁸ Herskovits took a different stance. He believed that rather than being a kind of illness, possession states had a logic to them if they were looked at in the context of the cultures in which they were practised. In Herskovits’s view, possession was something ‘*culturally* patterned... The dancing or other acts of the possessed persons are so stylized that one who knows this religion can identify the god possessing the devotee’.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁵ Ibid., p. 54.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., pp. 54-55.

⁵³⁷ Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom* (5th edn, London: Murray, 1913), p. 142.

⁵³⁸ Ruth Benedict, “Religion”, in Franz Boas (ed.), *General Anthropology* (Boston & New York: D.C. Heath & Company, 1938), pp. 658-59.

⁵³⁹ Melville J. Herskovits, *Cultural Anthropology* (reprint, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970, of orig. 1st abridged and revised edn, New York: Knopf, 1955).

In contrast to the language referencing mass hysteria, demons, and animalistic behaviour employed by some of her contemporaries, Beckwith used the calm tone of the detached observer of events, giving an account of how rhythmic dancing in a circle combined with short sharp intakes of breath led to the trance state in which the spirits could enter the Revivalists. Beckwith reassured the reader on a number of occasions that the services and rites she witnessed at Revival meetings did not get out of hand. Witnessing a dance led by a Revival mammy, Margaret Williston, to enable spirit possession, Beckwith described the meeting as being one of ‘complete orderliness’; Williston ‘fully recovered herself’ from her state of semi-trance and her dancing was not considered ‘indecorous’ by those present.⁵⁴⁰ Beckwith does not make her feelings on such possession states explicit but her considered tones when witnessing spirit possession may be attributable to the influence of Boas’s theory of cultural relativity: that she was viewing Revivalists states of possession as part of an integrated system of beliefs rather than something pathological. However, her reassurances that nothing ‘indecorous’ took place can lend an air of ambivalence to Beckwith’s take on Revivalist trance states. For instance, when Beckwith commented that at one of Mammy Forbes’s services which she attended, ‘there was no drumming or rocking, nor was there anything in the service that differed much from our own’, it is unclear whether this view was based on her clear admiration for the Mammy or because Beckwith preferred a form of service with which she was more familiar.⁵⁴¹

⁵⁴⁰ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 162.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

Ethnologists and others with an interest in African-Jamaican folk religions were not the only ones to feel some discomfiture at the more ecstatic forms of African-Jamaican worship. The Jamaican elites and “respectable classes” also voiced concerns. In the late 1890s, the *Daily Gleaner* newspaper, a major critic of Revival, attempted to demonstrate that Revival religion had led to an increase in the number of inmates at Kingston Asylum.⁵⁴² When visiting the asylum in the early twentieth century, Pullen-Burry was informed by the matron that many of the patients were suffering from ‘Obeah delusions and religious mania’.⁵⁴³ African-Jamaican religions were included in a list of the patients’ mental health problems alongside ‘arrested insanity,’ ‘depression, and melancholia’.⁵⁴⁴ Beckwith was told by a Scottish clergyman that he had found two or three women at a Revival meeting ‘quite insensible and foaming at the mouth’ and that he had to slap them to bring them to their senses.⁵⁴⁵ A local missionary also had to physically calm some worshippers at one gathering Helen Roberts heard about. The missionary had decided to witness a Revival meeting for himself, and on arrival, found those present ‘utterly hysterical’ and hitting each other with sticks and self-lacerating with sharp stones. He slapped the faces of the most emotionally wrought and ordered the meeting to be stopped.⁵⁴⁶

The linking of Revival religions with mental instability in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is also demonstrated in definitions of “Pocomania,” an alternative name for Pukkumina, which was used as an expression of scorn by those critical of the faith. Dianne Stewart believes that *poco*

⁵⁴² *Daily Gleaner*, 26 June 1899, cited in Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led nor Driven*, p. 71.

⁵⁴³ Pullen-Burry, *Ethiopia in Exile*, p. 171-172.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 171-172.

⁵⁴⁵ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 160.

⁵⁴⁶ Roberts, “Spirituals or Revival Hymns of the Jamaica Negro,” p. 411.

was a Revivalist term to which disapproving whites attached the word “mania”.⁵⁴⁷ An alternate derivation but one which still links Pukkumina with mental instability is given by Brian Moore and Michele Johnson. They suggest that “Pocomania” came from a Spanish term to mean “a little madness”.⁵⁴⁸ Beckwith herself was told that Pukkumerians preferred to describe themselves as “Revivalist” because of the derisory nature of the term.

Despite her matter-of-fact descriptions of the dancing and laboured breathing performed in order to bring about the trance states necessary to receive the spirits, Beckwith appears to have accepted at least part of this discourse which associated Revival religion with mental instability and hysteria. She described the Pukkumerian leader, Mr Mighty, as mentally confused by the ‘religious orgies to which he had accustomed himself’.⁵⁴⁹ When it came to older leaders such as Sam Thompson, their behaviour, in her opinion, was caused by senility. She attributed Thompson’s subsequent arrest for fraud to his ‘confused, half-senile’ state of mind.⁵⁵⁰ Alexander Bedward (who Beckwith said was about sixty-two years of age when she met him) was labelled by her as both deluded and senile.⁵⁵¹

However, another ethnographer writing in the early years of the twentieth century presented a different side to the depiction of Bedward as a senile and mentally overwrought preacher. Before she witnessed one of Bedward’s Hope River healing sessions, Bessie Pullen-Burry had described him as ‘a crazed enthusiast’.⁵⁵² After attending an immersion ceremony in 1904, her opinion

⁵⁴⁷ Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, p. 271 n. 53.

⁵⁴⁸ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, p. 56.

⁵⁴⁹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 180.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵⁵² Pullen-Burry, *Jamaica As It Is, 1903*, p. 208.

changed and she voiced doubts about the veracity of his earlier period of mental instability, partly because of the success of his mission:

At one time he [Bedward] was placed in a lunatic asylum,... One would scarcely think there was much imbecility about him, for his ministry, according to all accounts, must be a very thriving financial concern.⁵⁵³

Pullen-Burry went on to describe him as having ‘a round, fairly intelligent, black-whiskered face’ and that she had heard ‘from a reliable source’ that Bedward’s services in his chapel at August Town were ‘accompanied with sobriety and decorum’.⁵⁵⁴ Her comments are especially interesting to compare with Beckwith’s as Pullen-Burry held a particularly disparaging view of Africans and those of African heritage. For example, using the contemporary theory of the hierarchical ladder of evolutionary progress on which all races could be placed according to their achievements, Pullen-Burry placed Africans a little above the Tierra del Fuegians and Andaman islanders whom she considered to be at the bottom of the scale.⁵⁵⁵

Bedward, Mighty and Thompson may have actually been suffering from dementia or some form of mental illness as ascribed to them by Beckwith. In 1892, Bedward’s own family had tried to get him committed to an asylum because of episodes of erratic and violent behaviour. After an examination, the doctor diagnosed that the preacher was insane but his family could not afford to have him privately committed.⁵⁵⁶ In 1895, he was detained on grounds of insanity but later freed after a legal campaign. He was again arrested and declared insane in April 1921, after leading 685 of his followers on a march from August Town to

⁵⁵³ Pullen-Burry, *Ethiopia in Exile*, p. 142.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 145, 147.

⁵⁵⁵ Pullen-Burry, *Jamaica As It is*, 1903, p. 25.

⁵⁵⁶ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led nor Driven*, p. 82.

Kingston. When approached by the police, he introduced himself as ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’.⁵⁵⁷ Those of his followers who believed him to be Jesus Christ were also detained for observation, while the others were arrested for vagrancy. Bedward ended his days incarcerated in Kingston Asylum, dying there in 1930.

However, Ken Post has argued that it was Bedward’s challenge to authority and the racial status quo as much as the state of his mental health that left him vulnerable to some form of incarceration as categorising people as mentally ill or vagrant was a tactic used by the colonial powers to quell defiance.⁵⁵⁸ The statements made by Bedward which led to him being detained in 1895 invoked the spectre of Morant Bay alongside an attack on the Government and the clergy. The preacher told his followers not only to ‘remember the Morant War’ but also that:

There is a white wall and a black wall, and the white wall has been closing around the black wall; but now the black wall has become bigger than the white wall, and they must knock the white wall down. The white wall has oppressed us for years; now we must oppress the white wall.⁵⁵⁹

At the time of Beckwith’s visit twenty-five years later, Bedwardism still provided a challenge to the colonial authorities. In 1920, Beckwith noted that because of the large crowds swarming to Kingston to witness Bedward’s ascension, ‘[m]any feared that the occasion would give pretext for a negro uprising against the whites’.⁵⁶⁰ Bedward informed Beckwith that his ‘grievance against the whites’ was due to the government’s consistent refusal to allow Revivalist leaders to conduct marriage ceremonies. Revival ministers lost out on the enhanced status being a celebrant would have conferred. It also meant that Revivalists who wished to

⁵⁵⁷ Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 118.

⁵⁵⁸ Ken Post, “*Arise Ye Starvelings*”, p. 8.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7; Martha Warren Beckwith, “Some Religious Cults in Jamaica”, p. 41.

marry had to use the services of other clerics. Consequently, the Revivalist churches missed out on the fees for performing the marriage service.⁵⁶¹

Bedward's expression of anti-colonial sentiments coupled with a charismatic preaching style and an ability to attract large numbers to his meetings would have given the authorities cause for concern, especially as the bulk of Bedward's followers came from the disaffected rural and urban working classes. Beckwith described how hundreds of people travelled into Kingston to witness his proposed ascension, alongside the Bedwardites who had sold up or given away their property in the hope of accompanying their leader into heaven.⁵⁶² Some elite concerns over Bedward are illustrated by a letter published in the *Daily Gleaner* in 1895. The author, described by the paper as a Jamaican 'capitalist', felt that Bedward's 'political power was inconveniently large' and may dissuade other capitalists from investing in the island.⁵⁶³

Post queries the extent of Bedward's mental health problems because a doctor who gave evidence at the 1895 trial said that although the preacher was suffering from amentia, a usually congenital mental problem, he was aware of the difference between right and wrong.⁵⁶⁴ Moreover, the charges made against Bedward were largely based on a report of events in the *Gleaner*. In the *History of Bedwardism*, the only record of Bedward's ministry actually written by one of his followers, its author, A.A. Brooks, made no mention of Bedward's "white wall/black wall" speech, though the Revival leader's subsequent arrest for sedition

⁵⁶¹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 169.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁵⁶³ *The Daily Gleaner*, 23 August, 1895, p. 2, [consulted at <http://gleaner.newspaper.archive.com> (28 August 2009)].

⁵⁶⁴ *Jamaica Post*, 1 May, 1895, p. 3, cited in Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings*, p. 12.

is included.⁵⁶⁵ Furthermore, Brooks mentioned a constable who ‘emphatically declared that he never heard Bedward say those things charged to him’.⁵⁶⁶

A caveat has to be applied to Brooks’s text as it is very much an explanation and promotion of Bedwardism, which he regarded as the successor to Christianity, so omissions of information which portrayed it in an unfavourable light could be understandable.⁵⁶⁷ However, there does seem to be some evidence that the theory of links between Revival religions and mental health problems was being overstated.⁵⁶⁸ For example, a doctor who worked at the Kingston lunatic asylum disagreed with the *Gleaner*’s theory of such a direct connection. When he was interviewed by the *Gleaner* in 1899 as part of the paper’s campaign, Dr. Plaxton said that even though his inmates frequently talked about religion, they did so because ‘the masses of Jamaica have nothing to occupy their leisure except religious exercises’.⁵⁶⁹ Plaxton’s comments on the pervasiveness of religion in the lives of working-class African-Jamaicans were echoed by Helen Roberts. As part of her fieldwork, she had wanted to collect some comic secular songs alongside religious ones. These attempts were frustrated as, according to Roberts, the Revivalist group whom she wished to record ‘would sing nothing but sacred songs, so absorbed were they in religion’.⁵⁷⁰

Following his meeting with Beckwith, Bedward had taken a chair into the yard and sat surrounded by his followers waiting for him to ascend to heaven. After several failed attempts he declared his ascension was postponed, and would take

⁵⁶⁵ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 169-70.

⁵⁶⁶ A. A. Brooks, *History of Bedwardism or The Jamaica Native Baptist Free Church* (2nd ed., Kingston: The Gleaner Co., Ltd., 1917), p. 11.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁶⁸ ‘As Judaism was succeeded by Christianity, so Christianity is being succeeded by Bedwardism’ - *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 17.

⁵⁶⁹ *Daily Gleaner*, 26 June 1899 cited in Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led nor Driven*, p. 72.

⁵⁷⁰ Roberts, “Spirituals or Revival Hymns of the Jamaica Negro,” p. 142.

place at an unspecified later date. It is clear that Beckwith was influenced by her interview with the preacher which took place just before his attempted ascension. She stated in *Black Roadways* that this attempt, coupled with his subsequent behaviour, confirmed that her views on his mental state were correct. She concluded that Bedward was ‘so far gone in senility... as to have dreamed the impossible’.⁵⁷¹

A counter argument to the ideas that Bedward’s behaviour was either a threat to the socio-racial order of Jamaica or the result of mental health problems is put forward by Moore and Johnson. They note that what constitutes insanity is to a certain extent ‘socially constructed’ and in late post-emancipation Jamaica behaviour which ‘could not be explained logically... was labelled insane’.⁵⁷² The Jamaican Revivalists’ distinct modes of dress and a belief system which included dreams, possession and the releasing of shadows trapped by Obeah practitioners, fell outside of what was considered by many in late post-emancipation Jamaica as appropriate religious behaviour. However, Moore and Johnson argue that it was some of those elements of Revival which its critics categorised as forms of insanity that made up part of its appeal: for example, by providing a more spiritually-charged form of worship than was available in the mainstream churches and by giving hope to the downtrodden in its healing message.⁵⁷³ Therefore, Beckwith could well have been labelling some aspects of Bedward’s behaviour as resulting from “senility” or at least extreme self-delusion because of their sheer “otherness” in comparison to the “more orderly” Revival services she had attended - services

⁵⁷¹ Beckwith, “Some Religious Cults in Jamaica,” p. 43; Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 170.

⁵⁷² Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led nor Driven*, p. 72.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

which had greater similarities with the forms of Anglican worship she had grown up with.

Beckwith also failed to take into account any correlation between aspects of Bedward's behaviour, and the statements he made prior to the events of late December 1920, with other aspects of Revival practice which she had encountered during her research. For instance, in support of her theory on the degenerating state of Bedward's mental health, she reported that the preacher, in the days leading up to his ascension attempt, was supposed to have tied a woman to a tree for a day to teach her how to fly.⁵⁷⁴ Yet earlier in *Black Roadways* Beckwith mentioned that she was told that Myalists could perform 'extraordinary feats of climbing' such as going to the top of a tree or the roof of a house to prove that they were possessed. The heights reached by the climber led to the illusion that the person had flown there.⁵⁷⁵ Hurston had heard from African-Jamaicans attending a Nine Night that at one time all Africans had been able to fly as they never ate salt. Those who were brought to Jamaica to be slaves were able escape that fate and fly back to Africa as long as they had not eaten salt. Any who had eaten it had to remain as slaves as the salt rendered them 'too heavy to fly'.⁵⁷⁶ Therefore the idea of flight was a motif associated with certain African-Jamaican beliefs, not necessarily a product of religious delirium on Bedward's part.

By the time Beckwith met him, Bedward had declared himself to be the incarnation of Jesus Christ. During the course of the interview:

⁵⁷⁴ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 170.

⁵⁷⁵ William Forbes told Beckwith that '[t]he Myal Man... fly up on the house-top or into a tree – climb so you wouldn't believe a man could do that' - *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁵⁷⁶ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 46.

He pressed this point with a touch of asperity: “I myself am Jesus Christ; I was crucified,” he answered sharply when I hazarded an objection based on the teaching of Christ.⁵⁷⁷

Bedward’s insistence that he should be addressed as Jesus Christ fitted in with turn-of-the-century Revivalist behaviour whereby Revivalists identified themselves with Biblical figures including Christ and John the Baptist. The use of prominent Biblical figures was linked with the ability to prophesise, an important element in Revival. Possession was used by novice Revivalists as a means of getting the spirit of an Old Testament prophet or one of Christ’s apostles to work through them. They were then encouraged ‘to pursue further possessions in order to secure his or her own prophet or evangelist, generally one of the Old Testament figures... or any of the apostles except Judas’.⁵⁷⁸

Furthermore, the rhetoric surrounding Bedward associated him with the Biblical prophets. In his history of the Bedwardite movement, Brooks described Bedward as the prophet referred to in the gospel of *John* 1: 21-25: ‘Behold in our day he appears. “That Prophet” is in Augustown (*sic*)’.⁵⁷⁹ Other examples of Revivalists taking the names of Biblical figures include a white Jamaican preacher who was reported in the 1890s to be holding open air meetings accompanied by two black women, one of whom he called “Mary Magdalene” and the other the “Virgin Mary”. The custos of St Elizabeth reported concerns over the allegedly immoral behaviour of a Revival leader called “John the Baptist” who was accompanied by a woman called the “Virgin Mary”.⁵⁸⁰ The Isaiahs, a Revivalist

⁵⁷⁷ Beckwith, “Some Religious Cults in Jamaica,” p. 42.

⁵⁷⁸ Austin-Brooks, *Jamaica Genesis*, p. 63.

⁵⁷⁹ Brooks, *History of Bedwardism or The Jamaica Native Baptist Free Church*, p. 12.

⁵⁸⁰ Reported in *Friends Jamaica Mission*, 4 (7 July, 1896) cited in Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led nor Driven*, p. 78; John Salmon to Colonial Secretary, 26 December 1866, enclosed in Grant to Carnarvon, 23 February 1867, no. 32, CO137/422, cited in *ibid.*, p. 88.

group in St Ann's which Beckwith investigated as part of her fieldwork, were named after and inspired by the Old Testament prophet.⁵⁸¹

An emphasis on contexts

Beckwith's interview with Bedward not only gives an insight into early twentieth-century Revivalist beliefs, practice and leadership, but is akin to journalism in the way it captured the moment when the radical preacher was becoming a significant news story in Jamaica. The interview emphasises the importance of context, in this case of being in a particular place at a particular time, in providing what material is available for the folklorist or anthropologist to collect.⁵⁸² Beckwith was lucky enough to be in Jamaica at the time when Bedward's disgruntlement with the authorities was coming to a head. In her tract on methodology in folklore studies, *Folklore in America*, Beckwith stressed the importance of context in the collection of material. The folklorist:

must observe folk data in relation to their setting. He must know, that is, what habits of life and custom and what particular style in art have determined their form. Thus folk data should never be isolated from their historic, geographic and cultural surroundings.⁵⁸³

She made it clear on a number of occasions that *Black Roadways* was the outcome of fieldwork done at a specific time and in a specific situation. For example, Beckwith commented on the effect that post-war financial conditions had on the

⁵⁸¹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 165.

⁵⁸² William Wedenoja gives a modern example of the anthropologist unintentionally being in the right place at the right time: 'Ethnographic fieldwork is a fortuitous enterprise. By chance rather than design, the hamlet I chose to live in had a very successful Revival cult led by a popular leader who made me her "godson" on my first visit with her'. William Wedenoja, "Mothering and the Practice of "Balm" in Jamaica in Carol Shepherd McClain (ed.), *Women As Healers: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. 82.

⁵⁸³ Beckwith, *Folklore in America*, p. 66.

people and their folk practices. American tourism to the island, in her opinion, had meant an influx of ready money which gave poorer Jamaicans ‘disproportionate expectations’. Conversely, they were demoralised by poor wages.⁵⁸⁴

Social context played an important part in the shaping of folklore, which Beckwith regarded as a form of collective ‘fantasy’:

Fantasies that take shape in beautiful and organised forms will hardly breed suspicion and revolt. I think there is no doubt that the excesses of witchcraft and of religious and political excitement are due to the hunger of starved emotional experiences in sordid surroundings.⁵⁸⁵

This importance of context in the development of fantasy led to her conclusion that poverty, demoralisation and neglect had caused ‘the degeneration’ of ‘healthy’ African-Jamaican folk culture, and the rise of Obeah and Pukkumina.⁵⁸⁶

Beckwith’s emphasis on context also reflects the influence of Franz Boas and his emphasis on historical context: how history rather than ‘racial and mental characteristics’ contributed to the shaping of societies and their cultural expressions.⁵⁸⁷ In Boas’s view, no culture or people could be understood without an examination of their history.⁵⁸⁸ Unlike the earlier anthropologists such as Edward Tylor who looked at evolution as the basis of the differences between societies, Boas used the methodology of ‘combining an historical study of a given society’ with intensive fieldwork to examine how individual culture(s) developed.⁵⁸⁹ This form of methodology was not true of all Boasian scholars.

⁵⁸⁴ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 223.

⁵⁸⁵ Beckwith, *Folklore in America*, p. 64.

⁵⁸⁶ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 225.

⁵⁸⁷ Simon J. Bronner, “The Early Movements of Anthropology and Their Folkloristic Relationships,” *Folklore*, vol. 95, no. 1 (1984), p. 61.

⁵⁸⁸ Clinton Bennett, *In Search of the Sacred: Anthropology and the Study of Religions* (London & New York: Cassell, 1996), p. 70.

⁵⁸⁹ Bronner, “The Early Movements of Anthropology and Their Folkloristic Relationships”, p. 60.

Diana Paton and Maarit Forde argue that Herskovits's Haitian writings were 'divorced from history' because of his failure to mention the impact that the occupation of Haiti by the United States had on Vodou.⁵⁹⁰

However, Beckwith's Jamaican writings usually included both socio-political and historical contexts. For example, In *Jamaica Folklore* Beckwith gave the historical background to Christmas plays, the origins of folk games and Western interest in Jamaica's flora. However, when writing on folk religions, she tended to provide only a brief description of the history of their developments in Jamaica and their (possible) African origins. With Obeah and Myal, she emphasised that her research was evidence of their practice in the early twentieth century.⁵⁹¹ With Revival, she linked its history back to earlier Myalists, believing that it was 'directly influenced by the myal "angels"'.⁵⁹² Possibly because Pukkumina was a twentieth-century development, she provided no historical background for it.

Other anthropologists and folklorists writing on African-Jamaican religions in the same era also detailed the history of their development, but of Beckwith's contemporaries, it was only really Williams who made connections between modern life and its influence on spiritual practices. For example, he noted that traditions were dying out as a result of the growth in car ownership and road-building in Jamaica. The creation of greater accessibility between remote rural areas and the larger towns meant that rural folk culture would be unable to stand up to the onslaught of modern influences and ideas which could now flow back

⁵⁹⁰ Maarit Forde and Diana Paton, "Introduction" in Paton and Forde, *Obeah and Other Powers*, p. 18.

⁵⁹¹ See, for example, Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 105-106.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 158.

and forth.⁵⁹³ In contrast to Beckwith who believed that certain aspects of modern Jamaican life were detrimental to African-Jamaican folk cultures and beliefs, Williams felt that modernity and change could bring about a positive impact. He was certain that one day, (mainstream) Christianity would eventually sweep away folk religions like Revival: ‘The weird chant will yield to holy psalmody. The grotesque effort to constrain the shadow or the duppy will be forever thrown aside...’⁵⁹⁴

However, whilst Beckwith strongly believed that for many black Jamaicans poverty and lack of purpose had led to ‘excesses of witchcraft,’ Williams made no mention of poverty in the rural communities in which he lived and to whom he ministered.⁵⁹⁵ Nevertheless, he did acknowledge that the treatment of enslaved Africans had impacted on their folk religions, arguing that some of the “undesirable” elements in African-Jamaican folk cultures were the legacy of ‘centuries of slavery and degradation’.⁵⁹⁶

Yet, despite Beckwith’s belief in the importance of context and detailing that certain traditions/beliefs were specific to certain areas, Herskovits argued that in *Black Roadways* she generalised too much, giving the impression that various practices were the same all over the island and omitting any ‘aberrations from the accepted patterns’ of those practices.⁵⁹⁷ Herskovits’s critique may hold true for the chapters on Obeah and Myal as a certain amount of that information consists simply of quotations from earlier sources rather than anything Beckwith had

⁵⁹³ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 180.

⁵⁹⁴ Williams, *Whisperings of the Caribbean*, p. 250.

⁵⁹⁵ Beckwith, *Folklore in America*, p. 64.

⁵⁹⁶ Williams, *Whisperings of the Caribbean*, p. 250.

⁵⁹⁷ Herskovits, review of *Black Roadways*, p. 333.

witnessed or gleaned from informants herself. However, in her commemorative essay on Beckwith, Katharine Luomala comments that Beckwith's stance was not atypical for American anthropologists in the 1920s: they were still at a transition stage, moving away from generalised descriptions to an emphasis on the individual. Moreover, as Luomala points out, Beckwith did include a fair amount of data about her individual informants and, especially when it came to Myal, Revival and Pukkumina, usually specified the areas where she collected material.⁵⁹⁸ On some occasions, she provided more details as to whether a practice or belief was particular to a certain area; for example, when she stressed the differences between the designs of *gombey* drums used in Myal rituals in various parts of the island.⁵⁹⁹ Furthermore, Beckwith made it clear at the beginning of *Black Roadways* who her principle sources were, where they lived, their occupations, and their differing attitudes towards the various spiritual practices she was investigating.⁶⁰⁰ In *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, she meticulously listed her informants' names, ages, occupations and locality. Again, her informants' names, their occupations, and places of residence are listed in "Notes on Jamaica Ethnobotany". Each person's name also appears in brackets beside the information supplied in the listings of medicinal plants.

Multiple voices

Although Beckwith was guilty of generalisations when writing about African-Jamaicans as a whole, the individuality of her informants often has a strong presence in the text. This is attributable in no small part to Beckwith's

⁵⁹⁸ Katharine Luomala, "Martha Warren Beckwith: A Commemorative Essay," *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 75, no. 298 (Oct.-Dec., 1962), p. 345.

⁵⁹⁹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 149, 151.

⁶⁰⁰ Beckwith, *Jamaica Folklore*, p. 4.

methodology. In her work on Ruth Benedict, Judith Schachter Modall comments that Benedict, another Boas-trained anthropologist, 'did not characterize her informants and idiosyncrasies emerge only in narrative style'.⁶⁰¹ Such a comment holds true for Beckwith's treatment of her informants. As she transcribed, often in great detail, the information given to her by her interviewees in (largely) their own words and presented it with little over-riding authorial comment, her informants' individual opinions are made clear. The presence of their different voices in the text emphasises the varying attitudes held towards folk religion in early twentieth-century Jamaica by those in the social strata in which it was most commonly practised. Furthermore, they reinforce the powerful religious convictions held by Revivalists such as Bedward, and in his case give a glimpse into the complexities of both his mental state and his attitudes towards whites.

Another technique used by Beckwith which stresses the individuality of her informants' accounts was to blend a variety of different voices and standpoints in her writings. She was not unique in this method. In contrast to a style of ethnography developing in the 1920s which unified 'observations and dialogue gathered in particular places and at particular times into a text' through the voice of the anthropologist, some early Boasians such as Elsie Clews Parsons and Zora Neale Hurston included a range of viewpoints in their articles, books and monographs. These voices presented 'the anthropologist as observer, the native as co-observer answering the anthropologist's questions... the notes of previous anthropological observations, and a narrative of a "prototypical" ceremony by a native observer'.⁶⁰²

⁶⁰¹ Modell, *Ruth Benedict*, p. 172.

⁶⁰² Louise Lamphere, "Feminist Anthropology: The Legacy of Elsie Clews Parsons," *American Ethnologist*, vol. 16, no. 3 (Aug., 1989), p. 523.

Hitherto a feminist writer, Parsons had developed an interest in anthropology after meeting Boas in 1907, first writing on American Indians in the Southwestern United States, then travelling to Mexico, Peru and the Caribbean for fieldwork.⁶⁰³ Parsons' article "Spirit Cult in Hayti," provides an illustration of the mixing of a number of voices and viewpoints in one text. It begins with transcriptions of the lyrics of songs to the *loa*, followed by Parsons' descriptions of a number of Vodou ceremonies which she attended and an interview with a Vodou 'divinesse'.⁶⁰⁴ Hurston's *Tell My Horse* follows a similarly polyphonic pattern. In the book, as Ifeoma Nwankwo notes, Hurston became 'both the subject and the purveyor of her writings' combining her own observations and activities with Caribbean history, interviews, transcripts of songs, lists of poisons, folk tales and travelogue.⁶⁰⁵

As with *Black Roadways*' chapter on Obeah, in the chapters on Myal, Revival and Pukkumina, Beckwith did not situate herself in the text in such a strong way as Hurston. However, her interjection of more subjective comments, for example, observations on Bedward's supposed senility or her approval of Mammy Forbes's services, make the reader aware of her presence and she becomes something more than a detached observer of events. In *Life in a Haitian Valley* (1937), fellow Boasian Herskovits dismissed the idea of being a 'participant observer' believing this was impossible for white ethnographers who were studying New World African cultures.⁶⁰⁶ In Beckwith's case, she made no mention

⁶⁰³ Ibid., p. 520.

⁶⁰⁴ E. C. Parsons, "Spirit Cult in Hayti," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, vol. 20, (1926), p. 166ff, p. 175.

⁶⁰⁵ Ifeoma C.K. Nwankwo, "Insider and Outsider, Black and American: Rethinking Zora Neale Hurston's Caribbean Ethnography," *Radical History Review*, vol. 87, (Sept., 2003), p. 50.

⁶⁰⁶ Melville J. Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley* (reprint, with introduction by Edward Brathwaite, New York: Octagon Books, 1975, of orig. edn, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1937), pp. 322-323.

in her writings whether she participated in the Revival services and rituals she witnessed beyond attending them and interviewing members of the faith. This is in contrast to Parsons who was more actively involved in these aspects of her Haitian fieldwork, for example, by taking part in tree rites to the god Legba and a *mangé les-ainge* (feast for the angels).⁶⁰⁷ Like Parsons, Hurston appears as a participant as well as an observer in *Tell My Horse*. In Haiti, Hurston attempted to become an initiate of Vodou and took part in the yearly pilgrimage to sacred waterfalls at Saut d'Eau. In Jamaica she went wild hog hunting with the Accompong Maroons. The fact that Hurston was an African-American may have made it easier for her to participate in the cultures she was studying but, in other ways, she was as much an outsider to Caribbean cultures as Beckwith. For example, as mentioned in Chapter 1, Hurston stressed the cultural differences between herself as a black American woman and Jamaicans in general, regardless of race.⁶⁰⁸ In Haiti, despite being warned by a number of Haitians not to become involved in something she did not fully understand, Hurston was forced to curtail her training in Vodou and investigation into zombies after a violent and prolonged stomach upset which she believed had been sent as a warning for her to desist.⁶⁰⁹

Christianity in Revival religions

Beckwith's less participatory role and more subdued presence in the text has the effect of placing greater emphasis on her informants' words. The strength of faith revealed in the testimonies given by some of the Revivalist leaders Beckwith interviewed counteracts a commonly held belief amongst contemporary writers on

⁶⁰⁷ Parsons, "Spirit Cult in Hayti", *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, vol. 20 (1926), p. 166ff, p. 173.

⁶⁰⁸ See, for example, chapters 1 and 2 of Hurston, *Tell my Horse*.

⁶⁰⁹ Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows*, p. 300.

Jamaican folk religions that the Christian elements of such belief systems were somehow fake, a guise for other spiritual practices such as Obeah. The overriding message that comes across in the writings of most of Beckwith's contemporaries is that where African forms of religious practices were synthesised with Christianity, it was either to the detriment of the latter or as a failing on the part of the worshippers. A frequent comment was that African-Jamaicans were not proper Christians, only paying lip service to the faith whilst secretly practising Obeah or Myal. For example, Walter Jekyll, in uncharacteristically harsh language, described black Christianity in Jamaica as a form of 'hypocrisy'.⁶¹⁰ He regarded it as merely a veneer for African-Jamaicans' 'real religion' which was 'bound up with Obeah'.⁶¹¹ De Lisser too was of the opinion that Revival was 'a guise for myalistic practices by professedly religious persons'.⁶¹² Emerick described Myal as a portmanteau faith of Obeah, duppy lore, African 'cult' beliefs and 'whatever in Protestantism or Catholic ritual may appeal to the bizarre African imagination'.⁶¹³ He also dismissed the idea of Christian elements in Revival as being genuine, instead believing that '[t]he Revivalists masquerade as a Christian sect'.⁶¹⁴

These sentiments sit at odds with a couple of testimonies given to Beckwith by the Revivalist Margaret Williston and the head of the Isaiahs at Try-see, James Alexander. In both cases, their Christianity appeared sincerely held and genuine. For example, Margaret Williston told Beckwith that 'the Spirit teaches me to pray

⁶¹⁰ Jekyll, *Jamaica Song and Story*, p. 241.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁶¹² De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, p. 72, p. 77.

⁶¹³ Abraham Emerick, *Jamaica Mialism*, (Woodstock, 1916), p. 36ff, cited in Williams, *Voodooos and Obeahs*, p. 154.

⁶¹⁴ Abraham Emerick, *Jamaica Mialism*, (Woodstock, 1916), p. 36ff, cited in Williams, *Voodooos and Obeahs*, p. 154; Emerick, *Jamaica Mialism*, p. 47 ff cited in *ibid.*, p. 157.

and sends me on the highways and the hedges to bid others to come and to tell what a sweet Saviour I found.’ and that ‘When the Spirit overflows within you, you have to shout and shout and shout. You have to shout for joy’.⁶¹⁵ James Alexander said that he got called by the ‘spirit of God’ after reading *Psalms*: ‘I was taken away in the spirit to Browns Town. I didn’t walk ‘pon the earth; I flew in the air to Browns Town, I and the Master in spirit’.⁶¹⁶ The spirit took James to the church at Try-see and told him to look after the children there to protect them from Satan and the Devil.⁶¹⁷ His testimony is interesting because it directly mingles the image of flight, an image associated with beliefs brought to Jamaica by enslaved Africans, with his Christian faith and Christian imagery.

Such syncretism between African religious beliefs and practices and Christianity had occurred partly because the Church of England, the established church of Jamaica until 1870, had been reluctant to evangelize to Jamaica’s enslaved population. The Church feared that if the slaves were educated in the Christian message, they might consider themselves to be free, or at least on a par with whites and free people of colour. Therefore, enslaved Africans were frequently baptised *en masse* without any further Christian instruction. Another factor was the attraction of the nonconformist churches which had fewer qualms about encouraging black worshippers and purveyed the powerful message that all people were equal in the eyes of God. On the plantations status was based on skin colour, while in the dissenting churches it could be gained by merit.⁶¹⁸ Some black church members were chosen as class leaders who could refuse baptism, expel

⁶¹⁵ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 163-164.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁶¹⁸ Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787-1834* (reprint, Kingston: the University of the West Indies Press, 1998, of orig. edn, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 82.

people from the group, or deny them admission by providing the minister with a negative report. A person's social status could also be enhanced in the mission churches since literacy was taught because of an emphasis on the reading of Scripture.

Some components of nonconformist worship, such as possession by the Holy Spirit and the importance of baptism, had resonances with African spiritual practices which both attracted enslaved Africans to dissenting churches and led to syncretism between some aspects of Christianity and African religions. Possession by deities or ancestral spirits appears in a number of both West and Central African religions as does a link between water and the spirit world: for instance, in Ashanti beliefs, bodies of water had divine origins as they contained 'the power of the spirit of the Creator'.⁶¹⁹

The nonconformist churches also attracted black worshippers because of the involvement of the majority of the Anglican clergy in the slave trade. Church of England ministers were regarded by black people as 'part of the same social world' as the planters, and the Church of England as the church of the white plantocracy.⁶²⁰ Even after emancipation, the Anglican Church was still predominantly the preserve of whites and the middle classes. For example, James Froude commented on one Church of Jamaica service that he attended that '[t]he

⁶¹⁹ Stewart, *Religion and Society in Post-Emancipation*, p. 135.

⁶²⁰ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 77. However, there is a case of this emphasis on the Church of England as the preserve of the white community actually attracting black worshippers. After their Anglican catechist left in 1839, the Accompong Maroons 'complained of being left to the Baptists'. In part, this was because of their belief that the Church of England was 'closely associated with the power of the colonial government' and their desire to associate themselves with what they perceived gave white people their dominance and status. Kopytoff, "Religious Change among the Jamaican Maroons," p. 470.

congregation was upper middle-class English of the best sort, and was large, though almost wholly white'.⁶²¹

African attitudes towards religious beliefs also contributed to syncretism. According to Mervyn Alleyne, 'African religions seem to have been particularly flexible and hospitable to external influences'; for example, if regarded as especially efficacious, deities belonging to the pantheon of one ethnic group would be adopted by other groups.⁶²² The Africanist scholar John Mbiti argues that the 'practical' elements of religious practice, such as rain-making and detecting witchcraft, were more likely to have been exchanged between different ethnic groups in Africa rather than those concerning gods and spirits.⁶²³ This willingness to adopt another group's deity or spiritual techniques contradicts the idea that Christianity was used by African-Jamaicans to "mask" other religious practices. Instead, it demonstrates that beliefs from diverse religious traditions could be utilised pragmatically but with equal faith and sincerity. Furthermore, Sidney Mintz and Richard Price argue that African-American cultures in the Americas included within them expectations of 'dynamism, change, elaboration, and creativity'.⁶²⁴ This climate was created in part by enslavement bringing together Africans from a variety of ethnic groups and areas which 'produced among them a general openness to ideas and usages from other cultural traditions' and partly through valuing of individual creativity as a method utilised by enslaved Africans to combat the dehumanisation of slavery.⁶²⁵ When these factors are taken in

⁶²¹ Froude, *The English in the West Indies*, p. 126.

⁶²² Alleyne, *Roots of Jamaican Culture*, p. 59.

⁶²³ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, p. 101.

⁶²⁴ Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (reprint, Boston: Beacon Press 1992, of orig. edn, Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Inc., 1976), p. 51.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

conjunction with the earnest testimonies of Revivalists like Williston and Alexander, the cynicism expressed by early anthropologists and folklorists about the genuineness of the Christian component of African-Christian beliefs appears too sweeping a judgement.

Possibly because of her belief that folklore was ‘a living art... constantly taking fresh forms and recreating old ones,’ Beckwith differed from some of her contemporaries in regard to syncretised religions like Revival.⁶²⁶ There is no sense in her writings that she regarded the Christian elements of such belief systems as hypocritical. She argued that since many Revivalists also attended more mainstream churches, their acquaintance with the forms of Christianity practised in such churches had ‘established a standard’ for the Revivalist services which she had witnessed.⁶²⁷ However, such sentiments are problematic as again there is the implication that more mainstream forms of Christianity were the benchmark by which she judged African-Jamaicans’ spiritual beliefs: the nearer the religions were to the forms of Christian worship with which she was familiar, the more it seems that she approved of them.

Beckwith and race

Interspersed with such examples of informants speaking for themselves and citations from earlier writers on folk religions, Beckwith’s own voice is the guiding narrative in *Black Roadways* and her opinions are especially forthright when referring to matters of race and progress. Though frequently describing individual informants as ‘intelligent’ or ‘sensible’, when writing on African-Jamaicans as a

⁶²⁶ Beckwith, *Folklore in America*, p. 19.

⁶²⁷ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 162.

whole, her tone at times becomes more critical. This is illustrated in relation to religion by her reiteration of the view that Africans and people of African descent were inherently superstitious, and her acceptance of the stereotype of the emotionally overwrought Revivalist. When describing why she decided to undertake fieldwork in Jamaica, her language showed elements of, if not racial, then of cultural superiority at the very least:

It is this very island isolation and the opportunity it gives for study of the influence upon a backward race of contact with more developed peoples that lends such interest to a close knowledge of folk life in Jamaica as it exists today.⁶²⁸

Here Beckwith's choice of words echoed the more overtly racially-charged views of the ardent imperialist Bessie Pullen-Burry who also categorised African-Jamaicans as 'backward' and Africans themselves as 'unintelligent and degraded'.⁶²⁹ Beckwith's belief in the necessity for the British government to take a paternalistic interest in African-Jamaicans' welfare to discourage certain folk practices and idleness is not so dissimilar to the opinions expressed by Pullen-Burry on Britain's duty towards 'native peoples' in its colonies.⁶³⁰ Arguing that African, Asian and Arabic people fared better in British colonies than black people did in the United States or under self-government in Haiti, Pullen-Burry noted how:

[u]nder British rule we have evolved the fact that with the minimum of education but with the maximum of the white man's guidance,... a great deal has been done in converting a backward race into helpful members of a civilised community.⁶³¹

⁶²⁸ Ibid., p. xi.

⁶²⁹ Pullen-Burry, *Ethiopia in Exile*, p. 29; *Jamaica As It Is, 1903*, p. 161.

⁶³⁰ 'The black is shiftless and allows his house and water supply to go to ruin through pure inertia.' - Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 225.

⁶³¹ Pullen-Burry, *Ethiopia in Exile*, p. 65, pp. 67-68.

Paternalism and the not uncommon contemporary trope of describing Africans as childlike appeared in Williams's belief that part of the missionary's lot was to 'restrain and calm the emotions of the children of the "bush"' in order to encourage rational thinking as opposed to emotionalism.⁶³² For Williams, African-Jamaicans were 'children' and their ancestors, the 'misguided children of the African Forests'.⁶³³

The racial sentiments expressed by Beckwith and other ethnographers writing on Jamaica were not atypical for their times. Religions like Myal, Revival, and Pukkumina had African roots and were practised mainly by black working-class Jamaicans. However, they were written about predominately by white, black or brown middle-class commentators who had often absorbed a set of beliefs about race which had been developing throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The "scramble for Africa" by European powers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had contributed to a discourse of 'strengthened nationalism' and 'racist sentiment'.⁶³⁴ For some, notions of white racial and cultural supremacy were confirmed by 'the frequently noted decline and anticipated extinction' of indigenous peoples such as the Maoris, Native Americans and Australian aborigines.⁶³⁵ Herbert Spencer's and Charles Darwin's theories on evolution and natural selection which had been published in the 1850s were used to endorse these opinions and contributed to the idea of 'an evolutionary

⁶³² Williams, *Whisperings of the Caribbean*, p. 37.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁶³⁴ Malik, *The Meaning of Race*, p. 85.

⁶³⁵ Andrew Porter, 'Introduction: Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth Century,' in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 22.

ladder, running from inanimate matter through... to humanity itself'.⁶³⁶ Different races were believed to have progressed along, stalled on, or descended, this ladder. Cultural achievements as well as phenotype dictated a race's placement on the ladder. Anglo-Saxons were regarded as being on its top rungs whilst Africans and Native Americans were placed further down between Europeans and primates.⁶³⁷

However, ideas of racial superiority based on this linking of culture with race were challenged in the early years of the twentieth century by Franz Boas and his students. Because of his experiences of anti-Semitism in his native Germany, 'Boas attacked racial classifications', viewing them as 'a survival... of primitive habits of mind'.⁶³⁸ Through his theory of cultural relativity whereby every culture had to be examined in relation to itself and its own internal logic, Boas challenged the idea of societies' placement on an evolutionary ladder. In 1887, he moved to the United States, motivated in part by Germany's growing climate of nationalism. After working in museums and as chief assistant on the ethnological exhibits at the Chicago World's Fair of 1892, he became a lecturer in physical anthropology at Columbia University in 1899, founding its department of anthropology.⁶³⁹ At the time, many American anthropologists and folklorists were almost exclusively concerned with studying American Indians. The Indians not only fitted the vogue for anthropology as a means of the salvaging of 'pure, ancient species in danger of extinction' in the modern world but were also regarded as guardians of 'the virgin

⁶³⁶ For example, in *Social Statics* (1851), Spencer put forward the hypothesis that the 'progressive advance in flora and fauna was also observable in the development of human society from simple to complex forms' - Malik, *The Meaning of Race*, pp. 87-89.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-89.

⁶³⁸ Franz Boas, "An Anthropologist's Credo," *The Nation*, vol. 147 (1938), p 203 cited in Bronner, *Following Tradition*, p. 132.

⁶³⁹ E.H. Beardsley, "The American Scientist as Social Activist: Franz Boas, Burt G. Wheeler, and the Fight for Racial Justice, 1900-1915", *Isis*, vol. 64, no. 22 (1973), pp. 50-66. cited in Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of The Negro Past*, p. xi, p. xii.

land before whites came'.⁶⁴⁰ The belief in the purity of American-Indian culture was in stark contrast to perceptions of African-Americans. By the late nineteenth century, a strain of thought had emerged that held that Africans had no history and any culture to be found in Africa was in a very primitive form, and 'the linking of race and culture led to a wholesale condemnation of African tribes as racially inferior'.⁶⁴¹ Furthermore, as their ancestors had been brought over from Africa, black Americans were not regarded as having the same cultural links to the land as the Native Americans and, as Bronner notes, African-Americans 'presented a special problem' in cultural terms as they were more numerous and generally spoke English.⁶⁴²

Boas hoped to establish an institute or museum of Africa where North Americans could learn about African cultures and 'unprejudiced' research could be done into the lives of African-Americans.⁶⁴³ However, his plans were considered too radical. Instead, Boas tried to create a programme of black studies at Columbia where he, and students of his such as Beckwith, Hurston and Herskovits, challenged prevalent stereotypes about Africans and those of African ancestry in the New World such as their apparent lack of culture and the theory that the European was the highest of the racial types.⁶⁴⁴

Despite being influenced by Boas in a number of ways, Beckwith's attitude towards race in her Jamaican research is difficult to decipher. As illustrated so far,

⁶⁴⁰ Bronner, *Following Tradition*, p. 100.

⁶⁴¹ Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 143, cited in Hilary Sparkes, "The Bishop and the "Warrior": The Relationship Between Protestant Christianity and Perceptions of Africa in Late Post Emancipation Jamaica, 1880-1914", (MA dissertation, University of Warwick, 2007), p. 12.

⁶⁴² Bronner, *Following Tradition*, p. 100.

⁶⁴³ Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, p. ix.

⁶⁴⁴ For example, Boas argued against the linking of brain size with levels of intelligence. Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, p. 30; Franz Boas, *Anthropology and Modern Life* (reprint, with introduction by Ruth Bunzel, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1986, of orig. edn, New York: W.W. Norton, 1928), p. 40.

her writings on Jamaica present a mixed viewpoint. On the one hand, she accepted certain negative racial stereotypes concerning African-Jamaicans. On the other she described her three principle informants for *Black Roadways* as ‘intelligent’.⁶⁴⁵ Moreover, she seemed to have genuinely got on well with some informants, writing that George Parkes, ‘the blind man, used to look forward to my visits’ and that that William Forbes always brought her ‘a gift from his garden’.⁶⁴⁶ However, her stance on race in her Hawaiian research provides an interesting comparison with her Jamaican writings. In the former, any differences occur more in what Beckwith did not say than in what she did. Take for instance, *Hawaiian Mythology*, a book intended as a ‘guide to the native mythology of Hawaii’.⁶⁴⁷ Here Beckwith presented a collection of myths alongside explanations of their historical and cultural contexts and glosses on each individual story. What makes *Hawaiian Mythology* stand out against *Black Roadways* and her other Jamaican work is that there is no highlighting of race, positive or otherwise. Furthermore, there is very little in the way of negative language in her descriptions of Hawaiian religious beliefs. The words *sorcerer* and *sorcery* appeared but more as a “job” description for a particular set of magico-religious practices and their practitioners. The only detrimental references are firstly in relation to the belief that medicine had developed in Hawaii in order to combat diseases caused by sorcery and in the comment that ‘rival schools of sorcery arose to terrorize the land’.⁶⁴⁸ Aside from these, there is no mention of Hawaiian religions or spiritual practices being the preserve of the superstitious as appeared in her work on African-Jamaican faiths.

⁶⁴⁵ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. vii.

⁶⁴⁶ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, p. 368; Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. vii-viii.

⁶⁴⁷ Beckwith, *Hawaiian Mythology*, (reprint, with a new introduction by Katherine Luomala, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976, of orig. edn, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1940), p. xxxi.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Similarly, in the article “Hawaiian Household Customs,” co-written with Laura Green, sorcerers are briefly mentioned but again only to describe their actions – there are no pejorative comments about either the sorcerers or their magic. It is left for the reader to form their own opinion.⁶⁴⁹ Despite *Hawaiian Mythology* being published in 1940, Beckwith’s Hawaiian research ran concurrently alongside other fieldwork, therefore the idea that Beckwith’s attitude towards race changed through time is unlikely. However, Beckwith was brought up on the island of Maui and retained a great fondness for Hawaii throughout her life. Therefore, it could be argued that her differing attitudes toward the native Hawaiians and Africans/African-Americans stemmed from the fact that the former were somehow less of an exotic “other”.

Conclusion

In Beckwith’s writings on African-Jamaican religions which syncretised Christianity with other spiritual practices, it could be argued that she took a very different view to many other anthropologists and folklorists in the same era. Her contemporaries often regarded faiths like Myal, Revival and Pukkumina as either a guise for Obeah practice or as warped versions of more mainstream forms of Christianity. In contrast, Beckwith provided an alternative approach to this denigration of Creole religions by her acceptance of change in folk culture and her belief that multiple influences could create a new cultural form or practice that was equally valid to those of older provenance. As with Obeah, she examined religions in the African-Christian continuum in the context of the lives of Jamaica’s black

⁶⁴⁹ For example, ‘when sharks toss their victims about on the surface of the water as they chew the limbs, it is proof that they are the emissaries of a sorcerer’. Laura S. Green and Martha Warren Beckwith, “Hawaiian Household Customs,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series vol. 30, no. 1 (Jan.– March, 1928), p. 8.

peasantry as a whole. At times, she praised the forms of worship and some of the shepherds and mammies she interviewed. However, her attitudes towards those of the African diaspora, that they were prone to superstitious beliefs and needed paternalistic guidance, contributed to her acceptance of the racially-imbued theory of links between Revival religions, hysteria and insanity. It also influenced her perceptions of the various elements that made up syncretised Jamaican folk religions: for example, in her favouring of the more mainstream aspects of Christianity in Revival. As will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, because of their rich and varied spirit worlds, African-Jamaican religions were frequently dismissed as “superstition” by outside commentators. Through her labelling of some aspects of Pukkumina as ‘religious orgies’, and by writing more favourably of the Christian end of the Revival religious spectrum, Beckwith was as guilty of denying creolised faiths integrity as religions in their own right as those who considered them to be merely “superstition”.⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁵⁰ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 180.

***Chapter 4: A No Every Chain You Hear A Fe Rolling
Calf⁶⁵¹: The African-Jamaican Spirit World and Duppy***

Lore

Duppies and duppy lore

A common thread running through Obeah, Myal, Revival and Pukkumina was the belief in the existence of duppies. A newspaper article cited by Joseph Williams provides an example of the prevalent aspects of duppy lore in the early twentieth century. On 6th June 1931, the *Daily Gleaner* ran a story with the headlines “Ghost Mystery for The Spiritualists. Unseen Hands Throw At Girl All Kinds of Missiles From Which There Is No Escape: She Says She Is Controlled by Spirit: Hammer Tossed From Her Hand High In Air”. The story related a flurry of what appeared to be poltergeist activity, both the throwing of objects and physical assaults, which was taking place at a teacher’s house in Roehampton. The focus of the activity was a fourteen year-old girl, Muriel McDonald, who was lodging with the teacher. The newspaper reported that witnesses attributed the missile throwing to ‘spirits’.⁶⁵² Muriel herself told the paper that she regularly saw a ‘spirit’ of a man dressed in white whom she believed to be her tormentor, although she had never actually seen him throw anything or attack her.⁶⁵³ Joseph John Williams, who examined this story in detail in *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, considered whether the perpetrator had supernatural origins, be it a ghost, poltergeist, or a duppy. He opted for the latter, reasoning that stone-throwing was a predominant feature of duppy behaviour in the Jamaican countryside. According to Williams, ‘duppy-flung’

⁶⁵¹ Beckwith, *Jamaica Proverbs*, p. 15.

⁶⁵² Cited in Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, pp. 220-222.

⁶⁵³ Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 224-225.

stones acted in an identical manner to those thrown at the teacher's house: passing through window panes without breaking any glass, coming through ceilings without leaving a hole, and turning at sharp angles mid-trajectory.⁶⁵⁴ Williams gave no clue as to why the duppy was tormenting Muriel.

However, whether they were haunting the living because a past grievance had not been resolved, being manipulated by Obeah people, or rescued by Revivalists, duppies played an important role in African-Jamaican folk religions and spirit beliefs. This chapter will explore firstly the contemporary lore surrounding duppies, then how perceptions of the African-Jamaican spirit world were affected by theories of racial progress, and finally, how duppy lore was interpreted by Beckwith and her contemporaries.

Duppies were believed to be one of two types of spirit which every person possessed: the duppy and the shadow. After death, the spirit or duppy went up to Heaven or down to Hell, whilst the shadow remained on earth. Shadows of living people were vulnerable to being trapped by Obeah practitioners who would either nail the shadows to a silk-cotton tree, bury them beneath its roots, or contain them in bottles. The health of those whose shadows were trapped in such a way would quickly decline, and unless the shadow was restored to them, they would die. Mervyn Alleyne has pointed out that in modern Jamaica, the terms *duppy* and *shadow* are used interchangeably, *duppy* being the more frequently employed.⁶⁵⁵ This lack of distinction between the two spirit forms was also present in the late post-emancipation era as illustrated in this description given by Walter Jekyll:

A man, they say, has two spirits, one from God and the other not from God... At death the God-given spirit flies up upon a tree, and goes to heaven on the third

⁶⁵⁴ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 237.

⁶⁵⁵ Payne-Jackson and Alleyne, *Jamaican Folk Medicine*, pp. 71, 72.

day. The other spirit remains on earth as Duppy. Its abiding place is the grave of the dead man, but it wanders about at night as it did when he was alive.⁶⁵⁶

Joseph Williams also commented that ‘in common parlance in Jamaica *duppy* has come to be a generic term embracing pretty much everything in the psychic line’.⁶⁵⁷

A sizable amount of lore concerning duppies was recorded by anthropologists and folklorists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and Beckwith devoted a chapter of *Black Roadways* to “The Spirit World”. The focus on duppy lore by researchers may be a reflection of the importance of these spirits in African-Jamaican folk culture (although it may also reflect the preoccupations of the researchers). Alice Spinner, an English novelist who had moved to Jamaica in 1892 and took a keen interest in its folk culture, noted that:

in the daily life of the negro population “Duppies” occupied a very considerable and, indeed, dignified position... Even the more educated were not above a lurking belief in their existence; while for the ordinary negro, that there were Duppies around him was as undoubted a truth as the clear sunlight in which he lived.⁶⁵⁸

In appearance, duppies were described as looking exactly as the deceased had done in life with the exception that they walked ‘two feet above the ground, floating in the air’. The white-clad figure seen by Muriel resonates with the white clothing mentioned in a description of duppies given to Martha Beckwith by her informant George Parkes. Parkes, who was born with the ability to see duppies, told Beckwith that they would often appear wearing white ‘with their heads bound up

⁶⁵⁶Jekyll, *Jamaica Song and Story*, p. 175.

⁶⁵⁷ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 168.

⁶⁵⁸ Alice Spinner, “Duppies”, reprint of *National Review* article in *Daily Gleaner*, 30 September 1895, [consulted at <http://gleaner.newspaperarchive.com> (3 August 2007)].

just as they were put into the grave'. White clothing was commonly used to dress African-Jamaican corpses: a suit for a man and a muslin shroud for a woman.⁶⁵⁹ As the duppy made up part of a person's essential being, anyone had the potential to become a duppy but this process seems to have been automatic in the case of babies who died before baptism.⁶⁶⁰ Beckwith listed a number of duppies deemed by her sources to be particularly powerful: Old Hige, Whooping-boy, Long-bubby Susan and the spirits of Chinese or East Indian people.⁶⁶¹ Zora Neale Hurston was also told by those attending a Nine Night that 'coolie' and 'Chinee' duppies were the strongest.⁶⁶² According to Beckwith's sources, Whooping-boy was believed to ride a creature called Three-foot horse, whooping all the time.⁶⁶³ Long-bubby Susan was 'characterized by breasts which touched the ground and which she throws over her shoulder when attacked'. Beckwith speculated whether Susan and another female duppy, Old Hige, were one and the same, though it is unclear how she reached this conclusion, especially as Beckwith placed the Hige's origins as arising from a witch motif in European folk tales. In these tales, a child secretly observes a witch shedding her skin before flying off. In her absence, the child burns the skin or fills it with pepper so that the witch can not put it on again when she returns.⁶⁶⁴ The idea of the Old Hige being a witch rather than a duppy also appeared in Thomas Banbury's account of the creature. According to Banbury, instead of being spirits, Higes were living women who shed their skin before

⁶⁵⁹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 89, 70.

⁶⁶⁰ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 58.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.98.

⁶⁶² Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 44.

⁶⁶³ Jekyll, *Jamaica Song and Story*, p. 176; Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 89, 90, 98-99.

⁶⁶⁴ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 99.

roaming the night in a search for human blood, with fire issuing from their armpits.⁶⁶⁵

Duppies could sometimes appear in animal form and Beckwith noted that two of the most malevolent duppies were Rollin' Calf and Three-foot Horse.⁶⁶⁶ However, Hurston was informed by some Maroons that what she called the Three-leg-Horse was harmless but that women were afraid of it. It would appear around Christmas time to join in the Jonkonnu festivities.⁶⁶⁷ There was no such conflict in depictions of the Rollin' Calf. All accounts of the Calf portrayed it as a fearsome creature that frequented remote spots to terrorise travellers. It usually took the form of a cow with 'fiery eyes' and was accompanied by the sound of 'clanking chains'. However it could also manifest itself as a 'cat, dog, hog, goat, horse, or bull', the cat being the most dangerous form.⁶⁶⁸ To be caught by the Rollin' Calf meant instant death unless the victim ran up a hill, as it could not run up hills. Spinner was told that the Calf was the duppy of a person who had lived a bad life.⁶⁶⁹ Beckwith agreed with this, although she included butchers amongst the 'reprobates' who were likely to become Calves after death.⁶⁷⁰

Despite these malevolent duppies, not all duppy behaviour was negative. Jekyll noted how '[a] good Duppy will watch over and protect the living'. However, examples of 'good' duppies are a rarity in late post-emancipation descriptions of their behaviour. Many of the recorded instances of duppies and the customs surrounding them are concerned with ways to deal with the 'bad Duppy

⁶⁶⁵ Banbury, *Jamaica Superstitions*, p. 30.

⁶⁶⁶ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 98-99.

⁶⁶⁷ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 26.

⁶⁶⁸ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 100.

⁶⁶⁹ Spinner, "Duppies", *Daily Gleaner*, 30 September 1895.

⁶⁷⁰ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 101.

[who] tries to frighten and harm people'.⁶⁷¹ For example, aside from the case cited in the *Gleaner*, Williams gave a number of detailed accounts of poltergeist or other ghostly activity which was attributed to duppies. These included the bombardment with stones, thrown by unseen hands, of a school near a mission station in the Dry Harbour Mountains. Doors opened and shut of their own accord at another mission house in All Saints. Disembodied arms were witnessed striking a dying woman by a priest who had arrived to administer her the last rites.⁶⁷² Hurston attributed duppies' sinister or mischievous behaviour to the idea that when the duppy leaves the body at the time of death, the heart and brain of the deceased are no longer able to restrain its actions and it will occupy itself with wickedness.⁶⁷³

Many rituals were performed when preparing the dead for burial and during the funeral and "wake" to ensure that the duppy of the deceased did not return to cause mischief, or bring illness or death to the living. Beckwith observed how rites surrounding death had different variations throughout the island such as the beating of the gombay drum in St Elizabeth and the lighting of bonfires in the Santa Cruz Mountains.⁶⁷⁴ Regardless of regional differences, according to Beckwith, the commonalty between all the rites surrounding death in African-Jamaican culture was that they arose out of 'the Negro's strong feeling for the contaminating power of rotting objects, especially of the rotting corpse...' and a more general human anxiety about the potential of the dead to return and 'disturb' the living.⁶⁷⁵ Precautions to prevent an unwelcome visitation included all water

⁶⁷¹ Jekyll, *Jamaica Song and Story*, p. 147.

⁶⁷² Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, pp. 7, 9, 17.

⁶⁷³ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, pp. 43-44.

⁶⁷⁴ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 83.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

being thrown from a house where a death had occurred.⁶⁷⁶ Every pocket in a deceased man's suit must either be sewn up or removed in case he returned with them full of stones – the flinging of stones being one of the traits of an angry or mischievous duppy. Once the body was ready for burial, the corpse had to be taken from the house via the front door; if it left by the back door it would keep returning.⁶⁷⁷ As the funeral paused by on its way to the church or burial ground, people would turn their backs to the coffin, so that the dead would not recognise them and come back to cause them harm.⁶⁷⁸ After burial, a tree would then be inverted in the grave to keep the duppy down.⁶⁷⁹

Once buried, there was a belief that nine nights after death, the spirit of the dead person would return home. Spinner attributed this to the idea that '[o]n the ninth night... the fate of the "resurrected" soul is eternally decided'.⁶⁸⁰ Brian Moore and Michele Johnson note how middle and upper-class funerals resembled British wakes and Hurston pointed out class differences in Nine Night practice.⁶⁸¹ Amongst the middle classes, the Nine Night had 'degenerated into something that approximates an American wake', whereas those held by the peasantry were observed in, what she believed to be, a more traditional manner.⁶⁸²

Writers on folk religion in the late post-emancipation period frequently described Nine Nights as including singing, feasting, dancing, and the playing of games. At a Nine Night Hurston attended in the parish of St Thomas, after the singing of hymns and the telling of folk tales, the deceased's bed was dismantled

⁶⁷⁶ Alice Spinner, *A Reluctant Evangelist and Other Stories* (London & New York: Edward Arnold, 1896), p. 317.

⁶⁷⁷ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 70, 74.

⁶⁷⁸ Williams, *Whisperings of the Caribbean*, p. 299.

⁶⁷⁹ Cundall, "Folklore of the Negroes of Jamaica", *Folklore*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Mar.25, 1904), p. 88.

⁶⁸⁰ Spinner, *A Reluctant Evangelist and Other Stories*, p. 317.

⁶⁸¹ Moore and Johnson, "*They Do As They Please*", p. 70.

⁶⁸² Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 39.

and thrown from the house, followed by food and water, before games and fights commenced.⁶⁸³

A final meal was laid out for the duppy to ensure it left for the realm of spirits in a satisfied state. The food had to be white and unsalted. Hurston noted that ‘white rum’, unsalted ‘white rice’ and ‘white fowl’ were provided for the duppy. Food for the mourners included ‘[f]ried fish, rice, rum... [and] coffee’.⁶⁸⁴ In the detailed list of a Nine Night meal recorded by Herbert De Lisser, bread, fruit, drinking chocolate and ginger wine were also included.⁶⁸⁵

The telling of folk stories was another feature of funerary activities. At the St Thomas Nine Night, when the duppy of the departed decided to put in an appearance, Hurston commented how the older mourners kept it ‘entertained with Anansi stories’.⁶⁸⁶ Because the stories’ characters, Anansi, the trickster spider (anti-)hero and his animal companions, behaved in a human fashion, Beckwith speculated whether there were some connection between the tales and African-Jamaicans ideas of the spirit realm, which had led to the association of Anansi stories with funerals or Nine Nights:

Is there any relation in the mind of the folk between this animal world in which Anansi moves... and that underworld of shadows in which the dead live in a manner corresponding to their life on earth?⁶⁸⁷

She had also been told by the ‘head-man’ on a Westmoreland estate that Anansi was ‘leader of the dead’ in the underworld.⁶⁸⁸ Beckwith believed that her theory was supported by Anansi’s origins being derived from a West African spider god

⁶⁸³ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

⁶⁸⁵ De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, p. 127.

⁶⁸⁶ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 49.

⁶⁸⁷ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 221.

⁶⁸⁸ Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, p. 8.

and that in African-Jamaican folk belief the spirits of the dead were able to take on animal form.⁶⁸⁹

Approximately a month after death, what Beckwith described as a ‘tombing ceremony’ took place. The grave would then be covered with another mound of earth, or masonry in the case of the better off. Stone was also used if the duppy of the deceased was believed to be potentially dangerous. Hurston was told at a Kumina ceremony for the dead which she attended in St Thomas, that the ‘cement tomb’ was not built over the grave until eighteen months after death to make sure that the duppy had actually settled there. If the building of the tomb occurred earlier, there was a risk that the duppy may not be settled in the grave and therefore be trapped outside with the result it would become ‘a wandering spirit’.⁶⁹⁰

If the rites surrounding death and burial were not successful in preventing the return of the duppy, there were techniques the living could use to prevent it from harming them. These included saying the name of Jesus Christ or warning family spirits before throwing water out of the house at night.⁶⁹¹ As duppies were believed to have an inability to count beyond nine, ten or more tobacco seeds should be placed by a door to stop them from entering a house. Once the duppy reached the ninth seed, it would have to start counting all over again and thus be too preoccupied to come in.⁶⁹²

Although Beckwith cited examples of death rituals from two nonconformist ministers W.J. Gardner and James Phillippo which portray events

⁶⁸⁹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 221; Beckwith, *Jamaica Anansi Stories*, p. 8.

⁶⁹⁰ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 84; Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, pp. 52-53.

⁶⁹¹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 90-91.

⁶⁹² However, she was also told that duppies’ mathematical skills improved if they were given salt as it gave them the ability to become ‘too strong for mortals’; Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 45.

as very loud and boisterous, the account given to her by her informant Wilfred Bonito emphasised the feasting aspects of the rituals and only briefly mentioned ‘singing and entertainment’.⁶⁹³ This may have been because Wilfred felt it better to downplay anything which may seem too rowdy in his account to Beckwith or it may simply be that the feasting side of the occasions appealed to him the most. Although Beckwith mentioned that some games were played ‘merely to let off the emotional exuberance of the occasion’, amongst other contemporary writers on African-Jamaican death rituals, a common theme emerges of the raucousness of the occasion.⁶⁹⁴ For example, Williams described the Nine Night as a ‘degrading orgy’ and that during an episode of shadow-catching at one funeral he witnessed, ‘a general condition of hysteria had taken possession of the entire gathering and rum was served throughout the evening’.⁶⁹⁵

Other comments reflected a concern with what Moore and Johnson describe as ‘a culture of noise’, music, loud social gatherings, and street preaching, which was to be found in parts of Kingston and the larger towns. Such working-class exuberance challenged the Victorian bourgeois ideas of behaviour that the elites believed should now be the norm in Jamaica.⁶⁹⁶ For instance, Bessie Pullen-Burry condemned Nine Nights as ‘rendering night hideous to the respectable community’ with ‘drinking and immorality marking the proceedings’.⁶⁹⁷ The voracity of the singing which accompanied wakes and Nine Nights was especially commented on. Williams noted that ‘[n]o end of effort is expended on each and

⁶⁹³ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 81-82.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁶⁹⁵ Williams, *Whisperings of the Caribbean*, p. 251; Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, pp. 212-213.

⁶⁹⁶ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, pp. 152-153.

⁶⁹⁷ Pullen-Burry, *Ethiopia in Exile*, p. 148.

every hymn'.⁶⁹⁸ Pullen-Burry expressed herself in less charitable language: '[t]hose who live close by a negro settlement are familiar with the awful din proceeding from a dead man's house as soon as darkness had settled over the earth'.⁶⁹⁹ De Lisser, who attended a Nine Night in one of the Kingston slums, was alerted to its happening by 'a series of piercing sounds that stabbed the darkness and waxed and waned with monotonous regularity'.⁷⁰⁰ Although he was critical of the amount of noise produced by the singing, especially the female voices which rose in a 'shrill ear-splitting crescendo', De Lisser did attempt an explanation for the volume. He thought it originated from a West African custom whereby loud voices and drumming and the blowing of conch shells were used to scare away the ghost of the deceased.⁷⁰¹

Hymns by the American evangelists Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey were popular choices on such occasions. Beckwith believed that the reason they were chosen was because they were not 'church hymns' since the Anglican churches disapproved of African-Jamaican wakes.⁷⁰² Although it may just have been that she was a more sympathetic observer, the "Sankeys" and other funerary songs which Zora Neale Hurston heard in St Thomas, appear a lot more mournfully muted in tone than those described by Pullen-Burry and De Lisser. Hurston wrote that, '[p]laintive tunes, mournful songs are sung now... A new and most doleful arrangement of "Lead Kindly Light" fairly drips tears'.⁷⁰³

⁶⁹⁸ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, pp. 211-212.

⁶⁹⁹ Pullen-Burry, *Ethiopia in Exile*, p. 148.

⁷⁰⁰ De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, p. 120.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 128.

⁷⁰² Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 80.

⁷⁰³ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 50.

Anthropologists, folklorists and duppies

The use of Sankeys during wakes illustrates how, by the late post-emancipation period, rituals to placate the dead, ensure their smooth transition to the afterlife and prevent their return to haunt the living, had become creolised. However, many of the roots of the African-Jamaican lore surrounding duppies came from West Africa. This is illustrated by West African beliefs that cottonwood trees were the habitat of spirits and in the need to provide food and other offerings to those John Mbiti describes as ‘the living dead’.⁷⁰⁴ As with Jamaican duppies, if African spirits of the dead were not satisfied with their funerary arrangements, there was always the risk they would demonstrate their displeasure by tormenting the living. It was not uncommon for anthropologists and folklorists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to look to the African provenance of Jamaican spirit beliefs. For example, Spinner noted the ‘old imported African’ belief in the connection of silk cotton trees with duppies. Reasoning that as both buffalos and the Rollin’ Calf cannot run up hills, Spinner wondered whether the Calf was a trace memory of the African buffalo.⁷⁰⁵ Hurston believed that Three-foot/Three-leg Horse had its origins as an African ‘sex symbol’ associated with ‘some West African puberty ceremony for boys’.⁷⁰⁶ In contrast to Beckwith’s theory that Old Hige had developed from European witch tales, Williams attributed the Hige’s origins to Africa, believing that one of the definitions of the Ashanti term *obayifo* was of a witch or hag who sheds her skin at night and emitted flames from all orifices. Like

⁷⁰⁴ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, pp. 81-82.

⁷⁰⁵ Spinner, *A Reluctant Evangelist and Other Stories*, p. 324; Spinner is vague about the source of her knowledge of buffalo mobility. Spinner, “Duppies”, *Daily Gleaner*, 30 September 1895.

⁷⁰⁶ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 26.

her Jamaican counterpart, this creature would suck the blood of its victims or eat their souls.⁷⁰⁷

The very existence of the Jamaican Old Hige's and her African sisters contributed to a racialised discourse on religion as a marker of evolutionary progress. Since West African cosmologies tended to be inhabited by many spirits, not only those of the dead, but of flora, fauna and natural features such as rivers and mountains, this contrast with the monotheism of mainstream western Christianity contributed to a view which claimed that Africans had no "real" religion.⁷⁰⁸ Whereas some earlier writers such as Edward Long made reference to African religions as possessing deities and, occasionally, an overall creator-god, by the late nineteenth century, James Bryce's view that amongst the tribes of South Africa, 'there was no evidence of belief in a deity... but only the worship of spirits and ghosts' was not uncommon in contemporary thinking on African religion as a whole.⁷⁰⁹ Bryce's observations on the apparent lack of deities in African religion grew out of a nineteenth-century premise of a cultural hierarchy.⁷¹⁰ This theory placed western civilizations at the top, followed by those of India and China, with Africa and the Pacific at the bottom.⁷¹¹ Partly through a narrative which had arisen to justify European nations' "scramble for Africa", Africa was portrayed as the "dark continent", in need of civilising and lacking in the progress associated with

⁷⁰⁷ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, pp. 169-170.

⁷⁰⁸ On the idea of parts of the landscape being regarded as sacred in African beliefs, see Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, pp. 54-55.

⁷⁰⁹ James Bryce, *Impressions of South Africa* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1897), p.109 cited in Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race*, p. 121. Bryce was a British Liberal politician who visited South Africa in the 1890s

⁷¹⁰ For example, Edward Long commented that Africans 'are said to have as many religions as they have deities, and these are innumerable, but some have been taught to believe in the existence of a supreme God'. Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, p. 378.

⁷¹¹ Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race*, p. 27.

western ideas of modernity. In terms of religion, monotheism was an indicator of progress and civilisation.

There were some exceptions to the viewpoint that Africans had no real religion. The British traveller Mary Kingsley noted that in West Africa: '[G]od, in the sense we use the word, is in essence the same in all the Bantu tribes I have met with on the Coast'.⁷¹² In the case of Jamaica, an early nineteenth-century writer on the history of the Maroons, acknowledged that some sort of pantheon existed as he noted they believed in a chief god, 'the creator of all things', who was called Accompong. This was despite, in his view, the Maroons not having 'any mode of worship'.⁷¹³

However, the more common consensus amongst those who did acknowledge that religion existed in modern Africa was that it was an example of how religious practices had once been many centuries ago in the west. This was based on the idea of a psychic unity of mankind which postulated that all human societies went through certain fixed stages of development which meant that at various points in time, 'every group should exhibit the same cultural traits'.⁷¹⁴ Anthropologists used this to explain similarities of beliefs and cultural practices exhibited between societies far removed from one another. If a modern group exhibited cultural patterns that were similar to those practised by other societies in the past, the contemporary society was deemed to be at a lower stage of its evolutionary development.

⁷¹² Dea Birkett, *Mary Kingsley: Imperial Adventuress* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), p. 69; Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, pp. 442, 492.

⁷¹³ R.C. Dallas, *The History of the Maroons*, (reprint, 2 vols, London: Cass, 1968, of orig. edn, London: Longman & Rees, 1803), vol. 1, p. 93.

⁷¹⁴ Beckwith, *Folklore in America*, p. 14.

For instance, according to British anthropologist Edward Tylor, human civilisation had developed in three main stages moving from savage hunter-gatherers to a barbaric phase where agriculture and the use of metal implements were the defining features, and finally to the civilised stage. Applying this sequence to religions, Tylor argued that “savage” peoples believed they were surrounded by invisible beings: nature spirits, demons and the ghosts of ancestors. He termed this belief in a world of numerous spirits of different orders, “animism”. Over time, such beliefs could develop into the deification of natural elements like the sun, sky, or sea, or of particularly powerful chiefs and warriors.⁷¹⁵ It was not until a people reached the barbaric stage that the idea of a dominant deity came about. According to Tylor, contemporary Africans ‘were at the same stage of thought as our Aryan ancestors’ since the sky was regarded as the ‘highest deity’ in both pantheons.⁷¹⁶

Theories about the development of religions based on evolutionary principles were still influential in the early twentieth century. For example, African religious beliefs were considered superstition by Bessie Pullen-Burry who labelled Africans as ‘fetich-worshipper[s]’ and victims ‘of the lowest superstitions’.⁷¹⁷ The idea that Africans and those of African heritage were at a stage of evolution behind white westerners in both their intelligence and cultural practices is clear in her comments that the African-Jamaican spirit world had developed out of black Jamaicans’ ‘mental powers of assimilation and digestion [which could] scarcely touch the spiritual plane’, resulting in ‘their hereditary Obeah-worship and dread

⁷¹⁵ Edward B. Tylor, *Anthropology* (reprint, abridged and with foreword by Leslie A. White, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960, of orig. edn, London: Macmillan, 1881), pp. 18-19, 210, 213, 214, 218.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁷¹⁷ Pullen-Burry, *Jamaica As It Is*, 1903, p. 147.

of “duppies””.⁷¹⁸ In *Jamaica As it Is, 1903*, Pullen-Burry mentioned that she was influenced by the anthropology of Tylor and this influence is apparent in her comments. However, hers seems a rather hard-line reading of Tylor.⁷¹⁹ Although he associated animism with ‘the lower races of mankind’, Tylor did not take such a dismissive view of non-monotheistic religions as Pullen-Burry. Instead, he believed they were a way in which certain societies rationalised events which they could not otherwise explain.⁷²⁰ Tylor also stressed the importance of animism to those studying religious forms as it gave an insight into ‘early religious development’.⁷²¹ Moreover, he disagreed with the views of other cultural evolutionists such as the folklorist George Gomme or the Austrian anthropologist and linguist Father Wilhelm Schmidt, who held that spiritual beliefs such as animism found in modern non-industrialised societies were a degeneration from a higher form of religion.⁷²²

Other examples of African spiritual beliefs being considered as a primitive in the early twentieth century appeared in the writings of Helen Roberts and Abraham Emerick. In her account of a Revival ceremony, Roberts commented how it made her ‘realize that with all the veneer of civilization which Great Britain had attempted to impose on the people, at times like this they forgot it all and reverted to primitive orgies of emotion’.⁷²³ Emerick, by describing African-Jamaicans as ‘prone to Animism’, placed their faiths at a low stage on Tylor’s

⁷¹⁸ Pullen-Burry, *Jamaica As It Is, 1903*, p. 122.

⁷¹⁹ ‘I confess my own liking for such books as Professor Tylor’s “Primitive Culture” and W.S. Laing’s “Human Origins”’, *Ibid.*, pp. 228-229.

⁷²⁰ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, p. 359; Tylor, *Anthropology*, p. 210.

⁷²¹ Edward B. Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization* (reprint, 3rd edn, revised, edited and abridged, with an introduction by Paul Bohannon, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1964, of orig. edn, London: Murray, 1865), p. 193.

⁷²² *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁷²³ Roberts, “Spirituals or Revival Hymns of the Jamaica Negro”, p. 411.

scale of the development of religions: according to Tylor, animistic beliefs were held by those at the “savage” level in terms of their cultural/religious evolution.⁷²⁴

Joseph Williams presented a somewhat different viewpoint. A belief that a Satanic influence permeated some African-Jamaican folk religions imbued Williams’s writings, yet he did acknowledge that Africans had both religious beliefs and religions (as opposed to superstitions or demonolatry), mentioning they worshipped a ‘Supreme Being’, ‘minor deities and ancestral spirits’. However, he believed that in Jamaica, because of the suppression of any forms of African religion in pre-emancipation times, the enslaved Africans who were ‘essentially religious’ turned to the secret veneration of Sasabonsam, Accompong or Obboney, spirits that Williams equated with the Christian Devil.⁷²⁵ Aside from acknowledging that deities were present in African and African-derived religions, Williams also commented on the intricacies of the African-Jamaican spirit world which contradicted contemporary stereotyping of folk religions as a lower form of culture. For example, when describing the funeral rituals of the Jamaican peasantry, Williams cautioned his readers that ‘[h]owever absurd many of these practices appear to us to-day, it must be kept in mind that they were all part of a complicated system of religious beliefs’.⁷²⁶ Beckwith, too, noted that the African-Jamaican spirit world had a ‘complex emotional life’.⁷²⁷

⁷²⁴ Abraham Emerick, “Jamaica Mialism”, p. 43.

⁷²⁵ Williams, *Voodooos and Obeahs*, p. 214.

⁷²⁶ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, pp. 193-194.

⁷²⁷ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. xi.

The impact of evolutionary theories of culture on perceptions of African-Jamaican folk religions

Beckwith's acknowledgment of the complexity of African-Jamaican spirit worlds as opposed to the evolutionary view that such beliefs were more akin to superstition than true religion illustrate her fundamental disagreement with evolution-based theories on the development of cultures. In *Folklore in America*, Beckwith dismissed the evolutionary theory of culture as a 'fallacy' which had 'no existence in any but the most general interpretation of fact'.⁷²⁸ Beckwith was also very critical of the comparative method used by earlier anthropologists such as Tylor and James Frazer. She gave the example of cultural uses of fire to criticise the way that the comparative method compared cultural elements outside of the socio-cultural context in which they had developed:

the Christian of the Catholic Church certainly burns a candle as a means of purification for the dead. But the Jamaican *obeah* man performs exactly the same rite as a means of effecting the death of an enemy... The identical ritual is associated in each case with dissimilar ideas which spring from quite different sources.⁷²⁹

Beckwith believed the comparative method was frequently used in too generalised a fashion to withstand 'rigorous scientific scrutiny'.⁷³⁰ Anthropologists and folklorists should exercise 'extreme caution' when comparing wide-ranging examples of culture.⁷³¹ Beckwith's opinions on comparative and evolutionary theories of culture employed by the older school of anthropologists are very much in keeping with those of Franz Boas. Whereas evolutionary anthropologists like

⁷²⁸ Beckwith, *Folklore in America*, p. 34.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷³⁰ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 22.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Tylor and Frazer compared examples of cultures from a variety of peoples in an attempt to find points of origin and explain the development of cultures, Boas argued that cultural traits emerged through a process of diffusion. Such diffusion was caused by a society's contacts with outside influences rather than by a process of cultural evolution.⁷³² According to Boas, cultures also needed to be viewed in their historical context: the comparative method was ahistorical, comparing modern practices with those held by "primitive" peoples who existed centuries before.⁷³³ Furthermore, he criticised the assumption that 'because modern cultures are complex... the chronological sequence of all cultural history has led from the simple to the complex'.⁷³⁴ Boas argued that 'complex' structures could be found in the music, 'decorative arts' and folk stories of primitive peoples.⁷³⁵

He also criticised the evolutionists for failing to take into account the impact of colonisation on the cultural development of some societies. For example, European colonisation from the fourteenth century onwards had brought new diseases to Africa and the Americas that the indigenous peoples had little or no resistance against, resulting in the deterioration of both local economies and societies.⁷³⁶

Although anthropologists were challenging ideas of a cultural hierarchy based on the theory of evolution, Social Darwinist concepts had a significant impact on how African-Jamaican religions were viewed in Jamaica. For example, in the Anglican church Bishop Enos Nuttall, who did much to reinvigorate the Church of Jamaica

⁷³² Herskovits, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 62; Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, p. 24.

⁷³³ Bronner, "The Early Movements of Anthropology and Their Folkloristic Relationships", p. 58.

⁷³⁴ Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, p. 159.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 157.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 171, 26.

after its disestablishment in 1870, was influenced by positivism and social Darwinism.⁷³⁷ Nuttall believed Africans were at a lower level of progress than white Europeans, and that ‘hundreds and even thousands of years’ must be allowed ‘for the uplifting of the masses of the African race to the full standard of the Christianity of Christ’.⁷³⁸

Ideas of cultural evolution also appeared in the writings of both black and white missionaries. In his critique of the British Empire’s use of Protestantism in its colonisation of Africa, the political commentator Theophilus Scholes, noted that ‘the missionary enterprise of the Caucasian, like all his other activities, is influenced by the spirit of Caucasian superiority’.⁷³⁹ At times, this notion of superiority took on a cultural as well as a racial tone, for example, when requests were made for funding missions to Africa. A strong interest in Africa amongst the general population of Jamaica had led to auxiliary missionary societies being formed to help raise awareness and funds for projects in Africa.⁷⁴⁰ Such drives for donations frequently portrayed Africans as ‘morally barbaric’ and in the grip of superstition. As it was part of the missionaries’ vocation to evangelise, aspects of African life which were considered heathen were especially emphasised or exaggerated.⁷⁴¹

Negative ideas about Africa and African or African-derived religions are noticeable in sentiments expressed by the black middle classes, even amongst

⁷³⁷ Under Nuttall’s leadership Anglican churches grew from 92 in 1884 to 212 in 1900. Bryan, *The Jamaican People 1880-1902*, p. 61.

⁷³⁸ Nuttall, “Negro Christianity” in Montgomery (ed.), *Mankind and the Church, by Seven Bishops*.

⁷³⁹ Theophilus E.S. Scholes, *Glimpses of the Ages or the “Superior” and “Inferior” Races, So-Called, Discussed in the Light of Science and History*, (2 vols, London: John Long, 1905-1908), vol II, p. 292.

⁷⁴⁰ Shirley C. Gordon, *Our Cause for His Glory: Christianisation and Emancipation in Jamaica* (Kingston: The Press, University of the West Indies, 1998), p. 50.

⁷⁴¹ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p. 332.

those who expressed pride in Africa and spoke out against race prejudice. For example, Scholes felt that present-day Africans were lagging behind Western societies: ‘in their early histories – political, social, and religious – the most forward nations of today were in a condition precisely similar to that in which most African tribes are now found’.⁷⁴² The notion that modern Western culture was superior to that of contemporary Africa also appeared in the writings of the social reformer and Presbyterian minister Charles Wilson. In the early twentieth century, Wilson wrote that ‘every sane man must acknowledge the unqualified superiority of whites on the whole’ and that slavery had been ‘the means by which Africa came in touch with western civilization’.⁷⁴³ He applied this view of the superiority of white culture to his views on African-Jamaican spiritual practices. Writing on the problem of African-Jamaican male unemployment, Wilson suggested that by maintaining beliefs such as Obeah, ‘[t]he terrible heritage of immorality handed down by the past generation’, African-Jamaicans were hampering their opportunities to get better jobs because white culture was held in such esteem.⁷⁴⁴ This resulted in white British people being brought in from abroad to fill posts instead of native Jamaicans.⁷⁴⁵ It could be argued that by saying that black Jamaicans needed to adopt white cultural practices to succeed, Wilson was simply acknowledging a fact of life in early twentieth-century Jamaica. However, his description of Obeah as a ‘terrible heritage of immorality’ reflected as much a contemporary middle-class attitude to African-Jamaican spiritual beliefs as it did the views of a disapproving Christian minister.

⁷⁴² Scholes, *The British Empire and Alliances*, p. 282.

⁷⁴³ Wilson, *Men with Backbone and other Pleas for Progress*, pp. 81, 89-90.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

African-Jamaican religions were also depicted in a negative way by Claude McKay in his book, *Banana Bottom*. The character of Wumba, an Obeah man, is portrayed as ‘a venal charlatan’ and is dressed in the manner of an ‘African witch doctor’ in animal skins. Wumba’s occult powers are shown as feeble and he ends up calling on the Christian God’s mercy in a moment of fear when he believes the day of judgement is nigh.⁷⁴⁶ Revival fared no better in the novel. A white Revivalist leader, Evan Vaughan, believed to be based on the English preacher Raglan Phillips, is also shown to be as ineffective in his own way as Wumba after he loses control of the church service he is holding to a black female Revivalist.⁷⁴⁷

Marcus Garvey also distanced himself from Jamaican folk religions. In response to a letter published in the *Gleaner* newspaper which pointed out similarities between Garvey and Alexander Bedward, Garvey wrote that the letter’s author sought ‘to prejudice the minds of the people in Jamaica against the intelligence that rules the Universal Negro Improvement Association, likening it to the Bedward movement.’⁷⁴⁸ However, as this interchange occurred four months after Bedward’s much publicised failed attempt to ascend to Heaven, and Bedward was still the source of much press ridicule, Garvey’s discomfiture at the comparison is perhaps understandable.⁷⁴⁹

As members of what Patrick Bryan dubs Jamaica’s ‘black intelligentsia’, Scholes, McKay, Wilson and Garvey would all have had their views on African religions influenced in part by the strong presence of Christian ideology in the Jamaican education system. They were also influenced in their thinking on African

⁷⁴⁶ Claude MacKay, *Banana Bottom* (reprint, London: Black Classics, 1998, of orig. edn, New York & London: Harper Bros, 1933), pp. 116-117.

⁷⁴⁷ Austin-Brooks, *Jamaica Genesis*, p. 91; McKay, *Banana Bottom*, p. 197.

⁷⁴⁸ *Daily Gleaner* 6 April 1921 cited in Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, vol. 3, p. 333.

⁷⁴⁹ Johnson, “Shamans, Shepherds, Scientists and Others in Jamaican Fiction”, p. 228.

cultures, through religious upbringings or, in the case of Scholes and Wilson, through their work as Christian ministers.⁷⁵⁰ Marcus Garvey's parents were staunch Methodists. Similarly, Claude McKay's parents were stalwarts of their local Baptist church and McKay trained to be an elementary school teacher at a time when the school curriculum was imbued with Christianity.⁷⁵¹ After studying medicine in Scotland, Theophilus Scholes had then toured Scotland and Ireland with a group of other black people speaking of the need for the Christian salvation of Africa and raising funds for such a mission.⁷⁵² He was also pastor of a church in Jamaica and had worked in West Africa as a medical missionary, running a sanatorium at Mukimvika.

The internalisation of white cultural attitudes towards African-Jamaicans and how these attitudes had become absorbed into folk religions was not confined to the black middle classes. This is demonstrated by a comment about the afterlife made by Bedward when speaking with Beckwith in 1920. Before becoming a preacher, Bedward had been a labourer and lacked any formal education.⁷⁵³ During the course of his interview, Bedward showed Beckwith his hands and stated that in the new heaven and the new earth they would be as white as hers. The description of the afterlife given to Beckwith by the Pukkumerian shepherd Sam Thompson provides another example of how some African-Jamaican leaders of folk religions absorbed contemporary racial hierarchies into their ideas of the spirit world. In a

⁷⁵⁰ Bryan, *The Jamaican People 1880 -1902*, p. 239.

⁷⁵¹ Tyrone Tillery, *Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p. 4.

⁷⁵² Jeffrey Green, "Scholes, Theophilus Edward Samuel, (c.1858-c.1940)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article57175> (2 September 2007).

⁷⁵³ 'Alexander Bedward was born of very humble parentage in St. Andrew... He is uneducated, and grew up a labourer on the Mona Estate': Brooks, *History of Bedwardism*, p. 6.

drawing of the underworld which he showed to Beckwith, the dead are pictured ‘working under the whip of the ruling class just as they had worked in life’.⁷⁵⁴ Although it is most likely a reflection of post-emancipation worker/employer class relations, Thompson’s view of the ‘the land of the dead’, which he called ‘Lomas land’, also has strong resonances with slavery.⁷⁵⁵

Spirit beliefs and social class

Thompson’s idea of an underworld which reflected the current socio-racial status quo provides an example of how intertwined class as well as race was in narratives on the African-Jamaican spirit world. On the one hand, Jamaican folk religions like Myal, Revival and Pukkumina were strongly associated with the working classes or peasantry. Hurston described Pukkumina as a ‘craze among the peasants’.⁷⁵⁶ Rupert Lewis argues that Bedwardism attracted ‘the most oppressed section of the poor peasantry and semi-proletarian masses’.⁷⁵⁷ In an account of the trials of Bedward and his followers in 1921 which appeared in the *Daily Gleaner*, the occupations of some of those charged included, ‘labourers, cultivators,... [and] wharf labourers’ as well as some artisans.⁷⁵⁸ Some commentators on folk religions in the late post-emancipation era made the inference that the respectable working class and peasantry would not involve themselves in such beliefs. For example, De Lisser stated that ‘no really decent peasant would dream of becoming a revivalist’.⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁴ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp.169-170.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁷⁵⁶ Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 3.

⁷⁵⁷ Lewis, “Garvey’s Forerunners”, p. 37.

⁷⁵⁸ ““Lord Bedward”, His Chief Lieuts, And Hundreds of His Followers Are Made Prisoners By Police Yesterday Morning”, *Daily Gleaner*, 28 April 1921, p.1.

⁷⁵⁹ De Lisser, *Twentieth Century Jamaica*, p. 77.

Generally speaking, if folk religions and some dissenting churches were seen as the preserve of the lower classes, then the elites, the middle classes and those with social aspirations made up the congregations of the more mainstream Anglican or nonconformist churches. For example, Pullen-Burry noted that the Anglican Church ‘represents today the chosen religious expression of the most enlightened and educated classes in this island’.⁷⁶⁰ The Methodists appealed to a different social and racial group than other dissenting churches, attracting middle class urban brown Jamaicans. The Wesleyan Methodists, in particular, were more conservative than other dissenting groups. They tried to attract the planter class and, prior to emancipation, there was strict racial segregation in their chapels.⁷⁶¹

Because of the racialised nature of the class structure, the way it affected religious affiliation in Jamaica meant that the discourse which classed African-Jamaican spirit worlds and folk religions as “superstition” was also strongly imbued with racist overtones. Although by the late post-emancipation period some black Jamaicans had joined the ranks of the middle classes, the majority of African-Jamaicans made up the working classes and peasantry. However, some writers on African-Jamaican folk religions took the view that beliefs in cosmologies consisting of multiple spirits and demons who interacted with the living transcended race. For example, Emerick described Myal as a form of ‘spiritualism’ in the western sense of the word and put forward the case of ‘an English gentleman’ he knew ‘who ordered his life by his spiritual mediums’.⁷⁶² Furthermore, Emerick argued that the Myal dance was no more outrageous than the ‘tango and other modern animal dances’, all of which he attributed to the work

⁷⁶⁰ Pullen-Burry, *Jamaica As It is, 1903*, p. 126.

⁷⁶¹ Philip D. Curtin, *Two Jamaicas: The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony, 1830-1865* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 36.

⁷⁶² Emerick, “Jamaica Mialism”, p. 42; Abraham Emerick, “Obeah and Duppyism”, p. 189.

of the Devil.⁷⁶³ His definition of ‘animal dances’ in this context was in reference to contemporary dances such as the ‘turkey trot, bunny hug, fish walk’, rather than the racial origins of the dance or dancers.⁷⁶⁴ Thomas Banbury likened Myalists who interacted with spirits to white spiritualists.⁷⁶⁵ Williams, too, argued that manipulation of the spirit world was not solely the preserve of Africans or those of African heritage:

I do not for a moment imply that such a condition of affairs is at all peculiar to Jamaica. It is the same the whole world over wherever similar conditions happen to exist. And let it be remembered that right here in the United States we are far from being free from communications with the Devil and other forms of demonolatry.⁷⁶⁶

The idea that beliefs in a complex world of spirits that did not conform to the cosmologies present in mainstream religions could also transcend class barriers was noted by other writers on African-Jamaican folk religions. For Henry Hesketh Bell, a person’s social class rather than their ethnicity, would predispose them to a belief in spirits. In *Obeah: Witchcraft in the West Indies*, he commented that ‘[t]he lower classes, all over the world, are fascinated by anything wrapped up in mystery’.⁷⁶⁷ Williams believed that people who contacted spirits could be found in all levels of society, not just ‘among the poor and illiterate of country districts, but actually within select circles of intellectual centres’.⁷⁶⁸ According to Jekyll, ‘[e]verybody in Jamaica believes in Duppy, and many women and children will not go out at night for fear of meeting one.’⁷⁶⁹ Moore and Johnson note how the

⁷⁶³ Emerick, “Jamaica Mialism”, p. 50.

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁷⁶⁵ Banbury, *Jamaica Superstitions*, p. 19.

⁷⁶⁶ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 259.

⁷⁶⁷ Bell, *Obeah*, p. 8.

⁷⁶⁸ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 259.

⁷⁶⁹ Jekyll, *Jamaica Song and Story*, p. 174.

socially pervasive fear of duppies led to the Jamaican elites holding prayer meetings nine nights after a death despite bourgeois disapproval of African-Jamaican funerary rituals.⁷⁷⁰ In a similar vein, Joseph Williams was sure that ‘educated Jamaicans’ were secretly fearful of encountering ‘Mr. Duppy’ at night in cemeteries or other locations associated with spirits.⁷⁷¹

Anthropologists were not immune to a belief in spirits. Amongst Beckwith’s contemporaries writing on African-Jamaican spiritual beliefs, Hurston and Williams stand out in the sense that, unlike the others, they both appeared to have a belief that some of the phenomena they witnessed were actually caused by supernatural means. For example, at the Pukkumerian tombing ceremony in St Thomas, Hurston wrote that she saw a calabash full of water moving under its own volition to the top of a palm booth beneath which it was housed. Vessels filled with water were used in certain ceremonies as an entry and exit point for any spirits present; in this case, the calabash rose at the end of a ritual to ensure the deceased had safely been ensconced in his or her grave.⁷⁷² Although Hurston accepted the creation and existence of zombies as real phenomena (she included a photograph of a female zombie she had encountered in Gonaives, and who she accepted as a genuine victim of the zombification process, in *Tell My Horse*), she trained in hoodoo in the United States and attempted to become an initiate in Haitian Vodou.⁷⁷³ Ifeoma Nwankwo argues that in the case of Vodou, Hurston could not separate herself from her role as an anthropologist there to investigate religious phenomena.⁷⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Hurston seemed to have a genuine sense of wonder

⁷⁷⁰ Moore and Johnson, “*They Do As They Please*”, p. 80.

⁷⁷¹ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 175.

⁷⁷² Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 56.

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 181, 195-197.

⁷⁷⁴ Nwankwo, “Insider and Outsider, Black and American”, p. 65.

about the spiritual manifestation that she witnessed in St Thomas. Despite stating that the poltergeist activities or strange occurrences which he had either witnessed or recorded during his time in Jamaica were in the main ‘delusions or human manipulations’, Williams contended that on some, albeit rare occasions, authentic phenomena occurred. He ascribed any real poltergeist occurrences to the influence of the Devil behind the actions of humans who manipulated and controlled the projectile-throwing duppies.⁷⁷⁵ This is illustrated by his interpretation of the events at the teacher’s house at Roehampton as being caused by duppy activity.

Unlike Williams and Hurston, Beckwith either cited examples of duppy lore without comment as to their veracity or she looked to a psychological explanation. For example, Beckwith was told of a Myal man called Fifee Bogle who managed to trap a duppy which was victimising a young woman. Bogle stood under the cotton tree where the duppy resided and ‘did all kinds of queer talk and beat the drum’ and sang.⁷⁷⁶ This forced the duppy down from the tree to be caught by the Myal man and the woman’s torments ceased. Beckwith praised ‘the astute Bogle’s’ methods, commenting that ‘no psychoanalyst could have handled the case more effectively’.⁷⁷⁷

In contrast, aside from his own experiences, Williams also gave credence to the testimonies of his fellow Jesuit missionaries concerning duppy activity in Jamaica, and Hurston cited a number of examples of elite or middle-class Haitians who acknowledged the power of Vodou and devoted a chapter in *Tell My Horse* to a Doctor Reser, a white American who practised Vodou.⁷⁷⁸ More generally,

⁷⁷⁵ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 217.

⁷⁷⁶ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 147.

⁷⁷⁷ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 148.

⁷⁷⁸ See Williams, “Introduction”, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*. When writing on the belief in zombies, Hurston noted that ‘The upper class Haitians fear too, but they do not talk about it so openly as the poor’. Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, p. 181.

there is little mention of middle-class (Jamaican or otherwise) beliefs in alternative cosmologies in the writings of Beckwith. In fact, Beckwith appeared to be somewhat surprised by the involvement of middle-class Jamaicans in African-Jamaican spiritual beliefs. For example, she commented that on the day of Bedward's ascension attempt, '[e]ven the intelligent whites believed that something out of the ordinary was about to happen' and, when confronted by an egg believed to be "set" by an Obeah practitioner, 'even a Christian and highly intelligent colored person will tremble with fear'.⁷⁷⁹ Since ethnicity is mentioned in these examples, it could be argued that Beckwith automatically associated folk religions and other spirituals beliefs deemed nonconventional with African Jamaicans. However, because race and class were so intertwined in Jamaica at that time, it could be as much an assumption that the working classes and the peasantry were more likely to follow folk religions than other sections of society.

It is hard to ascertain whether Beckwith made little mention of middle-class participation in esoteric practices because of a racialised association of folk beliefs with African Jamaicans. Nevertheless, her general lack of acknowledgement of such participation appears strange as, throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, there was a growth of interest in spiritualism, mysticism, and the occult by the middle classes and elites in parts of Europe and the Americas.⁷⁸⁰ In 1848 two teenage sisters in New York State made contact with what they believed was the spirit of a dead person through a series of

⁷⁷⁹ My italics. Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, pp. 168, 120. Beckwith commented at the start of *Black Roadways* how brown Jamaicans 'move among the better classes of the island' and distanced themselves from African-Jamaican folk beliefs. *Ibid.*, p. x.

⁷⁸⁰ 'During the early nineteenth century new pseudo-sciences such as mesmerism renewed intellectual interest in universal hidden forces': Davies, *Grimoires*, p. 174; Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 31.

tapping noises. Their experiences attracted widespread attention, and a religious movement subsequently developed whereby the dead communicated with the living through tapping on tables, moving set objects, or through being channelled by spiritualist mediums.⁷⁸¹ Spiritualism established itself in Britain after a visit by two American mediums in the 1850s. Later in the nineteenth century a new form, theosophy, which combined spiritualism with ‘eastern mysticism... and occultism’, developed.⁷⁸² The First World War triggered a rise in interest in the spirit world, partly because bereaved families visited mediums and fortune tellers hoping to contact loved ones who had died in the fighting and partly through the sense of uncertainty that such a major conflict had engendered.

A different form of spiritualism was gaining ground amongst the middle classes in Latin America. Kardecism or Spiritism was distinct from North American spiritualism as it was more of a philosophy than a religion, mixing ideas from modern scientific discoveries with a belief in reincarnation. During a séance, Spiritism’s founder, a French teacher Hippolyte Léon Rivail, became convinced that souls could be reborn. Through this conviction, Rivail changed his name to Allan Kardec, a name the spirits told him that he was known by in a previous life.⁷⁸³ Kardec wrote a number of books on Spiritism using material gained from the spirit world. This information from spirits was transmitted to him via two mediums employing the process of automatic writing.⁷⁸⁴ Once texts such as *The Book of the Spirits* (1905) were translated into Spanish, they became very influential in Latin America, especially in Cuba and Puerto Rico, amongst ‘the

⁷⁸¹ Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*, p. 172.

⁷⁸² Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951*, p. 31.

⁷⁸³ Davies, *Grimoires*, p. 157.

⁷⁸⁴ Kardec himself was not a medium. Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*, p. 172.

liberal middle classes who were disillusioned by the conservative political grip of the Church'.⁷⁸⁵

Occultism enjoyed a renaissance too. For example, in 1888 the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was founded. The Order mixed Hermeticism, Rosicrucianism and the Kabala with magical lore found in Ancient Egyptian papyri.⁷⁸⁶ The leading English occultist and mystic Aleister Crowley set up an occultists' commune, the Abbey of Thelema, in Sicily in 1920 in order for adepts to study the religion of Thelema which combined magical lore with esoteric philosophy. The white American William Lauron DeLaurence became the leader of the Order of the Black Rose, a 'magic and miscegenation cult' made up of black men and white women.⁷⁸⁷ Occult and mystical texts from his Chicago publishing house were influential in Nigeria and Ghana as well as in the United States and the Caribbean; for example, according to Owen Davies, DeLaurence publications played a significant role in 'the development of several popular religious movements in Nigeria, such as *Mami Wata* worship'.⁷⁸⁸

Conclusion

Overall, in Beckwith's writings on duppies and duppy lore, she appears more in the role of detached observer and recorder of material than in her work on the faiths of the African-Christian complex and Obeah. There is little in the way of her opinions on the African-Jamaican spirit world. Unlike Emerick and Williams, Beckwith made no connections between the western forms of spiritualism and

⁷⁸⁵ Davies, *Grimoires*, p. 157.

⁷⁸⁶ From the late 1820s, Ancient Egyptian magical texts had started to be decoded in the West. *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 172.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 216-217.

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

esoteric beliefs which had been growing in popularity throughout the nineteenth century and the Jamaican spirit world which she was researching. She also largely ignored any belief in duppies held by the Jamaican middle classes and elites even though other commentators had noted the ubiquity of such beliefs throughout Jamaica. These omissions may have been because the focus of Beckwith's Jamaican fieldwork was the folklore and folk life of the African-Jamaican peasantry; therefore, she may have simply felt such links not to be relevant to her field of study. In the foreword to *Black Roadways* she stated that her aim in going to Jamaica was to study 'the life and thought of the Negro peasant population of the country districts'.⁷⁸⁹ As a white middle-class American, Beckwith would have obviously been writing from an etic perspective. However, Beckwith's ignoring of the fact that beliefs in spirit worlds outside of mainstream religions transcended race and class has resulted in an emphasis on the "otherness" of African-Jamaican spiritual ideas. Anthropologist Susan Greenwood, in her study of modern British Wicca, states that by attributing beliefs in 'otherworlds' and their spiritual inhabitants entirely to a person's own psychology, the reality of those beliefs becomes devalued.⁷⁹⁰ Greenwood's argument is applicable to Beckwith's interpretation of the success of Fifee Bogle in trapping the duppy. By attributing it to clever psychology on the part of Bogle, Beckwith denied the reality to Bogle, the victim of the duppy, and other Jamaicans who held similar beliefs, of a worldview which held that spirits of the dead could, and did, interact with the living. Therefore, just as the earlier evolutionary anthropologists considered African religions and spiritual beliefs as inferior to mainstream Christianity,

⁷⁸⁹ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. vii.

⁷⁹⁰ Greenwood, *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld*, p. 13.

Beckwith's desire to approach folk culture in a scientific manner also contributed to reducing African-Jamaican spirit beliefs to simply folk lore, rather than components of a genuine cosmology.

Conclusion: Martha Warren Beckwith's Impact and Legacy

Martha Warren Beckwith's work on African-Jamaican folk life was pioneering for its time. The information she collected and her treatment of her subject matter have left a number of important legacies for later generations of scholars researching the folk culture and religions of the African-Jamaican peasantry during the interwar years.

Her first legacy is in her choice of study area; at the time the Caribbean was not popular amongst British and American anthropologists as a region for research. Although Caribbean folklorists were keen on collecting local stories, proverbs and songs, many anthropologists from outside the area considered its cultures inauthentic, solely the product of acculturation. Nor did its inhabitants conform to the anthropologists' typical study group of isolated peoples removed from modern influences. Beckwith was something of a trail-blazer in her choice of Jamaica for her research. In the 1940s, Melville Herskovits described *Black Roadways* as 'one of the pioneer ethnographic works from the entire New World Negro area'.⁷⁹¹ Later anthropologists have also noted Beckwith's achievements as ground-breaking. For example, George Eaton Simpson commented that 'with the exception of Martha Beckwith's *Black Roadways* (1929), very little scientific work in the fields of cultural anthropology and sociology was undertaken in Jamaica until the late 1940s'.⁷⁹² Similar sentiments were expressed by Don Robotham who believed that Beckwith's research, along with Walter Jekyll's *Jamaica Song and Story* (1907), was '[t]he beginning of real scientific

⁷⁹¹ Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, p. 17.

⁷⁹² George Eaton Simpson, "Jamaican Revivalist Cults", *Social and Economic Studies*, vol. 5, no. 4 (1956), p. i.

anthropology and archaeology in Jamaica'.⁷⁹³ Sidney Mintz has described *Black Roadways* as 'a valiant first attempt to write an ethnography of the Caribbean', and Simon Bronner credits the book with being 'the first folklife study of blacks in the New World'.⁷⁹⁴

Beckwith's second legacy is her influence on other anthropologists and folklorists - those for whom *Black Roadways* made an impact on their own Caribbean research. In *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, Joseph John Williams, previously a harsh critic of Beckwith's, described *Black Roadways* as a 'delightful little book'.⁷⁹⁵ Although the language may seem patronising, his sentiments appear to be sincere since he cited examples from Beckwith's work on a number of occasions in *Psychic Phenomena*. Nevertheless, Williams's interest in Beckwith's work seems to have been something of an exception as Mintz has commented that '*Black Roadways* received very little notice at the time of its publication'.⁷⁹⁶ Mintz attributed this to the general antipathy amongst anthropologists towards the Caribbean as an area of study.⁷⁹⁷ However, Beckwith did make an impression on later generations of researchers. For example, Jean Besson points out Beckwith's influence on the wave of anthropologists and sociologists, 'Edith Clarke, Fernando Henriques, and Michael G. Smith', whose work on Jamaica appeared from the 1950s onwards.⁷⁹⁸ Besson also credits *Black Roadways*, which she describes as 'the seminal ethnography of the Jamaican peasantry', as an influence on her own

⁷⁹³ Don Robotham, "Anthropology and Archaeology in Jamaica", *America Indigena* [Mexico], no. 40 (2) (1980), p. 356.

⁷⁹⁴ Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories*, p. xv; Bronner, *Following Tradition*, p. 259.

⁷⁹⁵ Williams, *Psychic Phenomena of Jamaica*, p. 197.

⁷⁹⁶ Besson, *Martha Brae's Two Histories*, p. xv.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xv.

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxii. For example, Clarke's *My Mother Who Fathered Me* (1957), Smith's *The Rastafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica* (1960) and Henrique's *Family and Colour in Jamaica* (1968).

work on Revival religion in a Jamaican village, *Martha Brae's Two Histories: European Expansion and Caribbean Culture-Building in Jamaica* (2002).⁷⁹⁹

Since Beckwith was researching and collecting examples of African-Jamaican folk cultures at a time when they were largely ignored by other anthropologists, a third legacy of her Jamaican fieldwork is that she recorded material that may otherwise have been lost. The author of an article on Jamaican folk tales which appeared in the *Daily Gleaner* in 1970 cited both Beckwith's and Jekyll's works as examples of collections of Anansi stories which had been preserved at a time when 'story telling is now dying out in Jamaica as elsewhere'.⁸⁰⁰ In a similar vein, Olive Lewin describes *Black Roadways* as 'a valuable source of information' and that without the work of Beckwith, Helen Roberts and Walter Jekyll, 'much of Jamaica's traditional music and oral history might well have been irretrievably lost'.⁸⁰¹ Lewin also credits Beckwith, Jekyll and Roberts with bringing 'new perspectives to old practices', by taking African-Jamaican folk culture 'seriously' at a time when it was otherwise overlooked by researchers.⁸⁰²

Whilst Beckwith's fieldwork was particularly valuable in preserving African-Jamaican folk tales and customs which might otherwise have been lost, it has also provided a source of information about African-Jamaican religious beliefs and practices during the interwar years. In this regard, Dianne Stewart's comments on the material on Obeah and Myal collected by white planters during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries could also be applied to Beckwith's

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid., p. xxii.

⁸⁰⁰ "Once Upon A Time", *The Daily Gleaner*, 7 January 1970, p. 3. [consulted at <http://gleaner.newspaper.com> (3rd January, 2013)].

⁸⁰¹ Lewin, *Rock it Come Over*, pp. 47, 43.

⁸⁰² Ibid., p. 43.

Jamaican research. Stewart argues that, although problematic when ‘ascertaining the ethical and social significance of African-derived religions to practitioners’, these white observations of African-Jamaican religions still:

provide a clear view into the complex and nuanced religiosity of enslaved Africans in Jamaica during a period characterized by severe censorship and suppression of African culture and self-representation.⁸⁰³

Aside from the salvage aspects of Beckwith’s research, Lewin highlights another valuable aspect of her African-Jamaican fieldwork: as an academic who took African-Jamaican folk cultures seriously. Ken Post has argued that folk cultures were important to working-class African Jamaicans as they provided a means of keeping a sense of identity ‘[b]eneath the thick accretion of dominant values’ imposed by a society which looked down on them because of their ethnicity and class.⁸⁰⁴ By taking Jamaican folklore and folk life as an area worthy of academic study, Beckwith helped to demonstrate its importance and value. Her methodology, of including folk religions amongst other examples of African-Jamaican life such as the structure of the family, rites of passage, house-building, and agricultural practices, showed that the religions were part of a logical system of beliefs. This is especially true in the case of Obeah, an aspect of black Jamaican culture frequently commented on by outside observers usually to its detriment. More often than not, it was depicted as either a form of charlatanry performed by slick fraudsters on the gullible and superstitious, or purple prose was used to describe in lurid detail what were believed to be Obeah practices: orgies, human sacrifice, trysts with the Devil and/or malevolent African gods. Although Beckwith accepted contemporary depictions of the Obeah practitioner as either

⁸⁰³ Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, p. 34.

⁸⁰⁴ Post, “*Arise Ye Starvelings*”, p. 145.

charlatan or mentally confused by age or infirmity, she also saw positives in the practice, most notably in the healing abilities of some Obeah men and women. Beckwith's idea that Obeah was, above all, a neutral power which could be used for good or evil foreshadows modern thinking. Her more broadminded approach to Obeah is further demonstrated by her consideration in *Black Roadways* that deaths attributed to Obeah may be caused by something other than the use of poisons. Her example of a white man dying from an Obeah woman's curse highlighted that whites could be susceptible to a terror of Obeah so powerful that it resulted in death. This idea went against a view in many writings on Obeah that associated an overriding fear of its power with working-class black Jamaicans. If whites were noted as being fearful of Obeah, it was more typically ascribed to the Obeah man or woman's reputed skill in the administering of poisons, rather than through any belief in the Obeah practitioners' manipulation of duppies or placing of curses.

Beckwith's take on Revival is also more balanced than that of many of her contemporaries. Whereas those such as Herbert De Lisser and Abraham Emerick depicted the practice as a form of hysteria, Devil worship, or demonology, Beckwith wrote approvingly of some of the Revival services she attended, especially those held by the female leader and well-known healer Mammy Forbes. Beckwith's stance towards Revival and other Jamaican creolised faiths arose from her belief that it was the nature of folk culture to constantly evolve and for new folk groups to emerge. New beliefs and practices created by these changes were, in her opinion, as equally valid as areas of study as those considered "traditional". Her views are a contrast to those of ethnologists such as Williams or Herbert Thomas who regarded creolised beliefs as somehow a lesser form of culture in

contrast to what they believed was the original, purer, African form. Beckwith's Jamaican research shows little interest in the *ur-form* of African-Jamaican folk religions; a quest for origins only appeared in her work on the literary forms of African-Jamaican folk cultures: proverbs, songs and stories. Instead, her focus was primarily on the cultural and spiritual practices current at the time of her research.

Beckwith's Jamaican research was conducted and published at a time of transition in the study of both anthropology and folklore. Folklore studies were moving from being the pursuit of amateurs to becoming an academic discipline in their own right. In anthropology, the theories of the earlier evolutionary anthropologists were being replaced by Boasian ideas of cultural relativity. These developments impacted on Beckwith's approach to the folk religions that she was studying and contributed to some of the differences between her writings and those of her contemporaries.

American anthropology and folklore studies reflected attitudes in the United States towards its own citizens of African heritage and in its relationship with the Caribbean in general. Franz Boas and his students did much to challenge contemporary anthropological thinking about Africans and those of the African diaspora. They moved away from prevailing ideas that African-American culture was inferior to white culture, that the enslaved blacks forcibly transported to the New World arrived with no cultures of their own, and that phenotype was an indicator of intelligence and culture. However, even some Boasian anthropologists were not immune from an almost implicit sense of superiority generated in part by the United States' increasingly imperialistic behaviour towards the Caribbean in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Examples of cultural superiority

can be seen in Beckwith's belief that the Jamaican ruling classes needed guidance in dealing with the poorer levels of society and in Zora Neale Hurston's comments on the superior treatment of women in the United States, and her sweeping generalisations about the character of the Haitian people. Unlike Herskovits, Hurston did reference the nineteen-year occupation by the U.S. Marines but omitted to mention any problems caused by it.

The influence of contemporary American attitudes towards race and the Caribbean on Martha Beckwith's work make it as problematic as it was pioneering. Despite Beckwith appearing to have a good relationship with, and a respect for, her primary informants, she readily accepted certain beliefs about the Jamaican peasantry. In the case of Revival, she reiterated the idea that its practice led to hysteria and insanity. With Obeah, she followed Thomas's ideas of two types of practitioner, the charlatan and the gullible misfortunate. Beckwith's acceptance of socio-racial stereotypes in regard to African Jamaicans is further illustrated by her comment that the African-Jamaican working classes were 'shiftless'.⁸⁰⁵ She felt that they needed guidance and, in *Black Roadways*, Beckwith criticised the British and Jamaican governments for their neglect of the rural peasantry and called for them to put measures in place to discourage slothfulness in that sector of society. To prevent the Devil (or Sasabonsam) finding work for idle hands, Beckwith felt that a programme of activities, organised by the ruling classes, would have the benefits of preventing African-Jamaicans from following those aspects of folk religions and beliefs which she held to be "superstitious" or unseemly.

⁸⁰⁵ Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, p. 225.

As this example demonstrates, at times Beckwith moved away from her desired role as detached observer and recorder of material, taking a less than culturally relative approach to her subject matter. Her language, when describing the African-Jamaican peasantry had, if not racist overtones, then echoes of the earlier evolutionary anthropologists' racialised categorisations of cultures; for example, in the use of words like 'backward'.⁸⁰⁶ Frequently she labelled certain beliefs and practices, especially those elements of the folk religions which she disapproved of, as "superstitions". That she appeared to have regarded the African-Jamaican peasantry as inherently prone to "irrational" beliefs is illustrated by the lack of references she made to white or middle class interest in interactive spirit worlds or alternative cosmologies. Such interests, which had been on the increase in Europe and the Americas since the nineteenth century, were also often dismissed by critics as superstitions or occultism. Beckwith's stance is in contrast to some of her contemporaries. For example, Williams and Emerick both compared the similarities between white interest in spiritualism and esoterica with African-Jamaican involvement in Obeah and Revival. Nevertheless as western commentators often associated folk beliefs with the peasantry regardless of country or ethnicity, it is hard to say unequivocally whether Beckwith attributed a tendency towards superstition in rural African-Jamaicans purely because of their race, or because of their social status and geographical location, or indeed a mixture of all these factors.

However, a clue to this may lie in Beckwith's Hawaiian writings – Hawaii being the other area of research where she was most prolific. The terminology in her Jamaican fieldwork appears to be in direct contrast to the language she used

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid., p. xi.

when describing the Hawaiians. For example, a telling comment can be found when Beckwith was writing of her early upbringing on Maui: ‘we were always aware of a life just out of reach of us latecomers but lived intensely by the *kindly, generous race* who chanced so many centuries ago upon its shores’.⁸⁰⁷

Whether Beckwith’s opinions of African Jamaicans were influenced by her views on race or her subjects’ social status, they contributed to the creation of a further gulf between herself and the subjects of her research. By doing this, Beckwith conformed to Johannes Fabian’s view that western anthropologists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries distanced themselves from the non-western subjects of their research by linking non-western societies with ‘stagnation, underdevelopment and tradition’.⁸⁰⁸ In contrast, western societies were associated with rapid progress, sophisticated belief systems and technological developments.⁸⁰⁹ As a white middle-class American academic Beckwith was already an outsider. By this further distancing of herself from the people whose beliefs she studied, she reinforced the criticism that her research emphasised the otherness of African-Jamaican folk religions.⁸¹⁰

During the Algerian war of independence, the anti-colonial activist and author Frantz Fanon wrote that in the eyes of the coloniser, ‘[t]he customs of the colonized people, their traditions, their myths above all, their myths – are the very sign of their poverty of spirit and of their constitutional depravity’.⁸¹¹ Although written in

⁸⁰⁷ My italics. Beckwith, *Hawaiian Mythology*, p. xxxi.

⁸⁰⁸ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (reprint, with a new foreword by Matt Bunzel, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, of orig. edn, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 144.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁸¹⁰ Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis*, p. 77.

⁸¹¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (reprint, Harmondsworth & New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1978, of orig. edn, London: Mac Gibbon & Kee, 1965), p. 32.

the early 1960s, Fanon's premise holds true for elite and etic attitudes towards African-Jamaican folk religions in the late post-emancipation era. Martha Warren Beckwith's writings on these faiths and spiritual belief systems, along with other aspects of African-Jamaican folk culture went some way to challenging such attitudes; for instance, by seeing value and logic in spiritual belief systems like Obeah. Diana Paton and Maarit Forde have commented on Melville Herskovits's importance in the field of Caribbean anthropology, noting that '[a]s well as undertaking important research himself... Herskovits also influenced a generation of American anthropologists who studied the Caribbean, including Katherine Dunham, Zora Neale Hurston, and George Eaton Simpson'.⁸¹² Beckwith, in her choice of subject matter and her methodology, was a forerunner to Herskovits; therefore I consider her role to be equally important in opening up the field for future researchers. By looking at the information given to Beckwith by her informants on African-Jamaican folk religions, a number of different viewpoints emerge: belief, fear, cynicism, pragmatism, true faith, and respect. In a way, these differing viewpoints resonate with Beckwith's own, at times contradictory, opinions on the folk religions she studied. At times Martha Warren Beckwith's Jamaican writings are problematic and her approach to her subject contradictory, but the overall pioneering nature of her work means that her research has provided, and still provides, a valuable contribution to the study of African-Jamaican folk religions.

⁸¹² Forde and Paton, "Introduction", p. 17.

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