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MEMORY AND MYTH: POSTCOLONIAL RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY GUYANESE FICTION AND POETRY

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I investigate and problematize the historical location of the term 'religion' and examine how this location has affected the analytical reading of postcolonial fiction and poetry. The term 'religion' has been developed in response to a Western Enlightenment and Christian history and its adoption outside of this context should therefore be treated with caution. Within postcolonial literary criticism, there has been either a silencing of the category as a result of this caution or an uncritical and essentialising adoption of the term 'religion'. I argue that a vital aspect of how writers articulate their histories of colonial contact, migration, slavery and the re-forging of identities in the wake of these histories is illuminated by the classificatory term 'religion'. I demonstrate this through the close reading of Guyanese fiction and poetry, as critical themes are seen and discussed that would be otherwise ignored. Aspects of postcolonial theory and Religious Studies theory are combined to provide a new insight into the literature and therefore expand the field of postcolonial literary criticism. The way in which writers 'remember' history through writing is central to the way in which I theorize and articulate 'religion' throughout the thesis; the act of remembrance is persuasively interpreted in terms of 'religion'. The title 'Memory and Myth' therefore refers to both the syncretic mythology of Guyana, and the key themes in a new critical understanding of 'religion'.

Chapter One establishes the theoretical framework to be adopted throughout the thesis by engaging with key developments made in the past decade by Religious Studies theorists. Through this dialogue, I establish a working definition of the category religion whilst being aware of its limitations, particularly within a discussion of postcolonial literature. I challenge the reluctance often shown by postcolonial theorists in their adoption of the term 'religion' and offer an explanation for this reluctance.

Chapter Two attends to the problems involved in carrying out interdisciplinary research, whilst demonstrating the necessity for such an enquiry. Chapters Three, Four and Five focus on selected Guyanese writers and poets and demonstrate the illuminating effect of a critical reading of the term 'religion' for the analysis of postcolonial fiction and poetry. Chapter Three provides a close reading of Wilson Harris's novel *Jonestown* alongside theoretical and historical material on the actual Jonestown tragedy. Chapter Four examines the mesmerising effect of the Anancy tales on contemporary writers, particularly poet John Agard. And Chapter Five engages with the work of Indo-Guyanese writer, David Dabydeen and his elusive character Manu.

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INTRODUCTION

The central concern throughout this thesis is to investigate and problematize the historical location of the term 'religion' and how this location has affected the analytical reading of postcolonial fiction and poetry. The absence of any previous enquiry has led to the neglect of a vital aspect of how writers articulate their histories of colonial contact, migration, slavery and the re-forging of identities in the wake of these histories. I will argue that these key themes in postcolonial studies are illuminated by the classificatory term 'religion'. When the term 'religion', as a taxonomy, is applied to the close reading of Guyanese fiction and poetry, critical themes are seen and discussed that would be otherwise ignored. Throughout the thesis, the analytical subtleties of the classificatory term 'religion' will be addressed and expanded as it is applied to the close reading of Guyanese fiction and poetry. A key development to arise from the analysis of the fiction is the role of memory in my understanding and articulation of 'religion'. Historical and communal memories combine the Caribbean, Africa, India, China and Europe within Guyana forming a unique mythical plane where the Hindu goddess Kali, the Ashanti spider-god Anancy, and the Christian Virgin Mary all dwell. The title 'Memory and Myth' encompasses both Guyana's syncretic culture, which has become the muse for many Guyanese artists, and the key themes in a new critical understanding of 'religion'.

My use of the term 'religion'[1] responds to recent debates in the field of Religious Studies that have raised questions about the unproblematic and essentialist

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[1] The inverted commas act to emphasise the problem of categorising 'religion' in the opening pages of the thesis; the category is in question throughout, even when the visual emphasis is dropped, but the inverted commas will be used when I wish to draw particular attention to the issues.

adoption of the term with little understanding of its roots in Western, Christian, and Enlightenment history. Since the Enlightenment, and the establishment of the academic study of religion, the use of the term 'religion' has often assumed that there exists a unique, autonomous and transcendent experience that is essentially 'religious'. This has served to prioritise and protect the study of 'religion' from more critical enquiry by the authority it assumes. 'Religion' is more productively understood within, rather than above, the socio-political context of human experience. In the last decade, a handful of key scholars have been involved in these debates:[2] Russell McCutcheon, both in his own work *Manufacturing Religion* (1997) and as he positions the key issues with Willi Braun in the volume *Guide to the Study of Religion* (2000), has addressed the essentialist understanding of the term 'religion', and encouraged 'religion' to be understood as a classificatory construction. He writes: "sui generis religion is a constructed, analytical tool with an occluded manufacturing history and disguised material implications" and what is therefore needed is to "dispel the long-standing assumption that matters of religiosity and spirituality inhabit a privileged, unblemished realm" (McCutcheon, 1997: 5). Richard King (*Orientalism and Religion*, 1999) and David Chidester (*Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*, 1996) have re-located the term 'religion' in the light of postcolonial issues, while Tim Fitzgerald has argued, more radically, that the term 'religion' is redundant as an analytical category (*The Ideology of Religious Studies*, 2000) and Jeremy Carrette has nuanced the term religion through a reading of Foucault (*Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault*, 1999 and *Foucault and Religion*, 2000).[3] The key understanding that unites these often diverse works is that the term 'religion' is a construct and a political signifier.

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[2] Although this development has largely taken place in the last decade, the first thinker to problematize the category 'religion' was Wilfred Cantwell Smith in (1962) 1978 in his text, *The Meaning and End of Religion.*

[3] This list is far from exclusive and will be expanded on in the first chapter.

McCutcheon writes: "On the taxonomic level... operational definitions of religion are flexible analytical tools employed to investigate an aspect of human history and culture" (McCutcheon, 1997: 19). This construct, therefore, still has a key role in defining distinctive moments of exchange and contact between diverse landscapes and competing forces of power.[4] Carrette importantly states: "even if something is constructed it still functions" (Carrette, 2001: 125). For this study, 'religion' can offer lines of enquiry into postcolonial literary studies that would otherwise be undetected and an understanding of colonial contact as a religious phenomenon. Guyanese writers and poets are writing from a land and landscape defined by moments of exchange, often violent contact, and the merging of physical and non-material[5] boundaries; these themes are addressed recurrently by creative writers and it is these themes that define one's understanding of the category 'religion' in a postcolonial context. It is important to add that the nuancing of the term 'religion' is not to "deny that the behaviours and articulated beliefs of certain people are indeed understood by them to be religious" (McCutcheon, 1997: 11). Rather, the renegotiation of the category prevents other aspects of human experience responding to social, political and historical situations being denied consideration within the study of religion.

The specific location of the thesis is in the new and emerging interdisciplinary field of religion and postcolonial fiction and seeks to develop significantly this under-researched area, particularly by being an interdisciplinary study (it has been equally located in the Western academic fields of Religious Studies and English Studies). Both Postcolonial Studies and Religious Studies will therefore value from the creative links that are made between two varying disciplinary locations. Colonial ventures have been

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[4] It is this assertion that would see divisions in the thinking and approach of the listed scholars.
[5] I use the word 'non-material' to describe the *meta*physical, or what is often incorporated within discourses of the spiritual, and to therefore avoid similar tensions implicit within the category 'spiritual', as in 'religion'.

analysed in terms of religion for several decades, most recently by David Chidester (1996). It was the historian of religion, Mircea Eliade who first pointed to the "religious implications of geographic discoveries and colonization, principally the colonization of the two Americas" (Eliade, 1969: 88). Eliade's *sui generis* use of the term 'religion', that it described a transcendent, ahistorical essence, has been heavily discredited (McCutcheon, 1997: 12-13); however, his work still highlights how religion, as an analytical tool, can shed light on the colonial venture. Eliade was one of the first to recognise and analyse the European expeditions of 'discovery' and colonisation in terms of religion. In 1949, he wrote:

> It was in the name of Jesus Christ that the Spanish and Portuguese conquistadors took possession of the islands and continents that they had discovered and conquered. The setting of the Cross was equivalent to a justification and to the consecration of the new country, to a 'new birth,' thus repeating baptism (act of creation) (Eliade, 1949: 11).

It was the desire for a new beginning in an "earthly paradise" (Eliade, 1969: 90) that defined the first contact with the Americas: it was a religious pilgrimage. The violent possession of this paradise and the enslavement, torture and murder of the indigenous population was therefore also a religious venture. The desired outcome of this pilgrimage was the renewal and expansion of the Christian world. In 1969, Eliade pursued his argument further. He wrote:

> Christopher Columbus did not doubt that he had come near the earthly paradise… The great navigator accorded an eschatological significance to this geographic discovery… In his book… Columbus affirmed that the end of the world would be preceded by the conquest of the new continent… it was in this messianic and apocalyptic atmosphere that the transoceanic expeditions and geographic discoveries that radically shook and transformed Western Europe took place… people believed that the time had come to renew the Christian world (Eliade, 1969: 90-91).

Guyana was of particular interest to the early conquistadors because it was thought to hold the rumoured city of gold, El Dorado, and was therefore an ideal site of pilgrimage. As Eliade states, "the collective search [for El Dorado] lasted over four centuries and may doubtless be classified among the most singular religious phenomena" (Eliade, 1969: 102-3). Sir Walter Ralegh[6] was the first English explorer to travel to Guyana and it was the legendary city of gold that took him there. However, like Columbus, Ralegh was also in search of an earthly paradise, a utopian land of myth and legend. The title alone of Ralegh's autobiography of his travels, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana* (1596) is testimony to his desire to find a paradise and to lay claim to it. In Ralegh's descriptions, Guyana is described in terms of abundant fertility:

> … although the winter and summer as touching cold and heate differ not, neither do the trees ever senciblie lose their leaves, but have always fruite either ripe or green, and most of the year both blossomes, leaves, ripe fruit, and green at one time (Ralegh, 1596/1967: 71 – original spelling).

Through descriptions of excessive fertility, the landscape was often feminised. Intimate descriptions of 'virgin lands,' such as Ralegh's, were prolific amongst the writings of the early conquistadors.[7] The excessive fertility they described not only suggested that there was a desire to tame it, to civilise the wilderness and its inhabitants, but it also supports Eliade's argument that the conquistadors were in search of a new paradise filled with lavish beauty from which to renew the Christian world. Charles Nicholl argues that Ralegh was intrigued by the occultist movements of the sixteenth century

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[6] According to Charles Nicholl, Ralegh spelt his name this way rather than the often documented spelling, Raleigh. He also pronounced it 'Rawley' rather than 'Rahley' (Nicholl, 1996: 4).
[7] Columbus described the Caribbean islands in a similar way: "this island and all the others are very fertile to an excessive degree, and this island is extremely so… and many river, good and large, which is marvellous; its lands are high; there are in it many sierras and very high mountains… filled with trees of a thousand kinds and tall, seeming to touch the sky; and I am told they never lose their foliage…" (The letter of Columbus, 1493, edited by Hulme & Whitehead, 1992: 10).

and describes his El Dorado quest as being a direct product of this intrigue. For the occultists, conquest was a romantic expedition resulting in the birth of a New Britannia. Nicholl writes, "the voyage to America was part of an elaborate, mystical, Arthurian conception of New Britannia, a purified continent, a New Age" (Nicholl, 1996: 311). For Ralegh, El Dorado was the ultimate discovery for it represented the "Golden Age" that the occultists strove to reach, the utopian state of purity (Nicholl, 1996: 316). Eliade's understanding of colonialism in terms of religion is extremely helpful when considering these first literary accounts of the Caribbean and Guyana.

As briefly mentioned in the opening paragraphs, these themes are found in the wider literature on the study of religion and colonialism. As will be discussed in the first chapter, scholars such as David Chidester (1996), Richard King (1999) and Tim Fitzgerald (2000) have all analysed how colonialism and imperialism have impacted on the conception of the term 'religion' in a contemporary world. One's understanding of the category 'religion' is therefore connected to a Western history of conquest and imperialism. The study of religion was a product of the European Enlightenment and therefore defined itself within a scientific arena of knowledge, and was keen to distinguish itself from theological studies (although shaped by Christian theology). The term 'religion' became 'othered' by this process; it referred to other peoples' beliefs and behaviour. In addition, the study of religion was a comparative process, but Christian theological definitions ironically determined what was considered 'religious'. This complex historical process has significantly affected the popular and academic understanding of religion in the West. In order to rationalise the study of religion, religion was defined as a "mental activity",[8] something which some are susceptible to and others are not. The term 'religion' therefore slowly inherited a sense of

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[8] See Mary Keller, 2002: 6-7. This is considered in more detail in Chapter One.

backwardness. I argue that it is this historical baggage that has led postcolonial theorists to neglect considerations of religion in postcolonial culture, particularly postcolonial fiction. Scholars of Religious Studies and Anthropology have been for the past decade or so involved in the re-negotiation of the term 'religion'. However, postcolonial theorists are mostly outside of this debate, which results in either the omission of the term 'religion' altogether, for it implies a backwardness or dependence on inexplicable forces and superstition, or the uncritical usage of the term often limited to descriptions of missionary violence during colonial contact. As a result of the complex historical location of the study of religion, and a lack of engagement with this history within postcolonial studies, there is a significant gap in the field of postcolonial literary criticism. The handful of scholars who are addressing this void include Jamie Scott who has pioneered the field in the publication of two edited volumes entitled *'And the Birds Began to Sing'* (1996), and *Mapping the Sacred* (2000); the latter, which focuses on issues of geography in order to develop the implications of studying religion in postcolonial literature, has been of particular influence to this thesis. Peter Kerry Powers followed with his reading of religion in ethnic American women's literature (2001), and William Closson James (2000), whose essay appears in Scott's latter publication, pursues further his research into American indigenous religions. The field of postcolonial biblical criticism has been developed by R. S. Sugiritharajah in several books and edited volumes which problematise and unpack Western biblical criticism and theology (*The Postcolonial Bible,* 1998, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*, 2001, and *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An alternative way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology*, 2003). As mentioned, the thesis develops from these approaches by having an equal location in the two disciplinary fields of English literature and Religious Studies, thus including a thorough investigation into the term 'religion' and how it can be re-negotiated in order to be more useful to a postcolonial

enquiry, whilst also providing engaged literary criticism. The thesis is also a study of Guyanese fiction and poetry in the light of these interdisciplinary developments; it brings new approaches to readings both of critically acclaimed works, such as those of Wilson Harris and Fred D'Aguiar, and works less frequently engaged with, such as the playful poetry of African-Guyanese John Agard, Indian-Guyanese poet and novelist David Dabydeen, and Indian-Guyanese female writer Jan Shinebourne amongst others.

My approach to the category 'religion' is determined by historical and socio-political factors and describes an aspect of how people in postcolonial contexts locate themselves according to geographical, physical and psychological boundaries. My use of the analytical tool 'religion' will therefore reflect the recurring themes addressed by the Guyanese writers I discuss. These themes are geographical including landscape, boundaries and movement, and metaphysical including dreams, memories, and the unconscious. Guyana's landscape is a fascinating mix of jungle interiors and dramatic coastline, as it falls between the Amazonian basin and a treacherous Atlantic sea, which threatens to erode the land. The country is made up of areas of uninhabitable wet lands forcing a majority of the population to reside in a strip of coastline two hundred miles long.[9] The encroachment of boundaries on this dramatic landscape by firstly Columbus and then the Dutch and British colonisers resulted in the enforced migration of indigenous groups thus affecting sacred sites. The arrival of African slaves in the seventeenth century and indentured labourers from India in the nineteenth century created further boundary re-negotiation, as they aimed to orientate themselves in an alien and hostile land. These re-orientations often assumed a religious dimension. As will be established in Chapter One, supported by North American theorists of religion such as Charles Long (1986) and Catherine Albanese (1999) who both re-orientate the

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[9] See Judaman Seecoomar who states that ninety percent of the population occupy ten percent of the land space (2002: 9).

category 'religion' in light of issues to do with race, my understanding of religion throughout the thesis revolves around the concept of orientation and boundary negotiation. The establishment of boundaries in a new landscape by physical, social, psychological or temporal means can be usefully defined within the analytical space of 'religion'. As will be evident throughout the thesis, a central concern for many Guyanese writers is the landscape and how characters relate to it, further emphasising the significance of this negotiation. It is often commented upon by writers that growing up in such dramatic surroundings has had, unsurprisingly, a crucial effect on their creativity.[10] The landscape and the notion of orientation therefore make up the first strand in my approach to religion in Guyanese fiction and poetry.

The second theme in my approach to religion, which is also a recurring aspect of much of the writing, is memory and, in particular, its relationship to trauma. Writers are often engaged in a process of remembrance as they aim to identify not only with the landscape they inhabit, but the landscapes of their ancestors and therefore their past. As many of these memories are bound within an oral history, as a result of being excluded from historical documentation, story-telling and more recently creative writing can be understood as therapeutic sites at which they can be preserved. Religion can also be described as a site at which to deal with often painful cultural memories; creative writing becomes a meeting ground for forgotten religious narratives across diverse cultural boundaries, as will become apparent throughout the thesis. The

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[10] Wilson Harris's experience as a land surveyor had a profound effect on his writing: "That was really the launching pad for expeditions into the deep, forested rainforests of Guyana, so that I became intimately and profoundly involved with the landscapes, and riverscapes, of Guyana" (ed. by Bundy, 1999: 40. First heard as a Radio Four broadcast, 12th November, 1996). The whole essay is a celebration of the Guyanese landscape as a living, breathing entity. In many ways, Harris's expeditions can also be understood as religious ventures for his descriptions echo the awe-inspired tone of writers such as Ralegh. In a similar way, Fred D'Aguiar writes of Guyana: "landscape becomes a cathedral and altar. While the tongue utters a demotic tune, the body moves as if over a benediction, *through*, rather than over the land, absorbing nature's graces and information, paying homage to its marvels" (D'Aguiar, 1998: 5). The experience of Guyana's landscape for these writers can be explored within the analytical space of 'religion'.

discourse of memories brings the field of psychoanalysis into this interdisciplinary framework, raising theoretical questions which I will address before continuing.

The use of psychoanalytic theory alongside postcolonial literature raises important *ethical* questions, not dissimilar to the questions raised to do with the category 'religion'. Psychoanalysis, just as Religious Studies, is a product of the European Enlightenment and therefore a Western phenomenon. Peter Homans writes "the origins of psychoanalysis lie deep in the cultural traditions of the West and in its relationship to the religious symbols and values which inform these traditions" (Homans, 1989: 3). He continues that "psychoanalysis arose as a result of a long historical mourning process begun centuries ago, with roots in the origins of physical science in the seventeenth century and in the theology of the fourteenth" (Homans, 1989: 4). It was in response to the loss and mourning of organised religious structures, that psychoanalysis arose. In addition, individual needs became increasingly important, particularly as Church and State divided. Questions of behaviour, previously dictated by the Church, began to be considered in terms of child development and mental activity. Rather than having a deterministic approach to life, psychoanalysts considered life to be a reaction to a complex web of social situations, revealed through dream and fantasy. This leads to an interesting tension in the birth of psychoanalysis:

> Psychoanalysis is both a product of mourning which accompanies modernization and a contributor to the losses which mark modernization (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 127).

Psychoanalysis is therefore simultaneously a contributor to Enlightenment rationality and a reaction to the loss and mourning of the religious community. Carl Jung believed that psychoanalysis offered individuals a guide to their inner selves, something that

institutionalised religion was failing to do.[11] Psychoanalysis became the guide to discovering the religious within the self (Goldenberg, 1979: 48-9). Jung was more sympathetic to understanding the religious outside the institutionalised definition as he moved away from Freudian framings of the unconscious. For Jung, dreams and fantasies not only offered insights into the unconscious but also into alternative understandings of 'religion'. Memories, as often revealed in dream and fantasy, form a vital part of the imagination and there is an aspect of the imagination that can be distinguished from the creative imagination as a result of its negotiation with communal and historical memory. I will describe this as the 'religious imagination'. It is in this way that psychoanalysis can support insightful readings of postcolonial literature. The key is to ensure that the theory is used to add light to the text under consideration, rather than the theory being used to dictate a reading of the text. David Punter warns of the way in which theory should be used alongside the reading of postcolonial fiction: "what *is* needed is perceptions and ideas: perceptions of what might be *in the text*... and why it might be there" (Punter, 2000: 9-10). Punter's emphases remind us to use psychoanalysis to elicit ideas already contained within the text. For example, the complex work of Wilson Harris often unsettles the reader for it eludes narrative structure. His novels are built around shifting images and dream-like structures. As will be seen throughout the thesis, psychoanalysis helps to engage with the complexities of Harris's fiction, thus revealing the ingenuity of his project.

The work of a majority of postcolonial theorists is heavily invested in Western critical theory and psychoanalysis; it was itself, after all, a product of the Western

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[11] For Jung, it was the failure to update its mythology that caused the decline in modern Christianity. Segal writes: "That failure is an aspect of its overall failure to reinvigorate itself. Sometimes Jung says that modern Christianity has gone astray by severing belief from experience and trying in vain to rely on sheer belief. Jung's objection here is twofold: that belief without experience is empty, and that belief is often incompatible with modern scientific and historical knowledge" (Segal, 1999: 90).

academy.[12] For some this tension undermines the postcolonial project for it continues to place the West in the centre, therefore maintaining colonial and imperialist structures.[13] However, when one looks more closely at the work of theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, one recognises the complexity of their employment of Western theory.[14] One of the founding figures of postcolonial theory, Frantz Fanon, was also the first to interpret race and, what is now called postcolonialism, within a psychoanalytic framework. Homi Bhabha writes:

> For Fanon... there is the intricate irony of turning the European existentialist and psychoanalytic traditions to face the history of the Negro which they had never contemplated, to face the reality of Fanon himself. This leads to a meditation on the experience of dispossession and dislocation – psychic and social – which speaks to the condition of the marginalized, the alienated, those who live under the surveillance of a sign of identity and fantasy that denies their difference (Bhabha, foreword to *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1986 edition: xxiv).

In his famous text, *Black Skin, White Masks* (written 1952, translated into English, 1967), Fanon passionately describes the psychic dismemberment of black people as an effect of colonial violence. The psychic and the social are inseparable for Fanon:

> The analysis that I am undertaking is psychological. In spite of this it is apparent to me that the effective disalienation of the black man entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities. If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process:
> -primarily, economic;
> - subsequently, the internalization, or better, the epidermalization – of this inferiority (Fanon, 1967/1986: 13).

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[12] For example, one of the earliest scholars on race was the African American W. E. B. DuBois, writing at the start of the twentieth century, who gained his PhD at Harvard University under the supervision of the famous psychologist William James.

[13] David Punter says that "in their [Said's, Bhabha's and Spivak's] deployment of 'Western' theory they have become involved in prolonging and repeating imperialist subjugation" (Punter, 2000: 9). See chapter three, page 125 for further discussion on this point.

[14] There are numerous examples of postcolonial deployment of psychoanalysis. Homi Bhabha adopts the psychoanalytic notion of mimicry in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man", with reference to Freud and Lacan (opening quotation, 1994: 85 and pages 89, 90) to describe the unsettling and menacing colonial encounter: "Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an imminent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" (Bhabha, 1994: 86).

The black self was forced to consider itself in relation to whiteness leading to a psychic division of the self and an internalization of racism. The result is the "insufferable void of black abjection" (Marriott, 2000: 109). Fanon powerfully locates the moment of this division at the point at which he came into contact with the white world:

> I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things... and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.
> Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into non-being, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self (Fanon, 1967: 109).

Fanon's prose emphasises that the psychic division is also a bodily trauma; the physicality of the phrase "I burst apart" forces the reader to engage with the painful and torturous psychic fragmentation that is taking place. The metaphor of the dye suggests the stain of blackness in a white world that when fixed demobilizes any efforts to maintain subjectivity. For Fanon: "the relation between anxiety and phobia is essentially one of time, that is, present anxieties about the future are related to traumatic memories of the past" (Marriott, 2000: 108). Traumatic memories of race hatred, which are often submerged deep in the unconscious and are a product of historical conflict, have resulted in the psychic dismemberment of the black body and the epidermalization of a social inferiority (Fanon, 1967/1986: 13). Fanon located psychoanalysis within a postcolonial framework to add light to the complex negotiations of the stigmatized black body in a white world. Sadly, psychoanalysis has done little to incorporate the important developments made by Fanon and continues to

locate its theoretical frameworks largely around the white male.[15] Fanon's work has, however, been central to the birth and development of postcolonial theory and therefore establishes the usefulness of strands of psychoanalysis to a postcolonial enquiry, in which the social and the psychic are inseparable.

For my own project, psychoanalysis acts as a hinge between the study of religion and the reading of Guyanese fiction and poetry. Psychoanalysis deals with the internalisation of trauma and analyses, through patient-analyst therapy sessions, the ways in which this trauma is manifested in dreams and fantasies. These dreams are then slowly worked through using different techniques, hopefully resulting in a resolution of the trauma. Within Guyanese fiction and poetry, and much other postcolonial writing, the traumatic memories that manifest themselves through the process of writing are collective for they deal with the collective tragedy of conquest, slavery and indenture.[16] This adds a limitation to the use of psychoanalysis for the reading of Guyanese writing. It was a limitation that Fanon recognised but simultaneously overcame:

> Freud insisted that the individual factor be taken into account through psychoanalysis... It will be seen that the black man's alienation is not an individual question. Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny. In one sense... let us say that this is a question of a sociodiagnostic (Fanon, 1967/1986: 13).

Fanon demonstrates that psychoanalysis can still provide helpful insights into postcolonial trauma if its conceptual framework is realigned in order to acknowledge the power of collective memory and trauma; the psychic and the social are intimately engaged. As already briefly mentioned, trauma is often dealt with through transitional spaces such as writing and religion which takes psychoanalytic healing from a one-to-

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[15] In the introduction to the 1986 reprint of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Homi Bhabha writes: "the ritual respect accorded to the name of Fanon, the currency of his titles in the common language of liberation, are part of the ceremony of a polite, English refusal" (1986: viii).
[16] Maurice Halbwachs writes: "the framework of collective memory confines and binds our most intimate remembrances to each other" (Halbwachs, 1941/1992: 63).

one situation into a broader cultural arena.[17] It is this point that provides an interesting hinge between religion and fiction. Both fiction and religion are encountered at a personal level; however they are also a vital aspect of social encounters as the recovery process is visible in and accessible to the public domain. Religion particularly can be described as a social transitional space through which individuals and communities negotiate trauma; it is often where loss is both ritualized and transformed into hope. The work of Guyanese writers, however, can be interpreted in a similar way. The medium of fiction allows ancestral memories to be unearthed and then used productively to engage the community in a new creativity and a vision for the future. History can be re-written through fiction using the combined mythic discourses of the multiple heritages of Guyana. Interestingly, Jonte-Pace refers to psychoanalysis as "powerful mythology" as a result of the continual use of metaphors of pilgrimage and perilous journeys. Psychoanalysts themselves are therefore in a process of "mythmaking" (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 24). Barbara Webb understands that the literary project "is to reveal the hidden traces of historical experience erased from the collective memory of an exploited and oppressed people, so that history may be reconceived as a future history to be made" (Webb, 1992: 4). This project is apparent throughout the thesis as multiple mythical landscapes, from Jonestown to the figures Manu and Anancy, are revisited and recreated in order to write and conceive a future of possibility. The literary and religious imaginations are therefore engaged in a very similar process; through creativity a future history is designed. There is a particular aspect of psychoanalysis that unites these themes into one helpful concept: the notion of social and therapeutic anamnesis.

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[17] Diane Jonte-Pace writes: "the realms of art, literature and religions often serve as a kind of transferential, transitional, or intermediate realm" (2000: 144-5). This is discussed in more detail in chapter three, page 137.

Anamnesis is defined as "the recalling to memory of the past" (Hervieu-Léger, 2000: 125), the act of remembrance. This is usually a collective religious act for it involves the ritualization of the past so as to conceive the future. The French Sociologist, Danielle Hervieu-Léger defines religion as anamnesis for religious belief "is affirmed and manifested in the essentially religious act of recalling a past which gives meaning to the present and contains the future" (Hervieu-Leger, 2000: 125). I would argue that the writers I discuss are also engaged in the religious process of anamnesis, or the "mobilization of collective memory" (Hervieu-Léger, 2000: 124). Religion and writing enable the ritualization of the past into a collective memory that can then be used to re-envision a future creativity and history.[18] Wilson Harris's *Jonestown* (1996), David Dabydeen's *Turner* (1995), and John Agard's *Weblines* (2000), to cite just a few examples, are all engaged in what can be persuasively described as anamnesis; their texts are sites of remembrance but rather than a simple recall, they provide a "new architecture of cultures" (Harris, ed. by Bundy, 1999: 158). Hervieu-Léger writes:

> Collective religious memory is subject to constantly recurring constructions, so that the past which has its source in the historical events at its core can be grasped at any moment as being totally meaningful (Hervieu-Léger, 2000: 124).

The texts cited above are all engaged in a process of reconstruction of historical events. By revisiting historical events from the horrors of the Middle Passage and the plight of indentured Indian labourers to the inexplicable events of Jonestown in the Guyanese interior, the writer is perpetuating the collective postcolonial religious memory. The repetition of these horrors maintains their meaning but also highlights the possibilities of survival, and the ability to re-create. As Punter says, "the act of writing is therefore to stimulate some kind of memory" (Punter, 2000: 93). Not only is the process of

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[18] Again, refer to Halbwachs (1941/1992: Chapter Six: Religious Collective Memory).

writing a reconstruction of the past but it also acts to bring unconscious memories to the surface, to stimulate the process of remembrance. Punter describes this perpetual returning as a haunting: for "such personal and historical traumas can never be recounted in linear narrative fashion, they can never be considered to be over, consigned to an untroubled or untroubling past" (Punter, 2000: 67). These considerations lead Punter to "revert the gaze" and ask what psychoanalysis can learn from the manifestation of the collective memory in postcolonial literature (Punter, 2000: 104). For Punter, the "collective fantasy" or "group hallucination" points toward the "friability of the concept of the unconscious framework" (Punter, 2000: 104). The notion of the unconscious is shifted from the individual to the collective within "postcolonial imaginings" (Punter's title). Psychoanalysis remains useful to postcolonial theory if its boundaries are reconceptualised to include more easily the notion of collective loss and issues of race. The importance of the reconceptualisation of the boundaries of both psychoanalysis and religion, in light of collective memories, will be developed through the reading of the fiction throughout the thesis.

The decision to focus the thesis on contemporary Guyanese fiction, mainly using works published since 1990, reflects several points of interest. As already briefly mentioned, the intense landscape of Guyana has had a profound effect on the creative writers of the area. The geographical location of the country is also of interest; Guyana's colonial history has left it suspended in a liminal location of being both (yet neither) part of South America and (or) the Caribbean. As an English speaking country with the population being approximately fifty percent African-Guyanese and fifty percent Indian-Guyanese,[19] its cultural make-up is persuasively Caribbean. However, (as the footnoted figures represent) it is also one of the few countries in the Caribbean

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[19] Judaman Seecoomar provides the following figures: 48.3% Indo-Guyanese, 32.7% African-Guyanese, 12.2% Mixed, 6.3% Amerindian, 0.5% Portuguese, Chinese and other European (Seecoomar, 2002: 10).

still to have Amerindian communities. The jungle interior and dramatic scenery also make it an undeniable part of South America. As will be seen, the literature and poetry of Guyana represent the playfulness of these ambiguities. African, Indian, Amerindian and European mythology are intricately woven into the fabric of Guyanese fiction and poetry providing access to new mythologies in which multiple histories and memories are embedded. Wilson Harris is one particular writer who has, throughout his extensive literary career, established a mythology from which to celebrate and mourn Guyana's history and geography. Harris's writing, both his creative and theoretical works, has had a significant influence on my own work. His playful narratives and dream-like structures break down established boundaries and force the reader to question accepted truths, such as the division between life and death, real and imaginary, dream and waking. Harris's work demonstrates the need for an alternative understanding of religion in postcolonial literature for he questions normalized definitions, which simultaneously opens up doors for the formulation of new understandings and enquiries. In addition, Harris's employment as a land surveyor in the Guyanese interior has inspired his descriptions of the landscape as a living, breathing force in the Guyanese imagination. This sensitivity to the landscape and the recognition of it as a site of power are themes that can be engaged with within the classificatory term 'religion'. The negotiations that have taken place across the Guyanese landscape, both colonial and mythical, are central to the perception of the religious imagination of Guyanese authors and poets. Guyana's landscape has been central to the understanding of the mythical consciousness of South America and the Caribbean for centuries. As already discussed, the early conquistadors were keen to discover its mysteries to the extent that one can understand these expeditions as religious ventures. Contemporary writers have maintained the mystery surrounding the Guyanese interior by keeping the myth of El Dorado alive. In many ways Guyana has become the mythical centre for

the Caribbean as a result of this legacy. The colonial quest for gold has become a key metaphor to represent the greed that led to the mass destruction of indigenous South America by the colonisers and, simultaneously, the magical attraction of the Guyanese interior.

A brief overview of Guyana's colonial history can be given in terms of three main waves of events: the arrival of Christopher Columbus and other early conquistadors, the African slave trade, and the introduction of indentured labour post emancipation. The arrival of the early European colonisers, as has already been discussed briefly, established the white supremacist ideology which would plague Guyana, and other colonised countries. The contact was marked by a violent disregard for indigenous land boundaries and sacred sites. Attempts to trade with the Amerindians were aggressive encounters of threat and enslavement.[20] The Spanish, Dutch and British would fight over ownership of Guyana for the following several hundred years.[21] In the seventeenth century, when Guyana had been established as a Dutch colony, African slaves were transported to Guyana to increase the wealth of the colonisers as the mass harvesting of the Caribbean's natural resources, mainly sugar, continued. It took over three hundred years before the horrors of the slave trade came to an end in the Caribbean.[22] By this time, Guyana had been established as a British colony and the profit-greedy colonial powers were left with a dilemma; they needed to replace their free labour force with a cheap alternative. Instead of paying the African slaves an acceptable wage, the colonisers enticed labourers from East India (and a small

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[20] See Neil Whitehead *Lords of the Tiger Spirit: A History of the Caribs in Colonial Venezuela and Guyana 1498-1820* (1988, Foris Publications, Dordrecht: Holland). Whitehead provides an historical account of European contact in Guyana and the effect on the Amerindian population.

[21] From 1580-1803, Guyana was a Dutch colony and from 1803-1966, it was a British colony (Kean Gibson, 2003: 3).

[22] The first slaves were brought to the Caribbean as early as 1510. The sugar industry became the main trade in 1640, and a majority of the colonies were established as sugar plantations. It was this that led to the majority of slave transportation from Africa (Dale Bisnauth, 1996: 80). It is estimated that between 1662 and 1867, 268, 400 Africans were brought to Guyana as slaves in 943 ships (Eltis, Richardson, and Behrendt, 1999: 26).

number from China and Portugal) to Guyana with stories of wealth and rich lands. It was on their arrival in Guyana that the reality of the situation became clear: a life of gruelling labour, long hours and cruelty from the overseers on the sugar plantations. The arrival of the Indian immigrants caused resentment amongst the African community, as their opportunities of fair paid labour quickly deteriorated. This tension is still a reality in modern Guyana as relations between these two main groups continue to be dictated by stereotypes. In 1966 Guyana gained independence but has since been exploited by manipulative politicians with their own ideological agendas. The two main political parties in Guyana are the People's Progressive Party and the People's National Congress.[23] The PNC are mainly an African Guyanese party whose original leader was the dictator Forbes Burnham under whom Guyana greatly suffered, particularly the East Indian communities.[24] The PPP are an Indian-Guyanese party led by Cheddi Jagan, whose socialist agenda was more hopeful but it is argued that he prioritised the welfare of the East Indian communities over the African Guyanese.

This brief historical account of colonial and post-colonial Guyana will be reinforced throughout the thesis particularly through the analysis of fictional renderings, which can in many ways be more revealing than historical texts as they creatively engage with social tensions and realities. The representation of Guyana which the fiction offers is prioritised in the thesis. Instead of understanding fiction as a *mis*representation of history, it is more helpful to understand the fiction in terms of

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[23] In 1946, Forbes Burnham and Cheddi Jagan together formed the Political Affairs Committee. In 1950, it became the Peoples Progressive Party (Ralph Premdas, 1996: 48 & Kean Gibson, 2003: 21). Premdas describes the period of 1950-1953 as "the Golden Age of political harmony in Guiana" as they gained equal support from the Indian and African communities (Premdas, 1996: 48). Between 1957 and 1963 "unprecedented racial turmoil racked Guiana resulting in the removal of Jagan" by Burnham who complained that Jagan favoured the interests of the Indian-Guyanese (Premdas, 1996: 48). Burnham named his new party the PNC.

[24] The PNC 'won' the 1964 and 1973 elections by fraud which marked the beginning of a dictatorship to last twenty years. It was not until 1996 that the PPP were elected which showed promising changes but they rapidly declined leaving the country to be again run by racism (Gibson, 2003: 36-40). Premdas writes: "In the end every party and leader exploited particular ethnic sentiments for narrow, selfish ends, throwing the country in a tailspin of tragic racial bitterness" (Premdas, 1996: 62).

alternative modes of representation. For example, Wilson Harris's re-write of the Jonestown tragedy offers an alternative understanding of this event within history and how mass tragedies, such as Jonestown, can be helpfully addressed within the context of colonial contact and the destruction of indigenous groups.

It is also important to add that the thesis is not an ethnographic study of religion in Guyana,[25] but rather a nuanced reading of the term 'religion' and an interpretation of how writers represent 'religion' within their fiction. My aim is to offer an interpretation of 'religion' that is compatible with a reading of postcolonial fiction and poetry, and to address the silence that surrounds the use of this category within the analysis of postcolonial fiction. My approach is therefore theoretical rather than ethnographic; however the context in which the fiction and poetry is written is of central importance and can only strengthen the engagement with the texts. The choice of texts and authors aims to represent the broad spectrum of literary works being produced in Guyana, from influential authors such as Wilson Harris to less celebrated authors, particularly Indian-Guyanese writers such as Jan Shinebourne.

The thesis contains five chapters of which the first two establish the theoretical location and the last three pursue close readings of the selected fiction and poetry in the light of the theoretical parameters outlined in the initial chapters. The last three chapters also aim to portray the three main strands in Guyana's colonial history; Chapter Three considers the loss of pre-Columbian civilisations, Chapter Four celebrates African folk heritage, and Chapter Five looks at works by Indian-Guyanese authors.

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[25] Ethnography in itself is a complex and problematic mode of representation. It assumes that a 'genuine' representation of a group can be achieved; however the presence of an ethnographer would usually alter behaviour. Anthropologists such as Margery Wolf (1992) and David Richards (1994), address issues of representation.

In Chapter One, I explore the problems of defining the category 'religion' by engaging with recent developments made by theorists of religion, and bring these questions into the context of a postcolonial enquiry. I then establish how the term 'religion' is to be defined throughout the thesis in light of these considerations. The chapter offers an interpretation of why postcolonial literary critics often shy away from the term 'religion' and how postcolonial criticism can move beyond this silence using Erna Broder's novel *Louisiana*. Brodber is a Jamaican author whose work is often approached with caution due to its engagement with issues such as spirit possession. A reading of the novel, though it is not Guyanese, offers an interesting avenue into the theoretical issues raised by the use of the term 'religion' within the study of postcolonial fiction and demonstrates the transferability of the key issues raised. Brodber's work reveals the need for the category 'religion', as a analytical tool, for it allows complex issues such as the agency of the 'religious body' to be discussed.

Chapter Two deals with the problems often encountered when carrying out interdisciplinary work. Interdisciplinary studies are immensely rewarding, however one often encounters complex dilemmas which are usually to do with location. If care is not taken, the work can appear fragmented, disappearing in the space between two spheres of knowledge. The chapter argues for an understanding of knowledge as a multi-layered, on-going project rather than an individual and solitary activity: knowledge is understood as a palimpsest.

Chapter Three, moving on to the works of Guyanese authors, engages with the issues raised by Wilson Harris's novel *Jonestown* (1996). Based on the actual Jonestown, the novel raises intriguing questions to do with representation and memory. The fictional survivor, Franscico Bone, is encountering amnesia as a result of the horrors of Jonestown. He pursues a quest to recover his memory which leads him into the past and remembrance of the pre-Columbian civilisations which have also been wiped out.

In *Jonestown,* the act of remembrance is the key to salvation and healing. *Jonestown* is presented to the reader as a manuscript written by Bone which enabled him to recover his memory and also heal the past: Bone entitles it his 'Dream-book'. The novel encompasses several themes of psychoanalysis which provide interesting readings particularly to do with remembering, through both religion and writing, in order to heal. The novel also encounters two oppositional understandings of religion in the contemporary world; Jim Jones's American fundamental-Protestantism clashes with Harris's sensitivity to the heterogeneous mythical plane of Guyanese spirituality. The chapter exposes this tension and offers an interpretation of religion within Harris's fiction.

Chapter Four moves from tragedy to the celebration of the Anancy tales. The West African spider-trickster, Anancy, survived the Middle Passage by hiding away in the memories of a tortured people. His survival and his character have offered contemporary writers the ideal metaphor of creativity: the Anancy tactics of wit, parody, laughter, and play are used by writers as a metaphor of subversion of colonial structures and as an opportunity for new creative possibilities to be achieved from the margins. The role of story-telling and myth offers the hope of a future creativity which is unrestricted by colonial boundaries, as Anancy's contorting spider limbs are unable to be fixed. Anancy has also become a vital part of the religious imagination of Guyanese writers, as he has become a sacred tool of creativity and boundary negotiation. The chapter will focus mainly on the work of John Agard to demonstrate how Anancy has become a key figure in the mythical and religious landscape of Guyana's fiction and poetry.

Chapter Five, progressing on to the next key stage in Guyana's colonial history, looks at the under-researched area of Indian-Guyanese history and literary activity. The chapter is an ideal place to end as it demonstrates the knitting together of the various

historical and mythical heritages of Guyana. These strands of history cannot be separated, particularly for contemporary writers, as they respond to the cultural hybridity that has formed their own representation of Guyana. The chapter discusses the ways in which the passage from India to Guyana was represented in religious terms by both migrants and contemporary writers. The work of David Dabydeen and his narrative poem, *Turner* (1996), are the focus of the chapter. The poem is a response to J. W. Turner's famous 1840 painting, 'Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying'. The Slave Trade is remembered using Hindu mythology, forming another intriguing mythical plane from which to visualise Guyana's history.

My thesis is an engagement with the mythical landscape that has been formed of Guyana by a sample of its writers and poets. Ancestral memories and myths from pre-Columbian times to the arrival of Indian labourers resurface through the fictional and poetic renderings of Guyana's history. It is argued that both religion, as a taxonomy rather than a specific object, and literature offer a way to remember and heal the past; a new future of creativity and hope is envisioned to form a tapestry woven from the multiple threads of Guyana's cultural myths. Whilst portraying this vision, I am offering an interpretation of religion that is conducive to a reading of postcolonial literature. Religion is understood as a negotiation of surrounding boundaries so as to orientate oneself within the conflicting spaces of a postcolonial landscape. The creation of various mythical planes by Guyanese authors, as an act of subversion through the renegotiation of established colonial boundaries, can therefore be understood in terms of religion. This re-creation is also an act of remembrance which is also described in terms of religion. In order to develop critical insight, religion, therefore, can be persuasively interpreted as an act of remembrance and boundary re-negotiation which has formed the mythical landscapes of contemporary Guyanese fiction and poetry.

CHAPTER ONE:

SHIFTING THE BOUNDARIES: A POSTCOLONIAL INTERROGATION OF THE CATEGORY 'RELIGION'[26]

In recent years, scholars of various disciplines have begun to engage more critically with the moral issues of writing about and studying not only 'other' cultures but also any group that has been situated on the peripheries of the Western hegemonic framework. This is of particular relevance to anthropology and the study of religion as a result of the assumptions traditionally made about non-Western groups; Western forms of knowledge were prioritised whilst the subjects of study were viewed as primitive and backward. As a result, the category religion and how it is defined have also come under scrutiny. Traditionally, the study of religion and the definition of religion were primarily concerned with Christianity and rooted in a Western Enlightenment history. Both the contemporary study of religion, as a discipline, and the anthropological study of other cultures have been, and still are being, affected by this history. Richard King (1999) identifies that in an attempt to escape this historical baggage and be considered a secular, non-theological discipline, the study of religion now defines itself in opposition to Christianity, just as "atheism... has come to denote the belief in the non-existence of the Christian God" (King, 1999: 42). Ironically therefore, these "presuppositions... limit our understanding of non-Christian cultures in their own terms" (King, 1999: 42). The supposedly secular stance taken by the discipline aimed to legitimise the discipline academically, but consequently caused that

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[26] A version of this chapter entitled, "Shifting Boundaries: A Postcolonial Interrogation of the Category 'Religion' and its Application to Erna Brodber's *Louisiana*" has been published in *Moving Worlds: Masquerade, A Caribbean Issue*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2003.

which is being studied to be undermined (King, 1999: 42) and led the study of religion into a crisis.

Enlightenment history, as mentioned above, complicated the study of religion by prioritising scientific knowledge, logic and rationality, particularly in an academic context but also in social perceptions, as a result of the division between Church and State. I would extend King's observations to the study of postcolonial theory and literature. The presence of religion in postcolonial literature and poetry has been either ignored or dealt with problematically as a result of a dependency on both a Western definition of what religion is and a Western Enlightenment and intellectual history. The challenge for the reader, and for myself, is to examine 'religion' with critical postcolonial lenses whilst remembering that postcolonial theory itself is heavily affected by Western academia and its intellectual priorities.

The first step of the challenge laid out for scholars of religion is the need to be aware that the "notion of 'religion' itself is a Christian theological category" (King, 1999: 40). Great care should therefore be taken in applying the category to the "study of non-Western cultures" (King, 1999:40). Reactions to this dilemma vary. Tim Fitzgerald (2000) is also concerned with "the use of the word 'religion' in studies of non-western value systems and cultures" (Fitzgerald, 2000: 9). He notes that 'religion' is "part of a historical ideological category" (Fitzgerald, 2000: 8) that is rooted in the period of Enlightenment, when European intellectual thought dramatically changed, placing religion in a realm outside of rational, intellectual and scientific thought. This change has therefore also come to affect the study and perception of non-Western cultures as the dichotomy Church/State is presumed to be "a universal distinction within all societies" (Fitzgerald, 2000: 14). For Fitzgerald this is an overwhelming problem which should be dealt with by ceasing to use the word religion outside of theology, both as an academic discipline and as a label, for it has become "analytically

redundant and misleading" (Fitzgerald, 2000: 5). Though Fitzgerald makes vital points that cannot be ignored, such as indicating the Western ideology that is contained with the category religion, I would be inclined to disagree that scholars of religion should cease using the term altogether. As Carrette remarks "we must not assume that by removing the term 'religion' we will create a more neutral space free of illusions or a conceptual space free of investments of power" (2001: 125). The use of 'religion' as a category must be challenged and its users must be aware of its history of power and imperialism. However, if religion is re-named or re-categorised into cultural studies and anthropology, the game of the coloniser and imperialist to re-name merely starts again and the abuses of power continue. My use of the term religion will be legitimated throughout the thesis by engaging with the work of historians of religion such as Charles Long, Catherine Albanese and David Chidester. However, selected literature and poetry from Guyana play the key part in disentangling 'religion' from its Western presumptions and hierarchies of knowledge, in order to learn both more about the literature and the shifting nature of religion.

In an attempt to disengage from imperial and colonial discourse, many disciplines have justifiably ceased to use certain vocabulary and terminology. However, this can be, as I have already indicated, an even more problematic act as it serves to cover up or transfer a deeper-rooted ideology. David Chidester (1996) emphasises that it is misguided to edit the term religion from academic vocabulary; the solution is to examine effectively the study of religion in terms of its relationship to a European history of conquest. Although it is academics who have tried to locate and re-locate the term and to "fix their references, the terms *religion* and *religions* do not belong solely to the academy. They also belong to a history of encounter and contact... They have been entangled in the kinds of historical struggles of possession and dispossession, inclusion and exclusion, domination and resistance" (Chidester, 1996: 259) that define colonial

encounters. For Chidester, 'religion' provides a "focusing lens for reflecting on human identity and difference" (Chidester, 1996: 259). We should be open to the category's shifting boundaries in order to "minimize the structural violence that has inhered in the category of religion" (Chidester, 1996: 260).

The category of religion is bound up within issues of contested spaces and therefore colonial conquest. The first part of this chapter expands on this approach to 'religion' using the work of Long and Albanese who understand religion in terms of orientation. Priority is given to expression, experience, motivation and movements rather than structures of thought (Long, 1986: 7, Albanese, 1999: 11). A vital part of this expression is played out in literature and poetry, which I will concentrate on in the second part of the chapter. An absence of this kind of interrogation in postcolonial theory has caused an element of neglect. When Caribbean literature is read in relation to the conflicts of space, land and territory that define religion, the full impact of both colonialism on religious identities, and the religious nature of conquest is realised thus acknowledging another vital level in the palimpsest that typifies the colonial encounter.

Though not a Guyanese work, the Caribbean novel *Myal* (1988) by Erna Brodber is a perfect example of how religion can be productively understood as an analytical tool to help describe human identity and conflict in terms of orientation and negotiation. Criticism so far has, on the whole, failed to detect the complexity of the negotiations that take place in *Myal* because of a reluctance to use the word religion to explain the spiritual exchanges that take place. The second part of the chapter therefore examines criticism of *Myal* and its limitations, whilst the third part offers a close reading of Brodber's most recent novel *Louisiana* (1994) in the light of shifting the boundaries of the definition of religion.

RELIGION AS ORIENTATION

Space, landscape, territory and boundaries are words that frequently recur in postcolonial theory and literature. They are also words that are familiar to a contemporary interpretation of religion. In response to the work of historians of religion, Long, Albanese and Chidester, and the interdisciplinary work of Jamie Scott using the common denominator of the theme of landscape and space, I aim to bridge the gap between the study of religion and postcolonial literature.

Central to Long and Albanese's understanding of religion is orientation and boundary negotiation. They assist in offering a definition of how the term 'religion' can function, without granting it ahistorical and transcendent essence. As opposed to limiting one's understanding of religion to church (Long, 1986: 7), Long defines religion as "orientation – orientation in the ultimate sense, that is, how one comes to terms with the ultimate significance of one's place in the world". He continues that religion "is more than a structure of thought; it is experience, expression, motivations, intentions, behaviours, styles, and rhythms. Its first and fundamental expression is not on the level of thought" (Long, 1986: 7). If one's understanding of religion is limited to human belief, one neglects how people and communities "divide themselves on the basis of class, gender, geography, age and so on" (McCutcheon, 1997: 13). Though initially wary of attaching a definition to the slippery category religion, Albanese makes a similar observation to Long. "Religion", she states "can be understood as *a system of symbols (creed, code, cultus) by means of which people (a community) orient themselves in the world with reference to both ordinary and extraordinary powers, meanings and values.* Orientation means taking note of where the boundaries are and placing oneself in relation to them" (Albanese, 1999:11, emphasis in original). Albanese goes on to say that when one

understands religion in this way priority is given to "concrete human experience and expression" (Albanese, 1999:11).

The study of religion has historically placed emphasis on structures of thought, in order to both legitimise itself as an academic discipline and to distinguish itself from theology, but in the process it has neglected the importance of experience and expression. Rationalism severely affected the study of religion as religion was developed into a science by thinkers such as David Hume, Edward Tylor, Emile Durkheim and Sigmund Freud. As Chidester notes this meant "by the twentieth century... the academic study of religion could find its roots in the rationalism, naturalism, and skepticism of the European Enlightenment" (Chidester, 1996: xii). Chidester also notes that in looking back into the "general trends of thought" in the history of religion, one realises that "these are 'internal' histories" (Chidester, 1996: xiii):

> ...standard histories of the study of religion have been almost exclusively preoccupied with the questions, issues, or modes of analysis that were internal to the development of a set of European academic disciplines. As a result, the real story remains untold... The disciplinary history of the study of religion is also a history of discipline, a dramatic narrative of the discourses and practices of comparison that shaped subjectivities on the colonized peripheries and at European centers (Chidester, 1996: xiii).

Chidester's vital observation indicates the extent to which the study of religion has been hindered by its European history and has neglected not only the importance of human negotiations of power to a conceptualisation of religion but, more generally, the necessary analysis into its involvement in colonialism and conquest.

Long and Albanese both suggest, within the context of the United States, that interpreting religion as "orientation" is particularly significant for encounters of conquest and oppression. For African-Americans the reality of a multiple heritage has had to be dealt with "under a situation of oppression and duress" (Long, 1986: 7) in

turn forging a "religious experience of radical otherness" (Long, 1986: 9). W. E. B. DuBois captures the intensity of experiencing the multiple heritage of being African and American. He describes it as a "two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (DuBois, 1903 [1994]: 2). Double-consciousness, or "radical otherness", created a transformation in religious expression, experience and motivation. As the West "enslaved, colonized, and conquered... religion and cultures and peoples throughout the world were created anew through academic disciplinary orientations" (Long, 1986: 4). The fragmentary effect of colonial conquest, supported by Western academia, irreversibly transformed religious expression. Towards the end of *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois encapsulates the religious experience of a double-consciousness:

> A sort of suppressed terror hung in the air and seemed to seize us, - a pythian madness, a demoniac possession, that lent terrible reality to song and word. The black and massive form of the preacher swayed and quivered as the words crowded his lips and flew at us in singular eloquence. The people moaned and fluttered, and then the gaunt-cheeked brown woman beside me suddenly leaped straight into the air and shrieked like a lost soul, while round came wail and groan and outcry, and a scene of human passion such as I had never conceived before (DuBois, 1903 [1994]: 116).

Long describes DuBois' experience as "mysterium tremendum", a phrase coined by Rudolf Otto to capture religious experience as being "wholly other", a sense of feeling unworthy and 'other' whilst experiencing the divine; it is an uncanny moment (Otto, 1923: 17). According to Long, DuBois is filled with "demonic dread" because it is "his first experience of the autonomous creation of the slave community" (Long, 1986: 183). However, regardless of the fact that the slave community and thus the state of double-consciousness had reached a stage of autonomy "there is no space for the legitimate expression of such a human form" as a result of the "economic, political and linguistic

hegemony of the master". Therefore the search for "an authentic place for the expression... is the source of the revolutionary tendencies in these religions" (Long, 1986: 183).

It is this sense of religion as orientation, or *dis*orientation, that foregrounds an understanding and appreciation of postcolonial religiosity [27] and its presence in literature. During colonial conquest, the conflicts for physical space between indigenous peoples and the colonisers and the violent shifting from place to place of African slaves, had to have an impact on how religious experience and expression are conceptualised. The contact with the European coloniser irreversibly changed and fragmented the consciousness of the indigenous peoples, African slaves, and Indian indentured labourers of Guyana. This violent contact and fragmented consciousness became the "common structural elements of the religious experience" which necessarily "bear the weight of their histories and situations" (Long, 1986: 184). For Long, thinking back to DuBois's experience, "grotesque and bizarre convolutions of the human consciousness... emerge when the constitution of the religious consciousness faces historical memory" (Long, 1986: 184). The haunting memories of colonialism make religious bodies "shriek like a lost soul" (DuBois, 1903 [1994]: 116) and bring a dialectic of space to the foreground. The presence of this dialectic within literature, for example Wilson Harris's allusions to double-consciousness and his use of riddle-like narratives (*Jonestown*, 1996), as well as his animistic[28] descriptions of the landscape (*Palace of the Peacock*, 1960), provide the reader with a sense of the haunting

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[27] By 'religiosity' I mean the expression of religion or being 'religious'.

[28] The term animism was traditionally used in a derogatory sense by travel writers, anthropologists, missionaries and others to describe indigenous beliefs in animal and land spirits as primitive. It is now however beginning to be reappropriated into a more constructive use, as Caroline Rooney (2000: 8-10) and myself are advocating. The presence of animism in literature such as that of Harris emphasises the powerful link that exists between religion and geography.

memories of colonialism that manifest themselves within the religious body of both people and the landscape.

The nature of conquest could be interpreted as revolving around a human desire for a centre. In discussing the notion of sacred space and the search for this space, Mircea Eliade states that a "fixed point" is required. "The discovery or projection of a fixed point – the center – is equivalent to the creation of the world" (Eliade, 1957: 22). According to Eliade, the centre "defines the locus of reality" (Long, 1986: 78) which is often typified by the building of churches, domes, temples and cities (Long, 1986: 78). Eliade's notion of the projection of sacred space, as an act of creation, was directly related to the imperial process of colonialism. He wrote:

> This participation by urban cultures in an archetypal model is what gives them their reality and their validity. Settlement in a new, unknown, uncultivated country is equivalent to an act of creation... a territorial conquest does not become real until after... the ritual of taking possession, which is only a copy of the primordial act of the Creation of the World (Eliade, 1949: 10).

Colonialism can be categorised as a religious venture for it was carried out in the "name of Jesus Christ" by the early Spanish conquistadors (Eliade, 1949: 10). This act of pilgrimage was driven by the almost apocalyptic desire to recreate and expand Western Christianity (Eliade, 1969: 90). Long notes that, "cultural contact has come about as a result of the centrifugal/centripetal power of the citied traditions – the tendency to expand the power of the center over ever wider spatial areas" (Long, 1986: 109). The fact that the search for the mythical El Dorado (see main Introduction) was a part of this pilgrimage further confirms Eliade's thesis, for it was viewed as the sacred centre of the journey and offered the chance to "transform the earth into paradise" (Eliade, 1969: 96). The centre was also understood to be the European metropole, for it was imperially used as the site from which power emanated. The migration of people from colonised countries to the European metropole, such as London, demonstrates

the intensity of the European invention of the metropole as the sacred centre; colonised peoples have pursued their own, usually disappointing, pilgrimages to the imagined sacred centre.

Edward Said's notion of Orientalism (1978 [1995]) is comparable to Eliade's understanding of sacred space. Orientalism is a European projection of what it wants the Orient to be whilst simultaneously supporting the West's own sense of self. In Eliadean terms, Orientalism is the replicating of the sacred centre. Said indicates three strands in his definition of Orientalism; the first is the academic study of the Orient. The second is a style of thought "based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and... 'the Occident', or the East and the West which then influences theories, novels and social descriptions" (Said, 1978 [1995]: 2). The third is a more historical approach in which Orientalism acts as a "corporate institution" and a "Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1978[1995]: 3). The study of religion approached 'other' cultures in a similar vein. It traditionally presented a comparative study with other religions,[29] often Christianity, that controlled external perceptions of that culture and supported colonial interference (Chidester, 1996). Also, as indicated using the work of Eliade, colonialism can be interpreted as a religious venture, as the spreading of the sacred centre. As Said states, European culture managed and produced "the Orient politically, logically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said, 1978[1995]: 3).

Christopher Columbus, as discussed by Eliade and Long, understood his voyages as religious pilgrimages during which "the human...moves across space" replicating the "ceremonial center" and claiming landmarks (Long, 1986: 109). The

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[29] Friedrich Max Muller is often considered the founder of comparative religion. Refer to his text *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1873.

conquest consequently had an impact on the landscape and geography of the place as boundaries and territories are mapped out and create a new cartography of space. The racist and imperialistic approach often taken by the European invaders disregarded previous boundaries and landmarks that were once the ceremonial centres of indigenous peoples. If indigenous cultures survived, their religious lives were irreversibly fragmented and changed by colonial contact; religious experience and expression in colonised places will always reflect the violent shattering of physical boundaries and landmarks that took place in the name of religious pilgrimage. The shifting of African peoples to the Caribbean, through the torturous middle passage, was also bound to have an impact on religion and created a hybrid of religious expression (for example Myal, Obeah and Rastafarianism).[30] The literature of the Caribbean generally but specifically of Guyana, often evokes a powerful sense of the landscape; Wilson Harris, David Dabydeen, and Fred D'Aguiar are just a few for whom the landscape is brought to life in their writing. If this is read in conjunction with how Long, Albanese and I understand religion, one can gain a deeper access to the varying postcolonial identities and conflicts.

Homi Bhabha's discussion of the 'Third Space' and similar theories of liminality provide a further dimension to understanding the relationship between the study of religion and colonialism. He states that it is the "inter"- the Third Space – "the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (Bhabha, 1994: 38). If the word 'culture' is replaced with the

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[30] Refer to *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews* edited by Barry Chevannes, 1995, Diane Austin-Broos's *Jamaica Genesis*, 1997, Patrick Taylor's *Nation Dance*, 2001, and Dale Bisnauth's *A History of Religions in the Caribbean*, 1996, for information on Caribbean religions such as Myal, Obeah, and Rastafarianism.

word 'religion',[31] Bhabha's description can be interpreted as supporting the notion that religion is predominantly about the negotiations of space and exchange typical to colonial encounters. Thus the in-between space, the point of exchange and *inter*action, carries the burden of the meaning of *religion.* Bhabha describes how the Third Space produces a complexity and "ambivalence in the act of interpretation" which "ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture [and religion] have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha, 1994: 37). As already discussed with reference to Long, religions and cultures were "created anew" as a result of academic pursuits that, ironically, were aiming to fix definitions of religion and culture using scientific and logical methods. By paying attention to and exploring the Third Space, "we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (Bhabha, 1994: 39). It is when one witnesses the strength of a conversation between postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha and historians of religion such as Long and Chidester, that one recognises the need for more interdisciplinary work in this area. The problems encountered in the pursuit of this interdisciplinary dialogue are considered in the next chapter. Postcolonial literature, which Bhabha refers to repeatedly in his essays, is one of the sites from which these negotiations are being played out and the Third Space is being explored.

Jamie Scott's work on the interdisciplinary study of religion and postcolonial literature successfully treads the fine line between the disciplines. His first edited volume *"And the Birds Began to Sing": Religion and Literature in Post-Colonial Cultures* (1996) is witness to the importance of this combined discipline and need for "further interdisciplinary investigations of things religious and things literary in post-colonial cultures" (Scott, 1996: xxvi). Carol Morrell's (1996) essay in the volume on Jean Rhys's

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[31] The word culture has been suggested as a replacement for the word religion (Fitzgerald, 2000), and cultural studies as a replacement for the academic location of the study of religion. Bhabha's own choice of the word 'culture' can therefore be persuasively critiqued within this discussion.

Wide Sargasso Sea captures the intensity of the relationship between religion and postcolonial literature, in terms of the European projection of what religion is on to 'other' cultures:

> ... Rhys's employment in *Wide Sargasso Sea* of the hidden ideas and practices of Voodoo draws upon religious ideas from her West Indian childhood in order to replace a narrow eurocentric rejection of the other with an insistence on cultural continuity and exchange (Morrell, 1996: 223-4).

Beliefs and experiences are suppressed and made peripheral as a result of the way in which European intellectual history has prioritised scientific knowledge. Writers, such as Rhys, access and counteract these Eurocentric projections of knowledge. Gordon Collier makes a similar point in relation to West Indian poetry saying that its "sophistication is grounded in the institutions of the 'folk' rather than the eurocentric rigidities of the colonial past" as language is "bearing and shaping belief" (Collier, 1996: 247). To understand that writers are "bearing and shaping belief" through their use of language demonstrates the intensity of the relationship between postcolonial literature and religion. What Collier and other critics fail to do is interrogate their use of the term 'religion'. Collier parallels religion with 'European rigidities' and institutional Christianity and neglects the religion that Long defines, that is religion as orientation, and it seems to be this religion, not just 'folk belief', that Guyanese poets such as John Agard, David Dabydeen, Fred D'Aguiar and Grace Nichols are engaging with.

Scott's afterword to the volume describes the study of religion and literature in postcolonial cultures as a "praxis of equity", thus "dialogically engaged at the levels of both action and reflection" (Scott, 1996: 312). For Scott, a moral demand underlies a majority of readings of religion in postcolonial literature as a result of the focus on colonial conquest beginning with the "invasive appropriation of physical land" which "Christianity often helped to justify" (Scott, 1996: 312). As discussed with reference to

Long, the appropriation of land is foregrounded in my interpretation of religion in postcolonial literature, in conjunction with a more 'open-air' definition of religion, that is it also exists outside the church doors.

Scott's latest edited volume with Paul Simpson-Housley entitled *Mapping the Sacred: Religion, Geography and Postcolonial Literatures* (2001) delves deeper into the relationship that exists between the colonial appropriation of land, postcolonial literature and religion. This fascinating area provides a powerful link for the combined study of postcolonial literature and religion. Whilst discussing the colonial disregard for indigenous cultures that already inhabited the land that the colonisers appropriated, Scott writes:

> … these encounters have to do not just with land, but also with landscape. That is, encounter, conflict and accommodation in such matters involve not only efforts to possess land in the raw, but also efforts to dispossess other individuals and groups of their social and cultural identity, insofar as landscape is the expression of the imprint of their social and cultural habits upon the land. As a result, economic, social and political issues having to do with the sacralization, desacralization and reclamation of lands and landscapes permeate the writings under discussion. Often ambiguous and complex, such writings represent and dramatize the contested processes of colonization, resistance and decolonization by which lands and landscapes may be viewed as now sacred, now desacralized, now resacralized (Scott, 2001: xxvii).

Scott and contributors to the volume recognise the ways in which "fiction, drama and poetry" become sites where themes of "divine dispensation, dispossession and reclamation" are played out (Scott, 2001: xxvii). The complex negotiation of space, landscape and geography that took place during colonization and resistance became an undeniable part of postcolonial literatures. As Scott points out, these writings can be read "under the double rubric of the religious and the geographical" (Scott, 2001: xxvii), particularly if one understands space in the same religious terms as Eliade, Long, Albanese and Chidester.

Victoria Carchidi's essay "Heaven is a green place" (2001: 179-197), in Scott's volume, makes the recurring yet vital point about the hybridity of Caribbean culture. She points out that one may expect the imported and assorted religions of the Caribbean to be "abstract and alienated from the physical, material life of the Caribbean" (Carchidi, 2001: 179). However, as also pointed out by Patrick Taylor in the introduction to his edited volume, it is exactly the "admixture of cultural backgrounds" that defines Caribbean religiousness (Taylor, 2001: 5-6). Religion is understood "not as a single-stranded, 'pure' and purely derivative form, but as something that, alive to the needs of the people, draws syncretically upon a variety of different traditions" (Carchidi, 2001: 180). It is this perception of religion that Carchidi recognises in the writings of Derek Walcott, Zee Edgell and Erna Brodber and it is "these Caribbean writers [that] offer a blueprint for human beings in postcolonial lands and landscapes of increasing diversity" (Carchidi, 2001: 195).

Discussions about religion are not only synonymous with discussions about land, space and territory, but also memory. Long and Albanese both adhere to a definition of religion as orientation, that is the negotiation of surrounding boundaries in order to establish a sense of oneself in the world. This definition can be applied to postcolonial theory to gain a greater sense of the movements of both coloniser and colonised and why and to what extent this had an impact on the physical land. Simultaneously, the animistic writings of Wilson Harris, and many others are delving into their historical memory of contested and conflicting spaces and landscapes to produce a hybridized mythology in which history can be rewritten. Writers are therefore engaged in an act of remembrance and re-mythologizing. The discussion of religion is therefore both spatial and temporal; it is a discussion of orientation and remembrance. Peter Kerry Powers understands religions "as forms of cultural memory" (Powers, 2001: 11), and this is particularly important for a discussion of

religion in postcolonial fiction, for "fictions provide the space wherein the counter-memories of ethnic religious practices can be articulated" (Powers, 2001: 12).[32] The remaking of history through atonement with the landscape and cultural memory, using fiction, will be seen to be a religious process. Understanding religion in terms of memory will provide the focus for subsequent chapters.

The Woman's Body as a Religious Body in Erna Brodber's *Myal*

One of the many 'contested spaces' within Caribbean literature is the female body as its relationship to the land and language is negotiated. The black female body has historically been eroticised and exoticised, particularly in colonial encounters. Colonial accounts of the landscape were feminized. Lands are described as 'virgin' and 'over fertile'.[33] As Denise deCaires Narain writes:

> this conflation of woman with the land has interesting implications when the issue of language is added to the discussion, when women are perceived as safeguarding the 'mother tongue', and mothertongue and motherland become conflated so that women and women's language occupy a pure, original – 'untouchable' – symbolic space (deCaires Narain, 1999: 99).

Women's texts therefore engage in a struggle to retrieve and recuperate the woman's body and represent it in their own terms and outside of colonial and patriarchal discourses. This space of struggle and conflict, encountered through a relationship with

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[32] A limitation of Powers's work is that he fails to engage with important discussions taking place within the field of Religious Studies, as mapped out in the initial pages of this chapter, probably due to his location in Biblical Studies. See review on Powers's book (Darroch, 2003: 350-352).
[33] Refer to main Introduction: Raleigh 1956[1967]: 71, and 'Letter of Columbus' edited by Hulme and Whitehead, 1992: 10.

the landscape, can also be read as a religious space as one strains to locate not only female subjectivity but also postcolonial subjectivity in terms of how "one comes to terms with the ultimate significance of one's place in the world" (Long, 1986: 7). When the woman's body is read as a religious body in the literature and poetry of the Caribbean, the trajectories of power she is faced with in terms of race, class and gender, and how she is signified by her relationship to the landscape, are vigorously confronted. Powers notes that "religious traditions are repositories of memories that help women reshape their bodies and claim them as their own" while simultaneously negotiating the destruction carried out on their bodies in the name of that tradition (Powers, 2001: 44). As Long notes, during colonial conquest "religion and cultures and peoples throughout the world were created anew... *they were signified*" (Long, 1986: 4, italics in original). Erna Brodber's novel *Myal* is a kaleidoscope of these kinds of contested spaces, as many characters, particularly Ella, struggle to orient themselves according to the shifting boundaries that surround them. The novel is also named after a syncretic religion.[34] So why do commentaries on the novel rarely use the word 'religion' to explain what is taking place? And why are there so few commentaries on such an acclaimed novel and writer?

As discussed in the opening pages of the chapter, the word 'religion' and the study of religion are part of a Western Enlightenment history, which has hindered discussions of cultures and people outside of that history. As a result, many unhelpful connotations have been attached to the term 'religion'. Mary Keller describes how the

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[34] Myal is an African derived religion with hints of Christianity and specific to the Caribbean. Myal is the community's answer to Obeah, or spirit and land thievery, as it restores lost souls. It is these lost souls that "shriek", like Ella, in their search for orientation. An African pantheon of gods is called on to protect the community through dance, singing and spirit possession (See Bisnauth, 1996: 177-8).

word 'religion' has been correlated with the word 'belief' and the implications this has for understanding religiousness:[35]

> If I say that I am not religious but that my sister is, one is likely to get a sense that my sister has a bubble in her brain where she cultivates her belief, her faith. Religiousness is construed as a mental activity... Those whose religiousness is expressed in their work, in their wars... or in public displays have slid into the anachronistic space of "backwardness". They are suspected of being mentally needy because they cannot contain their bubble of belief properly. This strong association, that religiousness is a matter of belief that transpires in the psychic space of an individual, is extremely limiting if one is trying to make sense of religiousness in the contemporary world (Keller, 2002: 6-7).

This understanding of religion and religiousness is widespread across both social and academic perceptions. Religion is often considered in terms of "hierarchical evaluations of 'us' and 'them'" (Keller, 2002: 85). I suggest that it is because of this that postcolonial theorists are often reluctant to use the word; there is a fear that it implies 'backwardness'. This resistance to the term 'religion' is devastating both to the reading of postcolonial fiction and also to an understanding of religion in postcolonial situations. As Keller writes: "there is an ethical imperative in a postcolonial world to preserve the discursive space in which matters related to the gods, ancestors, deities, and spirits are considered comparatively and reflexively" (Keller, 2002: 85). This provides an answer to the two earlier questions: why the term religion is not used in relation to the novel *Myal* and why so few criticisms of the novel exist. I wish to confront the assumptions being carried by postcolonial literary criticism by analysing several critiques of *Myal.* All the critiques present important readings of the novel but if

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[35] McCutcheon also states that the problem is, "the study of human beings as if they simply were believing, disembodied minds. Human beings undoubtedly have very complex belief systems. But they also divide themselves... on the basis of class, gender, geography, age and so on. By overlooking the importance of these additional aspects of human existence, by decontextualizing human beings in this manner, one avoids confronting the relations between material, cultural productions... and the concrete political and economic conflicts and inequities of the people under study" (McCutcheon, 1997: 13).

the contested spaces are analysed in terms of religion, the novel is understood in its entirety.

One of the points repeatedly engaged with by those critiquing *Myal* is Ole African's quiet utterance "the half has never been told" (Brodber, 1986: 34-5) which is then echoed by the community in its critique of the colonial education system. This is key to reading the novel, but which half are critics trying to recuperate? Scott iterates how conquest and the colonial appropriation of land are not only efforts to "possess land in the raw, but also [an effort to] dispossess other individuals and groups of their social and cultural identity, insofar as landscape is the expression of the imprint of their social and cultural habits on the land" (Scott, 2001: xxvii). It is this story of the possession and dispossession of colonised peoples that must be told but, as Scott notes, this story cannot be disassociated from how land and landscape is "now sacred, now desacralized, now resacralized" (Scott, 2001: xxvii). There is interplay taking place between the religious and the geographical (as explored earlier) in much postcolonial literature. By appreciating the "ways in which fiction, drama and poetry frequently become arenas in which individuals and groups play out territorial themes of divine dispensation, dispossession and reclamation" one can begin to tell 'the half that has never been told'.

Myal is predominantly the story of Ella, an "alabaster baby", with a Jamaican mother and an estranged white Irish father. Her neither-nor, in-between existence entirely isolates her from the community. She travels to America and meets Selwyn Langley who steals her life story and her spirit to create a 'coon show'. Ella 'trips out on foreign' and only the community can save her. Alongside the Myal-ing team (made up of a Baptist minister, a Methodist minister's wife, Miss Gatha, Mass Cyrus and Ole African) Mass Cyrus exorcises Ella's body in the forest, which takes place at the beginning of the novel, and devastates the surrounding vegetation and livestock. After

recovering from the ordeal, Ella goes on to become a schoolteacher in an attempt to counteract the colonial narratives that were taught to children like her, so as to tell the half that has never been told. *Myal* is a story about possession and dispossession, in terms of colonial and patriarchal encounters. It negotiates physical and spiritual boundaries in order to fracture and disrupt structures of power.

The first critique I wish to discuss is that of deCaires Narain who recognises that one of the sites of possession and dispossession by the colonial encounter is the female body, which, I suggest, should then also be read as a religious body. DeCaires Narain constructs her critique of *Myal* around the challenges Caribbean women writers are confronted with in an attempt to represent the woman's body in fiction. So as not to appear to engage in the 'over-sexed' representation of the black body, Caribbean women's fiction tends to resist sexual characters and present women as "the capable, strong mother" and focuses on "mother-daughter relationships" (deCaires Narain, 1999: 99). According to deCaires Narain, Brodber's fiction is more in tune with French feminists' "insistence on re-metaphorizing the female body as a powerful site of multiple possibilities" and "unbounded sexuality" (deCaires Narain, 199: 98) and how this can be aligned with subverting colonial discourses. However, there is a tension, according to deCaires Narain, in this correlation. There is "an eschewal of sexual pleasure in favour of 'the spiritual' even as the aesthetics of her novels assert powerfully the sexual pleasures of the text" (deCaires Narain, 1999: 114). DeCaires Narain's problems with Brodber's novels are not entirely clear. She states that "it is not my intention to discredit her work" but this statement on its own appears to do just that. She continues that there are "gendered implications of [Brodber's] textual choices" and this has more to do with the "limitations and contradictions of 'ecriture feminine' itself" (deCaires Narain, 1999: 114) than of Brodber's writing.

In order to unravel and engage with deCaires Narain's argument, it is helpful to examine her specific comments on *Myal.* According to deCaires Narain, *Myal* focuses on a "broader sociocultural landscape as she exposes the alienating effects of colonial education, and various forms of Christianity, on the community via 'spirit thievery' or 'zombification'" (deCaires Narain, 1999:197). For her "the text incorporates a wide range of discourses (which clearly represent a range of ways of knowing), blurring distinctions between them and refusing to privilege any one voice" (deCaires Narain, 1999: 107). As discussed with reference to Scott, the 'sociocultural landscape' can be productively read in terms of the relationship between religion and geography. For example, the exorcism of whatever is inside Ella's body "short circuit[s] the whole of creation" (Brodber, 1986: 4); the female religious body is intimately, though utterly unromantically, linked to the landscape in postcolonial women's writing. It should also, for this reason, be discussed under the "double rubric of the religious and the geographical" (Scott, 2001: xxvii).

However, deCaires Narain resists this approach. Her focus remains within the metaphor of colonial zombification:

> What Brodber dramatizes with the use of Anita's and Ella's bodies is a playing out of the variety of ways in which cultural alienation is imposed on the whole community; their bodies become the stage upon which the whole community's zombification is enacted and exorcised, and its indigenous forms of spiritual healing which provide the cure (deCaires Narain, 1999: 110).

Myal is predominantly about exchanges and negotiations of power being acted out on the woman's body, as deCaires Narain notes. When this observation is placed alongside a reading of the woman's body as a religious site, the exchanges of power become even more pertinent. As Keller notes, understanding the female possessed/religious body, which is how Ella and Anita should be read, is an issue of subjectivity: that is a

challenge to "Western evaluations of proper subjectivity" (Keller, 2002: 8). As we have seen, DeCaires Narain is already engaged in a discussion between Western and black feminist representations of the body, in terms of Western feminism's blindness in recognising the female body as "a raced and gendered terrain" (deCaires Narain, 1999: 99). When this argument is expanded to incorporate more general Western understandings of subjectivity and agency, one can begin to see why critics are reluctant to describe characters such as Ella as a religious/possessed body. DeCaires Narain's criticism of Brodber appears to be that she presents the body in an "abstracted or disembodied" way (deCaires Narain, 1999: 114) and that this is an internalising of a French feminist tendency to treat the body as abstract and autonomous. As Keller continues: "with autonomy and democracy as two of the ideals that undergird contemporary evaluations of international human rights, the religious body, which is overcome by an external agency, which does not speak for itself but is spoken through, and whose will is the will of the agency that wields it, is anomalous" (Keller, 2002: 8). It is this kind of 'disembodiedness' that Brodber is engaging with and not the hierarchising of the abstract body over the 'messy corporeality of the female body' that deCaires Narain seems to be implying. As deCaires Narain notes, the woman's body becomes a "stage" for the entire community's colonial encounter and the novel as a whole is about "woman as a powerful deliverer" (deCaires Narain, 1999: 110). Her subjectivity is entangled in a community endeavour; her agency is not rooted in individuality and autonomy. In order to understand characters such as Ella as religious bodies one must disentangle oneself from Western (feminist) notions of subjectivity that emphasise individuality. Though deCaires Narain is supporting a critical reading of Western, and particularly French, feminism, she does not appear to engage with the complex issue of subjectivity for the possessed woman's religious body,

which is how Ella should be understood. In order to understand the agency of the possessed body, Keller continues that:

> Possessed women are approached as social bodies negotiating their relationships of subordination and domination to the axes of power familiar to the humanities and social sciences (race, class, and gender; colonialism; globalism) and those forces unfamiliar to contemporary, Western analyses of power (ancestors, deities, and spirits). The question of belief is gone, and the question of whether or not the discursive agencies are "real" is gone (Keller, 2001: 86 emphasis in the original).

In order to prevent a judgement-based evaluation of the possessed woman (whether her claims of possession are true or false) her body is to be understood within the axes of power that surround her. In the same way the term 'religion' is to be productively understood, possession is not a question of validity but of social negotiation. This demonstrates that reading Ella as a religious body is vital in order to understand Brodber's representation of the female body in the novel.

Carolyn Cooper's essay "'Something Ancestral Recaptured': Spirit Possession as Trope in Selected Feminist Fictions" (1991) provides a more constructive reading of *Myal* that incorporates the ambiguities of spirit possession whilst recognising how it acts to recuperate lost narratives. She states:

> The countervailing tropes of Euro-centric cultural imperialism that redefine such movements of transcendence as savage/demonic/demented are encoded in 'universalising' mythologies that have been systematically diminished in the subversive fictions of black feminist writers (Cooper, 1991: 64).

Rather than internalising Western notions of subjectivity that label the religious body as primitive, Brodber, as Cooper observes, is "reappropriating devalued folk wisdom" (Cooper, 1991: 65). Again, however, Cooper uses the term 'folk wisdom' in order to bypass the connotations if 'religion' is used, even though she is confronting very similar connotations wrapped up in perceptions of 'spirit possession'. Cooper's argument is

equally applicable to the "Euro-centric cultural imperialism" that defines religion, if she would confront her own wariness of using the term.

This aside, Cooper's reading of *Myal* is extremely helpful in working through the contradictions of spirit possession as a metaphor for colonial violence (obeah, zombification) and, simultaneously, community recuperation (myal). Brodber is interested in the "ordinariness of faith in the spirit world" (Cooper, 1991: 72). Instead of a sensationalised tale of magic and spirits, which is a frequent misrepresentation of Caribbean culture, as in Elizabeth Nunez-Harrell's novel *When Rocks Dance* as Cooper highlights, Brodber presents a matter-of-fact intersection between the spirit and human world:

> In Brodber's subtly shaded rural world, the reader focuses less on the 'strangeness' of events and more on their import for characters who fully believe in a cosmology where the natural and the supernatural, the demonic and the divine regularly consort (Cooper, 1991: 74).

As discussed earlier, there is a problem with locating religion, or folk wisdom, in belief; as Keller suggested, it implies 'backwardness'. This is particularly relevant to the politics of representation.[36] It sets up an immediate hierarchy between the observer and the observed; 'they "believe" but I (the anthropologist) do not because I have a superior knowledge'. But as Cooper implies, Brodber's fiction forces the reader to acknowledge the reality of her characters' world, rather than allowing a judgement to be made about the "strangeness of events" in terms of what they believe. Brodber goes beyond matters of belief by forcing her readers to acknowledge the socio-political implications involved in understanding religious expression.

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[36] Refer to arguments such as that of David Richards (*Masks of Difference*, 1994), who critiques imperialist discourses of anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz. Giyatri Spivak's famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" (1995) is also helpful in recognising the unavoidable tensions of representing the 'subaltern' and whether it is in fact possible.

Cooper closes by stating that "the central characters are challenged, however unwittingly, to reappropriate the 'discredited knowledge' of their collective histories" (Cooper, 1991: 84). Cooper borrows the term 'discredited knowledge' from Toni Morrison, whom she refers to earlier in the essay. Morrison states that their knowledge was "discredited only because Black people were discredited therefore what they *knew* was 'discredited'"(Morrison, 1985: 342). It is an identical process of 'discrediting knowledge' that has undermined the appreciation of religiousness in postcolonial literature and prevented critics from seeing literature as a site on which religious negotiations, such as the possession and dispossession of characters, are played out.

The prioritising of European intellectual thought, which went hand-in-hand with colonial conquest, also enforced the discrediting of knowledge. As discussed at the start of the chapter, the study of religion is severely affected by its Enlightenment history that subsequently affected the study of other cultures and is therefore involved in the colonial process. However, it is not the only discipline; the act of interpreting literature also became a tool for controlling colonial subjects. Helen Tiffin, in her essay "Decolonization and Audience: Erna Brodber's *Myal* and Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*", discusses how the teaching of literature became a "means of control and subordination, as a vehicle for colonialist interpellation" (Tiffin, 1990: 29). In India for example, literature took the place of spreading Christianity as a means of colonial control (Tiffin, 1990: 29). English Studies and Religious Studies share a similar history on the colonial frontiers. As Tiffin notes:

> The construction of the colonial audience as English readers meant that Nigerians, Indians, Caribbean peoples or Aboriginal Australians were asked to read and internalize ethnocentric and racist representations and denigrations of themselves, their very climate, religions, cultures as if these were 'facts' (Tiffin, 1990: 29).

Tiffin goes on to discuss how complicated the act of writing became when postcolonial writers "entered this complex discursive field" (Tiffin, 1990: 29) in terms of audience. Postcolonial writers are faced with the dilemma of readership. Their "agenda was (and is) to re-present their worlds against imposed European representations" however they are addressing an "English-educated audience... usually middle class hence an Anglo-culturally interpellated one" (Tiffin, 1990: 30). Tiffin turns to *Myal* in order to demonstrate the ways in which postcolonial writers tackle such dilemmas.

Ella is a prime example of the possessing effects of a colonial English education. She lives in a dreamland with characters such as Peter Pan; she is entirely zombified by images of England perpetuated by the coloniser. This is further permeated by Ella's 'marriage' to Selwyn until he devastates her by stealing her spirit and creating the 'coon show'. As Tiffin notes, "literary education forced the colonized to internalise, to learn by heart, British values and British ideals" thus "colonized peoples recited and approved their own denigration" (Tiffin, 1990: 32). After the myal team restores Ella's stolen spirit she is faced with the dilemma of teaching what began her zombification. Tiffin states "Ella evolves a counter-hegemonic strategy to de-colonize this discursive colonialist complex. She teaches the text in terms of what it was designed to inculcate" (Tiffin, 1990: 33). By "addressing questions of audience and address" (Tiffin, 1990: 38) writers such as Brodber are able to confront the complex problem of representation and offer a solution. Tiffin closes by saying:

> The way forward for the post-colonial writer is to challenge those prior representations within the whole context of audience: to aim at the disidentification of interpolated colonial and post-colonial audiences; and to unsettle the white reader in his certain certainties, to make him feel uncomfortable and responsible, not feed him more interpretative grist for a (western) academic mill (Tiffin, 1990: 38).

The menacing aspect of postcolonial writing can offer an interesting reading of the presence of religion in the literature. Just as postcolonial writers have reappropriated the process of writing and interpretation, religion has also been reappropriated, both in its expression in daily life and its representation in fiction and poetry. I would extend Tiffin's reading of Brodber to incorporate the presence of the shifting and fluid boundaries of religion in a postcolonial context; they also act to challenge the British imagined definition of religion.

Catherine Nelson-McDermott's essay "Myal-ing Criticism: Beyond Colonizing Dialectics" (1993) also explores the problem of reappropriating an imperial and colonial space. She asks the question: "how are Jamaican individuals within their community to negotiate the gap between the community as it has been constructed by imperialism and the community which might be constructed in such a way as to empower individuals?" (Nelson-McDermott, 1993: 53). She finds her answer in Brodber's *Myal*:

> This text ultimately... constructs an active, supportive community which both deals with the problems of the colonial dialectical space and moves beyond them to begin building a non-colonized, and non-colonizable, social space (Nelson-McDermott, 1993: 54).

Myal, both the novel and the religion, forms a space in which, and through which, the community can rewrite the colonizer. The key to achieving this is, again, to interrogate the colonial education system, and overthrow it, which Brodber does by using the metaphors of spirit thievery and myal. For Nelson-McDermott, spirit thievery occurs on two levels: the individual and the social or cultural (Nelson-McDermott, 1993: 55). The social/cultural thievery is demonstrated most in the "English school system's interpellation of its black students" and therefore "individual thieveries are symptomatic of the systemic or cultural thieveries" (Nelson-McDermott, 1993: 55).

Spirit thievery has many complex and interwoven features but, as Nelson-McDermott continues, so does the myaling or healing process.

As noted by the other critics, Ella's confrontation with the colonial school syllabus is her way of "short circuiting" colonial spirit thievery. Nelson-McDermott notes "she [Ella] begins to strengthen her school-children's psychic immune system so that they may fight the systemic disease" (Nelson-McDermott, 1993: 60). The various strands of the community, including the "white liberal body" (Nelson-McDermott, 1993: 61), are involved in the myaling process. It is also an important process for male-female relations as they "share the responsibility for healing" whilst "working out their relationships" (Nelson-McDermott, 1993: 63). Nelson-McDermott defines *Myal* as a "womanist 'creole' text" as it posits itself on "sites of fracture" and destabilises binaries and standard definitions (Nelson-McDermott, 1993: 64). She closes by saying:

> Erna Brodber's explanatory text enacts a myal process upon colonialist education systems and notions of community and identity, as well as upon critical dichotomies, by offering the reader alternate methods of perceiving (Nelson-McDermott, 1993: 65).

As discussed in relation to Tiffin's essay, the presence of religion in Brodber's novel, and many others, is also motivated by the disruption of dichotomies typical of Western theological definitions and the proposal of "alternate methods of perceiving". It is vital that the use and presence of religion in Caribbean literature is perceived in an alternative way.

The final critique of *Myal* to be interrogated is Shalini Puri's essay "An 'Other' Realism: Erna Brodber's 'Myal'" (1993). In a similar way to Nelson-McDermott, Puri concentrates on the way in which *Myal* situates itself on borders and is concerned with the breaking down of binaries. She begins by presenting the contradiction for the colonized society: "on one hand it must be a slave to Europe… on the other hand, it is

required to identify with Europe, to become Europe. Thus it is asked to be, simultaneously, Prospero and Caliban" (Puri, 1993: 95). This creates a sense of the 'unreal', which is shared by the Caribbean writer whose task it is to build "a poetics that can make real the colonized subject" (Puri, 1993: 96). It is here that Puri introduces a criticism of placing the formal features of literary realism, such as omniscient narrator, linear narratives and transparent language, in opposition to postcolonial Caribbean writing (Puri, 1993 98). She observes:

> Postmodern readings have tended to privilege the marvellous of 'marvellous realism', the magic of 'magical realism.' In doing so they have ignored perhaps the most profound poststructuralist insight: the warning against binarisms that privilege one term at the expense of the other and obscure the internal heterogeneity of each term. It would be fruitful for critics to attend to the realism of 'marvellous realism' and to how the friction between 'marvellous' and 'realism' sparks meaning (Puri, 1993: 98).

Puri applies this criticism to a reading of *Myal* but first indicates Brodber's own dual agenda as both a novelist and sociologist, saying that both "attempt to understand the social world as a *system* of relations" (Puri, 1993: 99). By disrupting binaries, Brodber "doubles the meanings of objectivity, science and realism" (Puri, 1993: 99).

Puri's discussion of the use of the metaphor of spirit possession in *Myal*, continuing the notion of doubling, is equally applicable to 'religion' in postcolonial Caribbean literature, even though her own use of the term is problematic. Her understanding of the term 'religion' appears to be limited to the colonialist church and its mission. She avoids using it to incorporate 'ancestral beliefs', 'oral traditions' and 'healing practices', which she places outside religion (Puri, 1993: 101), probably as a result of the colonial history of the term and a reliance on a Christianised definition that assumes that religion, as an essence, exists. However, as she says in relation in spirit possession, "the novel thus represents not only domination and theft but also the possibility of connection with the half that has never been told" (Puri, 1993: 101). *Myal*

also interrogates the doubling motif and the 'half that has never been told' within the category religion alongside its involvement in colonial conquest. She rightly claims that instances of the 'magical', and I would extend this to the religious, "disrupt the claims of Western science and provide an area of unofficial, secret knowledge from which resistance can spring" (Puri, 1993: 101). By 'doubling' and rejecting binaries, for example Ella is both/neither black and/or white, the novel resists a Western mode of thinking, which includes the Western perception of religion that places belief in a 'bubble' (refer to page 42; Keller, 2002: 6-7). As Puri points out, "*Myal* is most interested in those moments and spaces where differences meet" (Puri, 1993: 104). It is also during these encounters that religion can be identified, as Albanese and Long remark. Puri continues that "*Myal* seeks out borders" (Puri, 1993: 104) and "frustrates… tidy boundaries" (Puri, 1993: 195). I propose that it is in this way that religion and religious bodies operate in the fiction and poetry of the Caribbean: to 'frustrate the tidy boundaries' Western definitions want to set.

Puri describes Ella as becoming a "doubling agent" as she "learns to manipulate meanings" (Puri, 1993: 110). Ella's manipulation of meanings can be extended to both Brodber, as an author, and to the Caribbean community as a whole, which enables Ella to become a 'doubling agent'. Puri closes by emphasising the benefits of doubling and multiple narratives as they "signal the possibility of reversal and renewal" (Puri, 1993: 112):

> Its multiple narratives are not unconnected and discrete; they are related and conflicting. Indeed, doubling becomes a strategy for resisting and refusing colonialist narratives… The subjectification of the colonized depends on this ability to re-vision their reality, to provide an account of it which brings light to their possibilities. Myal's project of re-construction is thus tied to the project of recognition. The novel's faith in a poetics of doubleness, a 'twilight poetics' that walks the border between obscurity and illumination, derives from belief that it is at their borders that texts first fray, and it is there that the fabric of colonial narratives is most liable to be torn (Puri, 1993: 112).

As a place in which multiple cultures are exchanging and interacting with each other, religion in the Caribbean is also acting as a 'doubling agent' as it is being constantly reappropriated by the Caribbean people and 'refusing' to adhere to 'colonialist narratives'. Puri's essay encourages the reader of *Myal* to recognise the intricacies of its vitally eclectic narrative. However, as with the previous critiques, there is an absence of the word 'religion' and thus the politics and intricacies it incorporates. It is interesting here to refer back to DuBois' 'uncanny' religious experience of the autonomy of the black community's double-consciousness (refer to page 7). This doubling experience is key to the religious experience and expression of those oppressed, such as Ella.

Postcolonial religion is intricately woven into the fabric of Brodber's novel and I believe it cannot be read productively without this acknowledgement. All the essays discussed recognise that one of the novel's main aims is to negotiate established boundaries and recover postcolonial subjectivity, whether that is enacted on the female body or through the teaching of English literature. But, as the following passage demonstrates, there is a further dimension to Brodber's work which has been silenced:

> - I have been bad from the beginning. I had better pray that the Lord Jesus enter in and cleanse me. – But she wouldn't let him enter in the right form and through the right door. He could only come as the baby Jesus, into her uterus, fully nine months, curled up foetal fashion and ready to be delivered at any time (Brodber, 1988: 84).

The negotiations taking place across Ella's maternal and possessed body are conceptualised within the category 'religion'. An understanding of religion that transcends the body is insufficient, as is a reading of this passage that neglects an appreciation of alternative subjectivities contained within a contemporary framing of 'religion'. Ella's relationship to her body, and the imagined manifestation of Jesus in her womb, is a 'religious' response to the fracturing of bodies and psyches throughout colonial history. A productive reading of *Myal* therefore foregrounds religion and the

politics of religiousness, in terms of subjectivity and agency, and historical memory. All the features and themes discussed by the various critics can then be incorporated within this rubric. Though not Guyanese, Brodber's work is an ideal place to begin. Critiques of her work bring to the foreground the problem the thesis is addressing; postcolonial theory is unequipped to deal with the 'religious' in postcolonial fiction. A discussion of Brodber's work also demonstrates the possibility of extending this argument to a broader Caribbean context.

"I AM LOUISIANA. I GIVE PEOPLE THEIR HISTORY": LOCATION, DISLOCATION AND RELIGION IN ERNA BRODBER'S *LOUISIANA*

Brodber's latest novel, *Louisiana* (1994), is equally playful in its tribute to postcolonial subjectivity and religiosity as *Myal.* The themes discussed throughout this chapter, such as the importance of landscape and geography to an interpretation of religion in postcolonial literature and how the negotiations that take place at both physical and spiritual boundaries can assist in defining religion, are all enacted within *Louisiana.* The novel is also an act of remembrance and demonstrates the ways in which historical memory manifests itself through the religious body. The novel engages in the politics involved in the academic study of 'other' cultures. Brodber's 'doubling', or "dual agenda" (Puri, 1993: 99), is made even more pertinent and haunting in her latest novel as the characters move between varying geographical and spiritual locations. I will demonstrate the importance of interpreting the various themes of *Louisiana* in terms of 'religion as orientation'.

Ella, the novel's protagonist, is a young, black, female anthropologist and is sent, with a tape recorder, to a small town in the North American State of Louisiana to

carry out ethnographic research on Mammy. After their first meeting Mammy dies but, as opposed to the story ceasing, this is where the story begins. A spiritual communication begins between Ella and Mammy, with the tape recorder as the medium. An elaborate history of multiple places and landscapes reveals itself to Ella, who also begins to find her own history and future. Ella becomes the counsellor for a group of West Indian and black-American men, as she 'gives them their history' (Brodber, 1994: 129) and locates her own powerful sense of self and community.

The initial problem dealt with at the outset of this chapter was to do with the prioritising of Western knowledge and Enlightenment history in the study of religion and anthropology. Both disciplines are beginning to engage in a more self-critical role and to recognise the tensions of pursuing anthropology. However the participant-observer dichotomy continues to be a potent reminder of the privileging of Western forms of knowledge over the knowledge of those they are studying. From the outset of *Louisiana*, Brodber illuminates this tension and breaks it down. The novel is presented as a manuscript of ethnography, which finds its way to a publisher via Ella's husband Reuben twenty years after her death. The fictive publisher writes:

> The text argues persuasively that Ella came under the influence of psychic forces. Today the intellectual world understands that there are more ways of knowing than are accessible to the five senses; in 1936 when Ella Townsend received her assignment it was not so. The world is ready. We are. This manuscript's arrival is opportune. And in more than one way (Brodber, 1994: 4).

Brodber tells her audience that they *are* ready. She does not tolerate an outdated and ignorant response to 'alternative' and spiritual modes of communication. It was the traditional "intellectual world" that had a primitive and backward perception and fear of knowledge that is external to the five senses. Brodber's novels and her own academic work, pursue and sustain this polite, yet forceful, manipulation of academic structures and 'truths'.

Mammy, prior to her death, interrogates Ella and her anthropologist bravado, though Ella herself is fully aware that she is adding to "these white people's history of the blacks of South West Louisiana" (Brodber, 1994: 14). The novel is about the reclaiming, re-mythologizing, and rewriting of history. In order for Mammy's history to be heard, she must control both the writing and the hearing of the narrative. After Ella gives her anthropologist's speech saying "Tell me anything, everything", Mammy's thoughts retaliate:

> The young lady leans over and smiles her smile thinking with that speech, her fine line black pen and with her red button depressed, she has loosed Anna's threads and the ravelling would start. But that fabric is self-edge and on all of its sides (Brodber, 1994: 18).

It is not going to be that easy to unravel Mammy's complex life story; Ella must listen carefully, within herself, to hear the narrative unfold. This can only begin after Mammy's death and when Ella can hear and locate the voices:

> There is no question about it; it is as clear as a bell. Somebody spoke. A voice very familiar and it isn't her Mammy's. The ears are hearing other frequencies. The child has come through. Anna, she'll make it (Brodber, 1994: 28).

Ella's new community and spiritual circle guide her, as in *Myal*, so that she can begin to tell the 'half that has never been told'. "The ears are hearing other frequencies" that are external to the five senses and a white history; it is a recovery of African-American history, from the perspective of the African-American double-consciousness. And it is expressions such as this, which are typical of Brodber's prose, that act to unsettle and disturb a Western reader who is struggling to engage in forms of subjectivity that do not promote autonomy. References to vital African-American historical figures such as Marcus Garvey (Brodber, 1994: 148) and W.E.B. DuBois (Brodber, 1994: 41/53) indicate the intellectual history in which this novel is rooted.

With the help of her husband Reuben, Ella writes and relives the history of her teachers, Mammy and Lowly. Ella states "nothing I had read could have prepared me for the notion of thought transplant or whatever name we give to it" and it is Reuben that prevents Ella from handing herself "over to a psychiatrist" (Brodber, 1994: 31). Ella has been predominantly exposed to discourses stemming from Western anthropology and her initial challenge, therefore, is to overcome the fear that she is going mad; this is what a Western external audience would deduce from her experiences and therefore how she herself perceives them. Once she has confronted this perception, the "thought transplant" can take place:

> By the next morning, November 11th 1936 I was no longer just me. I was theirs. The venerable sisters had married themselves to me – given birth to me – they would say. I could feel the change. There was the morning and after, no doubt in my mind that I had heard things nobody had said to me and that I had said what I could not have said but what I was to hear myself say thereafter so often when they were about to make contact with me or when I needed to speak with them, - "Ah who sey Sammy dead" (Brodber: 1994: 32-33).

As discussed earlier, the subjectivity of a possessed woman is incompatible with Western notions of subjectivity. The venerable sisters 'give birth' to Ella and she is no longer an autonomous being; she "is theirs". Ella begins a process of 'becoming'. In order to recognise this she should be understood as a religious body and the types of disciplining that this involves need to be appreciated. Ella's resistance at Mammy's funeral, in which she "kicked, fought, foamed, stared..." (Brodber, 1994: 35) as "first timers sometimes do" (Brodber, 1994: 38) is indicative of the ambiguousness of becoming a disciplined body whilst simultaneously evoking a great deal of power, both in the community and in the spirit world. This can also be read as the "grotesque and bizarre convolutions" that "emerge when the constitution of the religious consciousness is faced with historical memory" (Long, 1986: 184). The horrific

memories of the Middle Passage and slavery resurface within the works of contemporary writers. For Brodber, these memories are powerfully expressed through the violent convolutions of the possessed body. As Fanon states, consciousness is not a question of individuality but of social encounter (Fanon, 1967: 13). The psychic and the social are inseparable. Ella "had been officially entered. I was going to be, if I was not already, a vessel, a horse, somebody's talking drum" (Brodber, 1994: 46). After a week Ella relaxes into her role: "I had arrived. Passed through my rite of passage with flying colours. I had broken through that membrane and was in, ready and willing to be and see something else" (Brodber, 1994: 52). Ella's journey into Mammy's history begins and it is her responsibility to press 'Record'.

Part of Ella's transformation is dependent on her relationship to Louisiana, which adopts many forms in the novel, such as that of place and person. From the outset of the novel and prior to Ella becoming Louisiana, the novel shifts from place to place: Louisiana, Jamaica and Louisiana, the American State. Ella was born in Jamaica, as was Lowly, Mammy's friend and the other venerable sister. Brodber's use of Jamaican creole within her narrative accentuates the fluidity of moving between two places that share a similarly fragmented and violent history. An example of this is the communication between Mammy and Ella, which always begins with the line from a Jamaican song: "Ah who sey Sammy dead", (Brodber, 1994: 31). The intentional geographical shifting presented by Brodber is also symptomatic of the postcolonial literary tactic to not be fixed in one location. David Richards presents an important critique of the imperialistic eyes of many anthropologists. He relates how Geertz fixes his subjects in a very specific locale and they are therefore "indistinguishable from the place; *their* place" (Richards, 1994: 241). In order for postcolonial writers to challenge this fixating of their subjectivities, Richards proposes that:

> The postcolonial subject's radical challenge to cultural representation begins fundamentally in the denial of a sense of place. The panopticon vision withers if there is not a landscape to survey, if there is no 'there' to be in, no 'there' to see. A sense of place is the first denial in the writings of dislocated postcolonial writers (Richards, 1994: 241).

With reference to Bhabha, Richards continues that it is in "these acts of denial" that the postcolonial subject finds identity. A similar act of maybe not denial but certainly refusal to be pinned down dominates *Louisiana*. Ella is sent by white anthropologists to formulate and locate a specific study of a 'typical' woman from Louisiana. Mammy resists this in multiple ways but the first is to present an ambiguous dislocation of place; she will not allow Louisiana itself to be specified.

The shifting of Louisiana can be persuasively correlated with the shifting definition of religion that I propose. Just as Brodber and other postcolonial writers refuse to pin down the exact geographical location of their novels in order to strengthen a sense of subjectivity and identity that counteract colonising narratives, so is religion as orientation employed as a counteractive tactic. Religion in *Louisiana*, just as geographical location, adopts a shifting and fluid form that undermines the Western-Christian assumptions that have dominated the landscape of religious identity.

> My mother's church had a stained glass window with a thorn-headed picture of Jesus the Christ, his head slightly leaned to one side, his arms open and his fingers delicately cocked reminding me somehow of the proper way of drinking tea (Brodber, 1994: 57).

The mocking prose used by Brodber to describe this Anglicised image of Christ demonstrates the cultural specificity of religious representation and displays how definitions of religion have been dominated by the British imagination. The institution of the Church and tea drinking will always be legacies of colonialism. However, if the definition of religion is stretched beyond these boundaries, as demonstrated by Brodber, the legacy is confronted. *Louisiana* demonstrates that the shifting landscapes

of religion and geography, in response to colonial encounters, are being equally enacted within the literature of the Caribbean and they serve to formulate the shifting identities of postcolonial subjects.

The portrayal of a shifting geography and religiousness merge when Ella 'becomes' Louisiana. She becomes both the land and its multiple landscapes:

> I am the link between the shores washed by the Caribbean sea, a hole, yet I am what joins your left hand to your right. I join the world of the living and the world of the spirits. I join the past with the present. In me Louise and Sue Ann are joined. Say Suzie Anna as Louise calls Mammy. Do you hear Louisiana there? Now say Lowly as Mammy calls Louise and follow that with Anna as Louise sometimes calls Mammy. Lowly-Anna. There's Louisiana again, particularly if you are lisp-tongued as you could well be. Or you could be Spanish and speak of those two venerable sisters as Louise y Anna. I was called in Louisiana, a state in the USA. Sue Ann lived in St. Mary, Louisiana and Louise in St. Mary, Louisiana, Jamaica. Ben is from there too. I am Louisiana. I wear a solid pendant with a hole through its centre. I look through this hole and I can see things. Still I am Mrs Ella Kohl, married to a half-caste Congolese reared in Antwerp by a fairy godfather. I wear long loose fitting white dresses in summer and long black robes over them in winter. I am Louisiana. I give people their history. I serve God and the venerable sisters (Brodber, 1994: 125).

This captures the complex relationship between religion and geography in Brodber's novel. As the "thought transplant" continues, Ella's religious body is transformed into the restless place of Louisiana and acts as the impenetrable link between the multiple shores of the diaspora's and their homelands, between their multiple histories and multiple levels of existence. The flowing narrative voice, which is "washed by the Caribbean sea", celebrates both the rich phonetics and the semantics of the word "Louisiana". The names of Mammy and Louise can also be heard when one calls on Louisiana, the place and Louisiana, the person. This enchanting narrative voice is extremely powerful as it echoes the assertive and prophetic biblical "I am". Louisiana is a female religious body; she is a manifestation of African-American double-consciousness and the giver of history.

Ella is fully aware of her 'becoming'; she declares "I am becoming. Language is the key" (Brodber 1994: 117). The French philosopher and feminist, Luce Irigaray, proposes the dilemma that faces the female subject in her process of 'becoming'. In her essay "Divine Women", Irigaray uses the religious framework of Christianity to demonstrate the implications of a patriarchal Godhead for female subjectivity; women have consequently been unable to 'become'. God, or the concept of God, constructs gender. This is therefore immediately problematic for the female self, who has no female God to aspire to. If "man is able to exist because of God", woman is unable to exist because of no female God (Irigaray, 1987: 61):

> We have no female trinity. But, as long as woman lacks a divine made in her image she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own. She lacks an ideal that would be her goal or path in becoming. Woman scatters and becomes an agent of destruction and annihilation because she has no other of her own that she can become (Irigaray, 1987: 64).

Not only is she unable to exist but she is also unable to speak, for in order to become one must enter into language, which is dominated by masculinity.[37] Ella's statement "I am becoming. Language is the key" could be persuasively read as a response to Irigaray's Western-oriented dilemma. Through her negotiations and communications with the venerable sisters, her divine others, Ella locates her subjectivity and can become. Her language is a combination of the many dialects of the diaspora, that can be interpreted as counteracting the dominant language of the coloniser. Irigaray's work is rooted in Western feminism which, as discussed earlier (see page 47-49) prioritises autonomy and this is often contradictory to the different Caribbean, African, Indian

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[37] Irigaray is influenced by Jacques Lacan who states that in order to become subjects we must enter into language, but language is dominantly male (Lacan, 1949). Therefore in order to speak or become subjects, women are forced to be masculine. We must either act like men or adhere to the feminine roles set up by men. Also see Grace Jantzen (*Becoming Divine*, 1998).

notions of female subjectivity.[38] In Brodber's novel, female subjectivity is located in the negotiations taking place across the multiple landscapes of the female religious body. As one steps away from the restricted definitions of religion and divinity that are rooted in Western Christianity, one simultaneously challenges restricted notions of subjectivity that undermine 'other' cultures.

The subtleties and complexities of Brodber's narrative can be more appreciated when the definition of religion as orientation is applied to a reading of *Louisiana.* The complexities of Brodber's writing are indicative of the complexities of postcolonial diasporic identities. These complexities are captured within an understanding of religion that examines how one negotiates different boundaries, both physical and spiritual. The shifting landscapes of geographical location and religion are simultaneously enacted in *Louisiana.* It is the search for orientation, which firstly requires disorientation from the control of the coloniser, that produces a powerful sense of what the religious means in postcolonial cultures and literatures; it is about defining moments of contact and exchange and appreciating the effects this will inevitably have on personal and actual landscapes. *Louisiana,* on the surface, is a challenging ethnography that many anthropologists would find hard to accept.[39] It is also a challenge to postcolonial critics as they struggle to write about the exchanges taking place on and across Ella's body. Brodber is, either consciously or unconsciously, exposing two major problems that she will have come across in her different fields. It has been my aim, in presenting a reading of *Louisiana* in contrast to current readings of *Myal,* to highlight the constraints critics of postcolonial literature are placing on themselves by being wary of the term 'religion'.

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[38] Refer to Chilla Bulbeck's text *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms,* 1998.
[39] Paul Stoller's *In Sorcery's Shadow* (1987) and Margery Wolf's *Thrice Told Tale* (1992) are two types of ethnography that play with the dichotomy of participant-observer. Stoller comments on the detrimental effect he feared it would have on his career.

Since the outset of this chapter it has been my aim to introduce the complications involved in a combined study of postcolonial literature and religion. The study of religion itself is entangled in many of the imperialistic theories of Western intellectual thought, such as its close relationship with traditional anthropology that, as Chidester demonstrates, was involved in the justification of the colonial appropriation of both land and people's identities. The study of religion in different cultures was often a comparative study with Christianity, which, as both King and Chidester note (King, 1999:42, Chidester, 1996: 27), limited an understanding of religious expression and practice. The group's 'religiousness' was measured in terms of Christian or other monotheistic traditions' religious structures. The study of religion is therefore entirely submerged in the colonial invasion of land and people.

Long, Albanese, King and Chidester expand upon predominant Western definitions of religion, which are rooted in Christianity and essentialising assumptions, by foregrounding negotiations of space that are particularly relevant to postcolonial cultures. This in turn exposes the tensions of studying religion whilst providing a functional framework for dealing with these tensions. Colonial conquest affected the physical structures and boundaries of the land, which necessarily impacted on the identities of those who both dwelt on the land and who were brought to the land. This fragmentation subsequently affected the religious consciousness of the people, which has since been played out in the works of postcolonial poets, novelists and playwrights and is of particular relevance to syncretic Caribbean culture. Religions such as Myal, Obeah, Vodou and Rastafarianism are all symptomatic of colonial encounters, both in their syncretism and in their resistant tendencies. Writers such as Brodber repeatedly display that land, space and territory are an integral part of discussions on religion. It is in the correlation of discussions on religion with discussions on land and geography

that an insightful, combined study of postcolonial literature and religion can be achieved.

Erna Brodber's novels are particularly applicable to an interpretation of religion as orientation and as synonymous with the land and provide a platform from which to address the complexities of reading religion in postcolonial fiction. The religiousness of the main characters is portrayed to the reader in terms of their personal and communal conflicts being enacted on both spiritual and physical grounds. However, critiques of Brodber's novels, particularly *Myal* as demonstrated, are often reluctant to understand this dynamic as religion or as an expression of religious consciousness. The recovery of identity for the postcolonial subject, whether that be through the female body or through the tension of teaching English literature in colonised places, is central to Brodber's writing, as commentaries on *Myal* explored. However the haunting memories of colonialism, and therefore the recovery of these memories, are often manifested within the religious consciousness. Novels such as *Myal* and *Louisiana* exemplify the need for recognising the dynamic of religiousness within postcolonial cultures. This chapter has demonstrated that a vital avenue for scholars of religion to explore is postcolonial literature, and that a vital avenue for postcolonial literary critics to explore is religion. The next step in the thesis is to deal with the complexities of doing interdisciplinary studies and to address questions raised in bringing together different fields of study, such as postcolonial literary studies and Religious Studies.

CHAPTER TWO:

DEVELOPING A HERMENEUTICS FOR THE COMBINED STUDY OF RELIGION AND POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

> How do we know what we know? What are our sources of knowledge and why do we trust them? It's not enough to tell me what you see. I want to know where you are standing as you see and speak, and also why you stand there (June O'Connor, 1995: 48).
>
> Then I saw that on the word were carved other words, hieroglyphics, tiny rows of them, and they were in a language I could not understand. But I became aware of the noisy and voluble existence of words, and incessant chattering from the past... (Melville, *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, 1998: 5).

Many hazards accompany the pursuit of interdisciplinary research, but there also exist many rewards. This chapter will attend to these hazards but, more importantly for this project, the chapter will focus on the benefits achieved when one uses a diverse theoretical framework. Disciplines are formed and nurtured by a specific history of knowledge. This disciplinary standpoint produces its own exclusive, and often elitist, vocabulary and discourse. June O'Connor challenges the sanctity of disciplinary location and reminds theorists of the importance of recognising the structures by which we are bound and the platform from which we speak in order to prevent blindness to alternative modes of analysis. Interdisciplinary research helps to avoid these pitfalls by balancing between two or more positions, by speaking across several discourses, and by listening to the dialogue taking place across disciplinary borders.

One way to formulate an argument in favour of interdisciplinary dialogue is to adopt Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. Dialogism is against the prioritising of one opinion or position over another as the 'otherness' of a position or word is equally

valid; no utterance is a single unit, according to Bakhtin. The theory of dialogism attends to the various historical, social and cultural settings that are unavoidably present in any one utterance. It is this notion of a web of positions, which are delicately linked, that leads to the idea of intertextuality. Bakhtin used phrases such as polyphony, double-voiced discourse, hybridization, and heteroglossia to describe the dual positions and voices that compete with one another simultaneously in the novel. But this notion of dialogue can also be applied to a wider context of disciplinary location to understand the nature of interdisciplinary research and how one manages the competing voices it encompasses.

During this chapter the notion of dialogism will also be used to expose the limitations imposed by the structures of the disciplines of religion and postcolonial theory. For instance, Gavin Flood introduces the theory of dialogism to the study of religion to produce a metatheory of Religious Studies that is "sensitive to history, to language and to subjectivity" (Flood, 1999: 35). In terms of postcolonial theory, dialogism is of huge significance, for it articulates the experience and reality of a dual identity or 'double consciousness'[40] for those individuals impacted by slavery and colonialism. The expression of this experience within postcolonial literature can then also be analysed using dialogism. In addition, for this particular study, the notion of dialogism can be used to provide a bridge of communication between Religious Studies and postcolonial literary studies. In this way, Bakhtin's theory of dialogism will be adopted in order to create a useful hermeneutic device to carry out the combined study of religion and postcolonial literature.

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[40]As referred to in Chapter One, W. E. B. DuBois, in his ground-breaking text, *Souls of Black Folk*, refers to his African American identity as a 'double consciousness': being both African and American simultaneously.

THE NATURE OF DISCIPLINES

Since the development of the disciplines of Religious Studies and postcolonial literary studies,[41] the dialogue between them has been insufficiently investigated. It is only in the past several decades that scholars of religion have been explicitly interrogating the importance of examining religion from a postcolonial perspective, and rereading religious narratives in view of the colonial encounter.[42] Interdisciplinary research between Religious Studies and postcolonial *literary* studies has been an even more neglected area, with only a handful of published works, such as Jamie Scott's edited volumes (1996 and 2000), and Peter Kerry Powers' book *Recalling Religions* (2000). Very few scholars from either field have been keen to examine this phenomenon, the reason for which has been developed in the first chapter; postcolonial theorists are hindered by their assumptions about what religion is, which result from both the Christian origins of the term and its use to describe a transcendent truth distinctive and autonomous from all other human experience. Colonialism was a religious, as well as economic, venture in that it was a defining moment of human contact and exchange; Christianity and imperialism were intimately linked. As a result, postcolonial theorists' consideration of religion has been from this perspective. This has been an important part of the process of theorizing colonialism; however it has led to a lack of critical insight into theorizing the religious within postcolonial contexts. Postcolonial theory is

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[41] Postcolonial theory is interdisciplinary by its very nature. However the study of the vast amount of postcolonial literature has been developed within the discipline of English Studies, within the Western academy. (An important essay to refer to here is Ngugi wa Thiong'o's essay "On the Abolition of the English Department" (1972) which describes both the institutional nature of postcolonial literary studies and the transition which took place from an English department to African Literature department). During this chapter I will therefore be using the term postcolonial literary studies to imply a disciplinary location.

[42] Charles Long's *Significations* (1986) is an important starting point. A reading of his work is carried out in Chapter One. Others include David Chidester (1996), Richard King (1999), Tim Fitzgerald (2000), and Mary Keller (2002).

contained within a secularist approach in response to Western Enlightenment history which prioritises reason and rationale over irrationality and superstition. The adherence to this Western Enlightenment model by postcolonial theorists has resulted in the neglect of the religious narratives that are present in much postcolonial literature and the need for a more nuanced understanding of the term 'religion'. It is for this reason that interdisciplinary research is crucial, particularly between Religious Studies and postcolonial literary studies.

There exist, however, several significant dilemmas that prevent interdisciplinary research being a straight-forward process. This is mainly to do with the institutional organisation of knowledge. Institutions promote interdisciplinary dialogue and research but the reality is that universities are dependant on departmental divisions in order to function efficiently. As Andrew Hass writes:

> The wider institution, however much it espouses a nominal notion of interdisciplinary studies, is not set up for the ground-breaking disruption and dispersal of a pure interdisciplinarity. The academy functions by virtue of its disciplines, not in opposition to them. Precise and defining boundaries are set rigidly in place through the creation of institutional compartments – faculties, departments, schools, and colleges – that become dividing lines of bureaucratic organization by which each discipline is held in check and each field of study demarcated one against the other... The University resists and will continue to resist any interdisciplinarity that disrupts the structural logic upon which it has prided itself for so many centuries... The academy loves to applaud interdisciplinary rhetoric, and does so by employing the language of interdisciplinarity itself. But we know that this kind of rhetoric goes only so far. It must of necessity go only so far if the academy is to remain what it is (Hass, 2003: 4-5).

Hass persuasively addresses the irony of pursuing interdisciplinary research within the academy; universities may in theory support interdisciplinary dialogue but in reality interdisciplinary ventures threaten the very structures on which universities depend. For example, though one can submit an interdisciplinary PhD, there is little possibility of employment without choosing to locate oneself in one field over the other. As Hass

points out, this division is a result of the Enlightenment ordering of knowledge or "methodological exactitude" (Hass, 2003: 5) which has come to define the structure of our universities. McCutcheon argues that it is defining 'religion' as *sui generis*, as a distinctive and transcendent experience outside of all other human experience, that has enabled it to maintain its own disciplinary location. For this reason, he believes that religious studies should be an entirely interdisciplinary subject:

> Given the financial, social, and political realities of the modern university, the choice appears to be between a departmentally based study of religion structured as a traditional academic discipline or closing relatively young departments of religion and redistributing the study of religion among other more securely established departments. Sadly, and for a variety of reasons, developing cross-disciplinary fields of enquiry appears not to be a viable option for administrators... Although the critique of sui generis religion may hasten the death of the academic discipline variously known in English as religious studies, history of religions, and comparative religion, it might simultaneously open the way for a cross-disciplinary, decentred study of this intriguing aspect of human communities (McCutcheon, 1997: 21).

However, I would argue that it is still important to have a specific location from which to address issues to do with the contemporary study of religion and the limitations of the category itself, whilst continuously pursuing cross-disciplinary associations.

The work of Michel Foucault attends to the structures of power that inspired such a term as 'discipline' and the historical connotations that it carries. According to Foucault, "disciplines became general formulas of domination" (1977: 137). Not only are they dominating, they are also exclusive:

> Discipline sometimes requires enclosure, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself. It is the protected place of disciplinary monotony (Foucault, 1977: 141).

Foucault's notion of 'disciplinary monotony' is resonant of Bakhtin's term 'monologic;' the idea of a single, unified omnipotent voice of which both Foucault (within

institutions) and Bakhtin (within literary criticism) are highly suspicious. In response to Foucault, Hass reiterates that: "the language of any one discipline is a product of many other languages or discourses, which together have created the necessary constituents of and conditions for an environment in which it is first possible for another language to become a discipline" (Hass, 2003: 7). In this way, no discipline is homogeneous or an original enterprise "but emerges organically through the various sedimentations of discursive practice built up over time" (Hass, 2003: 8).

In his essay "The Discourse on Language" (1972) Foucault remarks on how a discipline is formed and sustained by a set of rules created by itself. The knowledge disciplines assume is disseminated "without there being any question of their meaning or their validity being derived from whoever happened to invent them" (Foucault, 1972: 222). Though disciplines are becoming increasingly reflexive and self-critical, Foucault's statement is in a similar vein to June O'Connor's more contemporary observation, which reminds one that "much of what we see, we see because we have been trained, educated and socialized to see in certain ways" (O'Connor, 1995: 47). As a result, certain knowledges are excluded or, in O'Connor's words "there are also things we do not see" (O'Connor, 1995: 47) and in Foucault's words, "it [disciplinary knowledge] repulses a whole teratology of learning" (Foucault, 1972: 223). Foucault attends to the exclusive nature of 'disciplinary monotony' by stating:

> Disciplines constitute a system of control in the production of discourse, fixing its limits through the action of an identity taking the form of a permanent reactivation of the rules (Foucault, 1972: 224).

Foucault sees these 'system[s] of control' as "principles of constraint" which can only be restrictive to investigations of knowledge before they can ever be constructive (Foucault, 1972: 224). The challenge is to recognise the structures that are restricting one's vision and to break them down. Disciplinary locatedness is an effective strategy

for learning; however it is necessary to remain suspicious of the power and exclusivity which can accompany such strategies.

Postcolonial theory did, however, manage to establish itself outside of any disciplinary location, thriving off the dialogues taking place across different disciplinary and political boundaries. Young writes:

> Postcolonial critique incorporates the legacy of the syncretic traditions of Marxism that developed outside the west in the course of anti-colonial struggles... As a result, it is theoretically and historically fundamentally hybrid, the product of the clash of cultures that brought it into being; it is interdisciplinary and transcultural in its theory and has been in its effects (Young, 2001: 10).

The incentive behind postcolonial theory is: "that it is possible to make effective political interventions within and behind its own disciplinary field by developing significant connections between different forms of intellectual engagement and activism in the world today" (Young, 2001: 11). Postcolonial theory was developed within the field of political activism and was then translated into the various disciplinary fields of the academy such as history, politics, and literature. However, even postcolonial theory has found itself rooted more specifically in one field than any other. Whilst it still "draws on a wide... range of theory from different disciplines in order to develop its own insights" it has found itself more suited to literature departments (Young, 2001: 64). For, as Young writes, literature departments:

> provided the solitary space within academic institutions where subjective forms of knowledge were taken seriously. Before postcolonialism, for example, there were plenty of histories of colonialism. But such histories rarely considered the ways in which colonialism was experienced, or analysed, by those who suffered its effects (Young, 2001: 64).

This allegiance to literature departments has been maintained; even as the vital insights of postcolonial theory are being extensively applied to research carried out by scholars

in other fields, centres of postcolonial study are still largely run from literature departments.

The location of postcolonial theory within the Western academy generally has drawn its own criticisms. The argument follows that postcolonial theory is merely continuing the subjugation of the other by repeating the imperial process of prioritizing the West as the centre of knowledge. The aim of postcolonial studies is to be aware of and to stand against the dominance of Western discourse and knowledge. This includes a highly political position that aims to break down institutional and disciplinary boundaries and to challenge Western assumptions about knowledge from mostly within the West. It has been argued that the West is again "call[ing] the shots in telling the other story" (Young, 2001: 61). But Young sees this as an over-simplification of the positioning of postcolonial studies in the Western academy. He states:

> For the first time... the power of western academic institutions has been deployed against the west. For the first time, in the western academy, postcolonial subjects become subjects rather than the objects of knowledge. For the first time, tricontinental knowledge, cultural and political practices, have asserted and achieved more or less equal institutional status with any other (Young, 2001: 63).

This crucial observation empowers the position of postcolonial studies situated in the Western academy. Postcolonial studies is aware of the ambiguity of its position and continually resists adhering to the structures of the Western academy, both in its denial of singular disciplinary status (for individual departments of postcolonial studies still do not exist, although institutions as a whole may reflect a postcolonial 'orientation' such as London's School of Oriental and African Studies) and in its playful employment of Western critical theory.

From the outset of *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha situates himself, and his work, in the 'beyond', refusing to be defined by singular categories:

> What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself (Bhabha, 1994: 1-2).

Bhabha recognises that the most fruitful dialogue takes place at the borders; it is the 'in-between' spaces that offer "innovative sites of collaboration" (Bhabha, 1994: 2). Subjectivity cannot be understood or defined in terms of singularities such as 'class' and 'gender'. A dialogue across and 'beyond' such limiting categories is required in order to articulate identity. Using this kind of dialogue, postcolonial cultures: "deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to 'translate' and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity" (Bhabha, 1994: 6). For Bhabha, dialogue across borders, institutional, geographical and political, is the key to articulating otherness and cultural hybridity, and, I would add, the key to understanding how religion functions within postcolonial situations.

In his essay "The Commitment to Theory" (1994), Bhabha also questions the employment of Western critical theory by postcolonial theorists. He asks: "Are the interests of 'Western' theory necessarily collusive with the hegemonic role of the West as a power bloc? Is the language of theory merely another power ploy of the culturally privileged Western elite to produce a discourse of the Other that reinforces its own power-knowledge equation?" (Bhabha, 1994: 20-21). In response to his questions, Bhabha proposes a breaking down of the binary division between theory and practice/politics for neither can exist without the other: "it is precisely that popular binarism between theory and politics, whose foundational basis is a view of knowledge as totalizing generality and everyday life as experience, subjectivity or false consciousness, that I have tried to erase" (Bhabha, 1994: 30). Bhabha argues for a

change in our conception of knowledge that recognises the role of the political in determining knowledge: "I have therefore argued for a certain relation to knowledge which I think is crucial in structuring our sense of what the *object* of theory may be in the act of determining our specific political *objectives*" (Bhabha, 1994: 31). For Bhabha, theory is therefore an instrument in the pursuit of political activity, which is in turn a response to the Western 'power bloc'. Bhabha's legitimization of 'everyday experiences' and subjectivity within the pursuit of knowledge would suggest an alignment with contemporary scholars of religion, such as Long and Albanese, who are locating religion as experience rather than a structure of thought and undermining the discourse of rational Enlightenment theory; our understanding of religion should also be determined by "specific cultural objectives". However, this conversation has, thus far, not taken place for reasons detailed in Chapter One. Bhabha's location situates postcolonial theory as an ideal site from which to understand and theorise a contemporary understanding of religion, even if this has not yet been realised by postcolonial theorists themselves. The site in-between theory and politics is labelled the "Third Space" by Bhabha. He writes:

> The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys the mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past (Bhabha, 1994: 37).

This disruption to the binary of theory and politics is the place from which postcolonial theory operates, and from which it can challenge homogenized codes of knowledge and identity. This can include the challenge to a homogenized and unified notion of *sui generis* religion. For Bhabha, "Third Space" not only disrupts standardised

practice but also acknowledges the "necessity of theory" (Bhabha, 1994: 37) to this process.

Ato Quayson (2000), however, raises several significant criticisms concerning postcolonial theorists' employment of critical theory, particularly in relation to Homi Bhabha's interdisciplinary approach and "necessity of theory". He states that when reading Bhabha, "we are placed within a theoretical loop: there is a lot of sound and fury but we are not sure whether we can every fully grasp what is signified or whether it signifies anything at all" (Quayson, 2000: 44). This is an important criticism that captures the frustration which is often inherent in any reading of Bhabha; however, it could be argued that this frustration is not a result of his interdisciplinary approach but his playful style, and his understanding of theorizing as a necessarily "ambivalent process" if one is to resist homogenizing notions of culture and religion. The idea of a theoretical loop is significant; the borrowing and appropriation of varying theoretical and disciplinary positions in order to boost one's own position can be negligent and problematic. In response to this, Quayson calls for an ethical approach: "the interdisciplinary model has ultimately to answer to the ways in which it shapes an ethical attitude to reality" (Quayson, 2000: 46). He goes on to say that "the interdisciplinary model should provide ways out of itself and into the real world... we need clear tools by which to understand and struggle against injustice, oppression and even obfuscation" (Quayson: 2000: 47). The aim of postcolonial studies is to remain dedicated to the reality of oppression and this target can be obscured during the merging of disciplinary boundaries, particularly in the uncritical adoption of Western frameworks formed by psychoanalysts, such as Lacan and Freud. My own adoption of Bakhtin will aim continually to address the ethical questions raised by Quayson. Bahktin established a discourse of otherness which has enabled many positive

developments in postcolonial studies.[43] In this way it provides 'clear tools' with which to investigate the nature and significance of interdisciplinary research between Religious Studies and postcolonial literary studies.

Prior to discussing dialogism, it is important to provide an historical overview of the disciplinary location of Religious Studies. The study of religion has been approached in many ways since it began to differentiate itself from theology towards the end of the nineteenth century. The name which is assigned to this early practice of Religious Studies is comparative religion: the act of enquiring about 'other' religions which usually involves a comparison with one's own "dominant domestic tradition" (Sharpe, 1975: 2). Eric Sharpe locates the decade in which Darwin formulated his theory of evolution as the main turning-point for the study of religion; in his words "comparative religion (at first a synonym for the science of religion) did not exist in 1859; by 1869 it did" (Sharpe, 1975: 28). This locates the foundations of the study of religion in a specific Western scientific history, which in many ways, it is still responding to. The study of religion since fragmented into more specific fields such as the psychology of religion and phenomenology of religion, which come under the general rubric of Religious Studies. These methods of studying religion, as a result of the historical baggage they carry, can be, and possibly should be, viewed as problematic for the contemporary student of religion. For example, the phenomenology of religion is described by Sharpe as providing "a path to the understanding… of religion, and to grasp its essence… by means of an as far as possible value-free examination of its manifestations" (Sharpe, 1975: 220). There are several elements of this approach which are highly problematic. The first is the notion that there is an "essence" of religion to grasp, a single unified experience which pays no attention to cultural, historical or

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[43] Bhabha refers to Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic in his discussion of the Third Space between theory and practice. He also makes reference to Paul Gilroy's insightful adoption of Bakhtin's theory (Bhabha, 1994: 12 and Gilroy, 1987: 214)

social situatedness, which is particularly contradictory to Bhabha's understanding of culture (Bhabha, 1994: 37), and second, the idea that one can ever carry out a "value-free examination" of the experiences of others. An evaluation of another's experiences, as sometimes seen in colonial writings, often includes a comparison with one's own, considered superior, systems of knowledge, or belief.[44] This provides a sense of what needs to take place in the study of religion; the phenomenology of religion is important as it pays attention to the experiences of individuals, but is also in many ways, as we have seen, highly problematic. Within the study of religion, experiences were often judged to determine if they 'deserved' the description 'religion'. It is in order to prevent the elevating of certain types of experiences into the higher imaginary realm of religion that a more nuanced notion of religion is needed. It is therefore necessary to be critical of the assumptions made in the approach to the study of religion and how we can develop from them.

Dialogism

Prior to a closer examination of the 'systems of control' at play within the disciplines of Religious Studies and postcolonial literary studies, as a result of a lack of interdisciplinary dialogue, I will investigate the details of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and locate his work within the history of critical theory. It is important to note that Bakhtin's work came out of a specific intellectual and social movement that was taking place in France and Russia in the late 1960's. As a result of the ground-breaking nature of his work, after being introduced to the Western world through Julia Kristeva, he would come to be classed as one of the early poststructuralist thinkers alongside Michel

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[44] David Chidester's text *Savage Systems* (1996) explores this aspect of the study of religion in a colonial context, as discussed in Chapter One.

Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes (Allen, 2000: 16). Importantly, it was the work of poststructuralist theorists that led to crucial developments in the work of key postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. The history of postcolonial studies is therefore, as already discussed, contained in the same theoretical network.

The formalist and Saussurean approach to literary studies, which formulated universal strategies and systems with which to understand language, infuriated Bakhtin for they failed to take the historical and social contexts of language into account:

> To produce an abstract account of literary language or any language is to forget that language is utilized by individuals in specific social contexts. The crucial word here is utterance, a word which captures the human-centred and socially specific aspect of language lacking in the formalism and Saussurean linguistics (Allen, 2000: 17).

For Bakhtin, the utterance will never be static or stand alone; it is in a constant state of change for it is always being affected by the social context within which it is uttered, which is also in constant transformation.[45] It is in this way that "all utterances are *dialogic*, their meaning and logic dependant upon what has previously been said and on how they will be received by others" (Allen, 2000: 18). Dialogism describes the playful nature of language as it struggles against monologic social and political structures. This is what Bakhtin and Kristeva call the *carnivalesque*:

> Carnivalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest. There is no equivalence, but rather identity between challenging official linguistic codes and challenging official law (Kristeva, 1966: 36).

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[45] "The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue" (Bakhtin, 1981 [1996]: 276).

The official languages of disciplines, as seen by Foucault and Hass, are restricted by similar codes and laws. Interdisciplinary dialogue, and in particular the aims of postcolonial theory, can be understood in terms of the carnivalesque for they, "break through the laws of a language" and simultaneously enact, "a social and political protest". A model for interdisciplinarity is therefore contained within Bakhtin's notion of dialogism. Bakhtin however saw dialogism most powerfully taking place in the novel. The notion of the carnivalesque, for example, can be readily applied to much postcolonial fiction in the way it unsettles colonial language structures by using dialects, such as creole.[46] This political game reasserts the position of colonial subjects in their quests for identity outside of colonial structures. It is this detail that exposes the limitations of 'borrowing' Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, but there remain important parallels that aid an understanding of my aims in pursuing interdisciplinary research. He saw the novel as a genre that is unique in the way it can contain multiple voices and dialogues which simultaneously interact with one another:

> The orientation of the word amid the utterances and languages of others, and all the specific phenomena connected with this orientation, takes on artistic significance in novel style. Diversity of voices and heteroglossia enter the novel and organize themselves within it into a structured artistic system. This constitutes the distinguishing feature of the novel as a genre (Bakhtin, 1981: 300).

Bakhtin formulated a vocabulary to describe the presence of these multiple utterances and languages; the words heteroglossia, polyphony, double-voiced discourse, and hybridization all came to describe the playful structures of duality within the novel and Bakhtin's notion of dialogism. These words have since been transferred into the

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[46] Refer back to Chapter One and Erna Brodber's play with the word 'Louisiana' (Brodber, 1994: 125). See page 64 of the thesis. John Agard's poetry, particularly *Weblines* (2000), is a further example of how Caribbean writers use language and play with words to distort the structures of standardised colonial English. See Chapter Four.

vocabulary of other theoretical positions, particularly postcolonial studies and interdisciplinarity.[47]

What is important here is that Bakhtin was breaking down established structuralist modes of thought that removed the word from its social, political and ideological context by attempting to formulate unified meanings. Bakhtin's project was to undermine this standpoint and to expose the multiple levels on which language works as well as the way in which social conflicts and tensions become an intrinsic part of the text, such as the encounter between colonised and coloniser which is often played out in a conflict of language:

> The word, directed towards its object, enters a dialogically agitated environment of alien words, value judgements and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile (Bakhtin, 1981: 276).

This complex entanglement of words, opinions and social tensions has a profound effect on the formulation of the text as the author, often unconsciously, transposes this web onto the novel:

> If texts are made up of the bits and pieces of the social text, then the on-going ideological struggles and tensions which characterize language and discourse in society will continue to reverberate in the text itself... Texts do not present clear and stable meanings; they embody society's dialogic conflict over the meaning of the words (Allen, 2000: 36).

The term 'religion', for example, carries many connotations which result from its predominantly Christian and Western history as well as the attitudes of a mainly secularist society; a novelist's use of this term therefore reflects the social tensions built

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[47] Hass discusses interdisciplinarity as a search for a "new language" (Hass, 2003: 7). He describes this new language using Bakhtinian phrases (though he does not refer to Bahktin) such as "rhetorical polyphony" (Hass, 2003: 7), "heterogeneous language" (Hass, 2003: 8), and "vocality" (Hass, 2003: 9).

within it which the critic has a duty to attend to. This is part of what is called intertextuality; the text is in constant negotiation with external and *other* forces. Kristeva extended Bakhtin's dialogic to form the term intertextuality: "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva, 1966: 37). In this way, it can be argued that no text is unique or original but a complex web of previous assertions and social tensions. Hass understands disciplines in a similar way:

> What provides the structural basis of our discourses does not come from some transcendental place, but from heterogeneous languages and formations which, although preceding our discourses, precede without any fixed location as a starting point, except insofar as they are fixed within the fluctuating and often competing natures of our human history (Hass, 2003: 8).

Historically, knowledge has been viewed as something transcendental and originary but interdisciplinary dialogue has helped to dislodge this myth as it resists fixed locations and homogeneous discourse. This leads Hass to "difference" for, "as borders fall, difference becomes the new paradigm *contra* homogeneity and universality" (Hass, 2003: 10). This site of difference is the same location from which Bhabha positions himself, for the 'beyond' is the site of difference: "The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (Bhabha, 1994: 2). Postcolonial studies and select Religious Studies theorists speak the language of interdisciplinarity but, as seen in many postcolonial theorists' treatment of 'religion', this does not always ensure a problem-free interdisciplinary dialogue. But the language of interdisciplinarity does not assume transcendental knowledge and so leaves space, and the necessary vocabulary, for fruitful dialogues to take place, as to be explored in the following three chapters.

DIALOGISM AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION

I have already suggested how Bakhtin's work on the dialogic can be helpful to the study of religion by dislodging traditional perceptions. Gavin Flood uses dialogism to challenge Religious Studies scholars who use universal and ahistorical frameworks to define religion and religious experience. Gavin Flood's text *Beyond Phenomenology* (1999) proposes to get beyond the restricting structures of the phenomenological study of religion. His aim is to produce a metatheory of the study of religion which questions "the ways in which its categories have been formed and its knowledges constructed" (Flood, 1999: 3). Flood describes the metatheory of religion as:

> ... critical reflection upon theory and practice. Through metatheoretical analysis we can attempt to unravel the underlying assumptions inherent in any research programme and to critically comment upon them; a metatheoretical perspective is a critical perspective. It involves deconstruction in the analysis or rereading of texts that are its object. In contrast to the antitheorist, the metatheorist would argue that data are not transparent and that fault-lines and tensions within a research programme can be brought into the open; a metatheoretical perspective is therefore a reflexive perspective (Flood, 1999: 5).

The notion of a 'metatheory' is, however, assuming the possibility of a standpoint above, or outside of, theory. Flood's language directly contradicts the language of interdisciplinarity as established by Bhabha and Hass: "Such negotiations between politics and theory make it impossible to think of the place of the theoretical as a metanarrative claiming a more total form of generality" (Bhabha, 1994: 30). Though Flood's aim is to propose a study of religion that is more reflexive, his discourse presents a perspective that understands theory as transcendental. Flood, however, does recognise the need for the academic study of religion to distinguish itself from the universalistic and objective approach of phenomenology, which is also a central objective for the interdisciplinary study of religion within postcolonial literature. Flood

draws upon several important changes in approach: firstly, he highlights the word *critical*; there needs to be a "critical reflection" which examines the structures from which one's knowledge has been formed. Secondly, he calls for the need to "unravel… assumptions" which often burden research projects. Thirdly, he asks for a "deconstruction" of how texts are read so as to illuminate contradictions and tensions. And finally, he summarises this perspective as "reflexive". As already seen, postcolonial theorists are engaged in this process of deconstruction and reflection; the aim of postcolonial theory, within the Western academy, is continually to question the power structures at work within the Western pursuit of knowledge, to be, in a word, reflexive. This approach is equally about listening to those excluded by Western imperialism and to make a space from within which they can be heard. As Robert Young explains "postcolonial theory is designed to undo the ideological heritage of colonialism not only in the decolonized countries but also in the west itself. Once the process of political decolonization has taken place then a cultural decolonization must follow: decolonize the west, deconstruct it" (Young, 2001: 65). The dialogue that is taking place across these two disciplines again emphasises the benefits of understanding or studying religion from a postcolonial perspective.

Flood goes on to describe his theoretical position as "dialogical" (Flood, 1999: 7). He is keen to remove the objectivist approach of the Religious Studies scholar, particularly phenomenology, in favour of a "reflexive critique" that will enable religious studies to engage in a more active dialogue with disciplines within the humanities and social sciences. Flood sees dialogue not just as conversation, but, as Bakhtin did, in terms of utterances which are always "intertextual and all encounters intersubjective" (Flood, 1999: 35). He continues by outlining that when this approach is applied to the study of religion, which he calls "dialogical reflexivity", it "becomes aware of the intertextual and intersubjective webs in which it is embedded, is sensitive to history, to

language and to subjectivity" (Flood, 1999: 35). When one is looking at religion within Guyanese literature, one must be sensitive to the colonial history in which it is enmeshed and the impact this has on subjectivity, agency, language and landscape. If the study of religion fails to engage in this type of intertextual, interdisciplinary debate then it will continue to be excluded from the important developments taking place across the humanities. Flood argues that:

> A lack of engagement with metatheoretical concerns has the effect of marginalizing religious studies when it should be at the centre of contemporary debates about power, agency, and ideology. The academic study of religions has potentially great contributions to make to debates, not only concerning contemporary religious change and the commodification of religious goods, but also concerning globalization, world capitalism, and environmental issues (Flood, 1999: 40).

This is already beginning to be addressed by scholars such as Jamie Scott,[48] Richard King[49] and other theorists who are engaged in the changes that Flood is highlighting.

It may be helpful to break up Flood's argument further, in order to see how he is manipulating different traditions to form a new and effective approach for the study of religion. He firstly critiques phenomenology on the basis that it disembodies the subject, and supports the notion that it is possible to attain an ultimate meaning (the philosophy of consciousness) that is external to the structures of knowledge in which we are all unavoidably immersed. In order to do this, he adopts the "philosophy of the sign" which he summarises by saying that the "self is a sign-bearing agent embodied within social and historical contexts, within narratives rather than a disengaged consciousness" (Flood, 1999: 14). The philosophy of the sign is similar to dialogism, as it recognises "the interactive nature of research" which is the first step in critiquing

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[48] Two volumes edited by Scott investigate religion in postcolonial literature. They are *And the Birds Began to Sing* (1996) and *Mapping the Sacred* (2001). See Chapter One. The interdisciplinary debate taking place between postcolonial literature, religion and geography in Scott's work is particularly engaging, in terms of how religion and colonialism impact the landscape and vice versa.
[49] *Orientalism and Religion* (1999).

phenomenology, and also recognises "that all research programmes are dialogical" (Flood, 1999:15); it is impossible to be an 'external observer' (a vital development in the field of anthropology, which is challenging how ethnography is carried out, presented and read). Flood's next step is to analyse religious utterances and language, as this is foregrounded in any dialogical approach to research. This draws attention to the importance of interdisciplinary research between religious and literary studies; how do religious utterances translate into postcolonial literature? What signs are transferred through these utterances? Writers such as Wilson Harris and Erna Brodber make these questions particularly pertinent, as their writing is often a performance of dialogues between varying religious 'utterances', or traditions, locations and landscapes. Flood's final assertion is that:

> The dialogical nature of research entails an ethic of practice which reflexively recognises the contextual nature of research and its implicit values and is sensitive to the power relationship in any epistemology (Flood, 1999: 15).

This 'ethic of practice' should be central to any research project, as discussed earlier with reference to Quayson (2000: 46), but particularly to a postcolonial approach which is a response to Western, imperial structures and assumptions. As Flood makes clear, the theory of dialogism is committed to an ethic of practice as a result of its assertion that all utterances, practices, and projects are intertextual. It also recognises the importance of a contextual analysis in terms of understanding and referring to historical and social locatedness. By its very nature, dialogism incorporates an 'ethic of practice'.

Religious Studies, as a discipline, is taking part in important debates, to do with reflexivity, that are impacting on the nature of many disciplinary approaches. As seen in Chapter One, these debates have been extended to the category of religion itself as many scholars are addressing imperial assumptions that are implicit within the term

'religion'. What is important here, however, is the recognition that interdisciplinary research is necessary to the development of Religious Studies, as long as an ethical approach is maintained; in order for it to attend to the issues of reflexivity that are incorporated in a dialogical analysis, it is necessary to cross disciplinary boundaries and therefore engage with the dangers of a 'monological' and hierarchical approach.

DIALOGISM AND POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

As I mentioned briefly earlier, many postcolonial theorists are indebted to the work and efforts of Bakhtin. His discursive tactics became important tools for postcolonial theorists to express the often violent colonial encounter, the fragmented and layered consciousness of colonial subjects, and also the ways in which colonial subjects retaliate. The concepts he uses to describe the playful resistance and duality of language, such as heteroglossia, carnivalesque, polyphony and double-voiced discourse "are of great assistance in articulating the manner in which the 'othered' subject speaks, writes and reads" (Allen, 2000: 161). Bakhtin's writing addresses the way in which positions of power are subverted through speech as well as what it is like to speak as an 'other'. Within the context of postcolonial studies:

> ... a return to Bakhtin helps retain not only the notion of subjecthood, of the struggle for identity and agency, but also that of the inevitably 'double-voiced' or intertextual nature of the speech and writing of such marginalized, 'othered' subjects (Allen, 1999: 164).

Allen briefly draws attention to the work of founding figures of postcolonial studies, Frantz Fanon and W. E. B. DuBois, and the more contemporary work of Homi Bhabha to demonstrate how they articulate experiences of otherness and how this

relates to Bakhtin's notion of dialogism. It may be useful to expand on his points. Fanon's masterpiece *Black Skin, White Masks*, is a perfect example:

> And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty (Fanon, 1967: 110-1).

This sensation, described by Fanon, is the experience of otherness, which is accompanied by a discomfort with one's own body. The 'third-person consciousness' he describes is the articulation of both being outside of one's self and also the occupying of multiple positions and consciousnesses simultaneously. This often disabling multiplicity inevitably finds its way into the speech and writing of those affected by it, which Bakhtin helps to articulate (Allen, 2000: 164). Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, in terms of attention paid to the otherness of words and the social schema in which they are bound, attends to the imbalance of power which is often involved in contact and exchange. Assumptions and stereotypes are imposed upon individuals within this exchange; as Fanon describes, when he came into contact with the 'white man' "I subjected myself to an objective examination... and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: 'Sho' good eatin'" (Fanon, 1967: 112). Bakhtin, as we have already seen, recognises that words, like the self, cannot be isolated from other alien words and forces. The self enters into a dialogically tense environment which postcolonial writers can immediately engage with and which the words they use express. The postcolonial writer "exists as a 'split' subject whose utterances are always 'double-voiced', their own and yet replete with an 'otherness' which we can associate with the socially oriented notion of intertextuality" (Allen, 2000: 165). Postcolonial writers and the words they

use are epitomized by the notion of intertextuality; that is nothing is static or stable but always in a state of exchange and negotiation with other forces, dialogues, and words.

Reference to Fanon brings another disciplinary field into the frame: psychoanalysis. Fanon demonstrates that psychoanalysis can offer important insights into the analysis of colonial encounters but only if it is removed from its predominantly white male discourse. The idea of individual consciousness is redundant within a postcolonial enquiry which deals with the psychic fracturing of communities leading to multiple identities and consciousnesses. Fanon's, "psychoanalytic framework illuminates the madness of racism, the pleasure of pain, the agonistic fantasy of political power" (Bhabha, 1994: 41). For Fanon the psychic and the social are inseparable for he speaks, "from deep within the struggle of psychic representation and social reality" (Bhabha, 1994: 40). As a discipline that deals with human fantasy and desire, psychoanalysis offers Fanon profound insights into the colonial condition (Bhabha, 1994: 43). Psychoanalytic language allows Fanon to make such profound observations as:

> The educated Negro, slave of spontaneous and cosmic Negro myth, feels at a given stage that his race no longer understands him.
> Or that he no longer understands it.
> Then he congratulates himself on this and enlarging the difference, the incomprehension, the disharmony, he finds in them the meaning of his real humanity. Or more rarely he wants to belong to his people. And it is with rage in his mouth and abandon in his heart that he buries himself in the vast black abyss. We shall see that this attitude so heroically absolute, renounces the present and the future in the name of a mystical past (Fanon, 1967/1982: 16).

Fanon engages with the depths of the psychic fracturing caused by the colonial encounter. For the black person,[50] the psyche is irreversibly transformed as a result of contact with the white world. The past, prior to contact, is dissolved into a mythical and imaginary framework from which it is impossible to imagine a future. The racism of the white world is internalised resulting in the painful epidermalisation of the black body: "I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self" (Fanon, 1967/1982: 109). The black body, and psyche, are fixed and objectified by the white gaze, leaving it immobilized for "he must be black in relation to the white man" (Fanon, 1967/1982: 110). For Fanon the psychic dismemberment is most powerfully explained in terms of physical disease and bodily decay: "What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage [sic] that spattered my whole body with black blood?" (Fanon, 1967/1982: 112). The body and the psyche are inseparable for Fanon, as the disease of internalised racism first attacks the body and then the mind.

The use of Fanon's and Bhabha's work for this project, that is the reconceptualisation of 'religion' within a postcolonial theoretical framework, leads to a provocative tension which should be addressed before continuing. This tension is to do with Fanon's and Bhabha's uncritical employment of the category 'religion' and the implications of this as I continue to refer to their work for the purpose of my argument. Both Fanon and Bhabha use the term 'religion' to refer to the colonial restrictions placed upon colonised bodies and communities or to refer to a community's nostalgic

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[50] Throughout his work, Fanon refers to the "black man". Although he passionately and persuasively articulates the lack of subjectivity granted to the 'black man' and the psychic dismemberment this creates, he fails to acknowledge female subjectivity, and the plight of the black woman as she is multiply oppressed.

dependence on a 'mythical past' (see previous quotation). In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon writes:

> Inside a single nation, religion splits up people into different spiritual communities, all of them kept up and stiffened by colonialism and its instruments... this religious tension may be responsible for the revival of the commonest racial feeling (Fanon, 1965: 129).

Both writers use the term within the parameters of a Christian and Enlightenment history, the problems of which have been initiated in the introductory chapters. This allows both writers to make uncritical and essentialising observations, as above. Religion is understood as the cause of violent nationalism, sustained by colonial controls. Fanon's perception of 'religion' is easily comparable to that of Bhabha's:

> In the aftermath of the *Satanic Verses* affair in Britian, Black and Irish feminists, despite their different constituencies, have made common cause against the 'racialization of religion' as the dominant discourse through which the State represents their conflicts and struggles, however secular or even 'sexual' they may be (Bhabha, 1994: 2).

Bhabha's location of the 'secular' and the 'sexual' as existing outside of the realm of 'religion' has been shown, and will continue to be shown, as a limitation when conceptualising religion in the contemporary world. For Bhabha, 'religion', as a concept, enables governments to deflect responsibility for violent conflicts in post-colonial nations; these conflicts are easily labelled as 'religious conflicts'. This is an important argument which I am not trying to refute; it is for the same reason that the category 'religion' needs to be investigated. If the category fails to be critiqued within the context of postcolonial literatures and nations, then issues placed within the transcendental realm of 'the religious' remain untouchable. Bhabha formulates the concept of 'nation-space' or 'nationness' to counter-act "political ideologies": "the liminal figure of the nation-space would ensure that no political ideologies could claim

transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves" (Bhabha, 1994: 148). Whereas Bhabha understands religion to be only encapsulated within "political ideologies" I suggest that it exists within the liminal 'nation-space' that Bhabha describes. The "meanings and practices" that Bhabha sees emerging "in the margins of the contemporary experience of society" (Bhabha, 1994: 148) can be usefully defined in terms of religion as orientation. Although Bhabha is dependant on a Western and Christianised perception of religion and is reluctant to see its function outside of these parameters, his work is still important to this study; although our theoretical tools may differ, our mutual aim is to engage with identities fragmented by colonial violence and slavery and to validate the experiences that emerge in response to this fragmentation.

For Fanon religion and myths similarly equate to backwardness and barbarity: "The customs of the colonized people, their traditions, their myths – above all their myths - are the very sign of that poverty of spirit and of their constitutional depravity… the bearers of disease, on the same level as the Christian religion, which wages war on embryonic heresies and instincts, and on evil as yet unborn" (Fanon, 1965: 32). Fanon's education in Western scientific rationalism prevents him from recognising the creativity of myths and their redemptive value, as accessed by writers such as Harris, Agard and Dabydeen. As with Bhabha, it is important to vocalise and engage with Fanon's projections whilst still recognising the value of their work to this thesis; whilst they may use different conceptual frames, their arguments still confront the question of how colonised and post-colonised bodies orient themselves along lines of gender, race and class, which as has been discussed, is also a question of religion. In addition, the limited use of the category 'religion' by these two central figures in postcolonial theory demonstrates the need for investigation into the politics of the category for a postcolonial enquiry.

The addition of psychoanalysis to this interdisciplinary study offers another layer onto the dialogic palimpsest, and simultaneously provides a persuasive reading of religion in Guyanese fiction. The disciplines of Religious Studies and psychoanalysis have had an interesting relationship from the dismissal of religion by theorists such as Freud, and indeed Fanon, to the more sympathetic perspective of psychoanalysts such as Jung and Kristeva. For the purpose of this study, psychoanalysis recognises the importance of memory to what I will call the religious imagination, that is an aspect of the creative imagination as it responds to political, social and bodily divisions. As Fanon noted, the psyche of the black 'man' is irreversibly fragmented by the memory of the first encounter with the white world. This memory, and many others, are not remembered by one individual or one generation but are transposed onto the collective psyche.[51] In the same way that this trauma affects social encounters, it also affects manifestations of the religious. Although Fanon articulates religion as the "depravity of the spirit", I suggest that religion becomes a vital tool in the healing process for the community. It formulates a transitional space in which these traumatic memories can be ritualised and thus addressed. These memories are also transposed onto the mythic landscape of the community, offering writers a site of creativity from which to re-envisage the future. This is particularly true of the Caribbean, as it has become a melting pot of cultures forming an identity of difference, which Bhabha recognises as the key to the recovery of identity (Bhabha, 1994: 2). Writers such as Wilson Harris, as seen in the next chapter, prioritise dream-like states of consciousness within their fiction, where memory and myth merge. The religious imagination is a vital part of this creative process, as will be seen throughout, for fiction and religion are sites from which the past can be healed and hope can be articulated.

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[51] See Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* 1941/1992.

These sites of creativity are also manifested within non-literate spaces. Western knowledge has been collected and prioritised using the written word; but the written word itself is a product of engagement with oral culture. The myths of the oral tradition in Guyana represent its syncretic culture and have been the inspiration for its contemporary creative writers. Oral culture is a literature in itself which postcolonial writers recognise as a central part of their creative process.[52] This is of particular importance to the study of religion within literature:

> Equally, the vast majority of humans throughout history have participated in an oral as opposed to a literate culture. This point perhaps needs to be underlined, for it means that the vast majority of religious expression throughout history has been of a non-literate nature, taking the form of speech, song, performance or iconography. Bearing this in mind we should note that the literary bias in Western notions of religion does not accurately reflect the diversity of human experience (King, 1999: 62).

The literary texts to be discussed throughout the thesis often reflect writers' engagement with the rich heritage of Guyana as it has been expressed within oral culture. For example, the folk heritage of the Ashanti people, the Anancy tales, survived the Middle Passage against all the odds and have since given generations of people laughter and the hope of the survival of the weak in the face of adversity and unimaginable cruelty. They have also offered contemporary writers extensive metaphors with which to weave multiple webs of creativity and possibility. Maybe it would be helpful here to remember Bakhtin's dialogism, and that the literary word can never transcend or rise above the social and historical context from which it has arisen. The words and phrases, or 'living utterances', which are adopted by writers are intricately bound to the social tensions which surround the text. As Bakhtin says "it [the living utterance] cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue"

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[52] Robert Bringhurst recovers the oral traditions of Canada, and views these traditions as a body of literature: *A Story as Sharp as a Knife: The Classical Haida Mythmakers and Their World*, Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1999.

(Bakhtin, 1981 [1996]: 276). In this way, postcolonial writers are in a constant intertextual dialogue with their historical locations, and these locations are then reflected in the words they use which in turn empower the postcolonial subjects they represent.[53] The Anancy tales are a product of the communal religious imagination and have continued to dwell in the memories of generations of people, thousands of miles from their origin. The oral tradition is a feisty reminder of how myth and memory can open up futures of possibility. David Punter (2000) includes the literary and political within 'practice'. "Alternative voices" are then recognised as speaking within literary and political, and I would add religious, arenas (Punter, 2000: 9). Postcolonial literature, as a practice, therefore becomes an ideal place to encounter the religious experiences occurring in postcolonial cultures, as will be seen in Guyanese writers' transcriptions of the Jonestown tragedy, the Anancy tales, and their East Indian heritage.

It seems apt to conclude with the reading of a novel that engages with the ways in which discourse operates on multiple levels and speaks across boundaries, be they racial, historical or cultural, in order to demonstrate the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach to postcolonial literature. Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale* demonstrates, not least in the title, the nature of dialogism in the novel and the notion of the literary as practice. The novel is filled with multiple voices and accents, from London to the Guyanese Savannahs. It is, from the outset, established as a storyteller's tale; the storyteller is a ventriloquist and has a natural talent for capturing and telling amazing stories, and thus the narrator's Prologue provides some intriguing examples. There is an immediate tension established between the written and oral word by the narrator who says "writing things down has made you forget everything" (Melville,

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[53] Issues of representation surround this debate. For example, Gayatri Spivak asks the famous question "can the subaltern speak?" Is representation another abuse of power? Will representation always be misrepresentation by nature? It is important to remember these questions and to be aware of the positions of power we hold when writing about the 'subaltern'.

1997: 2). The reader is provided with a bridge between the oral and written traditions of history, not least because the ventriloquist narrator is able to speak in multiple tongues:

> My grandmother distrusts writing. She says all writing is fiction. Even writing that purports to be factual, that puts down the date of a man's birth and the date of his death, is some sort of fabrication. Do you think a man's life is slung between two dates like a hammock? Slung in the middle of history with no visible means of support? It takes more that one life to make a person (Melville, 1997: 2).

The narrator ridicules the Western approach to knowledge and history, which prioritises the written word. Ironically however, this is a written text but it beautifully demonstrates that the postcolonial novel is often a celebration of the oral tradition and can also be helpfully understood in terms of Bakhtin's dialogism. In the final part of the Prologue, the narrator laments the loss of the fantastical tale. The reader has been trained only to listen to a realist and rational tale. Why? "Because hard-nosed, tough-minded realism is what is required these days. Facts are King... Now, alas, fiction has to disguise itself as fact and I must bow to the trend and become a realist" (Melville, 1997: 9). The same Western structures of thought, which have plagued the study of religion by prioritising rational and objective analysis, have also infected the reader of the novel. The narrator will still challenge, however, established formulas for telling a tale as Melville produces a story in which no voice or utterance is static and in which multiple dialogues and discourses are woven into one.

The narrator explains how he found his vocation; it was when he discovered the polyvocality of words:

> But I became aware of the noisy and voluble existence of words, an incessant chattering from the past, and as the babble grew louder, as the throng of words grew and approached along the forest trails, the savannah tracks, the lanes and by-ways and gullies, the words, some declaiming, some whispering, were joined, firstly by laughter and ribald whistles then by rude farting

> sounds and finally by an unmistakable clattering that could only be the rattling dance of bones (Melville, 1999: 5).

All words and utterances are part of a history, as captured by Melville's narrator. And these are the same utterances that echo the religious narratives of thousands of generations. The "rattling dance of bones", referred to here, is an acknowledgement of Amerindian practices and the sacred importance of bones throughout Amerindian history. The bones of ancestors are made into bone flutes which are then played to entice their spirits and to ask for guidance. Writers such as Wilson Harris and Fred D'Aguiar frequently weave this history into their narratives in an act of what will be described as remembrance and recovery. Religion, as defined as an aspect of human negotiation of boundaries and as the way in which the past is remembered, can be recognised within Melville's narrative as the characters give value to earthly and bodily explorations. The use of the category religion for the reading of such passages enables the complexities of the politics of exchange to be explored. Melville's narrator is tracking a path back through history to enable the reader to follow and hear the sounds and songs of an almost forgotten tradition. It is the dialogical nature of words that enables this to take place.

The main aim of this chapter has been to engage in a debate about the importance of interdisciplinary research. Academic disciplines can cut themselves off from other vital lines of enquiry as a result of being too heavily invested in their own structures of disciplinary knowledge. They become blind, as June O'Connor reminds us, to other ways of knowing and seeing. Being open to interdisciplinary links can help to avoid this blindness as new and exciting avenues are realised. However, an ethic of practice should be employed as interdisciplinary research can fall into the trap of borrowing external modes of analysis with insufficient awareness of surrounding issues. I have examined some of the structures that exist in the fields of Religious Studies and

postcolonial studies and have encouraged interdisciplinary discussion using Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. Bakhtin recognised that no utterance or word can exist on its own; it is part of a web of events which repeatedly challenges its meaning. In the same way, disciplinary knowledge is constantly being challenged by other competing discourses. When open to these challenges, one begins to hear the multiple dialogues that are taking place. Bakhtin's theory of dialogism has also assisted in exposing and dealing with some of the tensions within the specific disciplines of Religious Studies and postcolonial studies. For example, dialogism reminds scholars of religion to expand their use of the term beyond transcendental truths and to recognise the cultural, social and historical specificities, rather than drawing universal, ahistorical and supposedly objectivist conclusions. The discussion throughout the chapter has helped to locate the ways in which a nuanced reading of the category 'religion' is responding to postcolonial theory. As I try to move away from an understanding of 'religion' that necessitates an essential and unique experience that transcends culture and history, towards a taxonomic analytical tool that is responding to an aspect of human experience as rooted in negotiations of gender, class and race, it is Bhabha that writes: "such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past" (Bhabha, 1994: 37).

CHAPTER THREE:

RELIGION AND REMEMBRANCE: WILSON HARRIS'S *JONESTOWN* AS AN ACT OF ANAMNESIS

> I was prompted to ask: what is history? Is it an account of events set out and approved by a dominant culture? Or does history possess another door, other doors, to be opened by strangeness... To be opened as if such a door or doors within the self unlock themselves all of a sudden? The doors within the self witness to an architecture of which we know little (Harris, 2001: 1).

The introduction of the work of Wilson Harris continues the pursuit of a theoretical re-positioning and re-evaluation of all that is fixed and assumed and opens up further lines of enquiry into the interdisciplinary study of religion in postcolonial literature. Harris is amongst the early wave of Caribbean authors such as Derek Walcott, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, and George Lamming, whose works drew immediate attention from around the world to the field of Caribbean literature. As a Guyanese writer, Harris's mixed African, East Indian, Amerindian and Scottish ancestry, has had a profound effect on his literary creativity. Harris combines the mythologies[54] of his mixed ancestry, a combination which is specific to syncretic Guyanese culture, and through them creates a myriad of narratives that lead the reader on an epic but rewarding journey. Harris's work, and his depiction of the Jonestown suicides, is rightly placed at the centre of the thesis for his work is in many ways the heart of the discussion; Harris resists simplified definitions and straight-forward explanations. He explores what I have called the religious imagination (how these rememberings are a

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[54] By 'mythologies' I refer to ancestral narratives that become part of the creative process of remembering and re-narrating, particularly for writers such as Harris.

key aspect of the creative imagination but are also significant for an understanding of religion) through his characters as they encounter the chasms between dreaming and waking, real and unreal, life and death. The depiction of these *religious* experiences defines the significance of Harris's work as one continues to engage with the complexities of understanding and theorising religion in Guyanese and, more generally, postcolonial fiction. For Harris, the religious is encapsulated in the psyche of an individual. Psychoanalysis is therefore introduced within the chapter as both a tool with which to access some of the more elusive themes introduced by Harris, and to also underline the importance of psychoanalysis for an understanding of religion in Guyanese fiction.

Since the mass suicide at the Jonestown Settlement (or the People's Temple Agricultural Project) in Guyana, November 18th 1978, many narratives of the events have emerged. These narratives range from the popularist version of events, which has dominated the public imagination and possibly the literary imagination, to scholarly analysis, predominantly researched within the field of Religious Studies. What are often tragically lost are the individual stories of the 922 people (including 260 children)[55] whose lives ended on that night. Recently, several Guyanese writers have chosen Jonestown as the subject of their novels and poems. However, on the surface these writers appear to be dependant on the popularist version of events. Do the recent fictions of Wilson Harris, Fred D'Aguiar and Michael Gilkes betray the memories of the individual victims of Jonestown or are they, in some way, an act of retrieval, remembrance or re-narration? This chapter will provide an intricate reading mainly of Wilson Harris's 1996 novel, *Jonestown,* in order to examine the layers of meaning contained within his fiction. He creates a web of references to psychoanalysis and

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[55] These figures have been obtained from Mary Maaga's text, *Hearing the Voices of Jonestown* (1998), page 5.

religious narratives, through the act of anamnesis, to allow both the individual and historical victims of tragedy to be remembered and, if possible, healed. The redemptive power of Harris's fiction also has implications for the reading of much postcolonial literature, in terms of the close relationship the literature has with the act of anamnesis. Prior to engaging with these issues, I will attempt to provide one history of the Jonestown community of the many that have emerged since 1978. As Hall says, the many texts of Jonestown "unfold as a narrative history" (Hall, 1989: 313). To talk of one history neglects the often contradictory multiple versions of events. It is therefore more suitable, particularly in a discussion of Harris's work, to refer to a 'narrative history' or a 'narrative of events'.

A Short History of Jonestown

Jim Jones was born in 1931 in Indiana, "a town which bore the indelible stamp of white Protestant culture" (Hall, 1989: 3). His own 'mission' officially began in Indianapolis, in 1954, where he established his own church and named it Community Unity. His church was eventually affiliated with the Disciples of Christ and renamed the People's Temple Full Gospel Church. In 1964 the Disciples of Christ ordained him. Prior to this, between 1961 and 1963, Jones and his wife Marceline carried out missionary work in Brazil, at which time Jones made his first visit to Guyana. Jones also began to adopt an increasingly socialist outlook (he was appointed Chairman of the City Human Rights Commission in 1961), and was heavily inspired by Malcolm X, which supposedly caused him to question his Christian faith and whether it could be compatible with socialism (Feinsod, 1981: 20). As a result of his lack of faith in the society in which he lived, Jones became increasingly fearful that an Apocalypse, caused by a nuclear war, was going to take place. He had read that California would be least

affected if a nuclear war were to take place and, accompanied by about 70 members, moved his church to Redwood Valley in 1965 (Maaga, 1008: 2). The church continued to flourish attracting both young educated whites and urban blacks of San Francisco and Los Angeles (Maaga, 1998: 3).

In 1969, Grace Greoch and Tim Stoen were married at the People's Temple Church in Redwood Valley. The movements and actions of the Stoens were to become central features in the build-up to the tragedy of November 1978. Tim Stoen was one of Jones's closest friends as well as his lawyer, until his defection from Jonestown in June 1977. In 1972 Grace Stoen had a child who became known as John-John. His paternity has never been confirmed. Jones claimed John-John was his child and apparently signed an agreement with Tim Stoen claiming paternity (Feinsod, 1981: 31). The custody of John-John became a central issue in the events leading to 1978 and a main reason for the visit by Congressman Leo Ryan on the day of the suicides. In 1976, Grace Stoen defected but was unable to take her son with her. Jones, knowing he would lose custody and that this would cause bad publicity for the People's Temple, was desperate for this not to go to court. One way for him to prevent this happening was to remove John from the country and therefore from American law (Feinsod, 1981: 47-49).

It was two years prior to this, in 1974, that Jones sent a small number of People's Temple members to Georgetown, Guyana to start an agricultural project. The People's Temple approached the Guyanese government about purchasing a strip of land and the government responded positively. They leased the People's Temple 3843 acres of land along the Venezuelan border, which had been a matter of dispute between Guyana and Venezuela for years. The Guyanese government officials were confident that the Venezuelans would not fight for the land while it was being leased to an American organisation.

Jones saw Guyana as a Utopia, a 'Promised Land'. It is interesting that Guyana is the home of the mythic El Dorado, the ultimate paradise for the early white Christian conquistadors. Jones's perception of Guyana as a Utopia can be read as a response to the colonial mythic imaginings of South America and the Caribbean as sites of paradise that offered the renewal and extension of their own Christian faiths. In many ways, Jones was repeating the colonial pilgrimage of the early colonisers for he also believed that "the restoration of the early church would transform the earth into paradise" (Eliade, 1969: 96). This is even more persuasive considering Jones chose the home of the mythic El Dorado as the site from which to build his new sacred city. Rebecca Moore, the sister of two women, Carolyn and Annie, who died at Jonestown, collected and published the letters written by her family from the time her sisters joined People's Temple until after their deaths. Carolyn had a child, Kimo (Hawaiian for Jim) by Jones on January 31st 1975 (Moore, 1986: 112) and Annie was Jones's nurse. Rebecca Moore says:

> Jim Jones felt utter and total rage against the racism and injustice of the institutions in this country, and that was why they went to Guyana, to create their own non-racist institution (Moore, 1985: 312).

This was an idealistic and honourable aim, yet it should be paralleled with the political situation in Guyana at the time. Guyana gained independence from Britain in 1966, about ten years prior to when the People's Temple settled in Guyana. It was therefore a time of political unrest and racial tension. The two dominant peoples of Guyana, the African and East-Indian Guyanese, were struggling against each other for political control and power, creating a feeling of distrust and hatred, fuelled by stereotypes, between these two groups. According to Ralph Premdas, "between 1975 and 1985 a reign of ethically oriented terror engulfed Guyana" (quoted by Seecoomar, 2002: 26). Jones's desire for a Utopian, Promised Land appeared to blind him and his followers to

the racial tension that was engulfing Guyanese politics. Though the racial conflicts in Guyana cannot be compared with those in the United States, it was still not the Utopia of racial equality Jones thought he had found. This implies that Jones's notions of race were limited to a simplistic binary of black and white. He romanticised about the socialist attitudes of a post-colonial state, without engaging with the reality of what British colonialism, including slavery and indentured labour, left behind and how this history had affected his own idealistic imaginings of Guyana as the ultimate paradise.

In 1977, approximately fifty members lived in Jonestown. The jungle land had been cleared, which was an impressive achievement. 90% of the Guyanese population occupy 10% of the land space on the coast as a result of the uninhabitable nature of the Guyanese interior (Seecoomar, 2002: 9). The Guyanese government are reported to have been impressed by what the People's Temple settlers achieved (Moore, 1985: 244). By September 1978 over one thousand people lived in Jonestown in a self-sufficient community, which included medical and dental care, an education system and their own food production. Every Sunday Jonestown had an open day when the local Guyanese could come and receive free medical care. Annie and Carolyn Moore's father John, who visited Jonestown with his wife in March 1978, notes that "the tragedy takes on an added dimension of waste" because of what an achievement Jonestown was (Moore, 1985: 248).

However, during the last six months, the atmosphere in Jonestown changed. As people defected from Jonestown, its number of enemies increased. A group called the Concerned Relatives was formed, and it became their sole aim to dismantle Jonestown and 'save' their loved ones from Jones, whom they believed to be a crazed dictator. Jones became obsessed by the movements of this group:

> ... his [Jones's] obsession with enemies, traitors, and death meant that his heart belonged not to the elderly black women or to the children who made up the majority of his community but to the

> 'other.' His energy was consistently poured into his confrontations with the Concerned Relatives and those who had defected (Maaga, 1998: 139).

This, according to Maaga, made Jones an outsider and the leadership of the movement shifted more to the female inner-circle, including the Moore sisters Annie and Carolyn.

The Concerned Relatives eventually convinced Congressman Leo Ryan to visit the Jonestown settlement. The Ryan party, including reporters and fourteen Concerned Relatives, after being asked not to visit, arrived at Jonestown on Friday 17th November. They were met by Marceline Jones, given a tour of the premises and then entertained and provided with food throughout the course of the evening. Ryan was impressed and saw no evidence of people being held against their will. However, the following day, Ryan carried out planned interviews with Jones and other members. During his interview Jones "broke down and descended into a disjointed monologue" (Feinsod, 1982: 176). At the same time sixteen members had approached the Ryan party and asked to leave with them, a small percentage of the near one thousand residents. As they were leaving a member tried to stab Ryan. The party decided to leave quickly. As they were boarding the planes, which were situated approximately ten minutes drive away from the compound, several men arrived in a truck from Jonestown and opened fire, killing Ryan, three journalists and one defector. While this was taking place, Jones had gathered all the residents in the pavilion and told them the time had come to carry out the 'revolutionary suicide'.

Jones had been convinced that the 'enemy' were trying to destroy Jonestown. Feinsod claims that by killing Ryan, Jones had ensured that the enemy would come:

> Ryan's death was Jones's way of validating his prophecy; the end he had promised the people of Jonestown was now imminent. This was the apocalypse Jones had expected all his life. Like so much that happened in Jonestown, the attack at the Port Kaituma airstrip had been a theater [sic], an act that conferred reality an illusion (Feinsod, 1981: 187).

Jones's notions of reality and his validation for his actions will remain largely unknown. The reality we do know is that nine hundred and twenty three deaths occurred directly related to Jonestown. This figure, provided by Maaga (1998: 5), includes the five shot at the airstrip, the nine hundred and eleven who died of cyanide poisoning, two hundred and sixty of whom were children, the two who died from gunshot wounds (Annie Moore and Jim Jones), Sharon Amos who slit her own throat and those of her three children at the Jonestown headquarters, and Maaga also includes Mike Prokes who survived the suicide but shot himself four months later.

Only four people who were on the compound at the time escaped the suicides. Odell Rhodes and Stanley Clayton escaped into the jungle, while seventy four-year-old Grover Davis and eighty-year-old Hyacinth Thrush slept through the entire event.[56] Other survivors include forty-six members who were at the Georgetown headquarters (this figure was mainly made up of the basketball team including Jones's son, Stephan). Jones had radioed through to the headquarters telling them also to carry out the act of revolutionary suicide but Sharon Amos was the only one to do so.

The response by historians of religion allows an understanding of this tragedy to be forged amidst the mass hysteria created by the major part of the media coverage. The work of J. Z. Smith (1982) was amongst the first academic responses to Jonestown. He urges other scholars of religion to respond intelligibly to the events of Jonestown:

> For if we do not persist in the quest for intelligibility, there can be no human sciences, let alone any place for the study of religion within them (Smith, 1982: 120).

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[56] Odell Rhodes's story is written by Ethan Feinsod in *Awake in a Nightmare, Jonestown: the Only Eyewitness Account* (1981). See pages 204-6.

Smith claims that Religious Studies, as a discipline, has been 'domesticised' within the Secular Academy,[57] which is preventing Jonestown, "the most important single event in the history of religions", from being understood (Smith, 1982: 104). Research on Jones was excluded because it was considered that "he was not religious"; he was a crazed cult leader and his followers were brainwashed victims. The People's Temple is labelled a cult so as to distinguish it from the everyday religion of America; a group such as the People's Temple threaten the civility of American religiosity and is therefore excluded from the parameters of its definition by being labelled a cult. A vital starting point when interpreting Jonestown is "recognition of the ordinary humanness of the participants in Jonestown" (Smith, 1982: 111). Smith goes on to say that "familiarity…is the prerequisite of intelligibility" (Smith, 1982: 112). In this respect, the accounts of Odell Rhodes and of Rebecca Moore can be considered as the most effective and haunting precisely because of their familiarity. The school of enquiry into New Religious Movements includes extensive work by Eileen Barker (1982, 1989, 1998), who has worked to demystify both public and academic perceptions of varied religious movements such as the People's Temple, The Unification Church (the Moonies), ISKCON (Hare Krishnas) and the Church of Scientology. As Barker points out, it is since the events at Jonestown that perceptions of New Religious Movements have become increasingly frenzied and generalised (Barker, 1989: 14 -15). Interestingly, Barker also points out that it was only after the mass suicide of the People's Temple members that it was labelled a cult (Barker, 1989: 15).

The way in which the majority of the American public responded to the tragedy has become an intriguing topic of enquiry for scholars of religion. 'Returning the gaze' back on to the public reactions both increases the familiarity of Jonestown and an

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[57] The debate about the secular nature of the study of religion within the Western academy is dealt with else where. See Chapters One and Two.

understanding of surrounding factors. David Chidester has researched into and written extensively on Jonestown.[58] In his essay "Rituals of Exclusion and the Jonestown Dead" (1988), he explores the way in which American society protected the boundaries of 'civil religion' by excluding the Jonestown dead from their territory. The events of Jonestown and its dead disrupted the "symbolic order of American society" (Chidester, 1988: 683) and the presence of the dead bodies on American soil represented a "dangerous defilement of American territory" (Chidester, 1988: 686). Chidester continues:

> In religious terms, the Jonestown dead were heretics...because they rejected the shared values of an American civil religion. In political terms, they were traitors advocating a socialist, revolutionary overthrow of an American government. In ethical terms, their suicides violated the fundamental socioethical order of the living in America. Here was an unassimilable otherness that could not be so easily reincorporated, but it could be exorcised through rituals of exclusion (Chidester, 1988: 696).

The debates over the issuing of death certificates, release of bodies and burial arrangements (no state wanted the bodies buried in their soil) took nearly one year (Chidester, 1988: 694). Jim Jones's body was cremated without ceremony on 21st December 1978, just one month after the tragedy, but then returned to be stored with the rest of the unclaimed and unidentified bodies in Dover Air Force Base. His ashes were eventually scattered over the Atlantic. As Chidester observes, "this cremation was simply an exercise in symbolic elimination" (Chidester, 1988: 691).

The reactions of American society to the events of Jonestown intrigue the scholar of religion because they demonstrate the overwhelming presence of a civil

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[58] His texts include *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), "Rituals of Exclusion and the Jonestown Dead" (Journal of the American Academy of Religion, LV1/4, 1988), and "Saving the Children by Killing Them: Redemptive Sacrifice in the Ideologies of Jim Jones and Ronald Reagan" (Religion and American Culture, Vol. 1, Part 2, 1991).

religion, which might be described as a set of boundaries that protects the symbolic order and identity of that society:

> Generally, Americans come to terms with the event by dismissing the people of Jonestown as not sane, not Christian, and not American, thereby reinforcing normative psychological, religious, and political boundaries around a legitimate human identity in America (Chidester, 1988: 700).

The common understanding of Jonestown, which persists within the media, takes an added dimension in light of Chidester's analysis. The persistence of the popularist story that states that Jones was a crazed dictator and the members were brainwashed victims, helps American society to 'box off' the events in the category of cult tragedy, and therefore protect the normative symbolic order.

However, the popular reaction to Jonestown has formulated a history that is hard to remove. As John Hall says, "the tide of mass media attention did more to create myths than to help us understand the tragedy" (Hall, 1989: 289). All historical accounts are flawed because they depend to some extent on mythological accounts. In this way, history and myth become inextricably bound. The production of myths is therefore involved in the process Chidester refers to; they reinforce the normative boundaries of society and its symbolic order.

Since the death of her sisters, Rebecca Moore has become an established scholar of Jonestown. "Is the Canon on Jonestown Closed?" (2000) maps the scholarly progress, or lack of it, made in the two decades since the tragedy:

> Astonishingly or not, two decades of scholarly reflection upon the events of that day seemed to have had little impact on the conventional wisdom about Jonestown or People's Temple. In effect the Canon concerning Jonestown is closed. A publicly accepted history of Jonestown exists which appears almost unalterable in its persistence (Moore, 2000: 7).

Moore calls this a "loss of institutional memory" which is complicating "the process of recovery" (Moore, 2000: 7). The amnesia referred to by Moore is intriguing in light of Wilson Harris's novel *Jonestown*. Harris's novel is a "memory theatre", an act of unravelling the "amnesiac fate" which haunts so many tragedies in history. However Moore ends with interesting words that establish an unavoidable ambiguity and tension when one reads the novel *Jonestown* alongside the event and tragedy. She writes:

> Jonestown – as a myth, a word, a concept – has entered common parlance and is visible everywhere… A novel by Wilson Harris is titled Jonestown but has little to do with the original Jonestown… (Moore, 2000: 21).

Harris's novel is dismissed within a list of other popular reactions to Jonestown. Would Harris, an exceptional author and scholar, be so careless as to show no understanding of the events that took place at Jonestown and the repercussions his unresearched work may have? Does Jonestown merely provide a powerful metaphor of horror and tragedy for Harris's creative project? This leads to the question of whether *Jonestown* the novel and Jonestown the tragedy can be examined alongside one another.

THE "INFINITE REHEARSAL" [59] OF TRAGEDY

I would argue that Harris's novel engages with more subtle questions aroused by Jonestown than one at first might suspect. These questions are to do with humanity's capacity for destruction and the repetition of this destruction throughout history,

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[59] This is the title of Harris's 1987 novel, which is part of the *Carnival Trilogy*. It is also a recurring phrase throughout Harris's other novels and essays and refers to the recurring cycles of humanity that plague existence: "I know that in unravelling the illusory capture of creation I may still apprehend the obsessional ground of conquest, rehearse its proportions, excavate its consequences, within a play of shadow and light threaded into value; a play that is infinite rehearsal, a play that approaches again and again a sensation of ultimate meaning residing within a deposit of ghosts relating to the conquistadorial body – as well as victimized body – of new worlds and old worlds, new forests and old forests, new stars and old constellations within the workshop of the gods" (*The Infinite Rehearsal,* Harris, 1993, 173).

particularly holocausts, and the annihilation of communities (principally the Amerindian communities of South America). Interestingly, John Moore (father of victims Annie and Carolyn, and scholar Rebecca) was haunted by similar questions. In a sermon following the tragedy he said: "The forces of death are powerful in our society. Nowhere is death more visible than in the decay of our cities" (Moore, 1986: 370). The notion of decaying cities is a historical pattern that Harris saw being repeated at Jonestown. Many religious traditions echo this belief within their texts and mythologies, such as the Christian story of Noah and the flood and the Hindu understanding of history as cycles of creation and destruction (to be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five). As Eliade writes: "deluge or flood puts an end to an exhausted and sinful humanity, and a new regenerated humanity is born, usually from a mythical ancestor who escaped the catastrophe, or from a lunar animal" (Eliade, 1954: 87). Harris responds to these patterns in mythology through his fiction. Simultaneously, he recognises that fiction is engaged in an infinite process of creation and re-creation: "there is no final creation since finality is ceaselessly partial and is subject to profoundest alterations" (Harris, *The Mask of the Beggar,* 2003: x). Jim Jones desired a new beginning for what he saw as a "sinful humanity". Harris recognises that Jones was obsessed with mythologies of creation and destruction and the desire for an apocalyptic ending to his story; but Jones's massacre became one in an infinite rehearsal of destruction.

For many victims, one response to these themes of destruction is through the act of anamnesis, or remembrance, in order to heal the amnesia caused by the witnessing of such tragedy. In *Jonestown,* Harris maps the traumatic journey to a possible recovery of the only fictional survivor and witness of the tragedy, Francisco Bone. Themes about remembrance and healing will be developed during the chapter; however, we are still left with an ethical question to do with Harris's dependency on

the popularist version of events of Jonestown, regardless of the awareness of his larger project.

The final words of Mary McCormick Maaga's text *Reaching the Voices of Jonestown* (1998) warns of the dangers of misrepresenting the past:

> My goal has been to challenge memories. If one remembers that which is comfortable, that which protects the status quo, is one not doomed to repeat history? Forgetting is a terrible thing. Remembering what never happened is, perhaps, more dangerous (Maaga, 1998: 141).

For Maaga, it is this dependency on false memories that has plagued most accounts of the Jonestown tragedy. And this is continued to some extent, in literary accounts:

> It stained the rivers red. Stir any creek, the red stain shows.
> The vowels are howler monkeys roaring, shocked again
> by carnage in Paradise, their mouths widening to oval O's.
> Believers felled like lumber for some dumb millennial plan:
> again, spectacular failure of Upright Man.
> The site's been cleared. Deceivers and deceived are gone.
> Of all that sin-converted host only their sins remain
> washed in the unconverted forest's cleansing rain ("Jonestown" by Michael Gilkes, 2002:34).

Gilkes' poem captures the destruction that Jonestown wreaked on Guyana's landscape and echoes Harris's project of exploring humanity's destructive ability: "again, spectacular failure of Upright Man". However, within the narrative is collusion with the popular myths that historians of religion have tried to dismantle. Gilkes refers to "some dumb millennial plan", believers being "felled like lumber" as if they were unresponsive victims with no mind of their own, and to "Deceivers and deceived". These descriptions have little correlation with the history of Jonestown as mapped by aforementioned scholars of religion, and the poem fails to capture the individual stories of those who died. This type of response is unhelpful to those who want to understand why Jonestown happened and what implications it has for studying religion in

contemporary society. It also confirms the popular belief in a civil religion and the act of exclusion which has taken place within the popular imagination.

Harris's novel, narrated by Francisco Bone, is a "Memory-theatre", a retrieval and rehearsal of Bone's painful memories. But how does the portrayal of Bone's memories affect the 'real' victims and stories of Jonestown? False 'memories' include Harris's reference to the lethal drink as "Coca-Cola laced with cyanide" (Harris, 1996: 3), which is a fabrication. He also labels Jonestown a "cult" with seemingly no insight into how problematic this term actually is (Harris, 1996: 3).[60] A similar attitude is echoed in Fred D'Aguiar's narrative poem, *Bill of Rights* in which there is an assumption that all the members were vulnerable and society's outcasts: "No longer the butt of classroom jokes – a gnome" (D'Aguiar, 1998: 2), and that they were brainwashed: "My face is as expressionless as a satellite dish" (D'Aguiar, 1998: 10). Suicide has been constructed as a taboo in Western culture. In order to deal with the mass suicide of over nine hundred people, and to protect the normative social boundaries, as already discussed, society constructed a myth of needy people brainwashed by a crazed leader. As Hall says "culture salvages plausible reality by covering the abyss with a curtain circumscribing a world that we can affirm" (Hall, 1989: xvii), such as a crazed leader who brainwashed needy victims. It is important to remember that a large percentage of the members were educated and middle class, with previously successful careers. Sadly, D'Aguiar, Harris and Gilkes allow themselves to be, to some extent, seduced by the myths that dominate the popular imagination in order to formulate an understanding of the tragedy. It is important to question to what extent their adherence to these common inaccuracies alters how we read the fiction and, in a more positive light, what

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[60] The term cult is now widely accepted as unsuitable by historians of religion. As a result of popular usage the term has come to denote negative stereotypes with little understanding of the individual groups, which are often vastly different. The term also ensures that there is a distinction between so-called 'cult' behaviour and what J. Z. Smith and Chidester call 'civil' or 'normative' religion. See Barker (1989: 4), Hall (1989: xvii), and Saliba (1995: 1).

literary accounts of *religious* events such as Jonestown provide, which are over-looked in historical texts.

Harris does inform his reader that *Jonestown* is a fiction, but through the voice of his fictional survivor, Francisco Bone:

> In my archetypal fiction I call Jim Jones Jonah Jones. All of the characters appearing in the book are fictional and archetypal. In this way I have sought to explore the overlapping layers and environments and theatres of legend and history that one may associate with Jonestown (Harris, 1996: 3).

It is at this point that Harris's project becomes clear. The fictionalization of Jonestown allows Harris to "explore the overlapping layers" of multiple tragedies throughout history. He is particularly intrigued by and committed to the often misrepresented past of the lost civilisations of the Arawaks, Caribs and Maya as well as the small community wiped out in November, 1978:

> I was obsessed – let me confess – by cities and settlements in the Central and South Americas that are an enigma to many scholars. I dreamt of their abandonment, their bird masks, their animal-masks... Did their inhabitants rebel against the priests, did obscure holocausts occur, civil strife, famine, plague? Was Jonestown the latest manifestation of the breakdown of populations within the hidden flexibilities and inflexibilities of pre-Columbian civilizations? (Harris, 1996: 4).

The breakdown of pre-Columbian civilizations largely took place during contact with colonialism and imperialism. Harris's comparing of Jonestown with these civilizations suggests that its demise was also, to some extent, the fault of interference by Western governments, which, as has been discussed, was a large contributing factor. In addition, however, Jones was following in the tracks of European explorers and conquistadors by choosing the uninhabitable and mysterious Guyanese interior for the establishment of his idealistic community and was himself, therefore, engaging in a colonial venture and dream; Harris labels Jonestown the, "Conquest Mission established by the cult

Master of Ritual" (Harris, 1996: 14). Harris's understanding of the establishment and breakdown of communities such as Jonestown, and the ambiguities that they entail, is therefore more insightful than at first appeared.

Other works by Harris are similar assessments of pre-Columbian civilisations and the destruction caused during European contact. One of Harris's more recent works, *The Dark Jester* (2001), returns to Pizarro's conquest of Peru:

> Had the conquest of the ancient Americas, and of Atahualpan Peru, established a seal upon civilisation one needed to break and transfigure in order to find resources humanity had apparently lost?
> What did I know of the recesses of humanity in which such questions raised themselves as riddles of fiction and Jest? (Harris, 2001: 2).

Harris aims to address the destructive capabilities of humanity within the "riddles of fiction". For Harris, fiction offers a creative response to the darker recesses of human nature, and a chance to re-write history from the other side. In Harris's fiction, ghostly presences act as the guide on a journey of rediscovery: for example, it is the Jester in *The Dark Jester* (2001), Mr Mageye in *Jonestown* (1996), and Ghost in *The Infinite Rehearsal* (1987). They present the main character, and the reader, with riddles with which to untangle historical facts from their dominant cultures so as to reveal "an approach to the ruling concepts of civilization from the other side, from the ruled or apparently eclipsed side in humanity" (Harris, *The Infinite Rehearsal*, 1987/1993: 171).

The work of many Caribbean writers such as Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris is heavily invested with the agenda of piecing together fragmented histories. The sense of responsibility this entails is captured in their writing. Walcott writes:

> Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows white scars (Walcott, 1996:506).

There is a redemptive tone to Walcott's observation. He, and many other writers, take great responsibility for fixing the broken vase or creating a completed jigsaw out of the fragments of Caribbean history. Colonial conquest frequently resulted in an erasure of a past and a history for many cultures. Many Caribbean writers adopt as their task a commitment to be true to the ancient peoples who have been written out of history and those abused by generations of slavery. For both Harris and Walcott, the process of writing is a reconfiguration of past and present whilst honouring indigenous Caribbean, Asiatic and African fragments which form contemporary Caribbean history. However, the sense of responsibility is not a result of being plagued by nostalgia or the "sigh of history" as Walcott calls it. It is a more productive task of anamnesis, filled with redemptive hope, as Harris would say, that realises the beauty of syncretic Caribbean culture.

In *Jonestown*, Harris presents this reconfiguration of a multiple heritage in the style of a "Dream-book", the narrator's name for the novel (which will be discussed in more detail towards the end of the chapter). This "Dream-book" consists of past memories and future imaginings for Francisco Bone (and Harris), which surface as a result of the extensive trauma he has suffered during his near death at Jonestown. As the past is recovered, Bone seeks "to be true to the broken communities, the apparently lost communities from which I have sprung" (Harris, 1995: 6). The tragedy of Jonestown comes to represent "broken communities" of pre-Columbian times and the "Memory-theatre" becomes an unravelling, an "infinite rehearsal" of "amnesiac fate". This amnesiac fate haunts survivors of both tragedies like Jonestown and the near extinction of ancient civilisations, and constantly threatens to resurface. Maaga notes that a sign hanging at the meeting point in Jonestown stated: "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (Maaga, 1998: 140). Is Harris pointing to the irony of this phrase chosen by Jim Jones? Jones 'forgot' the patterns of history

and holocausts that he was about to repeat. This appears to be what Harris calls 'amnesiac fate', the fate of forgetting.

So as not to display, as Maaga warns, false memories of events, Harris produces a dream-like narrative rather than a realist historical narrative. As Paul Sharrad notes:

> Dream can be a kind of memory that fills in the gaps of waking history. In its non-rational, supra-factual realm, images of the imaginative eye give us the possibility of reconstructing a landscape and cosmology from submerged elements of African, Aztec, Arawak and Carib cultures (Sharrad, 1992: 115-6).

Rather then adhering to any alleged series of events, Harris creates a conglomeration of past and present narratives based upon one of history's human tragedies, such as in *The Dark Jester* (2001) and *Jonestown* (1996). As Andrew Armstrong observes, "Harris thus reads Jonestown as a repeated slaughter superimposed on other narratives of history and legends" (Armstrong, 2002: 3). By working through suppressed cultural memories and putting the pieces back together, writers such as Harris provide an antidote for the amnesia which has led to the forgetting of ancient South American and Caribbean traditions. It is in this way that fiction provides additional insights into tragic events as documented by historians, particularly human-made tragedy. A network of events can be unravelled and restructured allowing the wider implications to be viewed and analysed. Hena Maes-Jelinek's reading of *Jonestown* confirms that:

> In Harris's novel what happened in Guyana on the "Day of the Dead" is not seen as an isolated event either but as part of a large-scale historical and moral context, one among similarly inspired disasters in different social and natural environments. It explores all the interstices of "the holocaust that afflicts us all in a variety of overt and masked forms everywhere" (126) and, as a manifestation of an irrational and incomprehensible will to destroy, it epitomizes other twentieth-century "ideological" genocides (Maes-Jelinek, 1997: 213).

For Harris, the Jonestown tragedy is an event within the destructive cycle of history, and it is therefore to "be compared literally to the massacres and holocausts that have

taken place in the world since the conquest of the Americas" in order to "throw considerable light on similarly motivated if far more extensive events" (Maes-Jelinek, 1997: 213). Harris enables the reader to explore the ways in which Jonestown might be related to pre-Columbian civilizations as well as to recover a history of these civilizations often dominated by colonial accounts. It could therefore be argued that Harris's and others' literary adaptations of Jonestown are more useful to historians of religion than Rebecca Moore indicated (Moore, 2000: 21 – see page 9). It is at this point that one recognises how mutually beneficial and necessary interdisciplinary research is between Religious Studies and postcolonial literary studies.

I have established that *Jonestown* can be an important text for historians, Religious Studies scholars and postcolonial theorists, and that one reason for writing about Jonestown concerns the retrieval of lost histories. Fred D'Aguiar's essay "Made in Guyana" (1998) provides a further reading of *Jonestown* that remembers Harris's dedication to the Guyanese landscape. Much of Harris's fiction revolves around a respect for and sensitivity to Guyana's waterlands and jungles. For Harris, and D'Aguiar, the landscape is a living, breathing deity: "Landscape becomes a cathedral and altar. While the tongue utters a demotic tune, the body moves as if in a benediction, through, rather than over the land, absorbing nature's graces and information, paying homage to its marvels" (D'Aguiar, 1998: 5). It is this kind of experience, as writers articulate their bodily, psychic, and spiritual contact with a dramatic landscape and their respect for its history, that can be defined as religious. This kind of *religious* experience, through nature, is an intrinsic part of Harris's writing:

> Jones, Deacon and I had been the architects of Jonah City within the huge forested belly of South America, the new Rome afloat upon the sea (a sea of leaves) as upon land branching into space…
>
> Jonestown. The sky dripped upon Limbo and upon Jonestown. Jonah saw himself in the belly of the White Sky or Whale of

> American legend as a saddened Aeneas afloat upon coffin and cradle (Harris, 1996: 81-82).

The 'huge forested belly' and dripping sky of South America locate the event of Jonestown within the unique and living landscape of Guyana. The Jonestown members were, initially, successful in 'seducing' the jungle interior. Jones had, after all, intended the settlement to be an agricultural project. However, this success gave way to human-made destruction, by both the American government and Jones himself, resulting in the pollution of the land by nearly one thousand bloated bodies. Harris also pursues the theme that Jones's project was an extension of the early conquistadors who wished to expand Christian Europe. This project was a pilgrimage which involved the rebuilding of the sacred centre, Rome: "the architects of Jonah city" were building, "the new Rome afloat upon the sea... as upon land breaching into space" (as above). As Eliade notes, within the "religious architecture of Christian Europe", the sacred centre is a place where heaven and earth, land and sky, meet (Eliade, 1949: 15). Harris also extends the notion that Jones's imagination was saturated by Christian American and colonial mythology by calling him Jonah, the Biblical saviour of a forsaken city. Harris's reference to the Greek warrior, Aeneas, further broadens the mythological plane that Harris is using. Aeneas, like Jonah (though not as reluctant), represents piety in Greek mythology, for he abandoned his lover, Dido, in the name of duty. The use of Greek mythology and tragedy adds further emphasis to Harris's understanding of history as a theatre performance in a cycle of infinite rehearsal: "Each apparent finality of performance was itself but a private rehearsal pointing to unsuspected facets and the re-emergence of forgotten perspectives in the cross-cultural and the universal imagination" (Harris, 1987: 171).

For Harris, the hope of salvation is in nature's ability to re-grow over sites of decay, as D'Aguiar's reading of Harris indicates:

> Harris does not deny our powerful capacity to destroy each other and every other species, and the earth along with ourselves... what Harris argues is that the solution to the cycle of destruction cannot be found in this man-made world, but in the very wilderness humanity is ignoring or else trying to reduce to rubble (D'Aguiar, 1998: 6).

As already discussed, a reason for Harris to write about Jonestown was to demonstrate humanity's tragic ability to destroy itself, but an additional element within Harris's fiction, that D'Aguiar suggests, is his belief in the healing power within the surrounding wilderness, often unrecognised by its inhabitants. My reading of religion in Harris's fiction is rooted in this intense contact between humanity and nature, and how the body and psyche respond to this. The surrounding wilderness at Jonestown did heal itself; it is now overgrown and shows little memory of the tragedy. In *Bill of Rights* D'Aguiar celebrates nature's ability to fight back:

> *As the savannah races towards the forest*
> *The forest retreats towards the river*
> *As the river reaches for us*
> *We plant with our backs to the trees*
>
> *The savannah knows God watches*
> *The forest knows it too*
>
> *Yet the savannah advances*
> *Still the forest beats its retreat* (D'Aguiar, 1998: 26).

The advancing and retreating described by D'Aguiar demonstrate that the landscape is an active participant in its war against invasion. The presence of God watching is not a deterrent for the landscape's army but an encouragement; a spiritual warfare between the God of humanity and the God of nature commences. As discussed earlier, with reference to Chidester (1988), reactions to Jonestown are in many ways to do with boundaries, and the defilement of territory caused by the act of mass suicide. Chidester concentrated on the defilement caused to American soil, because of the threat to American civil religion by the bodies of the members. D'Aguiar returns the focus to

Guyana and the conflict that took place between the foreign settlers and the Guyanese wilderness.

As an ex-Guyanese citizen and writer, D'Aguiar's own reflections on the tragedy shed further light on the events. He labels Jim Jones "as an accident waiting to happen... an imperialist dream turned into a nightmare, the excesses of Western-bred indulgence, with the idea of God and paradise reaching a logical conclusion" (D'Aguiar, 1998: 12-13). Guyana's reaction to Jonestown has been left out of history, another example of the imperialist cataloguing of events that still plagues our history books. D'Aguiar is therefore keen to remind his largely American audience (the paper was delivered at the 'Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, D.C.... as part of the IDB Cultural Centre Lectures Programme') that the Guyanese "do not talk about Jonestown. In fact, Jonestown is even a joke, a foreign experiment failing spectacularly on Guyanese soil" (D'Aguiar, 1998: 13). The Guyanese therefore responded in a similar way to the Americans in terms of ownership of the religious defilement. Their silence is also an act of elimination and exorcism through "rituals of exclusion" (Chidester, 1989: 696). But D'Aguiar also helps to explain why the events triggered a response in Guyana's literary world:

> If Guyana were ever a site for the last romantic engagement of this century, with an ancient, pure and instructive landscape, then Jones' presence in the Guyanese interior, so close to the rain forest of the Amazonian basin, certainly exploded that notion for my generation of Guyanese writers (D'Aguiar, 1998: 13).

Jonestown requires a literary response from Guyanese writers as a result of the destruction it caused outside of the settlement, and within the Guyanese imagination. Many writers are keen to claim the landscape back as their own, which they are doing

through their fiction and poetry. As D'Aguiar says "the calamity distinguished Guyana from Ghana once and for all in everyone's mind" (D'Aguiar, 1998: 11).[61]

WRITING TO HEAL

The act of writing is often considered therapeutic, a way of working through painful memories and forgotten pasts. The re-staging of the past within novels such as *Jonestown* can therefore be understood as a form of healing, for the writer and for the community, particularly the local Guyanese who witnessed the tragedy and for whom the painful memories linger in their homes. Creative writing is held to be therapeutic by many, including Erna Brodber who keeps her "non-academic writing for therapeutic purposes" (DeCaires Narain, 1999: 100). Harris, in a similar way, mentions in a paper that he is "visited by characters" and that this "has a therapeutic value" (Harris, 1992: 69). By re-living the past, by forming one's own version of events, through the process of writing, one can begin to offer healing to others and to oneself.

David Punter offers helpful insights into the ways in which fiction operates as a literary act of remembrance and therefore healing. Francisco Bone works through an act of remembrance that eventually leads him out of the despair of being the only survivor to a place of acceptance. It is in this way that an act of remembrance is also an act of healing. Punter states:

> The literary, we may say, can be defined – among many other ways - as the major site on which that crucial question - 'Do you remember?' is insistently asked... What marks its [the literary's] special relationship with the postcolonial? I suggest that this is at least partly a matter of the mutual connection with trauma, and thus inevitably with mourning and melancholy (Punter, 2000: 131).

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[61]Refer to the poem by Marc Matthews, "Guyana, Not Ghana" (1986).

Postcolonial writers are often overwhelmed by the act of remembrance and use fiction to delve into painful memories, both personal and historical. This ability to recover painful memories has forged a special relationship between the postcolonial and the literary. Trauma is a site from which these memories can be extracted, traumas such as Jonestown: "for trauma is that which inverts linear history, that which forever inserts a wedge into history's doors, keeping them permanently open, preventing closure but permitting the seepage of the heart's blood..." (Punter, 2000: 137-8). The re-enactment of Jonestown, through fiction using a dream-like and 'anti-linear' narrative, is a natural consequence of the trauma it caused; it will never be over (Punter, 2000: 67). The relationship between postcolonial fiction and mourning and melancholy, necessary reactions to trauma, is particularly relevant to a discussion of Harris's work. This theme will be developed in more detail later but it is sufficient to say that Harris's use of psychoanalytical discourse, in terms of methods of healing, is an intriguing but almost necessary part of Harris's fiction. A psychoanalytical reading of *Jonestown*, particularly developing Freud's and Kristeva's themes of mourning and melancholy, the abject, and the uncanny recognises the complex palimpsest that is Harris's fiction, and also provides a reading of the literary and the religious as sites for communal healing. It will be argued that Harris successfully translates the Western tool of psychoanalysis, or the 'talking cure', into postcolonial trauma. Punter is keen to point out that "possibilities of post-traumatic healing are remote" (Punter, 2000: 132). This is a central consideration when reading Harris's fiction, particularly in view of the recurring theme of infinite rehearsal. Harris repeatedly works towards the healing of trauma but, as will be discussed with reference to the ending of *Jonestown*, his novels are often inconclusive and ambiguous which may suggest that Harris also views post-traumatic healing as a remote possibility.

Reading *Jonestown* and much other postcolonial fiction in terms of remembrance, recovery and healing recognises an element of the religious haunting that is also taking place. Harris's re-narration of the tragic event of Jonestown is not only a re-enactment of trauma. It is the re-enactment of the trauma of a religious community. *Jonestown* therefore involves the re-tracing of the spiritual and religious memories of hidden and lost societies, and also deals with the way in which painful pasts are reconstructed or remembered through religious expression. Many, if not all, of Harris's novels are spiritual journeys which explore both the real and the imaginary, two categories which refuse to stay within the fixed binaries in which they are often placed. As Alan Riach notes, one reason for this "religious element" within Harris's writing is that it "offers redemptive hope", which Riach compares to the poetry of William Blake (Riach, 1992: 11). Harris's narrator Francisco Bone is in search of this redemptive hope and healing. He hopes to find this by revisiting the past and recording his memories of Jonestown and Guyanese indigenous culture in his Dream-book:

> A rush of thoughts takes me into the opening chapters of Jonestown long before I begin to write. I see them, those chapters, in my mind's eye, as I quarrel inwardly all over again – in Memory, in my state of trauma... An infinite quarrel from which one's pen is fashioned, heart's blood, the setting of the sun's ink on the eve of the Day of the Dead (Harris, 1996: 20).

While in a "state of trauma", Francisco Bone begins to write. Through the writing he lays to rest the many ghosts that haunt him, those of his childhood (such as his mother's death) and those of Jonestown (such as his relationship with Jones and the extent of his involvement in the decision to initiate a mass suicide). His 'pen is

fashioned' by the series of traumatic events that lead up to the Day of the Dead (as Bone entitles it).[62] His Dream-book is a necessary process of redemption and healing.

Within the Caribbean, syncretic religions such as Myal and Obeah (a mix of African and Christian belief systems) operate around notions of healing both the individual (Obeah) and the community (Myal). Brodber's novel *Myal* (see chapter one) is a wonderful example of a community's combined spiritual endeavour. Religions such as these could be interpreted as purely resistant, especially when they are used metaphorically in literature, and this is certainly an element. However they operate more towards the redemptive hope which Harris then translates into literary expression rather than resistance. Andrew Armstrong writes: "Harris's parodic writing in Jonestown is not a denial of the seriousness of the event of the 1978 massacre in the jungles of Guyana but rather a reverential, even priestly recasting of the event through the shamanistic capacity of writing in order to tap the redemptive power of narrative" (Armstrong, 2002: 3-4). Armstrong's description of "parodic writing" captures the playful ambivalence of Harris's work, which is seen particularly in the character Mr Mageye who Bone refers to as a "genuine and sacred jester" (1996: 33). Mr Mageye's bizarre eruptions of laughter at bleak moments can be interpreted as the "parodic" elements of Harris's writing:

> For some uncanny, emotional reason – some uncanny wound within philosophy that brings ecstasy and pain – I found myself laughing with Mr Mageye. But laughter ceased and we began to consider terrorizing and terrorized regimes, cruel natures (Harris, 1999: 103).

Mr Mageye is Bone's guide and his mediator on a "parodic" journey of "ecstasy and pain". For Harris, as the author of *Jonestown*, writing acts as the healing mediator, the

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[62] The Day of the Dead is a festival in Mexico and parts of Central America that celebrates the lives of all those who have died during the year.

shaman. The use of religious and spiritual narratives allows Harris to create a "priestly recasting of the event" and to become a divine mediator of the past as he enacts rites of healing.

One particular biblical narrative that recurs throughout *Jonestown* is the story of Lazarus (a central Christian figure of healing who is raised from the dead by Christ). The notions of healing and redemption are interwoven with resurrection in Christianity, which symbolises both spiritual and physical re-birth. Bone's own escape from death is translated into a Lazarus-like experience. Bone's Magus, Mr Mageye, who guides him through his dream book, explains:

> '... that you Francisco - as you wrestle with the severity of trauma – need to revisit Jonestown. You cannot do so without the horn of the huntsman and the sound of the flute. The huntsman wears the mask of Christ. The horn and the flute are branches of the archetype of a numinous and pagan Christ who summons Lazarus from the grave... Your fate – if I may so put it as I read the signs, Francisco – is to venture into the music that addressed Lazarus, the music of the womb of space, the music of remarriage – in your case, Francisco – to the people of Jonestown. How can one break the trauma of the grave and not find oneself involved in a remarriage to humanity? I do not envy you the task. It is a terrifying embrace to remarry a perverse humanity, a bitter task, a bitter threshold or re-entry into Jonestown. And yet it has to be done. I can promise you a genuine ecstasy nevertheless, before I depart, and the trial that lies before you – however tormenting – will prove a liberation... I cannot say more [...]. Let me say however that your projection of sickness upon the Christ-archetype is an unspoken cry for help, a cry from the grave into which you dreamt you fell when you lay on a pillow of stone on the Day of the Dead' (Harris, 1996: 104).

This extensive quotation demonstrates the intricacy of Harris's fiction. The layers of detail provide a riddle-like tonic for dealing with the trauma of a near-death experience. Harris parallels Christ's resurrection of Lazarus with the Amerindian use of the bone

flute, carved from the enemy's bones and played to invoke ancestral guidance.[63] Harris creates an orchestral union, "the music of remarriage", between Christian, pagan and Amerindian philosophy and poetry to encourage the healing process. "The horn of the huntsman [Christ] and the sound of the flute [Amerindian ancestors]" are the instruments Francisco must use, the music he must "venture into" in order for his cry to be answered and for him to be raised from the grave like Lazarus. The challenging ordeal of re-visiting the past will provide liberation, even ecstasy, and the hope of a successful conclusion to the healing process. This liberation and ecstasy carry echoes of Christian deliverance from suffering, which are further emphasised in the final pages of the novel (as will be discussed towards the end of chapter). Jones also sought this deliverance through the mass suicide, from what he viewed as a failed humanity. However Mr Mageye, and Harris, view the 'perverse humanity' as the Jonestown community, whereas Jones himself saw everyone except the community as perverse. From the perspective of Jones, Francisco will find his liberation in death, a perspective that is not absent from a reading of *Jonestown*. A more accepted reading suggests that Francisco will find his liberation in his resurrection from both death and the trauma he has suffered. Harris ensures that his fiction is ambiguous so that multiple readings are available to his reader. The central theme that rides above the ambiguity is Harris's construction of the healing process around a religious narrative.

Fred D'Aguiar echoes several themes explored in the above passage. The traumatic lament of the Amerindian bone flute is also present in *Bill of Rights*:

> Their cries that could raise the dead, raise hair
> And a thousand flutes in a death air,
>
> A thousand flutes piled on top

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[63] "The Caribs ate a morsel of enemy flesh when the Spanish priests and conquistadors invaded their lands. They sought to know and digest the secrets of the enemy in that morsel. They hallowed the bone from which the morsel had come into a flute that is said to inhabit all species that sing" (Harris, 1996: 16).

Each other, like so many grains of rice
…

A thousand flutes for bullets
A thousand souls for flutes
A thousand bullets for souls (D'Aguiar, 1998: 15).

And later in the poem:

I play a flute hollowed from bone
Bird beast or human I don't care
Old or young I am indifferent
… (D'Aguiar, 1998: 59).

In a similar way to Harris, D'Aguiar layers his text with ancestral memories which he then 'plays' in an attempt to bridge the gap between diverse humanities and cultures.[64] D'Aguiar's poetry also adopts a 'shamanistic capacity' as it enacts a painful lament, not just of the memories of Jonestown but of the almost forgotten Amerindian tradition.

In Harris's fiction, and D'Aguiar's poetry, religion is used to reconstruct and subsequently ritualize the past. Daniele Hervieu-Leger describes religion as a mobilization of collective memory (Hervieu-Leger, 2000: 124). Religious belief, for Hervieu-Leger, "is affirmed and manifested in the essentially religious act of recalling a past which gives meaning to the present and contains the future. The practice of *anamnesis*, of the recalling to memory of the past, is most often observed as a rite" (Hervieu-Leger, 2000: 125). Harris adopts the religious act of anamnesis to place the past within a meaningful context, whether this past is the destruction of pre-Columbian civilizations or more recent holocausts such as Jonestown. Peter Kerry Powers describes how postcolonial writers use religion to "chant new descent lines that translate memories and traditions to create a continuity between past and present" (Powers, 2001: 114). Religion sustains cultural memories that are often repressed. In

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[64] See Maes-Jelinek's essay "Tricksters of heaven: Visions of Holocaust in Fred D'Aguiar's *Bill of Rights* and Wilson Harris's *Jonestown*" (1997), particularly page 212 where she describes D'Aguiar's poetry as a "polyphonic instrument".

this way, religion is a necessary part of the postcolonial project; religion helps to prevent the amnesiac fate that Harris describes through the "religious act of recalling a past" (Hervieu-Leger, 2000: 124).

HARRIS AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

Implicit within Harris's use of religious narratives is his adoption of psychoanalytical discourse. The religious process of healing and anamnesis can be accessed through psychoanalysis or the 'talking-cure'. Psychoanalysis is a Western construction and there are therefore reservations about using it alongside postcolonial theory and fiction. Much of postcolonial theory is reluctant to be dependant on the developments of Western theory as this contradicts the project of forging a space outside of the West and its imperial powers. As Punter says:

> ... in their [Said, Bhabha and Spivak's] deployment of 'Western' theory they have become involved in prolonging and repeating imperialist subjugation, to the point at which Spivak can solemnly claim, in the teeth of the evidence, that the subaltern 'cannot speak' (Punter, 2000: 9).

This is an important criticism but Punter's reservations could be viewed as a simplification of Bhabha's, Spivak's and Said's projects. As discussed in the previous chapter, these theorists often use poststructuralism and other Western modes of thought to undermine imperialism using the West's own intellectual strategies. This act of anti-colonialism can be extremely effective. Punter goes on to remind his readers of the way theory should be used alongside the analysis of postcolonial fiction: " what *is* needed is perceptions and ideas: perceptions of what might be *in the text*... and ideas about how and why it might be there" (Punter, 2000: 9-10). He continues that any use of theory should "be of value only insofar as their encounter with postcolonial texts

succeeds in producing a conjuncture for further thought" (Punter, 2000: 10). Harris's descriptions of the psyche within his fiction trigger a vast variety of ideas and perceptions for his readers. The question is therefore what psychoanalysis can offer to assist in the reading of *Jonestown*. I will aim to map some of the parallels with psychoanalytical theory within *Jonestown* in order to demonstrate both the intricate detail that exists within Harris's fiction, and to formulate an interpretation of the text that recognises the postcolonial novel as a 'talking cure'. I will argue that Harris uses images of religion and the psyche, in an act of anamnesis, to remember, re-narrate and, possibly yet not conclusively, to heal the past, including personal trauma and historical holocausts, such as Jonestown and the near extinction of pre-Columbian civilizations. Mr Mageye tells Bone that he needs to revisit the trauma in order to move beyond it:

> 'You need to see it happening all over again in your Dream-book. It is pertinent, believe me, Francisco, to a discovery and rediscovery of the depth of your own passion and emotion which you may have eclipsed or hidden from yourself until the tragedy of Jonestown brought you face to face with the accumulated spectres of years, the dread spectre of the twentieth century as it addresses the psyche of ageless childhood' (Harris, 1996: 56).

Prior to imagining the possibility of healing, Harris makes the reader experience the trauma of a failed humanity. Within his fiction, Harris portrays the depths of tragedy and suffering in order to address the injustice and offer a site of hope beyond such tragedy. As Harris's narrator says, "we are hunted, we are pursued by repetitive catastrophes, repetitive Nemesis, and our insight into Beauty – which we may gain at the heart of terror – deepens the trial of creation to bridge chasms itself" (Harris, 1996: 21). For Harris, "Beauty" can only be understood when face to face with despair and terror.

As seen in the above quotation, one of the first details that hints at the parallels being made with psychoanalysis is that Harris's narrator, Bone, calls his 'collection of

memories' a 'Dream-book'. Freud's own name for *The Interpretation of Dreams*, written in 1899, was his 'dream-book' (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 21). Much, if not all, of Harris's fiction is presented in a dream-like narrative. His characters are often on journeys of recovery; details are revealed to them in nonsensical stages as they drift on different planes of consciousness:

> It [Harris's fiction] is concerned with the recovery of dimensionalities that our received ideas, our conventional reckonings, flatten out or conventionalize. Now a fiction that proceeds in this way is akin to the language of dream, and I believe that Harris's entire body of fiction can be treated as a single continuous dream-book, whose text, just like a cycle of dreams over a number of years, is an inflection of thematic clusters and revisitations (Bundy, 1999: 13).

If Harris's entire body of fiction is to "be treated as a single continuous dream-book" then *Jonestown* is merely a chapter of a greater project. However, *Jonestown* is still a contained piece of work, with its own rewards. Bundy goes on to say that "the dream-book has to do with celebration through the art of memory. And because celebration can have to do with sound and noise and tumult and interval, with instruments of hearing and audition, the dream-book is also a composition in music and remembrancing [sic]" (Bundy, 1999: 14). Each book in the series is therefore part of the composition. Each contains its own, often traumatic, memories and laments, and celebrates or mourns different pasts, but can be powerfully collated.

Interestingly, Francisco Bone's dream-book begins when he is confronted with death:

> I suffered the most severe and disabling trauma on the Day of the Dead (as I see and continue to see in my mind's eye the bodies in a Clearing or town centre in Jonestown on November 18). The shock was so great – I blamed myself for not taking risks to avert the holocaust – that though I was wounded a numbness concealed for some time the physical injury that I suffered. The consequences of such 'numbness' occupy different proportions of the Dream-book (Harris, 1996: 3).

Bone's trauma and numbness, which he writes about in the hope of being healed, pivots on his confrontation with death. Bone often describes this trauma in terms of the uncanny: "As the severity of trauma began to break by degrees uncanny correspondences seemed to loom as I voyaged between Maya twinships of pasts and futures and the Mathematics of Chaos" (Harris, 1996: 5). The trauma is both emphasised and then slowly healed as he drifts through different times and meets familiar strangers and becomes a stranger to himself (Harris, 1996:48). Kristeva, Freud and other psychoanalysts locate the experience of the uncanny in an encounter with death (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 51):

> The fear of death dictates an ambivalent attitude: we imagine ourselves surviving (religions promise immortality) but death just the same remains the survivor's enemy and it accompanies him in his new existence. Apparitions and ghosts represent this ambiguity and fill with uncanny strangeness our confrontations with the image of death (Kristeva, 1991: 185).

The experience Kristeva describes is similar to Bone's experience in his Dream-book. In many ways it is his survival that haunts him most: "Why should I live? Why should I survive on such terms?" (Harris, 1996: 24). He imagines himself both surviving and being dead, and he continues to be trapped in this Limbo land throughout the Dream-book: "When I escaped I dreamt I was dead and gained some comfort from rhymes of self-mockery, from handsome skeletons" (Harris, 1996: 3). On his journey through Limbo land he is confronted with many ghosts both from his past and his future. The uncanniest of these confrontations is with his skeleton twin, as Bone exclaims, "Was he not my twin? Was he a stranger?" (Harris, 1996: 110). The twin retorts:

> 'When I broke from you and fell into the pit I took part of your memory with me. Memory is archetypal. It is shared between fleshed bone and twin-skeleton... One is blessed ignorance of what the other suffers. I kept you going. I made survival a shade of flesh easier for you. But it's time now. I have been in hell. And it's time you knew... So when I broke out of your feeling body on the day of the holocaust I took the rap. I took your hell with

> me to give you a Limbo chance to grow flesh upon our mutual grave' (Harris, 1996: 110).

This alter ego is summoned by the confrontation with death, as if part of the survivor must necessarily die during the confrontation.

Diane Jonte-Pace (2001) formulates a counterthesis to Freud's notion of the uncanny, a counterthesis that is within Freud's texts but simultaneously unspeakable:

> The dominant thesis Freud develops and pursues is that the uncanny emerges from the return of repressed castration fears. Interrupting this thesis is a counterthesis in which the uncanny emerges from the return of repressed ideas associating death, the mother, and immortality (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 62).

Freud's inability to recognise this counterthesis within his own work is illuminating for Jonte-Pace. The counterthesis also adds an intriguing dimension to a reading of *Jonestown.* Jonte-Pace states that, "death and the mother are primary factors invoking the uncanny" (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 68). After his own near-death experience, one of the first memories that Bone is faced with on his journey is the death of his mother:

> I was stricken to the heart for I suddenly remembered that my mother would die this very night. She would be borne aloft by beggars, she would be mugged and stabbed by a tall Cat of the Carnival of Albouystoun. I had returned not to witness her wedding to a tall Carnival ghost of a Frenchman but her death all over again as I had done as a child on Carnival Night in Albouystoun. I had returned on the day and night of her death. It was 24th March, 1939 (Harris, 1996: 30).

The name of Bone's mother is Marie Antoinette (Harris, 1996: 35), who Mr Mageye refers to as "the Virgin of Albouystown" (Harris, 1996: 34). Her death was also on the eve of World War Two, as if she, the suffering mother of humanity and Christ, is dying in an act of protest for the mass destruction and death which is about to take place. There are three Maries in *Jonestown*: Bone's mother, Deacon's wife (Harris, 1996: 81) and the Marie of Jonestown who is shot by Jones on the Day of the Dead (Harris,

1996: 13-14). Harris's female characters are often portrayed as saviours and mothers; their purpose is to lead the male characters towards salvation, as 'mothers of humanity':

> Poor Marie. Rich, wilderness Marie. Virgin Marie. Queen Marie. Princess Marie. Peasant Marie. Child's ancient heart. Bride of humanity. Mother of Gods. Child of Gods contesting their parentage of her. Biological Magic? Adoptive, spiritual, medicinal magic? (Harris, 1996: 85).

They are also mysterious, uncanny and terrifying but ultimately they are mothers. Harris's portrayal of the feminine is problematic; however Kristeva's analysis of the maternal body as abjection offers an insightful reading of the presence of these uncanny women.

Abjection, for Kristeva, is:

> Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck (Kristeva, 1982: 2).

For Kristeva, this loathing most powerfully takes place at the site of the maternal body:

> But devotees of the abject, she as well as he, do not cease looking, within what flows from the other's "innermost being" for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body (Kristeva, 1982: 54).

The womb becomes a place of fascination and fear, loathing and desire. Harris's fiction repeatedly pays tribute to this site of abjection. Interestingly, Kristeva ends *Powers of Horror* (1982) by saying, "it is within literature that I finally saw it [abjection] carrying, with its horror, its full power into effect" (Kristeva, 1982: 207). Francisco Bone, prior to his mother's death, works through the anxiety caused by abjection:

> I loved my mother, I stood in dread of her nevertheless, in dread of the masquerade of the womb, and its submission to death, even as she stroked my Lazarus-arm as a portent of resurrectionary text in my Dream-book on my returning across a chasm from Jonestown to Albouystown (Harris, 1996: 41).

The misogynistic fear of the womb lies within its ability to die and cause death (when the womb rejects life and ceases to produce life) as well as create life. This masquerade creates a sense of dread, particularly for the person who was created in that womb. At this point, Bone's mother comes to represent the "mother of humanity" (Harris, 1996: 41) causing "an uncanny dread of the masks one's dead mother wears, or has worn across centuries and generations" (Harris, 1996: 40). The holocausts throughout history become contained in the womb of the mother of humanity, as it submits to death. The mother's body is "a palimpsest of layered ancestries" (Harris, 1996:41) creating a feeling of desire and dread.

Abjection, for Kristeva, is also a necessary part of the religious imagination. According to Kristeva "[a]bjection accompanies all religious structuring and reappears… at the time of their collapse" (Kristeva, 1982: 17). She continues, "[t]he various means of *purifying* the abject – the various catharses – make up the history of religions" (Kristeva, 1982: 17). In this way, rituals take place in an attempt to purify abjection. Sites of defilement and horror, such as bodily functions, particularly for the female, maternal body are transgressed through the ritualization of these processes:

> In her [Kristeva's] analysis, rituals maintain and repair broken or threatened barriers between the sacred, safe, clean (propre) world of the symbolic, and the polluted, unclean territory of the abject, which is closely associated with the feminine and maternal. Thus rituals attempt to differentiate an abject, maternal chaos from an orderly, symbolic cosmos (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 112).

It is at the site of the sacred "where we encounter the rituals of defilement and their derivatives" which are "based on the feeling of abjection and all converging on the maternal" (Kristeva, 1982: 64). Abjection is therefore experienced most powerfully at the site of the religious and maternal body. The Virgin Mary is the ultimate ritualization

and purification of the religious maternal body.[65] In this way, Francisco Bone's religious and maternal journey, and his act of anamnesis, is necessarily expressed through the abject:

> All this was pertinent to my love for my mother, my dread of my mother. Did she instinctively know more than I gave her credit for? I thought I knew the facts of her coming death, they seemed unassailable to me. Why could I not save her? I wanted to pray but was unable to pray. I had no language, it seemed, no word or utterance of prayer when as an infant, I lay against her breasts and drew sustenance of milk from her (Harris, 1996: 41).

Bone recedes to the time prior to language and identity beyond the maternal body; the semiotic.[66] At this point, Bone's dread of the mother is based on her all-consuming power. His desire to pray, to ritualise and cleanse the site of abjection, is consumed by the presence of the maternal body as it forces him to regress to the semiotic stage. It is the kind of "maternal chaos" described by Jonte-Pace that Bone, and Harris, are trying to come to terms with during the Dream-book, and the reason for the repeated resurrection and ritualization of Marie. The mother, "the Virgin of Albouystown", is turned into a religious and ritualized idol at the first site of anamnesis, in order to mask the dread Bone experiences in her presence.

MOURNING AND MELANCHOLIA IN *JONESTOWN*

A final theme in the work of Freud and Kristeva that has intriguing parallels with Harris's *Jonestown*, and that begins to tie together the threads of interpretation already referred to, is that of mourning and melancholia. Bone's experiences in *Jonestown* could

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[65] Dawne McCance (2003: 132) writes: "Without the relief of an *Aufhebung* [meaning 'outside of', or 'annihilation', and therefore similar to abjection], borderline signification revisits, rewrites, again and again, the West's religious idealisations, particularly Christianity's Virgin Mother, 'one of the most powerful imaginary constructs known in the history of civilisations' (Kristeva, 1987: 237)".
[66] Kristeva labels the language prior to speech between mother and child as the semiotic.

be interpreted as a negotiation between these two stages of grief. A wider reading could suggest that Harris is entertaining a notion of postcolonial mourning for pre-Columbian civilizations. Jonte-Pace states that Freud, in "Mourning and Melancholia":

> ... examines the similarities and differences between the usual process of grieving or mourning (Trauer) and the more intense, painful, and pathological variant of mourning, known to the medical community of his era as melancholia, which was similar to what is called clinical depression today. Both, he argued, originate with the death or loss of a loved object or ideal (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 120).

David Punter locates the "special relationship" between the postcolonial and the literary in their "mutual connection" with trauma and thus mourning and melancholy (Punter, 2000: 132). The process of grief described by Freud has important correlations with postcolonial literature, as a result of the sense of loss that is often a central theme. Punter also refers to the act of remembrance within literature as being "bound on one side to memory and on the other to mourning" (Punter, 2000: 128). Harris's work, particularly *Jonestown*, as has been established, is an act of remembrance and anamnesis, and therefore, according to Punter, an act of mourning. When remembrance adopts a more pathological tone, such as Bone's inability to accept his mother's death, it turns from mourning to melancholia: "But now the numbness throbbed with pain. I had come abreast of the wound. I knew the sharp, acute pain now that I had brought from the future into the past" (Harris, 1996: 42). The pain Harris describes is similar to the pain Freud described to distinguish melancholia from mourning; it is "more intense, painful" (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 120). The numbness felt during grief suddenly "throbbed with pain", like a disease and therefore a pathological form of grief. The etymology of the word pathology is also revealing when considering *Jonestown*. 'Pathology' derives from 'pathos', which refers to the quality of writing or speech that excites pity, sadness

and suffering. *Jonestown* is a written lament for lost civilizations of pre-colonial history and humanity's destructive ability:

> One forgets. One remembers. Such lapses and bridges between memory and non-memory are native to the trauma of cultures... (Harris, 1996: 83).

Francisco Bone's Dream-book is a traumatic text of mourning and fragmented memories that invokes pity, sadness and suffering yet also hopes for movement to a place beyond the Limbo land he is trapped in, an exit from the pathological state.

During her reading of mourning and melancholia, Jonte-Pace refers to Freud's wider picture, the Jewish Diaspora:

> In "One Transience," [Freud] contrasts the melancholic Jews (his companions) with the mourning Jews (himself). The melancholic companions demand immortality (of the land, of the religion), while the mourning Jew takes the rationalist position, which is also an assimilationist position. He acknowledges the loss of the land and the loss of the traditional... His colleagues are unable to mourn and unable to assimilate: they are beset by what he elsewhere called melancholia (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 125).

The postcolonial diaspora triggers a similar tension. The remembrance of the homeland, or the pre-colonial traditions, becomes a site, often through literature, of mourning or melancholy. Harris is just one writer who is tapping into the sense of loss, and therefore mourning or melancholy, caused by colonial invasion:

> Depth was uncanny proportionality of Memory theatre, Memory's lift, Memory's height, upon which to view impending events, failed events, lost causes, futuristic ruins, as well as past events that are native to the wastelands of the future, past events that one may have buried in conventional complacency within the present moment that continues to ignore the Shadow of the future (Harris, 1996: 84).

The Memory theatre Harris describes is the site for the 'infinite rehearsal' of tragic pasts that continue to re-manifest themselves in the future. As has been shown, Harris is describing a cycle of destruction that humanity is trapped in. It could be argued that

Harris' use psychoanalytic themes to expose the sense of loss of pre-colonial civilizations destroyed by colonialism and Western imperialism.

Peter Homans locates the birth of psychoanalysis in another sense of loss, the fracturing of Western religious identity and the change to Western culture:

> From Homan's perspective, psychoanalysis is both a product of the mourning which accompanies modernization and a contributor to the losses which mark modernization. Psychoanalysis emerges out of the introspection and individuation which follow upon Freud's successful mourning of the loss of traditional Jewish communal and religious structures (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 129).

According to Homans, it was Freud's mourning for the loss of traditional religious structures that led to the birth of psychoanalysis (Homans, 1989: 4). This interesting thesis recognises the relationship of political, social, and psychological realities to 'religion' if it is reconceptualised beyond Freud's restrictive binary of secular/religious. The boundaries of religion have dramatically shifted as a result of cultural changes. Contemporary events such as Jonestown suggest that religion has a powerful influence on contemporary society. Jonte-Pace re-affirms this thesis by discussing "cultural shifts" and "ongoing instability" (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 147) rather than loss. She feels that Freud is important to the study of religion because he reminds the scholar to carry out a "study of change and transition in religion and of how we mourn those losses, changes, and transitions" (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 147). She goes on to state, "religious ideas today are often communicated in movie theatres rather than churches" (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 147). This observation marks a central shift in how one understands religion in a contemporary setting. If one fails to recognise this shift, one's understanding of religion is severely limited. Writers such as Harris are continuing a long tradition of both reflecting and celebrating this shift by taking religion out of the church and into the realm of fiction. As Hervieu-Léger states, anamnesis is a religious and literary act

(Hervieu-Léger, 2000: 124). Fiction has been an important site for religious musings and contemplations throughout history and for understanding how religion functions; however this seems to have been largely over-looked in the reading of postcolonial fiction and poetry. It is the aim of this thesis to correct this over-sight as much as possible.

To return to the theme of mourning, Jonte-Pace refers to the inability to mourn the mother, which was touched on earlier:

> To mourn the mother would be to identify with her, to become her. And we cannot identify with the mother because, as D. W. Winnicott (1972) and Julia Kristeva (1982) show, the separation from her is necessary for the birth and continuity of the self. A union with her would symbolize fragmentation, death and annihilation (Jonte-Pace. 2001: 138).

Francisco Bone's inability to mourn his own mother is the first stage in his own re-birth and continuity of the self. Jonte-Pace continues: "Death, absence, and loss are precipitating events of mourning and melancholia. The strange, yet familiar body of the mother is the corpus or corpse or 'open wound' underlying both" (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 138). Bone's mother becomes the "mother of humanity" and represents the mourning and melancholy triggered by human tragedy. According to Jonte-Pace, "fantasies of immortality are intertwined with ideas about maternity, death, and the uncanny" (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 139). Francisco Bone's Dream-book is a reflection on his own immortality, why he failed to die. It therefore follows that Harris should use "ideas about maternity, death and the uncanny" to emphasise themes such as his character's immortality and senses of loss and nostalgia for "the broken communities, the apparently lost cultures from which I have sprung" (Harris, 1996: 6).

It has been argued that Harris is pursuing an active dialogue with psychoanalysis, through his fiction, in order to promote a notion of healing and anamnesis that I would define in terms of religion. In this way he is formulating a

postcolonial 'talking cure'. But what is a 'talking cure' and can it be applied to a wider political and cultural situation? Jonte-Pace states:

> ... understanding is only part of what makes transformation possible in Freud's "talking cure". Freud explains the gradual process of healing in the context of the therapeutic relationship: insight, awareness, and understanding or "remembering" are followed by a slow and patient "working through" of resistance... In the context of the "talking cure," the element that makes possible the remembering and the working through is the transference, the relationship of patient to therapist (Jonte-Pace, 2001: 144).

Jonte-Pace continues by saying that outside of the patient-therapist relationship and within the broader cultural arena "the realms of art, literature, and religions often serve as a kind of transferential, transitional, or intermediate region" (Jonte, Pace, 2001: 145). If one accepts Jonte-Pace's persuasive argument, Harris could be interpreted as accessing a collective talking cure using the transitional space of literature and religion. Writing and religion, as has been established, both operate as therapeutic strategies, and allow the "working through", the process of insight, awareness, understanding and remembering, to take place.

The entire Dream-book can be interpreted as a progression through these stages. And the final pages of *Jonestown* could suggest that the "working through" is complete. A conclusion has been reached but the nature of this conclusion remains ambiguous. Bone enters into a Judgement Day and is held accountable for the colonial sins of humanity. When the Judges ask, "Who then is to be tried and judged?" Bone replies, "judge me... I am here before you. I have nothing. I am poor. Judge me. It is no accident" (Harris, 1996: 233). What follows is Bone's ambiguous point of recovery, or death:

> They took me without further ado to the edge of the cliff. The sun was still high though setting on the Skin of the Predator. It shone there, it was imprinted there. It was alive. It fell with me, the Predator fell with me, when their hands, the judges' hands,

drove me over the edge of the cliff. Black-out music. Black soul music. I fell into a net of music, the net of the huntsman Christ. The Predator peered through me, in me, but was held at bay in the net. We stood face to face, Dread and I, Predator and I. Old age and youth parted and I was naked in the lighted Darkness of the Self. The Child rode on the Predator's groaning back. Lightness becomes a new burden upon the extremities of galaxies in which humanity sees itself attuned to the sources and origins of every memorial star that takes it closer and closer – however far removed to the unfathomable body of the Creator (Harris, 1996: 233-4).

This leap of faith is a positive step in Francisco's journey and it leads him to the "music that addressed Lazarus" (Harris, 1996: 104) and thus his own resurrection. Earlier in his Dream-book, Francisco is urged to leap by the huntsman, but he is unable to do so:

> 'Leap...into my net and help me to hold the heart of the Predator at bay within the rhythms of profoundest self-confessional, self-judgemental creativity. The leap into space I grant is dangerous' (Harris, 1996: 75).

By the end of the Dream-book, Bone is able to entertain a "self-confessional, self judgemental creativity", as he cries "judge me", and he is able to leap. As a result of haunting rehearsals of "colonial possessions," "vanished empires," "imperial Limbo and Jonestown," Bone "became a diminutive cosmic architect of a Virgin Ship and of Memory theatre. All were stages for, and initiations into, my trial at the bar of time" (Harris, 1996: 77). Harris often uses the notion of architecture to refer to the building of new communities and cultures in the Caribbean, post slavery and Independence.[67] The image of Bone as a, "cosmic architect" suggests that the process of re-building and re-birth has begun; Bone is able to move beyond the tragedy and be reborn of the Virgin Ship, the womb of humanity and the vessel for his journey, as if Creation has been renewed and the "infinite rehearsal" has begun again. The final page of *Jonestown*

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[67] Harris writes: "I used the word 'architecture'... because I believe this is a valid approach to a gateway society as well as to a community which is involved in an original re-constitution or re-creation of variables of myth and legend in the wake of stages of conquest" (Taken from Harris's essay, "History, Fable and Myth", 1999/1970: 159)

therefore indicates Bone's final stage of initiation at the trial of time for he has progressed through an historical journey of anamnesis. The ritualized 'passing-over' symbolizes Bone's acceptance of events and therefore a point of recovery, albeit an ambiguous recovery.

A superficial reading of the novel *Jonestown,* and an initial paralleling with the recorded versions of events, suggest that Harris has been seduced by the myths that dominate the popular imagination. A closer reading, however, uncovers the multiple layers of history that are contained in *Jonestown*, and his attention to intricate details. Harris laments over the cycle of destruction in which humanity is trapped. His understanding of tragedy is therefore, in many ways, more insightful and haunting than accounts offered by historians. But Harris offers humanity some hope. *Jonestown* is an act of remembrance and retrieval. The psychoanalytic, religious and literary are used to enact a collective talking cure. These three sites of anamnesis are intricately woven within Harris's fiction to offer a complex yet inspiring site of recovery. The presence of the mother, and images of immortality and death within Harris's fiction urge the reader to analyse *Jonestown* in terms of the uncanny and the abject, notions which are ultimately bound to religion and literature. Both the victims of individual and historical tragedy are healed through the process of mourning and remembrance, which is accessed and expressed most powerfully through religion and literature, particularly postcolonial literature. The aim of this chapter has been to translate the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to the reading of postcolonial fiction and to continue the project of exploring the multiple ways in which religion is a vital part of postcolonial fiction and poetry, and why. Central to Harris's fiction is the act of religious anamnesis, "the recalling to memory of the past" (Hervieu-Leger, 2000: 125). Harris emphasises this project using images from the psychoanalytical process of healing, or the talking

cure. This chapter has exposed what is lost in a reading of Harris's work that shies away from the notion of the religious as a site of transference.

CHAPTER FOUR:

CAUGHT IN ANANCY'S[68] WEB: THE POETRY OF JOHN AGARD, GRACE NICHOLS AND OTHERS

> But did you think I'd desert you so easy
> my diasporic spiderlings
> my siblings of the web
>
> No I stowed away in the ceiling
> of your dreams whose waters
> the big ships could not chart
>
> And in your utmost imaginings
> I began new weavings (from Weblines by John Agard, 1983/2000: 42).

Understanding religion as an act of remembrance and as a way in which communities re-negotiate themselves within the conflicting boundaries and in response to traumatic memories is further emphasised by the continued re-narration of the Anancy tales. The tales of the trickster spider, Anancy, are a vital ingredient in the creativity of the Caribbean imagination. Anancy's ingenuity, particularly when used to trick more powerful creatures, provided inspiration and hope for the generations of enslaved peoples that lived in the Caribbean under colonial control. The Ashanti-derived trickster travelled across the Middle Passage in dark and forgotten corners, spinning silent webs to catch the discarded memories of his people, memories that were erased by the brutality they experienced during their journey. Anancy's magic then scattered these memories into the field of the imagination to encourage the process of re-creation and renewal to begin.

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[68] Anancy is spelt in several ways: 'Ananse' is the common spelling when referring to the Ashanti, and in the Caribbean it is either spelt 'Anansi' or 'Anancy'. I will refer to it as 'Anancy' throughout.

The Anancy tales have provided contemporary writers and poets with a metaphoric tool with which to explore and bring to life the psychic dismemberment that their ancestors endured and the 're-memberment' of which they are a significant part. Writers employ the Anancy tactics of parody, laughter and play to subvert colonial structures and to reveal new creative possibilities from the margins. Writers such as Edward Brathwaite, Derek Walcott and George Lamming have been bringing Anancy into their work since the 1960's,[69] both metaphorically and with reference to Anancy as a character, but the subsequent generation of Caribbean writers has also been caught in Anancy's web. Anancy is a significant part of the mythic landscape of Guyana (that is the landscape that carries the imprints of diverse cultural memories), as Wilson Harris repeatedly demonstrates and as more recent writers such as John Agard and Grace Nichols playfully celebrate through their work, which will be the focus for this chapter. Anancy is also a significant part of the religious imagination of the Guyanese people; Anancy is a trickster who unsettles established boundaries but simultaneously affirms social cohesion through laughter and remembrance. The reestablishment of these boundaries is, I have argued, can be usefully described as a religious process. Anancy is a sacred tool with which to orientate oneself within the conflicting boundaries of the Caribbean, both during slavery and since emancipation. The religious imagination is therefore significantly affected by the myth of Anancy.

This chapter will initially explore material on the West African Ashanti folktales to decipher Caribbean Anancy's roots and the changes that have occurred to the tales and their reception through his transportation. More general theoretical and anthropological works on the trickster and also on myth raise important questions, particularly for the interdisciplinary approach. For example, the Swiss psychiatrist Carl

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[69] See Brathwaite's *The Arrivants,* 1967, Oxford University Press.

Jung interprets the retelling of trickster stories as an act of 'therapeutic anamnesis', which highlights important parallels with the previous chapter. Finally, my attention will turn to Anancy in Guyana and the effect his presence has had on the mythic and religious landscape as depicted by poets John Agard, Grace Nichols and Maggie Harris.

HISTORY OF 'ANANSE' AND THE ROLE OF MYTH

'Ananse' is the trickster legend of Ashanti mythology of the Akan in West Africa, whence many of the Caribbean slaves were transported from between 1662 and 1867.[70] In one of the first tales, Ananse succeeds in having the folk stories named after him by outwitting Nyame, the High God.[71] The stories of Nyame become *anansesem*, literally Ananse stories (Pelton, 1980: 28). In this story, Anancy approaches Nyame and asks for the stories to be told in his name. Nyame is amused by Anancy's audacity and so agrees to change the name of the tales if Anancy can do what Nyame imagines to be three impossible tasks. The tasks vary slightly according to the collection but as recorded by Barker, Anancy is asked to bring three things: "the first was a jar full of live bees, the second was a boa-constrictor, and the third a tiger" (Barker, 1917: 9). Anancy manages to trick each of these animals in entertaining ways and so Nyame grudgingly keeps his promise and names the stories after the spider. It is through his wit rather than strength that Anancy gets what he wants. In order to catch the bees:

> ... he took an earthen vessel and set out for a place where he knew there were a number of bees. When he came in sight of the

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[70] See article by David Eltis, David Richardson, and Stephen Behrendt (1999). In their recently collected data they estimate that 268,400 slaves in 943 ships arrived in Guyana between 1662 and 1867 (Eltis et. al., 1999: 26). Half of those arriving in Guyana came from the Gold Coast (Eltis et. al., 1999: 30).

[71] This is often the initial story in collections of Anancy tales. See R. S. Rattray (1930) and W. H. Barker (1917) for African Ananse tales and Walter Jekyll (1917) and Philip Sherlock (1956, 1966) for stories collected in the Caribbean. Interestingly, Nyame is not referred to in the Caribbean versions. The stories were initially Tiger stories and Tiger is often in the place of Nyame throughout the tales. Anancy is terrified of Tiger but often succeeds in outwitting him.

bees he began saying to himself, 'They will not be able to fill this jar' – 'Yes, they will be able to' – 'No, they will not be able,' until the bees came up to him and said, 'What are you talking about, Mr. Anansi?' He thereupon explained to them that Hyankupon [Nyame] and he had had a great dispute. [Nyame] had said the bees could not fly into the jar – Anansi had said they could. The bees immediately declared that of course they could fly into the jar – which they at once did. As soon as they were safely inside, Anansi sealed up the jar and sent it off to [Nyame] (Barker, 1917: 9-10).

The wit of Anancy and other tricksters has captured the cultural imagination and has been strongly debated by anthropologists, psychoanalysts, and historians of religions for centuries. Many Western academics have proposed an array of interpretations from the notion that it is a product of primitive culture, particularly the use of animals in place of humans,[72] to the psychological interpretation that the trickster should be understood as an archetype, a universal part of the mind.[73] Unfortunately, the array of interpretations seems to reveal more about ethnocentric tendencies of traditional anthropology than the various trickster figures. Anthropologists such as E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Claude Levi-Strauss have struggled to fit the trickster into the specific categories that they have formulated,[74] as is true of the psychoanalytic approach.

Robert Pelton appears to be one of the first to question these approaches and broaden his interpretative methods. He acknowledges the important issues that previous scholars have raised (such as Carl Jung's notion of therapeutic anamnesis) but establishes a new approach that more strongly reflects the social network within which

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[72] See Walter Jekyll (1907). Alice Werner in her Introduction writes: "the native mind is quite ready to assume that animals think and act in much the same way as human beings" (Jekyll, 1907: xiii). This view is contradicted as early as 1930 when R. S. Rattray writes that the animal names "were chosen with all the cleverness and insight into their various characteristics which one would expect from a nation of hunters and dwellers with nature" (Rattray, 1930: xii).

[73] Carl Jung's notion of the archetype will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Jung interprets the trickster as an archetype that is "still lurking in the sophisticated psyche of Western man" (Pelton, 1980: 228). As discussed by Pelton, Jung also "sees that the very act of retelling the myth of the trickster is a 'therapeutic anamnesis'" (Pelton, 1980: 229). This aspect of Jung's theory is worth more attention, considering that the notion of anamnesis is becoming a key concept in the thesis and in the reading of the literature.

[74] See Pelton (1980: 3)

the different trickster figures are celebrated.[75] For Pelton, understanding the trickster is a question of "cross-cultural hermeneutics" (Pelton, 1980: 3). The barriers of interpretation between contrasting cultures, such as Western academia and Ashanti society, have limited a fruitful dialogue. Pelton goes on to say that the problem "is... one of language":

> The trickster speaks – and embodies – a vivid and subtle religious language, through which he links animality and ritual transformation, shapes culture by means of sex and laughter, ties cosmic process to personal history, empowers divination to change boundaries into horizons, and reveals the passages to sacred embedded life (Pelton, 1980: 3).

I will argue later that it is this *religious* language which travelled with Anancy into the Caribbean and infused the literature and poetry of contemporary artists.[76] Interestingly, Pelton admits that the "many modes of speech... our culture has devised to talk about religion are not fully suited to the task" (Pelton, 1980: 13). This is an academic as well as a social dilemma; historians of religion frequently adapt their own approach, and their language, in order to respond to theoretical developments in the field. For example, the term religion is recognised by certain theorists as problematic leading to the reassessment of its usage and the language used to describe what it is believed to encompass. As is argued throughout, for postcolonial theorists this lack of language has led to a silence in the interpretation of significant works. Part of my project, therefore, is to formulate a language, which will unavoidably have its own limitations, with which to discuss and analyse such works.

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[75] His book is divided into four main chapters in which he focuses separately on four West African tricksters: Ananse, Legba of the Fon, Eshnu of the Yoruba, and Ogo-Yurugu of the Dogon.
[76] With reference to Anancy in the Caribbean, Sharlene Poliner (1984) states "whether he acts out of malice, misery, or mercy, the very essence of Annancy's power – and, indeed the very essence of Annancy himself – is language. For people whose word was long discarded as valid legal testimony and who were mocked for being unable to communicate in local creole idiom, Annancy reclaims an identity and heritage" (1984: 18).

Pelton recognises that the task for scholars who are interested in mythology and folklore is to "find a way to speak about 'remembering' so that we can understand how the trickster links the mythical past to the present" (Pelton, 1980: 12). As with previous and subsequent chapters the notion of 'remembrance' again becomes central to the interpretation of the fiction. Contemporary Guyanese fiction is linked to the mythical past of Ashanti society (as well as Indian, Amerindian, Chinese and Portuguese). However this mythical past is fused with the historical past of slavery and the Middle Passage; a vital communication with lost ancestries is allowed to continue whilst providing a language with which to talk about the experiences which are engraved in the 'mind's eye'[77] but often inexplicable in words. It is at this point that psychoanalytical criticism can provide helpful insights into the act of remembrance and trauma.[78] As Pelton says, "the trickster is an anamnesis. He is the riddle that once posed brings the healing of the memory and the liberation of the imagination" (Pelton, 1980: 275). Through the act of retelling, painful memories are erased and the imagination can begin to carve new images and patterns of representation.

It is in the act of retelling the stories that the social power lies. Through the story telling, social boundaries are reaffirmed and social order is renewed. However, the celebrated trickster repeatedly contradicts and defies the rules; the retelling of trickster stories would therefore suggest a social defiance rather than renewal. Pelton, however, points out that it is through the breaking of the rules that the rules are

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[77] This is phrase used by Harris, particularly in *Jonestown*, to refer to the visions and memories engraved in one's consciousness. See Harris, 1996: 20.
[78] As discussed widely in Chapter Three with reference to the work of Wilson Harris.

established: "Ananse's movement away from order in the end creates order" (Pelton, 1980: 36).[79] Pelton continues:

> Thus there is a double doubleness about him: if he parodies sacred mysteries by disguising himself as a bird, by claiming the power to heal, or by fishing with the spirits, his parody brings about creation, not destruction... he negates negation and thereby gives birth to a dialectic whose aim is not synthesis, but a never-ending juggling of thesis and antithesis (Pelton, 1980: 36-7).

As seen in Chapter Three with reference to Harris's *Jonestown,* parody has become a key tool in the story-telling tactics of Caribbean writers. In this context, parody also acts to "bring about creation" to counteract the destruction caused by colonial violence, particularly to African social networks. The Anancy tales therefore continue a similar process in their new surroundings, particularly through the works of contemporary writers and poets. In West Africa the Anancy tales play with social tensions in order to diffuse situations through laughter allowing a process of renewal to take place and for authority to be undermined. The telling of the stories to children further reinforces the social cohesion as "they become the source of that renewal" (Pelton, 1980: 69). Pelton continues by stating that Anancy "is the agent of social anamnesis for the children and, through them, the whole society" (Pelton, 1980: 69). John Agard and Grace Nichols both write children's fiction and poetry, and the Anancy tales are often told to groups of children in the Caribbean, ensuring that the African ancestry is always present in children's memories.

Anancy and other trickster figures embody multiple contradictions and therefore resist standardised interpretations of religion; in order to understand why the

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[79] See also Christopher Vecsey (1993): "By breaking the patterns of a culture the trickster helps define those patterns... [the tales] serve the vital purpose of questioning and affirming the most important societal concepts" (Vecsey, 1993: 106). And Poliner, who states "Thus, literally in the face of darkness and death, [the Anancy tales] offer to the Ashanti a double reassurance of order and creative renewal, an explanation of how their world came to be the way it is through the mischief of Ananse and the wisdom of Nyame" (1984: 13).

Anancy tales carry such importance in West Africa and in the Caribbean, perceptions of religion that rely on binary divisions must be set aside. The key to understanding Anancy is the acceptance of irony and ambiguity:

> ... in the world of myth we have the figure of the trickster, in whom the anomalous and the ordered, the sacred and the profane, the absurd and the meaningful are joined to create, not merely an ironic symbol, but an image of irony and of the working of the ironic imagination itself (Pelton, 1980: 260).

The understanding of religion as orientation, as established in Chapter One, provides an effective approach to the Anancy tales, both in West Africa and as used in Guyanese fiction and poetry. Within the Caribbean, the Anancy stories have been used to re-*orientate* the identities of fragmented and disillusioned communities in the wake of slavery. Conflicting boundaries and the continuous renewal of established boundaries can be celebrated rather than avoided within this understanding of religion. The contradictions and ambiguities within the tales defy structured and inflexible categories but represent the boundlessness and creativity of human thought and experience that in turn define religious experience. These patterns of contradiction established by the Anancy tales of West Africa persist in the literature of the Caribbean and provide opportunities for unbounded creativity. In the Caribbean, Anancy is a sacred tool with which to defy and contradict inflexible colonial boundaries whilst establishing new points of orientation.

The Western pursuit of knowledge often disregarded contradictions and tensions in non-Western societies, labelling them as a sign of the uncivilised and under-developed primitive mind. As has been established in the opening chapters, this search for knowledge was part of the colonial venture and what it produced was a "discourse of conquest" (Doueihi, 1993: 195). Anne Doueihi outlines a major flaw in the

hermeneutic practices of early Western scholarship, particularly in anthropology. The theoretical study of the trickster has been:

> a discourse of domination... a discourse that analyzes the conquered civilization in terms of the conquerors, and it is therefore... a discourse of conquest, a discourse that continues to express and accept an ideology sanctioning the domination of one culture over another (Doueihi, 1993: 195).

This vital observation establishes the network of power within which Western scholarship is located and exposes the agenda that has shaped ideas. The trickster tales are particularly awkward for the traditional Western scholar as a result of the ambiguous content, for ambiguity threatens the validity of unquestioned truths. The traditional response to such tales is to define them as profane[80] and inferior folk lore, as opposed to sacred myth, and therefore of little importance (Doueihi, 1993: 196). Doeuihi states that "the trickster is bounced back and forth, stretched and twisted, so as to fit within the framework staked out by the discourse of domination by means of which the Western world, scholars included, distorts and suppresses its other" (Doueihi, 1993: 196). Pelton's work has pioneered a more open-minded and celebratory approach to the tales but Doueihi's essay is still an important reminder of the flawed roots of Western scholarship and evidence of a need for a revised approach to postcolonial and non-Western phenomena. For Doueihi, the key to creative interpretations lies in the trickster stories themselves: "the trickster shows us a way to see the world by opening our minds to the spontaneous transformations of a reality that is always open and creative" (Doeuihi, 1993: 200). The alternative reality that the trickster embodies opens the minds of its listeners, readers and critics to new creative possibilities.

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[80] The definitions of sacred and profane are rooted in a Christian framework that allows little space for the contradictory messages that the trickster conveys. Although the trickster figure exists in Western Culture (for example, Brer Rabbit), he would still be excluded from the traditional categories of 'sacred' or 'religious'.

In the conclusion to an edited volume on the trickster,[81] William Hynes establishes six key themes which recur in most of the trickster stories (however, he is keen to resist a universal categorization of the trickster's personality). These themes are a helpful guideline, particularly when considering the impact of the Anancy stories on Guyanese fiction. Firstly, he refers to the "entertainment value of the trickster myths" (Hynes, 1993: 202). First and foremost, the trickster tales are told to induce laughter.[82] John Agard captures the humour of the tales in his poetry through hilarious cross-cultural dialogues representing his own journey, and that of many others, from ancestral Africa to the Caribbean to England. A perfect example is the poem "How Nansi Got Lead Part in *Swan Lake*":

> Soft as a fufu I glided in my tutu that covered my cucu,
> Doing a pas-de-deux me one twice times over, true-true,
> And pirou-eighted to make old spider grandmother proud (Agard, 2000:60).

This hilarious poem plays with the awkward meeting of Caribbean and Western art forms such as the ballet and Anancy folklore, which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. The second theme Hynes refers to is related to the first: "trickster myths are ritual vents for social frustrations" (Hynes, 1993: 206). Laughter is one way of inducing such "ritual vents". But Hynes is also referring to disharmonies or tensions amongst the group which can be satirised and thus diffused through the telling of the trickster tales. The third theme that Hynes refers to is that "tricksters reaffirm the belief system" (Hynes, 1993: 207). As discussed with reference to Pelton, the trickster's mocking of established rules actually reaffirms them. Fourthly, "tricksters are psychic explorers and adventures" (Hynes, 1993: 208). This is an interesting point that refers to

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[81] Edition is entitled *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts and Criticisms*, edited by William Hynes and William Doty, 1993, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

[82] Earlier in the edition, Hynes and Doty write: "American religiosity... has trouble with both the comic and the deceitful. The trickster figures referred to in this volume graph ways of operating that go against the Western grain" (Hynes & Doty, 1993: 28).

the psychic importance of the tales; the trickster repeatedly breaks physical boundaries and proposes a new state of reality by which writers such as Wilson Harris, as will shortly be seen, are particularly intrigued. The fifth point raised by Hynes is also of interest to a discussion on Guyanese fiction. It is that "tricksters are agents of creativity who transcend monoculturality" (Hynes, 1993: 211). This theme outlines why the Anancy tales are so useful to the postcolonial writer. Anancy provides a mythic framework for multivocality, creativity, and ambiguity around which the Caribbean writer can build his or her fiction and poetry. The final theme referred to by Hynes is that "tricksterish metaplay dissolves the order of things in the depth of the open-ended metaplay of life" (Hynes 1993: 214). Again, this a significant point with reference to the work of Harris who persistently challenges the established and expected "order of things" in favour of the metaphysical that undermines Western structures of reality. Hynes's point is also important to a discussion of the Anancy tales in the Caribbean as part of their purpose has been resistance to the colonial structures, particularly during slavery. The tales became an outlet for the social frustrations caused by plantation life and allowed access to an alternative "open-ended metaplay of life" in which the weak were victors over oppression.

These and other themes will be kept in mind as the focus is shifted from the anthropological interpretation of the African Anancy to an interpretation of the presence of Anancy in Guyanese poetry and fiction. Carl Jung's understanding of myth will provide a helpful transition between these two areas in light of the interesting questions he raises, particularly his notion that the retelling of trickster tales should be understood as an act of therapeutic anamnesis. Some theorists refer to the Anancy tales as myth and others refer to them as folk tales. As already discussed briefly, this is a process of legitimization; the tales are often considered too profane to be entitled myths. In the same way as the term 'religion' prioritises certain experiences, myths are

perceived as superior, presumably because of their 'religious' significance, as opposed to the irreligious content of folk tales such as the Anancy tales. The distinction is therefore based on a crude dichotomy for, as already established, the Anancy tales should also be considered in a religious context.[83] Carl Jung approached myth in helpful ways, as will be discussed, but his work was framed by a "discourse of domination" as a result of his location in a traditional school of thought. However Jung's work still assists in establishing key approaches to deciphering the meaning of myth both in society and in literature.[84]

Naomi Goldenberg (1979) responds to Jung's thoughts on myth from a feminist and religious studies perspective. According to Goldenberg, Jung believed that "the most important feature of any religion is its myth... When Jung used the word myth he referred to the deepest sort of experience in human life" (Goldenberg, 1979: 47). She continues:

> Myths function as the building materials of reality. They connect mind and body, matter and spirit, people and their experiences. This connection is vivid and palpable. The value of myth is judged by the quality of the interior feeling it generates in individuals (Goldenberg, 1979: 48).

The role of psychoanalysis, for Jung, is to realign individuals with mythic images by which to live. Previously religions had provided individuals with these myths but Jung

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[83] Christopher Vecsey points out that in Ashanti society there is no distinction between religion and society (Vecsey, 1993: 108). However in the same essay Vecsey confusingly claims that the Anancy tales "are not myths in any sense of the word" as there is "no apparent connection with Akan ritual; they are simply tales" (Vecsey, 1993: 108). This confirms that there is a great deal of confusion within the distinction. William Bascom in his essay "The Myth Ritual Theory" (1998: 427) calls for a clearer distinction between the two categories. As it stands the distinction seems to reveal more about the assumptions made by scholars using the categories than the categories themselves.

[84] See Segal, 1999, for discussions on myth, particularly Chapter Six: "Jung on Mythology". Segal writes: "For Jung, myth and religion have traditionally worked in tandem. Religion has preserved myth and myth has sustained religion. The heart of religion for Jung is neither belief nor practice, but experience, and myth provides the best entrée to the experience of God, which means to the unconscious" (Segal, 1999: 90).

believed religion was failing in this task and psychoanalysis was to become the guide to discovering the religious within the self (Goldenberg, 1979: 48-9).

Jung saw myths as universal. He writes: "myths and symbols... can arise autochthonously in every corner of the earth and yet are identical, because they are fashioned out of the same worldwide human unconscious, whose contents are infinitely less variable than are races and individuals" (Jung, edited by Segal, 1998: 62). Jung argued for a collective psyche or unconscious, which, for him, explained the recurrence of imagery in myths throughout the world. "These cases" he writes, "are so numerous that we are obliged to assume the existence of a collective psychic substratum. I have called this the *collective unconscious*" (Jung, edited by Segal, 1998: 67). Many scholars, particularly anthropologists, have rejected Jung's universalizing notions. Jung relied fully on secondary material collected by anthropologists and was not interested in social specificity (Pelton, 1980: 228). At the centre of Jung's universalizing theory on myth and the trickster is the much debated notion of the archetype. In response to the question of where the archetypes come from, he states:

> It seems to me that their origin can only be explained by assuming them to be deposits of the constantly repeated experiences of humanity... the archetype is a kind of readiness to produce over and over again the same or similar mythical ideas. Hence it seems as though what is impressed upon the unconscious were exclusively the subjective fantasy-ideas aroused by the physical process. We may therefore assume that the archetypes are recurrent impressions made by subjective reactions (Jung, edited by Segal, 1998: 77).

Jung therefore understands humanity to be enclosed in a permanent cycle of repetition, and this repetition creates archetypes. The unconscious absorbs these repetitions which are then manifested in dreams, fantasy or life (Jung, ed. by Segal, 1998: 78). Archetypes therefore allow Jung to map happenings in the unconscious on a collective plane. Mythology, for Jung, is the most powerful "projection of the collective unconscious"

(Jung, ed. by Segal, 1998: 79), and therefore the most revealing map of the human unconscious.

There is, however, a subtle but important difference between Jung's understanding of myths and of archetypes. Segal writes, "...myths are more than archetypes. Myths are stories. Archetypes... are motifs, or images, in the stories. Myths are consciously created. Archetypes are the unconscious raw material of myths" (Segal, 1998: 81-2). Jung understands archetypes as "involuntary manifestations" (Jung, ed. by Segal, 1998: 83), whereas myths are "handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth" (Jung, ed. by Segal, 1998: 83). This leads Jung into what I would consider one of the most serious flaws in his work, particularly for the context in which I am using it. He states that the use of myth as "a tribal history" is still applicable to 'primitive cultures' because:

> Primitive mentality differs from the civilised chiefly in that the conscious mind is far less developed in scope and intensity. Functions such as thinking, willing etc. are not yet differentiated; they are pre-conscious, and in the case of thinking, for instance, this shows itself in the circumstances that the primitive does not think consciously but that thoughts appear. The primitive cannot assert that he thinks; it is rather that "something thinks in him" (Jung, ed. by Segal, 1998: 83).

Not surprisingly, Jung fails to state what "circumstances" he is referring to. This ethnocentric attitude was common in Jung's time but still highlights a major flaw in his work. His quest for knowledge was based on the "discourse of domination" that Doeuihi refers to as, "an ideology sanctioning the domination of one culture over another" (Doueihi, 1993: 195). Goldenberg references even more outrageous racist commentary given by Jung. In a lecture in 1910, Jung stated: "The reasons for repression are to be sought in the specifically American complex, namely, living together with lower races, more particularly the Negroes. Living together with barbarous races has a suggestive effect on the laboriously subjugated instincts of the

white race and drags it down" (Goldenberg, 1979: 54). Jung based his work on a white supremacist ideology. This ideology allowed him to offer racist and sexist generalizations,[85] and to continue to refer to categories as archetypes. As Goldenberg states, "Jung often claimed archetypal status for the categories he formulated. Once a description of a national group or a psychic situation or of either of the two sexes was considered an archetype, it became immune to sociological analysis" (Goldenberg, 1979: 56). The notion of the archetype is therefore a dangerous category that allowed scholars to use universal assumptions that are rooted in sexist and racist ideology. Goldenberg writes, "Jungians do not realize that their archetypes are descriptions of cultural conditions that are rooted in history. Instead they prefer to see archetypes as the inescapable determinants of history" (Goldenberg, 1979: 60). This vital insight summarises the problem with Jung's archetypes: they are considered transcendent, ahistorical categories rather than culturally and historically specific reactions. This is particularly limiting when trying to understand the reactions, experiences and memories of those situated outside of the centre, and on the receiving end of such white supremacist ideologies.

The question then arises as to whether Jung's work can be of any use at all to a postcolonial enquiry. From the perspective of feminism, both Goldenberg (1979) and Carrette (1994) suggest that "what is required is to remove the hierarchical nature of archetype as a distinct and separate image process, and value the symbolic material with its diverse reactions in consciousness... where the archetypal is seen as a descriptive term and not a separate process" (Carrette, 1994: 174). It is therefore possible to salvage strands of Jungian analysis in light of its serious flaws. After pursing a thorough

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[85] Jung was as sexist as he was racist. Goldenberg writes that although Jung wrote about the feminine (something which Freud avoided), it was a very limited category: "as soon as a woman began to behave in a way that deviated from Jung's feminine archetypes, she was heavily censured. For example, Jung believed that women courted psychological disaster if they attempted to work at a 'masculine' job" (Goldenberg, 1979: 56).

investigation into the history of the 'archetype', Carrette writes that the notion of the archetype has "ceased to function effectively in relation to experience and phenomena" (Carrette, 1994: 185-186). However, "this does not necessarily mean a rejection of Jung's ideas... but a modification and clarification of existing concepts and premises" (Carrette, 1994: 187). For my analysis, Jung's most important insight is his understanding of the retelling of the trickster myths as an act of therapeutic anamnesis (Pelton, 1980: 229). As discussed more thoroughly in the previous chapter, the notion of healing through retelling provides a persuasive analysis of postcolonial fiction. The constant remapping of past events into a more meaningful context allows healing to take place. The trickster, according to Jung, becomes a "saviour figure" and confirms "the mythological truth that the wounded wounder is the agent of healing, and the sufferer takes away suffering" (Jung, as quoted by Pelton, 1980: 229-230). Anancy is therefore a tool of anamnesis, a symbol of healing and progression. Another helpful part of Jung's work, particularly in the light of how it is being understood throughout the thesis, is his conception of religion. According to Goldenberg, "Jung wanted religion to be a phenomenon that always remained open to each individual's conception of it as that conception was revealed in the activities of dream and fantasy" (Goldenberg, 1979: 70). This is particularly relevant when considering the work of Wilson Harris. Harris's fiction is led by the revelations of dream and fantasy, as they merge with past lives and legends. Harris's work has several correlations with the psychology of Jung,[86] and this is one of the most recognisable. Religion is revealed through the dream world of his characters; their spiritual quests often reveal to them hidden secrets of the meaning of life. Donne and his crew in *Palace of the Peacock* retrace the journey of their dead selves in order to be cleansed of their errors and to reach a

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[86] In his essay "Merlin and Parsifal: Adversial Twins" (edited by Andrew Bundy, 1999), Harris engages in a discussion with the work of Jung, particularly the notion of cross-cultural legends.

place of understanding. Dream and fantasy can offer insight into the religious imagination. As Goldenberg states, "Jung's analysis of the religious nature of fantasy and dream is of crucial importance for anyone interested in providing alternatives to religious activities as prescribed by traditional institutions" (Goldenberg, 1979: 70). Many postcolonial writers aim to find an understanding of religion that is outside the boundaries prescribed by the Christian missionaries in the Caribbean. Jung offers an appealing interpretation which works persuasively with Guyanese fiction and poetry, and is outside the structures of colonial Christianity.

ANANCY AS A METAPHOR IN GUYANESE FICTION AND POETRY

Harris is also persuaded by Jung's notion of the archetype. For Harris, archetypes explain the cycles of destruction which nature and humanity are engaged in (as discussed more thoroughly in the previous chapter). However these archetypes are most powerfully realised, as Jung also believed, in dream. Harris talks about being "visited by archetypal and troubling dreams", and it appears to be these dreams that are translated in to his fictional works. Harris writes:

> Archetypal dreams employ symbols of brokenness to depict the shedding of habit. A naked jar sings in a hollow body, sings to be restored, re-filled with the blood of the imagination. The jar sleeps yet sings (Harris, 1999: 42).[87]

Harris is referring to the bone-flute as an archetypal instrument that carries the "blood of the imagination" throughout generations. As an archetype, the flute produces the unconscious manifestation of past lives and memories as the "jar sleeps yet sings". For Harris, archetypal images offer a creative response to the merging of myths and legends

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[87] This quotation is taken from Harris's essay, "The Music of Living Landscapes" published by Bundy, 1999. It was first heard as a broadcast on Radio BBC Four, November 12th 1996.

in Guyana. The notion of recurring myths and archetypes, particularly through dreams and fantasy, provide Harris with a tool with which to access the Guyanese imagination and represent it within fiction. Harris has not openly rejected any of Jung's work and his white supremacist ideologies. However, Harris persuasively[88] transfers Jung's theoretical models into a postcolonial context. An important difference, that indicates Harris's engagement with the troubling aspects of archetypal theory, is that he refers to "broken archetypes" for "archetypes cannot be seized in their wholeness" (Harris, 2000: 249).[89] This is vital difference from Jung's archetypes as Harris's phrase embodies the type of contradiction that traditional Western scholarship finds unsettling. The notion "broken archetype" acknowledges that the psychic dismemberment caused by colonial invasion to indigenous peoples and slaves left scars and chasms in the unconscious. Through his fictional works, Harris seeks to build "bridges across chasms in reality", and the "quest for bridges is born... of the activity of broken archetypes" (Harris, 2000: 249). In particular, Harris refers to the broken Virgin-archetype; she resists absolutes as "she secretes elements of Arawak as well as European mythology" (Harris, 2000: 250). According to Harris, the violence of civilisation has led to the fracturing of stable archetypes, such as Jung proposed, but this has in turn allowed "fallacious absolutes" to be questioned leading to the enrichment of "our creative conscience" (Harris, 2000: 249). For Harris, "the broken archetype becomes, therefore, a re-visionary dynamic, in all its factors and strands, that we may address and immerse ourselves within the womb of space and time" (Harris, 2000: 249-50). The broken archetype is therefore a key to re-visioning the imagination post-conquest. Anancy the

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[88] As discussed in the previous chapter, Harris's notion of the feminine is often limited: women are often goddesses, virgins or mothers. There is therefore a limitation to Harris's *persuasive* use of Jung's universalising archetype category.
[89] Taken from essay "Apprenticeship of the Furies" (2000).

spider, in his Caribbean form, is, I imagine, one such broken archetype for Harris as he spins his webs of creativity.

Harris's, and other Caribbean writers', use of myth within their fiction is a powerful tactic in the renewal of Caribbean creativity. As Barbara Webb explains, many writers have rejected "historical representation in fiction in favour of what they consider the more creative forms of mythic discourse" (Webb, 1992: 3).[90] The hybridization of mythic discourse in the Caribbean, as a result of Amerindian heritage, African slavery, Indian indentureship, and European influences, has inspired creative responses to a violent history, and has led to Harris's broken archetypes. This history can be rewritten using the myths of the cross-cultural communities, for "the folk or mythic imagination is the key to artistic and historical understanding" (Webb, 1992: 4). Webb argues that the:

> literary project... is to reveal the hidden traces of historical experience erased from the collective memory of an exploited and oppressed people, so that history may be reconceived as a future history to be made (Webb, 1992: 7).

The Anancy tales are essential to the folk and mythic imagination of the Caribbean and therefore a key tool in the literary project Webb describes. Through the telling of the tales, and the incorporation of them into fiction and poetry, the collective memory can be re-envisioned and a "future history" reconceived.

The bodily transportation of the Anancy tales from Africa to the Caribbean, across the Middle Passage, has ensured that they continue to live in the mythic

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[90] See also Joyce Jonas and her commentary on the work of George Lamming and Wilson Harris: "Embedded in the narrative structures employed by Lamming and Harris, then, is a total rejection of the very concept of history. Written historical texts lift events out of time and fix them in space so that they become solid objects – an architecture of a people's past acts. No such architecture exists in oral culture, where memory and imagination make oral recapitulation of the past a renewed corporate immersion into relived experience... They demystify history, exposing institutionalized history writing as an entirely arbitrary systematizing of selected events (akin to fictive narrative) that serves an ideological purpose but is never, nor ever can be, objectively factual" (Jonas, 1990: 135).

imagination. Anancy's 'shape-shifting' abilities are central to how he has been conceived in the Caribbean imagination. Anancy's ability to shift his form from human to spider, usually in times of trouble, has been translated into the communal re-imaginings of the Middle Passage. It is believed that the limbo dance originated on the slave ships as a form of exercise as there was so little space and the dance continues to be celebrated in Caribbean carnival and calypso as a symbol of survival. The bodily contortions of the limbo dance can also be directly related to the trickster spider-man, Anancy. As limbs are lowered and spread to carry out the dance, the dancer is transformed into a human-spider. Harris pursues this further:

> But there is something else in the limbo-anancy syndrome... and that is the curious dislocation of a chain of miles reflected in the dance so that a re-trace of the Middle Passage from Africa to the Americas and the West Indies is not to be equated with a uniform sum. Not only has the journey from the Old World to the new varied with each century and each method of transport but needs to be re-activated in the imagination as a limbo-perspective when one dwells on the Middle Passage: a limbo gateway between Africa and the Caribbean (Harris, ed. by Bundy, 1999: 157).[91]

The dance takes on a spiritual and religious dimension as it symbolises the body's transportation from Africa to the Caribbean. Geneviève Fabre states that in Africa, "dance was a way of mediating between the godly and the human, the living and the dead... Dancers not only communicated with the spirits but impersonated them through specific body movements, rhythms, or masks and became possessed themselves" (Fabre, 1999: 33). During the Middle Passage, dance provided a reunion with "dismembered gods" (Harris, 1999: 158). Metamorphosis into the trickster spider-god allowed the slaves to "re-enact the tragedy of dismemberment and dislocation" but also "the possibility of transformation through recollection, reassembly and movement" (Fabre, 1999: 43). Fabre also refers to the invisibility achieved through

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[91]This essay, "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and the Guianas" was first presented at the Edgar Mittelholzer Lectures in 1970, at the Ministry of Information and Culture, Georgetown.

'shape-shifting' into a human-spider, as limbs are contorted to fit into tiny spaces: "Invisible or perceived only as bodies and commodities that were shipped away, the enslaved would turn this liability... into an asset and proclaim with vehemence of limb and voice their humanity and vitality" (Fabre, 1999: 42).

As the body is dislocated from its roots, the dance provides a spiritual re-memberment to be carried with them to new shores: a "limbo gateway". For Harris this gateway or threshold is "the archetypal sea-change stemming from Old Worlds" (Harris, ed. by Bundy, 1999: 157). The continued enactment of the limbo dance provides an "activation of subconscious and sleeping resources in the phantom limb of dismembered slave and god" (Harris, ed. by Bundy, 1999: 158). The dance is not only a 're-membering' but also a summoning of the memories repressed by the trauma of the passage and a re-alignment with a spiritual and mythical past. However, it is not a simple remembrance or "total recall of an African past", for many memories were irretrievably lost, even to the unconscious. As Harris says, "limbo was rather the renascence of a new corpus of sensibility that could translate and accommodate African and other legacies within a new architecture of cultures" (Harris, ed. by Bundy, 1999: 158). The Anancy tales are part of the building blocks of the "new architecture of cultures" which was built in the Caribbean in the wake of conquest and slavery. Harris relates the limbo dance and its history to Haitian Vodun,[92] which is also a unique response to the hybridisation of myths and legends in the Caribbean as it "seeks to accommodate new Catholic features in its constitution of the muse" (Harris, ed. by Bundy, 1999: 158). The religious body is also drawn to respond to the dislocation and relocation caused by slavery and it does this by uniting strands of conflicting cultures. The psychic, spiritual, and physical self are absorbed in the re-creation of the

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[92] Harris uses this spelling (vodun) throughout his essay.

imagination, and the re-awakening of the collective memory. As Jung states, the dreams, which are imbued with the unconscious memories of ancestral lives, reveal religious phenomena. The "anancy-syndrome" and Haitian vodun are a manifestation of the religious memory.

Harris ends the essay with reference to the artist's role in the building of the "new architecture of cultures". Imagination thrives at the 'limbo gateway', and Harris sees the "necessity for the re-visionary, profoundly courageous, open-spirited and receptive artist of conscience whose evolution out of the folk as poet, novelist, painter is a symbol of risk, a symbol of inner integrity" (Harris, ed. by Bundy, 1999: 165). Harris relates this artist to the trickster as it "incurs a gamble of the soul". The poet, John Agard, is committed to the trickster's tactics; his poetry is about play and laughter but at the core of this playfulness lie complex webs of meaning that represent his commitment to the re-visioning of culture and imagination. The collection of poems entitled *Limbo Dancer in Dark Glasses* (1983/2000) is a celebration of the shape-shifting limbo dance and the bodies possessed by the spider-god:

> whether male or female
> who can be sure
>
> who can pin a gender
> on this limbo dancer
>
> who can decipher
> this human spider
>
> dismembered under
> a deck of fire (Agard, 1983/2000: 85).

The limbo dance transforms its performers beyond human recognition. Just like Anancy, who changes from male to female, human to animal, the dancers contort their bodies and perform a rhythmic feat. Agard captures the graceful and quiet movements of the dancers; his words demand to be whispered so as to maintain the mystery of the

limbo dancer, hidden behind dark glasses. The phrase "dark glasses" is reminiscent of DuBois's notion of double consciousness (*The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903), which he described using the metaphor of a veil. The "dark glasses" provide the gift of 'second-sight' but simultaneously define their subject in racialised terms as a result of their darkness.

The limbo dancer is the child of "Mother of universe/drunk with thirst/for movement" [93] (Agard, 1983/2000: 87), born of the "primal womb" [94] (Agard, 1983/2000: 87). Mother Earth:

> Arched her belly like a bow
> Stretched every limb to limitless
> Saying when time ripe
> For giving birth
>
> Let this child of mine be called limbo ("Name" by Agard, 1983/2000: 87).

The limbo dancer is therefore a mythical being, a manifestation of a history of bodily contortions from the hold of the slave ships. Nature and humanity unite to form a celebratory dance of survival. The landscape, particularly in Guyana, is central to the creation of re-visionary myth. From the rough seas to the jungle interiors, the land will not let its inhabitants forget that it is a living, breathing force. For, as Harris writes, "landscape possessed resonance. The landscape possessed a life, because the landscape, for me, is like an open book and the alphabet with which one worked was all around me" (Harris, 1999: 40).[95] A union with the landscape is necessary for survival. It is also where creation, or re-creation, begins. The arching belly and stretching limbs of

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[93] From the poem, "Name".
[94] From the poem, "Limbo Dancer's Wombsong".
[95] This is taken from the essay "The Music of Living Landscapes". In the essay, Harris speaks of his experiences as a land surveyor in the Guyanese interior and the profound effect this had on his life and writing. *Palace of the Peacock* (Faber & Faber, 1960) was a direct result of this experience.

"Mother Earth"[96] capture the constant movement, groaning, and transformation of the land and sea. She never settles and is always in a process of renewal and rebirth, acting as the perfect muse for the Guyanese author who is also entangled in the same process. As Agard writes:

> and in the mouths of exile
> I will spin proverbs
> bridging two worlds
>
> teach transplanted ones
> the weaver's way with words
>
> hide talking drum
> in skin of English words
>
> fetch rainwater vowels
> in goblet of mouth... (From "When Water Was All the Talk in the Rafters of History" by Agard, 2000: 48-49).

The poet is dedicated to the bridging of these divided worlds as "new melodies spiralled/from old drumbeats" and "from old brutalities/new beings emerged" (Agard, 2000: 50). The continuity of Agard's fifteen-page-long poem, unbroken by punctuation and sustained by the rhythmic flow, is itself a journey from ancestral Africa to the Caribbean. The poem mirrors the achievement of cultural continuity and renewal in the face of "old brutalities". Agard is calling for a new history to be forged:

> It's weaving time, my people
>
> Gather your fragments
> into fabrics
>
> Gather your wanderings
> Into webs
>
> Gather your threads
> Into tapestries
>
> Gather your contradictions

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[96] Agard's gendering of the landscape by calling it "Mother Earth" is in many ways problematic. It is a trait of early colonisers who feminised the landscape through metaphors of abundant fertility, rape and possession.

Into cloths of wholeness (Agard, 2000: 54).

Agard harnesses the creativity at the 'limbo gateway' and encourages a re-visioning of a "new architecture of cultures" (Harris, 1999: 158). The spider metaphors allow Agard to "weave between the lines" (Agard, 2000: 51), as the notion of shape-shifting is transferred onto the elusive nature of the written and spoken word, and to join the different ancestral threads to form one tapestry.

The movements and stretched limbs of the limbo dancer also enable a link with ancestral shores:

> In the morning when I wake
> I give a good stretch
> & my limbs know no limit
>
> my fingers stroke sands of Africa
>
> my toes curl around lianas
> of Brazilian rainforest ("Limbo Dancer's Morning" by Agard, 1983/2000: 88).

The dance is a remembrance of Africa but also a product of the merging of multiple cultures, as already discussed. For Agard, this results in a spatial infinity where no boundaries exist: "I seem to lose all sense of space/& in so doing become space" (Agard, 1983/2000: 88). The limbo dancer is absorbed into the atmosphere and into the natural music of the borderless landscapes: "my limbs merge with wind/sound floods my every fibre/my toes grope for holes of flute..." (Agard, 1983/2000: 88). As Harris says, "the body of the dancer in a living landscape is the technology of music" (Harris, 1999: 46). Music is created by the merging of these landscapes within the body of the limbo dancer. This religious body becomes a vessel for the sounds of the living landscape.

The music of the limbo dancer is also present in his ability to bend words and language into a poetic display:

LIMB/BOW

pronounce dem
two syllable
real slow
you hear me
real slow ("Limbo Dancer's Mantra" by Agard, 1983/2000: 109).

Within this play with words and boundaries, Agard is portraying the intensity of a bodily and spiritual engagement with history and geography that can be understood in terms of religion. The rhythm of creole also embodies history as words are broken down into syllabic fragments such as "Limb/bow"; the sounds are witness to the ability to create music out of words that remember tragedy:

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

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

that will take care of itself (Agard, 1983/2000: 109).

The language born out of slavery acts as a meditation; the words, organised in short, truncated rhymes, lull the dancer and act as an incantation to the limbo god as the magical spider metamorphosis takes place. As Pelton states, "the trickster speaks – and embodies – a vivid and subtle religious language" (Pelton, 1980: 3). Agard translates the trickster's language into Caribbean Creole through poetry and demonstrates that the playfulness of Creole brings the Anancy stories to life as we "mediate on dem/two syllable"... "Limb/Bow". It is a language imbued with the trickster's laughter, ingenuity, and religious sensibility. The limbo-dancer urges a response that engages with the intensity of these experiences, a response that can be offered within the analytical space of religion.

The language is a key part of the creative process and Anancy provides an ideal metaphoric tool with which to bring this language to life. Helen Tiffin argues that, "metaphoric activity in post-colonial writing is thus likely to be more culturally functional than poetically decorative" (Tiffin, 1982: 15). The writing often is imbued with a political and cultural agenda but, as seen with Agard, the unconventional poetic of the language is undeniable. Tiffin goes on to say that metaphors are "active agents in the reconstitution of the colonial psyche, fragmented, debilitated, or apparently destroyed by the imperial process. It is thus not surprising to find that in many post-colonial traditions metaphors expressing on one hand, loss, trauma, exile and on the other, creativity, excitement, change are pervasive" (Tiffin, 1982: 17). As Tiffin goes on to say, Anancy is the ideal metaphor for contemporary writers because of his ambiguous character. However, Anancy does not always win, and he is often tripped up as a result of his own greed. This is a source of laughter and amusement. As Tiffin points out, Anancy is sometimes in the place of cruel master and overseer, thus further problematises a simple reading of Anancy as folk hero (Tiffin, 1982: 22). Tiffin argues that, "Anancy, then, was to some extent an object upon which the slaves displaced a great deal of their self-contempt and self-hate". This allowed 'the slave' to "reprimand and censor the undesirable part of himself [sic]... then find it possible to laugh at it..." (Tiffin, 1982: 22). The weakness in Tiffin's argument is her reference to the slave as a single, male entity. The social function of the Anancy tales is a complex matter but Tiffin seems to oversimplify it again by using archetypal concepts. As discussed earlier with reference to Pelton, the Anancy tales provide social cohesion and anamnesis, particularly through laughter, and laughter is culturally specific. As Doty and Hynes write:

> Much of American religiosity... has trouble dealing with the comic and the deceitful. The trickster figures... graph ways of operating that go against the Western grain. Despite Augustine's

> dictum that good can come from evil, we are taught to reject almost automatically the suggestion that a deceitful figure – by the definitions of our society, morally bad – can bring about good (Doty and Hynes, 1993: 28).

The telling of the trickster tales and the performance of the limbo dance were therefore frowned on by the colonial missionaries as sinful and heathen. The rebellious qualities of the tales unsettled the white overseers, which probably made their telling even more appealing. Their purpose is therefore transformed in the journey from Africa to the Caribbean. As Tiffin says, "Anancy tale telling seemed dangerous to a white plantocracy… In West Africa the actual telling of the tales had been a traditional and hence inherently conservative activity; but in the Caribbean its associations were inevitably more rebellious and radical" (Tiffin, 1982: 23). The controversial nature of the tales, as they unsettled the firmly established colonial boundaries and provided social cohesion for the slave society, something that the authorities were keen to prevent, has ensured their appeal for generations. My re-working of the term 'religion' is similarly a response to the restricting boundaries of a Western framing of the term; it is therefore ideal to consider the Anancy tales within the new analytical framework of 'religion'.

In honour of laughter and fun, Agard re-writes several of the classic Anancy tales in poetry. One such poem is "How Ananse's Waist Suffered a Double-Dine Dilemma" (Agard, 2000: 22), based on the story of how Anancy's waist became thin, for "My waist wasn't always this thin./Let me take you back to the beginning" (Agard, 2000: 22). This is a tale in which Anancy's trickery and greed backfire. A feast is taking place in two opposite villages and, because of his greed, Anancy is determined to benefit from both. He ties two ropes around his waist and gives each of his sons a rope telling them to head to the villages saying, "When feasting start, pull hard, I will come" (Agard, 2000: 23), thus enabling him to eat at both feasts. However:

How was I to know that both north and south
Would simultaneously start sharing out?

Well, to cut a long story short,
Those obedient boys pulled hard from south and north

You'd swear it was tug-o-war tussle
While I paid the price with my middle

Which I'm pleased to say
Lives on in legend and riddle (Agard, 2000: 23).

In many instances the tales are a simple source of amusement, with which writers and poets can celebrate their folk heritage, and some of the most amusing tales are those in which Anancy's plans backfire. In this instance Anancy provides laughter whilst simultaneously teaching a lesson on the downfalls of greed. The parody of this tale, and others, and the laughter they induce encourage social cohesion through anamnesis; as the tales are re-told throughout generations, the trickster brings the "healing of the memory and the liberation of the imagination" (Pelton, 1980: 275). Pelton's statement is even more vivid, and healing even more essential, in the light of the experiences of the African communities in the Caribbean. Though the tales are often a simple source of amusement they are also a reminder of the ability to heal the memory and liberate the imagination in the wake of communal tragedy. The ability to re-write the tales within their new context, as done by Agard and other poets but also by generations of oral story-tellers, is witness to this liberation of the imagination.

Agard pursues this playful re-writing of the tales by transporting Anancy to England in pursuit of the passage of many Caribbean peoples:

since spider feel at home
with thread and rope

I thought I'd try Eu-rope
(the name sounding promising) (From "The Embodiment", Agard, 2000: 56).

The placing of the mischievous Anancy in the English landscape allows Agard to capture the discomfort of diasporic peoples with the humour of Anancy-tactics:

> arrived at Heathrow not quite light
> eight nothing-to-declare suitcases
> balanced on eight metropolis-dreaming legs
>
> soon got used to juggling eight cups of tea
> like I was a spider embodiment of Earl Grey (Agard, 2000: 56).

The journey to the colonial metropolis is fraught with expectations and disappointments. It is a theme that many writers grapple with as they attempt to deal with the trials of their own journey through the healing medium of fiction and poetry. Through humour, Agard brings many of the tensions to the surface. For example, Anancy's role in *Swan Lake* plays on the racism which can sometimes be witnessed in ballet, particularly productions of *Swan Lake*; some directors would not view a black dancer amidst the sea of whiteness as aesthetically pleasing, however a spider is more promising:

> Face-masked, nerves unwracked, stomach butterfly-free,
> At audition time I presented my eight-legged mime
> And white leotards swanleapt in spotlight (From "How Nansi Got Lead Part in Swan Lake", by Agard, 2000: 60).

Agard undermines the aesthetics of such productions by placing Anancy, a spider with a lisp and a bald head, as the lead role:

> But paper hailed my artistry as spellbinding.
> First time ballet buffs had ever witnessed
> Ballerina swan transformed to spider gracefully unwinding (Agard, 2000: 60).

Agard mocks the fickle nature of an audience but also adapts Anancy's trickery into a British and contemporary landscape; if he was guaranteed a free meal, Anancy would be sure to attempt such a stunt in the classic tales. Agard combines the mythic tales as

celebrated by Western ballet (the transformation of the princess into the swan who is freed from her curse by the love of the beautiful prince) with the West African/Caribbean trickster myths of Anancy, the spider-man. As already indicated, early scholars of African folk tales deduced that the use of animals in place of human characters was a result of the under-developed primitive mind (see footnote 67). Agard mocks this assumption by placing Anancy alongside the acclaimed folk tale and cultural icon of *Swan Lake*.

Although using a different approach, the poetry of Grace Nichols tackles many similar issues as those raised by Agard as she mediates a mythical reunion with an ancestral past. Nichols re-collects the memories of the women who carried history in their wombs:

> Child of the middle passage womb
> push
> daughter of a vengeful Chi
> she came
> into the new world
> birth aching her pain
> from one continent/to another (from "One Continent/To Another", Nichols, 1984: 5).

The passage of women during slavery has been overlooked in history; the slave, for example, is often conceived as male rather than female.[97] Nichols marks the plight of the female body during slavery, whilst simultaneously celebrating the ancestral re-imaginings that take place through the female body:

> From the darkness within her
> from the dimness of previous incarnations
> the Congo surfaced
> so did Sierra Leone and the
> Gold Coast which she used to tread
> searching the horizons for lost
> moons

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[97] Refer to bell hooks *Ain't I a Woman,* 1982, Pluto Press, particularly Chapter One: 'Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience.'

her jigida guarding the crevice
the soft wet forest
between her thighs (Nichols, 1983: 6).

From the depths of her body, her ancestral past can be re-awakened; her body is intimately engaged with the lost landscapes of her ancestral past as her sexuality guides her through her history. As with Harris, it is through dream that the past and the religious imagination are truly revealed. Nichols laments, "I must construct myself a dreaam[sic]/one dream is all I need to keep/me from the borders of this darkness" (from "One Dream", Nichols, 1983: 38). Throughout *I is a long memoried woman* (1983), Nichols constructs a dream through which she is reunited with her ancestry, particularly her religious ancestry; her body is the vessel through which these religious re-awakenings take place:

Spirit of Sky
Spirit of Sea
Spirit of Stone
Spirit of Tree
Spirit that lurk in all things
Is at one with me ("The Wandering", Nichols, 1983: 58).

Atonement to the landscape is the first step in the spiritual journey to retrace a mythical past. And Anancy is one of the characters she meets during this journey:

I was the Ashanti spider
woman-keeper
of dreams
tenacious
opalescent
dark eyes
unblinking ("Like Anansi", Nichols, 1983: 66).

For Nichols, Anancy is the "woman-keeper of dreams". With "dark eyes/unblinking", she cunningly guards memories and ensures their safety in the unconscious, to be awakened through dream.

In *Sunris*, Nichols addresses Africa saying:

I think of you too and I marvel
how your myriad rituals
have survived the crucible.
How they remain with us like relics
In the pillow of our unconscious... (From "Sunris", Nichols, 1996: 66).

In *Sunris*, Nichols portrays the celebrations of Carnival in Guyana during which time a 'myriad of rituals' and deities from Africa, India, China, and Europe come together: "Bless my eyesight/Is a whole heap of deity/like they come to greet me/I think dis time I go make history" (Nichols, 1996: 72). The ancestral memories, stored in the "pillow of our unconscious", are re-awakened by the ceremonies of revival:

Beat dih iron Ogun
Lemme hear dih metal ring
Boom dih bass out Shango
Dih crowd they thundering

Cool me down Yemanja
Bathe my face in your river.
Dance yuh dance Kali
Destroy, renew me with each blood-shiver (Nichols, 1996: 73).

As the Carnival procession passes by and the deities possess their worshippers, a frenzy of cross-cultural dialogue begins to take place; the pantheon of Yoruba deities, Ogun, Shango, Yemanja, are reunited in the streets of Georgetown; the Hindu goddess Kali, who destroys and creates, and Shiva, with "each blood-shiver", christen the people in this new dialogue. Further down in the procession is the, "Virgin Mary gyal/shaking up like celebration" (Nichols, 1996: 73). And then finally, the narrator of the poem transforms herself as if to unite all of the strands of her heritage which "seem familiar/but I can't quite remember it..." (Nichols, 1996: 73):

With the Gods as my judge
And dih people my witness,
Heritage just reach out
And give me a kiss.
From dih depths of dih unconscious
I hear dih snake hiss,
I just done christen myself, SUNRIS (Nichols, 1996: 74).

Sunris delves into her unconscious and discovers all the strands of her history; her body becomes the channel for this history as she is the manifestation of her multiple heritage. Nichols formulates a new mythical landscape that is specific to Guyana and which ignores the boundaries of established traditions. This reorientation is a *religious* process that prioritises the impulses of the unconscious. Nichols provides her readers with a map of how religion should be understood in Guyanese fiction and poetry.

Another poet who re-organises classical mythology, with Anancy as her guide, is Maggie Harris in her collection *Limbolands* (1999). In the poem "I Am the Mythmaker, Said He", she creates a mythical dialogue between the Greek spider-goddess, Arachne, and the trickster-spider, Anancy:

> Arachne and Anancy meet to throw the dice again
> she with a wisp of silver greying at the temple
> he with a lilt of that selfsame skip
> and the curve of an ivory cane (Harris, 1999: 30).

Arachne is the character of Greek mythology who challenged Athena, the goddess of weaving, to a weaving contest. Though they produced work of an equal standard, Athena punished Arachne with a life of shame for challenging the gods, which pushed Arachne to suicide. Athena then took pity on Arachne and resurrected her, but as a spider so that she would not be totally free of her punishment but could at least continue to enjoy the art of weaving. Arachne, like Anancy, is portrayed as a mischievous character willing to challenge the gods. The meeting of these two stubborn characters forms an intriguing dialogue between two opposing mythic planes:

> But Arachne and Anancy both had stayed
> the trickster and the weaver both replayed
> through parallels of consciousness, the rolling of the dice
> the setting of the pattern, tapestries displayed... (Harris, 1999: 30).

In a battle of wits the two characters journey through a muddled landscape where Rapunzel finds herself in the jungles of Guyana and in the hands of Anancy:

In the dreamtime small
feet run from the creek
where Anancy, sit

ting on a lily
leaf laughed with a clap
of the hands and fash

ioned a sail out of
sugarcane leaves. There
Rapunzel stroked the roots
of his miniscule plantation
and briskly called his name

until he came. (Harris, 1999: 34).

Anancy produces a rhythmic re-enactment of the tale set in a Guyanese landscape where "Kiskadees called/through treetops heavy/with rain" (Harris, 1999: 34). He observes the tale "sit/ting on a lily leaf" and intoxicates it with crude innuendos, as if to shatter the purity of the classic Western fairytale. The shape-shifter challenges the boundaries of social networks, particularly as established by such patriarchal fairytales; the cursed Princess awaits the Prince to free her, whereas what Anancy portrays is an over-sexed scene in which both succumb to madness: "the prince tossed in his tower/...and Rupunzel lay naked sucking tubes of sugarcane" (Harris, 1999: 35). However, Anancy is still portrayed as a patriarchal figure in the classic African/Caribbean tales who sees women as objects of desire and service. Arachne chastises Anancy for this: "You are a fool, Anancy, Arachne slowly drawled/the time has passed for blame to be laid/always at women's door" (Harris, 1999: 35). Anancy responds to Arachne, saying:

I am the mythmaker I
perpetuating vision
wining and dining and players all
-pieces you and I (Harris, 1999: 36).

Arachne and Anancy are involved in a perpetual game of mythmaking, in which they revise mythology in the light of history and the progression of time. It is as if they are the seeds in the unconscious, altering myth, for myth, according to Jung, is the site at which the unconscious is revealed.[98] The ingenious poem ends with "Λ & Λ still scissored lay/in mimicry and majesty and ink" (Harris, 1999: 36). The two mischievous characters, godly re-writers of myth, settle down and await more players for their game of mythmaking.

Within Guyanese writing, Anancy is more popular amongst poets than novelists. However, there are several writers for whom Anancy is a source of inspiration. As already discussed, Wilson Harris's metaphoric musings are inspired by the trickster spider. Anancy is never far from the pages of Harris's fiction, either in the metaphoric imagery of 'limbo gateways', and 'dismembered limbs', or in the shape-shifting elusiveness of Harris's texts inspired by trickster mischievousness. At other times the spider is an explicit presence:

> He seemed oblivious of the cosmic Spider (the Carnival attire of a Child) on the dining-room coffin. He seemed oblivious of its subtle Carnival metamorphoses as it hopped on the floor and crept out of the room onto the riverbank and into the fabric of Mr Mageye's camera. Its eyes gleamed, light-year eyes within the cradle of humanity in the soil of the Earth; light-year eyes sensitive all at once in a peculiar and unexpected way to the wheeling presence of Kali. I felt my phantom fingers move on my hand that had been despoiled by Deacon's bullet on the Day of the Dead even though they were alive now, it seemed, in the cosmic Spider (From Jonestown, Harris, 1996: 205 - emphasis in original).

Francisco Bone's quest for re-memory in the novel *Jonestown* leads him to the "cosmic Spider". The spider provides Bone's dis-membered hand with "phantom fingers". As discussed with reference to Harris's essay, the limbo-anancy syndrome represents the dismemberment and trauma caused by the Middle Passage but the possibility of re-

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[98] Jung, ed. by Segal, 1998: 79.

creation and renewal in light of the versatility of the spider. Part of Bone's recovery from amnesia is granted by the spider, who provides him with a physical re-memberment, and the hope of renewal: "spider-metamorphosis enveloped the cradle and the grave and a resurrection of consciousness through the door of space" (Harris, 1996: 206). The renewal of creation through birth and death, through destruction and re-creation, is represented in the spider's metamorphosis as well as by the presence of the Hindu goddess, Kali (Harris, 1996: 204-5). Importantly, Harris portrays the Spider as a carnival figure as he playfully shifts through the narrative. As Jonas says, "the Anancy artist is the masquerading carnival figure par excellence, celebrating play in a structured world that threatens momently [sic] to destroy what is most precious in the human spirit" (Jonas, 1990: 5). Harris compares Anancy's role to that of the goddess Kali; though he offers renewal, his mischievous play could simultaneously destroy.

Harris's perpetual play with boundaries, which leaves the reader suspended in a disorientating space where rules are broken and the imagined becomes real, is also part of the trickster's influence. In response to Harris's trickster ways, Jonas writes:

> The emphasis on dream, vision, memory and myth, together with the metaphysical bent, pull away from the thing-oriented, materialistic world of empiricism to a world view which recognises a deeply hidden order mocking the limitations of our rigid forms and concepts (Jonas, 1990: 43).

Harris creates a fiction in which "social structure is negated by a pervasive trickster hovering where order ends and chaos begins" (Jonas, 1990: 43). For Jonas, the trickster allows writers to defy the colonial structures and boundaries through such playful tactics as those outlined above. The Great House at the slave plantations is a key site that represents the strict colonial structures and European ideals. For Jonas, Anancy represents the opportunity to destabilise this oppressive structure and to allow a folk voice, uninhibited by ambiguity, to respond. As Jonas states, "the House is the

superstructure of European cultural forms" in which "history, language and religion are... encompassed" (Jonas, 1990: 49). Religion, therefore, also represents the oppressive structures which need to be "broken down; the entire polarizing structure of insider/outsider... sacred/profane has to be demolished" (Jonas, 1990: 50). The folk imagination that responds to these structures and breaks them down can, however, also be understood as 'religious' negotiations. It is the definition of 'religion', as embodied by colonial Christianity, which needs to be re-structured and "broken down" in order to respond analytically to the ways in which communities restructure themselves against oppressive regimes. It is the trickster who provides the incentive for such a re-negotiation: "his survival in folk imagination surely has to do with this capacity to transform disruption, discontinuity, brokenness, and defect into triumphant new configurations of possibility" (Jonas, 1990: 51). Anancy transforms rigid boundaries and assumptions into future possibilities. He is therefore the ideal muse for re-imagining 'religion' in the post-colonial Caribbean as he encourages the breaking of boundaries but the re-visioning of the imagination, of which religion is a vital part.

In a forthcoming work by Fred D'Aguiar, entitled *Naming the Dead*,[99] the past is again re-imagined, and the Anancy stories play a central role in this *religious* process. The book is another return to the Jonestown settlement and the story of one female survivor. In the novel she recalls her role as a teacher in the Jonestown school, where she would frequently sit the children down and tell them Anancy stories. In a correspondence, D'Aguiar provided more insight into the novel:

> the main character, Corrine, tells the children of Jonestown Anancy stories to teach them how to survive Jonestown and learn a bit about human nature. The Anancy story is also a commentary using the roundabout route of fable, on the calamity that is Jonestown.

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[99] *Naming the Dead* is due to be published in 2005.

D'Aguiar also referred to "the fact that Anancy is at the centre of story-fying the Jonestown calamity" (email correspondences dating 12-05-04). Using myth and story-telling, as Harris does in a more abstract way, D'Aguiar aims to communicate a narrative of the Jonestown tragedy that does not rely on fear and hysteria. D'Aguiar, I imagine, is drawing a playful parallel with the myths that surround the Jonestown tragedy (see Chapter Three); many of the facts are unknown and much of the media reporting was itself a process of mythmaking. The Anancy stories offer a 'way into' the Jonestown myths. The trickster repeatedly revisits painful memories and offers a site of healing through laughter and remembrance. A more bleak interpretation, again inspired by the trickster's ambiguous and contradictory nature, is that Jim Jones became the ultimate trickster, who is also a saviour figure,[100] to the Jonestown members. D'Aguiar's representation of the children's involvement in Jonestown is also important. The re-telling of the tales to children, who are simultaneously engaged in a trickster nightmare, offers both hope and despair; they are the site of renewal, and thus healing, as the stories are retold to them, however the children do not survive and thus the renewal is cruelly aborted.[101]

A further attraction of the trickster for many novelists, as seen with the poetry of Agard, is in the mischievous and playful themes he inspires. Pauline Melville's short stories[102] are celebrations of trickster antics as characters and objects disappear and reappear, and the tales twist and turn. Melville's title for one of her collections is *Shape-Shifter* (1990), which immediately establishes the influence of the ultimate shape-shifter, Anancy. The story of the folklorist Shakespeare McNab is a humorous example of this

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100 Refer to Pelton's observations that, "as the trickster gradually sheds his gross, antinomian aspects, he becomes a saviour figure... he becomes his opposite as unconsciousness becomes consciousness and unrelatedness becomes relation" (Pelton, 1980: 230).

101 D'Aguiar's novel would have been considered in much greater detail if it were published. Once it is published, references to the novel will be revised.

102 Melville has published two collections of short stories entitled *Shape-Shifter* (1990) and *Migration of Ghosts* (1998).

influence. McNab is a radio broadcaster who tells folk tales, one of which, an Anancy tale, gets him in trouble with the Vice-President, Hogg. In order to win back the favour of the Vice-President, McNab performs an Anancy-like trick. Appealing to his superstitious nature, McNab informs the Vice-President's secretary that "my dead mother appeared to me in a dream last night warning me that he is in imminent danger and I felt it my duty to pass the message on" (Melville, 1990: 13). McNab then performs an impressive show as he dresses up as a woman, pretending to be a ghost:

> Silence followed. Hogg's small eyes shifted from side to side. Nothing happened. Hogg permitted himself to relax a fraction when the silence was broken by the clip-clop of hooves along the dried earth road. Hogg thrust his head out of the car window. What he saw appalled him. Beyond the section of road, illuminated by the car headlights, he could just make out the figure of a woman... Hogg gave a little moan and fell to his knees in the back of the car. No sooner had he assumed this position than all hell seemed to break loose in the trees at the side of the car. He could hear shouts, the crashing of branches and the snapping of twigs, as if some enormous creature was thrashing about. Then Hogg heard a familiar voice yelling:
>
> 'Go away! Leave him alone, I tell you'....
>
> 'La Diablese.' Shakespeare lowered his voice to a whisper. 'That must have been the warning my mother was trying to give you in the dream. Did you get the message I left?' (Melville, 1990: 15-17).

Melville provides the reader with a contemporary trickster tale. Just like Anancy, McNab uses his wit against the more powerful creature, the Vice-President, in an effort to save his own skin. McNab manages to pull the stunt off, much to his delight as, just like Anancy, he was "laughing and boasting as he related, in full detail, the success of his ruse" (Melville, 1990: 18). However, the Vice-President, so impressed by his skills as a communicator with the dead, hires him as his personal advisor. On hearing this news, McNab's Grandmother merely replies: "Leave the country" (Melville, 1990: 18). As already discussed, Anancy's elaborate plans often backfire and his feuds continue, stimulating great amusement. The political nature of the tale is also significant considering Guyana's unsettled government and its reign of untrustworthy leaders

since Independence. Just as with the early Anancy tales, Melville's story would therefore act as a force of social cohesion and a "ritual vent for social frustrations" (Hynes, 1993:206) for a Guyanese audience through its political humour.

Anancy the spider has provided Guyanese writers and poets with a creative playground from which to construct their works and to liberate their imaginations. It has been necessary for Caribbean peoples to build a "new architecture of cultures" and to envision a new history outside of colonial restrictions. The passage of Anancy, the limbo-trickster, has provided writers with a metaphoric tool with which to express the possibility of renewal and re-birth, for the spider survived the Middle Passage by possessing the contorting limbs of the slaves. Anancy represents the survival of ancestral memories and resistance to oppression, which is still celebrated during the Carnival limbo dance. The continued telling of the tales and performance of the dance encourage the healing of memories and thus a social anamnesis to take place. Anancy's trickster ways have also inspired writers in their production of shape-shifting works that elude boundaries and challenge standard perceptions of reality. Anancy encourages an understanding of religion that is based on the re-negotiation of spatial and metaphysical boundaries. As seen throughout the chapter, poets John Agard, Grace Nichols and Maggie Harris, and novelists Wilson Harris, Fred D'Aguiar and Pauline Melville are all engaged in such re-negotiations of space and reality. The re-alignment of often unconscious ancestral memories, to form a new mythical landscape and cultural tapestry, is productively understood within the analytical framework of 'religion'.

CHAPTER FIVE:

SACRED MIGRATIONS IN INDO-GUYANESE FICTION AND POETRY: THE WORK OF DAVID DABYDEEN.

They came in ships.
From across the seas, they came.
Britain, colonising India, transporting her in chains
from Chota Nagpur and the Ganges Plain.
...

They came in fleets.
They came in droves
like cattle
brown like cattle,
eyes limpid, like cattle.

(extract from 'They came in Ships' by Mahadai Das)

In 1838, the first ship of indentured labourers from India arrived in British Guiana. Following the abolition of slavery, the British government were desperate to replace the labour on the sugar plantations. Their solution was to entice labourers from India using a picture of a life of paradise in the Americas and the Caribbean. The reality was a bitter system of neo-slavery. This part of Caribbean history is often overlooked in historical and literary research.[103] The arrival of Indian immigrants in Guyana dramatically changed the cultural and political situation; feelings of hostility between the African and Indian Guyanese, due to the replacement of the labour force and conflicting feelings of ownership over the land, have continued to escalate into

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[103] In 1975 V. S. Naipaul asked for an "intellectual response" to the East Indian diaspora in the Caribbean (Dabydeen & Samaroo, 1996: 5). In the Introduction to *Across the Dark Waters*, Dabydeen notes that since the mid 1970's there has been an increase in research focusing on Indian migration to the Caribbean but that there is still a great deal to be considered (Dabydeen, 1996: 9-10). In addition, courses on Caribbean literature throughout the academy often focus more on African-Caribbean literary activity, for example the work of Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Caryl Phillips, George Lamming, Fred D'Aguiar, Grace Nichols, and John Agard than writers such as Dabydeen and Jan Shinebourne.

violence. Guyana, having gained independence in 1966, has become another racially divided postcolonial state.

The aim of this chapter is to attend to a fraction of the vast amount of literary activity amongst the Indo-Guyanese. The more specific aim is to reflect on the ways in which the transition from India to the Caribbean has been represented in religious terms, both historically and fictionally. In what ways do contemporary writers explore and represent the migration of their ancestors' religions? After I have provided an historical overview of Indian immigration, using historical texts, fiction, and poetry, I will turn my attention to the work of David Dabydeen and the recurring character in his fiction, Manu. Manu, a name Dabydeen "plucked out from memory" (Dawes, 1997: 204), slipped into Dabydeen's more recent works *Turner* (1995) and *A Harlot's Progress* (1999) as a slave drowned after being thrown overboard Turner's famous slave ship. However Manu is also the law giver and god of deluge in Vedic scriptures. The Middle Passage of both slavery and indentured labour are interwoven in Dabydeen's fiction and poetry; Hindu mythology is unconsciously merged with the Middle Passage of African slavery. Why did a Hindu god of water survive in Dabydeen's memory? Was Manu, the god saved from drowning, called to and praised by Dabydeen's ancestors during and after having survived the second Middle Passage? As discussed in chapter three, religion can be understood as a mobilization of collective memory and as an act of anamnesis, "the recalling to memory of the past" (Hervieu-Léger, 2000: 125). Dabydeen's work is another site in which religion as remembrance manifests itself, further emphasising the need to challenge simplistic interpretations of religion in postcolonial fiction, whilst attending to the ways in which writers translate religion into their work.

A Brief History of Indian Immigration to Guyana

Moses Nagamootoo in the foreword to his recent novel *Hendree's Cure* (2000) writes:

> My rationale for blending fictional and documentary styles is based on my conviction that 'history' needs to be recovered not only by scholarship, but also by acts of the imagination, especially when 'history' has barely been chronicled in terms of conventional historical texts...The imagination embodies history, helping to remember a dismembered past (Negamootoo, 2000: foreword).

Using a similar rationale to Nagamootoo I will present a history of indentured labour in Guyana, for it is a history that has "barely been chronicled in terms of conventional historical texts" (Nagamootoo, 2000: foreword). Indo-Guyanese writers such as Mahadai Das, Jan Shinebourne, Narmala Shewcharan, David Dabydeen and many others have established, through fiction, a platform from which to engage with their ancestral history. Importantly, the first three listed writers are women. There has been little written on the work of Indo-Caribbean women writers[104] but also relatively little written *by* Indo-Caribbean, more specifically, Indo-Guyanese women.[105] The memories, as expressed in the fiction of the different writers, will therefore form an important part of the history I will present.

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[104] See Veronique Bragard's essays: "The Flute of Voicelessness and Misplacement: Indo-Caribbean Women's Creative Memory" in *Images of African and Caribbean Women: Migration, Displacement, Diaspora* (Centre of Commonwealth Studies, University of Stirling, Nov. 1996. pages 73-84) and "Gendered Voyages into Coolitude: The Shaping of the Indo-Caribbean Women's Literary Consciousness" in *Kunapipi*, Vol. XX, No. 1, 1998.

[105] See "East Indian Women in the Caribbean: Experience and Voice" by Jeremy Poynting, in *India in the Caribbean* edited by David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo, Hansib Publishing Ltd: London, 1987. Poynting suggests economic and sociological reasons why there are so few Indo-Caribbean women writers, mainly to do with lack of education and literacy (Poynting, 1987: 232-235).

RECRUITMENT

Between 1838 and 1917 approximately 551,000 indentured Indians came from India to the Caribbean and 239,000 of them came from India to British Guiana.[106] They came mainly from the rural villages of "the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Bengal and Madras" (Bisnauth, 2000: 21). An important question to ask is what made them abandon "their attachment to the land and their reluctance to cross the *kala pani* [the black waters]" (Bisnauth, 2000: 37). One major reason, as Bisnauth explains, was to escape the famines of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Other reasons, particularly among young immigrants, included an opportunity to escape restrictive family ties and a hope for a better future. Verene Shepherd refers to three stages of immigration into Guyana between 1838 and 1917 (Shepherd, 2002: 5). The first was between 1838 and 1848 at which time immigration temporarily halted until 1850 by which time, Shepherd notes, "some of the worst abuses had been corrected" (Shepherd, 2002: 5). The second phase was between 1851 and 1870, and the third between 1870 and 1917. Shepherd notes that the third phase of "immigration to colonial Guyana... was regarded as a new form of settler colonization pushed by British imperialist interests" (Shepherd, 2002: 5). At this later stage, the British were keen to entice the Indian immigrants to settle permanently in Guyana, rather than be considered transient workers who were originally hired on five year contracts, after which time they would, in theory, be provided with a return ticket. The reality of returning to India after this time proved difficult for many immigrants. For example, many were excluded from their caste because of impure actions, such as crossing the kala pani and mixing with

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106 See Dabydeen & Samaroo, *Across Dark Waters: Ethnicity and Indian Identity in the Caribbean,* Macmillan: London, 1996, page 1 and Dale Bisnauth *The Settlement of Indians in Guyana, 1890-1930,* Peepal Tree Press: Leeds, 2000 page 11.

lower castes, and therefore often became outcastes on their return:[107] "They found they were treated by their counterparts of the sub-continent as alien in speech and habit; they were suspected of having apostatised from the religion of their fathers and almost always were looked upon with suspicion" (Bisnauth, 2000: 239).

There was a severe disparity in the sexual ratio of immigrants to colonial Guyana, particularly in the first stages. On the first ship, the Whitby, only fourteen of the arrivals were women but by 1856, this had risen to 38.2% (Shepherd, 2002: 5). Women were often restricted from making the decision to leave because of arranged marriages and child betrothal and "men were reluctant to subject wives and daughters to the voyage" (Shepherd, 2002: 6). Women on board the ships therefore usually "comprised young widows and married or single women who had severed ties of relationships with India" (Shepherd, 2002: 11).[108] This disparity had many knock-on effects. According to Basdeo Mangru (1987), "the disproportion of the sexes, non-recognition of customary marriages, erosion of traditional restraints and marriage customs, produced serious problems in the indentured community" (Mangru, 1987: 217). He also observes that the shortage of women "accelerated the weakening and modification of caste consciousness by facilitating inter-caste marriage" (Mangru, 1987: 217). However it is elsewhere observed that women, particularly older women from the first generation of immigrants, were considered the preservers of tradition, particularly domestic culture, and highly respected in the villages as sources of inspiration and wisdom (Poynting, 1987: 232). This is often reflected in the literature, for example the character Nani in Jan Shinebourne's novel, *The Last English Plantation* (see chapter 11, "Oblation").

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[107] Malcolm Cross, in his essay "East Indian–Creole relations in Trinidad and Guiana in the late 19th Century" (*Across the Dark Waters*, Dabydeen and Samaroo, 1996, page 17) notes that 66, 140 immigrants from Guyana returned to India between 1843 and 1916.
[108] See also Bisnauth, 2000: 49.

The recruitment of labourers in India was often corrupt, and revolved around money. In his novel, *The Counting House*, Dabydeen writes the fictional story of a young ambitious couple who are seduced by the elaborate stories of the recruiter and immigrate to Guyana:

> 'Guiana is the very land of Ramayana. Ramayana set in long-time-ago place, and the white people them now plough it, and they call it Guiana. And it have enough hand and neck and foot to wear bangle. You wish you had ten hands like Lord Shiva, and even then you run out of skin' (Dabydeen, 1996: 4).

The recruiters were paid per person they recruited and were awarded bonuses for their recruitment of women (due to the shortage of women) and wages were deducted if they failed to meet targets:

> These pressures led recruiters to commit irregularities of one sort or another... The fact that recruiters from time to time lost their licenses because they attempted to kidnap women, and because they tried to induce them by fraudulent means to emigrate, indicates that kidnapping and abduction were not unknown during the period of concern... the majority of the female emigrants were, in fact, recruited from the street where they had been driven to obtain a livelihood...

The recruitment process was therefore led by money and greed. As Dabydeen says "people became as important a commodity of international trade as ores, whale-oil, rice, or rolling stock" and "East Indian indenturship turned out to be... a new system of slavery" (Dabydeen & Samaroo, 1996: 3).

THE VOYAGE

During the voyage across the *kala pani*, there was no allowance made for religious and linguistic differences:

> In the same manner that slavery brought together Africans of different religions and linguistic affiliations, so did indenturship create a mélange out of Bhojpuri speakers and Tamils. Beef eaters were bundled together on the same ships and on the same estates with those who found it abhorrent (Dabydeen & Samaroo, 1996: 3-4).

The only allowance was for single men and women who were provided with separate living accommodation (Bisnauth, 2000: 51). The voyage could last between fifty and one hundred and fifty days depending on weather, and often included incidences of disease and epidemics. Verene Shepherd documents a tragic case of a young woman, Maharini, who died on board the Allanshaw in 1885 after being raped by one of the sailors. The documentation of this case is surprisingly good but inconclusive. Her death was brought before a court in Guyana, demonstrating essential differences between the slave trade and indentureship, however the evidence was inadmissible. Shepherd concludes:

> This case demonstrates that in the case of the treatment of women, 'the other Middle Passage'... replicated some of the abuses of slave ships and will no doubt give ammunition to those who contend that nineteenth century labour migration was no more than a 'new form of slavery'. Of course the transatlantic slave trade was unique in its severity (Shepherd, 2002: 80).

This is a vital statement to observe. British colonialism took many brutal forms in Guyana, and elsewhere, and it is important to remember the unique suffering imposed by the bondage of the slave trade but to also remember the less documented brutalities of indentureship.

The voyage across the second Middle Passage was a turbulent and horrifying journey and the memories of it were passed down through the generations. Dabydeen projects his own imaginings of this past in *The Counting House*:

> They had with them all their belongings – lengths of cloth, knives, glass mirrors, brass pots, crude bracelets and coins secreted in the hem of their dhotis, in the lining of their blankets, in their

> stomachs. She fancied she could tell who had swallowed their wealth for safety... when the sea was distressed they clenched their mouths, swallowing and re-swallowing whilst all around the other coolies abandoned their stomachs, colouring the deck with massala, tumeric and dhall. The recruiter had promised romance, comparing it to the story of Lord Bharrat's journey to Dandaka forest to meet his bride, but in three long months to Guiana and the two long years following, she met only with the sickness of greed (Dabydeen, 1996: 70).

The "sickness of greed" that Rohini quickly recognises defines the indenture system. The image of Indian ingredients "colouring the deck" is a reminder of the violent splattering of people from one place to another and the spread of this "sickness of greed".

Other memories, which have their roots in the passage, were translated through song, dance, and festivals:

> It is highly probable that many of the songs sung by the emigrants by way of entertainment were religious in theme. Singing and dancing, to the accompaniment of the dholak and the sitar were encouraged on the emigrant vessel, as were wrestling and single-stick playing, which later came to be associated with the celebration of the festivals of Holi and Tadjah. These forms of entertainment survived the voyage across the kala pani to bring some enrichment into the drab lives which the immigrants lived under the conditions of the sugar plantations (Bisnauth, 2000: 56).

The passage became the first site of religious and cultural adaptation. The experiences and memories of slavery and indenture irreversibly affected the religious consciousness. The passage across the kala pani was the beginning of the syncretism of festivals and practices that are now specific to contemporary Caribbean Hinduism.

THE ARRIVAL

The "dreams of milk-and-honey riches/fleeing famine and death" (Das, 'They Came in Ships') were quickly shattered on arrival at the sugar plantations of Guyana. Das's

haunting poem captures the disillusionment and suffering that was certain to have been felt by many:

> I saw them dying at streetcorners, alone, hungry
> for a crumb of British bread,
> and a healing hand's mighty touch.
>
> I recall my grandfather's haunting gaze;
> my eye sweeps over history
> to my children, unborn
> I recall the piracy of innocence,
> light snuffed like a candle in their eyes (Das, 'They Came in Ships').

The hope of new beginnings became "the cry of coolies" that "echoed round the land", for the "Dreams of a cow and endless calves/and endless reality in chains". Dreams and promises of a prosperous future in Guyana became chained by the reality of indentureship and the bitter and monotonous task of harvesting sugar cane:

> The soil was manured, the cane was planted, the fields were weeded, the cane was harvested, and then the cycle of nurturing and killing began again. The factory's machinery was never idle, crushing, boiling, fermenting, distilling, making sugar and rum, molasses and bagasse. Boat loads of new coolies arrived to replace those who succumbed to diseases. Many of them died rapidly of the same epidemics, but there was no shortage of ships from India to replenish the work gangs (Dabydeen, 1996: 67-68).

The indentured Indians became a cog in the machine of colonial capitalism. The narrative slips into the mechanical tone of the coloniser and plantation owner as the "sickness of greed" takes over; the indenture system is profitable and if the labouring machines fail, they are easily replaceable.

In *The Counting House*, Rohini and Vidia are broken by their passage to Guyana; both succumb to a kind of madness that is easier to deal with than the reality of plantation life. Rohini is seduced by the plantation owner and infected with the "sickness of greed": "Rohini would bear Gladstone's baby, revelling even as it burdened her with pain, swelling her body to the roundness of the globe which one day

it would inherit" (Dabydeen, 1996: 155). Vidia's savings are stolen to pay for the termination of Gladstone's baby, his only hope of a life beyond the hideousness of indenture, which causes him to cease functioning:

> Madness, Rohini say, madness: Vidia refuse to eat and people take his starvation for a holy sign, but Rohini claim it is madness... when she wake up she hear him in a corner scratching at the floorboards, crying for his money. She call, and he stop for a while, but the money-jumbie whisper in his head above common-sense or wife (Dabydeen, 1996: 172).

Vidia has been forced into the colonial system of greed and capitalism and roots his own success in his ability to accumulate wealth. The story of Vidia and Rohini was a reality for thousands of indentured labourers. Through his fiction and inventions of characters such as Vidia and Rohini, Dabydeen imagines, researches the stories of those who died, were abused, or succumbed to insanity and were written out of history in the hope that strands or even glimpses of their stories can begin to be salvaged.

As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, the salvaging of history through fiction is a re-memory of past and forgotten lives; writers are constantly engaged in a process of anamnesis. However this salvaging can become a burden for many writers. Dabydeen in his poem "Coolie Odyssey" (1988) captures the ambiguity of re-memory:

> We mark your memory in songs,
> Fleshed in the emptiness of folk,
> Poems that scrape bowl and bone
> In English basements far from home,
> Or confess the lust of beasts
> In rare conceits
> To congregations of the educated
> Sipping wine, attentive between courses –
> See the applause fluttering from their white hands
> Like so many messy table napkins (Dabydeen, 1988: 13).

The writing down of ancestral memories becomes a type of theft or spirit thievery, as "We plunder for the maps of El Dorado/To make bountiful our minds in an England/Starved of gold" (Dabydeen, 1988: 12). The academic audience becomes a

part of that theft as they feast on these memories. The images of bodily consumption in lines such as "poems that scrape bowl and bone" and "sipping wine, attentive between courses" powerfully reflect the members of a greedy consumer society that crudely digest these ancestral memories in a search for an 'authentic' history that they have been "starved" of, which is starving their 'subjects'. Dabydeen has said, self-reflexively, in an interview that he is "concerned about the critical business that thrives upon the expression of poverty or dispossession... they are consuming poverty, the poverty of the tribe" (Binder, 1997: 169). The obese audiences continue to feast on the poverty of nations. The pursuit of these memories through research for fictional works and anthropological studies will, however, continue to allow the act of historical retrieval to take place.

The arrival of indentured labourers from India was the beginning of another violent era for Guyanese society. The replacement of the African Guyanese labour force, after a short period of apprenticeship following emancipation, with indentured labourers understandably led to a hostile reception of East Indian immigrants. Walter Rodney, the sociologist and political activist murdered in Guyana, writes:

> There were in effect two semi-autonomous sets of working class struggles against the domination of capital – the one conducted by the descendents of ex-slaves and the other by indentured labourers and their fellow Indians. Pursuing their legitimate aspirations, these two ethnically defined sectors of the labouring people could and did come into conflict with each other (Rodney, 1981: 179).

The struggle for recognition in, and a sense of ownership of, their adopted society, in a direct response to colonial control and displacement, have created the racial conflict between the Indian and African Guyanese in Guyana. However, Malcolm Cross recognises this as a trigger but refers to three more specific reasons "that seem to have been important in raising the level of competition and conflict between the different

ethnic groups in Guiana"; they are "availability of land, the overall social and economic situation, and the attitudes and policies of the planters" (Cross, 1996: 22). The Guyanese landscape is a recurring feature in literary texts. Growing up in a unique landscape was a constant source of inspiration for the writers yet also a source of frustration for its inhabitants: "the most pressing problem was coping with the ravages of the sea on one side and the flood waters from the highlands behind – an almost insuperable task" (Cross, 1996: 22). Inhabitants fought over the small areas of land which were manageable. Land settlement schemes were set up for Indians, during what Shepherd referred to as the third phase of indentured immigration, to curb the cost of returning labourers to India. Cross highlights the tensions which raged as a result:

> All of these land-settlement schemes were for the sole benefit of the Indians and even though they never rivalled the successes achieved by the Indians on their own, it must have been a policy which aggravated the sense of frustration and bitterness felt by the 'dispossessed' Creoles (Cross, 1996: 23).

The tensions between African and Indian Guyanese often resulted in a violent confrontation. As Jamie Scott writes, and as is discussed in more detail in Chapter One: "landscape is the expression of the imprint of their social and cultural habits on the land" (Scott, 2001: xxvii). Both the East Indian and African Guyanese re-forged their identities, in response to slavery and indentured labour, through their relationship with the land. As these two main groups continue to fight to possess the landscape and define it as their own, the conflict becomes one of "sacralization, desacralization and reclamation of lands and landscapes" (Scott, 2001: xxvii). The response to the sense of dispossession felt by East Indian and African labourers is a question of religion as well as ownership. Dabydeen plays out these themes of "divine dispensation" through his fiction.

Dabydeen's poem "For Mala" is a lament for the hundreds of East Indians murdered at Wismar in 1964:

> The high point of barbarity, and the blackest episode of the year occurred at Wismar... where in the space of a few hours hundreds of East Indian residents were attacked and killed. The men and children were locked up in their houses which were then set afire. The women and young girls were raped, mutilated and then dumped in the river to die (Dabydeen, 1984: 46).

In his collection, *Slave Song* (1984), Dabydeen writes in Creole, a language which he says is defined by its "brokenness, no doubt reflecting the brokenness and suffering of its original users – African slaves and East Indian indentured labourers" (Dabydeen, 1984: 13). He describes it as a "naturally tragic language... like the rawness of a wound" (Dabydeen, 1984: 13-14). The use of Creole in this collection of poems is therefore vital as it represents the brutality and vulgarity of a history in a way that English could not: "the English fails where the Creole succeeds". This is also the reason for the title: "slave and song, the contradiction between the two. What I wanted to show was the way of life that survived brilliantly and wickedly, mischievously and tragically, in spite of certain experiences of violence and brutality" (Binder, 1997: 168). Dabydeen interestingly includes translations and notes to his poems but admits in an interview to this being a playful act: "many of the notes are spoof notes: they are almost saying that I want to be the critic as well as the poet" (Binder, 1997: 169). He does admit that the notes "matter" for they demonstrate that he is also "rendering history" as the critic, but he adds in a final note of ambivalence, "of course, this is a complete illusion, a farce" (Binder, 1997: 169). As in the poem quoted earlier, "Coolie Odyssey", Dabydeen is burdened with guilt and a fascination about the production of art for the consumption and reproduction of the masses by the artist. The notes therefore "raise these issues of critical consumption" (Binder, 1997: 169). The poem "For Mala" represents the

barbarity and tragedy of Guyanese history and the formation of the language around this tragedy:

> Yesterday deh pull out young girl from de river tangle –
> Up in de net in de fish, bloat, bubby bite –
> Up, teet-mark in she troat an tigh:
> Was na pirae (Dabydeen, 1984: 19).

A victim of the mass slaughter is pulled out of the river harbouring the scars of a violent assault, and it was not the piranhas ("pirae"). The violent assault is indicative of being savagely ripped apart and consumed by hundreds of vicious predators, as she has "teet-mark in she troat and tigh". As Dabydeen says, the use of the fragmented style and sharp sounds of Creole adds emphases to the brutality of this and hundreds of other assaults on both sides.

Dabydeen and other writers also celebrate the survival of their ancestors, both African and East Indian, "in spite of certain experiences of violence and brutality", as Dabydeen says (Binder, 1997: 168). Part of the survival of the transition from India to the Caribbean is expressed in religious and cultural shifts. Jan Shinebourne captures this in the portrayal of the Diwali festival, the lighting of lights, as it is transferred into the Guyanese landscape. The main character June, a young East Indian Guyanese school girl, "is sure to remember this movement of people of which she had been a part" (Shinebourne, 1988: 175). The Diwali festival comes to represent and celebrate the mass migration of people:

> It was the darkest night of November which was always chosen for Diwali, so that the symbolism of lights was felt more intensely, and the meaning of exile and return deepened (Shinebourne, 1988: 175).

The spreading of lights amongst the darkness of their existence speaks directly to the indentured experience:

> Nani retold the story of Rama's exile in the forest. As she recited the story, it seemed to lift her to another plane and she rolled the legend off her tongue like a visionary, conjuring the mythical scenes so that the children felt they were hearing them for the first time... the movement of royal deities between the celestial and the earthly, between exile and return... the myth absorbed the humiliations of their plantation existence and for one day they swept and cleaned their houses as if they were cleaning away their own exile and its injuries, bearing the lights to light their own way on their own patch of earth, hoping that Laksmi, the goddess of prosperity and good luck would visit them that night and bless every lighted house (Shinebourne, 1988: 175-6).

Nani, the protector of tradition, is the story-teller. Her animation of the myth is a result of its potency in the Indian diaspora. For June, "the myth of exile was alive" (Shinebourne, 1988: 177). The festival provides a site from which to make sense of their own exile, to celebrate their survival and to hope for a better future away from the "humiliations of their plantation existence" (Shinebourne, 1988: 176). The marking of the "myth of exile", even if this exile was not your own but your ancestors', becomes one of the most important nights for Caribbean Hinduism.

Brian Moore (1995) refers to Diwali (Deepavali or Divali) as "the jewel in the crown of Hindu festivals" (Moore, 1995: 217). However, early plantation life disrupted the observation of Hindu rites and festivals, including Diwali:

> In the plantation environment of nineteenth century Guyana this festival lost its prominence among the Hindu immigrants mainly because it is centred around the family which was very weak, but also because the estates did not grant a holiday to celebrate. Consequently celebrations were relatively low key until after the immigrants began to settle off the estates late in the century and the traditional family began to be reconstructed (Moore, 1995: 217).

This is echoed by Bisnauth, who states that it "became popular in the post 1917 period", that is the end of indentured immigration, but he also correlates its growth in popularity with the "emergence of the Rama and Krishna cults" (Bisnauth, 2000: 128). However Bisnauth does not appear to acknowledge the disruptive effect which

plantation life had on Hindu customs. Celebration of rites was often random as the East Indian community had no temples (Vertovec, 1996: 115) and they were not granted holidays, but more devastating to early Hinduism in the Caribbean was the fact that "early migrants were so linguistically disunited due to their diverse areas of origin" (Vertovec, 1996: 115). Plantation owners, as during slavery, purposefully divided the immigrants according to their language so as to "prevent combination in cases of disturbance among them" (Vertovec, 1996: 115). This had a destabilising effect on the celebration of Hindu customs, particularly "collective religious activity", until "through the years, a common, creolized Indian tongue or 'plantation Hindustani' developed in each Caribbean context" (Vertovec, 1996: 115). It is this tongue that Dabydeen celebrates and which allowed for the awakening of festivals such as Diwali, and for their pertinence to be felt by next generations of Indian-Guyanese.

Vertovec points out that Hinduism in the Caribbean has been and still is in a process of transformation. He states that:

> The religious traditions of Hindus in the Caribbean are the products of over one hundred and forty years of inadvertent permutation, deliberate alteration or innovation, and structurally necessary modification (Vertovec, 1996: 108).

Though this is surely the same for Hinduism in India, there are, as discussed above, many changes that are specific to the Indian diaspora. Unlike in India where the term Hinduism covers such a vast variety of religious practices as to render the term impractical (Vertovec, 1996: 108), Hinduism in the Caribbean has become more "homogenized" (Vertovec, 1996: 109). Differences of customs were forced to disappear along with the different languages. Vertovec states:

> Especially due to the relatively small size and socially isolated status of their communities, a single corpus of belief and practice has usually come to be pervasive among Hindus in each post-colonial context outside India (Vertovec, 1996: 110)

One important feature of Hinduism that is largely redundant in Guyana, and the rest of the Caribbean, is the caste system. Vertovec explains that while caste 'identities' survived in the Caribbean, caste as a system did not:

> This inability for reconstruction occurred because the caste system is a highly localized phenomenon in villages of India; it had no chance of being maintained through historical conditions in which individual members of diverse caste groups... were plucked out of local hierarchies throughout North and South India and placed together in contexts where their proximity and commensality, economic activities, and social relationships were managed by non-Indians on estates and, after indenture, altered by wholly alien socio-economic circumstances. For most practical purposes, this resulted in a new kind of egalitarianism among Hindus in the Caribbean (Vertovec, 1996: 119-120).

As a result of living conditions on the plantations, it was impossible to maintain caste distinctions; however one area where caste still has an impact in the Caribbean is in the role of the Brahman priests. The 'pandits' were respected as religious leaders and were called upon to perform rituals such as weddings, funerals, and cleansing ceremonies. Vertovec explains that "in the new context of the Caribbean, Brahmans gained clients for their ritual services by offering to all – regardless of caste background – the beliefs and practices previously within their own exclusive preserve" (Vertovec, 1996: 120). The development of Hindu organisations such as Sanatan Dharma (orthodox Hinduism) and the Arya Samaj, "a reformist movement calling for a Vedic purification of Hindu belief and practice" (Vertovec, 1996: 121), was a significant factor in the continuation of Brahmanic Hinduism in Guyana.

A relatively small percentage of the immigrants were also Muslim. Brinsley Samaroo explains that Islam first came to the Caribbean with the African slaves, but had almost disappeared due to severe punishment by early colonists (Samaroo, 1996: 205). Indian Islam, however, differs from Middle-Eastern Islam in many ways:

> In modern-day Trinidad and Guyana where there are substantial Muslim populations, there is much confusion, often conflict,

> between these two types of Islam. While the majority of believers continue to follow this particular brand of Indian Islam, missionaries with Middle-Eastern training and assistance are doing their utmost to de-Indianize the faith (Samaroo, 1996: 206).

Unlike in the ancestral land, the Hindu and Muslim relations in the Caribbean were relatively peaceful as they were "united by common poverty" (Samaroo, 1996: 209). Samaroo continues that the "integration of Hindu practices with Islamic, and the partial merging of the cultures... served as cementing factors". The passage from India was the first site of this union: "this brotherhood of the boat (jahaji bhai) has persisted even among the descendants of the immigrants up to the present time" (Samaroo, 1996: 209).

Guyana, Trinidad and Surinam also became the sites of Indian Hindu missionary activity, particularly representatives from the Aryan Samaj in India (Vertovec, 196: 121), which was greatly influenced by Islamic thought (Samaroo, 1996: 207). Christian missionaries often recorded their frustration in their failure to convert the East Indian immigrants who were "unrepentant; practising their own religion with undiminished tenacity" (Seecharan, 1993: 11). India was kept alive in the Guyanese imagination, not only through East Indian communities' own dedication to their ancestral homeland and ancient values but also through the arrival of Hindu missionaries who brought the words of Gandhi. Seecharan notes that "by the end of the 1920's" Gandhi was elevated to "virtual sainthood by Indo-Guyanese" (Seecharan, 1996: 53). Gandhi received significant coverage in Guianese newspapers such as *The East Indian Herald* and *The Daily Argosy* (Seecharan, 1996: 37). *The Daily Argosy* was a British colonial paper that labelled Gandhi an "unbalanced fanatic" but also admitted that Gandhi was the political leader to many East Indians in British Guiana (Seecharan, 1996: 39). Literacy amongst the young educated Indian-Guyanese ensured that the contents of these articles and the actions of Gandhi in the Motherland were distributed

amongst the community. Seecharan argues that the Indo-Guyanese took on the nationalist struggles in India as their own which in turn affected their commitment to their adopted homeland. Seecharan argues that while it "strengthened Indians in the colony psychologically" it also:

> ... prolonged a sense of ambivalence towards the colony... it delayed the emergence of a comprehensive, unmediated loyalty to British Guiana... they seemed to be perpetually looking over their shoulders for 'Mother India's' guidance and reassurance. Above all it encouraged the Indo-Guyanese leadership to ignore the feelings of the Afro-Guyanese, and the political, economic and cultural space this group was also demanding (Seecharan, 1993: 55).

The allegiance to the homeland in an alien and often unwelcoming country is understandable but, as Seecharan has observed, it presents interesting questions about diaspora identities, particularly to do with ownership and identity, and the overwhelming effect these issues can have on the entire political structure of the country.

Vijay Mishra (1996) attends to the psychological implications for the diaspora identity. He uses the term "the diasporic imaginary" to refer to "any ethnic enclave in a nation-state that defines itself, consciously, unconsciously or because of the political self-interest of a racialized nation-state, as a group that lives in displacement" (Mishra, 1996: 423). He refers to the "hyphenated bodies" of the diaspora, who are forced in to "an extreme form of double consciousness" as a result of their displacement from their homeland and lack of identification with their adopted land (Mishra, 1996: 422). The construction of the 'Nation' around this displacement is an unavoidable side-effect:

> Now in the construction of the 'Nation Thing' the nation itself is a fiction since it is built around a narrative imaginatively constructed by its subjects. The idea of the homeland then becomes, as Renato Salecl has pointed out, '[a] fantasy structure, [a] scenario, through which society perceives itself as a homogenous entity'... Salecl refers, after Lacan, to fantasy as something that is predicated upon the construction of desire

> around a particularly traumatic event. The fantasy of the homeland is then linked, in the case of the diaspora, to that recollected moment when diasporic subjects feel they were wrenched from their mother(father)land. The cause can be the traumatized 'middle passage' of slave trade or the sailing ships (later steam ships) of Indian indenture... what is clear is that the moment of 'rupture' is transformed into trauma around an absence that because it cannot be fully symbolized becomes part of the fantasy itself (Mishra, 1996: 423).

Mishra demonstrates that the diasporic identity is much more complex and traumatic than Seecharan seems to acknowledge. The allegiance to, and fantastical construction of, the homeland are acts of desperation, in an attempt to reform a bond that was wrenched apart. Most importantly, because the "absence" (the homeland), cannot be "fully symbolized", it becomes a fantasy. In an attempt to preserve the indefinable loss, fictional narratives of home are used. Mishra continues, "imaginary homelands are constructed from the space of distance to compensate for a loss occasioned by an unspeakable trauma" (Mishra, 1996: 423-4).

As discussed in Chapter Three, religion becomes a vehicle in the transportation of this type of loss into a meaningful context, particularly for writers. As mentioned in the chapter, and in relation to the work of Wilson Harris, Danièle Hervieu-Léger describes religion as mobilization of collective memory. The communal observation of, for example, the Diwali festival in Guyana, as described by Shinebourne, can be understood as a mobilization of collective memory, and speaks directly to the present situation of exile. The recalling of the past to affirm the present and the future is, Hervieu-Léger argues, a religious act. This past, however, often is traumatic, and it is the site of trauma that acts as a trigger for the process of retrieval, such as Francisco Bone's near-death experience. This can be related directly to Mishra's understanding of the diasporic imaginary; the absence and indefinable loss of the homeland defines the experiences of the diaspora, even if this understanding is based on an imaginary

reconstruction. And this reconstruction is often expressed in religious terms. As a result of the trauma of the passage, the memories that are sustained are from this:

> All that remained was the memory of the passage and a loss that could only be sustained through categories of myth. The sailing ship... became as important a site for purposes of legitimation as the motherland itself... this was the first space in which the Indian labourers had to face the reality of losing caste as a consequence of crossing the kala pani, the black sea (Mishra, 1996: 429).

As will shortly be discussed with reference to Dabydeen, the sea and the trauma of the passage are the thematic locations from which to begin a process of re-memory and retrieval for Caribbean writers. The ancestral memories of the ships, both from slavery and indenture, continue to haunt later generations; they adopt these memories as their own to legitimate, but also celebrate, often through religion, their survival and current location. The harbouring of "one's ancestral baggage" (Mishra, 1996: 431) means that the "space of the ships and the memory of the passage" are ever present in diaspora households, as Mishra points out with reference to the Tulsi household in V.S Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas* (1969), in the "rituals of religion and eating" and in the "names of the characters and in the extended family structure" (Mishra, 1996: 432).

The diasporic community is also burdened with a permanent hyphenated state (Mishra, 1996: 432). Naipaul captures this ambivalent state of neither/nor, particularly for the East Indian-West Indian:

> To be an Indian or East Indian from the West Indies is to be a perpetual surprise to people outside the region. When you think of the West Indies you think of Columbus and the Spanish galleons, slavery and the naval rivalries of the eighteenth century... You don't go to Trinidad, then, expecting to find Hindu pundits scuttling about country roads on motor-cycles; to see pennants with ancient devices fluttering from temples; to see mosques cool and white rhetorical against the usual Caribbean buildings of concrete and corrugated iron; to find India celebrated in the street names of one whole district of Port of Spain; to see the Hindu festival of lights or the Muslim mourning ceremony for Husein... to be Indian from Trinidad is to be unlikely. It is, in

> addition to everything else, to be the embodiment of an old verbal ambiguity. For this word 'Indian' has been abused as no other word in the language; almost every time it is used it has to be qualified (Naipaul, 1972: 33).

The diaspora experience and identity becomes a "verbal ambiguity". The denial of established borders can be interpreted as liberating but, by definition, it is disempowering. As Mishra notes, the un-hyphenated subject is always perceived as pure, therefore the hyphenated subject is a deviation, a contamination: "the politics of the hyphen is itself hyphenated because in the name of empowering people, the classification indeed disempowers them, it makes them, to use a hyphenated term, 'empoweringly-disempowered' (Mishra, 1996: 433). However, Mishra goes on to note that the diaspora experience has led to the exploration of "hybrid, cross-cultural and interdiasporic relationships" and the creation of "new vibrant forms" of expression (Mishra, 1996: 434). Naipaul confirms this by saying, "culture is like language, ever developing. There is no right or wrong, no purity from which to decline. Usage sanctions everything" (Naipaul, 1972: 36). The diasporic community and its cultural, religious expressions are equally valid but still ambivalence exists for the hyphenated subjects. Naipaul, and Mishra, know that "there can be no true return" (Naipaul, 1972: 38) to the Motherland, even when a part of your memory places you there: "Certainly it was odd, when I was in India two years ago, to find that often, listening to a language I thought I had forgotten, I was understanding. Just a word or two, but they seemed to recall a past life and fleetingly they gave that sensation of an experience that has been lived before" (Naipaul, 1972: 38). This awakening of ancestral memories is confirmation of a past which has nearly been erased. And it is writers and poets who often adopt the retrieval of these communal memories as their project. These acts of retrieval by both the community and the writers are 'religious'; the act of remembrance, or anamnesis, is perpetually ritualised by writers and communities through myth-

making and story-telling. Anamnesis is a 'religious' act and, when understood in this way, it highlights the usefulness of the concept of the religious imagination. Postcolonial writers, as they delve into their imaginations, are involved in a ritualisation of mythic past.

THE MANIFESTATION OF MANU

> Manu opens his mouth, but he has swallowed too much sea-water to speak. In his desperation to reach the shores of Africa, he drank as much sea as he could, to shorten the distance. Instead of words, fish tumble out, gorgeous and bizarre and dreadful in shape and hue, and mingling among the catch, worms, sea-snakes, sponges and other nameless life. The new nameless and exotic world he carries in his belly spills out onto the floor, confronting them with a spectacle of their own transformation. Manu himself stares at what lies before him – as he would stare at his magical pebbles – but out of stupefaction, not wisdom (Dabydeen, 1999: 97).

Dabydeen's unconscious conjuring of Manu (though he consciously chose the name Manu for a character, he was unaware of the significance of this name) is witness to the awakening of ancestral memories through writing and the religious significance of this act. Just as Naipaul's memory is awakened on hearing what he thought would be an alien language, Dabydeen recalls the narratives of his childhood through the act of writing. Manu is an important character in classic Hinduism and his presence in Dabydeen's imagination suggests the story of Manu, like the Anancy tales, survived the crossing of the kali pani.

In order to understand the significance of Manu's presence in Dabydeen's fiction, it is necessary first to contextualise the discussion of Hinduism. 'Hinduism', as a term, is often considered a crude amalgamation of vastly different ideas and practices. Flood writes:

> Part of the problem of definition is due to the fact that Hinduism does not have a single historical founder, as do so many other world religions; it does not have a unified system of belief encoded in a creed or declaration of faith; it does not have a single system of soteriology; and it does not have a centralized authority or bureaucratic structure (Flood, 1996: 6).

Hinduism, therefore, cannot be understood as an exclusive category. Flood concludes that it is best understood in terms of "prototype theory", which proposes that "categories do not have rigid boundaries, but rather there are degrees of category membership" (Flood, 1996: 7). A large part of the problem of conceptualising Hinduism in Western scholarship is an understanding of religion that is based on Western, Christian perceptions. As discussed in Chapter One in relation to the work of Tim Fitzgerald and Richard King, and as Flood confirms (Flood, 1996: 8), 'religion' as a Western, Christian category is defined in terms of belief and this is extremely limiting when trying to understand Hinduism, or other forms of religious expression outside of a Christian monotheistic framework. This further confirms that an investigation into the term 'religion', and its usage by postcolonial theorists, in the context of postcolonial literature, is central to an understanding of both the presence of religious expression in the fiction and the fiction itself. It should also be added that what is offered here is an understanding of Hinduism based upon its manifestation in contemporary Guyanese literature.

Within Hindu theism, which can be understood as the observance of two supreme Gods, Siva and Visnu, who create, maintain and destroy the cosmos, Manu is the first man and ruler of the earth (Flood, 1996: 114). However there are "fourteen Manvantaras, or periods of time, in which an original ruler of the earth is called Manu" (Dimmit & Buitenan, 1978: 23). Manu is therefore present in each cycle of time as the first man. According to Dimmit and Buitenan, "each Manu is a semi-divine being whose sons become the rulers of society. And he is also known as the upholder of

Figure 1: J.M.W Turner Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On) 1840.

Dharma in each age" (Dimmit & Buitenan, 1978: 24). The Manu who appears to hold the most importance is the one rescued by the fish Matsya, one of Visnu's 'avatāras', or 'incarnations': avatāras' are "descents of a portion of the lord into animal or human form in order to redress the balance of good and evil in the world by supporting the forces of good" (Dimmit & Buitenan, 1978: 62). Flood notes that the "mythology of these incarnations focuses upon the creation, destruction and recreation of the cosmos. The *Matsya Purāna* tells how the first man, Manu, is saved from a cosmic deluge by the Fish" (Flood, 1996: 116). The Manu in Dabydeen's novel *A Harlot's Progress* (1999), as quoted above, is a fascinating incarnation of the first Manu; his worldly death but spiritual freedom by drowning and his vomiting whole fish (possibly *avatāras* of Visnu), in the place of wise words, imply powerful points of comparison with the Hindu myth. This is made more intriguing by the fact that both Dabydeen's narrative poem, *Turner*, and novel, *A Harlot's Progress*, are based on the horrors of the Middle Passage and slavery, not the plights of the indentured labourers. As will be discussed in more detail later, Dabydeen captures the intricate details of the ancestral union that form the Caribbean experience and memory. He interweaves the African history of slavery with Indian indenture using the religious vehicle of Hindu mythology.

In the traditional tale, Manu rescues Matsya, the fish. Manu places Matsya in a bowl of water but Matsya grows too big. Manu puts him in a bigger bowl but again he quickly outgrows it. This continues until eventually Manu "threw it into the sea where it filled the entire ocean" (Dimmit & Buitenan, 1978: 71). At this point Manu realises that the fish is an incarnation of Visnu, and is praised for his dedication. Because of this, Manu is called to save the "aggregate of creatures" on the earth from the flood which will soon destroy everything:

> Soon, O king, the earth shall be flooded with water, with its mountains, trees and forests. A boat has been constructed by a group of all the gods in order to rescue the great aggregate of

> creatures, O lord of the earth, those are sweat-born, egg-born, plant-born, and live born. Put all these creatures into the boat, O faithful one, and save them! When the boat is battered by the wind at the end of the age, O king, fasten it to my horn, O chief of kings. Thus at the end of the dissolution of the world with its standing and moving beings you shall be Prajāpati, master of creatures on earth, O king. You shall be the all-knowing wise king at the start of the Krta Age, and you shall rule the Manvantara, worshiped by all the gods (Dimmit & Buitenan, 1978: 72).

As a result of his faithfulness, Manu is spared death by drowning; however, Dabydeen's Manu drowns voluntarily in order to escape enslavement.

The story of Manu is amongst the most popular of myths and it is therefore more than possible that Dabydeen heard it as a child, growing up in the villages of Guyana amongst the East Indian community. However, Dabydeen himself has no direct memories of Manu:

> With 'Turner' I didn't know what I was doing with Manu. Manu was a total accident. It was just a name I'd plucked out from memory. And it wasn't until the book was reviewed in The New Statesman by an English scholar who... identified Manu as the Noah of Indian myth, that I went to my encyclopedia [sic], my Encyclopedia Britannica (!) and checked it out and thought, "What a curious accident!" It reminded me of what Wilson Harris says: that when you write something, it's only in revising it that you get clues to much deeper meaning or a deeper structure. Now the deeper sense of Indianness did not reside with Manu but in descriptions of planting and reaping. Manu was a kind of trigger, which in some peculiar way forced me to express an Indianness (Interview with Kwame Dawes, 1997: 204).

Dabydeen's unconscious awakening of Manu could be read as a religious act of anamnesis. The act of writing fiction and poetry can be seen as a vital "trigger" for the manifestation of religious memory when considering Manu's accidental arrival in Dabydeen's *Turner* (1995).[109] Kevin Grant states that "the most striking aspect of David

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[109] A Harlot's Progress (1999) was written later than Turner (1995), and therefore after the revelation of who Manu is. His use of Manu in A Harlot's Progress is therefore not an accident but a conscious act. Manu is also present in a short story entitled "Adoration", published in Kunapipi, vol. XX no. 1, 1998, also later than Turner.

Dabydeen's work is its concern with language and its power to redeem" (Grant, 1997: 13). The redemption of an almost forgotten past through the act of writing and the re-incarnation of traditional mythology works powerfully in Dabydeen's writing. The "deeper meaning and deeper structure" of his writing is recognised when the notion of religious memory is applied to it. In an attempt to express an "Indianness", Dabydeen retrieved Manu from the Hindu mythology that, in part, formulated his interpretation of his "Indianness" as a child. Interestingly, Dabydeen recognises his Indianness more in the agricultural labour which dictated the experiences of his ancestors; however, these two factors are not exclusive to one another. The landscape becomes the site from which identity evolves often resulting in a divine dispensation and reclamation; the land gains sacred significance as a result of its central importance in the forging of identities post conquest, slavery, and indenture. Simultaneously, religious narratives are often a source with which, and through which, to understand and represent the struggles of slavery, labour and migration. The Diwali festival, for example, speaks directly to those in exile and releases those celebrating from the hardships of plantation labour. Indentured labour is therefore engrained in the religious consciousness of East Indian-Caribbeans. Was Manu, the god of deluge who was rescued from drowning, a source of inspiration and support in the crossing of the 'kala pani'? Were thanks for survival expressed in praise to Manu and remembrance of him through story-telling to later generations, such as Dabydeen? Though it is impossible to know this for sure, the presence of Manu in Dabydeen's fiction is an intriguing 'accident', which confirms that "bizarre convolutions of the human consciousness... emerge when the constitution of the religious consciousness faces historical memory" (Long, 1986: 184).

In *Turner* (1995), Dabydeen provides the drowned slaves of J. W. Turner's 1840 painting, *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying* (see insert) with a story and a past which was erased with them during the Middle Passage:

> My poem focuses on the submerged head of the African in the foreground of Turner's painting. It has been drowned in Turner's (and other artists') sea for centuries. When it awakens it can only partially recall the sources of its life, so it invents a body, a biography, and peoples and imagined landscape... His real desire is to begin anew in the sea but he is too trapped by grievous memory to escape history... the desire for transfiguration or newness or creative amnesia is frustrated (Dabydeen, 1995: 7).

The tragic experiences of the slaves even if they did survive the passage, and the tactical actions by the slavers (such as renaming and dividing the slaves), resulted in the erasure of the past. Dabydeen laments this loss and the psychic division which results from it. *Turner* is a haunting narrative which embodies the conflicting desires of someone who has forgotten the past. Karen McIntyre notes that "the poem effectively navigates its way through a fictional and fictionalised odyssey of discovery, recuperation and transformation" (McIntyre, 1997: 142). During this odyssey, Dabydeen narrates a fictional landscape which is both Africa and India; in Guyana, experiences of being Indian and African are fused, particularly through the experiences of agricultural labour. As Dabydeen says with reference to *Slave Song*, "you can't write about planting or anything agricultural, even with an African theme, without the Indianness inevitably fusing into that African body of experience" (Interview with Dawes, 1997: 204). In *Turner* this fusion takes place at the level of myth: Dabydeen constructs a mythic landscape which is a product of perpetual migration. Through his writing, Dabydeen constructs "an imaginary homeland" for "the loss could only be sustained through categories of myth" (Mishra, 1996: 423). As Mishra says, "the fantasy of the homeland is then linked... to that recollected moment when diasporic subjects feel they were wrenched from their mother(father)land" (Mishra, 1996: 423). Importantly, this mythic landscape is constructed from the sea, the site of rupture from the mother/land. Manu who, in the original myth, watched the world disappear under the sea, is, in *Turner*, at the centre of this reconstruction, just as if another world cycle is

coming to an end and another Manvantara is beginning. Again the landscape acquires a sacred significance as Dabydeen engages with Guyana's syncretic mythology.

For Dabydeen the sea was a deliberate setting for the poem: "Most of it takes place in the actuality of the sea, and the sea is actual, not just as the location of the drowned man, but in the rhythms of the poem" (Interview with Dawes, 1997: 205). The sea forms the central stage for the migrant, whether of slavery or indenture, and Dabydeen captures the tragedy of this migration as well as the 'actuality of the sea' in the opening lines:

> Stillborn from all the signs. First a woman sobs
> Above the creak of timbers and the cleaving
> Of the sea, sobs from the depths of true
> Hurt and grief, as you will never hear
> But from woman giving birth, belly
> Blown and flapping loose and torn like sails,
> Rough sailors' hands jerking and tugging
> At ropes of veins, to no avail. Blood vessels
> Burst asunder, all below – deck are drowned (Dabydeen, 1995: 9).

The tragedy of giving birth to a stillborn child is the tragedy of the Middle Passage. Dabydeen's metaphor emphasises the moment of rupture and trauma by relating it to the actual wrenching of a child from its mother. The woman in labour becomes the ship in a storm as the rhythm of the poem violently sways; her body is broken as her belly is "blown and flapping loose" and "blood vessels/Burst asunder". Images of rape of the women onboard, but also the motherland, are also present in the "rough sailors' hands jerking and tugging". The mother is a central image in much of Dabydeen's work[110] and Dabydeen relates himself to the stillborn child in *Turner*:

> I grew up without a mother, so that the absent mother is probably what moves me very deeply and creates writing. Turner is really about the absent mother, too. So there are those

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[110] In *The Intended* (1991), set in London, the young narrator is without a mother: "Just because you ain't got a mother don't mean that England will mother you, you stupid mother-fucker" (Dabydeen, 1991: 246). In *Disappearance* (1993), the narrator is also driven by thoughts of his mother at home.

> moments of autobiography. So when one speaks of an abortion, one is also speaking of the absent mother; the absence is the mother, not the life of the child (Interview with Dawes, 1997: 220).

The absence of the mother in Dabydeen's writing also speaks directly to the diaspora identity and Mishra's thesis. Dabydeen accesses the mother's "Hurt and grief" of giving birth to a stillborn child to represent the hurt and grief of all those drowned in the black sea ('kali pani'). Then, after the storm there is "stillness", and the "part-born, sometimes with its mother," is "Tossed overboard" (Dabydeen, 1995: 9). The man drowned overboard is the stillborn, or aborted, child and his 're-birth' through death is the beginning of his-story: "As I have given fresh names to birds and fish/And human kind, all things living but unknown,/Dimly recalled, or dead" (Dabydeen, 1995: 9). The process of re-birth is also a process of re-creation. The absent mother, whether homeland or actual, is the site of trauma and mourning and therefore the key to creativity. The re-naming of creation is also a direct response to the colonial theft of names and places.

What follows is a ream of memories from a mythic childhood and land: "I dream to be small again, even though/My mother caught me with my fingers/In a panoose jar..." (Dabydeen, 1995: 12). And Manu, as a wise healer and shaman, is at the centre of this mythic past. The narrator imagines a fall he had as a child in which he hit his head, "On a stone waiting at the bottom of the pond":

> I come up dazed, I float half-dead, I bleed
> For days afterwards, for even Manu cannot
> Stem the flow with his poultices soaked
> In goat-dung mixed with the skin of abara fruit,
> The smell of which makes me retch (Dabydeen, 1995: 12).

The memories of this childhood fall, and Manu's healing, merge with his drowning in the Middle Passage:

> For days afterwards the sea is strewn with companions:
> The gods have taken revenge on all of us.
> We float together for days before the waves
> Divide us. I have known them all, briefly,
> I have always known them, year after year
> From different sunken ships (Dabydeen, 1995: 13).

Dabydeen expresses what Wilson Harris refers to as "infinite rehearsal"; humanity is trapped in a cycle of destruction. The repeated slaughter of slaves and indentured labourers during the passage across the black waters resulted in the permanent presence of their ghosts and memories, particularly for their offspring. Their bodies become enshrined in the seabed:

> ... The sea prepares
> Their festive masks, salt crystals like a myriad
> Of sequins hemmed into their flesh through golden
> Threads of hair. The sea decorates, violates (Dabydeen, 1995: 15).

The sea prepares the neglected bodies for burial, as it adorns them, in the style of Hindu festivals, with the "crystals", "sequins" and "golden/Threads" of the seabed. But this adornment becomes a sinister violation of the body: "Sea-quats cling to my body like gorgeous/Ornaments. I have become the sea's whore,/Yielding" (Dabydeen, 1995: 19). Their violated bodies, memories, and ghosts become permanently enshrined by the sea. Manu cannot rescue them from this deluge for, "even Manu could not prophesy/The shapes of death revolving in their eyes" (Dabydeen, 1995: 31). Their absorption into the seabed liberates them from the shackles of slavery, but gradually erases all memories of the past: "Now I am loosed/Into the sea, I no longer call,/I have even forgotten the words" (Dabydeen, 1995: 23), and leaves the drowned slave as "neither ghost/Nor portent of a past or future life/such as I am, now" (Dabydeen, 1995: 24).

Abandoned in this barrenness, it is in "Manu's memory" that the drowned slave makes his story:

> One and the same pathway Manu prophesied,
> His voice lowered to a mysterious whisper
> As he told that time future was neither time past
> Nor time present, but a rupture so complete
> That pain and happiness will become one, death
> And freedom, barrenness and riches (Dabydeen, 1995: 36).

From this state of "emptiness" one is able to "dream, surmise, invent, immortalise" and "each will be Manu, the source and future/Chronicles of our tribe" (Dabydeen, 1995: 36). Manu, just as in the myth, will be eternally re-manifested after his death, "after the sword that bore into him" (Dabydeen, 1995: 40) at the hands of the slavers. The drowned slave, however, is left with little hope of re-birth: "I wanted to begin anew in the sea/But the child would not bear the future" (Dabydeen, 1995: 41). As he drowns, his imagined landscape disappears:

> No savannah, moon, gods, magicians
> To heal or curse, harvests, ceremonies,
> No men to plough, corn to fatten their herds,
> No stars, no land, no words, no community,
> No mother.

The final line of *Turner* echoes the first; the drowned slave is again the stillborn or aborted child with no mother. The hopes of rebirth in the sea are shattered as the fantasy of the motherland disintegrates from sight.

Turner enacts the inherent ironies and ambiguities of colonialism as it moves from hope to destruction; though the past, pre-colonial experiences are erased from memory, sites of new creativity are still produced as cultures meet in alternative spaces:

> Instead of the critical and imaginatively necrophilial engagement with the artefacts of the past resulting in a stale and unproductive creativity – a form of stillbirth – the emphasis is firmly shifted to a counter-perception, despite a history of Western 'forgetting', of aporia; creativity is stillborn (McIntyre, 1997: 148).

McIntyre sees this most strongly in Dabydeen's allusion to the bone flute:

> Shall I call to it even as the dead

> Survive catastrophe to speak to one
> Redemptive and prophetic voice, even
> As a jackal breathing into bone
> Rouses familiar song? Shall I suckle
> It on tales of resurrected folk (Dabydeen, 1995: 34).

The bone flute, the instrument carved from the enemy's bones in Amerindian tradition, is itself "a form of creativity that is *still*born rather than stillborn" where "new cross-cultural creativity can arise out of conflict, oppositions refigured into a creative syncretism signalling the emergence of new cultural formations" (McIntyre, 1997: 149). Though the bone flute offers prophetic insight and redemption, fashioning it is also a violent process and a process through which the voices of the past, present and future become indistinguishable. The birth of these new formations is therefore, as any birth, a traumatic and painful experience. McIntyre also goes on to say that expression of these formations is still dependent on the hegemonic structures, and the reason for Dabydeen's final lines "No words, no community,/No mother" (McIntyre, 1997: 151). I would add that these final lines refer to the fact that it is through the loss of the mother/land and her language that an engagement in new cross-cultural creativity can begin.[111]

Dabydeen's novel *A Harlot's Progress*, written after *Turner*, is a continuation of the same narrative. The slave boy, who is renamed several times (once as Noah (Dabydeen, 1999: 164)), survives the passage and the horrific abuse by the captain. This is also present in *Turner*: "He whispered eloquently/Into our ears even as we wriggled beneath him,/Breathless with pain, wanting to remove his hook/Implanted in our flesh" (Dabydeen, 1995: 40). As in *Turner*, the slave is left with an emptiness from which he rewrites his history. The novel begins with an abolitionist interviewing 'Mungo' as an old man, in order to transcribe his life story. As Lee Jenkins says:

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[111] The presence of the mother and death establish Dabydeen's work as another site of the uncanny, as referred to in Chapter Three with reference to Wilson Harris and Diane Jonte-Pace.

> *A Harlot's Progress*... is similarly focalized through the trickster-like fabulations of a slave whose myriad imaginative scenarios take place of an originary narrative demanded by a white abolitionist patron but which the slave himself withholds and perhaps knows to be unavailable (Jenkins, 2001: 83).

Rather than allowing his life story, which may not even be retrievable, to be written down by a white hand, Mungo produces a fragmented and often incoherent narrative of events:

> Memory don't bother me, that's why I don't tell Mr Pringle anything. I can change memory, like I can change my posture, fling the blanket away, spring out of bed, dance a step or two of cotillion, and babble into his blank pages the most lively of syllables (Dabydeen, 1999: 2).

Mungo refuses to indulge the white imagination in the traumas of slavery. The novel is presented as a series of confused, and often contradictory, memories, for: "Captain Thistlewood had pressed a hot iron on his forehead, the shock of the pain erasing memory of Africa which returned only in occasional glimpses and fragments of voices" (Dabydeen, 1999: 152). These voices are the voices of his past community, the leader of which is Manu.

Whilst on board the ship, Mungo is haunted, but also guided, by the ghostly presence of his community, who were all slaughtered prior to boarding or during the passage:

> I lock myself in the cabin and await his coming, but instead a mist seeps through hidden spaces and forms the shapes of Ellar and Tanda and Kaka and Manu. Ellar's skin is flayed by a sailor's whip. She is streaked with blood like a mask of desire. She is gaudy with bruises. She wears the swelling of her lips and cheeks like haughty ornaments... Kaka's head is a palette of colours... In place of an ordinary roundness, his head is indented in places, small pockets bearing unfamiliar liquids – raven-black, the pink of coral, rouge of crab-back – bubbling up through hidden spaces (Dabydeen, 1999: 97).

The horrific violence of slavery stunts Mungo's memory; this is how he will remember his community. The guilt of his own survival, for he is 'chosen' by Captain Thistlewood, plagues him and distorts his memories further. Manu's escape is most intriguing as he manages to free himself from the chains and "rushes to the side of the ship… A gaggle of sailors rush after Manu but he has already disappeared into the sea" (Dabydeen, 1999: 95). Manu is saved again by the vastness of the sea, however no vessel is sent from the gods to take him home, instead he had "swum and swum, swallowing up the distance, until he reached the mouth of the river leading to our village" (Dabydeen, 1999: 98). They turn to him for guidance but "he has swallowed too much sea water to speak… Instead of words, fish tumble out, gorgeous and bizarre and dreadful in shape and hue" (Dabydeen, 1999: 97). In a bizarre twist to the original myth, Manu has digested the fish deities: "The new nameless and exotic world he carries in his belly spills out onto the floor, confronting them with a spectacle of their own transformation" (Dabydeen, 1999: 97). They are transformed by the obscenity of slavery as their broken and abused bodies become the property of someone else; words are unavailable to describe their experiences. Dabydeen reformulates a mythic landscape within which to speak of the horrors. Manu drowns and digests the *avatāras* whose "gorgeous and bizarre" presence and silence speak more loudly than the words Manu can offer.

On Mungo's arrival in England, after he is sold into slavery, the fragmented voices of his tribe continue to guide him, but also torment him: "'Come back to me,' he pleads, afflicted by the burden of being the remnant of his tribe" (Dabydeen, 1999: 118). They torture him with memories of the violent passage, and the demise of his mother: "Don't you remember? You saw it all, you were chained a few yards from her. Each night the Captain came below to feed on your mother, a little at a time. Her toes. Her feet. Her ankles. Her legs. Only her torso was left, fixed to the floor by irons at her

neck and hands" (Dabydeen, 1999: 121). The narrator's relationship with the memories of his mother is again a painful presence in the novel. Her rape and dismemberment are the disintegration of the motherland and mark the site of rupture and trauma, and the site from which to reconstruct an "imagined homeland". The mother's body is again targeted as the site of abjection, the site from which to represent the violent, pornographic and cannibalistic nature of slavery. The tearing apart of the womb, as also seen in the opening lines of *Turner* ("Belly/Blown and flapping loose and torn like sails" (Dabydeen, 1995: 9)), locates the maternal body as "desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject" (Kristeva, 1982: 30). This projection of fear onto the maternal body, which Dabydeen locates in his actual loss of his mother, is powerfully linked to the religious imagination. Just as in Harris's fiction, the maternal body is ritualized throughout Dabydeen's work in order to purify abjection, and thus come to terms with the pornographic nature of colonialism. For writers such as Harris and Dabydeen, the maternal body is the uncanny site of both fear and the hope of salvation.

'The pornography of empire' is a phrase Wilson Harris used to describe Dabydeen's *Slave Song*, and it is equally applicable to *Turner* and *A Harlot's Progress*. Dabydeen has described Empire as "an erotic project" for it brings "to the surface the latent eroticism of the encounter between black and white" (Interview with Frank Birbalsingh, 1997: 184). The oppression and domination of slavery and indenture took place first and foremost on the bodies of the oppressed. Dabydeen exposes the implications of this in the sinister descriptions of what can become a sado-masochistic encounter:

> 'I miss the whippings the most,' Baju says boldly, returning them to obscenity. 'The sailors knew exactly where to lash you, to pucker your skin and you quiver and make sucking noises. Afterwards, with exhaustion, I used to sink into such a lovely deep sleep and wake up feeling so refreshed, the air in the hold

> fresh, smelling of my garden, the young oranges and paw-paws,
> the jacaranda' (Dabydeen, 1999: 140-1).

The ghosts of Mungo's tribe sink into an erotic retrieval of their memories of slavery, which leads directly to a discussion of how they died: '"I died of cholera... 'Shame, I died of cholera too. I was having such fun'... 'Dysentery killed me'... 'I was taken early... I flapped and couldn't breath, the chains hooked me to the floor, I tried to heave out of them, and I thought this was what sex was, for it was my first time...' (Dabydeen, 1999: 141). Benita Parry states that "such writing simultaneously articulates and interrogates the heightened and morbid erotic energies released by colonialism" (Parry, 1988: 4). The project of colonialism was necessarily entangled in a "sexual pathology" which is rarely dwelt upon. Dabydeen articulates and exposes the putrid eroticism involved in the colonial project and encounter resulting from the combined sexual, physical and psychic abuse.

The oppressed body was the site of "sexual pathology" but it was also the site on which religious negotiations took place. Dabydeen's poem "The Canecutters' Song" plays out the tension of this exchange:

> White hooman walk tru de field fo watch we canecutta,
> Tall, straight, straang-limb,
> Hair sprinkle in de wind like gold-duss,
> Lang lace frack loose on she bady like bamboo-flag,
> An flesh mo dan hibiscus early maan, white an saaf an wet
> Flowering in she panty.
> O Shanti! Shanti! Shanti!
> Wash dis dutty-skin in yu dew
> Wipe am clean on yu saaf white petal!
> O Shanti! Shanti! Shanti! –
> So me spirit call, so e halla foh yu... (Dabydeen, 1984: 25).

Dabydeen moves between images of Hindu ceremonies and the obscene desire for a white woman. The pornographic observance of her body is paralleled with the observance of a religious ceremony. This demonstrates again the necessary relationship between abjection and the religious imagination; the defilement and horror of the

female body is transgressed through ritual. Her skin represents the purity of the white hibiscus flower: "An flesh mo dan hibiscus early maan" (Dabydeen, 1984: 25), which as Dabydeen reminds us in his notes, is an important part of Hindu rites. Her body is also described as a "bamboo-flag" and her hair "sprinkle in de wind like gold-duss". Dabydeen explains that "a white flag is attached to a very tall, freshly cut bamboo stick... A piece of gold, or gold dust... is wrapped in some cloth and this attached to the bamboo pole – symbolic payment of Lord Krishna" (Dabydeen, 1984: 52). The call, "O Shanti" is both one of spiritual purification and sexual desire, meaning both peace and a Hindu girl's name (Dabydeen, 1984: 52-3). The poem continues with a cannibalistic feeding on the woman's body: "Dat yu womb lie like starapple buss open in de mud" (Dabydeen, 1984: 26). The starapple is a fruit used in religious ceremonies but also "like raw flesh" because of its "deep, purple colour" (Dabydeen, 1984: 52). Dabydeen describes his poem as a sexual defecation of a religious ceremony. What he does not explicitly explore in his notes, but which is powerfully present in the poem, is that both the religious and pornographic exploitations take place on the body; identical images refer simultaneously to both religious observance and violent sexual desires. As Kristeva says, religious structures are used to transgress sites of defilement (Kristeva, 1982: 17). Dabydeen confronts the ambiguous role of religious structures and rituals by placing religious symbols alongside sexual imagery.

As Hegel's master/slave dialectic indicates, the oppressed body finds its autonomy through the work of the hands. As has been discussed, this autonomy is then often expressed in the religious consciousness. The experiences of agricultural labour in Guyana, both in slavery and indenture, are, as already mentioned, an important part of Dabydeen's writing. In order to retrieve the lost histories of Guyana, and to explore the tensions of the colonial encounter, one must return to the sugar plantations. Dabydeen has said that the "agricultural experience is very Indian, and it is

arrogant to marginalise us, to think that we can be on the land, day in and day out, since 1838, and not feel for that land and not belong to that land" (Interview with Birbalsingh, 1997: 186). In his writing he is trying to "see a continuum of slave and indenture experience" for he describes himself as an Anancy figure "with one foot planted in Africa... [and]... one foot planted in India in an equally ambiguous way" (Interview with Birbalsingh, 1997: 188). This double consciousness has manifested itself in the religious memory and explains the incarnation of the Hindu god Manu as an African prophet and slave, for the "Indianness inevitably and unconsciously fus[es] into that African body of experience" (Interview with Dawes, 1997: 204). The manifestation of Manu can also be seen as a ritualization of the abjection of colonialism, which is played out on the maternal body in Dabydeen's work; the horrors of colonialism are represented in the defilement of the maternal body, and Manu's incarnation acts as a purification of this defilement.

This chapter has addressed the presence of the Indian diaspora in Guyanese fiction, and how writers have attended to this part of Guyana's mythical ancestry. David Dabydeen's writing is fuelled by the experiences of his ancestors' journey, remembered in the collective consciousness of the Indian-Guyanese community, as they travelled from India to Guyana. Dabydeen's writing is also a tribute to the diverse experiences which form the Caribbean identity, from Amerindian to African to Indian. Rather than dividing these histories, Dabydeen invents a mythic landscape that incorporates the unique strands of individual pasts but celebrates the creolization of Caribbean culture. Dabydeen also recognises that the transition from India to Guyana, and the merging of the multiple strands of Guyanese culture, is a religious process. At the centre of this mythic landscape is the ambiguous figure Manu, Hindu god of deluge and African prophet. Through the unconscious incarnation of this character, Dabydeen

is celebrating the fluidity of ancestral memory. His writing demonstrates that religion is a manifestation of ancestral memory; sites of trauma, such as the Middle Passage of slavery and indenture, are understood and explored in the religious consciousness. The discussions of this chapter add further weight to the argument that religion and literature are the transitional spaces through which to recover from the traumas of exile. The pathological mourning for the mother/land is a strong theme in Dabydeen's work. The violence, horrors and pornography of colonialism are played out on the defilement of the maternal body in lines such as "belly/Blown and flapping loose and torn like sails" (Dabydeen, 1995: 9). Dabydeen's use of Manu to heal the melancholy demonstrates that the religious imagination must necessarily respond to sites of abjection.

CONCLUSION

> I am my father in my mother's eucalyptus-anointed body. Every time I move it hurts so I strike a pose and hold it and it is like holding my breath. I puff out my chest, put my best foot forward and I fly without wings or an engine and keep my position before the camera of my dreaming eye. As my father in my mother's body [sic]. I bump into aluminium clouds. I bounce off the curved and elastic blue wall of the sky. The limbs of trees, fingers that project from the body of the earth, grab at me. A mountain range nudges me and I know it is my mother's shoulders. I comb the landscape of my father's eyes for their only child but see nothing that looks even remotely like me... The people who parade along the street pour buckets of water dyed red and blue and yellow on my head. Flour and talcum powder flies from bags into my face and sticks to my body. Hand drums and flutes, whistles and clapping bounce me along with the crowd, which chants in Hindi and English... (D'Aguiar, 2003: 159).

This disorientating narrative, taken from D'Aguiar's latest novel *Bethany Bettany* (2003), helps to draw together some of the key themes and critical strategies that I have employed throughout this thesis. The novel follows the tragic life of the main character, Bethany-Bettany, as she deals with the death of her father, her abandonment by her mother and the physical and verbal abuse in the hands of her father's family. This bleak story is set in the fictional Guyanese town of Boundary and deals with the issues of a postcolonial nation, for which Bethany-Bettany becomes a metaphor, struggling to gain a sense of identity in the wake of colonialism. The above passage locates the themes of landscape, memory, dreaming, and a sense of disorientation as central to the new critical reading of religion in Guyanese literature that I have pursued throughout this thesis.

It has been ascertained that the category 'religion' is a Christian, Western construction that is rooted in a history of Enlightenment and imperialism. In order to distance 'religion' from this history but for it to remain a useful classificatory category,

it is necessary to engage in a critical re-reading of the term. The recent and on-going works of scholars such as Russ McCutcheon (1997), David Chidester (1996), Jeremy Carrette (1999/2000), Richard King (1999), and Tim Fitzgerald (2000) are central to this process. David Chidester, Richard King, and Tim Fitzgerald are all engaged in the analytical re-assessment of the term 'religion' in relation to colonialism. Whilst Fitzgerald concludes that 'religion' is redundant as an analytical category in light of its imperial history, both King and Chidester are keen to maintain its usage as a classificatory category. Rather than using the term in an essentialist way to describe a particular state of mind or way of behaving, 'religion' is understood as a taxonomy, a constructed category to help to speak about certain moments of exchange and relations to power. This is particularly useful to a postcolonial enquiry for it prevents the hierarchical assumptions which are implicit within the uncritical adoption of the term 'religion'; 'they, the researched, are religious but I, the researcher, am not'. Understanding religion as a classificatory category also provides a new vocabulary and analytical space with which and from which to speak about the moments of exchange and negotiation that have defined colonial encounters.

Postcolonial writers have been writing about such moments of contact and exchange, both with the coloniser and other cultures, for generations. When the new critical understanding of the term 'religion' is applied to the literature, new readings emerge that are central to the text and that would be absent otherwise. Like many other postcolonial nations, Guyana has become a meeting point of different cultures; the two main groups are Indian and African Guyanese, as a result of slavery and indentured labour, however, the indigenous population is still represented, unlike a majority of the Caribbean islands, and the remaining ethnic groups are Chinese, Portuguese and other European. As seen by D'Aguiar in the above passage, writers are continuously addressing the multiple heritages that have formed their nation. What is less explicit in

a reading of the passage is why it is that in describing the alienation of a fragmented nation, represented by the narrator Bethany-Bettany, that D'Aguiar, and his narrator, are led into the celebrations of a Hindu-Caribbean festival:

> Calypsos mix with the film music. I hear both, one in each ear. People float in dances to both, sounds. Children fill cups with this dyed water, grab handfuls of flour and powder and chase each other. Not a soul remains untarnished (D'Aguiar, 2003: 160).

The analytical space of religion, described here in the meeting of Indian and African culture ("I hear both, one in each ear"), allows D'Aguiar to capture simultaneously the sense of disorientation felt by a fragmented community, and also the possibility of renewal. The, often violent, negotiations of power that Bethany-Bettany is forced into lead her into a dream in which she is in her mother's "eucalyptus-anointed" body. The mother's body is often at the centre of such negotiations of power within Guyanese fiction: in Harris's *Jonestown*, and other novels, the mother is an archetypal saviour and healing force; in Dabydeen's *Turner*, the mother represents the motherland, grieving for her children lost to slavery. The mother's body offers writers a sense of archetypal 'sacredness' with which to define the unspeakable; she represents both the threat of decay and the hope of renewal and rebirth. When this aspect of the literature is brought into the sphere of Religious Studies, the significance of the mother and the situations she defines become speakable. In Western Christian imagery, the mother's body is defined by the Virgin Mary (one of the most powerful religious symbols); she is the site of bodily birth yet heavenly purity. The presence of the mother's body as an ambiguous site of danger as well as purity within the fiction unsettles the sanctity of such iconoclastic imagery. Writers play with these images in order to confront and

redefine the boundaries of white colonial Christianity and to speak where they would previously have been silenced.[112]

Additional themes that permeate through the passage quoted in the epigraph are those of memory and dreaming. Bethany is dreaming of her parents and remembering snippets of an untroubled past. This act of remembrance, through her dream, leads her into the collective remembrance of syncretic Guyanese culture. Throughout the thesis, the notion of memory has played a significant part in the understanding and portrayal of religion. Through a discussion of Harris's novel *Jonestown,* in which he revisits the traumatic events of the Jonestown community, I established that the act of remembrance can be defined in terms of religion. This assertion became a central concern in the reading of the fiction and poetry. Writers are often engaged in an act of retrieval, and when this retrieval is understood in terms of religion, new readings of the fiction become visible. The writers are engaged in a re-mythologizing of the past in order to visualise a future creativity. The West African Anancy stories, which survived the Middle Passage and generations of enslavement, were the ideal site from which to redefine the identity and history of a fragmented people. The continued repetition and recreation of these folk stories, by both the oral tradition and creative writers, are more than a simple remembrance; the category 'religion' allows access to the depths of this issue. The stories provide a creative outlet for the complex negotiations of power that colonial and postcolonial communities are often engaged in, and the search for identity amidst such confrontations. I have asserted that responses to these negotiations, through the telling of Anancy stories, the re-writing of events such as Jonestown, or the manifestation of the Hindu god Manu,

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[112] Bethany is believed to be the reincarnation of her evil mother and, at one point in the novel, Bethany is pinned down on the kitchen table by the priest and one of her aunts in order to rid her of her mother's evil spirit. She is subjected to a humiliating physical examination to check if she has been seduced by the devil: "Listen, child. I need to check your body for a sign. Answer me. Do you ever touch yourself down below?" (D'Aguiar, 2003: 141). The female black body is a threat to white purity.

can be productively understood as religious expressions. These expressions are often triggered by an act of remembrance, or anamnesis.

The field of psychoanalysis has offered vital links in the complex dialogue that has been taking place across Religious Studies and postcolonial theory. The responses to the negotiations described above are an issue of psychic as well as social dismemberment, and a reason for memory being a key theme. It has been necessary to reposition the concerns of psychoanalysis in the light of postcolonial theory, and this has been mainly achieved with reference to the ground-breaking work of Frantz Fanon (1968) and the recent work of David Punter (2000). Fanon forced the white psychoanalytic traditions to face the issue of black subjectivity and the reality of the psychic internalisation of racism, which Fanon called the "epidermalization of this inferiority" (Fanon, 1967/1986: 13). The conflicts of power taking place within the psyche, as well as in society, have been a key consideration in articulating an understanding of religion. The creative imagination has responded to the fragmented psyches and collective trauma of colonised peoples through the re-mythologizing of history and by what Harris describes as, "building a new architecture of cultures" (Harris, ed. by Bundy, 1999: 158).

The final theme of interest in the D'Aguiar passage is his description of the landscape and Bethany's relationship to it.

> The limbs of trees, fingers that project from the body of the earth, grab at me. A mountain range nudges me and I know it is my mother's shoulders. I comb the landscape of my father's eyes for their only child but see nothing that looks even remotely like me (D'Aguiar, 2003: 159).

The landscape is a persistent force for Guyanese writers and their articulation of it has been of particular significance for this study. As a result of its ambiguity (both jungle and sea, both Caribbean and South American), the landscape is often represented as a

living, breathing force with divine and mysterious powers. Like Harris, D'Aguiar brings the landscape to life in his writing, and provides his trees with limbs and mountains with shoulders. For Bethany, the landscape is also her mother, which further suggests the archetypal sacredness that the symbol of the mother provides. Colonial encounters were dictated by boundaries; indigenous boundaries were disregarded and new boundaries were established. This continued negotiation of boundaries, both physical and psychological, is a question of religion. By re-orientating the category 'religion' in terms of boundary negotiation, it is recognised as key to understanding and articulating colonial encounters. For Guyanese writers the landscape takes on religious significance as a result of the negotiations of power that have taken place on and across it. For generations of enslaved people, and indentured labourers, the relationship to the land enabled them to re-articulate their identities and re-build their communities; their bodies were engrained in the roots of trees and in the contours of the land. Using the word 'religion' to describe this relationship, and writers' accounts of it, has enabled this dynamic to be understood more persuasively.

Until now, the study of postcolonial fiction has failed to engage in a critical reading of the notion of 'religion'. This thesis has aligned the work of contemporary theorists of religion with that of Guyanese writers and poets. My renegotiation of the category 'religion' has exposed tensions at the heart of postcolonial theory, particularly to do with its dependence on Western constructions and definitions; however, simultaneously, the renegotiation has provided new insights into key themes of postcolonial literature and poetry. The theoretical framework adopted throughout the thesis is in many ways applicable to readings of fiction outside of Guyana, and even outside of the Caribbean. This thesis provides postcolonial theory with a theoretical location that recognises that 'religion' can be both a colonial category and a critical

context for liberated identity. The denial of such a category is to deny the memory of struggle and to reduce the landscape of interpretation.

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