NATION LANGUAGE, TRADITIONAL SPIRITUAL BELIEFS, AND
GENDER ROLES IN THE WORK OF OPAL PALMER ADISA:
A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Dedication

To my son Luis André, a true warrior, and my family and friends who have been there for me.
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Abstract

The linguistic research reported here explores how Caribbean writer Opal Palmer Adisa manipulates nation language (Jamaican Creole) and expressions of traditional spiritual beliefs in her creative work in order to comment on gender roles and identity formation in contemporary Jamaican society. The research examines the way in which the language in the texts reflects male/female interaction in Jamaica and critically assesses the power relations and identity politics embodied in the linguistic forms selected. The research also considers how references to traditional spiritual beliefs and practices are employed to underscore and explain the gender practices of the society. The analysis draws on theoretical work in sociolinguistics, critical discourse analysis, and cultural studies pertaining to language and gender, language and power, language and resistance, and language and identity.

Key words: critical discourse analysis, gender roles, Nation Language, Jamaica, African traditional beliefs, power relations, language and identity
Biographical information

Sonia Crescioni has a Bachelor’s degree in Mass Communication with a minor in French from the University of South Florida, Tampa and a Master’s degree in Translation from the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus. She is a certified English as a Second language teacher and has experience teaching at elementary and university levels. Her doctoral studies in the literature and languages of the English-speaking Caribbean with a specialization in linguistics are motivated by her interest in other countries and the languages and cultures of other people as universal expressions of human connectivity. She currently works as an interpreter at the U.S. District Court for Puerto Rico and is inspired to continue teaching to help people learn new languages.
Chapter One:

Introduction

1.0 Background on Opal Palmer Adisa

   Opal Palmer Adisa is a feminist poet, writer, photographer, educator, and community organizer who was born in Kingston, Jamaica and raised on a sugar estate. She has a Ph.D. in Ethnic Studies and Literature from the University of California at Berkley, is Distinguished Professor emerita of Creative writing and Diversity Studies at California College of the Arts, where she taught for twenty-five years, and is presently the University Director of The Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies, Mona, in Kingston, Jamaica. In addition, Adisa has conducted writing workshops in schools, museums, churches, community centers, and correctional institutions in the California Bay Area, as well as internationally, including the Caribbean.

   Adisa has written two novels (*It Begins with Tears* [1997], *Painting Away Regrets* [2011]), several short story collections, (including, *Love’s Promise*, 2017), essays, and poetry collections, her latest being *4-Headed Woman* (2013). She is a consummate storyteller, and as Calderaro (2008) puts it, her sweet, passionate stories and poetry make her readers want to stand up, sing, and dance (p. 2). Her work, which has been collected in over 400 anthologies and journals, creates a world of sensuous colors, sounds, and smells through which readers can learn about Jamaican identity, culture, landscape, and history. She is widely read in Jamaica, England, the United States, Canada and Africa.
Adisa writes in Standard Caribbean English and Jamaican Creole (Nation Language) and uses code-switching between the two language varieties extensively for the purposes of character and narrative development. Her facility in both codes and the language choices she makes will be a major focus of this dissertation, as will her exploration of gender roles and her incorporation of African traditional beliefs in her writing.

2.0 Critical Discourse Analysis

This dissertation is a critical discourse analysis of Opal Palmer Adisa’s use of Nation Language, exploration of gender roles, and expressions of African traditional beliefs in the novel It Begins with Tears. Critical linguistics contends that “language is as it is because of its function in the social structure, and the organization of behavioral meanings should give some insight into its social foundations” (Halliday, 1973, p. 5). Critical linguists believe that words and phrases do not come pre-packaged with specific delimited meanings that a researcher can zero in on as if they were fixed and self-contained. Rather, meaning is actively produced by the interweaving of words and phrases in different contexts.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA, a subgenre of critical linguistics) not only describes discursive practices but also shows how texts (both spoken and written) are shaped by relations of power and by ideologies of how discourse constructs social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief. When we attempt to grasp patterns in a text, we always have to carry out that exercise against a cultural backdrop. The cultural backdrop is made up of many different social worlds (such as classrooms, families, clubs), subcultures (including age cohorts, socioeconomic classes,
and geographic regions), and in most societies, languages and dialects. These provide shared systems of meaning that we selectively draw upon to communicate with each other. As we read texts, we produce a personal interpretation which we then subject to discourse analysis (Parker, 1999). This makes CDA particularly appropriate for an analysis of Adisa’s employment of creole language forms, her depiction of evolving gender roles, and her recourse to African traditional sayings and practices in the depiction of Caribbean characters. More details about the application of Critical Discourse Analysis to literary works, the selection of passages, and the criteria for analysis are provided in Chapter 5.

2.1 Nation Language

As defined by Brathwaite (1964, p. 260), “Nation Language is the kind of English language spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and laborers, the servants who were brought by the conquistadors.” In other words, Nation Language is another name for Jamaican Creole, also known as Patwa or Jamaican. Adisa credits Jamaican storyteller Louise Bennett for making it possible for her to use the creole in her writing. She explains why she employs Nation Language in her work:

I use Nation language when it is the only way and the best way to get my point across, to say what I mean from the center of my navel. But I also use it to interrupt and disrupt Standard English as a reminder to myself that I have another tongue, but also to jolt readers to listen and read more carefully, to glean from the language the Caribbean sensibilities that I am always pushing, sometimes subtly,
other times more forcefully. Nation Language allows me to infuse the poem with all the smells and colors of home. (Calderaro, 2008, p. 2)

In another interview, Adisa enlarges upon this topic, stating: “I think the way that people speak is important, it has to be addressed in the literature and one of the things I like to try and make sure I do is to give language a voice to give agency to people, make true use of Nation Language and express their deepest feelings. All writers like Hemingway at various points used Nation language, spoke the way they explain themselves which is through their mother tongue.” (Adisa, 2014)

This dissertation examines Nation Language because it is language of the people of Jamaica and the variety spoken by most of the characters in *It Begins with Tears*. Jamaicans make good use of the Creole in idiomatic expressions, interjections, and story-telling. Adisa’s writing is full of many examples, a selection of which are identified and analyzed in this dissertation.

2.2 Gender roles

Human beings, like many other species, are divided into the male and female sexes based on primary sexual features like chromosomal configuration and reproductive organs and or secondary physical characteristics like relative body size, distribution of hair, fat, and muscle tissue, and size and placement of the larynx. These physical differences lead to expectations regarding sexual behavior that include believing in heterosexuality as the only possibility, seeing reproduction and child rearing as a purely female responsibility, and justifying the male tendency to stray sexually (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).
In addition to physiological sex, humans are also distinguished by gender, a social construct which overlaps to a great extent (but not completely) with biological sex. Male and female genders persist as structurally important social categories because people perform gendered and gendering behavior. In other words, each society has stereotypical expectations of certain behaviors that are linked to each sex, and these gender behaviors are taken as “natural” reflections of sex. People act as their society thinks men and women should act, and they raise their children to perpetuate gendered attitudes and behaviors. However, gender behaviors are socially determined and may vary across cultures or historical periods.

One type of gendered behavior is the differential use of language by women and men which has been documented by numerous sociolinguistic studies. Researchers have tended to approach language and gender from four major angles: Deficit, Dominance, Difference, and Dynamic (Coates, 1986).

All of Adisa’s works deal with gender roles in one way or another. In her stories, Adisa portrays strong women who are representative of the women in Jamaica who are often female heads of household, independent business owners, and fierce maintainers of family bonds. She illustrates their vital role in Jamaican society, despite concerted attempts by men to control and victimize them from an early age. Her dialogs demonstrate clear differences between the way men and women communicate, further underscoring their societal functions.

This dissertation seeks to explore the depiction of gender roles in *It Begins with Tears* in order to give a voice to a once silent group that is key to society. Misogyny has been shown to be counterproductive in modern society, and most commentators feel it
must be brought to an end. Because Jamaica is currently struggling with the problem and Adisa’s novel reflects that struggle, the topic of gender roles is included in this dissertation.

**2.3 African traditional and spiritual beliefs**

African traditional and spiritual beliefs play an important role in Adisa’s work. *It Begins with Tears* incorporates strong African oral traditions that reflect local wisdom, especially in the speech of elderly women and Obeah or medicine women who are often consulted in times of physical or psychological distress. Proverbs and ancestral tales are an intrinsic part of Jamaican culture because they are the way the elders pass wisdom on to the younger generations. They also provide a running commentary on social structures and roles that have been around since slavery times, when the men were forcibly separated from their families and the women were obligated to find the means to care for their children and maintain social cohesion in the face of great adversity.

Adisa is deeply concerned with the struggles of Caribbean women and believes that traditional African spiritual beliefs may play an important role in healing the wounds caused by a history of slavery and sexual oppression. The references to traditional spiritual beliefs and practices in her works are also employed to underscore and explain the gender practices of Jamaican society. Adisa manipulates Nation Language and expressions of African traditional culture in order to highlight the historical links among language, gender, power, resistance, and identity in Jamaica.

This dissertation examines the way in which the African references in the texts reflect male/female interaction in Jamaica, and it critically assesses the power relations and identity politics embodied in the discourse forms selected.
3.0 Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to better understand the links among language, gender, power, resistance, and identity in Jamaican society, through a critical analysis of discourse in Opal Palmer Adisa’s novel *It Begins with Tears*. Although a literary work is utilized as data, this dissertation is not a literary study, but rather a linguistic one that looks at the discourse structures and processes in the text.

Particular attention is paid to the use of Nation Language and how Jamaican women claim their space in society through the use of their creole vernacular. The analysis examines the abuse of women and children in the fictional village presented in the novel, as well as issues related to maternity, infidelity, and women’s roles in cultural transmission and identity formation. The dissertation highlights how Adisa utilizes a discourse of resistance to reveal female needs, pain, and struggles and to denounce those who trample upon women.

4.0 Research question

The major research question motivating this dissertation is the following: How does Adisa deploy Jamaican Creole vs. Standard Caribbean English to underscore personal identity, illuminate the role and the relevance of traditional belief systems in Jamaican society, and shed light on the nature of male-female relations and gender roles in Jamaican society? The answers to this question provided by critical discourse analysis reveal processes that can be useful in better understanding her work and Jamaican society as a whole.
5.0 Justification

To the best of the author’s knowledge, an analysis of the sort presented in this dissertation has not been carried out by any previous researchers. Thus the work represents a unique contribution to the study of Adisa’s writing, to the critical analysis of written texts in general, and to the understanding of the struggles of Jamaican women.

6.0 Outline of remaining chapters

Chapter 2 reviews the scholarly literature on the nature of Nation Language and its use by various Caribbean writers, including Adisa. It describes the historical development of attitudes toward creole languages and their assigned functions in Caribbean society. It also explains in more detail why Adisa employs Nation Language in her creative writing and what the repercussions of that decision have been. Furthermore, it reviews the scholarly literature on the linguistic process of code switching, its functions, the attitudes expressed toward it, and its use by writers for specific creative purposes. It explores what is known as the creole continuum in Jamaica and shows how speakers and writers selectively utilize different varieties of the creole and the standard language to accomplish different social goals.

Chapter 3 reviews the scholarly literature on gender roles and how they are reflected in and reinforced by language choices and discourse structures. It discusses the historical development of the Jamaican family and the reasons behind the gender conflicts and domestic violence that exist today in Jamaican society. It also demonstrates the linguistic differences that have been shown to exist between Jamaican men and women.
Chapter 4 reviews the literature on how African oral traditions transmit important cultural values that are still relevant in modern Caribbean societies. It shows how speakers and writers utilize Afro-Caribbean proverbs, sayings, and parables to encapsulate the teachings of the elders and show their universal application to contemporary events. The chapter also considers how these forms of traditional discourse bring perspectives often contrary to modern scientific discourse and provide their users with a connection to ancient ancestral beliefs and practices.

In Chapter 5, the scholarly literature on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is reviewed in detail in order to further justify its utilization in the exploration of literary works. The specific techniques for selecting key passages and analyzing them in terms of the three focal topics of Nation Language, gender roles, and African traditional beliefs are also explained. Then the detailed findings from the critical discourse analysis of the key passages are reported.

The final chapter of the dissertation recapitulates the research carried out. It reviews and synthesizes the findings regarding the use of Nation Language and African oral traditions in the depiction of gender roles. It comments on the contribution of CDA to an improved understanding of all of the above and the implications of the findings. Finally, it signals the limitations of the research as well as potential directions that future research may take.
Chapter 2:

Nation Language

1.0 Introduction

As a result of colonization, for many years Jamaicans were thought to lack a language of their own. Instead the idea was promoted that they spoke a bastardized form of English known as *patois* (*patwa*) or creole. This caused their native tongue to be seen in a negative light as an imperfect imitation of the colonizers’ language. However, linguistic studies since the 1960s have demonstrated that Jamaicans, like many other Caribbean peoples, combined African and English elements to create their own rule-governed grammar and distinctive linguistic variety which is referred to by Brathwaite (1964, p. 260) as *Nation Language*.

In this chapter, we examine the nature of Nation Language, the other terms used to refer to the phenomenon, and the views toward it adopted by linguists. Then we consider the historical origins of both Standard Caribbean English and Jamaican Creole and explore the notion of a post-creole continuum and code switching between the two varieties. We also take a brief look at Dread talk, a subset of Jamaican Creole. Finally, we look at the difficulties encountered by several Jamaican authors who have utilized Nation Language in their writing and try to understand why they have persevered in that effort.

1.1 Brathwaite’s conception of Nation Language

Brathwaite explains that in the aftermath of European conquest and the arrival of slave labor from Africa, the Caribbean became a multilingual society in which the African languages that the slaves spoke were suppressed by the European masters who
imposed their own languages (English, Spanish, French, Dutch, and Portuguese) upon them. He clarifies that the English utilized in the Caribbean is in fact Creole English, an adaptation made in the new environment of the Caribbean when features of various dialects of English mixed with elements of the African languages brought by the slaves. There are also vestiges of Amerindian languages, Hindi (brought by imported Indian laborers), and varieties of Chinese spoken in the region. The product is “that spectrum--that prism--of languages” which Brathwaite refers to as a “plurality” (p. 259). He states that even though the African slaves originated from many areas of West Africa and spoke different languages, they had a common semantic and stylistic form which led to the advent of a single “new language structure” (p. 261).

Brathwaite claims that the African languages had to submerge themselves, “because officially the conquering peoples did not wish to hear people speaking Ashanti or any of the Congolese languages” (pp. 261-262). This resulted in their suppression and in the assignment of an inferior status to them and their enslaved speakers who were viewed as less than human. This subjugation did not mean the complete disappearance of the African varieties since they influenced the creoles created by the slaves which were adaptations to the new linguistic environment and “the cultural imperatives of the European languages” (p. 262). This transformation also affected the way in which European colonizers spoke their own languages and resulted in distinctive New World dialects.

1.2 Other popular terms for Nation Language

Patwa (also written patwah or patois) originated in mid-17th century French and literally means “rough speech” (Gladwell, 1994). The Oxford English Dictionary (2016)
traces its etymology to Old French *patoier* ‘treat roughly,’ derived from *patte* ‘paw’. It is traditionally used to denote the dialect of a particular region, especially one with low status in relation to the standard language of the country. It also serves to signal the jargon or informal speech used by a particular social group. This is the most common way in which Jamaicans refer to their vernacular speech.

*Broken English* is a pejorative term for a limited register of English used by a non-native speaker. *Broken English* may be fragmented, incomplete, and/or marked by faulty syntax and inappropriate diction. Casimir (1984) demonstrates the extremely negative connotation of the term:

> There exists today a universal language that is spoken and understood almost everywhere: it is broken English. I am not referring to Pidgin-English—a highly formalized and restricted branch of B.E.—but to the much more general language that is used by the waiters in Hawaii, prostitutes in Paris and ambassadors in Washington, by businessmen from Buenos Aires, by scientists at international meetings and by dirty-postcard pictures peddlers in Greece. (p. 122)

In Jamaica, the term is used casually and in self-deprecation, but it also rears its head whenever discussion of using Jamaican Creole in formal settings comes up (Noel, 2012).

*Dialect* is defined by Hudson (1996, p. 22) as “a set of linguistic items with similar distribution.” This distribution may be geographic, social, or occupational. Typically, dialects utilize distinctive words, grammar, or pronunciations that make them identifiable as distinct varieties. However, lay people tend to see dialects as variants of standard languages that lack prestige or are somehow less legitimate than the “real” (standard) languages. The word “dialect” is often used disparagingly, as in “It’s just a
dialect.” In Jamaica, it is very common to hear people refer to Jamaican Creole as “dialect.”

*Quashie,* from the African word Kwasi, refers to the country bumpkin. As Winston James remarks, “Quashie (black peasant) and buccra (white man) are antipodes of Jamaica’s social world: the Black country bumpkin, the peasant, the subaltern, and the symbol of power, superordination, the oppressor, the white man,” (James, 2000, p. 59). The term *quashie talk* (or *bush talk*) refers to the basilectal speech of the most rural and least educated of Jamaicans (DeCamp, 1971, p. 350). It is not heard as often as *patwa* or *Broken English.*

All of these terms are used to refer to what most linguists call Jamaican Creole and what Brathwaite calls Nation Language.

### 1.3 Linguistic view of Nation Language

As already stated, linguistic studies have demonstrated that Jamaicans combined African and European elements to create their own rule-governed grammar and distinctive linguistic variety. Alleyne (2002) asserts that slaves resisted by preserving African language forms that were incomprehensible to their masters. The dominant African group in Jamaica spoke the Twi-Akan language, and Alleyne has found evidence of the existence of Twi-Akan words in what he terms “Jamaican.” Alleyne, like Pryce (1997), prefers to use the term “Jamaican” for the Jamaican variety of Nation Language because it legitimizes the variety as the official expression of the people’s ethnic identity.

Many linguists refer to the vernacular of Jamaica as an example of an English-lexifier creole (Romaine, 1988; Holm, 1988; Faracas, 2007; Mufwene, 2015). It is also commonly referred to as Jamaican Creole in the scholarly literature of creolistics (Holm,
One of the big controversies among linguists has been the notion of creole exceptionalism. Creole exceptionalism is defined as a set of beliefs, widespread among both linguists and non-linguists, that creole languages form an exceptional class on phylogenetic and/or typological grounds. It also has non-linguistic (e.g., sociological) implications, such as the claim that creole languages are a “handicap” for their speakers, which has undermined the role that creoles should play in the education and socioeconomic development of monolingual creolophones (DeGraff, 2005). Creolists oppose the view that creoles are somehow not “natural” and do not follow the rules of “natural” languages. They are not judgmental toward creoles and view them as natural languages that just evolved more quickly under special circumstances.

In September of 2002, the Jamaican Language Unit (JLU) was established in the Department of Language, Linguistics, and Philosophy of the University of the West Indies in Mona, Jamaica. It is dedicated to the study and preservation of Jamaican. Dr. Carolyn Cooper, a Jamaican writer, poet, and professor of linguistics at the university, Dr. Hubert Devonish, another professor of linguistics at the same university, and other linguists have played key roles in the development of the unit and its research projects. Cooper teaches courses in which Jamaican Creole is studied, and she encourages students to speak and write in Jamaican in academic papers at the university.

In this dissertation, the terms “Nation Language,” “Jamaican Creole,” and “Jamaican” will be used interchangeably to describe the creole utilized in Jamaica.

2.0 Standard Caribbean English vs. Nation Language

Standard English is only one of the many varieties of English. It may be viewed as the most important, since it is the variety of English normally used in formal settings
(e.g., governmental sessions, public speaking engagements, religious observances, 
diplomatic negotiations, job interviews, etc.), in print documents (e.g., books, 
newspapers, laws, etc.), and in the education of both native and non-native leaners. 
Consequently, it is the variety associated with ‘educated’ people. However, most native 
speakers of English utilize a non-standard variety of the language in their daily 
interactions in family and community. 

Therefore, English, like other Ausbau languages (Kloss, 1967) can best be 
described as constituting an autonomous standardized variety together with all the non-
standard varieties which are heteronomous with regard to it (Chambers & Trudgill, 
1997). Standard English is thus not the English language but rather simply one variety of 
it (Bex & Watts, 1999). 

Speakers in bilingual or bidialectal speech communities often use one language 
variety to communicate informally with community members and another to 
communicate with outsiders or in highly formal community settings (Devonish, 1992, p. 
12). This is definitely true of Standard Caribbean English and the different English-
lexifier creoles. As we will see in Chapter 5, characters in Adisa’s stories speak in 
Jamaican Creole to communicate with one another and in a more Standard English in 
interactions with tourists or persons not fully integrated into the local community. 

In addition, in bilingual/bidialectal speech communities, there may be 
convergence of features from the two varieties, as occurs in Jamaica and Guyana. Vowel 
systems may overlap, and there may be constant lexical borrowing, although 
morphosyntactic convergence tends to be minimal (Devonish, 1992, p. 12)
DeCamp (1971) considers that pure Jamaican Creole no longer exists but has merged into Standard Caribbean English. Patrick (2004) offers evidence that partially supports and partially contradicts this position. After examining the deletion of /t/ and /d/ in word final position, he concludes that certain phonological elements of Standard Caribbean English do not exist in Jamaican Creole but are inserted systematically and predictably under particular conditions.

2.1 Origins of Standard Caribbean English

The first Caribbean islands settled by the British were St Kitts (1623 and 1624) and Barbados (1627). Once Barbados was populated, English speakers moved to other islands, particularly to Jamaica after the British seized it from the Spanish in 1660. During the so-called “Homestead Phase” of British colonization (1627-mid-17th century, according to Schneider, 2011, p. 98), the Caribbean islands were primarily populated by white settlers and indentured servants from various parts of England, Ireland, and Scotland. Their different dialects contributed to the linguistic nature of Standard Caribbean English. At the same time, enslaved Africans were being taken from West Africa and transported across the Atlantic through the infamous Middle Passage to do forced labor on Caribbean plantations, bringing with them different African linguistic forms and patterns, some of which were incorporated into Standard Caribbean English (SCE). Many smaller islands populated by English-speakers changed hands among the various other European colonial maritime powers, namely France, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands, bringing additional linguistic influences into Standard Caribbean English, and further differentiating it from other dialects of British English (Mufwene, 2001).
Standard Caribbean English is the prestige dialect of English spoken across the Caribbean, as depicted in Allsopp’s *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (2004). In the Introduction to the dictionary, Allsopp states: “Caribbean English is a collection of sub-varieties of English distributed… over a large number of non-contiguous territories of which two, Guyana and Belize, are widely distant parts of the South and Central American mainland. Their history, both pre- and post-Columbian, joins with their geography to further complicate the language picture in the territories covered in this work” (Introduction, p. xli). The dictionary is the result of a collection of forms utilized in most of the Anglophone Caribbean which are given a standard spelling therein. The lexical entries were gathered from many different written sources, including literature, folk songs, local histories, guidebooks, legal documents, etc. In addition, a team of researchers recorded voices in 22 regions of the English-speaking Caribbean (from Guyana to Belize) speaking on a wide array of subjects (Introduction, xli).

According to Romaine (1984), a standard language is “a highly codified variety of a language, which has been developed and elaborated for use across a broad range of functions” (pp. 231-232). Standard Caribbean English is the type of English utilized in newspapers, textbooks, legal documents, and other formal writing in the region. It is also used in many radio and television broadcasts and is understood by residents of many different islands. It follows most written conventions of British Received Pronunciation (RP) standard, but differs from RP primarily in pronunciation (e.g. reduction of diphthongal glides, palatalization of velar consonants /k/ and /g/). Other ways in which SCE differs from RP can be seen in the presence of syllable-final /t/ card ɹæɹd , lack of initial /h-/ happy ɹæpɪ/, glottalisation of /ʋ/ bottle /bɔʔɪ/, nonlowering of /ɒ/ but /bot/, short
/a/ before /f, s, θ/ bath /baθ/, use of /æ/ which /ætʃ/, alveolarisation of /ŋ/

walking /wɔːkŋ/, yod deletion in /ju:/ news /nuːz/ tune /tuːn/, non-lexical distribution of /æ/ and /ɑː/ grand /grand/, cancel /ka(:)ns/, short vowel distinction before /t/ fern /fɛːn/
# burn /bʌrn/, unshifted long /uː/ town /tuːn/ (Varieties of English). Some of these features are typical of Scottish and Irish dialects, speakers of which were plentiful in the Caribbean during the colonial period. There tends to be more lung pressure and mouth pressure behind the articulation of Caribbean English, and thus it generally sounds louder than British English. It is also accompanied by more release of laughter and exclamatory sounds and much more facial and hand gesture than would characterize spoken British and North American English. There are specific Caribbean lexical items that have arisen from African, Arawakan, and European influences in the region in addition to these phonological differences (Allsopp, 2004).

2.2 Origins of creoles and the post-creole continuum

Nation Language is the vernacular language utilized daily by most speakers in Jamaica. As we have seen, it is the historical product of extensive contact among speakers from different ethnic, linguistic, and social backgrounds. Its history began soon after the capture of African slaves from various language groups, probably in the “slave castles” or commercial forts along the coast of West Africa where the slaves invented a pidginized variety of English in order to communicate among themselves and with their captors (Mufwene, 2001).

Once in the Caribbean, these speakers of various West African languages interacted with settlers and others from different parts of the British Isles, and a creole developed from the merging of linguistic features from the different groups (Mufwene,
2001). In addition, escaped slaves (known as Maroons) cohabited with the indigenous peoples in secluded areas. Alleyne (2002) claims that Maroon language was important in forming the Jamaican Creole substrata. Bilby (1983, cited in Lalla & D’Costa, 1990, p. 13) discusses the Akan elements in Maroon spirit possession language and probable connections with influences from Sierra Leone and Surinam. Contributions of other African cultures can also be found in Jamaican Creole (Mufwene, 1993).

Nation Language is primarily an oral language. It has only been written down in a standard orthography since the late 1960s (Cassidy & LePage, 1967), and the orthography is not widely known since it is not used in most Jamaican schools. Moreover, in recent years, proposals have been made to reform it to be more phonologically accurate (Devonish & Seiler, 1991). Its limited standardization works against utilizing the creole in education because of the doubts parents have regarding the advisability of promoting what they see as “broken English” and because of the relative lack of teaching materials written in the creole. Recent programs at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica (like the Jamaica Language Unit)\(^1\) have attempted to overcome both of these problems by advocating a bilingual or bidialectal approach in which students learn to contrast the two varieties and switch between them as the social situation demands (Devonish, 1992).

In bilingual or bidialectal communities, code switching is a very common and useful communicative resource, and in some speech communities, it is the norm. It is often associated with in-group and informal activities and can be an important identity marker (Zentella, 1997). Nevertheless, as Grosjean (2012) indicates, there is often a

\(^1\)For more information, go to: http://www.mona.uwi.edu/dllp/jlu/index.htm.
negative attitude toward code-switching, for it is seen as a grammarless mixture of two languages and given somewhat disparaging names (e.g., Tex-Mex, Spanglish, Franglais, etc.).

Code switching among creole and standard varieties was first identified as a characteristic of West Indian culture by linguist David DeCamp (1971). DeCamp described a complex pattern of switching along a *post-creole continuum*. The continuum refers to the range of variations that exist in an established creole language from the *acrolect* (which are closest to the standard lexifier language) to the *basilect* (which are the most distant from the standard language), with the *mesolect* being constituted by the intermediate varieties between the two. Since then, numerous studies have shown that speakers of creole languages in this region regularly select among features of both the local Creoles and their European lexifier languages (Holm, 1989; Devonish, 1992; Mufwene, 1993).

In Jamaica, it is common for speakers to range freely over the entire continuum during the space of one day, as they move among different social domains and interact with different interlocutors. However, as Wardhaugh (2010) remarks:

…Jamaicans do not perceive the existence of a continuum. Instead, they perceive what they say and hear only in relation to the two ends and make any judgments and adjustments in terms of the two extremes, Standard English or 'the dialect,' 'patois,' or 'Quashie,' as it is sometimes referred to. . . The idea of a simple continuum may therefore be little more than a neat theoretical concept, since the variation found in everyday language use requires taking into consideration many other explanatory factors. (p. 78)
Opal Palmer Adisa confirms the utility of code switching between Nation Language and Standard Caribbean English in a recent interview (Adisa, 2014, p. 1):

“People, particularly the educated, can switch code. I think I can switch code too, and Nation Language is the heart of the Caribbean, so it is important that Caribbean writers let the heart beat, so to speak.”

If code switching occurs frequently enough over an extended period of time, intermediate forms can result, and the two language varieties can begin to converge (Gumperz & Wilson, 1971). DeCamp, writing in 1971, considered that pure Jamaican Creole was merging into Standard Caribbean English, a process referred to as decreolization which is more visible in varieties like Bahamian English or Hawaiian Creole. DeCamp’s viewpoint was sustained by Devonish (1992), who asserted that convergence between two language varieties was occurring in Jamaica and Guyana due to constant lexical borrowing and a degree of rule-governed morphosyntactic mixing.

The use of creoles in the Caribbean is constrained by strong language attitudes. The elite classes (who may aspire to be like Europeans or Americans) often disassociate from the masses and label them as inferior and unintelligent due to their use of creole forms. Until recently, Caribbean writers have used creoles sparingly in their writing and primarily to depict uneducated characters. To safeguard against being associated with ancestral history, slavery, or indentured service, some writers strove to sound European, effectively silencing their native tongues. In Flockemann (1993), Rosa Guy, a Trinidadian writer, talks about the hierarchy of classes in the Caribbean and how it has fostered the view of Caribbean Creole English as an aberrant dialect of English. She comments on her own upbringing and how her friends and family imitated the speech of
less affluent people for fun. Nevertheless, she notes that this disparaged language has become the language of poetry.

Opal Palmer Adisa is one author who has refused to mock or suppress the creole language in her writing, and we will see in the analysis of her novel *It Begins with Tears* how she is able to give voice to characters who might otherwise not be heard outside of their immediate social milieu, illustrating in the process the typical mix of Standard Caribbean English and various levels of Jamaican Creole in the narration and dialogs of the story.

### 2.3 Dread Talk (*Rasta talk, I-talk, or soul language*)

The Rastafarian movement arose in the slums of Kingston, Jamaica during the 1930s after Ras (King) Tafari Makonne, claiming to be a direct descendent of the Biblical David, declared himself Emperor of Ethiopia Haile Selassie I. Ever since Marcus Garvey’s “Back to Africa” movement of the early 1900s, some Jamaicans had been looking toward Africa for salvation. Rastafarians see Ethiopia as the cradle of humanity and worship Haile Selassie as a Messiah. Their beliefs center on a critique of the evils of Western industrialized society which they call “Babylon.”

The majority of Rastas are highly visible owing to their matted hair, or dreadlocks, which they hold to be sacred and which they sometimes cover under woolen caps colored red, gold, and green (representing blood, gold, and land). They regard the herb ganja (*Cannabis sativa*) as a special gift from God and smoke it as part of their sacred rituals, using a hookah or “chalice” (Chevannes, 1996).

During the first half of the 20th century, the Rastafari were seen as a passing fad at best and a nuisance at worst. However, since the early 1970s, Rastafarianism has been
recognized as a popular Afro-Caribbean religion and a significant global cultural trend. Rough estimates put adherents in Jamaica at 70,000 to 100,000 or 3-4% of the population and about one million worldwide. Its close association with reggae music has given Rastafarianism international exposure and acceptance.

As part of their quest to isolate themselves from the hegemonic control of the established political order, the Rastafarians created Dread Talk, an argot characterized by extensive word play, as a unique form of self-expression. The name is derived from the twisted dreadlocks that characterize the Rastafarians, who do not believe in cutting their hair. Baldwin (1979) (cited in Manget-Johnson, 2008, p.1) explains that neither Standard Caribbean English nor Jamaican Creole were suitable to express the Rastafarians’ resistance to their condition of poverty. Pollard (1982) considers that the Rastafari freed themselves by creating a language that subverted the language of the status quo. They expanded the lexicon of Jamaican Creole to include special forms that embodied resistance to the mental and spiritual entrapment of the Afro-Caribbean mind in its search for peace and love (e.g., *politricks* for *politics; downpression* for *oppression*). They also replaced words that conveyed negativity with affirmative versions (e.g. *understand* is replaced by *overstand*; *livication* replaces *dedication*). One of the most prominent linguistic features is the use of the pronominal *I* to express one-ness and divine immanence (Chevannes, 1996), as *I and I*, a term that reinforces the Rastafarian belief that Jah exists in all people, and all are united under Jah (God), *I man* (inner man), and *I-tal”* (food that is in its natural state).

The explosion of Reggae music in the 1970s acted as a vehicle for Rasta talk and its message of social justice, peace, and love. Reggae denounces the troubles the poor
suffer in Jamaica and has become part of the protest music repertoire of the planet. It exposes social injustices such as racism and apartheid as well. It condemns corruption and inspires others to oppose ideologies that talk negatively about them, diminish their culture, and promote inequality (Manget-Johnson, 2008).

Caribbean writers have also taken note of Dread Talk and incorporated it into their work, especially when depicting Rastafarian characters. In Opal Palmer Adisa’s poem “Ethiopia under a Jamaican mango tree,” forms such as deadas (dead flesh) and to satter (to sit down) create a portrait of the Rasta believer and his/her customary behavior. The title of the poem alludes to the syncretic complexity of West Indian culture, and readers experience that complexity via code switches among Standard Caribbean English, Jamaican Creole, and Dread talk.

meet fire. I man\textsuperscript{2} is
son of Jah. I man is Jah.
I man a guh satter and
meditate and plough de land
and I man a guh eat fresh
vegetable, no deadas. I man
a guh make disyah mango tree
I temple. I man a guh hook

\textsuperscript{2} I man refers to a Rasta believer.
3.0 Nation Language in literature

Despite the ubiquitous nature of creoles in the region, Jamaican and other Caribbean writers often face censorship when they consider utilizing their local vernaculars in their creations. Publishers tend to discourage writing in anything other than standard language because it reduces the potential market for the material. Nevertheless, some writers have embraced Nation Language as the most legitimate platform for expressing Caribbean cultural attitudes and self-awareness. Let us consider a few Jamaican writers who are notable for regularly incorporating Nation Language into their work.

3.1 Claude McKay (1889-1948)

Claude McKay was a famous Jamaican poet who became a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance movement of the 1920s as exemplified by his book *Harlem Shadows* (1922). He wrote many poems and essays about his early life in Jamaica and his later life as a Black man struggling to survive in the United States. McKay’s *Songs of Jamaica* (1912) contained the first poems published in Jamaican Creole. His second book, *Constab Ballads* (based on his experiences as a police officer in Jamaica), came out in the same year and was also written in Creole.

McKay was among the Harlem intellectuals who fled to France to escape racism and segregation in the United States. He bemoaned the divisions that existed among Blacks and was acclaimed by Senegalese poet and politician Léopold Sédar Senghor as the spiritual founder of the *Négritude* movement, whose basic tenets Senghor explained as follows: “far from seeing in one’s blackness inferiority, one accepts it; one lays claim to it with pride; one cultivates it lovingly” (cited in Banoum, 2011).
3.2 Louise Bennett (1919-2006)

Louise Simone Bennett-Coverley (or “Miss Lou”) was a Jamaican poet, folklorist, writer, activist, radio and television personality, and educator. Writing and performing her poems in Jamaican, she was key to having this language of the people receive literary recognition in its own right. Today she remains a household name in Jamaica, “mother of Jamaican culture,” and a cultural icon. Miss Lou is very much a part of Jamaican poetic tradition and has influenced other popular Caribbean poets, including Mutabaruka, Linton Kwesi Johnson, and Paul Keens-Douglas.

During the 1930’s, she wrote and recited poems in Jamaican, and in 1942 she published *Dialect Verses*, her first poetry collection. Among Louise Bennett’s many recordings are: *Jamaica Singing Games* (1953), *Jamaican Folk Songs* (Folkways Records, 1954), *Children’s Jamaican Songs and Games* (Folkways, 1957), and radio monologues known as *Miss Lou’s Views* (1966-1967).

Her poem “Colonization in Reverse” (1966) gives the historical context of many minorities living in the UK in post-colonial times. She portrays the experience of dislocation and racial inequality suffered by Jamaicans in their move to England for employment and a better life (Headly, 2015).

3.3 James Berry (1924- )

James Berry is a prominent Jamaican poet who won the 1981 British National Poetry Competition, was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1991, and has been a major force in promoting West Indian writers in England. He has published five collections of poetry (*Fractured Circles* [1979], *Lucy’s Letters and Loving* [1982], *Chain of Days* [1985], *Hot Earth Cold Earth* [1995], *Windrush Songs* [2007]),

Berry views Caribbean Creole English as "simply a different language, which struggles to find appropriate adjustments in order to settle down as the mother tongue into which it has grown" (Flockemann, 1993, p. 70). He considers that the islands suffered abuse at the hands of the British Empire which suppressed their inhabitants and displaced their mother tongues (Berry, 1986). His use of Creole is particularly notable in *Lucy’s Letters and Loving*, which features a Jamaican immigrant in London who writes home about her experiences.

### 3.4 Linton Kwesi Johnson (1952-)

Another Jamaican poet who utilizes Nation Language is Linton Kwesi Johnson. He moved to Britain from Jamaica in 1963 and was immersed in the radical currents running throughout the Black diaspora at the time. Influenced by Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Johnson searched his own style in poetic language in order to overcome linguistic and mental colonization imposed by the education system in the British colonies of the Caribbean. His model for his work was what he called “the dub lyricists,” Jamaican and Black British ‘deejays’ who would improvise rhymes over the heavy rhythm tracks of reggae dub records (Dawson, 2009). Kwesi, based in London, is considered to be the father of reggae dub poetry, a blend of reggae music and spoken

### 3.5 Opal Palmer Adisa (1954-)

Opal Palmer Adisa has had to fight with her editors to keep Nation Language in her work in order to be true to reality and convincing to both Caribbean and global audiences. Nation Language makes her work more genuine. She sees her major contribution as giving a voice (via Nation Language) to the downtrodden who have been silenced. Adisa’s epigraph to *Bake-Face and Other Guava Stories* (1986) is an excerpt from "May sisters without voices be given microphones" which states:

\[
\text{me [did] fraid God gwane tek me one} \\
\text{lil pickne to punish me fah me silence}^3 \text{ (p. viii)}
\]

Adisa uses Nation Language to flesh out her characters and give the reader a better sense of their social class, ethnic origin, and educational level. She also uses code switching to move the story along by incorporating local idioms or expressions that sum up or sometimes foreshadow the actions of the characters.

In Chapter 5, excerpts from her novel *It Begins with Tears* (1997) will be analyzed, and the instances of code switching will be discussed in detail.

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^3I was afraid that God was going to take one of my little babies to punish me for my silence.
4.0 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that creole languages are considered by linguists to be real languages whose use and value in society date back to the time in which slaves were forcibly abducted from their homeland and taken to other countries where other languages were spoken and where their own languages were prohibited. Jamaican Creole (also known as Nation Language, patwa, or Jamaican) is actively used in Jamaica and its diaspora, and Jamaican authors have been utilizing code switching between Standard Caribbean English and Jamaican to make their writing more genuine and natural, despite efforts by publishers to compel them to publish only in Standard English.

The next chapter will review the scholarly literature on gender roles and how they are reflected in and reinforced by language choices and discourse structures. It will also discuss the relevance of gender in the development of male-female relations and the family in modern Jamaica.
Chapter 3:
Gender Roles

1.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the scholarly literature on gender roles and how they are reflected in and reinforced by language choices and discourse structures. It discusses the historical development of the Jamaican family and some of the reasons behind the gender conflicts and domestic violence that exist today in Jamaican society. It also demonstrates the linguistic differences that have been shown to exist between Jamaican men and women.

1.1 Gender versus sex

There is no distinction between sex and gender in some languages like French, Norwegian, and Danish, for example (Oakley, 1972), but for language scholars, it is an important distinction. Sex is biologically-based, and gender is learned behavior. Sex has to do with genes, the secretion of hormones, and the physical developments that result from them. Gender, on the other hand, is socially constructed and learned. People acquire characteristics seen as masculine or feminine in their society, and these gender traits vary from culture to culture and change during different historical periods (Talbot, 2010).

Human beings, like many other species, are divided into the male and female sexes, based on primary sexual features like chromosomal configuration and reproductive organs and secondary physical characteristics like relative body size, distribution of hair, fat, and muscle tissue, and size and placement of the larynx. These physical differences lead to expectations regarding sexual behavior that include believing in heterosexuality as
the only possibility, seeing reproduction and child rearing as a purely female responsibility, and justifying the male tendency to stray sexually.

Sex is a major identity marker. However, many individuals do not fit neatly into the dichotomous physiological prototypes for the sexes, and it has become clear in recent years that sex, rather than being a duality, exists along a continuum, with individuals exhibiting to varying degrees the sexual traits typically associated with each of the two polar opposites (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).

1.2. Gendered behaviors and attitudes

In addition to physiological sex, humans are also distinguished by gender, a social construct which overlaps to a great extent (but not completely) with biological sex. Male and female genders persist as structurally important social categories because people perform gendered and gendering behavior. In other words, each society has stereotypical expectations of certain behaviors that are linked to each sex, and these gender behaviors are taken as “natural” reflections of sex. People act as their society thinks men and women should act, and they raise their children to perpetuate gendered attitudes and behaviors. However, gender behaviors are socially determined and may vary across cultures or historical periods.

One type of gendered behavior is the differential use of language by women and men which has been documented by numerous sociolinguistic studies.

2.0 Language and gender studies

Researchers have tended to approach language and gender from four major angles: deficit, dominance, difference, and dynamic (Coates, 1986).
2.1 The deficit approach (e.g., Jespersen, 1922; Lakoff, 1975)

This approach focuses on how women’s speech is lacking in certain characteristics found in men’s speech. Jespersen’s remarks about women’s “instinctive shrinking from coarse and gross expressions and their preference for refined and (in certain spheres) veiled and indirect expressions” (p. 246) reflect the prevailing views of his era and seem merely quaint today. However, Lakoff’s attempt to describe the powerlessness of the “woman’s register” brought her much criticism from fellow feminists. Her proposed features of women’s speech, including the use of tag questions, question intonation, empty adjectives, and weak directives, have since been found to appear in men’s speech as well, particularly that of men lacking in social power.

2.2 The dominance approach (e.g., Spender, 1980; Hooks, 1984)

This approach maintains that the way men and women use language mirrors their relative power in society. Men dominate women, and as a result, women’s way of speaking reflects and reproduces their subordinate position in society. The language forms that women use render their speech powerless and trivial and disqualify them from positions of authority. In this way, their language becomes a tool of oppression. It is acquired as part of learning to be a woman, is imposed on women by societal norms, and serves to keep women in their place.

Part of the dominance view is that men made language, and therefore it reflects their interests and agendas, leaving women unrepresented and unable to express themselves adequately. The resolution of this inequality lies in changing the language itself to remove sexist thinking (e.g., by eliminating generic male pronoun usage or using gender neutral occupational titles) and thus allow speakers to adopt new attitudes of
gender equality. Dominance studies and the consciousness they have raised have resulted in the coining of “politically correct” forms such as Ms. or chairperson and the use of plural they to avoid selecting between he and she.

2.3 The difference approach (e.g., Tannen, 1990; Maltz & Borker, 1982)

This approach argues that the differences between male and female language are cultural, not political. Girls and boys live in different subcultures and grow up with different conventions for verbal interaction. Tannen asserts that men favor a report style, while women favor a rapport style. Men and women also have different modes of moral reasoning and of acquiring and processing knowledge. In the difference approach, neither male nor female speech patterns are superior; they are simply different and need to be understood as such. Both men and women must appreciate how they each think and express themselves in order to get along better.

Difference studies have tried to quantify the differences between men and women’s speech differences and have come up with findings that are often at odds with one another. Gleser, Gottschalk, & John (1959) found that men swore more, and women used more intensive adverbs. Bucci & Freedman (1981) concluded that women were more likely to use first person “I,” which connotes individualism and selfishness, generally associated with the male stereotype. Dovidio et al (1988) found that boys were more likely than girls to give opinions, but when sentence lengths were calculated, women were wordier, both in writing and in speaking.

Mulac, Studley, & Blau (1990) observed that women referred to emotion more often than men did, while Mehl & Pennebaker (2003) found that women referred more to positive emotions, and men referred more to anger. Mulac et al (2001) concluded that
women used dyadic statements and directives more often, while men used more negations and asked more questions. Newman, Handelman, & Pennebaker (2008) analyzed over 14,000 text files from 70 studies and found that women used more words related to psychological and social processes, while men talked more about object properties and impersonal themes. They came to the conclusion that men used language to convey information, while women used language more for social purposes.

2.4 The discourse (dynamic) approach (e.g. Talbot, 2010; Cameron, 1992)

This is currently the predominant approach to language and gender. Studies in this framework sustain that there are no fixed gender styles, but rather individuals construct socially appropriate behaviors from the dynamic and variable factors operating within an interaction. In other words, they “do gender.” Dynamic studies utilize theoretical frameworks like social constructivism and critical discourse analysis to critically examine how women and men structure their discourse and actively negotiate their relationships via language.

All of these approaches to language and gender will be taken into consideration in the analysis of Opal Palmer Adisa’s writing, where she often challenges gender stereotypes. For example, in her novel Painting Away Regrets, Adisa presents a vibrant woman who contests the patriarchal paradigm by being bold and sensuous and by actively seeking out love, success, and independence instead of being dependent, weak, and submissive as Caribbean women have been portrayed in the past. It would be interesting to compare the gender norms of Adisa’s Jamaican characters with those of the mostly white, middle-class American samples that predominate in sociolinguistic studies of language and gender.
3.0 Gender roles in the Caribbean

Since gender is a social construct that is created and performed anew in each distinct context, it is vital to consider the historical development of gender roles over time and place.

3.1 Historical antecedents in Africa

African culture and people have greatly influenced the Caribbean. The African influence is particularly evident in Caribbean family life. Caribbean families include legal and non-legal marriages, and there is an extended family system in which women play a central role in social, cultural, and economic areas of family life. Three different approaches to the Afro-Caribbean family are discussed in the scholarly literature. The first view denies the effect of traditional African culture; the second is indifferent to the effect of traditional African culture; and the third establishes that traditional African cultural influences are key to any meaningful understanding of the Afro-Caribbean family.

According to the first view, slavery conditions in the Caribbean were so brutal that most slaves could not preserve their traditional African culture (Frazier, 1966; Goveia, 1965; Matthews, 1953; Patterson, 1967; Simey, 1946). Because of this, slaves formed non-traditional, casual relationships that did not permit stable partnerships and which encouraged promiscuity (Matthews, 1953).

Blake (1961) and Clarke (1957) identify European family norms as most influential in lives of Afro-Caribbean individuals, groups, and societies. According to these researchers, traditional African culture has no bearing on the family and kinship,
and the influence of traditional African culture in the family can be excluded (Smith, 1967, 1988).

The second view maintains that although African culture may have helped in establishing Afro-Caribbean social norms, it no longer affects family and kinship practices. This view asserts that individuals and groups have different living experiences because of class, gender, and color distinctions in creole societies (Alexander, 1977, 1984; Douglass, 1992; Manyoni, 1977; 1980). Alexander (1984) states that although illegitimate children and non-legal marriages may be common phenomena in all middle and lower class Jamaican families, they are generally viewed by Jamaican society as traits that typify the African-descended lower classes. Dark skin is also associated with lower class (Alexander, 1977, 1984). Both this view and the first reflect a Eurocentric approach.

The third view admits African cultural influence on the family. Scholarly work based upon this view shows that Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices resulted from the retention and/or re-interpretation of African traditions and practices (Craton, 1979; Herskovits, 1958; Higman, 1973, 1974, 1978; Mintz & Price, 1976). Herskovits (1958) states that the slavery and plantation systems could not completely eliminate traditional African culture and African family traditions. Enslaved African women drew on their traditional gender ideologies and practices to manage their slave condition and family life (Momsen, 1993, 1988, 2002; Morrisey, 1998; Rajack-Talley, 2004; Reddock, 1998). Matriarchs, such as grand-mothers and great-grandmothers, became important in the maintenance of strong family and kinship ties and in raising the social status of their nuclear and extended families (Beckles, 1989).
The agency of Caribbean women, however, goes substantially beyond what is normally credited to them in the literature. For example, Faraclas (2012) traces the significant impact that women have had on the emergence of the creolized societies, cultures, and languages of the region. He points out that women played a prominent role in shaping the two major types of creolization that typify the colonial Caribbean:

1. the establishment of subsistence societies (during the 16th-18th centuries) by Indigenous and African women in the Spanish Antilles within the context of a pre-capitalist and pre-racialized colonial regime which gave rise to a broad but covert form of creolization that yielded feminized, Indigenized, and Africanized varieties of European languages and cultures; and

2. the creation of subsistence gardening and marketing networks (during the 17th-19th centuries), primarily by enslaved African women of the English and French colonized islands within the context of a racialized capitalist colonial regime which gave rise to a narrow but overt form of creolization that generated Europeanized versions of feminized African (and Indigenous) languages and cultures.

Faraclas (2012) notes that Indigenous and African descended women have been major players in the history of the Caribbean, even though their voices and stories are often erased and silenced. He cites Lucille Mathurin Mair, Barbara Buh, Elsa Goveia, Bridge Brereton, Hilary Beckles, and others in this regard and quotes Blanca Silvestrini (2001) who summarizes this, when she says:
[w]omen have lived in the borderlands for a long time- the borderlands of society and of history. Their everyday lives, their multiple forms of resistance, their ways of understanding and changing the world have been devalued and considered insignificant. Until very recently, in spite of the many roles played by women, they were defined by their relationships to men- as wives, sisters and mothers of men. A woman’s primary functions and roles were dictated by the family of which she was a member. Records traditionally used by historians witness the silence about women’s participation in other activities…” Caribbean women have had multiple responsibilities not documented in the historical records. Either their work was not recognized as such at the time or it was valued less highly than men’s, not only in economic but also in social terms. Some women managed to be recognized for their accomplishments, and these are the ones we proudly display today in our “catalogue of important women”. But the experiences of the great majority of Caribbean women are still outside the realms of history. (pp. 161-162)

Based on archival evidence, Faraclas suggests that these women often played a leadership role in the resistance to European colonial plundering of Indigenous land and African labor. Part of this resistance, he observes, was the founding of renegade and maroon communities which he calls *sociétés de cohabitation* (this term was first coined by González-López). In these multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual communities, Indigenous and African descended women creatively used their traditional knowledges to ensure that they and their loved ones survived and thrived.

Faraclas insists, however that the African and Indigenous-descended women’s leadership role in resisting the European colonial domination of the Caribbean was not
limited to renegade and maroon activities outside of the colonial system, but also extended to the heart of the colonial system itself. He contends that it was those women who were instrumental in Africanizing and Indigenizing the Spanish and Portuguese colonial societies of the Americas. Faraclas also asserts that African and Indigenous-descended women were equally instrumental in overturning the chattel slavery regime on the plantations of the Caribbean. They accomplished this first by using their traditional practices to take control over food production and marketing and then by scaffolding networks of slave and maroon networks of resistance.

In the final analysis, both European and African women and their cultural practices have exerted important influences on Caribbean families.

**3.2 Effects of slavery on family structure**

From the statements of the enslaved themselves, it can be seen that slavery affected family structure. In the slave narrative collections of the Work Projects Administration, consisting of over 2,200 interviews carried out with former slaves in the United States during the late 1930s, the family structures of the interviewees were categorized into three different groups. The first category is “two-parent consolidated,” which means that the family lived together on the same plantation. The second is “two-parent divided residence,” in which the father lived on a different plantation from his wife and children. The third is “single-parent family,” which refers to families primarily headed by females.
### Table 1:
**Distribution of family types in WPA slave narratives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>two-parent consolidated families</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two-parent divided residence families</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>single-parent female headed families</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>single-parent male headed</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no-parent families (orphans)</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In many two-parent divided residence situations, the men lived on a nearby plantation and were allowed passes to visit their families on the weekends. A few slaves were only allowed irregular visits. This separation placed serious strains upon the relationship between the spouses as well as on the relationships between the children and their fathers. In the case of most of the divided residence families, the members reunited after freedom. In some of the cases of single-parent families, the father was unknown or was permanently absent due to his death or sale or because he was of European descent.

Between 15 and 25% of mother-headed households were formed because the father was white. The amount of interracial sex was strongly correlated with the level of day-to-day exchange between white men and slave women. Slave women who worked in the master’s house and those who worked in small slave holdings were at highest risk. Sometimes slaves were raped at an early age by all of the master’s sons and consequently children were born with no possibility of assigning exact paternity.
It is evident that slavery disrupted the family as a result of the separation and sale of family members. However, the WPA study showed that slave owners benefitted from keeping slave families together because such a practice increased fertility, and a stable family life helped members be more productive. The threat of sale of family members increased the coercive authority of the masters, while putting stress on enslaved families themselves (Crawford, 1992). The data reported above all came from the United States; however, similar practices occurred in Jamaica, although the exact proportions may have varied.

In Jamaica, slaves began to work on an estate at the age of four, (Patterson, 1967, p.157). Among the duties of young girls in Rosehall Estate, Jamaica were collecting food for the hogs and weeding. Most women in Jamaica between 19 and 54 years of age worked in the fields. Then at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were more women than men in the fields because of their lower mortality rates (Patterson, 1967; Craton, 1978; Dunn, 1972). When slavery was abolished in the British colonies by 1838, the proportion of men to women in the fields was lower than 40 percent (Craton, 1978). By mid-19th century, in Cuba, the working day in the grinding season lasted twenty hours. Slaves slept four or five hours only. Women cut cane during the ninth month of pregnancy (Knight, 1970, p.76).

Craton (1978) suggests that planters had a preference for buying rather than breeding slaves. Among the reasons were that African women lactated their offspring for a long period, during which sexual intercourse was taboo. There were high infant mortality rates due to disease and malnourishment. Dislocation, stress, and overcrowding, (comparable to conditions in a Nazi concentration camp) had biological and
psychological effects on slaves. Slave women also performed abortions to avoid bringing children into slave labor. This resulted in a high frequency of sterility among slave women, and more than half of female slaves never had babies.

In Spanish Caribbean colonies, according to Francisco d’Arango and Perreneo, (quoted in Hall, 1971, p. 24), during and after pregnancy, a female slave was regarded as useless for several months, and she had to be fed more and better quality food. The lack of work and added expense were viewed by the master as a loss, and as a result, female slaves cost one-third the price of male slaves (Hall, 1971, p. 26). In Cuba, slave mothers returned to work around six weeks after giving birth, and the child was handed over to the plantation nursery (Knight, 1970, p.76).

In Jamaica, according to Patterson (1967), children were removed from their mothers and placed with a driveress first in the grass gang and then in other gangs as they grew up. Enslaved fathers could not assert authority as husbands and fathers because the mothers belonged to someone else. Enslaved women did not like marriage because it made for extra work and confined them to one man. When women were allowed to keep their children during the later years of slavery, they took on a matriarchal role in the household, and the children were seen as belonging to her and not to the man.

The slave trade was abolished in the British colonies in 1807. During the post-slavery period, Black women were categorized as dependent housewives, no matter if they were married or single. Their economic sources were centered on the household, and many were self-employed in order to be able to raise their children at the same time as they worked at market gardening, petty trading, laundry work, dressmaking, and domestic work.
3.3 The evolving role of women in Jamaican society

Biographies serve to document the contributions of females in Jamaica. Una Marson, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Amy Jacques Garvey, Edna Manley, and Mary Seacole are all prominent twentieth century Jamaican women whose biographies told the story of women in Jamaica and served to place them on the pages of history. One of the first Jamaican women who changed the history of Jamaica was Nanny of the Maroons. Mathurin Mair (2006) was able to find the Jamaican Land Patent of 1740 which recorded the government grant of 500 acres to Nanny of the Windward Maroons and her people. Mair’s archival work revealed the inheritance of land by Jamaican free colored women during slavery times and showed how they amassed wealth and left it to their children. Via examination of wills, she was able to show that white male Jamaicans left their property to their wives and their legitimate children, their non-white mistresses, and their illegitimate mixed-race children. Similarly, Veront Satchell (1990) used conveyance deeds to conduct a study of land transactions between 1866 and 1900 and showed that women participated actively in the Jamaican real estate market.

When slavery was abolished in Britain in 1834, special magistrates were appointed in the colonies to direct apprenticeships. These magistrates wrote detailed reports on conditions in their districts which up until 1840 included the situation of ex-slave women. Mair (2006) used the reports to conclude that the harassment of black Jamaican women became one of the most notable features of the first years of free society. In Jamaica, the Anglican Church’s vestry minute books dating back to the seventeenth century captured important aspects of women’s lives, especially white
women, who often received charitable donations. In contrast, non-white free women rarely benefitted from monetary grants, nor were they admitted to the parish poor houses.

Mair also searched the records of the parish slave courts in the 1820s and 1830s and the Kingston Court of Quarter Sessions between 1787 and 1812 and found evidence of court-ordered punishments of enslaved women in Jamaica. Jonathan Dalby (2008) used Jamaican Assize Court records to study patterns in the prosecution of sexual offenses, domestic violence, murders, and assaults, especially in post-Emancipation Jamaica, which shed further light on the condition of women during this period.

Gender topics such as “proper wifehood,” the “new woman,” marriage, and female independence were discussed in 1904 in The Daily Gleaner, Jamaica’s principal newspaper which still operates today. The paper contained reports on court cases involving domestic violence and female misbehavior like drunkenness, as well as articles describing how people of different classes celebrated births, deaths, and marriages which further illuminated women’s historical experiences in Jamaica (Moore & Johnson, 2000a, 2000b, 2004, 2011).

During the slavery period, newspapers provided significant information on the lives of enslaved women. Advertisements for runaway slaves are an important source. Mair (2006) searched from 1791 to 1829 to probe the extent to which women ran away, what kind of women fled, why they escaped, and where they ran. She additionally used published narratives of the Wesleyan (Methodist) Mission to study the roles of free colored women in Jamaican congregations. They were found to be lay leaders and significant supporters of clergymen; however, clerics were warned to be wary of the
temptations these female supporters represented, and legal unions between a white minister and a ‘respectable’ mixed-race woman were not well regarded.

Moore & Johnson (2004) used a wide range of church records to study Jamaican social and cultural history after 1860. They found that women constituted the majority of the church-going population and were the special target of evangelism. The church had a moral mission to make them into decent, respectable, God-fearing wives and mothers.

Plantation records have been a primary source for Jamaican historical researchers. Many plantation owners lived in Britain, so their agents in the colonies wrote reports about their properties and prepared inventories of assets, including enslaved laborers. Mair (2006) found in these documents that women outnumbered men in the field gangs of Jamaican sugar estates by the 1790s and that females endured chronic ill health under the punishing regime of gang labor.

Oral histories or personal interviews have also been key to understanding Jamaican women’s history, because fewer women than men were literate, so they wrote less. The archives, generated by men with positions of authority, had little to say about most aspects of women’s lives in the past, especially those related to family life, childbearing, and domestic work (Brereton, 2002). The autobiographical writings of Maria Nugent, the wife of the governor of Jamaica in the early 1800s, has provided ‘gendered testimony’ and insights into aspects of Jamaican women’s lives not written about by men or included in official records (Brereton, 1998).

Warner-Lewis (2003) studied Central Africans in the Caribbean by using oral records of the descendants of enslaved or indentured individuals in the region. By means of songs, folktales, language, and rituals recorded in Jamaica and other places, she was
able to analyze the significance and context of marriage, courtship, and ‘proper’ behavior of girls and women (Warner-Lewis, 2003; Brereton, 2006).

Robertson (1995) examined pictorial sources for 19th century women in Jamaica and found that dress styles were an indicator of attitudes toward women. In a similar vein, Buckridge (2004) studied ‘the language of dress’ in Jamaica between 1750 and 1890 by looking at pictures, paintings, drawings, and postcards of women during the period. He concluded that some Jamaican women chose dress, hair, and body ornamentation to resist or reject European fashions, while others accommodated to them.

Class, race, and generational differences have long been studied, but gender is a notoriously slippery construct to investigate. Since gender is socially constructed, it is constantly changing and must be examined as it is lived. Women writers believe that gender issues have not been given sufficient consideration due to the hegemonic male worldview that predominates in the academy and publishing and the commonly held notion that in order for women to move ahead in a man’s world, they must embrace masculine values (Jacobs, Jacobson, & Marchbank, 2002).

In many societies, including Jamaica, women and girls have heavy familial and social responsibilities, restricted mobility, unequal access to protective services and legal aid, and limited political power. These factors influence their ability to survive and recover from economic downturns, domestic violence, and armed conflicts. Many crimes against women and girls go unnoticed and unprosecuted (Mazurana & Proctor, 2013), especially during war and civil upheaval.

4.0 Exploration of gender in Caribbean literature
When the Europeans invaded indigenous Amerindian communities in the Caribbean and later enslaved Africans, new gender relationships were created as a by-product of the racial and ethnic mixing that resulted in the creole identity. Even though the term *creole* was associated with impure descent and mixed race by Europeans who considered themselves pure-blooded, travel logs contain references to sexual attraction. Dutch traveler Francesco Carletti described Creole women as less harmful, more joyful, and healthier than European women and recommended either marriage or concubinage with them (Dwivedi, 2015).

Modern analyses of Creole women’s identity focus on the damage caused by the Europeans’ obsession with them. Wilson (1998) considers that creolization tried to erase African culture, heritage, and identity and hide a process which commenced with the rape of young African slave girls and continues to this day with the preference shown within Creole families for having lighter-skinned members. The notion of “improving the race” through mixing with European men can be seen in Vicioso (1988), who provides a guide to Dominican skin color terminology based on degree of whiteness. Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre (1956) defines the preference for whiteness as a “big house view,” that is, the perspective of the colonizer toward the colonized. In Panamanian writer Carlos G. Wilson’s 1991 novel *Los Nietos de Felicidad Dolores*, a Black female character lessens the pain of violation by considering herself lucky to have been impregnated by white soldiers.

Women in the Caribbean Project was established in the 1970s to address many issues affecting Caribbean women, such as the confinement of young girls to their homes and the need to enroll young girls in schools and provide them with sexual education.
These and many other issues need to be acknowledged and dealt with in order for Caribbean women to enjoy equal rights and fair treatment.

4.1 Adisa’s work

Although women and men in the Caribbean share language and place, they have operated within distinct social arenas. Adisa sees Jamaican women as “big women,” in relation to their hearts, desires, independence, resistance, and willingness to confront their reality and forge ahead no matter what. Her Jamaican women characters are philosophical, observant, and outspoken, and can express themselves sweetly or bitterly. Adisa focuses on their fervor, their relationships with men and children, and their determination to achieve their goals in life.

In the essay “The Swelling of a Womb/The Forging of a Writer” contained in the collection *Eros Muse* (2006), Adisa recounts how she became a mother and a writer. She wanted to share all her stories with her children and leave them a legacy of who she is. She has been a single mother since 1995, so she has counted on her children to support her in her work. For her, writing is a necessity, and being a mother and a writer is what her whole world is about. While writers often borrow from their own lives, Adisa believes that she really has not utilized that much material from her own life. She continuously observes and listens to people and invents stories about them. People assume Adisa writes about her life, and she is indeed moving in a more autobiographical direction in her writing. However, she feels that when she writes, she invents herself and her life according to the way she wants to be seen. “I am at heart and at labor a seducer,
seducing the reader to believe or identify with a certain character” (Calderaro, 2008, p. 5).

One example of Adisa’s exploration of Jamaican female roles that she has not personally experienced are the market women who appear as characters in her novels. In her interview by Crescioni (2012), Adisa explains the influence of these women on her feminist thinking:

I was raised in Jamaica at the time when there were market women. The meat section were men, but the force of the market were women. They were clearly in control, and they were so vigilant and alert. I remember once going to the market with my mother, and I think someone, and the person might have been hungry, trying to steal something from the market women, and it was not a machete, it was a big butcher knife, and she said, “If you take it, I’ll cut it off.” and that was all, you know, and the other women railed around her. So I grew up with feminist doctrine even before the word became popular, and for me women have always been strong, not weak, and they’ve always made their own decisions. Adisa’s treatment of gender roles will be examined extensively in the critical discourse analysis of key scenes from *It Begins with Tears* in Chapter 5.

4.2 Other authors’ treatment of gender in the Caribbean

Feminist writing has pointed to the power of males since the times of Plato and Aristotle, when women were openly objectified and subordinated. Caribbean women writers have continuously written about their concern with identity formation, viewed through the lens of gender and ethnicity (Morgan, 2006).
O’Callaghan (2004) analyzed the problems of representation of women in the West Indies. According to her, Aphra Ben was the first woman to represent the West Indies in literature. She wrote a slave narrative titled *Oroonoko or the Royal Slave* in 1678. She is referred to in Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* as one of the female precursors who wrote before the 18th century and paved the way for women in literature. Through Aphra Ben’s writing, an oppressed group of people was portrayed, expressing resistance to colonialism in the West Indies. O’Callaghan also discusses Jean Rhys (1890-1979) who raised questions as to which literary writings should be considered West Indian. She touched upon gender, race, class, color, and social oppression in *Voyage in the Dark* (1934).

Among the Caribbean women writers that O’Callaghan feels should be better known by the general reading public are Merle Hodge, Erna Brodber, Olive Senior, Jamaica Kincaid, and Helen Pyne-Timothy. Merle Hodge’s *Crick Crack Monkey* (1970) constitutes one of the first attempts by Afro-Caribbean women to reconstruct the daily life of Caribbean people in the face of denigration and attempts at cultural erasure. Hodge placed value on the maternal ancestress, the African great-grandmother, who provided identity and cultural continuity to the new generations by giving newborn infants African names in defiance of the European names bestowed on them by their masters.

In sum, Caribbean women writers have long been visionaries and have created a niche for gender representation by writing about women and for women. Migration has strengthened the process of identity formation based on ethnicity and gender. Morgan (2006) points to upcoming and influential authors like Dione Brand and Patricia Powell who are presently covering new transnational and
cross-gender grounds. They create spaces of liberation for women in times of change, while at the same time keeping a balance among race, class, and gender.

5.0 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the difference between biological sex and the social construct referred to as gender and has addressed gendered behavior and attitudes and the cultural variation that exists in gender performance. It has reviewed language and gender studies written from the deficit, dominance, difference, or a discourse approaches. The chapter has additionally explained current gender roles in the Caribbean as stemming from historical antecedents in Africa as well as the effects of slavery on family structure. Finally, it has touched upon gender in Caribbean literature.

Chapter 4 will review the literature on the transmission of African oral traditions and cultural values in modern Caribbean societies via proverbs, sayings, and parables. The chapter will also show how such traditional genres provide Caribbean people (particularly women) with a connection to ancient ancestral beliefs and practices, enhance group cohesion, and provide a guide for action in the present.
Chapter 4:

African Traditional Beliefs and Practices

1.0 Introduction

The culture of Jamaica retains certain aspects of African traditional beliefs and practices which are necessary to understand when engaging with its national discourse. In order to consider the topic in a manageable fashion, in this chapter, we will look briefly at the importance of oral tradition in African culture and examine how it came to the Caribbean and was adapted into its current forms. We will then delve into the history and functions of African traditional spiritual beliefs and practices in Caribbean society and literature, including the practices of Obeah and Rastafarianism. Afterwards, we will explore in more depth specific types of African influence that can still be attested in Jamaica today, including ancestral tales, proverbs, and rituals.

1.1 Importance of oral tradition in African culture

Oral tradition is the transmission of accumulated cultural experiences and beliefs from one generation to another through spoken language in the form of folk tales, fables, epic narratives, proverbs, sayings, and songs. In West Africa, knowledge used to be shared primarily through oral tradition, not written texts.\(^4\) Parents and grandparents participated in passing down wisdom, culture, history, and lessons of everyday life to the younger generations. Oral tradition is generally under-appreciated among Western scholars and often excluded from collections on African literature (Smith & Ce, 2015). In

\(^4\) There is a growing body of work on early Arabic and local written literatures in Africa (see Dienst, 2012 for an account of Dr. Wendy Belcher’s work on Ethiopian scripts). However, in this dissertation, we will focus on the oral traditions which were more common.
addition, the variability in African oral literary forms has often been overlooked because it was assumed by European scholars that all oral tradition was simply handed down verbatim, a pattern believed to be typical of illiterate societies (Finnegan, 2012).

Orally rendered stories of all genres transmit culture, preserve memories, and make sense of the world. They encourage a sense of identity, communicate values and serve to educate and entertain. They are a reflection of the lives and experiences of real people, and they are repeated to the younger generations, travelling across countries and continents, and are often transformed in the process. Their purpose is to explain phenomena, tell the news, enforce cultural norms, or educate children (Sorrentino, 2017). They memorialize traditions, events, and culture from earlier times.

In traditional African society, specialized storytellers in Africa known as *griots* (females are *griottes*) performed at weddings, naming ceremonies, and religious celebrations and often served as advisors to nobility and messengers to the community. They made announcements and functioned as the voice of the leaders (Hale, 1997). The role of the griots was to preserve, codify, and impart the collective history and wisdom of the group. Their tools were their words, gestures, songs, facial expressions, and body movements. Masks and costumes were sometimes used, and performances could take hours or days to recount the history, genealogy, battles, and uprisings of the community. They employed riddles, proverbs, and myths to educate and entertain their audiences. People sat together to listen, and the griots relied on repetition as a technique to help the audience recall a chorus, line, or stanza.

Contemporary West African griots continue to preside over live performances but also make use of television and radio to broadcast oral history, fables, folktales, proverbs,
epic narratives, genealogies, and songs (Lott, 2002). The basic structure of the performances and the unifying cultural function remain the same.

African oral literature is heavily dependent on the emotive and creative skills of the performer who renders it at a given time. The enactment of a praise poem at a funeral, for example, involves the emotional situation of a funeral, the singer’s voice, sobs, facial expression, vocal expressiveness, and movement as well as the musical setting of the poem. The delivery and movement of the performer may include dancing, and both the performer and the audience collaborate to heighten the beauty of the occasion. At times, the artistic piece requires a dignified, aloof, and continuous rendition by the performer.

Much of what is considered poetry in African oral literature is designed to be produced in a musical setting. For example, the Saabi is a long, poetic narrative about male-female relationships sung by West African women, and Southern Bantu precise poems and the ijala poetry of Yoruba hunters are chanted or sung to music. Traditional African songs recall memories of times past and express dreams of the future. Some are solemn and others, happy. Some connect the singer to the community, while others serve to seduce or to destroy. They can be ritualistic and used for spiritual and healing purposes, but the majority are secular and refer to politics, history, economics, medicine, or the environment. Songs are used to celebrate people, animals, places, nature, objects, and groups. Such praise songs are featured in naming ceremonies, initiations, and weddings. Lullabies put babies to sleep, and love songs express deep attraction and sentiment. Songs are also used to critique social institutions like marriage. Some tell the

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5 Oral history is the recording of historical information filtered through the storyteller’s experience and opinion. Fables and folktales generally teach a moral or lesson. Epic narratives are recounts of the exploits of a hero which may be exaggerated to create an effect. Genealogies are detailed histories of a dynasty or a people.
story of women who threaten to commit suicide if they are forced to marry a man they do not love. In others, a wife who must receive a second wife in the home is supported by friends who insult the second wife (Sidikou & Hale, 2012). In short, songs reflect and interact with all aspects of cultural behavior.

In the Caribbean, African oral tradition was an important means of recalling and connecting enslaved Africans to their memories of the motherland. It was also closely linked to African spiritual beliefs and practices which were reshaped in the New World setting.

1.2 Afro-Caribbean spiritual beliefs and practices

Between 1500 and 1800, approximately eleven million Africans were forcibly moved to the Caribbean as a result of the Atlantic slave trade (Sherlock & Bennet, 2000, p. 124). They brought with them their belief systems, cultural traditions, and speech patterns. Jamaican slaves came primarily from West Africa. Among their traditional spiritual beliefs were the following:

- Newborns were not of this world until they had survived nine days;
- The spirits of the dead would only rest after forty days;
- Both physical and psychic healing was possible through the intervention of an obeah man or woman; and
- Communication with spirits could take place via dancing and drumming.

Such beliefs and customs were viewed with great suspicion by the British masters, who often prohibited them. Drumming, in particular, was banned because, in
addition to its religious uses, it was employed to send messages from one plantation to another and could potentially serve as an organizing tool in uprisings or escapes.

Many enslaved Africans in the Caribbean were subjected to religious conversion to Christianity in order to “civilize” them. However, they were often not fully indoctrinated due to the masters’ unwillingness to release them from their labors for religious observance. For example, in Cuba, Pérez (1994) reports that: “In addition to failing to support a religious presence at the mills, slave owners did not allow slaves time to practice the sacraments or receive religious indoctrination and observe Sundays and religious holidays” (p. 152). The enslaved workers responded by creating culturally syncretic forms that drew from both African and Christian theology—*Voodoo* in Haiti, *Santería* and *Espiritismo* in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, and *Obeah* on many of the other islands of the Caribbean. As Bastide (1971) points out, the strategies of religious syncretism—active transformation through renegotiation, reorganization and redefinition of clashing belief systems—were consistent with the general creolization process.

Afro-Caribbean spirituality is based on contact between people and the spiritual world through rituals, sacrifice, divination, spiritual possession, and healing (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert, 2003). Even though there are differences among the various island cultures, they share a number of qualities, among them a combination of monotheism and polytheism. The spiritual practices involve a devotion to dead ancestors who watch over people from the other side and a belief in a supernatural power that can be invested in living beings and non-living objects. There is also a belief in other spirits
who can be contacted to produce positive or negative effects upon living humans (Bastide, 1971).

In Jamaica, *Obeah* practices, which center on the consultation and appeasement of the Orishas (god figures), continue to be culturally salient today. Matibag (1996) compares the Orishas to the gods of Greek and Roman antiquity, defined as “archetypes, primordial beings, magical agents, receivers of prayer and sacrifice” (p. 46). They include Shango (or Changó), a hot-blooded man who serves as judge and jury for human actions; Oshun, the bringer of love; Yemoya, the guardian of the home; Ogun, a fierce warrior with the strength of steel; Nannie, the maternal ancestor who works through dreams; Egúngún, the god of moral inquisition; Osanyin, an herbalist who drives away fever; Oshanlá, the goddess of creativity and justice; and Obatálá, who has eyes all over his body allowing individuals to examine themselves (Adisa, 2011).

Eleguá, Echú, also called Echú-Eleguá, is a very powerful deity. All ceremonies must be initiated with a request for permission from this ruler of roads, crossroads, and thresholds. He is the messenger between humans and the Orishas. He reports human actions to Olodumare (the divine creator). He opens, closes, and indicates paths and must be consulted before making big life decisions. Echú is a mischievous trickster who can be severe in his punishment of those who ignore his commands.

Ogún is the Orisha of war, iron, tools, minerals, and the mountains. He is both a warrior and a blacksmith, an important figure due to the importance of iron technology in African society. Though he protects people against criminals, he is also responsible for railroad and auto accidents and violent crimes that employ metal weapons (Gonzalez-Wippler, 1989, p. 45).
Changó is considered the strongest and most important of the Orishas. “He is a womanizer and drinker, quarrelsome, courageous, and daring; made for challenges and dares, proud of his masculine virtues, boastful of his strength and manly beauty, heartbroken” (Barnet, 1997, p. 91). Feared and worshipped, his strength is music, and he rules over the sacred *batá* drums, fire, thunder, and lightning. He is the protector of warriors, fishermen, and hunters.

Yemayá is the great universal mother, the deity of maternity, the sea, and salt water. She gave birth to all the other Orishas, as well as to the sun and moon. She is related to Obatalá, the god of purity and justice whose name means “king of the white cloth.” He is always dressed in white and represents truth, peace, and compassion. He is the spirit of creativity sent down by Olodumare to create the earth and mold the earth. Another female deity is Ochún, the protector of rivers, fresh waters, and gold. She represents female sensuality, love, beauty, and sexual desire.

According to Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert (2003), the practice of Obeah by African slaves was seen by the British as a threat to the stability and health of the colonial plantation system, and it was forbidden on most British islands at the beginning of the 18th century. Obeah men were seen as leaders who could influence or incite slaves into revolt, as was apparently the case in the 1760 Jamaican rebellion. In slave revolts in the British West Indies, Obeah-men imparted oaths of secrecy and dispensed fetishes to immunize the slaves from the weapons of the Europeans. Obeah inspired resistance and revolt among slaves, afforded them meeting places and leaders, and served as a

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6 In 1760, a rebellion of Ashanti slaves took place in Jamaica under Tacky, who claimed he had been an African chief. He hired an Obeah-man to give the slaves a potion that would make them undefeatable in the struggle. The slaves believed Tacky was immortal; however, in the end, they were defeated after resisting fiercely.
repository of the memories of slaves to preserve African traditions which could be used
to oppose the colonial system. Numerous attempts were made by mainstream religious
and civic organizations to eradicate Obeah; however, via syncretism with Christian (and
later Asian) theological belief systems, it developed into an important aspect of Afro-
Caribbean culture in the Lesser Antilles.⁷

In their review of the critical literature on Obeah in the Caribbean, Fernández
Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert (2003) indicate that Obeah, as defined by George Simpson in
Black Religions in the New World, a Jamaican conjuring practice closely linked to
witchcraft. However, Karla Frye proposes in “An Article of Faith: Obeah and Hybrid
Identities in Elizabeth Nuñez Harrell’s When Rocks Dance” that Obeah is not a religion
as such but rather a system of beliefs based on spirituality and an acceptance of the
supernatural which involves aspects of witchcraft, sorcery, magic, spells, and healing.

The term Obeah can be traced to the Ashanti, Twi, and related ethnic groups from
the Gold Coast of Africa, which were heavily represented in the slave populations of the
British colonies. The Ashanti word Obayifo (meaning ‘witch or wizard’) was
phonetically transformed in the Caribbean into Obeah, Obiah, or Orbia.⁸ The practice of
Obeah involves the “putting on” and “taking off” of duppies or jumbees (ghost or spirits
of the dead) for either good or evil purposes. Unlike Voodoo and Santería, Obeah beliefs
and rituals are not centered on community worship but involve instead secret, individual
consultations aimed at achieving specific ends. Nevertheless, in “Another Poor Devil of a

⁷ Laguerre (2000) argues that Obeah served to facilitate an anti-colonial, Afro-centric identity
among the escaped slaves who may be seen as the historical precursors of the Black Power movement.
⁸ Hulme (1986) describes how the exotic term Obeah marks its practice as alien, rather than
familiar. Obeah is doubly alien because it is both foreign to the European experience and an untamed
African intrusion on the domesticated Caribbean.
Human Being: Jean Rhys and the Novel as Obeah,” Elaine Savory claims that Obeah should be reconsidered as central to the community (cited in Fernández-Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert, 2000).

One can find Obeah and other Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices recorded throughout West Indian literature. Obeah was featured in William Shepherd’s poem “The Negro Incantation,” which appeared in the Monthly magazine in 1797. It contains the following lines that refer to the creation of an Obeah spell to bring about the demise of the masters:

Haste.

The magic shreds prepare
Thus the white man’s corpse we tear.
Lo! Feathers from the raven’s plume,
that croaks our proud oppressor’s doom.

Now to aid the potent spell,
crush we next the brittle shell
fearful omen on the foe.

Look! The blanched bones we throw.

From mouldering graves we stole the hallowed earth,

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9 There was a similar fascination with African spiritual practices in the French Caribbean. William Seabrook’s 1929 novel The Magic Island contained an account of a blood-maddened and highly sexual voodoo ceremony. Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert (2000) cite Ivette Romero-Cesáreo’s description of the Shaman woman’s use of special healing baths (“water, dark from leaves—paoca, calaba balsam, bride’s rose, and the power of Satan”) in Simone Schwarz-Bart’s 1972 novel Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle, published in English under the title of The Bridge of Beyond. They also signal Brinda Mehta’s analysis of the same book, in which the Shaman woman is viewed as a mediator who makes possible the survival of the whole community through her message of union, resistance to oppression, sisterhood, and taking care of the environment. This has clear parallels to the role of the Obeah woman in Jamaican society.
which mix’d with blood,
winds up the mystic charm;
wide yawns the grave for all of Northern birth,
and soon shall smoke with blood each sable warrior’s arm

Benjamin Moseley’s *Treatise on Sugar* (1799) commented on the story of Three-fingered Jack, the terror of Jamaica in 1780, an escaped slave who outdid Spartacus in his rebelliousness. Many European descended people believed that Jack was possessed of supernatural power. In the end, he was subdued by a “christened” slave who was promised his freedom in exchange for Jack’s three-fingered hand and thought his conversion to Christianity made him immune to Jack’s sorcery. In the 1800 play, *Obi, or Three-fingered Jack* by William Earle, the African descended priestess worked incantations reminiscent of the witches in *Macbeth* over captive planter Ormon’s wax effigy:

Toil him and moil him again and again.
Sicken his heart and madden his brain;
Till strength, and sense,
and life depart,
as I tear the last pulse from the white man’s heart.

The year 1800 also saw the publication of *Henrietta*, a Gothic novella in which an obscure dread of Obeah increases the heroine’s terrors. James Montgomery included a description of the “horrible” practice of Obeah among the West Indian maroons (self-governing communities of escaped slaves and descendants) in his 1807 book titled *The West Indies*. 
According to Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert (2000), such literary depictions of Obeah served to terrify London audiences with the savage and sanguinary character of the “national manners, wars and superstitions” of West Africa (Edwards, 1793, p. 62). Many of the writers of the time considered Obeah a purely African, rather than Afro-Caribbean practice. While Obeah was treated ludicrously in Maria Edgeworth’s 1801 novel Belinda to amuse the middle-class reader, in her 1807 novel The Grateful Negro, Obeah was portrayed as a horrific force in a cautionary tale about Black power composed for the edification of British laborers.\(^{10}\)


\(^{10}\)Black Power is usually associated with the struggle for Black liberation in mid-twentieth century United States. However, even though the phrase originated with African-American activist Stokeley Carmichael in 1966, Riviére (1970) makes it clear that the Caribbean experienced rebellions of enslaved Africans that were the historical antecedents of the Black Power movement as well as of important modern rebellions elsewhere comparable to those that took place in the U.S. During the 1960s, Caribbean Black Power was invoked in the anticolonial and independence movements of the islands (Edmonson, 1974). In the 1970s, the Caribbean Black Power movement was directed against the continuing economic dominance of foreign capitalists in the Caribbean within the framework of neocolonialism (Quinn, 2014).
1.3 Modern day reflections of African culture in Caribbean

Cultural identity reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide a frame of reference to a given cultural group. In the Caribbean, cultural identity has played an important role in the anticolonial struggles that led to the current national entities. The unifying feature of the Caribbean islands is the Black experience. It was a key theme for the poets of the negritude movement, like Aimée Césaire and Leopold Senghor, and it continues to be a major concern of Caribbean filmmakers, artists, and writers. Jamaican born photographer Armet Francis attempted to reconstruct in visual terms the underlying unity of African descended people who were uprooted and redistributed across the African diaspora by the forces of colonization and slavery, thus performing an imaginary reunification.

Africa was present in the everyday life of the slave quarters, including African languages (Oldendorp finds more than two dozen African languages still spoken on St. Croix in 1767), the creole languages of the plantations, African lifeways, child-rearing practices, place names, stories narrated to children, foods consumed, religious practices and beliefs, crafts, and music. Today many of these features continue to be an integral and defining part of Caribbean culture. Although great efforts to erase the “otherness” (Fanon, 1952) of African-descended individuals were made, even by African descendants themselves, in the 1970s Afro-Caribbean identity came alive in Jamaica as a result of the impact of the national independence movements, the civil rights struggle, the creation and popularization of Rastafarianism, and the world-wide spread of reggae (Hall, 1990).
While Rastafarianism (another Caribbean-born form of spirituality) developed as a form of protest and a rejection of “Babylon” (Western, industrialized society and its moneyed institutions), ironically the tourism industry in Jamaica now promotes Rastafari-related merchandise to attract business. European-descended tourists who visit the island engage in cultural appropriation by wearing dreadlocks, sporting clothing in the colors of the Jamaican flag, and listening to the reggae of Bob Marley, who was a Rastafari. Since the 1960s, the government has encouraged visitors to come to Jamaica and “feel all right,” and in 2015, it decriminalized ganja (marijuana), a major draw to the island which is associated with Rastafarianism. Yet very few of these tourists really understand what the Rastafari believe and why they have become an important element of Jamaican society, even at the discourse level.

As we saw back in Chapter Two during the discussion of Nation Language, the Rastafari developed as a cultural group during the 1930s, strongly influenced by Marcus Garvey’s “Back to Africa” movement of the early 1900s. They looked to Africa for validation of the worth of African and African-descended people and found in Ethiopia (one of several cradles of human evolution to be found in Africa) a newly-crowned emperor (Haile Selassie) who seemed to fulfill a Biblical prophecy. They considered him an incarnation of God (Jah) and organized a religion around the Promised Land of Zion (Ethiopia) and its emperor. They even adopted the colors of the Ethiopian flag of that time.¹¹

¹¹ A song by Steel Pulse titled “Worth his Weight in Gold” describes the meaning of the flag’s colors. Red stands for the blood of African-descended martyrs that was shed around the world during their struggle for liberation, equal rights, and justice. Yellow represents the wealth of the homeland, Africa, particularly the gold that was stolen from it. Black symbolizes the people from whom this wealth was stolen and green, the beauty and vegetation of the Promised Land (Mike, 2014).
The Rastafari have many personal rituals, taboos, and practices related to food, nature, and Africa which result from their particular interpretation of the Bible. Meat and seafood are avoided as well as salt. Cutting hair is prohibited, and wearing uncut hair which mats into dreadlocks is a distinctive mark of Rasta membership and a symbol of their African identity. They wear full beards to imitate the biblical God head Tafari (Chevannes, 1994). The Rastafari also avoid mechanical exploitation and chemical fertilization of the land, preferring completely organic farming on a small scale.

Rastafarian communities are run by an Assembly of Elders who are in charge of affairs. There is a hierarchy of gender. Rastafarian religion is a patriarchal structure, slow in granting women a voice in roles outside the home. Women are submitted to male authority and can only acquire ‘the fullness of divine knowledge’ through their husbands, due to being classified as inferior beings (Chevannes, 1994, p. 14). Women have no ritual function and must keep their dreadlocks covered and show proper deference to males. They are not allowed to cook while menstruating and must obey dress and household codes like wearing ankle-length dresses in public and avoiding social contact. Since 1980, greater freedom for women has been achieved; however, there has been no increase in their religious role. Jamaican novelist Erna Brodber wrote about Rastafarianism in Jane and Louisa will soon come Home (1981) and in Myal (1988).

In Jamaica, Rastafarian “groundings” ("reasoning" sessions, roughly equivalent to a religious service) are performed to commemorate important dates, such as events in the lives of Haile Selassie and Marcus Garvey and the day of Emancipation. These include Obeah revenge or retaliation spells which may last for days and can bring dreadlocked individuals from all over Jamaica to dance to the rhythm of Rasta drums.
The African presence in Jamaica (and the rest of the Caribbean) has survived in spite of 400 years of displacement and suppression. However, for many (if not most) in the Caribbean, Africa represents what Benedict Anderson (1983) calls an “imagined community” to which one cannot return. Thus Marcus Garvey’s journey does not end in Africa, but rather in Jamaica with a traditional song sung to the music of Bob Marley. Now let us turn to a more detailed consideration of three discourse genres in the Caribbean which have been significantly influenced by African oral tradition and spirituality.

2.0 African influence in Caribbean discourse genres

As we have seen, traditional tales, proverbs, and rituals are an important part of oral tradition in African society, and it should not surprise us that they also make their appearance in the New World and are described and celebrated in Caribbean literature. Let us look at each in turn.

2.1 Ancestral tales

For centuries, the history, traditions, and beliefs of many African peoples have been passed on to the new generations through oral traditions and storytelling. The themes treated have included life after death, the birth of the universe, belief in magic, ancestor spirits, celestial beings, and animal legends. Let us look briefly at a few examples from West and Central Africa, the regions from which the majority of African-descended people in Jamaica originated.

The Akan of West Africa tell the story about how all humans originally lived deep within the earth. One day, seven men, five women, a leopard, and a dog crawled out of a hole made by a giant worm. Adu Ogyinae--the first man on the surface of the earth--
seemed to understand the world and its marvels and gave his terrified companions strength by placing his hands on them. Adu Ogyine also organized the people into teams and coordinated the construction of their first shelters. He died suddenly when a tree he was cutting fell on him, (Gerber, 2013). One of the points of this story is that one should not think that one is invincible just because one is powerful and strong.

In central Zaire, people recount tales of the Biloko, diabolical dwarf-like beings that wander around the lowest regions of the rainforest. These creatures are said to be restless ancestor spirits who resent living beings. They feverishly guard the forest and its animals from the hollow trees where they hide. Women faint when they see them, and only the most courageous hunters enter the forests and survive. They have long sharp claws and sharp-toothed mouths that can open wide enough to swallow a human completely. They cast spells and eat whoever comes under their spell (Gerber, 2013). A lesson implicit in this story is that evil lurks around us, and we must be careful and alert in order to survive.

An Angolan folk tale recounts the story of Chief Kitamba who, heartbroken after the death of his favorite wife Muhungu, ordered his people not to speak or eat until she could be brought back to life. The chief asked a medicine man to contact the queen of Kalunga (the world of the dead). The medicine man descended with his son into the land of the dead where he found the queen. She showed him Kalunga-ngombe, the lord of the underworld, who she said would devour everybody in the end. She gave the medicine man a funerary bracelet as proof of his encounter and sent him back, warning him that no one who entered Kalunga could leave and that he should not eat any of the food or speak of Chief Kitamba’s coming death. If he did so, he and his son would be forced to stay in
the underworld. When the medicine man returned to his village, he showed the bracelet to the chief, who confirmed it had belonged to his dead wife Muhungu (Gerber, 2013). The story teaches one to respect the supernatural and life beyond this world. It also underscores that those who heed sound advice from authoritative figures survive and succeed.

The exploits of Anansi, West Africa’s trickster-avatar, appear in hundreds of folktales. Usually in the form of a spider, Anansi attempts to trick humans into stealing or doing immoral things. These tales serve to teach listeners important life lessons. Anansi often succeeds at the expense of those he/she manipulates. One tale describes Anansi’s attempt to place the world’s wisdom into a pot, in order to hoard it by hiding the pot at the top of a tree. Anansi kept sliding back down the tree with the pot tied frontwise to the chest. Anansi’s son asked if it wouldn’t be better to tie the pot to the backside to make it easier to climb the tree. When Anansi tried to do this, however, the pot slipped and fell to the ground, the wisdom fell out, and a rainstorm washed it into the river and from there to the ocean. Now everyone in the world can claim to have a little bit of wisdom (Gerber, 2013). One moral of this story is that greed and avarice blind a person from seeing perils and not using their head, while another moral warns against claiming a monopoly on wisdom and the truth.

Telling stories to teach lessons is also characteristic of Caribbean culture. The telling of ancestral tales was continued in Jamaica in two primary ways: oral performance and inclusion in written literature.

The best known oral storyteller was undoubtedly Louise Bennett Coverley (Miss Lou), who was discussed in Chapter Two with regard to her use of Nation Language.
Her stories and poems (like “Noh Lkle Twang”) were written in Jamaican Creole and discussed Jamaican religion, politics, and Jamaican behavior. Recorded versions are widely enjoyed in Jamaica, and Miss Lou’s work opened the doors to many other storytellers and performers. Among them is Amina Blackwood-Meeks, writer, director, performer, and custodian of oral tradition. Joan Andrea Hutchinson, actor, teacher, singer, motivational speaker, poet, and the author of *Dat Bumpy Head Gal, Wild About Jamaica*, is internationally recognized for her poems, monologues, and performances in Jamaican Creole, many of which are available on CD. Allan Hope, known as Mutabaruka, is a popular dub poet, performer, and author of *Outcry* and *Sun and Moon*. Mervyn Morris, author of *The Pond, Shadowboxing*, and *Is English We Speaking*, who is described as one of the most resourceful and technically brilliant of contemporary Caribbean poets and a compelling oral performer (diGJamaica, 2015). All of these creative individuals continue to honor and fulfill the functions of traditional African oral storytellers.

given access to an unbroken chain of traditional oral storytelling through the written word.

2.2 Proverbs

Proverbs encapsulate, in a short expression, basic principles of wisdom, truth, and life lessons. Examples of well-known African proverbs are:

- It takes a village to raise a child.
- No matter how long the night, the day is sure to come.
- One falsehood spoils a thousand truths.
- The fool speaks, the wise man listens.
- Cross the river in a crowd and the crocodile won’t eat you.
- When a king has good counselors, his reign is peaceful.
- Not to know is bad; not to wish to know is worse.
- Do not follow the path. Go where there is no path to begin a trail.
- Do not call the forest that shelters you a jungle.
- When you follow in the path of your father, you learn to walk like him.
- It is best to bind up the finger before it is cut.
- Do not say the first thing that comes to mind.
- A little rain each day will fill the rivers to overflowing. (Teach Africa, n.d. p. 4).

Proverbs are an essential part of African culture and are guidelines for individual, family, and village behavior, built upon diverse real life experiences and observations over time. While Africa has many languages, many of the same proverbs exist in similar
forms in the overwhelming majority of them, no matter the cultural or geographical differences.

Proverbs capture the wisdom of the ancestors via metaphors that can explain complex issues in simple words by creating strong mental images (Malunga, & Banda, 2004). For example, the proverb “When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers,” can be used to dissuade people from going into war because of the “collateral” harm that war causes. Another proverb: “When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.” expresses the importance of collaboration to overcome problems.

The appreciation and use of proverbs was carried over into the Caribbean setting. In Jamaica, proverbs usually appear in Nation Language (Patwa). Some examples include:

- “One, one coco full basket” – Do not expect to achieve success overnight.
- “Mi cum yah fi drink milk, mi no cum yah fi count cow” - Conduct business in a direct manner or deliver what you promise and don’t waste time talking about it.
- “Every hoe ha them stick a bush” - To each his own and also there is someone for everyone.
- “Wah sweet nany goat a go run him belly” - The things that appear harmless to you now may hurt you later.
- “Chicken merry, hawk deh near” - Even in good times one must be careful.
- “Fire deh a muss muss tail, him think a cool breeze” - Be prepared for when disaster occurs.
• “Mi throw mi corn but me neva call no fowl”- You are who you are not who you say you are.
• “Sorry fi mawga dawg, mawga dawg tun roun bite you”- Sometimes those you help are the most ungrateful.
• “Cock mouth kill cock.”- Don’t think you are better than anyone.
• “Wanti wanti cyah get eh, getti getti nuh want eh”- Don’t take for granted what you have.
• “Trouble nuh set like rain”- There are no warnings before adversity strikes.
• “Time longa dan rope”- Wait until your time comes.
• “Learn fi creep before yuh walk”- Learn to crawl before you walk.
• “Every mikkle mek a mukkle”- A penny saved is a penny earned.
• “See an blind, hear an deaf”- See no evil, hear no evil.

The link between these Jamaican proverbs and existing African proverbs is easy to see. The modern versions continue in the same spirit and sometimes directly echo the oral traditions handed down over generations from the long-dead African ancestors.

2.3 Rituals

Traditional African society was regulated by numerous rituals, many of which persist to this day. These rituals highlight and demarcate significant life stages and transitions. They are valued as essential markers of cultural identity. Many are related to female and male roles and expectations. Many are enacted via pre-set forms of oral discourse.
In many parts of Africa, there are numerous taboos related to menstruation, and women are often expected to isolate themselves and undergo certain rituals during their periods. For example, The !Kung of the Kalahari Desert believe that just seeing menstrual blood on another woman’s leg will cause other women to begin menstruating (Shostak, 1983, p. 68). In some cultures, there are menstruation huts. In others, men and sexual relations are avoided while women are menstruating.

Marriage is a social institution marked by many rituals. In most Sahelian cultures, virginity is important for a respectable woman’s family. There are descriptions that date back several centuries of griots walking through a village with a blood-stained sheet and loudly proclaiming the evidence of a bride’s virginity on the morning of the wedding (Sidikou and Hale, 2012). Weddings can be affairs that last several days and include the departure of the bride from the house of her parents (including ritualized good-byes), her welcome reception at her husband’s home, and oral advice sessions on how to prepare for sexual activity, how to relate to in-laws, and how to respond to abuse. When a woman wants to avoid an arranged marriage and choose her own partner, the entire process involves the families and clans, since they have to agree on a suitable partner. Griots are sent to report orally on progress in these negotiations (Sidikou and Hale, 2012).

There are also many rituals involving pregnancy, usually accompanied by ritual phrases. Among the Estakor (Afemais) of Nigeria, first-time mothers are circumcised when they are seven months pregnant. The practice of clitorectomy, now seen in many Western societies as a violation of human rights, is important in their society. The circumcision blood constitutes a covenant between the woman and her people, and until she has gone through this procedure, she is an outsider. The newly-delivered woman
must spend seven days in a separate room, drinking herbs and not bathing. She also has to go through the ritual of “stakor” in which one side of a tooth is chopped off with a hammer to show that she is married and has experienced motherhood. These rituals are seen as honors for the woman, and the community views their completion as a sign of the woman’s vitality and worthiness (Akuijobi, 2011).

Naming rituals are very common throughout the African continent. The naming of children after birth links them to the past and particular events. They may be named for ancestors or an event or a quality the parents wish for. The ceremony is an opportunity for friends and relatives to vocally celebrate the heritage of the child (Sidikou and Hale, 2012).

There are many healing rituals in which spirits or deities are physically and verbally invoked. These may involve bathing, rubbing substances on the body, or drinking certain herbal concoctions. Incantations or prayers may accompany these actions. Other rituals refer to burials and controlling weather and have a strong oral component.

In contemporary Jamaica, rituals still play an important role in the culture, marking off life stages and establishing expected behavioral patterns. Death rituals have undergone both African and European influences, and traditional beliefs and songs are coupled with those of Christians. There are oral references to the spirit going to heaven, and African rituals to make sure the dead spirit is placed at ease. Moths or birds entering the home of the dying person are interpreted as signs of the arrival of death. The home of the departed is decorated with red and white floral arrangements. In accordance with African tradition, the corpse is carried out of the house feet first, clocks are stopped,
mirrors are covered, the colors black, white or purple are used, and the furniture is rearranged so that the ghost would not recognize the place if it were to return. Children are passed over a dead person three times to prevent the spirit from harming them.

Among Jamaicans who practice Kumina (a form of religious expression that originated in the Congo and is still maintained in one area of the island), rum is poured into the ground to ask permission from the earth spirit when graves are dug, and the body is placed to face the sunrise. People turn their backs on the dead and throw dirt between their legs to prevent the spirits from following them home. The deceased are buried together with personal belongings to ease their spirits and discourage them from leaving their graves (Tortello, 2006). According to the Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History (2006), singing, drumming, and dancing are essential at burials and “tombings” (the cementing over of graves) are carried out one year after death. The ritual language utilized during these events is a mixture of Jamaican Creole and fossilized Kikongo words and phrases.

3.0 Function of African traditional beliefs in Caribbean literature today

Many Caribbean authors include African elements in their creative writing. In this section, we consider the possible reasons for this, including the transmission of ancestral wisdom, the attempt to heal longstanding historical and cultural wounds, and the desire to resist the suppression of African-based identities.

3.1 Transmission of ancestral wisdom

In the Caribbean, children and adults are usually taught to respect their grandparents as repositories of wisdom. Grandparents frequently live in the homes of their children and provide childcare and other services to the extended family (McKoy
Davis, et. al., 2017). In a study by Edith Clark of the family life of African-descended people in Jamaica, it is noted that when a child feels his natural mother has been unfair to him, he turns to his grandmother because her word is final. Children call their grandmother “Momma” and refer to their own mother by following the same title with her name “Momma Irene,” for example. Clark observed that children “will copy the behavior pattern toward the mother of their siblings and be taught to obey and respect the grandmother as the head of the family.” (cited in Martin, & Mitchell, 1980, p. 47).

The grandmother as an archetypical figure of cultural retention appears in Alvin Bennett's *God the Stonebreaker* (1964), Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* (1986), Cecil Foster's *No Man in the House* (1992), Joseph Zobel's *La Rue Cases-Nègres* (1994), and Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (1995), among many others (Bethell Bennett, 2000). Opal Palmer Adisa also recognizes the role that grandmothers play in the home as a source of knowledge and guidance. In her novel *Painting Away Regrets* (2011), she emphasizes their value (and also echoes Obeah tradition) by having the character of the deceased grandmother transmit wisdom to her granddaughter through dreams.

### 3.2 Healing of wounds caused by slavery and sexual oppression

The history of the Caribbean is replete with examples of violence and cruelty, beginning with the kidnapping and enslavement of Africans, continuing through the genocidal attacks of Dominicans upon Haitians, and culminating with the incessant domestic abuse waged against women in all eras. This violence in all its manifestations has been addressed by many Caribbean writers, including Kamau Brathwaite in *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (1987), Dione Brand in *At the Full and Change of the*

For Opal Palmer Adisa, healing in the Caribbean has to come about by acknowledging the pain and seeking solace in the old-time traditions like Obeah that sustained African descendants throughout their painful history. In Jamaica, at present, Obeah men and women are readers and herbalists, and people resort to them for physical, mental, and spiritual healing and protection from evil (Murrel, 2010). Adisa explains that while Obeah is still popular in Jamaica, it is often maligned and negated since people feel ambivalent about it. Adisa’s own mother, a practicing Anglican Baptist, never admitted openly that she consulted an Obeah woman, but whenever she felt something was wrong, she would give herself a bush bath with herbs available from the Obeah woman for restoring balance and warding off duppies or spirits. Often when Jamaicans seek help through mainstream medicine or the church and find no remedy, they run down the road to the Obeah man or woman for relief (Davis, 2013).

3.3 Resisting the erasure of Afro-Caribbean identity

Many Caribbean writers rely on references to traditional African beliefs and behaviors in order to resist the effects of colonialism and neocolonialism and defend an African-based identity. Descriptions of traditional foods and their preparation in novels like Richardo Keens Douglas’ The Nutmeg Princess (1992), Edouard Glissant’s Ormerod (2003), and Opal Palmer Adisa’s Caribbean Passion (2004) are a form of fighting back.

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12 Balance is a very important element in Obeah healing, and many Obeah remedies involve rituals or sacrifices whose purpose is the restoration of balance in the individual (Sidikou and Hale, 2012). In Charlestown, (located in the Blue Mountains next to a river inhabited by maroon descendants who turn to Obeah for their medicinal needs), there is a sign that reads: “Walkgud mek gud duppy follow you”.
against the chain restaurants that seek to homogenize and colonize island palates. In her poem, “Meditations on Yellow,” from Gardening in the Tropics (2009), Olive Senior defends Caribbean identity in the face of European colonial conquest and present-day neocolonial tourism. The poem begins by describing the European quest for gold:

At three in the afternoon
you landed here at El Dorado
(for heat engenders gold and
fires the brain)
Had I known I would have
brewed you up some yellow fever-grass
and arsenic
but we were peaceful then
child-like in the yellow dawn of our innocence…

She goes on to describe how the European colonialists brought bananas, oranges, and sugar cane from the Orient in exchange for maize, pineapples, and guavas. Later she mocks the tourists who now come looking for gold on their bodies (suntans) and who consume island “coffee/ tea/ cock-soup/ rum / Red Stripe beer/ sensimilla” and still want more. The poem closes with an assertion of Caribbean resistance to domination by foreign capitalist enterprises: “I want to feel mellow /in that three o’clock yellow/ I want to feel/ though you own/ the silver tea service/ the communion plate/ you don’t own/ the tropics anymore…”

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13 Ironically, in the diaspora and among visiting tourists, the traditional foods are sought out.

14 Sensimilla refers to the female marijuana plant.
4.0 Conclusion

African traditional beliefs and behaviors were brought with the enslaved Africans to the Caribbean and retained or adapted by them in order to help them endure and heal their pain and suffering. Contemporary Caribbean writers draw upon traditional African references in order to transmit the wisdom of traditional teachings, show their relevance to the healing of current disorders that are the long-term result of slavery and imperialism, and fight back against cultural silencing and erasure of Afro-Caribbean identities.

In Chapter 5, we will present a critical discourse analysis of five key scenes from Opal Palmer Adisa’s novel *It Begins with Tears* which utilize the three themes explored in this dissertation: Nation Language, gender relations, and African traditional beliefs and practices.
Chapter 5:
Methodology and Analysis

1.0 Critical Discourse Analysis

In this chapter, the scholarly literature on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is reviewed more thoroughly in order to further justify its utilization in the exploration and special analysis of literary works. The specific techniques for selecting key passages and analyzing them in terms of the three focal topics of Nation Language, gender roles, and African traditional beliefs and practices are also explained. Then the detailed findings from the Critical Discourse Analysis of the key passages in Adisa’s novel *It Begins with Tears* are presented.

1.1 Definitions

As indicated briefly in Chapter 1, *Critical Discourse Analysis* is a subgenre of *critical linguistics* that not only describes discursive practices but also shows how both spoken and written texts are shaped by power relations and by ideologies of how discourse constructs social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief. CDA views discourse as a *social practice*. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation, institution, and social structure which frame it (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

In CDA, *meaning* is perceived as embedded within social, historical, political, and ideological contexts. When people use meaning, they do it to achieve a purpose such as increasing knowledge, building relationships, and developing world views (William-Gualandi, 2017). Practitioners of CDA are very varied in their approaches but generally
believe that discourse meaning is produced by the interplay of words and phrases within many different social domains and institutions. The nexus of the linguistic and non-linguistic elements creates *shared systems of meaning* that are drawn upon in communicative acts and utilized to generate personal interpretations of the significance of those acts (Parker, 1999).

Gee (2010) distinguishes *utterance level meaning* (based primarily on the mapping of form and function within a sentence or clause) from *situated or context-based meaning*. “Situated meanings arise because particular language forms take on specific or situated meanings in specific different contexts of use.” (p. 25). It is necessary to progressively widen the context of any utterance to fully understand its critical significance.

According to Van Dijk (1995), CDA focuses on the *function of language in society* and the ways that forms of inequality are expressed and legitimated in text and talk. His work pays attention to the abuse of power by the elite and by social institutions. Van Dijk seeks to discover and denounce the social dominance of certain groups, which is sanctioned by the courts, legitimated by laws, enforced by the police, and reproduced by media and books (Van Dijk, 1993). Wodak and Meyer (2001) underscore that CDA scholars tend to represent discriminated groups. Their work focuses on how racism and ethnocentrism can be analyzed in the media.

Furthermore, Fairclough (1992) explains that discourse helps build *social identities*. The way individuals present themselves depends heavily upon discourse. Discourse also aids in the construction of social relationships between people.
Fairclough (2002) asserts that one cannot take the role of discourse in social practice for
granted, it should instead be acknowledged and analyzed.

1.2 Review of literature on Critical Discourse Analysis studies

There are non-critical and critical approaches to discourse analysis. Non-critical
approaches focus on the description of discourse as it occurs without referring much to
the larger context within which it is created. Examples include the framework for
describing classroom discourse created by Sinclair and Coulthard (1977), the
ethnomethodological work in conversation analysis carried out by Sacks (1992), the
model for therapeutic discourse set forth in Labov and Fanshel (1977), and the social
psychological analysis elaborated by Potter and Wetherell (1990). However, this
dissertation is based on a critical approach.

Critical approaches not only describe discursive practices but also show how
discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies and how discourse constructs
social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief, none of which
may be immediately evident (Parker, 1999). Among the most popular critical approaches
are the critical linguistic model of Fowler (1983), the Althusserian ideological approach
of Pecheux (1969), and the CDA framework as practiced by Van Dijk (2001) and by
Wodak and Reisigl (2001). The basic difference between these critical approaches and
the aforementioned non-critical approaches can be appreciated via a quick comparison of
ethnomethodology and CDA.

The ethnomethodological approach to conversation analysis focuses on everyday
life as a skilled accomplishment. It was developed by Harold Garfinkel and his students
and colleagues during the 1960s. It avoids general theory and the use of concepts such as
class, power, or ideology, and concentrates on informal conversations between peers. It studies conversational openings and closings, how topics are established, developed, and changed, how people tell stories, how and why people formulate conversations, and how conversationalists alternate in taking turns at speaking (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974). Ethnomethodologists have made important contributions regarding the structures present in dialogues, but they pay little attention to societal forces which act upon discourse.

Wodak and Reisigl’s 2001 analysis of a 1997 interview on Austrian television is a good illustration of a CDA approach to racist discourse, specifically an approach they call discourse historical analysis. The discourse historical approach rejects non-causal approaches to racism and calls for multidisciplinary, historical analysis of discourse, both written and spoken, as a form of social practice (Wodak, 1997, 2001).

In 2000, Karl-Heinz Grasser, an Austrian Freedom Party finance minister, issued a regulation requiring all construction teams to be made up of Austrian or European Union workers, excluding non-European immigrants. There was strong protest by builders and immigrants alike. During the interview under analysis, Jörg Haider, leader of the Freedom Party, defended Grasser very strategically. In their discourse historical analysis, Wodak and Reisigl linked the actual words uttered by Haider with facts from the sociopolitical context to explain his underlying racism. They were able to show how he avoided responsibility for his actions by using the pronoun “we” rather than “I,” how he made personal attacks on two critics of the regulation as if they represented all of the critics, and how he set up an imaginary scenario in which all Austrian construction sites were filled with “black Africans.” Lastly, the researchers pointed out how Haider euphemistically and
patronizingly justified the objections to hiring immigrants when he said: “one is obligated to be understanding if there are emotions” (Wodak and Reisigl, 2001). The critical aspect of their study rests upon the in-depth analysis of the social and linguistic contexts and the rhetorical means by which racial discrimination is accomplished.

The critical analysis of key passages from Opal Palmer Adisa’s book in this dissertation will rest primarily upon the approach taken by Gee (2010, 2011). He considers that the actions we accomplish using language allow us to build (or destroy) things in the world. He identifies seven building tasks accomplished via language (significance, practices, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge) and states that the job of the critical discourse analyst is to ask questions about how each task is carried out using discourse elements. The precise application of Gee’s framework to the analysis of passages from Adisa’s novel will be explained in section 2.2.

2.0 Key passages in It Begins with Tears

As explained earlier, five key passages from the novel were selected for the purposes of analysis. Given the intensive nature of the CDA framework, an analysis of the entire book would exceed the time and space allotted for a dissertation. As a result, it was decided to focus in more detail on a textual sample of a more limited size in order to derive the richest analysis possible.

Before beginning the analysis, it is important to consider the nature of literary discourse which is quite different from natural conversation. The “I” in literary discourse does not represent the author; rather it is the narrator’s voice (Widdowson, 1975, 1992). In the Western literary canon, the only time the author may communicate directly to the reader is by using a chorus, as in classical Greek plays. There is an ongoing debate as to whether literariness lies in the language or is a function of something outside the language. Certain
words can have literary qualities, and dictionaries label words as being literary; however, the feature of literariness is not clearly defined. In literary discourse, ambiguity and the generation of multiple meanings are desirable.

Another aspect of literary discourse that must be considered is that a given author can decide to produce realistic dialog in order to bring the characters to life and make the story more believable. This is certainly the case with Adisa, who utilizes dialog to bring in Nation Language and African cultural traditions and to explore the personal relationships among the speakers which reflect and perpetuate societal gender ideologies and practices.

2.1 Selection criteria for five key passages

Key passages from the work of Opal Palmer Adisa were selected because they embodied the three focal themes selected for this research. They are the following:

- Passage 1 (The Argument)¹⁵ [pp. 1-4]
- Passage 2 (Nathan) [pp. 14-15]
- Passage 3 (Monica) [pp. 28-29]
- Passage 4 (Velma’s Immaculate Conception) [pp. 63-70]
- Passage 5 (The River) [pp. 212-219]

These passages serve to illustrate her use of Jamaican Creole vs. Standard English, to illuminate the role of traditional belief systems in Jamaican society, and to shed light on the nature of male-female relations. They contain all the elements necessary for a CDA analysis. Most are from the introductory chapters of the novel in which the characters are presented and the plot of the story is established.

¹⁵ The titles of the passages are the creation of the analyst, not the author of the book. Their purpose is to aid the reader in remembering what each passage is about when passages are compared with one another.
2.2 Guide questions for analysis of *It Begins with Tears*

According to Gee (2011), there are many questions one must ask in order to analyze a literary piece from a CDA approach. For instance, it is essential to determine not only what is being said by given characters but also what they and the author are trying to accomplish with the words that are used. In the case of Opal Palmer Adisa, the analysis will have to consider whether there is a preponderance of Creole or Standard English words in a given passage and how the words selected privilege or de-privilege specific language varieties (e.g., Jamaican Creole vs. English) and different ways of knowing and believing.

While analyzing written passages, it is also vital to ask what typical stories or *figured worlds* the words and phrases are assuming and inviting listeners to become a part of. Furthermore, the participants, activities, ways of interacting, forms of language, environments and institutions, as well as values present in these figured worlds must be analyzed (Gee, 2011). Once again, the context (physical, linguistic, and emotional) is key to the critical analysis of the written discourse.

In order to accomplish the CDA analysis of the passages, the following questions (based on Gee, 2011) were employed as guides.

1. What are the relations of power among the participants?

2. Are there hidden sources of power?

3. Who is being consulted in the interaction depicted?

4. Who is the intended audience of what is being said?

5. What is left unsaid or silenced?
6. How are specific linguistic structures utilized in the passage (e.g., passives, adjectives)?

7. How are the characters and events presented?

8. What language(s) is (are) being used? Is there code-switching?

9. When does the writer use Creole and Standard English to underscore the gender positions of the characters?

10. Are there differences in the way men and women express themselves in the passage?

To carry out the analysis, the novel was read carefully several times, and the passages that had references to Nation Language, gender roles and traditional spiritual beliefs were marked. Any portions in Jamaican Creole were translated into Standard English to ensure the accuracy of the analysis. Five particularly salient passages were selected for analysis. The passages were broken into smaller stretches of text presented on numbered lines, each line representing a new clause or proposition, for ease of structural analysis. (With the permission of the author, the complete passages were reproduced in the Appendix exactly as they appear in the book for the convenience of the reader.) Then the selected texts were analyzed in terms of the guide questions. At all times, the three themes under analysis (and their intersections) were kept in mind, as well as the larger context in which the characters’ actions took place and the author’s personal orientation toward those actions.
3.0 Critical analysis of the key passages

In the pages that follow, the five key passages of Adisa’s book *It Begins with Tears* are explained and analyzed via selected texts. All page references are to the original 1997 edition of the book published by Heinemann. The detailed line by line analysis is presented below.

3.1 Passage 1 (The Argument) [pp. 1-4]

The novel is set in Kristoff Village in rural Jamaica. It begins with a description of the changeable weather which is vividly personified via an extended metaphor referring to the volatile relationship between the Devil and the She-Devil. The inhabitants of the village are emotionally affected by the shifting weather conditions and make comments about it in Jamaican Creole that reflect their views of male-female relations. (“Devil stop beating your wife! Devil mek you must behave so bad!” (p. 1). The villagers are of two minds. Some feel the world is coming to an end; others interpret the dramatic change as an omen of good things to come.

Adisa’s marital/meteorological metaphor echoes traditional African cosmology in which what happens in heaven is reflected on earth. This is analogous to Greek mythology, where the gods control the weather and send wind and fire upon the earth and the seas to change the course of human events. Whenever the weather worsens, with lightning and thunder, the villagers react as if witnessing a marital argument (p. 1-2). The women are particularly incensed at the Devil’s violence, and the men marvel at the Devil’s stupidity in agitating the She-Devil.
Text 1a:

1. The women were outraged
2. that in these times Devil still felt
3. he could up and beat his wife.
4. They grumbled and mumbled,
5. spat frequently
6. and threatened.
7. ‘If it was me
8. ah would pour hot oil in him ears.’
9. ‘Long time now me would chop off him hand.’
10. ‘Nothing worse dan an ignorant man!’
11. The men were embarrassed,
12. as if caught with their pants down during a parade.
13. Most of them knew better
14. than to aggravate their wives or sweethearts
15. who would seize the occasion
16. to put their hands akimbo,
17. spread their legs,
18. raise their voices
19. as if they were on a platform
20. and rebuke them to no end.
21. ‘Devil is not a smart man a-tall.’
22. ‘You neva seh a more true thing, me friend.’
23. ‘Once you start hitting a woman
24. dere is no stopping.’
25. ‘One of oonuh go dead
26. or have to leave.’
27. ‘Most time man have to run cause
28. when Oman stand up,
29. dem stand up strong.’

Analyzing this stretch of text reveals several patterns. We have already commented on the use of a traditional reference to evil spirits (Devil and She-Devil) who act in very imperfect, human-like ways yet appear to be able to influence human actions and feelings. We also see how the narrator (who is the voice of the author) utilizes Standard Caribbean English (SCE) to describe the setting and the characters, most likely because she wants to appeal to a larger reading audience. In contrast, the characters in this text (poor Jamaican villagers) primarily speak in Nation Language (NL). This reflects their ethnic and class identity and makes the story seem more realistic.

As we go line by line through the text, we gain insight into the present and past gender and power relations in Jamaican culture. In the Caribbean, many women have experienced domestic violence resulting in physical and emotional abuse or death, so it is an important concern (Campbell, 2017)\(^\text{16}\). Lines 1-6 above describe the village women’s perception that “in these times,” male abuse of women is ignorant and unacceptable. This

\(^{16}\text{Campbell (2017, p. 3) indicated that, according to the 2013 summary report of the Pan American Health Organization, 19\% of Jamaican women had experienced violence at some time in their lives. She also cited the Economic and Social Survey of Jamaica 2015 which reported 116 females murdered in that year alone.}
implies that in the past (perhaps the ancient times when the Devil ruled), such behavior was expected, but this is no longer true. Their outrage is underscored by the use of the adverb “still” (line 2) and the active verbs *grumbled, mumbled, spat,* and *threatened* in lines 4-6. Direct and quite hyperbolic violent threats are spewed in lines 7-9 (*pouring hot oil in his ear, chopping off his hand*), painting a horrendous picture of revenge. In the eyes of the women, an abusive man is worthless and must painfully suffer the consequences.

We also see the embarrassment of the men who “know better than to aggravate” their women. Lines 16-20 depict the women’s typical response to abuse (standing arms akimbo, legs spread, and rebuking the men in loud voices). While Jamaica may be seen as a sexist society, the power of women in the household cannot be denied, and a wise man avoids making his mate “stand up strong” (lines 27-29). Here Adisa describes tough Jamaican women both physically and mentally positioning themselves in a stance against domestic violence and sending a message for women to resist and come together to denounce abuse. The fact that the men are “embarrassed” shows that they know that beating their wives is wrong.

It may be worth noting that in this passage, the men’s variety of Jamaican is less like Standard English (less acrolectal) than the women’s. The men’s speech begins with a more acrolectal structure, then gradually becomes more basilectal (more like African languages), until they finish with a proverb-like sentence, reminiscent of West African discourse.

Further, as the meteorological “argument” continues, the sun comes out briefly, and the people imagine a temporary reconciliation of the devilish pair. Then things
worsen, and they visualize more domestic violence. At one point, She-Devil threatens to leave Devil (p. 2-4):

Text 1b:

1. ‘Time to move, yes.
2. Picknie dem grown,’ she said.
3. ‘Me footloose and fancy free.’
4. Devil started to cuss in a loud voice
5. as if he wasn’t speaking to She-Devil standing right there beside him.
6. ‘Anybody think dem gwana walk out on me
7. betta think again,’ He-Devil said.
8. All the while Devil was carrying on,
9. he would shadow-dance with his machete,
10. the blade so silver sharp a fly pitched on it
11. and it was instantly cut in two.
12. She Devil wasn’t afraid of Devil’s machete
13. because she had a butcher knife
14. and no one could wield a butcher knife more skillfully than She-Devil.
15. A leg of goat or shoulder of beef put up no resistance to She-Devil.
16. So when He-Devil started shouting and cussing and fondling his machete,
17. She-Devil got her butcher knife,
18. went on the veranda
19. and sang at the top of her voice.
20. ‘Me is a meat grinder,
21. bring me meat to mince for you.’
22. That quieted He-Devil
23. because he had seen She-Devil
24. all too many times wield her butcher knife.
25. He-Devil decided
26. that She-Devil was menopausal.
27. Just as he was about to put his right foot in front of his left
28. and walk past She-Devil,
29. he felt hot water on his shirt.
30. ‘Lawd oman!’ he bawled out.
31. ‘Good! Yuh tink is you one know daylight,’
32. Devil chuckled to himself.
33. ‘Is murder you gwane murder me?’
34. Devil hadn’t seen the kettle resting on the railing,
35. nor had he seen She-Devil
36. turn and reach for it.
37. Before Devil could tear the shirt off his scaled skin,
38. She-Devil was on him.
39. She jumped on his back,
40. and he had a hard time dislodging her.
41. She-Devil panted and foamed
42. while she assaulted Devil.
43. ‘So you tink you is big man.
44. You tink you can come and go as you please.

45. So you sleep out last night.

46. Well we gwane see

47. how dis gwane work.’

In this second stretch of text in Passage 1 (Text 1b), we again see She-Devil and Devil speaking primarily in NL and the narrator utilizing SCE to frame the story. She-Devil refers to the traditional gender position of women as child raisers when she states in Lines 2-3: “Picknie dem grown... Me footloose and fancy free.” Jamaican women are expected to be the primary caretakers of their children until they are grown. Only then can mothers consider their own needs and perhaps leave an abusive relationship. In contrast, men generally have the freedom to do what they want without thinking of their children or mates, and they are offended by anyone who tries to control their actions, in particular, women. Their wives are viewed as their private and inalienable property.

In keeping with this traditional double standard, Devil loudly “cusses” She-Devil, asserting his authority over her: “Anybody think dem gwana walk out on me betta think again” (lines 6-7). He feels that even if he is not acting appropriately in the marital relationship, he should be the one to decide when it is over. He expresses male dominance and aggression by shadow-dancing with his ultra-sharp machete in a threatening manner. A Freudian analysis would immediately point out the phallic symbolism of the machete which he “fondles” in line 16.

However, She-Devil is not frightened because she has her own butcher knife to repel his menace. Since butchering meat is part of her domestic responsibilities, she is very skillful with a knife. In lines 20-21, she compares herself to a butcher in a meat
market: “Me is a meat grinder, bring me meat to mince for you.” She-Devil forcefully makes the point that she will not be intimidated and will slice him up if she must.

Devil, knowing full well her abilities with a knife, decides that it would be prudent to not provoke her. However, he excuses his own retreat by taking a stereotypically sexist stance and attributing her aggression and fearlessness to menopause. In other words, women cannot stand up for themselves unless they have been hormonally altered. Her reduced estrogen levels in menopause give her “unfeminine” powers and explain her lack of submission to the male.

Despite being armed, She-Devil decides on another tactic and throws boiling water on Devil to fend him off. Devil is taken by surprise and cries out: “Lawd oman!’ and accuses her of trying to murder him: ‘Is murder you gwane murder me?’” (lines 30-33). However, he still attempts to undercut her power by calling her crazy and laughing spitefully.

She-Devil then jumps on him like a fierce animal engaging her prey: “She-Devil panted and foamed while she assaulted Devil” (line 41). She asserts in lines 43-46 that he was out the night before, implying that he was with another woman, and reprimands him by referring to male privilege: “You tink you can come and go as you please.” Then she issues Devil a warning in the final two lines of dialog: “Well we gwane see how dis gwane work.” There is an unstated implication in this oblique threat that Devil is going to pay for his transgressions in ways that he cannot anticipate.

The story continues with ups and downs in the relationship between the Devil and She-Devil, and confusion reigns in the village as the weather changes ceaselessly. However, the clouds eventually clear, and the passage ends with the She-Devil preparing
the Devil his favorite meal of “roasted bread-fruit with susumba and cod-fish” washed down with “hot cocoa.”

While at the very beginning of this passage, the male voice seems more acrolectal than the female one, toward the end, the male voice becomes more basilectal, using typical West African structures.

**Text 1c:**

1. ‘Now you actin like oman.
2. A good oman treat her man
3. like him is man
4. and tek pleasure in him pleasure.’
5. She-Devil had decided
6. when she woke that morning
7. to let bygones be bygones.
8. She was confident
9. she had made her point yesterday
10. and she was thinking
11. she was getting too old for this nonsense.
12. ‘Devil and me so long together
13. we forget we two separate people.’

In this passage, He-Devil is adamant and reaffirms his gender position in NL when he says that a woman’s place is at home serving him, demonstrating he is a chauvinist by implying that a good woman should enjoy keeping him satiated and happy by acting subservient: ‘A good oman treat her man like him is man’ (lines 2-3). This is a
traditional patriarchal view of marriage with the husband as the ruler of the family. In the end, he wants to solve everything with sex, a common pattern in homes where a pattern of domestic violence between couples exists (Campbell, 2017). This is frequently followed by the woman feeling guilty and forgiving her partner, in many cases resulting in continued physical and mental abuse, unwanted pregnancies, and even death. This behavior is being overcome by the new generation of independent, empowered Jamaican women who desire true gender equality and insist on the participation of men in household chores and the rearing of children (Jackson, 2017). In the story, the Devils separate for some time and then, as is also common in the Caribbean, things go back to normal between them as if nothing had ever happened.

At this point, the author narrates in SCE (lines 5-7) how She-Devil determines to stop resorting to physical conflict and continuing arguments as a way of resolving differences of opinion: “She-Devil had decided when she woke that morning to let bygones be bygones.” In lines 10-11, she also considers that at her stage of life, it is time for some peace: “She-Devil was thinking she was getting too old for this nonsense.” She muses in lines 12-13 about the state of her marriage (“Devil and me so long together we forget we two separate people”), realizing that the traditional model of marriage in which the couple are merged into one unit under the leadership of the husband denies the wife independence as an actor.

The reader can read between the lines that although She-Devil rebels from time to time, she understands that conflict is part of being married, and she opts for making peace, even though she might have mixed feelings about yielding to Devil. In the end,
She-Devil puts the argument behind her for it is more important to have her mate back with her and have life return to ‘normalcy.’

In order to fully understand Passage 1, it is vital to take into consideration that Adisa is very involved in social activism in favor of women’s rights and sees the new generation of Jamaican women as instrumental in making much needed changes through their example and professional development. Toward the end of the tale of Devil and She-Devil, there is reference to their daughter who is married to a more enlightened man who shares family responsibilities more equally with his wife. This couple clearly represents the new Jamaica that Adisa is trying to build. In an interview, Adisa states:

Young couples who survive nowadays are redefining what marriage looks like. If marriage survives in the 21st century, we have to look at it. We have to shift and change the paradigm and I don’t think it should be monolithic. I think there are different strands and I don’t have a definition of what it might look like. I have two daughters and they are very different and I imagine that if they get married (they both want to get married and they probably will) but their marriages will be different and society has to allow for that. (Adisa, 2014)

3.2 Passage 2 (Nathan) [pp. 14-15]

Life is fairly uncomplicated in rural Kristoff Village. Nature regulates and determines much of human activity. The myriad colors and textures of nature are reflected in the fabrics sewn together by the apprentices at the seamstress’ shop. The seamstress, a strong Caribbean woman, watches over her girls like a hawk. She is protective of them and is especially vigilant with regard to Nathan, a young woodworker
who is madly in love with Arnella, a young apprentice. Nathan arrives at the shop to deliver some chairs he has been working on, and the seamstress comments as he lingers in the room:

Text 2:

1. ‘Nathan, look what you doing
2. and keep your fly close.
3. You think dese women send dem daughters here
4. for you to spoil.
5. Just put down the chairs
6. and go back to the shop with you sweaty self.’
7. ‘Yes mam,’ he said,
8. loud enough for Arnella to look up.
9. His voice was like a sudden wind.
10. She looked at him,
11. pricking her fingers with the needle she was using
12. to stitch button holes.
13. Staring directly at her Nathan said,
14. ‘Me nah spoil nobody daughter, mam’.
15. ‘Boy, don’t fresh wid me you hear.
16. You sure not gwane spoil any of dese girls in here,
17. so tek you eyes off dem
18. and go bout you business.’
The seamstress is the most prestigious person in this passage. She is older than the other participants and as the proprietor of the shop demands their respect and obedience. She has noticed Nathan’s interest in Arnella and knows he will jump at the chance to win her, so in lines 1-2 she scolds him derisively: “Nathan, look what you doing and keep you fly close,” somewhat crudely and with directness implying that as a man his sexuality is rampant and must be strictly controlled, both by clothing and by social monitoring. In lines 3-4, she references the gender role of the older women (the mothers and grandmothers) as guardians of the virtue of the younger women. She also sarcastically implies that he is like a farm animal: “go back to de shop with you sweaty self” (line 6).

Her reference to sweat also implies that she sees him, a woodworker, as being of lower class than the young seamstresses. While both Nathan and the girls do manual labor, the male work is viewed as dirty and sweaty, while the female work is perceived as clean and pristine.

Nathan acquiesces politely to the seamstress but rather more loudly than would be termed respectful. His unexpectedly loud tone calls Arnella’s attention as if it were “a sudden wind” (line 9), and she distractedly pricks her finger with a needle. This is another Freudian reference to male sexuality and the deleterious effects it has on females. Young men “prick” (deflower) virgins with their “needles” and leave them bleeding. The young girls are then regarded as “spoiled,” like fruit which has gone bad.

After his meek acceptance of the seamstress’ authority over him in the shop, Nathan roundly rejects the stereotypical gender position which is being attributed to him: “Me nah spoil nobody daughter.” He clearly resents her implication that he is a sexual
threat to Arnella. Here the male gets just one line, but it stands out as being more 
basilectal than most of the female lines.

The seamstress quickly puts him back in his place in line 15: “Boy don’t fresh 
wid me you hear.” She repeats her earlier assertion that he is not going to ruin her girls 
and then warns him to not even look at the girls: “so tek your eyes off dem” (line 17). 
Again, the implication is that male sexuality is easily aroused, even by mere visual 
stimuli, and has to be thwarted at every step.

3.3 Passage 3 (Monica) [pp. 28-29]

In the village, the local women see Monica, who had left her mother’s home at the 
age of 14, arrive on a bus from Kingston one midday. Her return causes an uproar among 
everyone-- men, women, and children-- but especially among the loud, fearful, and 
spiteful married women who witness her arrival and react in a chorus of insults:

Text 3a:

1. ‘Whore!’ the wives spat,
2. their grudging admiration fueling their anger,
3. and pretended
4. they didn’t see her.
5. ‘Is who have time
6. fi paint them nails?’
7. ‘Me dear! Hands fah working,’ another offered.
8. ‘Well we know how she use hers’.
9. ‘And koo de lips.
10. Red like American apple,’ a toothless old woman added.
11. ‘Is who she think she is?’
12. ‘And she barren too.’
13. ‘Not a picknie fi bring her water in her old age.’
14. ‘Ah tell.
15. De Lawd work in mysterious ways’.
16. ‘Damn wukliss whore.’
17. ‘Bitch. Is who gwane friend she?’
18. ‘Galang. Pride come before fall.’
19. ‘Lawd missus’.
20. ‘Nobody nah go bruk dem neck fi see you.’

The scene is charged with both positive and negative emotion. In line 1, the village women viciously label her as a “whore,” but also feel a “grudging admiration” for her attractive, well-dressed, and youthful appearance. The antithetical emotions fuel their anger, and they blurt out a series of sarcastic and disdainful remarks about her and even pretend to not see her. They envy Monica because she does not have to keep a house or take care of a man, and they fear losing their husbands to her youthfulness and beauty. They laugh and criticize her appearance and imply in lines 6-7 that she uses her hands with their painted nails for sex instead of for working as a decent woman should (“Me dear! Hands fah working,” “Well we know how she use hers”). Even a toothless woman has a say in appraising Monica’s painted lips (“And koo de lips. Red like American apple.”) The reference to a foreign fruit further distances Monica from the other Jamaican village women and also points to her consorting with tourists and outsiders.
The whole community is shocked and questions her supposed superiority and self-pride in line 11 ("Is who she think she is?") and line 18 ("Galang. Pride come before fall."). They further degrade her by labeling her as “barren,” like a field where no crops grow, because she has never had a child and is presumably unable (or unwilling) to procreate. Such an accusation is a major insult because Jamaican women have traditionally defined their womanhood by their ability to bear and raise their children, often by themselves (McKoy, Willie-Tyndale, Mitchell-Fearon, et al, 2017). Sarcastically, in lines 12 and 13, the wives further diminish her by declaring that she will die alone as a result of her childlessness ("not a picknie fi bring her water in her old age"). Here, the women use a lot of basilectal structures, especially as the discourse develops. It is punctuated near the end with a proverb, in West African style. 17

The passage continues with more attacks against Monica, and the question of morality is raised. She is condemned for not working, a major “sin” for a decent woman ("Damn wukliss whore"), and they declare that none of them will befriend her ("Bitch is who gwane friend she?") thus withdrawing a major source of female power in the Caribbean, the support of other women. In line 15, they marvel that God could permit such a woman to exist ("De Lawd work in mysterious ways"). This could be a case of multiple meanings: your interpretation is valid, but another complementary meaning could be being articulated simultaneously here: that God has punished her by not

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17McKoy et al (2017, p. 10) point out that: "Approximately 80% of Jamaican children are born outside of wedlock, and this high statistic contributes to the large numbers of single-parent households (Henry, 2013; Robinson, 2014). Female-headed households (46.4%) have the larger proportion of children (30.4%) in comparison to male-headed households (53.6%) which have a larger proportion of working age adults (66.7%)."
allowing her to have children. These formulaic phrases (Lawd work in mysterious ways) and proverb like phrases (Pride come before fall) are particularly common sites for the projection of multiple voices (‘Multiple meanings’).

Further on, they invoke the divine in line 19 with the exclamation: “Lawd missus.” Clearly, they consider that Monica is part of some divine plan to test the villagers, so they curse her in line 20 by stating that no one would ever sacrifice themselves to help her (“Nobody nah go bruk dem neck fi see you.”). The village women’s violent rejection of Monica becomes even more salient later on in the book as we will see in the analysis of Passage 5 (The River).

3.4 Passage 4 (Velma’s Immaculate Conception) [pp. 63-70]

Due to the lack of formal sexual education that prevails in Jamaica, many women are taken by surprise when their first (unprotected) sexual encounter results in a pregnancy. In Velma’s case, she chooses to explain her pregnancy by referring to the Christian belief in the immaculate conception of the baby Jesus as a result of the Virgin Mary’s encounter with the Holy Spirit. The other women, more knowledgeable about such matters, quite understandably reject her story:

**Text 4a:**

1. ‘How you mean nuh man nuh involve? [Velma’s mother].
2. Is fool and stupid and just born you think we is?’
3. ‘So me neva know

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18 Abrahams (2017) states that according to the 2008 National Reproductive Health Survey, “34 per cent of adolescent girls in Jamaica reported that their first sexual encounter was coerced.” This increases the chance that the encounter was unprotected and could result in a pregnancy.
4. you did name Mary?’
5. ‘But even Mary did have sense find Joseph’.
6. ‘Oonuh see me war and tribulation!’
7. Velma offered no explanation;
8. would not announce the name of the man responsible for her condition
9. and was not ashamed or contrite about her state.
10. Nothing her mother and aunt said,
11. no matter that they raised their voices,
12. calling on the entire village
13. to witness their tribulation;
14. no matter that they placed their hands on their heads
15. and bawled out loud;
16. no matter that they threatened
17. to throw her out like ‘stale piss,’
18. send her to Belleview in Kingston
19. because she was obviously crazy;
20. no matter their forceful act of taking her to an Obeah woman
21. to see who bad-mind her,
22. Velma was quietly insistent that no man was involved.

This passage juxtaposes the supposed innocence of Velma with the pragmatic knowledge of the village women about matters of sexuality and male-female relations. Velma’s own mother questions her tale and sarcastically comments in line 5 that even Mary, Jesus’ mother, had the good sense to find Joseph to serve as her baby’s titular
father, unlike Velma. In line 7, Velma’s mother predicts future problems because of Velma’s stories: “Oonuh see me war and tribulation.” We can assume that she is referring to problems of assigning paternity and financial responsibility for the child or perhaps to the teasing and bullying that an unacknowledged “bastard” child will experience. She may also be thinking that her daughter will be labeled a religious zealot or crackpot and suffer as a result.

Although the village women are stunned at Velma’s condition (since there have been no signs of a boyfriend) and her account (because it flies in the face of their practical experience), Velma does not show any repentance for her sin (lines 7-9). She refuses to name a father and does not budge, although her mom and aunt make her problem public knowledge. In lines 16-19, they threaten to throw her out like “stale piss” or commit her to the mental hospital at Belleview, and they force her to see an obeah woman to find out who ‘bad-minded her,’ referring to the man who got her pregnant (lines 20-21).

This last threat bears further analysis. Because of the local belief in the African-based obeah spiritual system, some villagers may agree that Velma’s baby has been spiritually conceived (although not in the Christian sense of “immaculate conception”), and the only way to verify this is through an obeah woman, like Miss Cotton in Kristoff Village. They may believe that a real-life man used devious spiritual intervention to overcome Velma’s virginity or that a malevolent spirit actually entered and impregnated her. It is notable that committing Velma to the modern “scientific” mental hospital is juxtaposed with a traditional obeah ritual. As we have already seen, when modern
science cannot help, then the ancestral spirits are consulted. But even this recourse to ancient practices does not sway Velma, and she sticks to her story.

Of course, there is more to Velma’s story than meets the eye. In this second stretch of text from the passage, we learn about Velma’s life and how she earned her bread. The passage describes how she would regularly encounter a mystery man on the road on her way to town to run errands. He would insistently approach her, demanding something from her bag.

**Text 4b:**

1. ‘Gi me some of what you have in you bag!’
2. He would be sitting on the bare ground, shirtless, his pants leg rolled up,
3. sharpening his cutlass.
4. He was the son of the overseer,
5. a brown buckra man who ‘gwane like him white,’
6. and who managed the sugar estate just outside Rosehall
7. which was owned by some English people.
8. His mother was the coolie woman
9. who lived with and worked for the overseer.
10. People claimed the overseer -brown buckra man-
11. had the coolie woman and all her people
12. slaving on the English people’s sugar estate just like slavery times.
13. He lied to Velma
14. that he himself was the overseer.
15. Velma saw him all the time.
Sometimes when she had to work late

he would ask her,

‘You nuh fraid duppy tek you weh?’

and she would smile

reach into the bag

give him two biscuits

and continue to walk her way.

She didn’t have any time to bother with him,

this coolie man who did nothing

but sit by the side of the road

shining his cutlass.

For two years, six days a week, Velma walked a total of twelve miles,

six miles to and six miles from work at the biscuit factory.

She was five months pregnant

when she told her mother.

They couldn’t find the father.

No matter where they looked

or who they asked.

No one saw her with anyone.

No man could be found to receive the blame.

Velma smiled,

and at seventeen had her first daughter,
39. whom she called Olive
40. getting the name from a tin can in the biscuit factory
41. where she worked.
42. She worked up until a week before
43. she had the baby,
44. still walking the twelve miles daily.
45. She still saw the brown-coolie man,
46. and he still begged her for something from her bag.
47. She didn’t work for almost two years
48. after Olive was born.
49. …sometimes would walk the twelve miles
50. with the baby hitched on her side.
51. She always saw the brown-coolie man, especially in the evening,
52. and he would have something for the baby,
53. a blackie mango, a piece of cane to soothe her gum,
54. a sweet-sop, a jackfruit, guinep, even potato pudding,
55. which he said his coolie mother made.

In this section of the passage, a man on the road is described as the mixed-race son of a coolie (East Indian indentured laborer)\(^\text{19}\) woman and a brown-skinned “buckra” (half white) plantation overseer. He is confident and arrogant and first presents himself as the overseer, although he does not appear to work at anything.

\(^{19}\) The term “coolie” originally referred to Chinese workers and did not carry stigma. Later it was used indiscriminately to refer disdainfully to all East and South Asians and was considered offensive (Allsopp, 2003).
He is also demanding and sexually aggressive. His calls to her: “Gi me some of what you have in you bag!” can be interpreted on two levels. The surface interpretation is that because she works and provides for her family, she has merchandise that he is making a claim to, like a common highwayman, although as the overseer’s son, he has no shortage of food.

On a deeper level, his stating that he wants what is in her “bag” may also be interpreted as a sexual move. Eating her “fruit” symbolizes consuming her sexually. Such a sexual interpretation is further supported by the phallic reference to his “sharpening” (line 3) and “shining his cutlass” (line 27). Given that this is the only man with whom she has regular contact, it seems probable that he is the father of her child. The fact that he brings the baby a blackie mango, a piece of cake to soothe her gum, a sweet-sop, a jackfruit, guinep, even potato pudding prepared by his coolie mother (lines 53-55), further underscores the likelihood of his paternity.

Velma refuses to give up the name of the father of her child, and no one observes her to be with anyone. “No man could be found to receive the blame” (lines 31-37). She names her daughter Olive, ostensibly inspired by a tin can from the factory where she works (lines 38-43); however, the name also invokes the possibly olive skin of the child.

Aside from the Christian references to immaculate conception, Velma’s story also refers to the traditional obeah belief in malevolent spirits. In lines 16-19, the man asks Velma when he sees her walking in the evening hours: “uh not afraid duppy tek you weh?” In Jamaica, it is commonly believed that if you hear a disembodied voice calling your name at night, you should not answer because a spirit is coming to get you. It is
ironic that the man identifies “duppies” as a potential threat, when he is the only one who actually presents a menace to Velma.

3.5 Passage 5 (The River) [pp. 212-219]

At the culminating point of the book, the river scene, there are many references to traditional spiritual beliefs, gender roles, and Nation Language. In brief synopsis, the passage graphically explains how after Monica is ambushed by three vengeful women of Kristoff Village and subjected to hot peppers forced into her vagina, Miss Cotton, the obeah woman, takes her to the river. There the sisterhood of community women seeks healing under the protection of Oshun, the Orisha goddess of sweet water and femininity. Since this passage is quite extended and very important to the overall message of the novel, it will be presented and analyzed in five stretches of text (5a-e).

As the women undress to enter the river as sisters, Althea feels awkward undressing in front of others because she is afraid to show her growing belly. She has internalized her mother’s own belief that her body is ugly. Althea is startled when Miss Cotton addresses her:

Text 5a [p. 213]

1. ‘Althea, you prove
2. you is woman
3. by carrying baby.
4. All we here is woman.
5. You tek up oman ways,
6. when you spread your legs.
7. So tek off you frock
8. and leave you mamma behind.

9. When one woman do wickedness against anoda oman,

10. den she do it against all oman dem.

11. Tek off dat frock

12. and come ova here

13. so ah can rub dis ointment pan you body.’

In this first stretch of text in NL (lines 1-8), Miss Cotton, the Obeah woman, calls upon Althea to open her eyes to her own womanliness and leave behind childish ways and the teachings of her mother, Grace, who made her feel ashamed of herself. Miss Cotton declares that the current circumstances call for all the women to be strong and present for one another. The ritual of anointment and search for Osanyin, a healer who lives in the forest, are both facets of obeah that stem from African traditional spiritual beliefs. Miss Cotton’s comment that “You tek up oman ways when you spread you legs” (lines 5-6) defines womanhood as beginning when sexual activity begins. When she states that “when one oman do wickedness against anoda woman, den she do it against all woman dem,” (lines 9-10), she is invoking sisterhood and underscoring that the injury to Monica by some of the women is an injury to all women. At the same time, however, she is perpetuating the patriarchal idea that a woman is never fully a woman (and by extension, human) until her humanity and womanhood are ‘validated’ by man, when she ‘spread she legs’. Here again, at the beginning the discourse is more acrolectal than at the end. Even the spelling switches (<woman> at the beginning <oman> at the end). Grammatically, we see the same thing: ‘legs’ with the Standard plural first, then ‘oman dem’ with the basilectal plural, typical of West African languages toward the end.
The actual ritual of cleansing and healing is spelled out in the next stretch of text:

Text 5b [p. 214]

1. ‘Each of oonuh must search out oonuh own place in the river.

2. Let her, de river, talk to you

3. so she can soothe oonuh worries.’

4. Angel immersed her entire body,

5. imagining she was baptizing herself.

6. Something pricked her right sole.

7. The pain in her legs expanded.

8. She tried swimming to the surface,

9. but found herself being pulled under.

10. She struggled, hysterical, spinning around.

11. She started to laugh,

12. thinking this was all too funny,

13. coming to Jamaica

14. where her dream of a happy life seemed attainable

15. only to drown as a result of

16. joining her new friends in a ritual observance of their ancestors’ ways.

17. Suddenly she was overcome with a desire

18. to know her real mother;

19. She could taste her salty tears

20. mingling with the warm, sweet breast milk

21. that was the river water,
22. and she allowed herself
23. to surrender,
24. feeling very close to the mother
25. she never knew.

In this second stretch of text from the fifth passage, the obeah woman continues the ritual begun already with the anointment, and her calming words in Nation Language instill a peace in the women. “Let her, de river talk to you so she can soothe your worries.” (lines 2-3). Miss Cotton’s use from the beginning of the discourse of basilectal forms underscores her traditional ties to Africa. She does not begin with more acrolectal forms as do other speakers, before they go into more basilectal forms. Also, as a woman, she does not seem to avoid the basilect at all, as other women seem to do.

When Angel, who was raised in the U.S. and has recently arrived in Jamaica, immerses herself in the water, we can see a simulated baptism which echoes that observed in both traditional Jamaican spiritual beliefs and Christian practices. She is being born again as a true Jamaican. Her momentary joy is disrupted when she is unexpectedly pricked on her foot and pulled down by an unforeseen force, and we can speculate that her search for her ancestral roots is powerful and painful. In lines 11-16, we see Angel’s hysteria and pain turning into ironic commentary as she considers how her attempt to fit into the local community may end up finishing her life. This then morphs into a deep nostalgia for the mother she never knew. The “sweet river water” mixes in her mind with the salty taste of her own tears and the imagined flavor of the breast milk of a mother she yearns to know (lines 17-25). Angel finds solace and connection to her mother by surrendering herself to the healing powers of the river.
The story continues with each one of the women going through her own healing process, some encountering tranquility, some facing imminent danger. Beryl hears but cannot see a child calling until she searches and finds a breathless Angel whom she cradles in her arms, putting an end to her sorrow and helpless surge of emotions.

Afterwards, Miss Cotton pulls all the women together in a circle to begin the healing of Monica:

**Text 5c [p. 215-216]**

1. After more than half an hour of soaking in the warm water
2. That was like expert hands massaging their bodies,
3. Miss Cotton called the women together.
4. They formed a circle
5. and Dahlia and Velma raised the song,
6. ‘Dere is a meeting here today,
7. come along no.’
8. Olive and Valrie pulled Monica to the centre of the circle
9. and immediately all the women splashed water on her.
10. Arnella’s firm voice broke through the spraying water.
11. ‘Call dem out.
12. Name dose who peppa you.
13. Name dem;
14. dem not you sistas.’
15. The other women echoed Arnella’s words,
16. until their collective voices were a mantra for retribution.
17. Everyone except Althea and Monica was shouting,
18. ‘Name dem;
19. dem is not you sistas.
20. Call dem out.’
21. Monica’s tears paled in the streaming water;
22. her body danced and shook.
23. Miss Cotton and Arnella signaled the women
to cease spraying water
24. And they freed Monica from the glass
25. she was trapped in.
26. They spun her round,
27. then Miss Cotton stood to one side of her and Arnella to the other.
28. Velma and Dahlia stepped forward.
29. They laid their hands on Monica’s left shoulder
30. With a forceful, downward sweep, they pulled off the burden
31. Monica had been hauling around;
32. They ended with a sound so powerful
33. it thrust their chests forward.
34. Monica began to throw up bile
35. and the stench caused the other women
to hold their breaths
36. and widen the circle.
37. Miss Cotton cupped up clean water
40. and fed Monica.
41. Velma and Dahlia alternately intoned,
42. ‘Release it;
43. let it go.’
44. ‘Mamma came to me after Miss Madge funeral
45. and say she forgive me.
46. Ah gwane call dem out
47. for Althea say
48. she no hate me.
49. Ah name dem
50. for ah forgive meself.’

In this stretch of text, we see the real reason for which the women have been led by priestess Arnella and Obeah woman Miss Cotton to the river, and that is to perform a ritual to rebuild the broken Monica. In lines 3-4, Miss Cotton authoritatively calls them together, and the women respond with a traditional church song: “Dere is a meeting here today, come along now.” (lines 5-7). Monica is suspended and centered by the group of women who cleanse her with the river water they splash on her inflamed genitals. Breaking the spell, the priestess’ voice is heard in lines 11-14 marking the beginning of the chanting of the words “Call dem out. Name dose who peppa you. Name dem’ dem not you sistas.” The other women repeat the mantra, and a catharsis is sparked. The words make a clear distinction between those women who can be considered “sistas” and those who cannot.
The chanting of the mantra becomes more intense, the voices resounding like ancestral drums, calling for spiritual intervention in the power struggle. In line 22, Monica’s body dances and shakes as if some evil force were writhing within her, evoking the image of an exorcism. The women are splashing water on her, an act of purification, but they stop at the Obeah woman and the priestess’s signal and free Monica from her state of shock “with a forceful downward sweep” which releases her from the weight on her conscience she has been “hauling around” (lines 31-32). They finish with “a sound so powerful it thrust their chests forward (lines 33-34), and Monica spews dark, malodorous bile which causes the others to recoil from the stench.

Immediately, Miss Cotton regains control and continues with the cleansing by feeding Monica river water while the priestess, elders, and young sisters chant “Release it, let it go” (lines 41-43). ‘Mamma came to me after Miss Madge funeral’, again, the basilect comes at the end of the passage. Monica finally confesses that her deceased mother has appeared to her in a dream and pardoned her, and this confession sets her free. This use of a dream as legitimate evidence of a change in attitude or behavior is in keeping with traditional African spirituality in which mothers and grandmothers appear to their descendants in dreams to reveal their wisdom and truths. Monica made a decision to leave home estranged her from her mother, and she needs to publicly declare that her mother has posthumously forgiven her in a dream.

Finally, Monica agrees to name the women who brutally attacked her: “Ah gwane call dem out” as the women at the river have been imploring her to do (line 46). The explanation on lines 47-48 (“for Althea says she no hate me”) is key because Monica had been involved with the father of Althea’s soon-to-be born baby, and Althea’s mother
Marva took part in the retaliation. At the close of this stretch of text, Monica acknowledges her own culpability and delivers herself from guilt by declaring: “ah forgive meself” (line 50).

The next portion of text from this emotional passage presents Monica’s narration of the horrendous violence perpetrated against her for consorting with married men which has led her to seek assistance from the obeah woman, Miss Cotton.

**Text 5d [pp. 217-218]**

1. Marva was de ring-leader.
2. She de one carry de bowl of peppa.
3. Dey stuff a scarf in me mouth.
4. Den Grace and Peggy tie me up.
5. Marva flung open me closet door.
6. and pull out me dress dem.
7. She kiss her teeth,
8. den rip dem up.
9. Wen dem did spend demself,
10. and me tink dem did done,
11. and was gwane leave me,
12. Peggy come and stand ova me tie up pan de bed;
13. she seh, “Dat will teach you
14. fi leave women men alone.”
15. She look inna me face
16. and laugh.
17. Den she wid her hand raised wid de peppa on it,
18. “Mek me blind you,
19. bout you want thief me man.
20. Ah gwane show you
21. how fi powda you face.”
22. She smear peppa all ova me face,
23. then push her index finger in me nose.
24. Grace start to beg Marva…
25. “Ah tink she did learn her lesson;
26. Ah tink she will leave Desmond alone now.”
27. But Marva was just warming up.
28. She turn to Grace,
29. huffing and puffing.
30. “Is why mek you so fool-fool,
31. and fraid-fraid, you own shadow?
32. She sleep wid you lawful husband
33. and you want fi have sympathy pan her.”
34. She start to rip me clothes off me,
35. and afta a while Grace and Penny join her,
36. then she lotioned her hand in the bowl of peppa
37. then push her hand inna me.
38. Me throat lock
39. and me blank out
when me come to
dem did gwane
and de house dark.
Me decide to die.
Den me remember you, Miss Cotton.
Ah figure if ah didn’t die,
only you one could cool the fire inside me.
So me try nuh fi tink bout
de fire eating me up
and call pan you.
And here me is now.’
Miss Cotton found herself,
and blew breaths deep within until she saw
rainbow-colored air sailing from her mouth.
Then, pulling Monica close,
she embraced her,
pressing her healing hands into the younger woman’s body…
releasing her, she looked Monica in the eyes
and asked?
‘Is dat all of it, de whole story?’
Den walk around de circle
and let’s be done wid it.’
Monica moved around the circle
63. and each woman she passed
64. cupped water,
65. threw it on her shoulder…
66. then used their hands to rinse her body.

In this final section of the passage, we see that the women attackers (Marva, Grace, and Peggy) have different degrees of motivation and vindictiveness. “Marva was de ring-leader” (line 1), and Peggy and Grace are her henchmen who tie up and gag Monica. Marva carries out the most violent aspects of the attack. She rips up Monica’s fancy dresses (line 5-8), symbols of her Jezebel behavior, and pushes hot peppers into her vagina --“she lotioned her hand in the bowl of peppa then push her hand inna me.” (lines 36-37)-- thus violating Monica in the very site where her “crimes” have taken place. Peggy is somewhat less violent than Marva and merely smears the hot peppers on Monica’s face like face powder (“Ah gwane show you how fi powda you face.” lines 20-21), although she does comment in lines 18-19 that she feels like blinding Monica with the peppers for trying to steal her husband (“Mek me blind you, bout you want thief me man.”). Grace attempts to curtail the punishment at that point by telling Peggy that she believes that Monica will now leave her husband Desmond alone. Marva snaps and chides Grace for her weakness: “Is why mek you so fool-fool, and fraid-fraid, She sleep wid you lawful husband and you want fi have sympathy pan her.” (lines 32-33). She then proceeds to up the ante by burning Monica’s private parts so that she will never think of having an affair with a married man again.

Monica describes to Miss Cotton how she nearly is asphyxiated and then passes out in response to the attack (lines 38-42). When she comes to, she considers death but
remembers the healing powers of the obeah woman and decides to go to her for help
(lines 44-50). ”A figure if ah didn’t die, only you could cool the fire inside me. “

Miss Cotton takes in the story and blows breaths from deep within until rainbow-
colored air sails from her mouth (lines 51-53). She closes the ritual by asking Monica if
she has anything else to let out and urges her in line 61 to leave all that behind her—“
let’s be done wid it.” Then the women pour water on Monica to rinse out any bad spirits
left within her.

In the last stretch of text in this key passage, Althea cements her forgiveness by
asking Monica to help her raise her baby.

Text 5e [p. 218-219]

1. Now standing in the river,

2. Wishing she could disappear from before Monica,

3. Althea thought compassionately of the life growing inside,

4. And she didn’t feel like a girl any more,

5. Nor did she feel hopeless.

6. She rubbed her stomach, smiling;

7. She was going to be a mother,

8. and she would be a good one to her daughter.

9. She raised her head,

10. and looking Monica in the eyes said,

11. ‘Ah gwane have a daughter

12. and ah would like you to help me

13. raise her’.
14. Monica stared at this girl
15. who had come to her through her pain
16. and felt capable of accepting
17. the honour bestowed on her.
18. ‘If ah gwane help you raise you daughter,
19. Den ah gwane be needing you blessing’.
20. Althea cupped her hand
21. and rinsed off Monica’s body.
22. The sun was full and bright
23. when they emerged.

In this last stretch of text of the river scene, Althea realizes that she is a fully grown woman now, and she vows to be a good mother (lines 1-8). She puts the past behind her and in lines 9-13 asks Monica to take the place of her own mother and become a grandma for her baby. Monica accepts in lines 14-17 and asks Althea for her blessing in lines 18-19.

Afterwards, the sun comes out and, the clouds dissipate, signaling that the evil spirits have been ousted. The unity of the women peacefully brings an end to the strife in the village and indicates better times ahead for all.

4.0 Conclusion

This chapter laid out the methodology used to analyze this literary piece from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. CDA terminology was defined, citing the work of the major theorists in the field with examples, and the literature on CDA was explored further to illustrate the approach.
The selection criteria of the five passages that were analyzed were given in detail. Guide questions based on Gee (2010, 2012) were utilized to analyze the passages. At each point in the analysis, focus was placed on the three themes of Nation Language, gender roles, and traditional spiritual beliefs.

The next and last chapter of this dissertation will present the conclusions and implications of the CDA analysis of passages from Opal Palmer Adisa’s novel *It begins with Tears*. The findings will be summarized, and new questions for future research will be proposed. The limitations of the approach will also be considered.
Chapter 6:  
Conclusions and Implications

1.0 Introduction

This final chapter of the dissertation summarizes and synthesizes the preceding chapters and findings regarding the interaction of language (both standard and creole), the social construct of gender, and the historical legacy of African traditions and beliefs in a Caribbean society as presented in a literary work. Among the larger goals of the research were achieving a better understanding of the links between language and gender, power and resistance, and creation and transformation of identity in Jamaican society.

2.0 Summary of the previous chapters

Chapter 1 served as a road map to the dissertation. It began by introducing Opal Palmer Adisa, a Jamaican author who has written many novels and collections of poetry in Standard Caribbean English and Jamaican Creole and is noted for her advocacy work among Jamaican women. Her novel It Begins with Tears served as the data source upon which the analysis was carried out. Then the chapter moved to a description of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and explained why its characteristics made it an appropriate method to analyze a literary work like hers that was strongly rooted in the discourse and cultural practices of a speech community. The three themes of Nation language (also known as Creole, Patwa or Jamaican), gender roles, and African Spiritual beliefs were defined, and their importance in the analysis of the novel clarified.

The purpose of the research was to better understand the links between gender, power, resistance, and identity in Jamaican society through a critical discourse analysis of
Adisa’s novel. The major research question was: how does Adisa deploy Jamaican Creole vs. Standard Caribbean English to underscore personal identity, shed light on the nature of male-female relations and gender roles in Jamaican society, and illuminate the role and the relevance of traditional belief systems in Jamaican society homestead? The answers to this question provided by CDA have revealed processes that can be useful in better understanding Adisa’s work and Jamaican society as a whole. The study is unique in that CDA has never been used before to analyze this novel, and its application serves as a model for future investigations, both literary and linguistic.

Chapter 2 examined Nation Language in detail, beginning with Brathwaite’s conception of it which was based on the historical developments resulting from European colonization of the Caribbean and the forcible importation of Africans to work as slaves in the region. The often pejorative nature of other existing names for Nation Language (such as Patwa, Jamaican Creole, Dialect, and Quashie), led to Brathwaite’s coining of the term Nation Language. The chapter then gave a linguistic view of Nation Language and traced the origins of Standard Caribbean English from the time of Britain’s seizure of Jamaica in 1655 and throughout the Homestead phase. It compared Standard Caribbean English to Nation Language and observed similarities and differences between them. The origins of Creoles and the post Creole continuum were discussed, and the Rastafarian subcategory of Nation Language known as Dread Talk was defined. A section was devoted to Nation Language in literature, and authors such as Claude McKay, Louise Bennet, James Berry, Linton Kwesi Johnson, and Opal Palmer Adisa’s life and works were.
Chapter 2 additionally pointed out how Pidgin and Creole languages have been at a disadvantage due to their oral nature and limited documentation which have made it difficult for scholars to research (Morgan, 1994). The need for linguistic empowerment of Caribbean people was fair and necessary in view of their historical oppression at the hands of European colonialists. The chapter made it clear that Caribbean creoles are a sign of cultural autonomy and represent a form of resistance to ideological and literary hegemony, serving as inspiration to colonized men, women, and children throughout the region and in the diaspora. A new sense of community has been developed by writers utilizing creole-based literary genres. This, in the opinion of Sindoni (2010), is paramount to doing away with the cultural and linguistic hegemony previously created by colonialism. Many Jamaican authors like Opal Palmer Adisa, Louise Bennet, and Kwesi Johnson initially faced censorship of their work by large European publishing houses but have continued to utilize Nation Language and in so doing, helped to normalize it for the wider reading public.

Chapter 3 discussed gender roles which are social constructs based only loosely on biological distinctions and are underscored by linguistic features of various kinds. Studies on language and gender have taken four distinct approaches. In the deficit approach, emphasis has been placed on the aspects of women’s speech that appear to lack the “default” features found in men’s speech. In the dominance approach, the hegemonic power of men over women has been revealed in the analysis of the lexicon and the overall usage patterns. In the difference approach, females and males have been seen as inhabiting different worlds (or planets) due to differential patterns of child rearing and socialization. Finally, the discourse (dynamic) approach has sustained that there are no
fixed gender styles; rather the linguistic choices made emerge from interactional settings and are actively negotiated and reshaped by the interlocutors.

In the Caribbean, the antecedent of contemporary gender relations goes back to African traditional societies but was hideously deformed by the cruel practices of slavery in the New World which broke up families, subjected women to systematic rape by their masters and overseers, and made their men disposable commodities. The essential disruption of the Afro-Caribbean family continues to this day and has resulted in female-headed families, absentee fathers, children born out of wedlock to very young mothers, and domestic violence. Many studies of gender relations in the Caribbean have described the historical process by which these occurred and the social and economic forces that still sustain them. Others have focused on the different gender experiences that result from class and color distinctions in Caribbean societies. Still other scholars have centered their attention on the retention of African traditional family values and practices and have underscored the cultural continuity between Africa and the Caribbean.

Chapter 3 also took a closer look at the evolving role of women in Jamaican society and discussed how gender relations are changing and giving rise to positive developments. Adisa’s works (and those of other contemporary Caribbean writers) have portrayed a new generation of women who are demanding male participation in the home and in child rearing and seeking gender equality. Adisa’s recollection of the influence of strong women, including her own mother, as well as the renowned market women, stresses how significant their contribution has been to the development of women’s rights and gender progress.

Chapter 4 reviewed the theories and literature on African traditional beliefs and practices and the importance of oral genres like folk tales, proverbs, and rituals. Caribbean
oral genres that have African roots touching upon national culture include the spoken rituals of Santería, brujería, and voodoo, the queh queh of Guyana, the Shangó shouts of Trinidad, and the songs from Pocomania and Myal in Jamaica, (Dathorne, 1981). Thus African oral literature has had a major influence in the New World.

The function of African traditional beliefs was the intergenerational transmission of ancestral wisdom, a task which has continued to this day in Afro-Caribbean societies. Chapter 4 pointed out studies focused on the influence of oral texts on national culture and dedicated space to consider the history of Rastafari culture in Jamaica and its widespread cultural impact, especially through reggae music. Part of the chapter was dedicated to the issues of the healing of wounds caused by the history of the violence of slavery in the Caribbean and to the ongoing resistance to the erasure of African identity, as encompassed in the poem “Meditations on Yellow” by Jamaican author Olive Senior.

The chapter explored several issues which originated in postcolonial times, such as the formation of cultural identity, cultural affiliations with the mother country, and resistance to European cultural hegemony (Skinner, 1998). In the islands of the Caribbean, oral and written texts in creole languages were forms of resistance to colonial cultural dominance, and during the post-colonial period, music became one of the most salient traits of Caribbean culture (Brathwaite, 1967). This declaration of cultural autonomy could also be seen in the work of authors living in former colonies around the world (i.e., Sam Selvon in Trinidad, Ngũgĩ wa Thiongò in Kenya, Mudrooroo in Australia, and J.M. Coetzee in South Africa). The chapter further explained how Opal Palmer Adisa has incorporated elements of African traditional spiritual beliefs in her
stories and poems, preserving the legacy of Jamaica’s forebearers and the Caribbean islands.

Chapter 5 presented in detail the methodology used to analyze the text of Adisa’s novel *It Begins with Tears*, utilizing the approach known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a subgenre of critical linguistics that describes discursive practices and shows how both spoken and written texts are shaped by power relations and by ideologies and how discourse constructs identities. Various definitions of CDA were presented, and the scholarly literature on CDA was reviewed.

Then the chapter explained why CDA was selected to analyze key passages from *It Begins with Tears*. It laid out the selection criteria for the five passages and listed the guide questions to which the analyst was obligated to pay attention, namely: the relations of power among the participants, any hidden sources of power, the actors being consulted in the interaction depicted, and, the intended audience. The analyst was also encharged with noting what was left unsaid or silenced, the use of specific linguistic structures, the presentation of the characters and events, the languages used, and any code-switching that arose. The analyst was additionally required to consider when the writer used Nation Language and Standard English to underscore the gender positions of the characters and if differences existed in the way men and women expressed themselves in the passage.

The bulk of Chapter 5 was taken up with the line-by-line CDA treatment of five key passages, titled by the analyst: “The Argument,” “Nathan,” “Monica,” “Velma’s Immaculate Conception,” and “The River.” These passages were divided into sections to facilitate the analysis.
Among the chief findings was the observation that the characters varied in their use of Nation Language depending on their gender, the degree of emotion involved, the level of formality of the interaction, and their relation to local Jamaican culture. Men used more basilectal forms, and women fluctuated between acrolectal and basilectal forms. Both men and women uttered more basilectal forms to convey strong emotion and codeswitched to more acrolectal forms or even Standard Caribbean English when there was less emotion or when more “proper” or formal address seemed to be required. The narrator, on the other hand, relied primarily on Standard Caribbean English to describe the setting and recount the story. Women deeply invested in obeah (like Miss Cotton) used basilectal Nation Language extensively, while newcomers to the village (like Angel, the young woman raised in the United States) employed it much less.

The analysis pointed to rather strict divisions between men and women’s daily activities and concerns but also documented changes in the younger generation’s view of the division of labor in marriage, partnering, and child-rearing. The analysis further revealed variability in terms of the villagers’ adherence to traditional African spiritual beliefs which seemed to be linked to gender. Women appeared to be more inclined toward integrating obeah beliefs into their lives, and incorporated many of the rituals (particularly those related to menses, childbirth, relief of stress or fear, and verification of love and infidelities) into their personal routines.

3.0 Contributions of this dissertation

The CDA treatment of the five passages from Adisa’s novel It Begins with Tears has made possible an improved understanding of the three themes of Nation Language, gender relations, and traditional African beliefs in Jamaica. Among the lessons learned
from the extensive review of literature and the close CDA analysis which constantly linked language use to social and historical factors are that:

1. Literary works like those of Adisa can provide almost ethnographic information about speech communities and thus lend themselves to CDA treatment.

2. Both men and women in Jamaican villages use Nation Language but in variable manners, depending on gender, level of emotion, and degree of formality.

3. Caribbean women are changing the way they are viewed by becoming more active professionally and requiring participation from men in carrying out household tasks and rearing children. Partly through the use of their language, they are resisting patriarchal dominance and claiming an active standing in their communities.

4. African traditional beliefs brought to the New World have constituted a lasting influence upon and a source of inner strength for many Caribbean writers such as Opal Palmer Adisa in Jamaica.

5. African-origin syncretic practices like obeah are used by Jamaican village women to create solidarity and unite them in their struggle to achieve gender equality and stability.

**4.0 Limitations of the study**

Among the limitations of this dissertation was the fact that the researcher does not speak Nation Language and is not from Jamaica, nonetheless, through the assistance of native speakers of Jamaican Creole and creolists, along with a short-term immersion in
the culture, the use of specialized dictionaries, and an adequate transcription, the
definition and interpretation of the analyzed texts was made possible.

Another limitation is that only one author (Opal Palmer Adisa) was examined, and only one of her books was subjected to analysis. Although many Caribbean authors were compared in the review of literature in terms of their portrayal of one or more of the themes studied, there are many others who, due to time constraints, were not included. Other books by Adisa may yield slightly different results when treated with CDA. Some of the impact of this limitation was diminished by the addition of an extended interview with Adisa which clarified her all-consuming interest in advocacy for Jamaican women, a theme which runs through all of her written output.

5.0 Future directions for research

There are still several remaining questions for future research from a linguistic standpoint. A fluent speaker of Jamaican Creole could analyze another of Adisa’s books using CDA or another methodology. Topics of interest could include the nature of the language attitudes toward speakers of creole languages in the U.S and the Caribbean and the acceptance or rejection of asserted in-group identity in Caribbean or diasporic communities. The themes of creole (or indigenous languages), gender roles, and traditional African beliefs could also be studied utilizing CDA treatment of the work of an author from a Latino of culture in the Greater Caribbean like Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, or Venezuela.

6.0 Closing remarks

The aspiration of this researcher was for this dissertation to increase understanding of the intersection of Nation Language, gender relations, and African
traditional beliefs in Jamaica, at least in the literary discourse expressed by one author in one novel. It is hoped that the work has answered certain questions and concerns and will inspire other linguists to continue further research into such topics utilizing literary works by Caribbean writers as their linguistic corpora.
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Appendix

Note: Written permission was received from Opal Palmer Adisa to include the following pages of her book *It Begins with Tears* in the dissertation.

**Prologue: Devil and She-Devil**

The sun was swollen big in the sky. Heat rose from the ground like steam. The sky was clean, pale blue with fluffy clouds that danced.

Then the rain came tumbling down. The sun roared and continued to shine. The rain took shame and went away. The sun, more fierce, swept over the vegetation, parching leaves and singeing the bare feet of children at play.

Again the rain lashed out, but the sun refused to relent. The children chanted.

'Devil stop beating you wife!'

'Devil mek you must behave so bad!'

Shame. Embarrassment. Like two people fighting over a shade—one pushing it up and the other roughly lowering it to shut out the peeping eyes of neighbours—the sun and rain competed.

The old people shook their heads, sighed deeply and kissed their teeth.

'But you see we crosses!'

'De Devil is strong, yes!'

'Is wha trouble brewing eh?'

All around Kristoff Village the attention of the community was captured by the unusual weather. It wasn't the first time that the sun had shone while the rain rained down, but it never usually lasted very long, nor was it so consistent. The adults pretended they weren't caught off guard by the raining sun as they ran back and forth first spreading clothes to dry, then rushing to gather them, or digging in their fields then suddenly seeking shelter under a banana leaf or a tree. But something was not right.

The women were outraged that in these times Devil still felt he could and beat his wife, 'In broad daylight at that! They grumbled

and mumbled, spat frequently and threatened.

'If it was me ah would pour hot oil in him ears.'
'Long time now me would a chop off him hand.'
'Nothing worse dan an ignorant man!'
The men were embarrassed, as if caught with their pants down during a parade. Most of them knew better than to aggravate their wives or sweethearts, who would seize the occasion to put their hands akimbo, spread their legs, raise their voices as if they were on a platform and rebuke them to no end.

'Devil is not a smart man a-tall.'
'You neva seh a more tru thing, me friend. Once you start hitting a woman dere is no stopping.'

'One of oonuh go dead or have to leave. Most time man have to run cause when oman stand up, dem stand up strong.'

Back and forth, back and forth. Sun and rain, rain and sun. For days. More than a week. The people of Kristoff Village were prepared to get wet and dry from a short walk to the shop to purchase a little oil or a piece of salt-pork. It was a bewildering time, the air so clean, the sky so bright, the sun so fierce, the rain so sweet.
An incredible time.
A time of great puzzlement.

Rain ah fall, sun ah shine

Devil and She-Devil was standing. One minute they would be talking and laughing, the next minute silence, then raised voices, and before you knew it it was all hell would break loose.

The tension was wearing on Devil's nerves, and She-Devil threatened many times to pack her bags and go find her a harmonious place where she could be by herself. Besides, she said,
'Time to move, yes. Pickie dem grown. Me footloose and fancy free.'

Well why she must say that? Devil started to cuss in a loud voice as if he wasn't speaking to She-Devil standing right there beside him.
'Anybody tink dem gwane walk out on me betta tink again.' All the while Devil was carrying on, he would shadow dance with his machete, the blade so silver sharp a fly pitched on it and was instantly cut in two. But She-Devil wasn't afraid of his machete because she had a butcher knife and no one could wield a butcher knife more skillfully than She-Devil. A leg of goat or shoulder of beef put up no resistance to She-Devil. So when Devil started shouting and cursing and fonduing his machete, She-Devil got her butcher knife, went on the veranda to catch some cool air and sang at the top of her voice, 'Me is a meat grinder, grinding meat is what me do. Me is a meat grinder, bring me meat to mince for you.' That quieted Devil because he had seen She-Devil all too many times wield her butcher knife. Devil decided She-Devil was a young woman, so he stomped out the front door, his hands in his pockets, whistling, 'Hill and gully ride oh, hill and gally...'

That was Tuesday afternoon, and he slept out, just, he hoped, to make She-Devil worry. Devil had never ever left his side of the bed cool in the infinite years he and She-Devil had been married.

Man! Devil was feeling confident and victorious when he got home Wednesday morning to find She-Devil waiting for him on the veranda. He walked up the path as cool as air, his shoulders back, chest stuck out and a little smile playing around the side of his mouth. Devil was thinking about how he was going to walk right up to She-Devil, make as if to walk past her, then grab her from behind the waist like he used to when they were courting, and blow a warm breath in the curl where her neck and shoulder connected. They would prance about, and maybe even make love right there on the veranda since they no longer had any children around.

Devil climbed the stairs of the veranda. She-Devil was still standing to one side, leaning on the banister. Devil thought he could read worry in her eyes and he chuckled to himself, 'Good! Yuh tink is you one know daylight.' Everything was going as he hoped, but just as he was about to put his right foot in front of his left and walk past She-Devil, he felt hot water on his shirt. 'Lawn oman!' he bawled out. 'Is murder you gwan murder me?' Devil hadn't seen the kettle resting on the railing, nor had he seen She-Devil turn and reach for it. Pandemonium. There was plenty wrestling going on that morning, but no sweet words or love juices flowed. Before Devil could tear the shirt off his scaled skin, She-Devil was on him. She jumped on his back and he had a hard time dislodging her. She-Devil pant ed and foamed while she assaulted Devil. 'So you think you is big man. Yourink you can come and go as you please. So you sleep out last night. Well we gwane see how dis gwane work.'
All the live-long day, Devil and She-Devil were at it. One minute the day would be bright, the sun shining, and the next minute the sky would be dark and rain rained down upon the earth. Devil and She-Devil's war created quite a confusion for the people of Kristoff Village, who were of two minds. Some felt the world was coming to an end; others interpreted the dramatic changes as an omen of good things to come. Whatever the individual views, there was a fair amount of uneasiness among the residents and fear among the children.

Thursday morning, when Devil and She-Devil woke, they were both bruised and sore. She-Devil took some coconut oil and rubbed it on Devil's peeling body. Then she went outside in her garden to the cocoa tree, picked a cocoa pod, grated it, boiled it, and poured it into four heaped tablespoons of condensed milk, stirred it in with a pinch of nutmeg and a dash of salt and served it to Devil. It was his favourite morning beverage. Next, She-Devil roasted breadfruit with susumba and cod-fish. She sat and watched as Devil sopped up the hot cocoa with the breadfruit, smacking his mouth as he ate the round green susumba pods seasoned with cod-fish, his lips greasy, his cheeks puffed up in delight. When Devil was done with his breakfast, he pushed back his chair and rocked back and forth on the hind legs, rubbing his stomach. Looking at She-Devil, his eyes dancing, his face round and gleaming, Devil said without reflection, 'Now you act like oman. A good oman treat her man like him is man, and tek pleasure in him pleasure.'

She-Devil had decided when she woke that morning to let bygones be bygones. She was confident that she had made her point yesterday and she was thinking that she was getting too old for this nonsense with Devil anyway. 'Maybe is familiarity,' she thought, 'Devil and me so long together we forget we two separate people.' That was why She-Devil got up and fixed Devil his favourite breakfast. But as she was getting ready to make herself something to eat (because She-Devil never could get used to the bitter taste of susumba), she heard Devil again, as if in a dream, and realised that in all the many, many years they had been husband and wife, so long she couldn't remember a time when they weren't together, in all the however many years, not once - and she paused there on that thought - not once had Devil ever cooked her a meal.

She-Devil was a loner, and not into the sentiments of the days, but Tegreg, her daughter, had been telling her about this Woman's Thing. 'What's de word Tegreg used now?' She-Devil paused with one hand on her hip, her right side thrusting. 'Femi, femi-something. But whatever Tegreg called it, she had her husband, Man-Stick, helping her wid all de house work.'

Man-Stick was a lean and agile fellow, who worked hard and had a sense of humour. They liked him well enough, but Tegreg said her parents set him a bad example because whenever they came to visit Devil and Man-Stick would sit on the veranda swapping stories while She-Devil ran around, catering to their every whim. This was why, Tegreg said, she didn't come visit more often. That was where She-Devil's memory lingered, and she realised that she had not seen Tegreg, her baby, for more than a month. She hadn't even talked with her because Devil said he didn't want any telephone in the house so people could dial his number and get him just like that. Devil said he wanted people to sweat. 'Anyone want see I-man dem hafi come I yard,' and that was the end of the conversation. And She-Devil heard the logic in Devil's reasoning and didn't argue, even though she liked the idea of having a phone.

Now, however, as Devil's comment about how a woman ought to act registered, She-Devil reflected. She had risen early to prepare a breakfast to Devil's liking. And this was how he thanked her, by saying that her value was only in pleasing him. She-Devil got hot. Steaming, sweating, hot. She hauled the cast-iron pot off the stove and knocked Devil on his head. Devil flew off the chair and crashed flat on his back. He tried to get up, but fell down again. His head was weighted down with rocks, then he was struck by a tidal wave. Indeed, he was soaked, for She-Devil, momentarily fearing she might finally have killed him, dashed a pot of cold water over his face to revive him.

That did it for Devil. He was through with She-Devil. She had indeed gone crazy, and he was not going to have anything else to do with her. As soon as the big coco went down on the top of his head, Devil decided he would write to Brimstone, his second child and only son, telling him to come and get him. He was going to mail the letter himself. He wished he had a telephone; he would have called
again and reclaim possession of her body. That was how it always indulged.

Hearing the chickens cackling, Arnella remembered that she hadn't fed them and the sun was fierce. She leaned over the bed and looked out the window. It was probably after nine. Still she didn't turn on the radio, and she shoed the chickens and told them to be patient and eat their own doodoo if they couldn't wait. Slowly she got off the bed and spread it. Her hand lingered on the quilt she had made. It wasn't hand-stitched but she liked it all the more. She looked, trying to discern a design, but then laughed at the idea that there should be a pattern. She hated the expected. There were geometric shapes, but no order to them. Many different fabrics were sewn together, some merely trimmed from dresses or shirts she had sewn for people; cotton, polyester, linen, tafeta.

The bed was all hers. Bought with money she pinched and saved while apprenticed to the dressmaker in Montego Bay. It was made from mahogany, made by an apprentice like herself, Nathan, who was simple-minded, except when it came to wood. He only charged for the wood because he liked her, and hoped that by making a bed for her he might have persuaded her to share it with him. She laughed at the memory. He was a few years older than she, probably twenty; she was seventeen then. It was as obvious as day that he liked her that first afternoon he came to deliver the dressmaker's chairs. At first she hadn't even noticed him, his face all thingy with sweat, until the dressmaker shouted, 'Nathan, look what you doing and keep your fly close. You think dese women send dem daughters here for you to spoil. Just put down de chairs and go back to de shop with you sweaty self.'

'Yes, mam,' he said, loud enough for Arnella to look up. His voice was like a sudden wind. She looked at him, pricking her fingers with the needle she was using to stitch button holes. Staring directly at her Nathan said, 'Me nah spoil nobody daughter, mam.'

'Boy, don't fresh wid me you hear. You sure not gwan spoil any of dese girls in here, so tek you eyes off dem and go bout you business.'

Arnella and the other three apprentices giggled at Nathan, and Arnella's nose crinkled at his loud smell. She saw the perspiration marks that ran the length of his shirt, noticed that two buttons were missing and that the other three were different sizes and colours.

'So you like de chair dem? Is me alone mek dem,' Nathan said with pride. But again his voice was like a sudden gust of wind that deflated just before the last word.

The dressmaker looked at the chairs, and there was admiration in her glance. 'You made dese all by yerself?' she asked. Nathan nodded his head. 'Ah tink you ready go on your own, Nathan. Dese very nice,' she ended, pushing the chairs under the table. Then, as if noticing Nathan's sweat for the first time, she asked him if he wanted a cool drink of water. He nodded vigorously. 'So get up and get this young man a tall glass of water with plenty ice,' the dressmaker now said to Arnella. As Arnella moved to the kitchen the dressmaker said to her retreating back, but loud enough for her to hear, 'You might as well get him water before him eyes dem fall right in you lap.' Then, turning to Nathan, she teased, 'But stop! Nathan, it look like you want nyam up Arnella wid you eyes.' The other girls laughed out loud and Arnella could tell that Nathan smiled broadly because a smile still lit up his entire round face when she returned with the pint glass of water.

About a week later Nathan started coming round in the evenings after he finished his trade, and the dressmaker remarked that he might make some smart woman a good husband as carpenters could make lots of money, if only he learned to wash his underarms more thoroughly and put on some deodorant. 'Is not jungle we live in any more, you know. You would tink a nice man like Nathan would rub some deodorant under his arms,' she lamented.

Arnella winced, remembering the first time Nathan awkwardly touched her. Sandpaper was smoother than his palm, she was certain. She told him he should rub coconut oil on his palms every night, and he must have taken her advice, for several months later when he tentatively placed his hand on her arm, it felt smoother. Still, she could not bear his touch. She liked him, but not enough to encourage his advances. Throughout the three years of her apprenticeship Arnella saw Nathan often, but as a friend. She got to see more of his work in other people's homes, when she went to deliver their dresses.
And koo de lips. Red like American apple,' a toothless old woman added.

'Shameful woman.'

Imagine! In her forties with the body of a young woman. Wearing such clothes! Heels, four inches, if not higher, and stepping like she was walking on air rather than the uneven gravel road.

'Is who sey she is?'

'And she barren too. Not a picknie fi bring her water in her old age.'

'Ah tell. De Lawd work in mysterious ways. Damn wukkiss whore.'
All agreed she arrived like a queen, pulling everyone's eyes to her.

'Bitch. Is who gwane friend she?'

'Galang. Pride come before fall.'

'Lawd missus. Nobody nah go bruk dem neck fi see you.'

People were mulling by Miss Cotton's store, getting little supplies. The store was on a slope. Monica stopped at the bottom, and her voice, full and playful, called up to the old store owner. 'Howdy, Miss Cotton. Is me, Monica, saying howdy. Hope you keeping well? Her voice was as clear and fresh as the sky after a shower of rain. Such poor manners, the people thought, staying at the side of the road, not climbing the stairs to greet the elder, but having Miss Cotton leave her customers and come out on the veranda to acknowledge her arrival.

'Monica, is dat you! Monica who run weh and bruk her parents' heart at fourteen? Monica! Pretty woman, Monica! All the while Miss Cotton adjusted her glasses and scratched her head, her volume rising with each phrase.

'Is me same one, Miss Cotton. You look as good as the day ah run

whe. Memba is you give me bun and cheese and aerated water to tek

wid me.'

'So wait. You gwane stand down dere and have me shout out me last breath? Seems like you lose you manners in town. Just bring you womanself up here.'

Monica mounted the stairs, pausing on each, aware that all eyes were on her, and after the eighth one she came face to face with Miss Cotton, who held her by the arms before embracing her.

'Chile, is good you come home,' Miss Cotton declared loudly, turning Monica around, admiring her dress, and calling for her assistant, her granddaughter, to bring Monica her favourite drink, a cold cream-soda.

That same evening Desmond Burton's motorbike just happened to break down right in front of Monica's gate. She had barely stepped inside her house for the first time, having first spent almost an hour visiting with Miss Cotton and Master Cotton. The sensation created by her arrival was more than even she had bargained for, and finally inside the privacy of her home all she wanted to do was 'kick off de damn high-heel boots and fling meself across de bed'. So when Desmond waved to her and shouted with dance in his voice, 'Howdy Miss Monica. We glad you memba to come back home,' she did not turn around to inspect the person who greeted her so intimately, but threw 'Howdy' over her shoulder and pulled the door shut behind her.

That first night home, Monica dreamt she was washing clothes, but when she looked in the tub the water was muddy. She threw it out and filled the tub again, but again when she started to wash her delicacies the water was muddy. Try as she might, the water remained muddy. Monica awoke in the middle of the night from that dream, her head feeling heavy and disoriented. Before falling back to sleep she made a promise to herself never again deliberately to take another woman's man, just because she could.

Roosters crowing. Loud. Demanding. Assured. That was the sound. Monica woke to on her first morning back in Kristoff Village. She sat on the edge of the bed, stretched and rubbed the sleep from her eyes.
Grace didn't want always to be afraid, but she couldn't always be with her mother so she had to live as best as she could with her handicap.

Grace had been with her mother the Friday when Monica moved back to Kristoff Village, but felt like she had been present on that occasion from the detailed description she got from Marva and Peggy.

Peggy was on her veranda, grating coconut because her silly cousin whom she had working for her always scraped her knuckles on the bus stopped just below her gate and it was her favourite pastime to see who got off and what they brought with them, then to sing out past without saying howdy.

Everyone in the entire village knew Monica was going to be moving back there, and they had been waiting for her return. The people weren't anxious, just curious. What other distractions were there? Peggy, however, was anxious, and even before Monica showed up she reminded people that this was a woman who hadn't even come to her father's funeral five years ago.

Shame.

Worthless.

But then again, country people's forgiveness was as abundant as the mosquitoes at night.

Rumour also had it that Monica was a big-time whore. Said she even slept with some men in the government, big-big, official men, ministers! But men, even important ones, are dogs; so that didn't signal anything.

Peggy was determined to know the moment when Monica arrived, and she did. Everyone was off the bus so Peggy was wondering why it was just idling there. Then she saw Monica. The bowl, grater and coconut flew out of her lap, and she didn't even stop to pick them up. Captivated, mouth open, she sidled all the way to the second step leading to her veranda to get a better look at Monica. She reached for her glasses; they weren't in the apron pocket where she usually kept them. She hollered to her cousin to bring her glasses so she could see better, record all the details, but the teenage girl claimed she could not find them. Even without her glasses, Peggy could see that Monica looked good. She touched her own body after Monica had walked off in the direction of Miss Cotton's shop, then she went into her bedroom, found the glasses at last on her dresser, put them on and looked at herself in the full-length mirror on the closet door. Monica was at least ten years Peggy's senior, if not more, but she looked good.

Speak the truth and shame the devil.

Peggy was deeply disturbed. She had two boys, and had been thinking about a third child lately. Monica didn't have any children. Her body hadn't gone through any wear and tear. She was barren. All she did was fuck men, other women's men. Bitch. Whore. Curse her womb and her pussy. Peggy spoke aloud in the empty room.

Peggy, who almost never went to Miss Cotton's shop, flung off her apron and walked to Miss Cotton so she could get a better view. She was certain a close-up view would reveal all the flaws. But close proximity can also highlight perfection. Peggy was speechless. Before her stood a woman with a smooth face, bright eyes and a compact figure. Such betrayal.

She had a bone to pick, but she would wait her time.

Is just suh

'How you mean nuh man nuh involve?'

'Is fool and stupid and just born you think we is?'

'So me neva know you did name Mary?'

'But even Mary did have sense find Joseph.'

'Oonuh see me war and tribulation! Oonuh see how worries come sit-down, buff, pan me head!'

Velma offered no explanation; would not announce the name of the man responsible for her condition and was not ashamed or connotate about her state. Nothing her mother and aunt said, no matter that they raised their voices, calling on the entire village to witness their tribulation; no matter that they placed their hands on their heads and bawled out loud; no matter that they threatened to throw her out like 'stale pie', send her to Bellevue in Kingston because she was obviously crazy; no matter their forceful act of taking her to an obeah
woman to see who ‘bad-mind’ her, Velma was quietly insistent that no man was involved. School never interested her. Very little did. She would gaze outside, and did not inspire her like the sounds and colours in nothing. Poetry did not titillate her like the sounds and colours in the landscape. The little quirbles and fights among her peers around. She was in general indifferent. But like no curiosity or animation. She was most of the children, Velma went to school to the sixth class. She could read and write her name, and read the headlines in the paper. But she had no interest. She did like butterflies and often caught them and placed them on her shoulders and her head. She liked needlework, taking coloured threads and making delicate flower designs on square pieces of cloth no larger than a handkerchief. Velma decorated all her mother’s towels and even a few covers for small square cushions. She didn’t talk much, only smiled or nodded her head. It wasn’t that she was uncomfortable around people, she just preferred to be in her own company. She ate little, was tall and thin, but big-hipped. Her skin was like boiling molasses that glowed in the dark; her hair like heavy rope was always braided in two thick plaits that divided her head and her face. She appeared to have two separate faces that looked at each other. She was beatiful, but not desirable. She was like the wind, everywhere, but invisible.

Velma tended the lime tree. She watered it daily, collected rocks and encircled it and planted Joseph-Coat plants all around the circumference. No one was allowed to pick limes from the tree without her permission, and she would throw a stone or stick after the dogs who went to relieve themselves by her tree. For five years Velma tended the lime tree, and made delicate designs on square calico cloth that she gave to her mother’s visitors.

Then at fifteen she announced she was going to Montego Bay to get a job. She left one morning, early, walking six miles to the nearest bus stop, and returned that night with a bag full of biscuits. Payment for a day’s work at the biscuit factory. She would receive a small brown envelope on Friday, which she brought, unopened, and placed in her mother’s hand. Velma never went inside a bank. For as long as she worked and her mother and aunt were well she would give them her envelope every Friday, and they gave her money for bus fare and lunch. When eventually her mother became too old, she turned over her little brown envelope to Olive, her older daughter, who went to the bank and gave her money for bus fare and lunch. Velma never went to the bank, and she never opened her little brown envelopes herself, not once, not ever.

Velma liked walking, early in the morning before the sun was hot, or late in the evening when the sun was asleep and the heat had cooled from the ground. She couldn’t remember if the first time she saw him was in the morning or in the evening, but she saw him many times and always he asked her the same thing.

‘Gi me some of what you have in you bag!’ It was not a command or a plea, just a fact, stated. He would be sitting on the bare ground, shirtless, his pants leg rolled up, sharpening his cutlass. He was the son of the overseer, a brown buckra man who ‘gwane like him white’, and who managed the sugar estate just outside Rosehall which was owned by some English people. His mother was the coolie woman who lived with and worked for the overseer. People claimed the overseer – brown buckra man – had the coolie woman and all her people slaving on the English people’s sugar estate. Just like slavery times. All the East Indian workers lived in the rows of barracks at the back of the house, without a kitchen. The women were forced to cook on little coal stoves in the open, and when rain fell they had to pull those coal stoves into their little rooms on a piece of cardboard or an old crate box and blow the coal to fire, praying the wind and rain hadn’t drownded the blaze. All those coolie people’s backs were bent, and they were ‘maga’, their ribs showing right through their scant clothes. They still lived in the barracks with no electricity. The brown buckra man did install a makeshift shower with two stalls, but they still had to ease themselves in a stinking pit toilet. The children didn’t though. They did just as the dogs, dug a hole or went behind some bush. Every ten years the barracks were painted a shade of green that blended into the cane fields.

This shirtless man, with rolled up pants and a cutlass, was the son of that brown buckra man and the coolie woman who took care o him. He lied to Velma that he himself was the overseer.

Velma saw him all the time. Sometimes when she had to work late he would ask her, ‘You nuf frind duppy tek you weh?’ and she would smile, reach into the bag and give him two biscuits and continue t
woman to see who 'bad-mind' her, Velma was quietly insistent that no man was involved. School never interested her. Very little did she go outside, as her mother did not inspire her like the sounds and colours in the landscape. She was in general indifferent. No curiosity or animation. She was like a butterfly and often caught them and placed them on her shoulders and her head. She liked needlework, taking coloured threads and making delicate flower designs on square pieces of cloth no larger than a handkerchief. Velma decorated all her mother's towels and even a few covers for small square cushions. She didn't talk much, only smiled or nodded her head. It wasn't that she was uncomfortable around people, she just preferred to be in her own company. She ate little, was tall and thin, but big-hipped. Her skin was like boiling molasses that glazed in the dark; her hair like heavy rope was always braided in two thick plaits that divided her head and her face. She appeared to have two separate faces that looked at each other. She was beautiful, but not desirable. She was like the wind, everywhere but invisible.

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'Gi me some of what you have in you bag!' It was not a command or a plea, just a fact, stated. He would be sitting on the bare ground, shirtless, his pants leg rolled up, sharpening his cutlass. He was the son of the overseer, a brown buckra man who 'gwane like him white', and who managed the sugar estate just outside Rosehall which was owned by some English people. His mother was the coolie woman who lived with and worked for the overseer. People claimed the overseer - brown buckra man - had the coolie woman and all her people slaving on the English people's sugar estate. Just like slavery times. All the East Indian workers lived in the rows of barracks at the back of the house, without a kitchen. The women were forced to cook on little coal stoves in the open, and when rain fell they had to pull those coal stoves into their little rooms on a piece of cardboard or an old crate box and blow the coal to fire, praying the wind and rain hadn't drowned the blaze. All those coolie people's backs were bent, and they were 'maga', their ribs showing right through their scant clothes. They still lived in the barracks with no electricity. The brown buckra man did install a makeshift shower with two stalls, but they still had to ease themselves in a stinking pit toilet. The children didn't though. They did just as the dogs, dug a hole or went behind some bush. Every ten years the barracks were painted a shade of green that blended into the cane fields.

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Velma saw him all the time. Sometimes when she had to work late he would ask her, 'You nuf fraud duppy tek you weh?' and she would smile, reach into the bag and give him two biscuits and continue to
walk her way. She didn't have any time to bother with him, this brown-coolie man who did nothing but sit by the side of the road, sharpening his cutlass.

For two years, six days a week Velma walked a total of twelve miles, six miles to and six miles from work at the biscuit factory. She was five months pregnant when she told her mother. They couldn't find the father. No matter where they looked or who they asked. No one saw her with anyone. No man could be found to receive the blame. Velma smiled, and at seventeen had her first daughter, whom she called Olive, getting the name from a tin can in the biscuit factory where she worked. She worked up until a week before she had the baby, still walking the twelve miles daily. She still saw the brown-coolie man, and he still begged her for something from her bag.

She didn't work for almost two years after Olive was born. The baby took up all her time. She didn't mind, but she missed the walks, and sometimes would just walk the twelve miles with the baby hitched on her side. She always saw the brown-coolie man, especially in the evening, and he would have something for the baby, a blackie mango, a piece of cane to soothe her gum, a sweet-sop, a jackfruit, guinep, even potato pudding which he said his coolie mother made.

When Olive turned two, Velma went back to the biscuit factory. The man who used to be manager was no longer there. The new man said he had no work for her, but she went inside and began to work anyway, and that Friday she got a brown envelope which she took home to her mother. Her mother took care of Olive, and Velma went back to walking, tending to her lime tree, and making embroidered designs on square calico that she now sold to people. The brown-coolie man still sat by the road, sharpening his cutlass, took many of Velma's cloths for his mother, and often gave her fruits or pudding or some other sweet cake for her daughter; but she still didn't have any time for him, and never tarried or engaged in any lengthy conversation with him. He still wondered why she wasn't afraid of duppies, and still begged her for something from her bag, which she always gave him.

When Olive was twenty-three, having successfully completed a course in cooking at the hotel where she had been working since she was seventeen, she was surprised to learn that both she and her mother, Velma, were going to be mothers. Velma was forty when Arnella was born. She still lived with her mother, aunt and father. Olive's daughter, Valrie. Arnella was a stubborn birth, even though she was the second and should have been easier. Velma was drenched in sweat by the time she pushed Arnella out. She bled more than was natural, Miss Cotton said. She was laid up in bed for almost two months and was unable to nurse Arnella; so Olive nursed her along close. But Arnella was a pretty baby, with a head full of curly black hair and eyes so navy-blue, they pulled you like a deep well with its cooling cry. The moment Velma looked at her second child, she knew she would love her too much, and they would disagree.

At the double christening, when the pastor asked for Arnella's name, Velma's mother said, 'Is god own dis one too', and everyone laughed, knowing of Velma's immaculate conception. Now Velma tended three lime trees, having buried the navel cords of both her daughters under lime trees. Velma gave limeade to everyone who visited her, and often she presented limes to the children of the village, who used them as balls. By the time Arnella was born, and even many years before, a bus had started regularly running to the junction of Kristoff Village, so Velma only had to walk two-and-a-half miles. But sometimes she still walked the twelve miles and she still saw the brown-coolie man sharpening his cutlass. The sugar estate was closed down, but the brown man and his coolie wife still lived there. The barracks were burned down and the estate was now painted blue and yellow. The brown-coolie man still gave Velma fruits and still begged her for something from her bag. She smiled at him and went her way.

Nah-grudge

Was there a time they didn't play together, weren't each other's very best friends? Until now.

They were almost twelve when they discovered they weren't sisters. Twins everyone called them. They had the same birthday and shared
the same parents, at least as they assumed. Then one day Sister Olive and Uncle Milford, her husband and head chef at the hotel where they both worked, were quarrelling. Arnella and Valrie heard Uncle Milford shout, 'Ah tired a you damn blasted family. No one know who is who. Is only two picknie me have, so me nuh know why them call me daddy and me haft mind three.' Arnella and Valrie was playing hopscotch in the yard and thought Uncle Milford were referring to Milton, their little brother. Certainly he didn't mean them.

But now, however, Sister Olive told Arnella that Aunt Velma was really her mother, and it was time she slept at Velma’s house. Sister Olive herself was really Arnella’s sister, not her mother. Arnella couldn’t believe that Aunt Velma was her mother. She didn’t remember ever sleeping in Aunt Velma’s bed like she slept in Sister Olive’s, and Valrie squeezed in between Sister Olive and Uncle Milford. Aunt Velma was her grandmother like Valrie’s, so she had always been led to believe. The new information was like a flogging and the two girls sat for a long, long time under a tree and wept and hugged each other and wept some more.

Later that day Sister Olive explained that because Arnella was born on the same day as Valrie, who was indeed her daughter, she had confused them as if they were twins. Arnella was confused. Valrie was confused. Everyone was confused. But Arnella went along with Sister Olive, trying to figure out the beginning of it. It was all too entangled.

The new arrangement lasted less than a week; then Arnella and Valrie were back in the same bed, in the same house, calling Olive ‘Sister Olive’ and believing her to be their real mother, and Aunt Velma their grandmother.

From the beginning they were inseparable in play and mischief and were often flogged and sent to bed together. In a way they looked exactly like each other, and yet they did not. Whereas Arnella was deep stained mahogany, Valrie was golden palm juice; but their faces were shaped the same: a perfect oval with fine-tipped noses, full pouting mouths, their bottoms lips deep purple, the colour of star-apples. They were long-legged and hippy and their arms swung and danced and seemed wings. They were beautiful and knew it because wherever they went people would say, ‘Lawd what pretty picknie! De pretty more dan de sun and de moon combine. Den gwine brak man’s heart!’ They were always given sweets, peanuts, pinched cheeks, any little gift, acknowledgement that they created pleasure in people. But whereas Arnella’s eyes were deep navy pools, Valrie’s were fiery-brown that shot sparks. Together they would drain people, Arnella pulling them into a cool place with her eyes, and Valrie jarring them with sparks of light.

They went to school together. In third class they were separated for a time but created such a sensation that the headmistress was forced to put them back together. They never competed or tried to out-do each other. Always they shared, loving each other’s company best. Discovering hidden places. Playing tricks on people. Laughing.

Arnella introduced Valrie to the river, and Valrie showed Arnella bow to grow things. They taught each other and had fun playing pranks on Sister Olive and Aunt Velma. They were not naughty girls, nor particularly disobedient, but they were willful.

At twelve, one day apart, they both started menstruate, and began what would come to be known as their separating stage. Velma swore that on that day when Arnella and Valrie came to her, they had Arina out of tears and fear that they were bleeding to death, their panties soaked in blood, she saw a thin layer of skin that had been connecting them dissolve.

Arnella found out that she and Olive had no father, never had. Immaculate conception, people laughed. Sister Olive, who was twenty odd years older than she, was her sister? Aunt Velma, an old woman, who told stories that sometimes made them so scared they had to sleep in Sister Olive’s bed, her mother? No father?

Arnella waded in the river, waded in the river until her body was thrived and Valrie had to go and beg Sister Olive to come and pull her out. They hugged each other and cried, not knowing when they stopped or fell asleep, their arms still around each other, their bodies heaving. Not sisters. They would never recover from that knowledge.

They were everything together, for each other, and insisted on sharing everything, including Godtree.

‘Which one a oonuh wan me fi chase you?’
'You have fi chase both a we,' they said, giggling and taking off in the direction of the mountain range.

They kissed his cheeks. They pulled down his pants and laughed at his tea-pot. They teased him. They played with him, they fell in love and slept with him, together, under the ackee tree, and they were going to remain that way forever, together. But then Aunt Velma got sick and Arnella had to move in with her, and she and Valrie didn't get to whisper their love to each other every night anymore, and they soon forgot the language they had always spoken, together, just for each other.

All we have is us

'You tired. Try fi lay down a while.'

Olive helped her into the bed, opened the windows wide and pushed back the curtain so the evening breeze could sweep the room. Shortly she returned with a damp cloth and a plate of food in her hands. Placing the food by the side of the bed, she wrapped Arnella's brow and blew cool breaths over her face. Then she pressed her ears to Arnella's stomach, listening for the child. Hearing the child playing, satisfied, she turned to the food.

'Don't bother give me nuh argument. Aunt Velma cook this fi you: nice, soft St Vincent yam and susumba in coconut milk. Her leg bother her still, but she seh ah mus mek sure you eat it.' Olive mashed the yam, mixed in some susumba then raised the fork to Arnella's mouth. Arnella chewed and laughed between contractions. Olive blew cool breaths in her face and fed her.

Sister and daughter. That's what Arnella was to Olive, from the beginning. She didn't love her any less than Valrie. In fact, she never thought of them separately. Hurt for them in the same place, right under her bosom. They were almost the same person. 'Nuh care Dat's dem! Dem head full a fancy and tales.'

Olive sat there on the side of the bed, watching night come on an glancing at Arnella dozing. It wasn't going to be much longer, she was certain. She wondered if Milford was home, and whether he had eaten the dinner that she left covered on the stove. Something was wrong with him; his stomach wasn't working right. She loved him. He was the only man who every time he touched her she felt her body, even now, all these thirty years they'd been together. But she didn't want to think about Milford now.

Interference worse than tooth-ache

'You should a did leave dem alone. Is dem alone have fi deal wid each other. Who you fi tell dem how to live dem life?'

It still angered Olive, hearing Aunt Velma accuse her of meddling. But what was she to do? Milford had been at her for almost two years how it wasn't right. How it was nastiness. How she should talk to her sister and her daughter and put an end to it. What did they expect from her? Truth was she didn't care. Arnella and Valrie could talk with whomever they wanted, and if they wanted to be with same man, so what? They wouldn't be the first or last. But Milford said it was just another example of her mixed-up family, and he wasn't going to put up with the slackness any longer. If she didn't put an end to it, he was going to leave. Leave! How he mean leave? Go where? What was she supposed to do if he left? That's when she decided that Arnella was going to be apprenticed with her dressmaker. Valrie cried and said right to Olive's face that she was wicked and evil and 'bad-eye'. Arnella sucked her teeth, and looked at Olive with those eyes of hers so steady and long, the older sister felt faint. Aunt Velma didn't eat for a week, and got so sick Olive had to take time off work and nurse her for a month. But Milford was happy. Said it was the first time she did something because it should be done, whether her family liked it or not, and that it was for their good.

Godfree said he loved both Valrie and Arnella and it wasn't fair that he had to choose between them. Besides, they all got along. His grandmother told him to leave both of them alone and find another girl, unrelated to them. They were almost sixteen then, and in truth Olive's first concern was that Godfree might ruin them, impregnating them at such a young age. She had seen how both Arnella and Valrie pursued him, swinging their hips whenever he came around with the other boys. 'Lawd! Gal pickenie hard fi raise,
oder, well now, dat's a horse of a different colour. You got to be prepared for change, Milford, or it will come and run you ova.' Mr Cotton rose and headed for the hill on which Godfree and Desmond were attempting to fly kites. 'Ah want to hear what Desmond and Godfree, and even Rupert dere wid him tongue on hold, have to say about dese changes. We gwan talk much story later aften we fly kite and eat we belly full.'

After they had eaten and drunk, Mr Cotton suggested that each man tell his story. As the elder, he began, linking his story to the community. There were long pauses, and much shuffling, but each man in turn managed to come bare, and as they talked they discovered they weren't afraid to look each other directly in the eye, remembering when they were boys and shared intimate details naturally.

The saying was true after all, 'A donkey can carry more load in a hamper, dan just strapped unto his back.' The stories took them way back and they remembered what they had allowed themselves to forget: that they too were vulnerable.

**River-mumma calling**

Miss Cotton and the women rose early the Sunday morning of their planned excursion to the river. They knew their men were on a similar journey. Miss Cotton's knee was bothering her, so she walked with her cane. Arnella and Valerie carrying Baby-Girl led the way, followed by Beryl, Angel, and Althea holding hands. Olive and Monica walked just behind them, and at the rear was Miss Cotton, between Dahlia and Velma. The air was chilly, and the older women had shawls over their shoulders.

When they turned into the bush off the road, an owl hooted. The hair on the back of Miss Cotton's neck rose. She stopped. Waited. Scared the bushes for the owl, but could not spot it. When she heard the second hoot, a signal that the way was cleared for them to proceed, she switched her cane and walked on. They quickly came to the bank of the river, but Arnella suggested that they walk further. It was only when Olive shouted that Miss Cotton was out of breath after more than three miles of trekking that Arnella finally stopped.

She threw off her slippers and gingerly moved down the side of the bank, extending one foot to test the water. She frowned and shook her head, walking further up, every so often extending one leg to test the water, each time not satisfied. Finally, from about fifty yards beyond where they had first halted, Arnella waved for the others to join her. Miss Cotton walked to where she was standing, lay flat on the ground, and extended one hand into the river. A smile lit up her face. She turned to Arnella. 'Yuh did good. Yuh did real good.' Then to the other women she nodded approvingly.

The women undressed silently. Althea, the youngest, and not accustomed to undressing in front of others, especially since her mother had told her that nakedness was an affront, felt very awkward. She didn't want to look at the other women, all of whom where older, all of whom had known her probably since she was in her mother's womb. She called them aunt, mamma, sister, not being old enough to call any of them by their names. But mostly, Althea didn't want them to look at her because they would see her pregnant stomach. Even though she suspected they all knew, and Monica had only the day before remarked that she couldn't hide it much longer, Althea was still afraid. She was also shy, having been raised by a mother who felt her body was ugly and even a sin, and so had warned her to cover up and not let anyone look upon it. She stood with her dress draped around her body; she wanted to run back home; she felt out of place.

When Miss Cotton spoke to her she jumped.

'Althea, you prove you is woman by carrying baby. All we here is woman. You not no little girl-pickie anymore. You tek up oman ways when you spread you legs. So tek off you frock and leave you mamma behind. Monica and Beryl and all de rest of we is oman. When one oman do wickedness against anoda oman, den she do it against all oman dem.'

The other women nodded their heads. Even Angel found herself agreeing. Olive and Dahlia made a vela click, indicating their agreement. But Miss Cotton's voice was still stiff like dried cassava when she spoke again to Althea. 'Tek off dat frock and come ova here so ah can rub dis ointment pan you body; we no have all day to dally.'

Monica, who now stood naked, went and helped Althea off with her dress, then walked her over to Miss Cotton, who immediately
began to anoint her body. The women all cupped their hands, took a little of the lotion that Miss Cotton poured into their palms, rubbed it over each other's bodies. Then in single file they waded into the river.

The water was warm and milky. The air was still, and the rays of the sun cast golden sheaths on the river. Arnella cupped a handful of water to her mouth and drank. Each woman found her own space and splashed around. Angel and Althea, the youngest, and both so shy for different reasons, stayed close together. After a while Arnella told the women to hush. 'Each of you must search out your own place in the river. Let her, de river, talk to you so she can soothe your worries.'

Angel wasn't sure what that meant, but reluctantly she parted from Althea, and began her journey quest. She wandered in a direction away from the other women. Soon she could hear her own breathing, in tune with the soft murmur of the river. She found herself in a dense area where the water bubbled like air in a hot-tub, and it was much warmer than where they had all entered. Angel immersed her entire body, imagining she was baptising herself. Something tricked her right sole. She lost her balance and found herself blowing bubbles. The pain in her legs expanded. She tried to swim to the surface, but found herself being pulled under. Frantically Angel fought with whoever, or whatever, was holding her down. Something pulled at her legs. She struggled, hysterical, spinning around. Her lungs were full. She couldn't hold her breath any longer. She started to laugh, thinking this was all too funny, coming to Jamaica where her dream of a happy life seemed attainable, only to drown as a result of joining her new friends in a ritual observance of their ancestors' ways. Then Angel panicked. It wasn't funny, she thought to herself. She didn't want to die. Suddenly she was overcome with a desire to know her real mother; she could taste her salty tears mingling with the warm, sweet, breast milk that was the river water, and she allowed herself to surrender, feeling very close to the mother she never knew.

Beryl had no trouble finding a place. She waded to it immediately. An almond tree hung over the banking of the river like an S on its side. Beryl manoeuvred her way around the branches resting in the water and stayed there listening to sounds inside her head. She felt light. She knew her mother was happy, and she heard her telling her, 'Is your time now me one daughter. Is your time now. Don't waste any more time. Don't let one mistake scare you fah life.' Beryl hugged herself, her arms making an X that covered her breasts. She rocked from side to side, and the tears that trickled down her face were sweet and fresh. She was willing to unload, to forgive herself, to begin again to remember the early light of daybreak that was a sign of perfect beauty and hope. As she began to itemise in her head all the things she would begin to do again she heard the child calling her. Immediately her hands flew to her ears, trying to block the sound. She hadn't heard any voices for a long time, but now she heard the urgent sound of this child calling her, not accusing, not teasing, but pleading with her for help. Beryl felt trapped and powerless. She called out, 'Is where you deh? Is where you deh? Tell me, and me will come get you.' She removed her hands from her ears and forced herself to listen outside of herself. She waded out from where she was nestled by the outside of herself. She waded out from where she was nestled by the almond tree. Once in the open stream, she turned around. She heard the voice more insistently. Urgent, yet fading. She tried to run, then realising where she was, she dove under the water, searching for what she wasn't sure. She came up for air and found herself in a bed of the river that was the shape of a perfect V. The water in her mouth was warm and sweet. She no longer heard the child, but she sensed her presence. Beryl dove again, and when she came up, she cradled a gasping Angel in her arms, and the sun was in her face blinding her.

After more than half an hour of soaking in the warm water that was like expert hands massaging their bodies, Miss Cotton called the women together. They formed a circle and Dahlia and Velma raised the song, 'Dere is a meeting here today, come along now...'. Olive and Valrie pulled Monica to the centre of the circle and immediately all the women splashed water on her. Through the crystal sheet of water they created, Monica looked like a torso in the centre of a glass sculpture.

Arnella's firm voice broke through the spraying water.

'Call dem out. Name dose who peppa you. Name dem; dem not you sistas.'

The other women echoed Arnella's words, until their collective
voices were a mantra for retribution. All the women cleared their throats and spat in the water. Even Baby-Girl appeared to join the women voices when she began bawling, as if to shout too, ‘Name dem!’ Everyone except Althea and Monica was shouting, ‘Name dem; dem is not you sistas. Call dem out.’

Monica’s tears paled in the streaming water; her body danced and shook. Miss Cotton and Arnella signalled the women to cease spraying water, and they freed Monica from the glass in which she was trapped. They spun her round, then Miss Cotton stood to one side of her and Arnella to the other.

Velma and Dahlia stepped forward. They laid their hands on Monica’s left shoulder. With a powerful, downward sweep, they pulled off the burden Monica had been hauling around; they rinsed their hands before doing the same thing to Monica’s right shoulder. They ended with a sound so powerful it thrust their chests forward. Then Dahlia stepped round and positioned herself behind Monica. She pressed her thumbs to the base of Monica’s waist, just above her buttocks, and Velma cupped the flesh that cushioned Monica’s stomach to her pelvic bone. Together they massaged and pressed. Monica’s moans were a circle that enclosed the women, forcing each of them to release their internal frustrations and bottled anger. Monica began to throw up bile and the stench caused the other women to hold their breaths and widen the circle.

The women waded away from the stench, pulling Monica along. They were close to the bank where they had entered.

Miss Cotton cupped up clean water and fed Monica. Arnella poured water over her shoulders and massaged her stomach. Velma and Dahlia alternately intoned, ‘Release it; let it go.’ The other women picked up the chant.

Then Miss Cotton and Arnella stood either side of Monica again, and tossed her back and forth with open hands. Monica’s body was like a weightless sponge, and each time Miss Cotton and Arnella tossed her, water spewed from her body, and she screamed, ‘Ah gwane name dem. Mamma came to me afra Miss Madge funeral and say she forgive me. Ah gwane call dem out for Althea say she no hate me. Ah name dem for ah forgive meself.’

‘Name dem,’ Arnella demanded.

Monica began to weep anew, leaning forward, hugging her stomach. Miss Cotton put her arms around her. ‘You have to name dem me child. Dem must face dem punishment.’

Dahlia and Velma again raised their voices, ‘Dere is a meeting here today, come along now . . .’

Monica stood tall, cupped her hands for water and drank. Her voice was soaked and heavy when she spoke.

‘Marva was de ring-leader. She de one carry de bowl of peppa. Dey stuff a scarf in me mouth. Den Grace suggest dem strap me to de bed, and she hold me hand while Marva and Peggy tie me up. Marva flung open me closet door and pull out me dress dem. She kiss her teeth, den rip dem up. Den Grace and Peggy follow suit, dragging dresses from de closet, pulling out de drawers, dashing me things dem pan de floor and trampling pan dem. Den Marva stumble ova by me dresser, smell me perfume, den start to dash de powder and perfume everywhere. When dem did spend demself, and me tink dem did done, and was gwane leave me, Peggy come stand ova me tie up pan de bed; she seh, “Dat will teach you fi leave women men alone.” Me want to tell her, dat Trevor is one man me no have to worry bout wid me cause him too wukless, but de scarf was in me mouth. Me smell de peppa on Marva, when she stand right beside me. She look inna me face and laugh. Den she seh wid her hand raised wid de peppa on it, “Mek me blind you, bout you want thief me man.” Her hand was dis close to me face,’ Monica indicated, bringing her hands less than an inch from her face, ‘but same time Grace pull weh her hand, and Marva just smear me face saying, “Ah gwane show you how fi powda you face.” She smear de peppa all ova me face, then push her index finger in me nose. Ah could neva be able to describe de sting, but more was to come. Grace start to beg Marva fi leave me alone, saying, “Ah tink she did learn her lesson; ah tink she will leave Desmond alone now.” But Marva was just warming up. She turn to Grace, huffing and puffing. “Is why mek you so fool-fool, and fraid-fraid, you own shadow? She a sleep wid you lawful husband and you want fi have sympathy pan her.” Grace neva say nothing more, just stand dere and wring she hand. Ah could tell dat Marva was worked up and couldn’t stop. She start to rip me clothes off me, and afra a while Grace and Peggy join her, then she lotioned her hand in the bowl of
peppa then push her hand inna me. Me throat lock and me blank out. When me come to dem did gwane and de house dark. Me decide to die, den me remember you, Miss Cotton. Ah figure if ah didn't die, only you one could cool the fire inside me, so me try nuh ti tink bout de fire eating me up and call pan you. And here me is now.'

The women were like poles stuck in the river bed. A cool breeze wafted around them. The heat of the sun dried their torsos. The taste in their mouths was no longer burning, but their saliva was flat and sticky.

Velma and Dahlia sucked in their breaths.

Arnella felt weightless.

Valerie, who was holding Baby-Girl, let out her breath.

For a moment the river had gone stagnant until Baby-Girl yawned, stirring it alive again. Miss Cotton was dizzy. Angel felt herself clinging to Beryl, unable to let go. They stood, waiting for directions.

Miss Cotton found herself, and blew breaths from deep within until she saw rainbow-coloured air sailing from her mouth. Then, pulling Monica close, she embraced her, pressing her healing hands into the younger woman's body, running her hands up, down and all over. Releasing her, she looked Monica in the eyes and asked, 'Is dat all of it, de whole story?' Monica nodded her head. 'Den walk around the circle and let's be done wid it.' Monica moved around the circle and each woman she passed cupped water, threw it on her shoulder, then used their hands to rinse her body. In single file they waded out of the river, as if enacting a children's ring game that disbanded when the circle disappeared.

Althea felt ashamed for her mother and for herself. Since her mother was unable to ask forgiveness for herself, Althea knew the responsibility fell to her as the only daughter. She couldn't, however, bring herself to look at Monica. She could never imagine, nor did she want to imagine, what pepper might feel like in her most private place. She couldn't understand how any woman, especially her own mother, could inflict such harm to another woman, no matter what her actions had been. Althea could think of nothing to say to Monica. She felt as if the other women, at Miss Cotton's instigation, had left her alone to face her punishment.

Althea stood, rubbing her water-shrivelled fingers together. The water no longer felt warm even though the sun was burning above her head. Why was Monica standing in front of her not saying anything? She saw out of the corner of her eyes that the other women were sitting on the river bank. Althea listened, as if the sound of the women's voices, her many aunts, could free her; still Monica stood before her not saying anything.

Althea thought of the child she was carrying. She had avoided thinking about the life growing inside. The first month her womanhood didn't visit her, Althea had prayed, thinking she could pray it to disappear. When another month passed and her womanhood didn't visit her, Althea decided to forget about it, hoping that would make it disappear. But still nothing happened, so she accepted her fate. Now, standing in the river, wishing she could disappear from before Monica, Althea thought compassionately of the life growing inside, and she didn't feel like a girl any more, nor did she feel hopeless. She rubbed her stomach, smiling; she was going to be a mother, and she would be a good one to her daughter. Althea felt brave then. She raised her head, and looking Monica in the eyes said, 'Ah gwane have a daughter and ah would like you to help me raise her.'

Monica stared at this girl who had come to her through her pain, and felt capable of accepting the honour bestowed on her. 'If ah gwane help you raise you daughter, den ah gwane be needing you blessing.'

Althea cupped her hand and rinsed off Monica's body. The sun was full and bright when they emerged.

The inhabitants of Kristoff Village came awake slowly, groggily. Somehow the village seemed bereft of its core vitality. A few women who ran out of needed items were surprised when they went to Miss Cotton and Mr Cotton's store to find it closed. They knocked, climbed the hill to the house in the back of the shop. But only barking dogs and fluttering chickens being chased by the rooster took note of their presence. They left empty-handed, perplexed, stopping at neighbours' houses to borrow the things they required and asking about the absence of the Cottons.

After the women had eaten their breakfast, Miss Cotton took Althea's hands, and patting them, said 'Child, you have to tell you daddy you