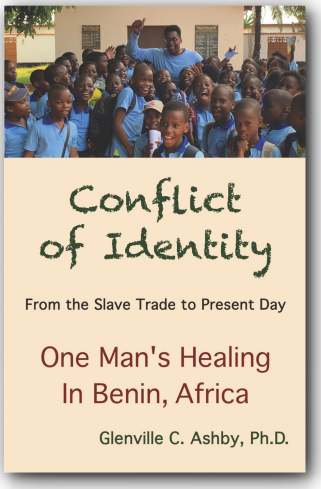

Conflict of Identity: From the Slave Trade to Present Day – One Man's Healing in Benin, Africa, explores the psychological trauma of the slave trade and slavery. It advances practical solutions, such as womb therapy and the 4–R Model toward conflict resolution and healing.

Conflict of Identity:

From the Slave Trade to Present Day

One Man's Healing in Benin, Africa

By Glenville C. Ashby, Ph.D.

Conflict of Identity

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One Man's Healing In Benin, Africa

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Post Traumatic Slave Trade Syndrome (PTSTS)

"There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds."

— Laurell K. Hamilton

"If you can just imagine a coastal village that is peaceful and uneventful; that would be a great description of my family, the Fante people of coastal Ghana. Suddenly, that calm is disrupted, never to return. Imagine observing strange looking people arriving by sea with weapons that you have never encountered, weapons that could destroy you in a second. You have no chance to defend yourself or your family. Your family is abducted and taken away to a place that no one could envision, never to be seen again. They are gone for good. What do you really talk about? Talk and cry, to whom? There is so much pain that those who

experienced it never spoke about it in any detail. The pain is still great. Some of our people were taken at gunpoint into the interior to help find more huno one couldman cargo. Complicit? You cooperated to save yourself, your family, your village. If you did not do it, someone would…and you will be dead. It is so easy to sit back and judge centuries later but the kind of terrorism my ancestors, and your ancestors experienced, is incomprehensible. If someone says with a broad brush that we sold each other, they really do not understand."

Kukuwa Kyereboah - African Dance and Culture Instructor and former Adjunct Professor at George Mason University, School of Dance

"The legacy of the Atlantic Slave Trade has diminished the dignity of every black person, regardless of his or her intrinsic qualities. Thus all blacks --rulers, traders, and war captives alike -- became victims or potential victims."

Professor Lansiné Kaba, Carnegie Mellon, Qatar

"The slave trade ravaged the natural and human potential of both lands. Colonialism has caused the

psychological defeat and self-loathing of black people in general."

Afrikana Chihombori, M.D.,

There is a loud silence in Benin when it comes to the slave trade. They do acknowledge slavery and its tremendous toll on the Diaspora; they were heartfelt when they embraced me as a son returning home. I saw it on their faces – the curiosity, the need to shake hands, and even embrace. Every exchange was authentic; I would never second-guess those moments. However, a pall descends over our interaction when I mention the slave trade. There is an aversion to discussing Africa's darkest chapter. I broached the subject to anyone I thought approachable and got similar results. I immediately harked back to the canards in Trinidad and Tobago that spoke of Africa's disregard for the Diaspora, that they sold us to the highest bidder, that we were not African regardless of how much we claim to be, and that if we go to Africa we will not be accepted. I reasoned that much of what we were taught could not be true. After all, did I not experience their warmth and their nods of recognition? There was something, inexplicable to their timidity over the slave

trade. I probed deeper and with growing trust, I was finally able to make sense of it all.

My dance teacher Kukuwa Kyereboah so vividly recounted the harsh reality of the slave trade. Kukuwa was born in Ghana and is steeped in her nation's history, especially that of Fante, her ethnic group. She was able to capture the defining moments of that period: the rape, the kidnappings, the betrayals, the duress, the existential decisions that many were forced to make. At the height of the slave trade, African societies were at the mercy of Darwinian forces.

Trauma lingers generationally, especially when it involved the rape of boys, girls, and women. While there are no existing statistics on this subject, I figure that a large percentage of families in Benin can, but will not, attest to the most shameful violations borne by their ancestors.

My teacher Joseph Adokpo did not easily reveal information regarding the kidnapping of his great grandfather. Should I expect anyone to be forthcoming when rape is involved? Africa's silence is rooted in the trauma of the slave trade. Of that, I am convinced.

The Cry of Silence

"The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma."

— Judith Lewis Herman

Africa and Africans have become the scapegoat for some of us in the Diaspora. We project the injuries of slavery on those that are least blameworthy.

Detractors of Pan Africanism have long argued that Africans sold each other into slavery, thus inviting the Maafa (Black Holocaust) unto themselves. It follows that they are undeserving of much sympathy. Oftentimes repeated and left unchallenged, this comment, inaccurate as it is, has caused division and confusion in the African Diaspora. In May of 2019, I received a letter from a reader regarding my article, **Mixed Emotions at** Ouidah Museum of History (The Jamaica Gleaner, April 28, 2019).

He has always been candid, sometimes very critical of my views. In this case, he misconstrued my comments regarding African kings and their complicity in the slave trade. He wrote,

"Anyway, with regard to last week's article, I wanted to point out that at least one Benin King, Behanzin, was deported or exported to Martinique because he didn't agree with what the French were doing to his country. I also wanted to point out that European conquests followed a similar pattern in India, Africa and the Americas. Conquests were always followed by the installation of puppet leaders. Why then, do you have mixed feelings about the part Africans played in the slave trade? Puppet kings had no autonomous power. Europeans were in Africa to exploit it and they were going to get their way.

"On the issue of artifacts, how did English planters in Jamaica reward their slaves who planted the sugar cane? You saw artifacts in a Museum at Ouidah, and you use those artifacts as proof that Africans kings sold their people into slavery; but there are also artifacts of slaves in the Americas. Are we to believe that those European artifacts that were given to good slaves, serve

as proofs that slaves voluntarily subjected themselves to slavery for the benefit of Europeans?

"I enjoy your articles, but as I have said before, in the almost 14 years that I have been doing my own independent research, I have not seen any argument which convinces that Africans acted differently from the Jews of WWII Germany in cooperating with the Nazis or Montezuma King of the Aztecs becoming a puppet king to Cortes. Nobody blames the Jews for selling out each other and nobody blames the puppet Montezuma king for enslaving his own people, because they did not. They were puppets, just like the Africans."

The reader is obviously correct. There is much to discern behind the curtains of puppet kings and puppet governments.

I think Kukuwa said it best: "If you did not cooperate, you and your people would have been killed, and then someone else would surely cooperate so they and their loved one would not suffer a similar fate."

We miss the mark when we make over-generalizations such as; *Africa's silence is an admission of guilt and shame for complicity in the Slave Trade*. Nothing could be further from the truth. What I found is that the aftermath of the

slave trade cast a pall over Benin that bore curious similarities to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder experienced by victims of brutal sexual assault and soldiers surviving the gore of war.

Trauma is a psychological, physical, mental or emotional scarring caused by the abrupt, painful disruption of the body's natural function or equilibrium. It indicates a break or severance of the natural order of things.

A blow to the body can lead to visual bruising, discoloration and/or swelling. Medical attention is sought or the area impacted can heal itself over time, depending on the severity of the wound. Because the body and mind (emotional and psychological component) function as a unit, the victim must be treated therapeutically. For example, victims of rape and assault, children who experience the death or abandonment of loved ones and victims of child abuse, carry psychological scars that are generational.

The ego is our point of reference; our psycho-emotional and cognitive construct that we use to interact with the outside world. This construct is nurtured by the child's support network. In the case of African societies,

kinship and community are paramount and supersede the individual. It is from these sources that the child ingests values and establishes its social and cosmological place in the family.

The first reaction of the ego or the mental filter is to eject a painful experience but, if unsuccessful, it must find ways to process it through defense mechanism or adaptations. This is the only way that the mind can function in a reasonably rational way. Even with skilled help, be it from a clinician or traditional priest, full rehabilitation is difficult and sometimes impossible.

In the absence of professional help, the mind attempts to regulate its own functioning as a means of preventing a complete break in the ego. This takes the form of ego defenses to prevent a break in reality or psychosis. These defense mechanisms are, in effect, the natural response of the mind to stressors.

Trauma creates what I call the **wounded self**. The slave trade unleashed a wave of terror throughout villages. Violent kidnappings, wars for human cargo, beatings, rape, branding, hours-long marches in chains in the dead of night to processing centers, incarceration, and mass killings of sick and pregnant women (unable to

survive the Middle Passage), traumatized -- once thriving -- communities. Those who managed to flee the constant assault sought refuge in Ganvie, in Benin, a lake village that stands today. Its encompassing water provided some tactical advantage against enslavers.

To survive, not only physically and mentally, the "**protective self**" emerged. Distrust replaces trust, aggression replaces passivity, and in some cases, withdrawal takes the place of camaraderie. Self-loathing, denial, and projection are also symptoms of Post Traumatic Slave Trade Syndrome. Learned over time, these traits become generational.

Notably, the terror of the slave trade experienced up to the end of the nineteenth century in some African countries, such as Dahomey (now Benin), was selectively transmitted through Oral Tradition by the not-too-distant forebears of present-day Africans. Understandably, this pain was hidden, buried deep in the unconscious.

It is only in 1980 that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PSTD) was recognized for its particular symptoms, and included in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. These symptoms are persistent avoidance of

distressing memories, thoughts or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic events (i.e., people, places, conversations, activities, objects, and situations[1]).

Trauma – Its many faces

- Can be caused by the exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways: directly experiencing the traumatic event, witnessing the event as it occurred to others, or learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend.

- The presence of one (or more) of the following intrusion symptoms associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning after the trauma has occurred: experiencing recurrent, involuntary distressing memories, dreams, or flashbacks of the traumatic event; experiencing psychological or physiological distress at exposure to cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s).

[1] https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/posttraumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/symptoms

- The persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s) after the traumatic event has occurred. Victims of sexual assault and soldiers returning from combat service are generally at risk of these kinds of pain. In many occasions, because of the trauma they experienced in the past, they tend to switch off their response to stimuli, which invariably opens them to experiences that are more traumatic. In the case of many female slaves who were raped during the voyage to the Americas, the avoidance of stimuli became persistent because of the numerous times they were raped.

The slave trade was defined by its vicious sexual pathologies. The Kingdom of Dahomey (1688-1894) in Abomey was well known for its commercial and diplomatic ties with the Portuguese slavery traders. This complicity by African Kings ensured their dominance over other ethnicities. During the height of the slave trade, Portugal furnished the Kings with new commodities, of which food and material defense were most notable. Military hardware, in particular, canons, were exchanged for the "finest" slaves. One canon was worth 15 strong males or 21 female slaves. Female slaves were prized for their youthfulness, virginity, and

firm, pointed breasts that gave them the revolting moniker: "Canon Girls".

Further, women and adolescent girls were chained and positioned on their backs (the men were in a prone position) during the perilous 10-week Middle Passage. This tactful positioning made it easier for female slaves to be raped.

The Portuguese traders' obsession with virginity and satisfying their most brutal fantasies redefined the slave trade as a network of sexual violence and exploitation. Eurocentric historians preferred to sanitize the trade of human cargo never highlighted its gore.

Guilt, like shame, is associated with silence. Victims of sexual violence recoil into a world of silence triggered by shame. A leading researcher on the psychological causes and effects of shame, June Tangney, lists four ways shame can be destructive: lack of motivation, lack of empathy, isolation, and aggression. I cannot help but use this yardstick to understand the continent vis-à-vis slavery. .

The Slave Trade and Survivor Guilt

Psychanalyst William Niederland coined the term "survivor syndrome" to describe the mental and physical symptoms of survivors of the Holocaust. One notable symptom was that of impending doom. Arnold Modell developed on this theory to include members in a family setting. What he found was very interesting: survivors could go to lengths to experience the pain of the not so fortunate.

The Maafa or the African Holocaust spanned centuries and while it differs psycho-dynamically from the Holocaust of World War II, there are some marked similarities in respect to shame and guilt. The helplessness of a people in the face of genocidal terror weighs on, not only the mind of immediate survivors, but also on the collective. Perennial questions are asked: How could this tragedy have been avoided? What more could we have done as a people? Are we culpable in any way for what we suffered?

Dr. Matthew Tull, author of *The Connection between PTSD and Suicide - Fear and Isolation are Risk Factors*, writes, "People with a diagnosis of PTSD are also at greater risk to attempt suicide. Among people who

have had a diagnosis of PTSD at some point in their lifetime, approximately 27% have also attempted suicide[2]."

Not surprisingly, the slave trade was characterized by an alarmingly high suicide rate that remains unexplored.

According to Manuel Barcia's *Going Back Home: Slave Suicide in 19th century Cuba,*

"Before and during the Middle Passage, suicides seem to have been a recurrent difficulty as well. Just before boarding the ships on the coast, the already enslaved men and women self-destroyed in a wide range of manners. Alongside escapes, suicides were the main reason of concern for slave traders while loading the ships. If captured, slaves could try repeatedly, resorting to other violent means of resistance such as self-mutilation or the assassination of crewmembers and land-based merchants. The fears of facing events like these were so somber that some contemporary writers, such as the Frenchman Jacques Savary, urged slave

[2] (https://www.verywellmind.com/ptsd-and-suicide-2797540)

vessels' captains to take a rapid departure after stacking their ships. For Savary, once the 'cargo' was on board and ready to depart, captains should sail right away. He saw the character of the Africans and the love they felt for their land as the principal causes for this necessary rush.

"The reasons for this is that the slaves have such a great love for their land that they despair to see that they are leaving it forever, and they die from sadness. I have heard merchants who participated in this commerce affirm that more Negroes die before leaving port than during the voyage. Some throw themselves into the sea and others knock their heads against the ship; some hold their breath until they suffocate and others starve themselves."

Savary was sadly right. Several of these cases were recorded during the centuries of the transatlantic slave Trade. A document found by historian Stuart Schwartz in the National Library of Lisbon describes one of these scenes. In 1812, Captain Felipe Nery wrote that while the vessel under his command was entering in the River Zaire in West Central Africa, three of the slaves he was carrying out threw "themselves into the sea" after being whipped.

It was on these ships that consummate fear was experienced -- a fear of being eaten by their capturers. Dwayne Wong argues in *Why didn't Africa Rescue Us,* that many slaves shared their terror with Portuguese traders in Gambia, citing Olaudah Equiano's experience. "When I looked around the ship too and saw a large furnace or copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together; every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow," he wrote, "I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. When I recovered a little, I found some black people about me, who I believed were some of those who brought me on board and had been receiving their pay; they talked to me in order to cheer me, but all in vain. I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and loose hair. They told me I was not and one of the crew brought me a small portion of spirituous liquor in a wine glass; but, being afraid of him, I would not take it out of his hand."

Of the impact of the slave trade on African societies, Wong writes, "The slave trade placed tremendous stress on African societies. There was the ever-present

fear of being kidnapped and taken away. No one, including the family members of the ruling class, was safe from the slave trade. In fact, even the slave traders themselves were not safe. There is the example of Daaga, a slave trader who was captured and taken to Trinidad where he led a rebellion. For centuries, the slave trade was an unstoppable force in Africa that was beyond the power of any one ruler or one kingdom to completely stop, so very often rulers were forced to make compromises with the Europeans."

He concludes, "The slave trade was not only horrible for those who were captured and sold. It was a very devastating and traumatic experience for the ones who escaped being captured. This point should be understood because as African Americans, West Indians, and Africans, we have all been victimized by the slave trade[3]."

On a psychological level, the slave trade produced a new kind of fear. Overwhelming distrust, anxiety and paranoia also transformed the fabric of village life. People banded together to perform routine tasks for

3 https://medium.com/@dwomowale/why-didnt-africans-rescue-us-cf80a5591330

fear of capture. Members of one's own ethnic group became intermediaries and facilitators in what had become a lucrative business. The probability of being kidnapped was extremely high; rape and capture of women were commonplace, while boys and young men were among the prized commodities.

One eyewitness, Alexander Falconbridge, chronicles his experience:

"There is great reason to believe that most of the Negroes shipped off from the coast of Africa are kidnapped. I was told by a Negro that as she was on her return home, one evening, from some neighbors, to whom she had been making a visit by invitation, she was kidnapped; and, notwithstanding she was big with child, sold for a slave. This transaction happened a considerable way up the country and she had passed through the hands of several purchasers before she reached the ship….

"A man and his son, according to their own information were seized by professional kidnappers, while they were planting yams, and sold for slaves. This likewise happened in the interior parts of the country, and after passing through several hands, they were purchased for

the ship to which I belonged. It frequently happens that those who kidnap others are themselves, in their turns, seized and sold." (Falconbridge 1788).

The psychodynamics of this African experience is different to that of slavery. Slavery and the post-slavery era were defined by plural societies where social stratification was based on color and class, and the molding of the new Negro to hate his origins and glorify the established institutions of his oppressor, while at the same time struggling internally with Eurocentric racism.

The symptoms of racial and color abuse are not unlike those of child sex abuse:

1) The victim responds or adapts in the following ways: projecting blame on others and not the real culprit; in this case, Africans are blamed for slavery and ablution is accorded the white colonizer; and

2) There is an overarching need to satisfy the abuser; in this case, validation is sought in the Diaspora by mirroring the colonizer.

In Africa on the other hand, the colonizer, after wringing the continent dry, withdrew after

handpicking political "heirs," leaving a state of wretchedness and the framework for ethnic-political rivalries. Compounded by natural disasters, the African, still in the throes of PTSD remained silent on the principal cause of their woes.

In her seminal work, *Death and Dying*, Elizabeth Kuber-Ross outlined the stages of grieving after a loss.

Denial: "It can't be happening to me. I don't believe it. It can't be true."

Anger: "If it is happening, I'm mad as hell and I'm going to fight this all the way."

Bargaining: "If I just really do this different and that different, can I avoid this loss?"

Depression: "Now I really feel sad. I don't want to go out; talk to anyone. I cry a lot."

Acceptance: "I realize she's not coming back and it still hurts a little but doesn't stop me in my tracks anymore."

In the case of the African, grief was enormous. As I read Kuber-Ross, I recalled the shrug of my tour guide when I asked about his feelings.

Surely, many Africans can identify with this model. The first stage of denial represents the incredulity and shock of the trauma that befell them. Of course, anger will follow. Many, I am sure negotiated and bargained to avoid the inevitable as seen in Stage 3. Captivity must have brought feelings of depression and fatalism and acceptance as outlined in Stages 4 and 5.

Indeed, both oppressed groups (in the Caribbean and Africa) developed their own peculiar coping mechanisms. In her groundbreaking work *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, Dr. Joyce DeGruy outlines the psychodynamics that characterize the black experience in the Americas. Clearly, they differ from the Africans' experience.

She identifies vacant esteem, ever-present anger and racist socialization. Of the latter, she writes, "It is not uncommon for people being held captive to take on the views and attitudes of their captors. At times, under the stressful conditions associated with being held captive, people can identify so closely with their tormentors they become like them. This transition has been known to occur after months of captivity and sometimes even after only a few weeks. So, what do you think might

happen to a people who have been held captive for years?" (p. 134)

Plantation culture and post-slavery society institutionally produced new attitudes, values, and belief patterns that moved the Diaspora away from Africa and to an uneasy alignment with its oppressor. Victims of slavery (not the slave trade) turned their anger inward, reviling their personhood and black skin, saving the harshest criticism for Africans for having sold them into slavery, while white society and their oppressors seemingly absolved from culpability.

Silence, arguably a kind of fatalism, begins in the home, spreading to schools and the wider society although the evidence of a tortured past is in plain sight.

Slavery: The Aftermath

"No pen can give an adequate description of the all-pervading corruption produced by slavery."

— Harriet Ann Jacobs

Africa is the womb and the center of healing for its children. It forms the psychological, spiritual, emotional, and material foundation for those that share its blood. The synthesis of these four layers leads to purposeful living. The problems we face as a people are rooted in the wanton desecration of the womb and the myopic approach to healing. Afrocentric therapy is the only modality that will effectively address our displacement. Blood ties us to the womb regardless of where we are physically. The recognition of this unbreakable nexus to Africa is paramount to real healing.

Over lifetimes, we have been cut off from the nurturance of the womb. We (Africans at home and abroad) have remained wounded since the Great Tragedy, i.e., the slave trade and slavery. Not only have

we been victims of systematic and systemic conditioning aimed at psychologically removing us from the womb -- we have taken on new identities and new egos to adapt to new environments. The **new ego** to which we identify as the **real self** is individualistic, self-serving, competitive and void of the foundational principles of the womb. Kinship, communalism, natural spirituality, environmentalism, cosmology, and the lineage are sacrificed at a self-serving altar. Identification with the **false self** has led to a host of maladaptive problems that centers on survival. Those of us in the Diaspora are beset with unique challenges that have created a different psychodynamic response to that observed in Africa. We have adopted values, behavioral patterns, and belief systems aimed at coping with our separation from the womb.

I make this statement not to engage in competitive victimhood but to highlight the ongoing implications of this great tragedy that claimed 17,000,000 lives according to UNESCO estimates.

On the other hand, victims in Africa and throughout the Americas, for various reasons, refuse to revisit an event that continues to have negative effects on their lives.

Scholars and activists in the Caribbean have actively pursued legal recourse to redress this injustice. In my article *The Black Holocaust - Behind a Global Economic System that Killed and Enslaved Millions*, (The Jamaica Gleaner, October 21, 2018), I wrote, "One of the most unique aspects of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was its indispensability. The European and American economies were built around this hub. Banking institutions, private financiers, insurance companies, shipping companies, traders, merchants, architects, politicians, the planter class, small investors, and builders all profited from the pillaging and enslavement of Africans."

In *How Slavery Helped Build a World Economy*, we learn how each plantation was part of an international economic and banking system – "As American financial and shipping companies expanded throughout the southern region, banks, and financial houses in New York supplied the loan capital and/or investment capital to purchase land and slaves. Recruited, as an inexpensive source of labor, enslaved Africans in the United States also became important economic and political capital in the American political economy. Enslaved Africans were legally a form of property - a

commodity. Individually and collectively, they were frequently used as collateral in all kinds of business transactions. They were also traded for other kinds of goods and services ... used to secure loans to purchase additional land or slaves (and) to pay off outstanding debts. When calculating the value of estates, the estimated value of each slave was included. This became the source of tax revenue for local and state governments. Taxes were also levied on slave transactions." - An excerpt from The Emergence of African-American Culture by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library (National Geographic Books, 2003)

Over time, blacks, warehoused in so called inner cities have become desensitized to a new kind of deadly violence. Tainted by death, loss, and a surfeit of sorrow and grief, children often suffer intense anxieties related to a sense of "death immersion" (Parson, 1988) or what Lifton (1982) has identified in adult survivor groups as the "death imprint." Death-related anxiety comes from identification with the dead and the sense of being trapped in death with the deceased relative, friend, or other persons who died. Rage, over physical and

psychological injuries endured, often prevents processing of sadness, grief, and sorrow.

Some of the indicators of a damaged psychic structure following urban violence are:

(1) Cumulative grief and mourning
(2) Feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness
(3) A sense of betrayal and defilement
(4) Fears of recurring trauma and violence
(5) The expectation of danger and violence
(6) A loss of future orientation
(7) Feelings of incompetence and an external loss of control over life events
(8) A disposition for self-abuse
(9) Detachment and a loss of bonding capacity
(10) Dysfunctional socialization -- a reversal of the normal, healthy patterns of interaction with abnormal and disruptive socialization.

The chief psychological reaction of children after modern day (inner city) traumas is an intolerance for strong effective tensions. Disturbing emotions include fears (e.g., fear of being alone), sadness, grief, guilt, depression, shame, anxiety, anger, belligerence, revulsion, despair, poor impulse control, and persistent,

anticipatory fear of being overwhelmed by strong effects and losing control. The specific emotional symptoms and adaptive responses that children show after trauma are naturally dependent upon their developmental phase.

Generational Silence

The extent to which psychopathologies are generational or genetic will help us understand if and how the slave trade and slavery affect blacks to this day.

For example, depression, we learn is not necessarily genetically predisposed. Scientific research of identical twins reflects that when one twin develops depression, the other does not in about 30 percent of cases. That is because "there is not a gene for depression," says Michael D. Yapko, a clinical psychologist who has written extensively on depression. "There is a genetic vulnerability toward depression, but not a gene. That's where epigenetics become important."

Epigenetics, the study of how and why certain genetic coding becomes expressed as physical or emotional traits, is critical in understanding a disease such as depression. According to Yapko, "the risks passed from parent to child aren't primarily in the biology realm,

they are in the social realm," he says. More specifically, he points a finger at what he calls "attributional style" – the way a parent explains or models how the world works. "This is where the hottest research is right now," he posits. "When life events happen to us, how we interpret these events determines whether we develop depression. By the time a kid is 5 years his attribution style matches mom or dad." Therefore, if mom or dad responds in a depressed or anxious way, the child is more likely to do the same.

Again, experts believe that genetics play less of a part than the environment in which the child grows up. "Environmental stressors such as loss, major life transitions, or intensive family or marital conflict can play a role, as can poverty, traumatic experiences, and physical illnesses," says psychologist David J. Miklowitz at the UCLA Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior in Los Angeles.[4]

[4] (David Levine: Does depression run in the family)

The Plantation Syndrome

"If you can convince people that freedom is injustice, they will then believe that slavery is freedom."

— Stefan Molyneux

The Plantation Syndrome is not unlike the Stockholm Syndrome, a term that was used by psychiatrist Nils Bejerot after a bank robbery and hostage situation unfolded in Stockholm, Sweden in 1973. During the five-day crisis, the hostages began to identify with their captors to the point of seeing the police as the main threat. They refused to testify against their captors.

The identical psychological scenario was played out in the 1974 case of Patty Hearst, the kidnapped daughter of a wealthy California family. While in captivity by the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), Hearst was radicalized. She denounced her former life and identified herself as an urban guerilla, stating, "Tell everybody that I'm smiling, that I feel free and strong, and I send my greetings and love to all the sisters and brothers out there."

The case of Monteath, the Igbo and extreme Christian apologist, who bought his freedom, comes to mind. His letter, an excerpt of which appears later, demonstrates the hold that the Church had on his psyche. He held that the enslavement of Africans, if only to save their heathen hearts, was a worthy one, despite the steep price in blood.

The unapologetic embrace of the oppressor to the point of self-annihilation characterizes the Plantation Syndrome. Many slaves suffered from this psychological trait, and it is easy to understand why. In the two cases previously mentioned, the victims were in captivity for a couple of days. Now imagine this dynamic in the context of centuries- long captivity. Imagine that this imprisonment was part of a larger institutionalized system that reinforced the beliefs and values of the captors. Imagine that a compensatory system was added to reinforce acquiescence and punish resistance.

The Plantation Syndrome is not so much a disorder but an unconscious adaptive trait and defense against ego fragmentation.

It makes sense that we in the Diaspora are still victims of the Plantation Syndrome. This is understandable, given centuries of wily conditioning. We adapted to survive, but many of our behaviors and values we adopted, in the process, have been destructive. We have unconsciously adopted the **false self** that has resulted in a host of psychological maladies that have destroyed our communities and us.

Author and lecturer, Neely Fuller, Jr. referred to the conditions in which blacks live as prison-like. Blacks, he argues, are conditioned to accept and believe that their existence is natural in the prison created by what he calls the "system of white supremacy."

Making the analogous connection to animals in their natural habitat, he states, “The fish is born in water, so the fish is not aware of water until it is out of it. If you are born in prison (and black people are born in prison), you think it is normal, it is natural. You never question racism. You might say, “What are you talking about? I am happy.”

He calls such a person, “firmly indoctrinated and unaware of his situation.”

It is in this prison that maladaptive, even pathological, behaviors are normalized. Not unlike prisons, life is harsh and inmates assume different personas to survive. In Fuller's **prison model** and my **plantation model**, race and color are psychologically punitive but they define existence. According to Fuller, "The black skin is our uniform." It is through language, symbols, laws, religion, entertainment, sex, politics, and economics that blackness is defiled and rendered expendable. The violence in both models is a representation of attempts at destroying the despised, the hateful, and the rejected within us. Fuller argues, "If you look at yourself in the mirror you see something you despise. You despise anything that looks like you: your mother, your neighbors. You despise them because they are dark."

Angry and frustrated by our own plight, and incapable of violently ending our own lives, we lash out and kill those that look like us.

Depersonalization is the stripping away of one's humanity. The scarred individual goes through life in an instinctive, self-serving way. Note that I have used the word de-culturing in the same context. This is because culture, applied correctly, builds, enlightens

and refines individuals and societies. In the **modern plantation** or the **prison system**, residents regress to the pre-Oedipal, primal stage of existence. Here, survival is paramount. That many on the **modern plantation** regress to this stage reflects the desperation for meaning and identity, failure of which results in internal rage that feeds on itself in the form of self-anesthetization, suicide, suicide by cop, and health-related problems such as obesity. When turned outward, the **modern plantation** is consumed with organized and random violence that is lethal.

Washington Post columnist, Petula Dvorak, writes in *We Scorned Addicts When They Were Black. It Is Different Now That They Are White:*

"Who was on the front line in the 1990s, when the drug was crack and the addicts were mostly black? Drug Czar William Bennett! His weapon was prosecution and prison and he was quite proficient with it. Today, when the drugs are opioids and the addicts are mostly white, what happens? United States Surgeon General Jerome Adams, a doctor, is out there, telling the country, "We need to see addiction as a chronic disease and not a moral failing." Imagine President George H.W. Bush saying those words, while holding a little bag of crack

cocaine during the height of America's epidemic in 1989! Maybe, the War on Crack Cocaine would have been $1 billion in treatment programs, not $1 billion in prosecution and prison costs.

Maybe, the number of people locked up for drug crimes would not have increased by 1,000 percent in three decades. And maybe entire communities of color would not have been devastated."

CJ Quartlbaum adds to this disturbing narrative in *What the Crack Epidemic and Opioid Crisis Tells Us about Race in America:*

News outlets told horror stories of crack babies and their mothers, gang violence, fiends, and this drug that was devastating communities. The face of that drug was black. Its users were black. The problem was black. This reporting created a negative image in the minds of Americans. It went along with the false narratives that were already told of black people since they were first brought here[5].

The ever-mounting depersonalization of blacks in the face of a national scourge led to their unconscious

[5] (The Witness, April 19, 2018)

erasure of self. Not only was there a steady increase in gang-related fatalities, but suicides had also increased.

In the article "*Saving black children from Suicide*"[6] published by BBC News, for instance, there is enough evidence to suggest that the burden of race in metropolis societies can lead to self-destructive behaviors among youths. The article reported the following:

"The dramatic increase in suicide was probably due to the incarceration of the parent. It is also one of the reasons behind the dramatic increase in suicidal ideation, which includes thoughts of suicide or failed attempts. It can start with children punching walls or cutting themselves to relieve whatever pain they are experiencing. One of the biggest obstacles facing adolescents with trauma is that 'they don't have the language' to effectively communicate their struggles. Another issue specific to black children is internalized racism. Inner city black children may internalize a feeling of being devalued based on dilapidating neighborhoods filled with blight, funding priorities for schools, and other factors negatively affecting their

[6] (BBC News Magazine (December 28, 2015)

communities. Many urban black children live in communities that may not be getting bombed, but could be considered war-torn communities[7]".

[7] (BBC News Magazine (December 28, 2015)

The Case for Reparations

“You don't right the wrongs of the past by wronging the people of the present.”

— Phil Valentine

Reparations Is About Justice, Healing, and Humanity

Reparations by their very nature have so much more to do with forgiveness than money. I think rejection of reparations on the grounds that one ethnic group is not responsible for wrongs commuted against another, and thus, should not bear responsibility, misses the point.

The transatlantic slave trade was a global phenomenon financed by and supported by governments and institutions that continue to thrive. This cannot go unnoticed. The Reparation Movement is not asking that any one demographic group repay an obvious debt. It is asking for justice that should begin with an official acknowledgement that a centuries-long crime was carried out at a state level.

Such an acknowledgement and apology theoretically level the playing field by stating that blacks are no different from any other group and deserving of equal respect. Such an official pronouncement will facilitate a meaningful dialogue. Reparations is as much a continental issue as it a Diasporic one. The African dynamic is different in some respects but worth mentioning.

Queen Mother Dowoti Desir of the Royal Palace of Hounon Houna II in Benin, views the importance of discussing the atrocities of the past, making mention of community tribunals in Rwanda where victim and perpetrator live side by side. She cautions, though, that when such a process is forced, politicized or westernized, the outcome could be disastrous as was the case in South Africa.

She noted that, "the transition to reconciliation through committees went terribly wrong and what we see today is the anger and hatred that were stockpiled projected in horrible xenophobic attacks." She added, "There is gross dissatisfaction, displeasure, and injustice that have come out of the Truth and Reconciliation process. We must remember that these societies worked out their differences where traditional courts and the

kinship system were integrated into the society long before contact with the West."

She reiterated that more research is needed to determine the impact of reconciliation commissions. More importantly, she concedes that the peace enjoyed in Benin should not preclude reparations, believing that emotional scars exist although they are hidden.

It was during my discussions with Biah C. Bertin, Benin's renowned architect and curator at Ouidah Museum of History that I realized that the atrocities of the slave trade and slavery are viewed through a different perspective. Bertin viewed tragedies, as part of history, that there are good and bad events in annals of time and that if there was not a seller of slaves there would not have been a buyer. He saw the world through the prism of determinism and society as arguably Darwinistic. He alluded to the United States as a great power that, like other major powers, will see its eventual demise. He was of the opinion that we should not judge past policies through present-day lens. Moreover, he attributed Benin's cosmopolitan and harmonious coexistence to its ability "to forget the past and not bear grudges."

While I concur that "bearing grudges" is counterproductive, I maintain that reparations transcend a paycheck, hence Dr. Bertin may not be entirely accurate in his submission. In fact, reparations demands that aggressors also work through their guilt while victims and descendants heal through dialogue and forgiveness.

As we heal from the evils of yesteryears, there is a need for African kings to follow the lead of some European institutions by acknowledging their missteps in the past and apologize to fellow Africans and the black Diaspora.

Already, one of the kings seems to be on the right path. I was particularly impressed with the sincere regret expressed by His Majesty King Dê-Gèbéze G. Ayontinme Toffa IX of Porto Novo, Benin.

He traced the origins of the Maafa (the Black Holocaust) reiterating the narrative, that religion (Christianity) was used to win favor with the kings. It was a duplicitous ploy aimed at undermining Vodun. They came with Bibles, the cross, and their God. They infiltrated every settlement with their religion. On the heels of the missionaries were merchants who capitalized on the

growing vulnerability of the kings and exploited their greed and their natural instinct to survive.

"You have to understand the peculiar dynamics of that time," he told me. "They made enticing promises; they said that opportunities awaited the able-bodied men that were given to them. They came bearing fine fabrics and guns. For the authorities that resisted they applied brute force. There was no way of pushing back. We never stood a chance. They knew that once our religion was compromised we were left open to every vice."

On the question of apologies and reparations, His Majesty King Dê-Gèbéze G. Ayontinme Toffa IX was unwavering.

"Some kings sold their own for materials they never had while others were forced to sell at the point of a gun. But whatever the reason slave masters and African kings must be held accountable and we have to ask the forgiveness of our Diaspora and this is only the beginning of the repair."

Africa: The Womb

"Physically separated but psychically connected…"

The destruction of the womb in the form of Africa's desolation and colonization triggered adverse psychological repercussions through its Diaspora. Victims of womb destruction (black people), are traumatized and have adopted coping mechanisms that form what I call the **false self**. Meanwhile, the **authentic self,** expressed through cultural reconnection remains buried. Healing is only possible when the false self rediscovers and reconnects to the womb. The womb is described as the source of culture and its accompanying teachings that promote collective harmony. There is value to returning to the continent only if we inculcate the teachings that we encounter. Africa is the reservoir of wisdom. We must return with a thirst for knowledge. We must be curious, never coy to inquire. There, countless griots, elders, and teachers are willing to embrace and teach those of us from the Diaspora. The womb represents knowledge and a well-defined codex by which we live.

Africa's womb was desecrated creating a cosmic imbalance that would affect generations of its children. This belief is in keeping with African cosmology that states that the individual is innately part of a larger landscape, an uninterrupted, continual lineage. Before the Maafa (Black Holocaust), the African was attached to the womb through a set of core values and rites. Lineage, kinship, and community subsumed the individual. Violently ripped from this bond, the psyche of the African was molded forcibly and subtly into a new abrasive setting which was fractured at best.

Disruption in the natural order has generational repercussions.

This explains why the womb is far more than a protective carapace. We must process the chaos that was once visited on the womb, then find our way through the labyrinth of emotions and ultimately heal individually and collectively.

Celebrated scholar, Dr. Frances Cress Welsing, refers to the womb solely as a shelter that the black man must leave to confront his adversary. In the seminal *The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colors*, she wrote, "Black women can teach their daughters how they possibly assist in the

destruction of black people by allowing black men to hide out in the vagina. To allow this hiding out (attempts to climb in the womb to be babies or fetuses again) when they know the men should turn and face their oppressors, it is an extreme level of self-destruction." (p. 288)

This is a brilliant expose and it is upon its threshold that I have added another layer to this psychological narrative, i.e., that the womb represents much more than a protective space.

It is in the womb that the baby bonds with its mother, where it experiences the comfort of acceptance, warmth, security and awareness. The baby, in the course of time becomes attuned to the mother's circulation, heartbeat, and breathing.

Dr. Manny Alvarez develops on this magical experience of the womb: "Sound is an important parameter in the development of the human brain. We know that sound in the uterus promotes the growth of the cognitive development that the brain needs to develop reasoning. Around this time, the baby's neurons begin migrating to and forming connections in the parts of its brain that processes sound and the auditory cortex. Once this

starts functioning the baby is able to hear the low frequency sounds in the womb, including the melody and rhythm of its mother's voice… this may be a key part of early language acquisition.

We know that, once a baby develops hearing, the sound of its parents' voices become a soothing element. To have this sensory confirmation of being cuddled in the womb is wonderful, an early manifestation of parental bonding[8]. This biological exchange is not unlike what takes place in the social context of society. Based on this projection, the physical return to my ancestral home triggers reflection, tranquility, pause, growth and becoming.

In a figurative sense, it is in the womb that all inner conflicts are resolved.

In Suzanne Sadedin's, "War in the Womb" a ferocious biological battle between mother and child belies any sentimental ideas we might have on pregnancy. It appears that the fetus' clings for nutrients almost at the

[8] https://www.askdrmanny.com/start-singing-reading-baby-womb/

mercy of the mother, ultimately forming the nucleus of the child's disposition[9].

Going back to the source, no matter the emotional peril is necessary. This explains why adoptees seek out their biological parents. It explains why memorials are erected where tragedies occurred.

Interestingly, the womb transcends physical space. In essence, it is indestructible because it exists on a psychic level. Despite the centuries-long attempt to uproot Africa from the African, our traditions are still present. The womb represents the collective and unconscious memory of a people, their spiritual security and empowerment, their physical protection and the preservation of the bloodline, their destiny and the final repose of the African spirit – that final reconnection to the primordial self.

Does it mean that our only recourse to conflict resolution and healing is in Africa? While it is fortuitous to set foot on the continent, Africa and her traditions live in us, regardless of residence. Still, the return to the

[9] (https://aeon.co/essays/why-pregnancy-is-a-biological-war-between-mother-and-baby)

Motherland has always been at the fore of the black consciousness movement. Marcus Garvey is probably the most famous figure to have promote this ambitious undertaking. There are countless others before the advent of Garvey. Erna Brodber writes in **Moments of Cooperation and Incorporation – African Americana and African Jamaican Connections, 1782-1996,** "Garvey's Black Starline was clearly not the only ship about to make its way from the United States to Africa, nor was immigration of African Americans to Africa an original Garvey idea. Apparently, the links with Africa through migration existed and continued to exist before Garvey entered the United States and while he was there (p.57).

In as much as I would favor a program like Aliyah for young blacks I must deign to reality. We can't all go back to Africa. Garvey himself stated, "I have no desire to take all black people back to Africa; there are blacks who are no good here and will likewise be no good there."

Garvey's vision of Africa veers from my view of Africa. Garvey mainly looked at the continent in economic and political terms, as a power that protects its people with the ability to rival and surpass other powers. To realize

this goal, he sought the professional input of blacks in the Diaspora. The material development of Africa was essential to his vision. In his later writings, his vision for Africa was lofty and sublime. He wrote, "We see a new Ethiopia, a new Africa, stretching her hands of influence throughout the world, teaching man the way of life and peace, The Way to God."

I argue that Africa has the solutions to many of our problems; that there is much to process, garner, and learn. Africa is the giver, the teacher. In this context, Africa is the womb, a physical and virtual space for conflict resolution and growth.

Together, we can learn the principles of African tradition anywhere. The same is true for **The Codex for the Present** that I have delineated in this book. In essence, the Womb is only a physical locality. It is equally virtual in nature since it occupies a space in the collective unconscious to which every Black person is connected. It is within that space that we **Re-Think, Re-Learn, Re-Speak and Re-Do.**

In Pan African psychology, the individual is viewed in generational terms (inseparable from a lineage that is past, present, and future). The same applies to the

community. Over time, this bond forms a collective unconscious. The collective unconscious in Jungian terms refers to the part of the unconscious mind that is derived from ancestral memory and experience and is common to all humankind, as distinct from the individual's unconscious.

I believe that every culture has its own collective unconscious based on its own unique experience. It is a dynamic and ever-changing phenomenon containing elements that are both constructive and destructive.

African Psychology and the Black Child

"Racism is still with us. But it is up to us to prepare our children for what they have to meet, and, hopefully, we shall overcome. "

— Rosa Parks

Pan African psychology is a unique modality that addresses the victimization of African peoples. Four hundred years after the first slave ship left the shores of Africa, the black child is still being born into a racial minefield. The child, regardless of the socio-economic setting, is unconsciously shaped by words and impressions received by primary caregivers and from his ever-expanding environment that validates his inner world. These first impressions take on real significance in later years. Racial energy and conflict define and consume the black child. Left unattended, the victim of racial oppression regresses into early or infantile stages of development characterized by anxiety, narcissism,

aggression, and other displays of psychic chaos. Racial energy environmentally enforced. Racism, colorism, class and economics are part of a gestalt that mold the individual psyche. For the black child this gestalt can prove onerously conflicting.

In the classical sense, the primary caregiver, advertently or inadvertently separates the child from the collective unconscious (by shielding the child from Africanness -- **the bad image**), creating greater racial turmoil in the process. The child, attempting to cope, adopts behaviors that exacerbate this condition. These behaviors form part of the **false self** or the **false ego.**

Ridding "the African" from the child is prevalent in the Americas, where colorism is tied to social standing.

Western psychology cannot address the unique needs of black people. In *Black Rage*, black psychiatrists William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs write, "White clinicians may unconsciously withdraw from an intimate knowledge of a black man's life because placing themselves in the position of the patient, even mentally, is too painful… such an intimate knowledge of the patient is vital to diagnosis and treatment, in its absence the patient suffers."

This concern is not limited to non-black psychologists. Black psychologists are no wiser and are equally untrained to address identity conflicts based on race.

"Black therapists," they note, "have a difficult path to travel, since their discipline and long training have taken place primarily in a white milieu."

They continue, "A black clinician's one inevitable problem of identification makes it difficult for him to be comfortable with his own blackness and to feel sufficiently in command of his destiny to reach out a hand to another sufferer."

It reasons that Western psychology, for all its good, does not adequately address the black problem. Freud, like many of his colleagues in the field, did not work with marginalized groups in hostile environments. He, instead, evaluated nuclear families or two-parent homes. The father he viewed as the authority figure, the **superego** that wields power and control.

Psychiatrist Franz Fanon challenged the universality of this theory questioning the relevance of Freud's work in understanding the black child. He argued that Freud's Oedipus complex does not exist in the psyche of the black child since his father does not symbolize the

traditional qualities of power and strength in racist societies.

Fanon's position is more credible in 21st Century America where millions of black males are incarcerated. This is not a mere conjecture, but a fact, because there is ample evidence to support his postulations.

Jeff Guo is of the belief that America has locked up so many black people it has warped our sense of reality. "Over the past 40 years," he pens, "the prison population has quintupled. Because of disparities in arrests and sentencing, this eruption has disproportionately affected black communities as black men are imprisoned at six times the rate of white men." **(Washington Post, September 26, 2016)**

A similar argument is presented in Danielle Paquette's *One In Nine Black Children Has Had A Parent In Prison***. (Washington Post, October 27, 2015)**

In support of this argument, Civil Rights lawyer Michelle Alexander argues in ***The New Jim Crow,*** that Jim Crow and Slavery were caste systems, not unlike America's prison system.

In my two-part series: ***America's War on the Black Male*** (**The Jamaica Gleaner, January 20 and 27, 2019**), I explored the targeted attempt by America's power structure to ruin the black male imago.

Freudian models cannot comprehensively address black psychopathology, a particular anxiety that is rooted in racial conflict. Admittedly, there is much to glean from psychoanalysis and we should build on its many theories, but not for a moment do I hold that the sexual drive or id (a Freudian concept) helps in understanding the black child.

Sexual complexes do not form the basis of the black child. That sex is a primal force that must be nurtured for psychological health is Eurocentric and is not primary to the black experience.

Western patriarchy and religious systems have compounded the role of sex. It is culpable for sexual guilt, and every kind of sexual overreach. Western psychology was born out of this phenomenon.

Therefore, it is not surprising that sexual obsession and European enslavement of Africans fall under the same rubric. This explains the castration of males after they were lynched, the sexual fetishism of the black female

by the white male, the virile black male imago held by white women, and the maladaptive response of black males acting out the self-fulfilling prophecy projected onto them. Additionally, it offers insight into the exhibitionism that passes for black culture. I first wrote on this subject for The Vienna Psychoanalyst[10].

I followed up on this subject in my article, Sex and the Death of Black Culture – Why There is an Urgent Need for Self-Reflection (The Jamaica Gleaner, September 8, 2019)

[10] (Slavery and the Castration Complex: Healing Centuries-Old Wounds with QiSynthesis, September 9, 2018).

APPENDIX 1

Writings in Black Psychology

I believe that including a few of my published articles would add to the overall theorem of this work. The articles, ***The Psychology of Becoming: How Could You be Black and Christian?*** and ***Barriers to African Traditional Religions*** reflect my movement away from conflicting views on Christianity toward wholeness and reconciliation**.**

Why Black Youth Must Immediately Give Up the N-Word and Sagging Pants (The Jamaica Gleaner, March 3, 2019)

Seeing our black boys posing and sauntering through in public with their underwear exposed might be ignored as just another passing fashion statement, offensive as it might be. In addition, hearing the repeated use of the word 'Nigga' in everyday colloquy (to identify themselves, and as a form of greeting), you might think, will eventually desensitize us, and the user, to its brutal meaning. But, no.

It is with such impassioned eloquence that writer Brandon Simeon Starkey said, "I am pained to summon the words of formerly enslaved people from beyond the grave to express that "n----r" is haunted by the ghosts of hate and the more spiritually chilling ghosts of self-hate."

"Nigga" has become one of the most notable words in Hip Hop culture. It is phonetically identical to the poisonous word "nigger," used during slavery and post-slavery era, to describe a black person. Not surprisingly, purveyors of this cultural genre have defended its use, ascribing new meaning to the word.

Apologists argue that artists have creatively desensitized the original meaning by its repeated use and the slight alteration to the original spelling. Some circles even define it as a "term of endearment." I disagree.

Slurs referring to every ethnic group exist, but none of these groups has romanticized these terms, nor have they become a form of self-identification, especially in public. Every single group, except blacks -telling, indeed!

Like the "N-Word", the sagging pants attire has a dark history. Some social critics have traced its origins to American prisons where a disproportionate number of black males is incarcerated. Victor Ochieng cites multiple sources, including *Odyssey Online* and *Diary of a Negress*, in his article, "Sagging Pants, Its Origins Is Worse than You Think." According to the first source, "a prisoner would claim another inmate by having him wear his pants down low for easy access and to show that the inmate belonged to him as his property, although some disagree with that theory."

A far more appalling and disturbing picture is painted in the latter source that traces its origins to slavery and

a perverted trend called "breaking the buck" that involved sexual punishment for so-called renegade slaves. "The slave would be beaten in front of a slave congregation, forced to stand on top of a tree stump with his britches completely removed to expose him to the entire gathering. The master and his guests then sodomize him. After that, the slave would be forced to wear his trousers sagging as a testimony that he was "broken".

What is noticeable is that these practices reemerged from the harsh reality of inner-city life where young men are raised in a culture that mirrors the slave plantation. It is in this modern, concrete plantation that we experience fear, violence, distrust, disunity, victimization, and hopelessness. And, it is on the slave plantation that black men and women identified themselves as "niggers", with indignity, internalized rage, internalized racism, and internalized terrorism. It is on the slave plantation that they were conditioned over time to hate their existence, to learn that they were nothing more than "niggers". When uttered, and they did pathologically (like our modern day youth), they were projecting their worthlessness.

This same unconscious dynamic trigger our desperate youths to repeat, almost instinctively, this repulsive word. This very dynamic applies to wearing sagging pants as a badge of honor, a "badge" that once symbolized sodomy, sexual victimization, and helplessness.

Today, centuries after the Maafa (the Black Holocaust), these dark symbols and practices have reemerged - to confirm - that our pain is as real today, as it was yesterday; and that ours is an unconscious cry for help that few among us truly understand.

The Black Community and the Need for Teachers, not Leaders

(The Jamaica Gleaner, June 23, 2019

Leadership is defined as 'the action of leading a group of people or an organization.' When rigidly enforced, leadership spurs a host of problems ranging from groupthink, loss of individuality, and sheepish obedience to abuse of power.

Rooted in the leadership syndrome is the belief that those that follow are intellectually compromised and in need of guidance for their own sake. Conversely, the leader is hoisted onto a pedestal by his flock, emerging as the paragon of wisdom and the holder of the keys to liberation.

For too long the black community has relied on the Leader. This dynamic is displayed in political and religious circles, but has failed to yield any meaningful results. In these scenarios, the leader, with almost a messianic aura beckons his followers to fulfill an agenda that he has set. Gone are individual empowerment and the gift of discernment, leaving wide open the real possibility of authoritarian rule.

Not that we did not have awe-inspiring leaders. On the African continent, I think of Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso.

In the Caribbean, Marcus Garvey immediately comes to mind, and if one is moved by socialist ideals, I think no further than Grenadian Maurice Bishop who deftly blended compassion and revolutionary fervor that was all but compelling.

Interestingly, though, every leader mentioned above left a band of disillusioned, dewy-eyed followers after they met their untimely demise. The political leader has seldom survived, and if he managed, has always veered from his original mission due to the power of circumstance. The reliance on the political leader, hence, has been fraught with disappointment, even peril. Today, the black political leader, if one is worthy to be called such, lacks vision and dare, and has neatly become part of the political zeitgeist. The black political leader is now either Democrat or Republican in the United States and in the Caribbean, part of the notorious two-party political system that has blighted the region.

Moreover, the black political leader outside mainstream society usually assumes the role of the spokesperson for the community, although the people have never had a say in his "coronation."

On many occasions, these so-called leaders present agendas that do not represent the will of the people. In some situations, they create discord and do more damage to the people than imagined. For example, in the United States today, unity between Africa and its Diaspora is undermined by a group calling itself ADOS (American Descendants of Slaves). This group rejects overtures by African organizations and presents African Americans as a distinct people that must fight its own battles as it advocates for reparations

The black community has also suffered at the hands of religious leadership. Arguably, religious leadership has been far more daunting and destructive to the black community.

History is witness to the knavery of black religious leaders. Philandering, subterfuge, and embezzlement (of church funds) pale when compared to the duplicity of self-anointed godmen and the cults. These cults have mushroomed in Africa and the United States. In the

Caribbean, we experienced a unique horror in 1978 in Guyana, when the People's Temple, led by a white preacher led a movement that was 80% black to its death.

Frankly, political and religious leaders can spare us their narcissism and self-serving rhetoric.

What the black community needs are a wellspring of educators. Yes, we are in sore need of teachers. Teachers know their calling, i.e., to impart knowledge to others without pride or prejudice.

The Caribbean, in particular, has produced many cultural scholars, but unfortunately, their work has remained outside the mainstream education system.

We must embrace and live by the motto*: Each One, Teach One*. The teacher is the foundation of society and the teacher of culture is the purveyor of society's very lifeline. It is culture that defines and instills dignity in a beleaguered people, hence the need to develop a new cultural paradigm. Our children must learn from the most impressive of teachers and their work. I think of Ivan Van Sertima (*They Came Before Columbus*); Orlando Paterson (*Slavery and Social Death*); Walter Rodney (*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*); Josef Ben Jochannan

(*Africa: Mother of Western Civilization*); Neely Fuller Jr. (*A Compensatory Counter Racist Code*); Frances Cress Welsing (*The Isis Papers*), and Joy DeGruy (*Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*).

Such are the caliber of teachers that must lend us their tools of empowerment so that we can emerge as self-leaders, not followers. Our youth must embrace a new code for modern-day living, a new set of principles that must be taught to every babe and suckling. We must adopt new ways of speaking (to each other), new ways of thinking and new ways of doing.

Over time, we must abandon self-derogatory values and behaviors that regrettably pass for culture.

From Brazil to China: Responding To Worldwide Prejudice Against Blacks

(The Jamaica Gleaner, November 11, 2018)

I was dazed for a moment, unable to make sense of the many scenes that just flashed before me. I was not dreaming nor was I delusional.

Newspapers surrounded me. And again, I reflected on all that I read, stitching together the avalanche of unsettling news: the cultural bias against blacks in every corner of the world.

And for a second time, with eyes closed, I saw before me Jair Bolsonaro, the newly elected president of Brazil, notorious for his unbridled candor. He repeated his views on black Brazilians: "I visited a Quilombo (settlement run by the descendants of runaway slaves) and the lightest Afro-descendant there weighed seven arrobas (230 pounds). They don't do anything. They are not even good for procreation."

(https://www.cnbc.com/2018/10/29/brazil-election-jair-bolsonaros-most-con...)

And I saw clearly his thoughts on immigration: "The scum of the earth is showing up in Brazil, as if we didn't have enough problems of our own to sort out."

And as quickly as Bolsonaro disappeared, a map of Israel was unfolded. Israel, the Jewish State where thousands of Africans today are now given a choice: jail or deportation.

The Jewish State that prides itself on defending every Jew alive. This, a mere supposition, according to an Israeli writer, his every line disturbingly revealing:

"The Israeli ambassador to Ethiopia, Hanan Aynor, wrote in 1973 that the Falashas (Ethiopian Jews) were primitive, illiterate, downtrodden and sick ... And 11 years passed (before these black Jews were allowed to return to Israel) during which time thousands of them died in refugee camps in Sudan, and Israel delayed the inevitable (their return) until Operation Moses in 1984.

"Even after the Law of Return was applied to Ethiopian Jews, the Government still raised many difficulties; and that while Israel was very excited about the return of Russian-speaking white people, it rejected for a long time aliyah (right of return) from Ethiopia."

(https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-they-didn-t-want-ethiopian-jews...)

And that infamous Chinese advertisement was running through my mind, so vivid, the laundry ad that featured an Asian woman, stuffing a black man into a washing machine, to turn him into a pale-skinned Asian.

And I reviewed the writings of Pan Qinglin, a member of the People's Consultative Conference, the nation's top political advisory board urging his people to "solve the problem of the black population of Guandong".

His paranoia drew praise. And I read: "Blacks travel in droves ... They engage in drug trafficking, harassment of women and fighting. Africans have a high rate of AIDS and the Ebola virus. If their population keeps growing China will change from a nation-state to an immigration country, from yellow country to a black-and-yellow country."

(https://qz.com/945053/china-has-an-irrational-fear-of-a-black-invasion-b...)

Astounding, given China's massive economic thrust in Africa.

And my reverie never ceased. And I saw the great nation of India, and my agitation grew, for their lives the Siddis people, descendants of Africans who settled there 400 years ago, becoming mighty in military and administrative matters.

Today it is different, though. And I read an article by Lucy Plumer, part of which read, "The Siddis are Indian citizens, they live the culture, they identify themselves as Indians. The only thing that makes them different is their skin color; outside of their small communities, they are considered outsiders in their own land. In India, Africans, in general, have a bad reputation. They are often labeled as drug dealers, or the women as prostitutes, and are subjected to much hostility and discrimination in society."

(https://www.thebetterindia.com/93626/india-racism-siddi-african/)

I shook my head, opened my eyes and stood. With downward gaze, I was moved by the headline: “Leaders around the world react to the mass killings at a Pittsburgh synagogue”.

And I wondered, did any world leader respond to the racist murder of nine members of the black church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015?

I knew the answer, always mindful of Dr. Henry Clarke's admonition, “We have no friends.”

I ambled to my library and it is there I reflected, my dejection slowly giving way to hope. It is in the Caribbean that I saw promise again. And I recall the words of one, Monique, who had just returned to Dominica after decades in the cold.

She said, "The sad thing is we are adopting some of the most negative qualities of the developed countries. The US is not that great; true blue Americans are moving to our islands by droves to retire and develop businesses. We need to take a step back and consider doing the same. I am happy to be back and want to take advantage of any opportunity to develop my Dominica."

And I was becoming more heartened. Indeed, there are options, none more interesting than an initiative promoted by the Government of Ghana. Representative Sheila Jackson of Texas said reassuringly at the United States launch of The Year of Return Ghana 2019, "Those

who have never been, there'll be a certain coming of age that will be grander than we've ever imagined."

Hundreds have already accepted the invitation to resettle.

And I thought of Garvey, and smiled - "Africa for Africans, at home and abroad."

Religion And The Psychology Of Becoming: How Could You Be Black And Christian?

(Published in Oxford University Philosophy Review 2018)

Introduction

A substantive portion of the Caribbean experience revolves around slavery and its aftermath. That there is little in the way of a Caribbean philosophy is indicative of an identity crisis.

Slavery supplanted one culture with another. Culture, especially in the Caribbean, cannot be explored without religion. Of note, is that religion is inextricably bound to the social and political fabric of that region.

While black academicians have responded to colonialism and imperialism in economic and political terms, the role of philosophy has been rendered inconsequential to forging a unified Caribbean fabric. That being said, one cannot marginalize the work of Jamaica-born Marcus Garvey whose writings addressed the role of government, ethics and religion in advancing the African race. Still, his work, like others, lacked the

standard arguments, especially in relation to the existence of God and the philosophy of Becoming.

For most academicians in the Caribbean, identity, and self are linked to race, culture, and nationality. This paper argues that Becoming or expressing the authentic self is only realizable outside the walls of institutions.

The Caribbean has been the most fertile of grounds for evangelization. Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and all of the islands are proudly referred to as "God-fearing nations."

While there is no shortage of religious philosophy, the philosophy of religion is absent.

The views of philosophers, agonistics, and atheists struggle for traction.

As religious institutions lose their grip on the levers of thought, many have begun to question religious doctrines and the nature of God. Outside of religious frameworks, there lacks a body of systemized work on existence, creation, identity, government, ethics, aesthetics, and society.

Earl McKenzie wrote of the all-encompassing nature of philosophy in *The Loneliness of a Caribbean Philosopher*.

According to this well-respected Caribbean professor, philosophy "includes reflections on the nature of knowledge, and the ways of knowing (epistemology). It is the nature of reality as opposed to appearance, and why the difference matters (metaphysics); belief in God; the meaning of life, the nature of evidential relations between propositions and the principles of good reasoning (logos); and the study of how we ought to live (ethics)' (McKenzie 2013: 22).

He also made mention that the Jewish experience was philosophically revisited by Emmanuel Levinas (McKenzie 2013: 14).

In this paper, I will focus on identity and the African experience. I argue later that once that consciousness takes on a religious, transcendental bent, the oppressed is fair game for any form of political and economic manipulation that we see played out in former colonies.

Interestingly, the title: *Religion And The Psychology Of Becoming: How Could You Be Black And Christian* arose from a casual conversation with a friend.

The following paper poses a number of questions: Should self (identity) be bound to a religious creed? Is humanism a more practical philosophy for a people?

Does God exist?

If there is an omnipresent, omnipotent, and munificent power, where was it during the most wretched of times?

Admittedly, there no monolithic response to these questions. As complex as they might be, it is the hope of the writer that the region's thinkers will address the concerns herein presented.

The aim of the following paper is to promote critical thinking and reasoning in the face of diverse religious doctrines.

The paper advances that self (identity) must be framed outside of all religious contexts and that the individual must learn to function outside of institutions of every type.

Ultimately, the individual must reject all forms of institutionally created ideations.

Religion And The Psychology Of Becoming: How Could You Be Black And Christian?

Part 1

It was an inquiry that stirred my reflection on identity.

Of the several photos I shared with a friend, he was particularly drawn by one that showed a white edifice constructed on the shores of Ghana centuries ago. It was no mere building. In its basements were slave dungeons that, over time, had held millions of captives before they were shipped to the Americas. More appalling were the building's upper tiers that held administrative offices and a giant rectory. Yes, a rectory, the home of priests and bishops. My friend was befuddled. This was a picture of the infamous Point of No Return, the Cape Coast Castle, just one of forty like buildings.

And I remember the words of Jesus: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to everyone" (Matthew 28: 19). But for millions, "the good news" was synonymous with death.

My friend of many years, who is Jewish, looked at me and uttered, "How could you be black and Christian?" I paused, unable to render an immediate response.

We parted ways, but I labored on the question.

I sat over a cup of tea a few minutes later and ruminated. I understand the Jewish experience.

The Holocaust they call it. Genocide. Millions murdered. Unconscionable. A crime against humanity. The Jews responded by closing ranks. Their Jewishness intact, they resisted conversion, even reclaiming Semitic names, so they can forget a Europe that was so unkind. My Jewish friend was on to something.

But slavery, more than three centuries of it, is a death march, an existential decay that could last generations.

Somehow, we survived, but with different names and culture. And a new savior. A savior whose name was invoked to chattel, pillage, and rape.

Alas, there is an indescribable power that the promise of salvation wields on the human mind. It bends it to its will. Centuries of systemic conditioning can do strange things to people.

Hours later, I am sitting in the lobby of a health facility in New York. A group of black Christian volunteers began praying, invoking repeatedly that name (Jesus) before leaving to minister to the sick. That haunting

question set off sirens in my head: How could you be black and Christian?

And I shook my head, for blacks are still stumbling. And I recalled comments made by a concerned citizen responding to a question on inner cities: "You go from Cicero to Central in Chicago - a one mile stretch - and you could find thirty churches."

And I look at my native Trinidad and Tobago characterized by its multiplex religious landscape and a crime rate that is shocking and revolting.

Days ago, I conducted a brief research on the Czech Republic and my young friend's boast was not an idle one. I needed to understand that nation's non-religious character.

I learned that the founder, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk (1850-1937), was a Neo-Platonist, who trumpeted philosophy over politics; that he showed a critical interest in the self-contradictions of capitalism; that he studied the prevalence of suicides and suffering in modern societies; and that he advanced moral righteousness and personal responsibility.

Religion was viewed as a source of morality, nothing more. His writings are arguably aligned with Confucianism's human-heartedness, goodness, and responsibility to self and society.

As for that country's crime rate, my research led me to information from the Overseas Security Advisory Council, a department of the United States Department of State.

It read, "Violent or confrontational crime is rare in the Czech Republic; terrorism and political violence are rated low, and drug-related crimes lean towards petty theft."

From the Pew Research Center (June 19, 2017), we garner these revelatory statistics:

About seven-in-ten Czechs (72 percent) do not identify with a religious group, including 46 percent who describe their religion as "nothing in particular". An additional 25 percent say "atheist" describes their religious identity. When it comes to religious belief - as opposed to religious identity - 66 percent of Czechs say they do not believe in God, compared with just 29 percent who do (compare these figures with the United

States where 61 percent of the population believe in God).

I am certain that figure is exponentially higher in the Caribbean where there is no ease on disaffection, crime, and poverty. Many are caught in spiritual webs weaved by flamboyant, persuasive preachers.

But whom was I kidding? I was raised in the Christian faith and very thankful for my religious upbringing. I would have it no other way. And although I have moved on, never have I converted. And who am I to deny displays of Christian charity and love? How could I not be thankful to the men and women of God who, risking life and limb, resisted slavery and the evils of Jim Crow?

With my thoughts, I struggled.

I began to read *The Loneliness of a Caribbean Philosopher and Other Essays* by Jamaican scholar, Dr. St. Hope Earl McKenzie, and therein are striking words. As he pursued philosophy early in his career, he knew of no past Caribbean thinker who had left a record of reflections on metaphysical, epistemological, logical, and moral questions. He also posited that the Caribbean philosopher has to inquire into the nature of the

historical background against which he or she is trying to do his or her work. Philosophy, he asserts, must be closely related to historical studies (McKenzie 2013: 7)

And he cites the inimitable Bertrand Russell, who wrote that "while philosophy is unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, it is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom" (Russell 1912: 89).

Yes, only if we could, during days of wretchedness, have planted the first philosophical seed. Maybe things would have been different. For sure, reason and critical analysis would have become part of our religious discourse. Maybe, we would have questioned our suffering and the nature of God, truth, and morality. We might have rejected Christianity, if not, religion as a whole.

But slavery's brutality and cunningness never granted us the luxury of philosophy.

So here we are. Christians.

Then again, religion is the consummate antidote to suffering. And who among us could have ever

evaluated the many arguments for God's existence? Some are literalists while others side with teleologists. There is a reason for everything, they say. God knows best so we never challenge our abject circumstances.

But it is through sublimation that pains miraculously heal. Well, maybe. And I thought of Freud and his defense mechanisms.

And I heard that searing question again: How can you be black and Christian?

And forgive me for quoting at length an excerpt from Marc Jacobs' *What A Friend We Have In Jesus,* the most provocative book I have critiqued. Words here ring true, so true:

"At the bottom of this holy church were dungeons and pens, where the African captives were kept in chains, before being led out - kicking, screaming, and hollering to boats that would take them away from Africa to a new world of cultivated horror...as they like to say, and some still say today, we brought you here to civilize you. And there are stairs leading from this church to the dungeons below, but there is one set of special stairs. After dark, the earthy disciples of Jesus descended these special stairs into the dungeon, below the pulpit and

pews, where those women were chained. They raped those women captives whenever the spirit moved them... and on the seventh day, these disciples did not rest, and when they were done, they would ascend those special stairs, back into the holy house to worship and sing praises to Jesus." (Jacobs 2015: 63)

Dramatic, some might argue, but true, nevertheless.

And the question: "How could you be black and Christian?" began pounding in my head and I struggled to answer, to make sense of it.

And I opened Jacob's book again. And before me was counsel, crystal clear:

"So when he is putting the rope around your neck, you call for God and he calls for God, and you wonder why the one you call on never answers...listen carefully, again, in real time: the God of the slaver is not the God of the slave." (Jacobs 2015: 64)

The day wore on. And so did that question: "How could you be black and be Christian?"

Part 2

Psychiatrist Frantz Fanon explored the conscious and unconscious forces behind colonialism. In his seminal works, *Black Skin White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon describes the psychic brutality that racism unleashes on both the oppressed and the oppressor. Born in Martinique, he used colonized Algeria as his template to have a better understanding of racial dynamics, identity and liberation. It is from *Black Skin White Masks* that many of his indelible quotes are culled. Identity for the oppressed is always an almost indefinable and perplexing concept. Stripped of his worth and in the throes of an existential crisis, he must salvage what is left of his ego. He reinvents himself or adapts to the role he is given by an outside structure. Fanon captures this internal crisis when he said the following:

"When people like me, they like me 'in spite of my color.' When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal cycle." (Fanon 1963: 30)

He also said that the colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards.

Slavery and racism destroy the ego and leaves the victim scrambling to heal. Hegel's ontology does not exist for blacks, at least in Fanon's reality.

Fanon argues that colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the people and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.

And of imperialism, his words were equally acerbic: "Imperialism leaves behind germs of rot which we must clinically detect and remove from our land but from our minds as well." (Fanon 1963: 27)

On religion, Fanon is unswerving: "I speak of the Christian religion, and no one need be astonished. The Church in the colonies is the white people's Church, the foreigner's Church. She does not call the native to God's ways, but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor. And as we know, in this matter many are called but few chosen."

Under this kind of psychopathological assault, the oppressed must protect his ego with what Sigmund Freud called defense mechanisms. One such mechanism is sublimation, of which religion is the perfect example.

Religion anesthetizes the fractured ego and to this day, it is the oppressors' best tool to rob a people of reason and the will to resist. (Notably, today's the oppressor comes in many colors and shades.)

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* very much echoes Fanon's work. Freire states that the interests of the oppressors lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them (Freire 2000: 43)

Again, once that consciousness takes on a religious, transcendental bent, the oppressed is fair game for any form of political and economic manipulation that we see played out in former colonies.

This is why our psychologists, philosophers and educators must revisit how religion is taught and practiced in the region.

Simply supplanting Christianity with Afrocentric religions - while perceptually encouraging - does little to address the identity question. Replacing one institution with another cannot bring healing to the ego and true independence; neither does revolution, as Fanon advocates.

Adopting a black God or a black savior still leaves us looking outward for salvation. Self or identity cannot and should not be defined or fashioned by outside markers.

The drive to be creative, to realize our potential, and thereby advance society, are internally based.

This brings us to the timeless call to enlightenment: *Man Know Thyself*.

"Thyself" signifies the uniqueness of the experience. My enlightenment is an individualistic, unique reality in the same way the realities celebrated in scriptures are unique to the sages, apostles and holy men who experienced them. Unfortunately, their realities are foisted upon us as truths; surely their truths, but not necessarily ours.

Clearly, religious institutions hijack our individual spirit, our path to our enlightenment.

Through a deliberate and detailed process of self-analysis, we must work toward our own individuation (realization) that is distinct from the collective. This is identity in the true sense. In addition, this authenticity is unattainable within the walls of institutions.

So, to answer my friend's question: How could you be black and Christian?

While I could base my answer on the painful fact that Christianity's teachings and actions are difficult to reconcile (especially for blacks and indigenous peoples), I prefer to argue that the Church presents the greatest barrier to growth.

My response transcends Christianity. It is really an indictment on all religions by virtue of their very constitution

Heraclitus (530-470 BC) said that change and becoming are universally constant. For the oppressed, in particular, there is no becoming in a metaphysical sense, when identity and personhood are so markedly uprooted.

In becoming, we absorb new ideas, concepts, realities and experiences as we move toward healing and wholeness. This process is unrealizable within institutions, especially those that present a priori assumptions as truths.

Christianity and its hierarchical construct, its tale of creation, and its apocalyptic, eschatological and salvific

dogmas, all without evidentiary basis — cannot forever quiet the natural impulse to think, reason, analyze, and ultimately, become.

And to my friend's question, what irony it is, that from the Bible, I find my answer: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things."

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Identity Conflicts - Barriers to Embracing African Traditional Religions

(The Jamaica Gleaner, June 16, 2019)

Identity is the fact of being who or what a person or thing is.

This "fact" could be one's religion, race, nationality, gender, employment, and so on.

Over time, identity can change. Remarkably, in today's world, even one's gender can be blurred and radically transformed.

From time immemorial, religion has shaped our view of self and the world. It is one of the most powerful identity markers. It has offered answers to the most enigmatic enquirers: What is life? Does God exist? Does evil exist? What awaits man after death?

Eschatology, or the philosophy of the afterlife, is by far the most compelling of all religious teachings. It serves as a moral compass during life and stirs powerful emotions, none more so than fear and hope. Christianity has presented itself more than any other

religion with the only prescription for the soul, for salvation and the assurance against the specter of death.

From birth, we are nurtured or conditioned by particular religious beliefs. This is either through a formal or informal process. Inculcating religious precepts can also take place at a conscious or unconscious level.

These religious building blocks become part of our unconscious, indelible and very real, although we might think otherwise.

Christianity has always had a captive audience in black people. It has also been a complicated relationship. As enslaved peoples, we struggled to understand God's plan for us. A wretched existence complicated our faith.

Still, Christianity offered hope, an expectation for redemption and everlasting relief from suffering. It demanded patience and steadfastness to the Word. (Note that a "slave Bible", a "redacted" version of the original, that only includes passages supporting obedience and piety, was distributed to the enslaved. Ninety percent of the Old Testament and fifty percent of the New Testament were removed. One of these

bibles is on display at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C.).

However, Christianity was challenged by the impulses of tradition, part of the "black unconscious" that would surface demanding expression while threatening the status quo.

After 400 years of Christian imprinting, black traditions are oftentimes forced to retreat. Centuries ago, the West "chopped down our traditions like a tree", but from the stump grew new shoots, and branches from the old root began appearing. Today, more than ever, the stage is set for the revival of African customs and African traditional religions, in particular.

Social media, globalization, and a new cultural zeitgeist willing to revisit history have fed a new black awareness. We have begun to throw off the yoke of Christian dogma, at least on an intellectual level. Many are traveling to Nigeria and Benin to experience the religion of their ancestors.

Still, as mentioned, 400 years of a religion based on fear and damnation (if we err) is never easily erased.

I recall two cases to prove this point. In the first instance, an acquaintance recounted her experience while undergoing a Yoruba initiation in Trinidad. She conceded that she panicked and literally ran from the spiritual house all the while questioning if she had offended Jesus. Such was the hold of her Christian upbringing.

In another case, a close friend participated in a Malidoma Somé ancestral ritual in upstate New York that involved animal sacrifice. For the next two years, she was tortured, guilt-ridden, convinced she had offended her deceased mother who was Christian.

These are examples of what I call "religious schizophrenia".

To avoid such conflicts, we must guard against impulsive decisions regarding African traditional religions. We must be deliberate. We must understand every nuance of our religious beliefs. Why do we believe what we believe? Do our beliefs make sense? Are they logical? How do we weigh faith against logic? What do we fear most? If there is the urge to explore and eventually convert to our ancestral practices, we must question our feelings.

Moreover, we must ask, why do we think it is necessary to convert? Do we know everything we need to know about African religious practices? How will our family and peers react? Have we always been free thinkers, unmoved by groupthink?

If we cannot cogently answer these questions, it is best to delay our decision.

Embracing the highly ritualistic African religious system requires a sharp shift in awareness. No doubt, it is resoundingly rewarding and empowering, but it demands dedication and maturity.

An authentic conversion begins with an epiphanic experience. It is never linked to overt or subtle coercion. It is never a reaction to circumstances. When it occurs in earnest, there is never wavering in mind, will, or feeling.

In truth, every religious practice is existentially meaningful when void of inner conflicts. We must function in a space that is inviolable, unperturbed by the prying of the self-righteous who believe they hold the key to truth. We must make decisions that are free from outside pressures.

In the end, truth predates religion. Religion only offers pathways to experience that truth, a truth that is never fully grasped. Moreover, we must forge a personal path to wisdom and understanding unencumbered by turmoil and ambiguity.

Christianity, Voodoo and the Conflict of Identity

(The Jamaica Gleaner, July 12, 2019)

In my book, '*The Believers: The Hidden World of West Indian Spiritualism in New York*,' I chronicled the many interviews I conducted with the disaporic communities of Brooklyn and Queens. The majority of interviewees professed their Christian upbringing and ongoing belief in the faith. However, when asked if they had ever visited a practitioner of Orisa, Vodun, or other Afrocentric religions during times of crisis, 90% answered in the affirmative.

My findings suggested that there is an unconscious belief among black people that their ancestral religion is more efficacious than any other faith; that ancestral religions effect change swiftly; and that African religion forms an indelible part of the Black archetype despite centuries of colonialism and its attempt to erase it.

According to Carl Jung, an archetype is a generational memory bank or a collective unconscious that is accessible to a people. In other words, Africa and its ancient traditions are inherent in the psyche of every

black person. Many may openly reject the existence of an archetype, but my studies have shown the overarching power of our ancestral roots.

This explains the ease with which we have unconsciously and consciously injected Africa into our every expression be it music, art, dance, food and spirituality.

It explains our many syncretic practices. For example, in America's south, Congolese slaves fused their African spiritual beliefs with Christianity to create Hoodoo, a spiritual system that remains very popular.

In *Old Style Conjure*, author Starr Casas commented on how the celebrated Harriet Tubman, a devout Christian, was also a conjurer who frequented the graveyard for wisdom. "Tubman," she pens "was a conjure woman and very gifted. It is known that she treated folks with herbal remedies and healing work. Folks interviewed in 1860 believed that she had supernatural powers (and that) she would walk in the graveyard around midnight praying and gathering roots and herbs. Yes, "Mama Moses" (as she was called) was indeed a Christian, but she was just not a mainstream Christian, being more of a Conjure type worker."

Another interesting figure during slavery was Gullah Jack (b.1822), a Methodist and spell worker notorious for inciting rebellions in South Carolina.

With the growing popularity of Ancestry/DNA, the African archetype, once latent, now looms. More than ever, Africa is calling her sons and daughters home. Many are reclaiming their roots, while discovering the systematic lies and prevarications directed at Vodun, Pocomania, Orisa, and Condumble. Many are discovering that these Afrocentric religions are not unlike mainstream religions having their own body of ethics, aesthetics, cosmology, and salvation.

Christianity, though, has ably responded to the surge in Pan African consciousness. It has pushed back hard with a concerted effort to evangelize all of Africa. This has led to an identity crisis among people of faith.

If a practitioner is comfortable brewing diverse religious practices, there is no conflict. However, it is common to find a conflict of identity among the majority that don a Christian persona in public and secretly dabble in African traditional religions in times of trouble. Most of us are unable to embrace both.

Research has taught me that dabbling in African traditional religions while courting Christian beliefs usually leads to a split psyche or internal conflicts.

This mental dis-ease (guilt, fear and ambiguity) is due to the skewed and erroneous belief that salvation is realizable only through the Christian savior. Regrettably, the seeds of this mistruth are so firmly rooted that many are unable to supplant them with reason.

I recall two of many cases that demonstrate the raging conflict that beset black folks.

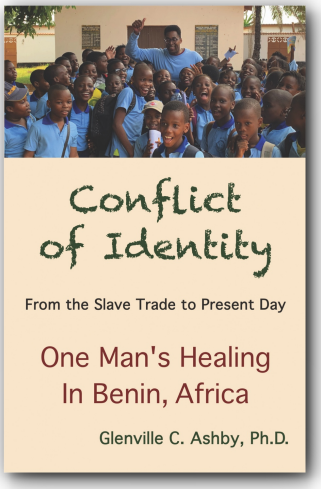
Both involve trusted friends. In the first case, Monica (not her real name) made the decision to initiate into the Orisa faith. A social and cultural activist, she decided to reclaim her African heritage. During the ceremony, a daunting feeling overcame her. Her early Christian upbringing surfaced and she suddenly questioned her decision. She abruptly aborted the initiation, all the while harangued by guilt and fear of Jesus' retribution.

In the next case, Donna (not her real name), participated in an ancestral ritual involving blood sacrifice. For two years, she struggled with guilt believing that her

deceased mother, who was Christian, would be incensed.

Kwame M.A. McPherson's '*My Date with Depression: From Mental Uncertainty to Self-Fulfillment*' supports the "inner conflict" argument. Of his experience, he penned, "Being baptized had not stopped my struggles and things only got worse. I became more isolated and clung to the church as the battle raged within me, especially after being aware of my ancestors' true story. I felt that religion, whether Christianity or any other, played a massive role in enslaving them and it was harder to balance and digest its involvement in my life and my efforts in seeking so-called 'salvation'."

Over the years, I have learned that we must resolve inner conflicts to enjoy a fruitful spiritual life. This does not mean that we should embrace one religion at the expense of another. Indeed, religious syncretism is edifying, if only we could liberate ourselves from the burden of Christian guilt.



Conflict of Identity: From the Slave Trade to Present Day – One Man's Healing in Benin, Africa, explores the psychological trauma of the slave trade and slavery. It advances practical solutions, such as womb therapy and the 4–R Model toward conflict resolution and healing.

Conflict of Identity:

From the Slave Trade to Present Day

One Man's Healing in Benin, Africa

By Glenville C. Ashby, Ph.D.