

WOMEN SPEAK, MEN SHARE, AND EVERYONE RUSH! PROPHETIC CONSCIOUSNESS, JUNKANOO AND THE CHURCH IN BAHAMIAN SOCIETY

By Carlton Turner

Abstract

Using the essential concepts of royal consciousness and prophetic consciousness from the biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann's *The Prophetic Imagination* this paper explores the dialectical tension at the heart of the Church and Junkanoo (a carnival-like street festival) relationship in contemporary Bahamian society. In doing so it argues that Junkanoo in Bahamian society, just like other African Caribbean religiocultural forms such as Obeah, Myal, Kuminah, Calypso, or Carnival, functions to both criticize and energise Christian witness. This is seen in how they reassert the powerful spirituality and religious leadership of women; reconstruct ecclesiastical and political notions of power; and maintain dialectical tension through their emphasis on movement, integration and liminality.

The Church that came into the Caribbean assumed the seat of power

Much like 1st century Palestinian Judaism, it was patriarchal, hierarchically constructed, and drew sharp boundaries between itself and African religiocultural heritages across the Anglophone Caribbean. In the Bahamian context, Junkanoo, a Christmastide carnival-like street festival of West African origin, came embody, principally by the church, attributions of heathenism, secularism, indecency, and even heathenism. Using essential concepts from the biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann's *Prophetic Imagination* this paper explores the dialectical tension at the heart of the Church and Junkanoo relationship in contemporary Bahamian society.¹ In doing so, it argues that Junkanoo in Bahamian society, just like other African Caribbean religiocultural forms such as Obeah, Myal, Kuminah, Calypso, or Carnival, functions to both criticize

and energise Christian witness.² This is seen in how they reassert the powerful spirituality and religious leadership of women; reconstruct ecclesiastical and political notions of power; and maintain dialectical tension through their emphasis on movement, integration and liminality.

To achieve this, this paper is divided into four parts. Part one explores Walter Brueggemann's concepts of royal consciousness and prophetic consciousness as a springboard to examine the complex Junkanoo/Church relationship. Part two introduces both the Church and Junkanoo in more detail. Part three explores the ways, highlighted above, in which Junkanoo functions dialectically to prophetically criticise and energise religion and society in the Bahamian context. Part four concludes the paper by relating the three dialectical ways in which Junkanoo functions, to the ministry of Jesus recorded in John's gospel.

1 Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Second ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

2 Indigenous African traditional religiosity is varied in the African Caribbean and is manifested through different, but equally marginalised activities. Obeah, Myal and Kuminah are spiritual systems steeped in West African cosmology that survived the Slave passage into mainly Anglophone Caribbean. For ease of reference, while Carnival is a Street festival surviving in the catholic Caribbean, Junkanoo is a street festival surviving in the English speaking Caribbean. Calypso is a musical tradition very much linked to Carnival.

Prophetic Consciousness and Mission: Some conceptual considerations

In his book 'The Prophetic Imagination', Walter Brueggemann proposes the interaction of two concepts, royal consciousness and prophetic consciousness, that are key to understanding change and renewal within the church as it exists in society today. Using ancient Israelite history as a backdrop, he links royal consciousness to cultural and political norms that are built upon affluence; carried out through oppressive social policies; and is legitimated by organized, state sanctioned, static religion. For example, the rule of Solomon saw an affluence within ancient Israel. However, this affluence came about through oppressive tax and labour policies. Furthermore, through the building of the temple, the nature of God changes among God's people where, "God is fully accessible to the king, who is patron, and the freedom of God is completely overcome."³ Because of its remoteness from the passionate freedom of God, royal consciousness becomes incapable of grieving and entering the pain of the oppressed. And, because it refuses to bend, to be dismantled, it does not, and cannot, bring about creativity, imagination and amazement.

Prophetic consciousness criticises royal consciousness through pathos and vulnerability.

Prophetic consciousness, on the other hand, operates in two ways. Firstly, it criticises royal consciousness through pathos and vulnerability. Brueggemann explains, "royal consciousness leads

people to numbness, especially to numbness about death. It is the task of the prophetic ministry and imagination to bring people to engage their experience of suffering to death."⁴ Secondly it energises the community towards an alternative being and living, independent of royal consciousness. In this vein, prophetic consciousness and ministry move "back into the deepest memories of this community and activate those very symbols that have always been the basis for contradicting the regnant consciousness."⁵ It nurtures a hope and a future, and brings about, through amazement, a renewed community that royal consciousness is incapable of doing.

But this dialectical tension between royal and prophetic consciousness has an established following in the academy, and provides a good foundation for theologically and missiologically examining the Church/Junkanoo relationship within the Bahamian context. Perhaps, the place to begin is a consideration of the idea of liminality found in the work of Victor Turner.⁶ Turner observes that the ritual process is one that moves from structure through anti-structure and back to structure. This in-between state, also called *communitas* or the liminal in his work, is a period of freedom and unstructured community experience. He describes it as crossing a threshold where one finds 'flow', or a creative space of becoming.

Similar echoes are found in G.W.F. Hegel's dialecticism which argues that history and knowledge proceed through a three-stage process (though Hegel doesn't use the terminology) of thesis, antithesis and synthesis; or in Thomas Kuhn's idea 'paradigm shift' where knowledge proceeds through, not exactly

3 Brueggemann, 28.

4 Ibid., 41.

5 Ibid., 64.

6 Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures, (London, : Routledge & K. Paul, 1969).

a negation of old concepts/paradigms, but a transcending of them. Such thinkers highlight not so much the polarisation of two entities, but rather their interaction, out of which something new emerges. However, that which is new does not come about unless it undergoes the unchartered and unstructured process.

The dialectical tension between royal and prophetic consciousness is key to missiological thinking, particularly within the developing world

The dialectical tension between royal and prophetic consciousness is also key to missiological thinking, particularly within the developing world. Joshva Raja argues for the need to 'reconstruct' mission. He writes, "reconstructing mission means to imagine, develop and provide alternative models of mission where human relationship and relationship with God are related to each other and one corrects, nourishes and builds the other."⁷ In other words, when considering post-colonial contexts, the goal is not simply to deconstruct colonial hegemonies and frameworks, but to reconstruct them with alternative ones through a dialogical process. The dialectical tension, the dialogical space, becomes one in which mutual encounter, and thus transformation can occur. He continues

Reconstruction as mission means to go beyond a mere critique of the structures but to develop an alternative world which is new Creation in Christ where all would give in peace. This alternative was projected

by the prophets even though they were [critique] of the exploitative and oppressive structures with hope to bring about change not merely by human efforts but also with the help of God and faith in God.⁸

Ultimately, to understand the Church and Junkanoo in the Bahamian context, I am proposing that they not be strictly seen as dual opposites, but as entities involved in dialectical tension, at the heart of which, transformation is continually taking place. What is clear, however, is that while both are dynamic entities, Junkanoo functions in particular ways to foster the dialectical tension, thus more embodying prophetic consciousness. On the other hand, due to its long connectedness to its colonial past, the legacies of the church more embody royal consciousness.

The Colonial Church and Junkanoo in Bahamian Society

Before discussing Junkanoo and the Church a disclaimer must be made. I am placing Junkanoo and the Church in what seems to be polarising categories, but this is only for functional reasons. There have always been complex interactions between the two, and in fact, royal consciousness and prophetic consciousness can and do occur in both. There is not enough space within this paper to examine both of these entities internally, so I will simply highlight how Junkanoo functions prophetically to criticise and energise the Church as a way of charting the dialectical tension and its importance for mission within the Bahamian context

The Legacy of the Colonial Church

Firstly, the Caribbean can be described as an ecclesiastical region. Any working definition of the Caribbean must wrestle

⁷ Joshva Raja, "Mission as Creating Common Spaces of Peace," in *Towards a Reconstruction of Mission Stories: Building Communities of Hope and Peace*, ed. Joshva Raja, et al. (Birmingham UK: ISPCK, 2010), 26.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

with the centrality of not simply religion, but the Church. The very genesis of the Caribbean has been an ecclesiastical one, which even in contemporary Caribbean society, finds expression in political, cultural, and social life. For example, one can trace the socio-political dynamics at work in the region by the types of churches in ascendancy – for example, the presence of the Roman Catholic Church in late 15th and 16th centuries, then English and Dutch Protestantism from the 17th century, Pentecostalism from the early 20th century, and now finally, the Megachurch and Televangelicalism streaming in from North America, the United States in particular. Also, Church is a significant player in Caribbean religious and social life. There is no rigid separation between church and state, or any sphere of life for that matter. There is the joke that two things are on every street corner in a Caribbean country, a church and a bar room. People, men and women, from all spheres of life, are participants in their churches.

A closer look at church structure in the Caribbean reveals an obsession with order and boundaries

But a closer look at church structure in the Caribbean reveals an obsession with order and boundaries, whether that be doctrinal, political, cultural, or in terms of gender. The expansion of the church into the Caribbean was concomitant with the quest for paradise, which, according to Bahamian playwright Ian Strachan, was an artificial Elizabethan notion envisioning nature as subdued and ordered, and in

colonies with untamed lands and peoples, the European quest was rational, ordered, a consequence of a pursuit of knowledge for its own sake; a pursuit of wealth, and a need for lands in the midst of inter-European wars and rivalries.⁹ Hence, the Anglophone Caribbean was constructed around ordered systems: dioceses, parishes, denominations, and then the 'others', spiritualities and religiosities (when we want to be polite) or heathens (when we want to be honest).

Keith Hunte explains that in 1629 and 1681 respectively, Barbados and Jamaica were divided into parishes, and for the social, political and economic functioning of the colonies; freeholders within parishes were legally bound to build churches and supply incumbents.¹⁰ Hunte further writes:

The society that developed in the West Indies by 1681 was a far cry from that which emerged in the early days of settlement. In the earlier phase, the intention for the colonial authorities, when they made the first efforts to build churches and to recruit clergy, had been to establish centres of public worship for a predominantly English and white population. The emergence of sugar plantations and the demographic changes that accompanied this transformation had altered all that. The colonial ruling class perceived two distinct societies in each colony: these would be defined as the society of free persons, and that of the slaves. In time, the distinction was essentially between whites and blacks. At any point, the question as to whom the church should serve was critical.¹¹

9 Ian G. Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean*, New World Studies (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

10 Keith Hunte, "Protestantism and Slavery in the British Caribbean," ed. Armando Lampe (Kingston, Jamaica: Kingston, Jamaica, 2001), 86.

11 *Ibid.*, 89.

In other words, the English Church in the Caribbean was marked by a neo-platonic dualism, which greatly enhanced the plantation machinery. It produced a rigid social world, drawing sharp distinctions between women and men, civilized and uncivilized, sacred and secular, sacred and profane, and religion and spirituality. Of the latter it must be understood that such a rationalistic society held propositions of faith, particularly the 39 Articles, as epistemologically and theologically valid for the practice of religion. Anything outside this set body of doctrine was instantaneously dismissed as mythological and superstitious. Religion was superior to spirituality in that it presupposed order, visible unity and hierarchy, moral clarity, and incontestable doctrinal reception. Spirituality, on the other hand, was not easily defined, it was located in the complexities and material realities of everyday lives, as shared and fluid interpreted experience. Sahaya G. Selvam sees this binary as artificial, proposing that the binary of religion and spirituality, follows a western dualistic framework, and that what is needed is a religious spirituality which shows their continual dynamic integration.¹²

The contemporary Bahamian Church never developed any kind alternative form of church outside of missionary denominations.

The contemporary Bahamian Church is quite unique because it never developed any kind alternative form of church outside of missionary denominations coming either out of England or North America.

While, for example, colonies with larger plantations developed Africanised Christian churches, such as Revival Zionism in Jamaica or Spiritual Baptists in Trinidad, present Bahamian congregations trace their history directly to their English, Scottish or American implantation, without rupture or revision. Perhaps the only revision has been the move from white to black leadership and or/membership. Furthermore, perhaps the only alternative revision of missionary Church within the Bahamian context is Junkanoo.

Junkanoo in Bahamian Society

Junkanoo is a New World Anglophone street festival of West African Origin which has been revived in the Bahamas since the mid-20th century to become a symbol of Bahamian national and cultural identity. The festival, held twice yearly, Boxing Day and New Years day in the early hours of the morning into mid-morning the next day, is a spectacle of colour, costuming, music and passionate movement and dance performed by competing groups along the main thoroughfare of the country. Its emergence within Bahamian society has always been fraught with contention with the Church.

Bahamian cultural icon and Junkanoo scholar Clement Bethel has placed Junkanoo into four historical time periods, all revealing its marginalisation within the nation.¹³ Between 1800 and 1899 African within the colony used militia bands in multiple ways: firstly, as means of celebration, particularly during emancipation; and secondly, as means of petitioning or protesting policies by the colonial governor. It was also during this period that the celebratory drumming and night time gatherings were energised due to the addition of some 6,000 Liberated Africans into the colony. This

¹² Sahaya G. Selvam, "Towards Religious-Spirituality: A Multidimensional Matrix of Religion and Spirituality," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 12, no. 36 (2013).

¹³ E. Clement Bethel, "Junkanoo in the Bahamas," *Caribbean Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1990).

directly led to the passing of various slave laws designed to quiet down what was deemed riotous activity by the slaves and their descendants.

Between 1900 and 1919 the Bahamas experienced economic depression. During this period, separate groups emerged relating to various community associations. The celebratory drumming manifested in gang clashes. Between 1920 and 1947 the nation experienced a period of prosperity during which time flamboyant and colourful costuming emerged. However, it was during this period that Labour unrest rocked the nation, as with the rest of the Caribbean, and again, the celebratory drumming turned to the 1942 Burma Road Riot where the Black majority stormed the centre of commerce, controlled by the white elite, smashing windows and looting.

Despite its importance for tourism and commerce, it still remains somewhat unpredictable in that it has the ability to organise Bahamians towards social and political critique and protest.

From 1948 to the present, Junkanoo was then controlled by the Tourism industry with the festival becoming a state sponsored competition and symbol of Bahamian identity. But, despite its importance for tourism and commerce,

it still remains somewhat unpredictable in that it has the ability to organise Bahamians towards social and political critique and protest.

Various sociologists and anthropologists have theorised how Junkanoo, and other such festivals continue to function. Looking at continental Southeast African tribal life Max Gluckman conceptualises such festivals as rituals of rebellion and reversal.¹⁴ As such, they address conflict and inequalities within such societies in peaceful ways. Other scholars have critiqued this insight as too simplistic and inadequate for the Caribbean plantation context. For example, Robert Dirks, referring to Junkanoo as the Black Saturnalia, refines Gluckman's theory showing that the festival emerged as a need to blunt tensions in the face of imminent violence.¹⁵

Caribbean scholars Keith Nurse and Nicolette Bethel, however, highlight the multiple functions of Junkanoo. Reflecting on the Trinidad Carnival, Nurse explains it as "It is essentially a process of masking so as to unmask. Mimicry, parody, satire, role reversals and symbolic social inversion are the methods used to confront class, race and gender oppression. In effect, carnival is a time when the world is turned upside-down."¹⁶ Nicolette Bethel describes it as "a ritual of rebellion, a politico-cultural movement or an annual invocation of the liminal."¹⁷ Others, including myself, see it as theological as well, a prophetic critique of missionary Christianity, calling it to be fluid, to involve movement and dialogue, to embrace the indigenous religious

14 Max Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1955).

15 Robert Dirks, *The Black Saturnalia: Conflict and Its Ritual Expression on British West Indian Slave Plantations*, University of Florida Monographs Social Sciences (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, University of Florida Press, 1987).;

16 See Keith Nurse, "Globalization and Trinidad Carnival: Diaspora, Hybridity, and Identity in Global Culture," *Cultural Studies* 13, no. 4 (1999): 664.

17 Nicolette Bethel, "Junkanoo in the Bahamas: A Tale of Identity," in *Junkanoo and Religion: Christianity and Cultural Identity in the Bahamas* (Nassau: Media Enterprises, 2003), 118.

heritages of the country, and ultimately to protest injustice and anti-Africanness.¹⁸ Bahamian Contextual Theologian Kirkley Sands states:

“Bahamian Junkanoo embodied the slaves’ prophetic voice. It constituted a demand for dialogue with their ancestral faith, and a call for social justice in the kind of democratically free society which that faith and their Baptist religious experience proleptically held out to them”¹⁹

In Bahamian society then, Junkanoo naturally becomes a means of prophetic criticism. Though vigorously participated in by church people, even by some clergy, it remains at the margins of the Church. It is often seen as belonging to profane space, the habitation of sin, fetishism, heathenism, and even the demonic; its only purpose being to let off pent up aggression, giving license to sexual promiscuity, or perverting the young.

But despite the royal consciousness and the coloniality of the missionary church, as well as Junkanoo’s own ambivalent and chequered history, it continues to exercise power over the Bahamian imagination. In many ways, it provides what the church seems unable to do. For example, an interview participant in my PhD field work makes the following observation:

It definitely touches something deeper. If I could put a word to it, or put my finger on it, I would, but it definitely touches something deep. It’s... some people would say it’s and indescribable feeling. That I could agree with. But it just touches the core, and I guess we

can say it’s something beyond the physical so it must be a spiritual feeling that’s being evoked.²⁰

To further elucidate how Junkanoo functions dialectically to advance prophetic consciousness, we will explore three interrelated notions: firstly, ‘talking back’ found in women’s spirituality and leadership; secondly, an alternative model of power exercised in the Junkanoo shack; and finally, the integrative and creative nature of the Junkanoo performance.

3. Prophetic Criticism and Energising in Junkanoo

Women Speak...

The Church coming into the Caribbean was forged in the enlightenment rationalism, and for the sake of ordering plantation life and society, reason, seen as masculine and hard, achieving certainty and order, was prioritised over spirituality, seen as feminine, soft, imperceptible, and achieving only the fringe business of affectivity and intuition. In such a context, then, the powerful spirituality of women has been downplayed and their potent leadership denied. To be clear, I’m not suggesting that spirituality is an abstract concept, for it is grounded in daily realities, and for this reason we can make reference to a gendered spirituality.

Reinhild Traitler, for example, points out the following presuppositions of a feminist spirituality: there is no spirituality in the abstract; women’s lives are different to men’s; Christian and religious traditions have been shaped by men; and the language and symbols of those traditions have been shaped by men, as well.²¹ What I’m arguing is that the contribution of women’s spirituality and leadership,

18 Carlton Turner, “Self-Negation within African Caribbean Christianity: Towards an Understanding of Junkanoo and Its Significance for Christian Praxis within Contemporary Bahamian Society,” *Black Theology: An International Journal* 11, no. 1 (2013).

19 Kirkley C. Sands, *Early Bahamian Slave Spirituality: The Genesis of Bahamian Cultural Identity* (Nassau, Bahamas: The Nassau Guardian Ltd, 2008), 65.

20 Formal Interview of Junkanoo Informant. December 2012.

21 Reinhild Traitler, “Feminist and Orthodox Spiritualities: “Women’s Spirituality”,” *The Ecumenical Review* 60, no. 1/2 (2008).

has been silenced inside, and outside the institutional church. Our exploration into the complex matter of women and the Church will look at the Church in the Bahamas, then look at Junkanoo and other theological critiques of Church in Caribbean society.

One finds an ambivalent history of women in the Bahamian Church. Gail Saunders explains that among women in post-emancipation Bahamian society, while the elite and coloured middle class emphasized “formalized institutional structures and systems of belief, the black labouring population combined ‘traditional, evangelical and fundamentalist forms of Christianity with revivalism and spiritualism.’”²² But in such a context though, “Elite women who belonged to the ‘small and narrow’ upper class society upheld the racist attitudes of the day. They imposed their opinion on the society that Africans and their descendants were racially inferior. They therefore had no social contact with the coloured middle class women or blacks except in the mistress and servant relationship.”²³

Further analysing this ambivalence extended to Bahamian society, Nicolette Bethel traces the matrifocal nature of the country and how this is far from reflected in the leadership in civic and ecclesiastical spheres. She argues:

“The Bahamian family, despite relative prosperity among all classes, is both structurally and functionally matrifocal. While middle-class Bahamians still choose to marry, many of these marriages break up while the children are still minors. As a result, mothers, whatever their class background, are likely to be the economic,

social and emotional centres of their children’s lives... The political authority of women, however, remains limited. Few Bahamian women are elected to political offices, and the frame of Bahamian society — the structure of laws, the hierarchy of politics and so on — is dominated by men. Nevertheless, young Bahamian women appear more self-confident and ambitious than their male counterparts”²⁴

The Church has been one of those key areas of Bahamian society where women’s leadership has been absent. In fact, in places where they have been present, the tendency was to be even more institutional in orientation.

While Junkanoo has predominantly involved male participation, largely due to its riotous nature throughout the decades, its late-night dedications, and the stigma surrounding it; one must acknowledge the presence and gifts of women within its undergirding spirituality and on-going development.

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In the African heritage of the Bahamas, women have been key to both spirituality and leadership within the African religious and cultural expressions. Such traditions allowed them the means of energizing an oppressed community towards freedom and self-affirmation. A case in point is the

22 Gail Saunders, *Bahamian Society after Emancipation*, Rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ ; Markus Wiener Publishers: Ian Randle Publishers, 2003), 22.

23 *Ibid.*, 20.

24 Nicolette Bethel, “Bahamian Kinship and the Power of Women” (MPhil, Corpus Christi College, 1993).

Crowing of the Eboe Queen, a tradition within Friendly Societies formed at the turn of the late 19th century, which Roseanne Adderley highlights as a contribution of Liberated Africans in the development of Bahamian society.²⁵ In the late 1880's circuit Judge L.W. Powles, reported that "The Africans still retain their tribal distinctions, and are divided into Yourabas, Egbas, Ebos, Congos, &c. Every August some of these tribes elect a queen whose will is law in certain matters."²⁶ One cannot overlook the significance of August and its relationship to emancipation for people in the Caribbean. Could it be that the very notion of freedom was symbolised by the crowing of women?

Also, women have been most knowledgeable about bush medicine, they have been powerful diviners in Obeah, they are the folklorists and griots, and, as in the case of Junkanoo, they have been key to the implicit spirit possession found within the act of 'rushin'.²⁷ In my ethnographic research into Junkanoo I made careful observation of women's dancing and have come to the conclusion that while descriptions such as sinful, lascivious, fleshy, and slack, have been projected on to the choreographed (mostly female) dancers often by Church people, something else was at work. Careful attention reveals an act of celebration, a breaking out of emotional, social, and religious confines, and particularly the religious and social constrictions on the body.²⁸ These were dances of

freedom, an embodied spirituality crying out for liberation.

This observation finds resonance with Carolyn Cooper's work on dancehall and its function as critique of the oppressive structures of society and the fact that what is displayed, is not to be taken at face value, or described as sexual or slack according to the conservative, dualistic, colonial framework; such categories are not appropriate to the religiocultural production itself. What is taking place, instead, is a highly critical and a potent form of resistance against social and political structures of power.²⁹

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But besides spirituality, women have been key to the development of Junkanoo as well. Women such as Arlene Nash-Ferguson, a prominent Anglican and Junkanoo historian, have taken the practice of Junkanoo into the field of education and operates a experiential educational programme for Bahamian children called 'Educulture'. Academics such as Nicolette Bethel, Vivian Wood, and Reesa Mackey have been leading research into Junkanoo in the Bahamas, particularly pointing out not only its utility, but also its regularization, domestication

25 Rosanne M. Adderley, *"New Negroes from Africa": Slave Trade Abolition and Free African Settlement in the Nineteenth-Century Caribbean*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 118 - 25.

26 L. D. Powles, *Land of the Pink Pearl* (London: S. Low, Marson, Searle and Rivington, 1888), 147.

27 The term 'rushin' refers to the dance move within the Junkanoo parade, or the act of participating within it.

28 My research entailed in-depth interviews and observational research on Junkanoo practices, parades and shacks. The aim of the research was to see how Junkanoo could be seen as a theological resource for the Church, particularly in the need for address what I have called Self-Negation.

29 Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the "Vulgar" Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*, 1st U.S. ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). See also, "Sweet & Sour Sauce: Sexual Politics in Jamaican Dancehall Culture," in *The Sixth Jagan Lecture, 2005* (York University, ON Canada: CERLAC, 2005). Dancehall is a type of music and environment within Jamaican popular culture.

and co-option by government.³⁰

With regard to the royal consciousness of Church, then, women's spirituality and leadership within Junkanoo represents that 'talking back', that protest against the restricted movement of the body in worship, and a model of Church invented to chain and tame the spirit, particularly the spirit of resistance. Two Caribbean women theologians have spoken of this theological act of 'talking back' that we find within African religicultural forms. Firstly, Roman Catholic theologian Ana Kasafi Perkins, speaks about 'talking back' as a method of resistance among women, who have been actors in, and not passive recipients of a plantation system. She writes:

"Talking back is part of the giftedness that Afro-Caribbean women like Ma Bell, Nanny and Anastasia have bequeathed to their offspring and it continues to form Caribbean culture around resistance in a fashion that has much to say to our desire as Catholic men and women to engender the true World Church. Historian Jean Besson establishes that women's lives were and continue to be a central part of an Afro-Caribbean peasant culture of resistance established in the face of the plantation system. Afro-Caribbean women's cultural resistance is rooted in the slavery past where they responded to enslavement not as passive recipients, but as active resisters who used their voices to force slave owners to take notice. Such women participated in

many modes of slave resistance, some similar to men but others peculiar to women. The ways that were typically female included poisoning their master's food and "using their tongues." "Woman tongue" included answering back, satire, complaining, and ridicule."³¹

She gives example of this 'talking back' in her work on Tanya Stephens who she uses to bring theology and dancehall into conversation, showing how Tanya's matured dancehall critiques the dehumanising, misogynistic, male practices endemic of the Caribbean patriarchal system. She writes:

Tanya rejects a certain self important contradictory religion, but not spirituality. In fact, as you have probably already realised, her music is rife with biblical allusions in an almost unconscious fashion. Perhaps this is to be expected having grown up in a society like Jamaica, which is saturated with Christian influences... She decries the suffocating feel that traditional religion has for those who want to be truly religious.³²

Secondly, Marjorie Lewis takes up the theme of 'talking back' and advocates that a concrete example of this resistance to ecclesiastical control would be in the promotion of a Nannyish T'eology, which uses as its exemplar, Nanny of the Marrons. Lewish contends that while Womanist theologians have addressed the tri-fold experience of oppression in race, class and gender, models of

30 See: Bethel, "Junkanoo in the Bahamas: A Tale of Identity."; Vivian Michelle Wood, "'Rushin' Hard and Runnin' Hot: Experiencing the Music of the Junkanoo Parade in Nassau, Bahamas." (PhD, Indiana University, 1995). Ressa Mackey, "All That Glitters Is Not Junkanoo: The National Junkanoo Museum and the Politics of Tourism and Identity" (Florida State University, 2009).

31 Ana Kasafi Perkins, "Engendering a Trinitarian Church in a Plural Society: A Jamaican Reflection," in *12th Conference of Caribbean Theology Today* (2005).

32 Ana Kasafi Perkins, "'Tasting Tears and [Not] Admitting Defeat": Promoting Values and Attitudes through the Music of Tanya Stephens?," in *Inaugural Lecture of the Centre for Social Ethics* (St. Michael's Theological College 2008).

a culturally appropriate critical theology, able to expose and respond to experiences of oppression in both society and Church, must find their sources in the heroines of spiritual and political resistance, as well as the Bible and Christian Traditions.³³ Thus Nanny, for Lewis, represents this 'talking back', or prophetic consciousness, through leadership, spirituality and political strategy.

Men Share...

Gender is quite a complex theme, but in societies such as the Bahamas, it has been forced to follow a dichotomous path. Nicolette Bethel makes the point that in a dichotomous society which promotes the binary of male as 'hard' and female as 'soft', where the academic and the artistic are seen as 'soft' as well, Junkanoo is perhaps the only acceptable domain for the creative/artistic man. Nonetheless, Junkanoo, itself, has to be critiqued for its sexist discourse towards women. She writes:

Despite the fact that many women participate in various ways, from the peripherally sexy appearances of the choreographed dancers to the comparatively few women carrying dancer or beller costumes or appearing as free dancers, it is generally understood that Junkanoo is a man's festival. All but a very few of the major leaders, designers and musicians are men, as are all the important free dancers in Junkanoo. My own position as a researcher of Junkanoo is made both more peripheral and less threatening by the fact that I am female.³⁴

But one definite way in which Junkanoo challenges the colonial legacy of the Church is in its understanding and use of power, particular exercised in the Junkanoo shacks. In fact, one can make a comparison between how the Church operates, and how the shack operates.

Churches in the Bahamas, even if they are Pentecostal and non-denominational, are hierarchically organized. While Anglican and Roman Catholic churches have a clear chain of command with the Bishop at the top, Baptist Churches and alliances are more structured around personalities. Personality clashes and power struggles have often led to the establishment of new churches as was the famous case of Native Baptist in the dispute between Prince Williams's and the Society of Anabaptists after the death of Sambo Scriven in 1823. In retaliation over the control of church finances, in 1832 Williams formed the St. John's Native Baptist Church, very close to the site of its parent church, Bethel Baptist.³⁵

Personality clashes and power struggles have often led to the establishment of new churches.

Even more than the Baptist, the North American mega-church model has become a reality in the nation, at the heart of which are Churches built around the personality and charisma of one person, or a couple. Such is the case of both Bishop Neil Ellis and Rev Dr Myles Munroe, both of whom have come to exercise international success. Myles Munroe's studied at Oral Roberts University and has

33 Marjorie Lewis, "Diaspora Dialogue: Womanist Theology in Engagement with Aspects of the Black British and Jamaican Experience," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 2, no. 1 (2004).

34 Nicolette Bethel, "Engendering the Bahamas: A Gendered Examination of Bahamian Nation Making, or National Identity and Gender in the Bahamian Context," *College of the Bahamas Research Journal* XII (2008).

35 Antonina Canzoneri, "Early History of Baptists in the Bahamas," *Journal of the Bahamas Historical Society* 4, no. 1 (1982).

built not a church per se, but a Christian based company where he is CEO. Neil Ellis is now the Presiding Bishop of the Global United Fellowship, and was in the running for the post of International Presiding Bishop of the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship International until he resigned from that fellowship altogether. Both are based in Nassau, the nation's capital. In large measure then, power in such models are always top-down, and much effort is put into maintaining order and the integrity of structure. Boundaries are sharply drawn and then vigorously policed.

Yet, in contradistinction to the practice of the church, the exercise of power, particularly in the confines of the Junkanoo shack, is egalitarian, and communally dispersed. Arlene Nash-Ferguson describes this as a "crude building used for the purpose of building and storing Junkanoo costumes."³⁶ But while it is shrouded in secrecy, and open to trusted membership only, once in the shack, power is not hierarchal. Darren Bastian makes the following comment about the shack: "The Junkanoo shack is now a place where the king meets and interacts with the peasant (for lack of a better analogy). The socioeconomic lines are erased and technically "all a we is one"; one family (every pun intended), one people seeking to tap into our roots (no pun intended)."³⁷ Nash goes on to state:

Your troops come from all over the island, and from all walks of life. They are all ages, and of all religious denominations. Their reasons for being a part of your group are as varied as they are. Doctors, electricians, policemen, morticians, fishermen, nurses, teachers and carpenters, will

appear and follow your direction. Your boss might appear at the door, sided by side with your newspaper boy, to follow your direction!³⁸

Furthermore, the act of 'rushin' onto Bay Street by the Over-the-Hill, Black and poor communities, is precisely about critiquing power. Nicolette Bethel explains:

Junkanoo has the quality of an occupation, an invasion of the centres of authority; it occurs at the heart of the commercial power of the white Bahamian elite. This symbolism is still implicit in the parades. Although today they follow a circular route, Bahamians still refer metonymously to the act of attending or participating in the parades as "going to Bay Street" — the focus of anti-black discrimination, the site of legislation, and the heart of commerce — and until 1998 the subversion of the everyday state of affairs was emphasized by the fact that the Junkanoo parades ran counter to the normal one-way traffic system of the downtown area. For many black Bahamians, then, Junkanoo embodies their best response to the dehumanization of slavery and its aftermath.³⁹

While interviewing a leader within one of the Junkanoo groups, he said the following about the Shack and how it prophetically challenges the practices of the Church:

Trust me, we have a lot to offer when it comes to Junkanoo.

36 Arlene Nash-Ferguson, *I Come to Get Me! An inside Look at the Junkanoo Festival* (Bahamas: Doongalik Studios, 2000), 86.

37 Darren Bastian, "Perspective on the Future of Junkanoo," in *Junkanoo and Religion: Christianity and Cultural Identity in the Bahamas* (Media Enterprises, 2003), 39.

38 Nash-Ferguson, 20.

39 Bethel, "Junkanoo in the Bahamas: A Tale of Identity," 122.

And if people take some of the same practice that we use in those groups and take it to the Church, the Church would be a better place. We live as one in those Junkanoo Shacks. You buy a loaf of bread, you share it. You buy a soda, you share it. We look out for each other. In some of these Churches Carlton, some of your members will see you dropping down and wouldn't give you nothing, and they have it to give you. We don't do that in those shacks. In the shack, we call it shack life. We live for one another. That's what the Church needs. The Church needs, that when your member hurting, and they got to lean on you, that ain't nobody business. That ain't no one business. Let's come together, you help a brother over there and he hurting.⁴⁰

The shack then becomes quite a peculiar place with regard to the exercise of power. Somehow the hierarchal structure endemic in Bahamian society, particularly the Church, is turned on its head. Community becomes more important than personality. Shared life and resources are prioritised over personal ego. In this way it resembles an alternative community nurturing prophetic consciousness.

Everybody Rush...

Royal consciousness within the colonial mind-set from which the Caribbean was formed, meant that the rules and regulations of the Church, its doctrine and confession, and also its leadership structure were to remain inflexible, with no place for negotiation and change. In the

case of the Bahamas, an imposed binary existed between the following:

White Church vs. Black Church:

Cleveland Enneas makes the point that whilst the missionary churches in post emancipation Bahamian society established their mother churches along the centre of commerce, Bay Street, (The Anglicans built Christ Church Cathedral and St. Matthews; The Methodists built Trinity and Ebenezer; The Baptist built Zion and the Methodists built St. Andrews Kirk), due to racial tensions, Black and coloured people began building their own churches in the Over-the-Hill area (St. Agnes was built by the Anglicans; Grants' Town Wesley, was built by the Methodists; and Bethel Baptist and St. John's Native Baptist, were built by the Baptist).⁴¹

White Section vs. Black Section:

What was normative across the Caribbean was very much a practice in post-Emancipation Bahamian society. Concerning the Mother Churches, Enneas writes, "all of these bespeak of affluence, prestige and exclusiveness, and had very little interest in the salvation of the slaves. In all these churches, there were those segregated sections relegated to the master's vassals, who endured, but didn't enjoy their segregation in the worship of that Christ who, they were taught, was the savior of all men."⁴²

Proper Worship Vs. Heathen Worship:

The inter-denominational dynamics of late 19th and early 20th century Bahamian church life was such that proper worship was applied to churches of sound doctrine. For example, in 1799, the SPG missionary on Long Island, Rev D.W. Rose, reported that slaves there were

40 This excerpt was taken from an In-depth Interview with a Junkanoo Group leader as part of my ethnographic research into the relationship between Junkanoo and the Church in Bahamian society, July 2011.

41 Cleveland W. Eneas, "The Quincentennial Celebration: Its Relevance to the Bahamian Church," in *Our Christian Heritage: 1492 - 1992*, ed. The Bahamas Quincentennial Commission's Religious Pageant Committee and The Bahamas Christian Council (Nassau, Bahamas: The Bahamas Christian Council, 1992), 25.

42 *ibid.*

calling themselves Baptists, “followers of St. John... Their preachers, black men, were artful and designing, making a merchandise of Religion. One of them was so impious as to proclaim that he had had a familiar conversation with the Almighty, and to point out the place where he had seen Him.”⁴³ In 1816 the “Act for the preventing the profanation of Religious Rites and also worshipping of God, under the pretence of preaching and teaching, by illiterate, ignorant, and ill disposed persons; and also for the better regulation of Methodist missionaries and other dissenting preachers, within these islands” was passed.⁴⁴

Male leadership vs. Female leadership only:
In the Anglican Diocese of the Bahamas, once the Established Church in the colony, the first female priest was consecrated only in 2000. In 1973 the Bahamas became an independent nation. It also had just had its first Black Anglican Bahamian Bishop.⁴⁵ It was inconceivable that a woman would become an ordained minister, an incumbent in a parish, a rector, or even a Bishop. In large measure, Bahamian Anglican polity had definite roles for women: the teaching of Sunday School, particularly for little children, Cook-outs and the organization social events, etc.

Whilst the Church is understood as stagnant, Junkanoo is integrative by nature.

But whilst the Church is understood as stagnant, with set roles and designations for its binary opposites, Junkanoo is integrative by nature. As I have argued elsewhere Junkanoo, as community space, brings a multiplicity of voices, classes, cultural and ethnic influences, and experiences into dialogue and interaction. It is fundamentally a dialectical and creative interaction between the individual and the community.⁴⁶ British Black Theologian Anthony Reddie, in speaking about the improvisation inherent in Black artistic and dramatic forms, explains that they function to challenge hegemony and injustice. In particular, they allow suppressed voices to emerge from the prevailing narratives. In speaking of carnival festivals within the Caribbean and the Americas, including Bahamian Junkanoo, he states:

Black slaves used this opportunity of the relative freedom of carnival to design and construct elaborate costumes in order to engage in ostentatious forms of dramatic behaviour that affirmed their basic humanity while mimicking the brutal and hypocritical practices of their so-called Christian slave masters.⁴⁷

As movement, Junkanoo also promotes flow and ‘communitas’, and is an exercise of street theatre. Keith Wisdom, drawing on Victor Turner’s concepts, highlights the creative and integrative nature of the festival in Bahamian society, and characterises it as social drama, street theatre, and an exercise in liminality. His argument is that Junkanoo brings

43 Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People*, vol. 1: From Aboriginal Times to the End of Slavery (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 331.

44 *Ibid.*, 332.

45 The Rev. Angela Palacios became the first ordained woman to the Diocese of the Bahamas in 2000. The first Black Bahamian Bishop of the Diocese of the Bahamas was Rt. Rev. Michael Eldon. He saw it as his duty to raise up native clergy persons.

46 Carlton Turner, “Junkanoo in Bahamaland: Community Space and Missional Space” (Unpublished MA, University of Birmingham 2009). Carlton Turner, *Junkanoo and Christianity: Community Space as Missional Space in Bahamaland*, Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2009.

47 Anthony Reddie, *Dramatizing Theologies: A Participative Approach to Black God-Talk*, Cross Cultural Theologies (London ; Oakville, CT: Equinox Pub., 2006), 40.

the disparate classes, races, and sexes together in Bahamian society, in dramatic fashion.⁴⁸ He also concludes that the transformative power in Junkanoo is that it has the capacity to take any 'junk' and make it 'new', therefore deserving the name 'Junkanoo'.

In the end, comparisons between the practice of Junkanoo and the practices of the Church, reveal that the former is open to change, and allows space for multiple viewpoints to interact. It is movement. The Church, largely following a colonial or institutional model seems more resistant to change. It is resistant to flow, and creativity.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that Junkanoo functions as an alternative prophetic community particularly in its critique of royal consciousness endemic in Bahamian and wider Caribbean society. It does so in how it enables women to 'talk back', a method of resistance deeply entrenched in stigmatised African religiocultural productions such as dancehall. Secondly, it proposes a new understanding of power, one that is shared, communal, and highly critical of existing exercises of power, particularly in the Church. Finally, it allows integration, dialogue, and change.

But these three find representation in the earliest accounts of Christianity, particularly the Gospel of John. While the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, follow a linear chronological progression, and are seen to be more historical, the Gospel of John is very hard to pin down. Commenting on Jean Vanier's wisdom interpretation of the Gospel of John, David Ford explains:

John's Gospel is the most puzzling of the four. Nearly everything

about it is subject to dispute - dating, authorship, contributions of later editors, community of origin and its opponents, relation to the other three Gospels, relation to Judaism, relation to Greek thought, culture and religion, historical veracity, and literary structure.⁴⁹

However, the text seems to militate against certainties and fixed meanings, and invites the reader into newer truths and deeper insights. For example, in the Farewell Discourse (Chapters 13 - 17), there is Jesus constant admonition to his disciples that they did not have all they needed as yet: "It is better for you that I go away" (16:7); "You will do greater things..." (John 14:12); "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:12 - 14).

Moreover, Ford explains, like Vanier, that the Fourth Gospel cannot be interpreted with an overemphasis on the indicative or the imperative mood, but rather in the interrogative and optative, in questioning and desire.⁵⁰ The community of believers at the heart of the Gospel are working out what it means to be Church and what it means to be disciples, and the heart of their approach isn't inviolable received doctrine, but rather discernment and wisdom in the face of a mystery that constantly eludes them.

When we come to John's narration of the Jesus' ministry, women experiences reveal a distinctive spirituality and strong leadership. In fact, in Jesus' interactions with women we find the interrogative and the optative at work. Deep cries concerning the realities of life come to light.

One such example of this is John 4. In the passage Jesus encounters a Samaritan

48 Keith Gordon Wisdom, "Bahamian Junkanoo: An Act in Modern Social Drama" (PhD, University of Georgia, 1985).

49 David Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 376.

50 Ibid.

woman at Jacob's well, and in the course of a potential explosive conversation, the distinction between them, woman/man, Samaritan/Jew, holy/defiled, are erased. He discloses to her his mystical nature, his purpose in quenching deepest desires of human beings, and she, unlike the Jewish Pharisee in the previous chapters, Nicodemus, understands and proclaims him as Messiah to those in her town: "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He can not be the Messiah, can he?" (John 4:29).

But a further exegesis of John 4 reveals the pneumatological imagery of her interactions with Jesus. It is interesting that their conversation goes into the area of true worship, a bitter point of contention between Jews and Samaritans in 1st Century Palestine. He reveals to her the following about boundaries and divisions concerning worship:

"Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:21 - 24)

The Samaritan woman is but one example of the women featured prominently throughout the 4th Gospel. Jesus defends the woman caught in adultery, about to lose her life to suit the hypocritical legalism of the Scribes and Pharisees, (John 8). To Mary and Martha, close friends with Jesus, He reveals himself to be the Resurrection and the Life, (John 11). He appears firstly to Mary Magdalene and she becomes the one

to carry the first Easter message, (John 20). At the crucifixion, it is the women, save the Beloved Disciple, who endure the agony of Jesus' passion while the men run away (John 19:25 - 27). John's Gospel characterise women as strong, wise disciples, deeply experiencing God's revelation in Jesus, and passing on their experiences to others.

With regard to power, John's Gospel portrays Jesus as the antithesis of imperial and ecclesiastical power and authority. In his Good Shepherd teaching (John 10), part of his imagery of nurture and care, is that of laying down his life for the sheep. While the thief comes to kill, steal and destroy, he comes to bring abundant life (John 10:10). Scholars agree that this passage is an allusion to Ezekiel 34, where the prophet compares the political and religious leaders of God's people to uncaring, abusive, unfaithful and bad shepherds who eventually consume the sheep themselves. But, perhaps the most dramatic display of the John's understanding of power is found at Jesus' trial before Pilate. Concerning kingship:

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?' (John 18:33 - 38, NRSV)

And concerning power:

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' (John 19:8 - 11, NRSV)

While power for Pilate means holding onto control, for Jesus it means giving up control. There is a communitarian nature to it, and the sharing of resources is paramount. While the values of the empire advocated bloodshed and domination, the early Jesus movement lived by the values of sacrifice for the sake of others.

Finally, instead of ecclesiastical structures, John's Gospel presents us with a lively drama of a living community centred around Jesus. Raymond Brown explains that there is an absence of descriptions of the Early Christian communities as "Church" or "People of God" or "Body of Christ". Instead, there are images such as Vine and Branches (John 15), Shepherd and Flock (John 10).⁵¹ Brown explains that these conceptions of the Christian community are not as simple as they seem, for they involve both individual connections to Jesus, the Shepherd and

51 Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

52 Ibid., 226.

53 Ford, 55.

the Vine, and a communal connection centred around Jesus. He writes:

... I have stressed that there was no sharp distinction between community and personal union with Jesus. The foundation of community is the response of individuals to Jesus as the revealer of God and the unique way to God, but those individuals form a unity.⁵²

But John's Gospel is also uniquely creative. In the Prologue of John's Gospel, David Ford notes the following:

John is rewriting the opening of the Bible... He is doing something daringly new, and not only with Genesis 1. In the Prologue he does it with Proverbs, Exodus and other texts too. It is a form of what Jewish interpreters call 'midrash': taking the plain sense seriously but going beyond it, linking it with other texts, asking new questions of it, extending the meaning, discovering depths, resonances and applications of it that have been suggested before.⁵³

In much the same manner, Junkanoo, through drama and improvisation, recreates and transforms static notions of Church. Therefore, Walter Brueggemann's concepts of royal consciousness and prophetic consciousness are helpful ways of interrogating this complex relationship in contemporary Bahamian society.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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