

Rupkatha Journal

On Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities

An Online Open Access Journal

ISSN 0975-2935

www.rupkatha.com

Volume IV, Number 2, 2012

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Indexing and abstracting

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Oral Literature and its Bearing on Caribbean Slave Songs of the Colonial Era

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Abstract

A discussion of Caribbean poetic traditions entails the study of concepts relating to oral literary forms and oral practices that Caribbean literature inextricably reveals, standing at a unique confluence between African, American and European cultures. This piece of writing undertakes to trace the origins of Black oral narrative forms and its characteristic features, influenced by colonial strategies. The beginnings of Caribbean literary output bring within its purview the survival tactics of a race of people who had emerged from a history of slavery and compromise to freedom. The Caribbean, whose ethnic, linguistic and racial mix is greatly diversified, is an interesting, dynamic and variegated cultural phenomenon as it incorporates aspects of both oral and written forms, within its literary modes. An insight into some of the songs and poems of the oral genre is thus helpful in understanding the earliest flowering of poetic talents from the region and judging their respective merits and drawbacks.

[Keywords: Caribbean, Slave Songs; oral, colonial]

Human beings since very inception have sought to give expression in words or symbols; they have tried to convey the fervor of emotions and their deepest desires or fears through some potent medium of communication and herein lies the birth of popular art, performance art or for that matter oral literature. In all societies this ardent desire or penchant to communicate both personally and on a public level led to the emergence of rituals, ceremonies and acknowledgement of customs, which set a framework within which, the larger pattern of the struggle for existence was enacted. Oral literature thus seems to have its roots at a primitive stage of society when the simple everyday attributes of life were depicted with rhythmic words and phrases, often with the accompaniment of drum beats and music to create the desired tempo of feverish participation and appeal. Mainly such compositions dealt with a kind of recognition; acceptance of or resistance against the elemental forces of nature, interplay of creative human instincts within time bound nuances of tradition, and all its attendant agencies that life at such stages endangered. The shifting dynamics of power struggle, feud between clans, familial beliefs and allegiances also became areas of priority. Often poems of the oral tradition have an immediate appeal, and claim clamorous attention due to its enduring lineage of popular or ancestral heraldic folk lore. Sometimes myth, legend and work ethics, all coalesce into what we might call a neat amalgam of stories, poetry, short abstract phraseologies celebrating victory or lamenting defeat, and often accompanied with short pithy moralizing on the nature of ethical norms and conduct.

Though the most prevalent and earliest form of oral poetry was the epic, as in Homer, it is not to be found in all cultures. In Africa, as well as in aboriginal America or for that matter even in Australia, this epic form was unknown. In the absence of the epic, the ballad was prevalent. The ballad though much shorter, was a narrative poem, sung and valued for the heroic exploits of a particular hero or a heroic act in general, associated with a nation or tribe,

Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities (ISSN 0975—2935), Vol. IV, No. 2, 2012.

Ed. Tirtha Prasad Mukhopadhyay.

URL of the Issue: <http://rupkatha.com/v4n2.php>

URL of the article: http://rupkatha.com/V4/n2/10_Oral_Literature_Caribbean.pdf

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and reflecting the common sentiments of valor, strength, racial pride or often commemorating an incident significant for the entire community.

The linguistic and formalistic aspects of the oral tradition (especially poetry) are greatly diversified and indigenous in treatment and flavor of comprehension, with regard to geographical locale, race or ethnicity, but interestingly one very common aspect of this tradition unlike the written one, is the bare stark and prosaic description of man's place, position and role amidst his immediate surroundings. Refined or polished mannerisms of the written and therefore more civilized cultures do not make up the spirit of oral narrative forms where naivety and simplicity are the norms.

For years critics have studied the subtle connections between oral textual features and European written forms and thereby explored the dynamics of the great divide between oral literature and writing, in literary studies. Sometimes hybridized texts of writers articulate the complex union of writing and oral forms. In fact a close study of Anglophone African, African Caribbean and African Canadian literature can explain how there is a synthesis between oral forms and writing as an emergent discourse. In Britain, cultural identities merge in literary phenomena and black writing, needless to say is the product of various diasporic and ethnic combinations. This literature can function on a philosophic or psycho realist dimension depicting a community-based culture interfaced by the colonialist discourse. The non-white writer then becomes perhaps, a self assertive community agent with the potential for forming a new historically formed identity, which in turn would need a new audience that requires both diasporic and European critical perspectives. A discussion of the relationship between oral and written forms also necessitates consideration of the importance of oral narratives, whether its impact is cultural, political or moral.

Ruth Finnegan in her book *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977) writes about oral poetry as a distinct social phenomenon whereby the position of the poet, the function of his poem and possible relations between literature and society remain dominant issues. Other interesting areas of focus concern the competing theories of oral composition and transmission, whether there is a special oral style, how far the terms 'oral', 'oral poetry' and 'now oral' can be perceived as separate or similar identities. For example Yorubaⁱ traditional poetry which is a functional art is largely event-based. We find in it certain subgenres like Oriki-Orile, Ekun-Iyawo, Irewoje, Oku-pipe, Ofo, Igbala, Ege, Osare, Ijala and Raraⁱⁱ to mention a few. These are identified with such ceremonies as marriage, naming, funeral and hunting. Consequently the importance of oral literary forms cannot be ignored as these poetic or functional practices have survived in the unscripted form for ages. And this separates it from mainstream literature. As Finnegan argues "there is no clear-cut divide between oral and written literature and when one tries to differentiate between them- as has often been attempted, there are constant over laps."ⁱⁱⁱ This is true for almost all cultures. For example in American Literature there is a great wealth of African diasporic heritage and its literature bears strong reminiscences of oral poetry itself. There are many examples of oral literary forms in African American culture, including spirituals, Gospel music, Blues and Rap. The African American tradition of Christian sermons makes a deliberate use of repetition, cadence and alliteration. Such instances are not far to seek. But while these characteristics and themes exist on many levels of African American Literature, they are not the exclusive definition of the genre and don't exist within all works of the genre. Thus in an era of faddish theorizing, hybridism and other preoccupations, the relationship and interface between memory and oral practices within the context of Caribbean poetry is often intriguing.

What is the relationship between Oral literary forms and literacy? And where exactly is the magical line of transition? If the oral tradition has so long been associated with primitiveness, is literacy considered the gateway to civilization? In contemporary Caribbean

literature the two seem inseparable. This study concerns itself with the origins of early Caribbean poetry in the colonial period and attempts to explain oral practices (through songs or poems) and performance aesthetics as integral and rudimentary facets of expression for the creative artist. Mark C. Amodio in his book on oral tradition makes an interesting comment about oral narratives when he says, ‘the mode of transmission in itself reveals little about any given poem’s mix of oral or written poetics’.^{iv} What he means is explained by a classic example from a medieval 13th century poem, “The Owl and the Nightingale”, which he feels is greatly suitable for public performance, but its poetic principles he feels are entirely literary. On the other hand *Layamon’s Brut* which may never have been performed draws heavily on poetic principles commonly found in oral poetry. One of his most important debates which emerge out of the theory of transmission goes a long way to define the positioning of oral traditions in the field of oral studies and also its scope and link with the written tradition. Arguing that the representations of oral performances in Middle English are ‘the fictionalized and romanticized products of highly literate sensibilities’ he makes his claim that in them there is no reliable representation of the ‘performative matrix’.^v Amodio agrees with John Miles Foley^{vi} that oral poetics is all about powerful associations, to look back and share common meanings that have roots in tradition and heritage, without which they would seem bizarre and illogical, lacking in the deeper truth underneath. Through a detailed analysis of verbal patterns, Amodio demonstrates the continuity and flexibility of oral poetry from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries.

Fekade Azeze’s^{vii} book, *Unheard Voices: Drought, Famine and God in Ethiopian Oral Poetry*, is based on research conducted in various regions of North Shawa in Ethiopia. A striking work, Fekade focuses on famine-inspired oral poetry in indigenous languages. It is the peasants Fekade believes, who suffer most from these persistent natural disasters and it is they who with a heroic resilience to suffering record most meticulously their experiences. Fekade explores how the cultural and religious fabric suffers breakdown during moments of deep crisis and how in turn value systems dependant on them also perishes. The book is a repository of wisdom and suffering, with thousands of beautiful verses transmitted orally from generation to generation and which Fekade documents and records superbly. Therefore one central role of oral literature in ancient societies had been to create, nurture and nourish the taboos that protect the environment from human abuse, or avert any reckless acts that could harm environmental sustainability, bringing destruction and human catastrophe in any form. Oral poems of this category include hunter’s songs and dirges, recited at the funeral of animals like the elephant, the buffalo and the lion. Among a tribe of Ghana,^{viii} the Ashanti,^{ix} a hunter who killed an animal believed to be of a strong spirit (Sasaboa) was obliged to undergo an elaborate purification rite to avert any disaster over his person, or to avoid being haunted by the spirit of the animal. Again he organized a complete funeral ceremony in which guns were fired amidst drumming, dancing and singing. This difficult and costly ceremony which in a way protected wildlife was called ‘Abofosie’.

Examples of oral narratives thus cover a wide range of subjects but its themes whatever they may be are related always to the fundamental aspects of life and conduct. Oge Ogede^x an important scholar of the oral tradition has said that even in oral narratives, works of praise and criticism are distinct from one another. Ogede also examines the ways in which praise and criticism work in tandem in an oral performance. He cites the example of the Egede tribe in West Africa, among whom poetry is used for negotiating social relationships and in mobilizing the political, religious and social sphere. Not only did Ogede study the poetry of major ethnic groups –the Zulu, the Yoruba, the Igbo, but also the lesser known ethnic minority groups. By drawing on works of leading artists and younger composers, he explores how oral poetry and performances are transmitted among the unlettered *Igede*; how they are improvised at the hands of different performance artists and how there is a mutual understanding between the

oral artist and his audience which are important strands of judgment to determine the success of a particular performance.

While oral poems were a particular feature of many ancient societies, they survived well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ruth Finnegan in her book (*Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1977) narrates a beautiful 19th century Maori song of mourning by Te Hen Heu Herea for his dead wife, entitled "Mourning Song for Rangiaho", which is as follows:

Many women call on me to sleep with them
 But I'll have none so worthless and so wanton
 There is not one like Rangiaho, so soft to feel
 Like a small, black eel .
 I would hold her again-

Even the wood in which she lies;
 But like the slender flax stem
 She slides from the first to the second heaven
 The mother of my children
 Gone

Blown by the wind
 Like the spume of a wave
 Into the eye of the void.

When sung, the effect of this melancholy theme fully permeated the consciousness of the audience. Oral poetry thus is not an odd or aberrant phenomenon in human culture, nor a remote past heritage long lost, it is to be found in both literate and non-literate societies through all times past and present. In one sense its presence can be felt all around us in various ballads and folk songs of America and the British Isles, American Negro verse, the popular songs transmitted by radio and T. V. and sometimes even children's verses. In modern times, oral poetry's significance has somehow been redefined because of its concern with popular culture or the preoccupation with contemporary protest literature, modified by the effects of the age, and so has prompted far reaching debates and controversies.

The oral tradition of the Caribbean was a synthesis of various literary and linguistic influences. Difference between musician poets and poets of the spoken word, who used music, though not, always, gave rise to the twin phenomenon of the Calypso^{xi} and Reggae^{xii}. The language situation in countries such as Trinidad and Guyana is of relatively recent origin compared to that in Barbados and Jamaica, where the territories settled down peacefully only in the last century after a period of political upheaval, and when it finally did, there was large-scale immigration from the far east like India, China and Indonesia. The importance of language thus, is immensely important to define the dominant ethos of any country or the spirit of public life. Languages of Imperialism often outlast the empires and this is a fact that Derek Walcott expresses wonderfully, when he commented about the British Empire in the Caribbean that everything good is gone, except the language of the people which is sometimes everything. Thus the oral diversity in literature is and should be quite naturally, enormously varied, with intermixtures both in form, technique, spirit and language. One common mode of associating them as coming from a single vantage point of culture was their theme, which was unmistakably a struggle for survival amidst change and flux, and with it, a celebration, rejoicing and living for the moment in a landscape, that defined its lineage more properly by recollection and feeling rather than by any neat time-bound classifications of geographical space. Trinidad which was

the place where Calypsos originated is known for many popular works in the oral genre, the calypso song below is one of the first recorded calypsos coming from the region, recorded by Lionel Belasco for the Victor Gramophone company in 1914. Later on verses were added to the following poem by Knolly La Fortune. The anonymous Calypso titled “Sly Mongoose” is as follows:

I
 Sly mongoose
 Dog know your ways
 Sly mongoose
 Dog know your ways
 Mongoose went to de master’s kitchen
 Pick up one of de fattest chicken
 Put it in de wais’-coat pocket
 Sly mongoose [...]
 III
 Ay say sly mongoose
 Ma ma, dog know your name
 Ay say sly mongoose
 Ma ma, dog know your name
 You dress like a cunning lawyer
 You talk like a young Pretender
 Don’t tell me you know me mother
 Sly mongoose ^{xiii}

Caribbean literature which involves a history of slavery, regeneration, change and migration is a decisively complex phenomenon that has produced innumerable works of singular literary merit. But while this literature has evolved fully only in the fifties of the last century, a radiant tradition of slave literature (in the form of poetry and songs) existed even during the 18th and 19th C. Caribbean literature which is roughly two and a half centuries old was born out of the African slaves who were brought to serve colonial and imperialist purposes. Some songs and poems were recorded by early colonial masters as the slaves who composed them extemporaneously were mostly illiterate. This literature of which most people are not aware is one of the earliest examples of poetry from the region.

The earliest examples of oral narratives from the Caribbean comprise anonymous slave songs which depict the conditions of their existence, and a few instances of such songs can help explain the nature of poetic compositions that tended to focus more on common everyday events and feelings, community issues and relationship between slaves and their masters. Anonymous work songs also included dancing songs (from the original African tradition of dancing with a group forming a circle) which had an elaborate scope for improvisation, and often with a call and response pattern which was integral to Negro culture, as the one given below: (from Burnett, Paula. ed. *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*. Penguin, 2005, p.7)

“Negro Song at Cornwall”
 Hey- ho-day! me no care a dammee
 Me acquire a house,
 Since massa come see we-oh!

Hey-ho-day! neger now quite eerie,
 For once me see massa-hey-ho-day!
 When massa go, me no care a dammee,

For how them usy we-hey-ho-day!

This anonymous song was recorded by Mathew Gregory 'Monk' Lewis, who was a novelist and who kept a journal of his two visits to his plantations in Jamaica, from 1815 to 1816 and from 1817 to 1818, which was published in London in 1834, as *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor*. Although he castigated slavery as a necessary evil, he was a benevolent slave master, who tried his best to improve the lot of his slaves, and in doing so earned their ardent love and devotion. He concludes his book with the remark—'what other Negroes may be, I will not pretend to guess; but I am certain that there cannot be more tractable or better disposed persons (take them for all in all) than my Negroes of Cornwall. I only wish, that in my future dealings with white persons, whether in Jamaica or out of it, I could but meet with half so much gratitude, affection, and good-will'.^{xiv}

Some poetic compositions expressed oppression and exploitation of slaves as in the following "Anonymous Work Song": (From Paula Burnett)

Tink dere is a God in a top,
No use me ill, Obissha!
Me no horse, me no mare, me no mule,
No use me ill, Obissha.^{xv}

The lines are a pathetic plea for just and humane behavior towards slaves, expressed in the most simplest and unassuming way. Another poem- "A Popular Negro Song" alludes to a local incident in which a notoriously cruel planter was renowned for throwing physically weak or ailing Negro workers from a valley which caused their instant death. One such slave secretly rescued and alive and even free, later on meets his abusive master at a market in Kingston where the master again attempts to claim his services, but the poor man manages to escape. The narration of the tale led to such a riotous turn of events that the exploitative master named Bedward, had to flee for his life. The story passed into the region's folklore and Dr. Jekyll in his momentous work-*Jamaican Song and Story, 1907*, referred to it in an Anansi tale. The lines of the poem are as follows:

Take him to the Gulley! Take him to the Gulley!
But bringee back the frock and board.'-
Oh! Massa, massa! Me no deadee yet!'-
Take him to the Gulley! Take him to the Gulley!
Carry him along!^{xvi}

The above song is one among four songs—(1. "Song of the King of the Eboes". 2. "Negro Song at Cornwall". 3. "A Negro Song", and 4. "A Popular Negro Song", the one above) recorded by Mathew Gregory Lewis in Jamaica. Though there are numerous other examples of songs with a similar concern, what is important is the unique style, spelling and pronunciation of these poetic compositions.

Call and Response pattern of songs which derived from Africa or the popular Ring-Game series (that of singing and dancing in a ring) have unknown origins but can be conjectured to have its beginnings in Africa, and became conspicuously, an important feature of the Caribbean Work-Songs or Folk-Songs, celebrating harvest of 'Yamma,' or Yam^{xvii} cultivation. A lot of English dance steps, later on merged with the original native styles. Below is an example of a popular "Work-Song" (with scope for improvisation) entitled "Guinea Corn": (source: *Columbia Magazine, Vol 11, May 1797*)

Guinea Corn, I long to see you
Guinea Corn, I long to top you
Guinea Corn, I long to plant you

Guinea Corn, I long to mould you
 Guinea Corn, I long to weed you
 Guinea Corn, I long to hoe you

Guinea Corn, I long to cut you....
 (Recorded in 1797)

The list goes on within the same pattern of repetition and with different adjectives such as “dry, beat, trash, parch, grind, turn and eat”, for each line. “Dancing songs” (often with no title, such as the one below) might again reflect community dancing or a kind of ritual enactment or participation of a group, among people of low literacy or general working class labors, but has an elemental simplicity and naivety about it. (The following “Dancing Song” was recorded by J.B. Moreton in Jamaica in 1793)

I

Hipsaw! My deaa! You no do like a me!
 You no jig like a-me! yo no twist like a-me!
 Hipsaw! My deaa! You no shake like a-me!
 You no wind like a me! Go, yondaa!
 Hipsaw! My deaa! You no jig like a-me!
 You no work him like a-me! you no sweet him like a-me!

II

Tajo, tajo, tajo! Tajo, my Mackey massa!
 O! laud, O! tajo,tajo, tajo!
 You work him, mickey massa!
 You sweet me, mackey massa!
 A little more, my Mackey massa!

Tajo, tajo, tajo! My Mackey massa!
 O! laud, O! tajo, tajo,tajo!
 I'll please my Mackey massa!
 I'll jig to Mackey massa!
 I'll sweet my Mackey massa!^{xviii}

Thus the tradition of satiric songs or satire by impersonation was a popular mode of address in oral songs. *Jamaican Songs and Story* by Walter Jekyll is a rich source of this oral culture. Sometimes contemporary events were alluded to through songs and poems; these songs acted as memory registers for a group of slaves who might have survived a similar disaster or catastrophe. The poem “War Down a Monkland” is one such work-song that briefly evokes memories of the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in 1865. According to popular opinion Queen Victoria dismissed a petition from Jamaicans for land to help them combat miserable poverty, the incident is said to have triggered widespread discontent including local riots which had to be controlled by troops who open fired on rioters. Governor Eyre suppressed the rebellion violently and about 600 people lost their lives. A royal enquiry commission was set up to investigate the case following which Governor Eyre was dismissed. Later it was assumed that the petition never reached the Queen at all. The incident became so famous that it passed into the island’s folkloric tradition as a song in 1865, and was recorded by Walter Jekyll in Jamaica in 1907. The song/poem is as follows:

War down a Monkland,

War down a Morant Bay,
 War down a Chiggerfoot,
 The Queen never know.
 War, war, war oh!
 War oh! Heavy war oh!

Soldiers from Newcastle
 Come down a Monkland
 With gun and sword
 Fe kill sinner oh!
 War, war, war oh!
 War oh! Heavy war oh!^{xix}

As noted before, Ruth Finnegan in her book *Oral Poetry* (Cambridge 1977) shows how popular culture by definition and understanding is basically oral, and she discusses the points of contention between classification of white European literature as written or literary and Black literature as essentially non-literary and oral. This statement might ring true for many cultures such as the Caribbean, Amerindian and West Indian, where people make do with predominantly oral literary tastes and do not abide by any written standards. But if this dispute between the written White (often considered elitist or conservative) and the non-written Black (popular and revolutionary) is to be analyzed in simplistic terms, then we might run the risk of confining ourselves to a very narrow idea of classification that eludes other inter-disciplinary aspects of language, literary devices, artistic style, merit and above all the multicultural dynamics of change and counterchange, which have created some of the best works of all times.

Notes and References

ⁱ The Yoruba people are one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa. The majority of the Yoruba speak the Yoruba language. The Yoruba constitute between 30 and 50 million individuals throughout West Africa and are found predominantly in Nigeria and make up around 21% of its population.

ⁱⁱ The importance of traditional and oral poetry in Yoruba culture cannot be overlooked. This traditional oral poetry is a stronghold of Yoruba cultural heritage. Being a functional art, the Yoruba traditional poetry is largely events based. Hence, such sub genres as Oriki-Orile, Ekun- Iyawo, Iremoje, Oku-pipe, Ofo, Igbala, Ege, Osare, Ijala, and Rara to mention but a few, are identified with such ceremonies as marriage, naming, funeral and hunting. History and myths of family and lineage were also to be located in them.

ⁱⁱⁱ Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

^{iv} Amodio, Mark.C. *Writing the Oral Tradition: Oral Poetics and Literate Culture in Medieval England. (Poetics of Orality and Literacy)* Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004. P 93.

^v Amodio, p 98.

^{vi} John Miles Foley (1947-2012), scholar of comparative oral tradition, medieval and Old English Literature (particularly Beowulf), Ancient Greek (especially Homer) and Serbian epic, was the founder of the academic journal *Oral Tradition and the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition* at the University of Missouri, where he was Curators' Professor of Classical Studies and English and W. H. Byler Endowed Chair in the Humanities. Foley is generally regarded as the world's foremost authority on the subject of comparative oral traditions.

^{vii} Fekade Azeze (b. June 28 1950, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) is Associate Professor of Ethiopian and African Literatures at Addis Ababa University. Specializing in Ethiopian oral literatures, he is the author of several volumes of poetry and criticism in both Amharic and English.

^{viii} Ghana is a country located in West Africa. It is bordered by the Ivory Coast to the west, Burkina Faso to the north, Togo to the east, and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. The word Ghana means "Warrior King" and is derived from the ancient Ghana Empire. Ghana was inhabited in pre-colonial times by a number of ancient predominantly Akan kingdoms, including the inland Ashanti Empire, the Akwamu, the Akyem, the Bonoman, the Denkyira, and the Fante among others. Trade with European states began after contact with the Portuguese in the 15th century, and the British established the Gold Coast Crown colony in 1874 over parts but not all of the country.

^{ix} The Ashanti (or Asante) Empire (or Confederacy), also Asanteman (1701–1896) was a West Africa state of the Ashanti people, the Akan people of the Ashanti Region, now in Ghana. The Ashanti (or Asante) are a major ethnic group in Ghana, a powerful, militaristic and highly disciplined people of West Africa. Their military power, which came from effective strategy and an early adoption of European Firearms, created an empire that stretched from central Ghana to present day Benin and Ivory Coast, bordered by the Dagomba kingdom to the north and Dahomey to the east.

^x Oge Ogede is a contributor to *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature* (CUP, 2004) and *Traditional Storytelling Today* (Routledge, 1999), and his essays have appeared in several other edited books as well as in several journals, his other important books are: *Intertextuality in Contemporary African Literature: Looking Inward* (Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield, 2011).

Achebe's Things Fall Apart: Reader's Guide (invited by Continuum International Publishing, London, UK, 2007).

Achebe and the Politics of Representation: form against itself, from Colonial Conquest and Occupation to Post-Independence Disillusionment (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001).

Art, Society, and Performance: Igede Praise Poetry (University Press of Florida, 1997).

^{xi} Calypso is a style of Afro-Caribbean music that originated in Trinidad and Tobago from African and European roots. The roots of the genre lay in the arrival of enslaved Africans, who, not being allowed to speak to each other, communicated through song. This forged a sense of community among the Africans, who saw their colonial masters change rapidly, bringing French, Spanish and British music styles to the island of Trinidad. The French brought Carnival to Trinidad, and calypso competitions at Carnival grew in popularity, especially after the abolition of slavery in 1834.

^{xii} Reggae is a music genre first developed in Jamaica in the late 1960s. While sometimes used in a broader sense to refer to most types of Jamaican music, the term *reggae* more properly denotes a particular music style that originated following on the development of ska and rocksteady.

^{xiii} Burnett, Paula. Ed. *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*. Penguin, 1986. P. 25.

^{xiv} Burnett, Paula. P.370.

^{xv} Burnett, Paula. p.2. Anonymous songs were recorded by J. B. Moreton in his book *West India Customs and Manners*, published in London in 1793. This book became a guide for prospective emigrants. Moreton was against slavery, saying that in Britain "the beasts of the field are better protected by laws than slaves in the West Indies". He lived in Jamaica which he obviously liked and observed that "all ranks and denominations of people are more friendly, kindly and hospitable, than in colder countries".

^{xvi} Burnett, Paula. p.8.

^{xvii} Yams are the staple crop of the Igbo people of Nigeria, in their language it is known as *ji*, and they commemorate it by having yam festivals known as *Iri-ji* or *Iwa-Ji* depending on the dialect. Yams are a primary agricultural and culturally important commodity in West Africa, where over 95 percent of world's yam crop is harvested. Yams are important for survival in these regions. Some varieties of these tubers can be stored up to six months without refrigeration, which makes them a valuable resource for the yearly period of food scarcity at the beginning of the wet season.

^{xviii} Burnett, Paula. p.3.

^{xix} Burnett, Paula. p.9. 'Monkland...Chiggerfoot' were places in the Morant Bay area. Newcastle is a garrison town in the hills above Kingston.

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