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“The Goddess in the Caribbean”

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DEDICATION

For the women who have tripped and fallen and cannot get back up. I have been there.

You can and You will.

ABSTRACT

This study establishes the existence and historical significance of the Goddess religion and examines manifestations of the Mystic Feminine archetype in the Caribbean. It identifies the presence of the Mystic Feminine in selected postcolonial literature, mythology and religion and analyses how the Mystic Feminine archetype can and does shape and influence female agency. The systemic and endemic scourge of violence towards women and girls in the Caribbean forms the background for this study. This study proposes that while the disempowerment of female agency is a complex phenomenon, it can be dismantled by awareness of that which has been deliberately obscured; the diminishment and demonisation of the empowered female, exemplified by the Mystic Feminine. “The Goddess in the Caribbean” suggests that heightened awareness of the complexity and richness of the role of the Mystic Feminine can be a catalyst for the elevation of female consciousness and the activation of female agency.

Keywords: Goddess, female agency, mystic, archetype, Caribbean, La Diabliesse, Goddess Kali, mythology, postcolonial literature

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Survey on Caribbean Archetypes and Gender, 18 February 2021.

INTRODUCTION

“The suppression of women's rights began with the suppression of women's rites.”

Merlin Stone¹

Rationale

This study focuses on Caribbean female agency, but not within the traditional gendered socio-ideological frameworks. It explores the unexplored consciousness of Caribbean women through an examination of the Mystic Feminine – arguably, the real seat of autonomy. Ultimately, this study asks two questions; Is there a Mystic Feminine archetype in the Caribbean? Could awareness of this Mystic Feminine have any influence on female agency in the Caribbean? An analysis of the Mystic Feminine in selected postcolonial literature, mythology, and religions, will reveal insights that can be instrumental in reclaiming female agency in both the mystical and the mortal realms of the Caribbean.

For the purposes of this study, the term Mystic Feminine will refer to an archetypal female supernaturally endowed with power. The term “Mystic Feminine” is an abstract and unfamiliar concept and therefore requires further explanation. To clarify this term, an understanding of the terms “archetype” and “collective unconscious” is necessary. Hudson explains both as follows:

Carl Jung originally developed the concepts of archetypes and the collective unconscious. Jung defined the collective unconscious as a deeper layer of the unconscious where we inherit the ability to frame experience. Jung proposed that the collective unconscious

¹ See inside front cover of *When God was a Woman* by Merlin Stone

consists of archetypes and universal forms which often appear in myths and dreams.

Archetypes, the stylized symbols that attempt to reflect the essence of the psyche, are the primitive images and evolutionary symbols that represent innate and collective ways in which human beings perceive and understand the world. (1)

Female mythological and cultural archetypes with similar traits are found in the oral traditions of most Caribbean islands. These cultural and mythological archetypes are manifestations of the Mystic Feminine. In Caribbean mythology these manifestations include the Soucouyant – a female who can turn into a ball of flames and fly, Mama de'Leau – a half snake, half woman figure who protects the water-ways and the La Diabliesse, a mixed-race female with one human and one cow foot. All three of these powerful female archetypes are demonised. The La Diabliesse which literally means Devil Woman is said to vengefully lead unsuspecting males over cliffs to their death. But questions arise – *why* does she do this and *what* have these men done? What influence does the demonisation of empowered Mystic Feminine have on female agency? This will be further explored in the Chapter “The Warrior Mystic Feminine”.

Although females occupy some of the region's highest offices ² gender violence is endemic with escalating numbers of Caribbean women and girls subjected to varying extremes of oppression and exploitation. The Caribbean region therefore is a complex site of polarised gender ideologies. The more successful women become, the more violent the repercussions.

² The article “Caribbean Women in Politics in the Caribbean” states that, “In recent years there have been 11 Heads of Government - Dominica was first in 1980, Haiti and Bermuda have each seen it done three times, Jamaica has had it twice with the same woman and both Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago have had women run the country” (n-p)

“Gender-based Violence in Trinidad and Tobago, A Qualitative Study” states that “Women’s economic independence can initially create a backlash from men, as they may feel their role is threatened” (32). Women across the Caribbean, in all strata of society have fallen victim to this violence, from rural to urban, across class, age, educational and economic demographics.³

To this end, there exists a growing collection of scholarly work which critically examines the social, political, and economic causes and effects of gender and gender-based violence in the Caribbean. Momsen observes that:

Within the Caribbean regional diversity of ethnicity, class, language and religion there is an ideological unity of patriarchy, of female subordination and dependence. Yet there is also a vibrant living tradition of female economic autonomy, of female-headed households and of a family structure in which men are often marginal and absentee (45).

Referring to this phenomenon as a “double paradox” (45) of gender ideologies, Momsen points out its complex colonial hegemonic roots. It is unquestionably evident that today, patriarchal toxic behaviours continue to contest female agency.

Religious belief systems are a prime site for these patriarchal toxic behaviours and most religions in the Caribbean are patriarchal. The Mystic Feminine is often defined within the context of a masculine hierarchy. Devotees acknowledge a masculine God as the Supreme Being, to whom the Goddess/Mother of God is in service. While there are manifestations of the Divine Feminine in Christianity, Hinduism and Afro-Syncretic religions such as Santeria and

³“Gender-based violence affects a cross- section of women. It is not confined to specific groups of women in society and must be placed within the larger context of gender-inequality.” – “GBV in The Caribbean”, UN Women Caribbean (n-p).

Orisha, the masculine Deity is still the presiding ideology and overlord.⁴ Numbers of female religious leaders are usually below those of their male counterparts. In the Caribbean, is the Divine Feminine equal to the Divine Masculine? How has the Hindu Goddess Kali managed to carve out a different niche for Herself and does Her presence influence female agency? These questions will be further explored in “The Mystic Feminine Warrior.”

In postcolonial literature, the Mystic Feminine archetype is a vessel for repressed truths too difficult to express in reality. In the Caribbean, women are repositories - the holders of the secrets and memories of their families, their communities, their nations. Often these secrets are shameful and fearful and thus many remain in a holding pattern, unable to speak, to find a voice. But the Mystic Feminine archetype in postcolonial literature does not remain silent. She uses Her power as repository to speak these secrets, and guide others to face their own fears. In so doing, She becomes an agent of change. In this dual capacity, she holds the keys to transformation, hence she becomes a Mystic Feminine Gate Keeper. The role of the Mystic Feminine as Goddess, Ghost and Mythological Gate Keeper will be further explored in selected

⁴ In Christianity, the Virgin Mary is the Mother of Christ Jesus, who as the son of God is the primary focus. In Catholicism, She functions as an intermediary to the omniscient, masculine God the father. In Hinduism, the pantheon of Hindu Goddesses each have a corresponding male/God counterpart with whom they work in tandem, but ultimately all are subordinate to the omniscient, masculine Brahma. In the Afro-Syncretic religions such as Santeria and Shango also known as Orisha, the Goddesses also have corresponding masculine counterparts, but all are in service to the one supreme Lord of Heaven, the masculine Oludumare. In Islam, Muslims worship Allah, said to be beyond gender, however as Shaikh notes, “...even though Muslims might not have images of God as father, there certainly is a long history of naturalized andocentrism, male authority, gendered hierarchies, and implicit masculine associations with the divine.” (n-p).

postcolonial literature in the chapter “The Mystic Feminine Gate-Keeper” How these manifestations relate to female agency in the Caribbean will also be examined.

The relationship between the Mystic Feminine and female agency in the Caribbean remains largely unexplored. Could there be a connection? Is it a silent and possibly missing link? Could awareness empower a change in consciousness? Just as knowledge of the violent history of colonial patriarchal hegemony in the Caribbean has resulted in a diverse population of fertile creators and thinkers, so too, an examination of the role of the Mystic Feminine may provide insights into the Caribbean female psyche, strategically recovering the dismissed power that has always been inherent in female agency.

Thesis statement

This study represents a search for “The Goddess in the Caribbean” – an analysis of the role of the Mystic Feminine in literature, mythology and religion and a consideration of Her potential influence on female agency.

Parameters

Due to the vast scope of each of the disciplines: literature, mythology and religion, this work will not encompass the entire Caribbean region but rather focus on content from selected Caribbean islands. In the chapter “The Mystic Feminine Gate Keeper”, the postcolonial literature examined is written by authors from Trinidad and Jamaica and a Trinidadian who currently resides in The Bahamas. Reference is also made to the work of authors from Guadeloupe, Guyana, Jamaica and Dominica.

In the chapter “The Warrior Mystic Feminine”, the mythological figure of the La Diabliesse is examined. The myth of the La Diabliesse is found in the folklore of Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia, Grenada, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. Reference is also made to parallel archetypal Mystic Feminine figures in other Latin American islands. This chapter explores the worship of the Hindu Goddess Kali in Trinidad and Guyana. The timeframe for this study is difficult to establish as the origins of religious and mythological characters are not definitive, but generally, the post-colonial period (20th century) to the present day. Female agency and the mystic feminine are analysed in this study, thus the themes are gendered, cultural, social and mystical anthropological in nature.

Objectives

While scholarly studies exist on both female agency and mythology in the Caribbean, research to date has not revealed any with the focus on the possibility of the influence of the Mystic Feminine on female agency. It is hoped that this study will fill that gap and inspire further scholarly work. The intention of this work is not to leverage the feminine over the masculine but to address the inequitable representation of the feminine in the individual and communal gender ideologies in the Caribbean that has resulted in a violent⁵ and often deadly imbalance. It is necessary to point out that there are good, responsible, loving, kind and decent men who are excellent colleagues, neighbours, friends, sons, brothers, uncles, husbands, partners, fathers, and grandfathers in the Caribbean. To be female is not to automatically be

⁵ “Three of the top ten recorded rape rates in the world occur in the Caribbean. While the worldwide average for rape was 15 per 100,000, The Bahamas had an average of 133, St. Vincent and the Grenadines 112, Jamaica 51, Dominica 34, Barbados 25 and Trinidad and Tobago 18.” – “GBV in The Caribbean,” UN Women Caribbean (n-p).

conferred the status of right, just or divine. Just as there are demonic mystic and mortal males, there are demonic mystic and mortal females.

This study on the Mystic Feminine is primarily intended to make available information that is lacking about empowered femininity in the Caribbean. This study does not suggest that knowledge of the Mystic Feminine is all that is needed to recover from the trauma of abuse. It is only in the taking of responsibility for one's own life and one's own healing that one is able to emerge out of victimhood. Ultimately, the intention of "The Goddess in the Caribbean" is to elevate the awareness and consciousness of female empowerment in the collective Caribbean psyche which can be key to turning the tide towards true female agency and therefore true gender equality.

Methodology

Data Collection: Primary oral sources include information from one survey on the awareness of the Mystic Feminine and contestation of female agency as well as three interviews.⁶ Information is also taken from primary documentary sources in the form of newspaper and social media articles on violence against women. Secondary documentary sources include academic studies on gender and the supernatural as well as Caribbean literature that features the Mystic Feminine.

⁶ The interview with Dr. Hannah Regis, a University of the West Indies UWI Lecturer is on gender and the supernatural in postcolonial Literature. Dr. Karen Moore, past president and fellow of The Trinidad and Tobago Psychologists Association offers insights on domestic abuse and female agency and Ms. Deidre Ferreira, Co-Creator with the Totality of Life provides her perspective on spirituality and the journey of healing with reference to the healing of women.

Data Utilisation: The genre of this work is both a cultural and a social study with a reference to literary content. The research approach is qualitative guided by scholarly data (empirical) and also includes a brief reference to quantitative information in the form of statistics.

Chapter Outlines

This study consists of three chapters.

Chapter One: Literature Review/Conceptual Framework. This chapter, “Finding the Mystic Feminine” defines the term “Mystic Feminine” and explores the Goddess archetype in a global, historical context and in a Caribbean context. It references published material on the Mystic Feminine in mythology and religion and highlights selected literary works. It also examines academic work on female agency in the Caribbean. This chapter points out the absence of a link between the Mystic Feminine and female agency, which this study hopes to address.

Chapter Two: “The Mystic Feminine Gate Keeper” will examine the role and function of the Mystic Feminine as a repository and agent of change in selected postcolonial Literature: Lelawatte Manoo Rahming’s poem “Footsteps in this land”, Lawrence Scott’s “The Wedding Photograph”, Patricia Powell’s “Travelling” and David Chariandy’s *Soucouyant*. This chapter will also explore how this role is reflected in female agency in the Caribbean.

Chapter Three: “The Mystic Feminine Warrior” will examine the complex deified and demonised role of the Mystic Feminine in mythology and religion, as represented by the La Diabliesse in the mythology of Trinidad, St. Lucia, Grenada, Martinique, and Guadeloupe. This chapter also explores the worship of the Hindu Goddess Kali in Trinidad and Guyana. These findings are related to contemporary female agency in the Caribbean.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review/Conceptual Framework

“Finding the Mystic Feminine”.

This study represents a meeting at the crossroads of female agency and feminine archetype. In Caribbean oral traditions, the deserted village crossroads under a full moon is a characteristic setting which has both literal and metaphoric meaning. It is the cross-point - the liminal space which facilitates a confrontation of energies – a battle for the truth. This study is being written at a time full of unprecedented violence towards women. It is being written at the crossroads of a Caribbean consciousness deserted by an awareness of the Mystic Feminine. This Literature Review/Conceptual framework will explore material that exists on this subject of the Mystic Feminine in an academic, universal, and Caribbean context. It will also explore works of the mythological, religious and literary manifestations of the Mystic Feminine and examine studies on gender ideology and female agency in the Caribbean.

From dismissal to outright demonisation, the concept of the existence of a Mystic Feminine has been persecuted by centuries of literal and ideological witch-hunts. Former Professor Emeritus of Archaeology at the University of California, Los Angeles, Lithuanian-American archaeologist, author, Marija Gimbutas (1921-1994) was a controversial and prolific academic of the Goddess religion. Gimbutas who has a PhD from the University of Tubingen in Germany, wrote eighteen books and over two hundred scholarly articles on the history of Goddess worship. In her last book, *The Civilisation of the Goddess*, she wrote:

The primordial deity for our Paleolithic and Neolithic ancestors was female, reflecting the sovereignty of motherhood. In fact, there are no images that have been found of a

Father God throughout the prehistoric record. Paleolithic and Neolithic symbols and images cluster around a self-generating Goddess and her basic functions as Giver-of-Life, Wielder-of-Death, and as Regeneratrix. (Gimbutas x).

The work of Gimbutas was and continues to be controversial.⁷ Notably, celebrated American author and professor Joseph Campbell was strongly influenced by the work of Gimbutas and in fact, wrote the introduction to Gimbutas' *Language of the Goddess* in 1989. In Campbell's *Goddesses, Mysteries of the Feminine Divine (The Collected works of Joseph Campbell)*, Editor Rossi writes:

Gimbutas work convinced Campbell even more deeply of what he was sensing, namely, that the Great Goddess was the central divine figure in the earliest mythological conception of the world, and that the powers outlined by Gimbutas were the roots of those that he saw in the goddesses of later mythologies and sacred traditions (237-43-Kindle)

Questions around the academic legitimacy of work on the Mystic Feminine continue to create controversy and so any literature review on the subject must indicate this early de-legitimising of the scholarship of the Mystic Feminine. This condemnation which dates back to the beginning of the publication of Gimbutas' work in the 1980's, continued throughout her academic career and included allusions to her gender as reasons to question her academic legitimacy.⁸

⁷ Spretnak notes that, "She is barely mentioned in textbooks and was not only toppled but nearly erased entirely." (1)

⁸ "For instance, John Chapman asserted in a biographical essay on Gimbutas in the book *Excavating Women* that he felt duty-bound to note that her identifying fertility themes in some of

In addition to the prolific academic work of Gimbutas⁹ on the existence of the Goddess, other works which explore the Mystic Feminine from an academic, ethnographic and a spiritual perspective include: *When God was a Woman* by Merlin Stone, *The Chalice & the Blade* by Riane Eisler, *Rebirth of the goddess : finding meaning in feminist spirituality* by Carol P. Christ, *Drawing Down the Moon* by Margot Adler, *Women who run with the wolves* by Clarissa Pinkola Estés and *The Goddess Path* by Patricia Monaghan. These works, among many others clearly establish a body of scholarship on the existence of the Goddess.

Within a Caribbean context, where are the studies on the existence of the Mystic Feminine? *High Mas: Carnival and the Poetics of Caribbean Culture* by Kevin Adonis Browne comes the closest to answering this question, with his exposé on the portrayal of the folklore character the La Diabliesse by Tracey Sankar. Published to critical acclaim in 2018, Dr. Browne shares a lyrical exploration of Carnival from both the lens of his camera and the musings of his mind. Browne's photo essay and chapter on "La Femme des Revenants" which translated from French to English means "A Queen of Sorrows", chronicles Sankar's journey through costuming and depiction, giving a visual and literal window into the other worldly inhabitation of this manifestation of the Mystic Feminine.

the non-Indo-European symbols occurred at the time, by his reckoning, when she had reached menopause, "a time when her own personal fertility is disappearing and her own children leave home."³⁸ (qtd in Spretnak 34)

⁹ In 2021, the Opus Archives and Research Centre on the Campuses of Pacifica Graduate Institute is presenting a year-long exhibition of the work of Marija Gimbutas: "Archaeomythology of a Goddess" as UNESCO has designated her an eminent personality who contributed to the shaping of civilisation

Browne's work and the manifestation of the Mystic Feminine in mythology as it relates to female agency will be further explored in the chapter "The Warrior Mystic Feminine". Other works which feature the La Diabliesse appear in anthologies of folktales and legends. *Folklore and legends of Trinidad and Tobago* and 'Mermaids, Imps and Goddesses'; The Folklore of Trinidad and Tobago" written and collected by Gérard Besson provides useful information. *Two years in the French West Indies* by Hearn, Lafcadio, 1850-1904 offers historical insights into the presence of the La Guiablesse in Martinique, in the early twentieth century.

The supernatural has always had a prominent place in Caribbean literature. This is possibly due to its diversity of belief systems and violent patriarchal, colonial hegemonic history. Scholarly work on ghost narratives has recently become prominent. Of relevance to this area of study is Erica Johnson's *Caribbean Ghostwriting*. Johnson points to haunting "...as a mode of historical agency" (24). Hannah Lutchmansingh in "Haunted Histories: Spectres of the Middle Passage in Caribbean Literature" observes that, "Ghost narratives become, in effect, memorials to survival and persistence of ancestral presences." (9) Both these works speak to this intersection of archetype and agency.

The Haunted Tropics: Caribbean Ghost Stories (2015) represented the first Caribbean ghost anthology of its kind. The editor, Martin Munro, states that, "Given the history of the Caribbean, it is not surprising that much of the region's literature bears a haunted quality:.." (x). Two stories from this collection, "Travelling" by Patricia Powell and "The Wedding Photograph" by Lawrence Scott will be analysed in the chapter "The Mystic Feminine Gate Keeper". What influence does the role of the Mystic Feminine in Caribbean literature have on female agency? The exploration of the answer to this question may shed some light on the question of female empowerment.

There do not appear to be studies devoted solely to the Mystic Feminine in Caribbean religions, with the exception of publications on the phenomenon of La Divina Pastora/Sooparee Mai. La Divina Pastora/Sooparee Mai which is known as the Black Madonna is a statue which resides at the Siparia Roman Catholic Church. She is worshipped by multiple religious faiths with the Catholics recognising Her as La Divina Pastora and the Hindus venerating Her as the Mother Lakshmi, the Goddess Durga or the Goddess Kali. To understand the Hindu Goddess Kali, Devdutt Pattanik offers an insight into Her secrets and mysteries in his video entitled. “Kali’s Secret, 28 Days, 28 Secrets”. Relevant to a study of the Goddess Kali in a Caribbean context is *Translating Kali’s feast: the goddess in Indo-Caribbean ritual and fiction* by Stephanos Stephanides with Karna Singh. Utilising ethnography and literature, it examines the subject both in a diasporic and cross-cultural context.

Rhoda Reddock’s, “Contestations Over Culture, Class, Gender And Identity In Trinidad And Tobago: 'The Little Tradition'” provides a link between Orisha and Kali worship offering a perspective on the Mystic Feminine in both African and Indian religions in a Caribbean context. Kumar Mahabir explores how this religious phenomenon is fraught with conflict in “Mother Kali as Virgin Mary: a new world Hindu/Catholic phenomenon in Trinidad.” There exist multiple articles, dissertations, publications and videos exploring and celebrating this syncretisation of beliefs. As a manifestation of the Mystic Feminine in Caribbean religious beliefs, the role of the Hindu Goddess Kali and Her influence in female agency will be further explored in the chapter “The Warrior Mystic Feminine”.

The study of gender ideologies in the Caribbean is a rich and evolving field of both academic and literary works. *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean. Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago*, edited by Eudine

Barriteau, *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*. Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago edited by Patricia Mohammed, and *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*. Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago edited by Rhoda Reddock are all seminal works on the subject. Another study that yields useful information on the state of female agency in the Caribbean is “Gender-based Violence in Trinidad and Tobago, A Qualitative Study” co-funded by the Government of Trinidad & Tobago through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Joint Programme on Gender-Based Violence and UN Women, Gabrielle Hosein, PhD, Team Leader.

There exists a considerable body of work on gender ideologies, female agency, and the existence of Mystic Feminine in mythology, religion and literature in a Caribbean context. What does not appear to exist, is the crossroads that links them all together – that enables the conjunction of truths between the mystical and the corporeal realms. Beyond this centuries old story of the push and pull of the patriarchy and female agency, it is hoped that this study’s unearthing of the empowering presence of the Mystic Feminine in the Caribbean will in turn empower and inspire the individual and collective feminine psyche.

CHAPTER TWO

“The Mystic Feminine Gate Keeper”

An analysis of the role of the Mystic Feminine as Gate Keeper in selected postcolonial literature and Her influence on female agency.

The Mystic Feminine archetype has manifested as Goddess, mythological female figure, or ghostly female figure in many cultures.¹⁰ This is due to the universal nature of archetypes embedded in the collective unconscious and their ability to be a channel for psychic energy. Of this, Babcock observes, “This shared unconscious explains how the same story can appear at different times in different cultures” (6).¹¹ These archetypes can both conceive (hold) and deliver (activate). The Mystic Feminine is thus both repository as holder of secrets and memories and activator acting as an agent of change. In this dual role, She becomes the holder of the keys to the liminal. The liminal space is the space between worlds: colonial and independent, mystical and mortal, fear and freedom, silence and voice. In postcolonial Caribbean literature, the Mystic Feminine functions as the Gate Keeper, holding the liminal keys that can change reality. So too, women in the Caribbean are Gate Keepers, holding the psychic keys that can transform lives.

¹⁰ Greek, Roman, Sumerian, Egyptian, Middle Eastern, Asian, European, Indian and African cultures

¹¹ One example of this is the similarity between the Irish Warrior Goddess The Mórrígan and the Egyptian Warrior Goddess Sekhmet who both govern war and interestingly enough, healing. See Kate Wood.

In postcolonial societies, the liminal is a place of transformative power. It is where the secrets and memories of a people are mystically housed, out of which are materially activated the stories, rituals, music and art. Of the significance of the liminal, Ashcroft et al. state that:

The importance of the liminal for post-colonial theory is precisely its usefulness for describing an ‘in-between’ space in which cultural change may occur: the transcultural space in which strategies for personal or communal self-hood may be elaborated, a region in which there is a continual process of movement and interchange between different states. (117)

In the poetry¹², plays¹³ and novels¹⁴ of postcolonial literature, the characters who enter this liminal mystical space are either guided by a mystical gate keeper, or are themselves transformed into gate keepers between the mystical and the material world. It should come as no surprise that the supernatural features prominently in postcolonial literature because as Munro states, “Every island in the Caribbean is a site of deep haunting...” (x). In a region still reeling from five hundred years of colonial hegemonic atrocities, there is an infinite supply of trauma, much of it subconscious and unexpressed.¹⁵ Often, this gate keeper is a manifestation of the

¹² the Amazons in “Amazon Women” by Olive Senior (Jamaica), multiple mystical and mortal female manifestations in “I is a long memored woman” by Grace Nichols (Guyana)

¹³ the white Goddess in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* by Derek Walcott (St. Lucia /Trinidad)

¹⁴ Bella in “The Obeahman Obeahed” by Maryse Conde(Guadeloupe), Ma Mait in “Travelling” by Patricia Powell(Jamaica), Annette in “The Voyage of the Centipede” by Gisele Pineau(Guadeloupe), the Old Nurse in “The Wedding Photograph” by Lawrence Scott(Trinidad), the ghostly female in “I used to live here once” by Jean Rhys(Dominica), Tituba in *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* by Maryse Conde(Guadeloupe), Aycayia in *The Mermaid of Black Conch* by Monique Roffey(Trinidad)

¹⁵ Caribbean scholars such as Wilson Harris and Edouard Glissant have critically analysed the profound and often dismissed role of the mythic imagination and cultural memory in the context of postcolonial societies. Of this Wilson writes, “Myth – a despised concept in an age of

Mystic Feminine. She is the guide on this journey, the purpose of which is to reclaim that which has been taken. In Her is manifested unquestionable female autonomy. Female agency is thus articulated through her ability to hold, to activate, to reveal, to guard and to guide.

The manifestation of the Mystic Feminine as Goddess is present in a growing number of postcolonial poems. In Lelawatte Manoo Rahming's poem "Footsteps in this land", the manifestation of the Mystic Feminine as Goddess holds the memories and secrets of the indigenous peoples and in so doing, holds the keys to the granting of their desires. Manoo Rahming is an Indo-Trinidadian residing in The Bahamas. In "Footsteps in this land", her sense of isolation is conveyed in the lines: "But I am alone/without a story/in this land/where my children/refuse to be born/in this land/where I have/no umbilical cord". Manoo-Rahming then appeals to the Goddess Atabeyra, "Oh Atabeyra/Great Mother of the Caribbean Sea/Goddess of childbirth/hear my prayer/hold my hand/build with me/the tunnel/for my children to cross."

Atabeyra is the Arawak or Taino Goddess of Fertility, Child-Birth, the Moon and the Waters (see Fig.1). The Arawak also known as the Taino were the indigenous inhabitants of both the Greater and Lesser Antilles. In this poem, the appeal to the Goddess Atreyaba is a cry for help in the conceiving and bringing to life of literal and/or metaphoric children - a sense of family, of belonging. Of this, Frank Birbalsingh writes, "Tellingly, despite her ethnic Indian (Hindu) origins, Ms. Manoo-Rahming's persona invokes an indigenous Caribbean deity implying hopes for a new sense of belonging that will emerge out of her experience in the Caribbean itself." (n-p).

realism – endorses a series of instinctualities in all useful but partial windows that we erect upon and into reality" (207).

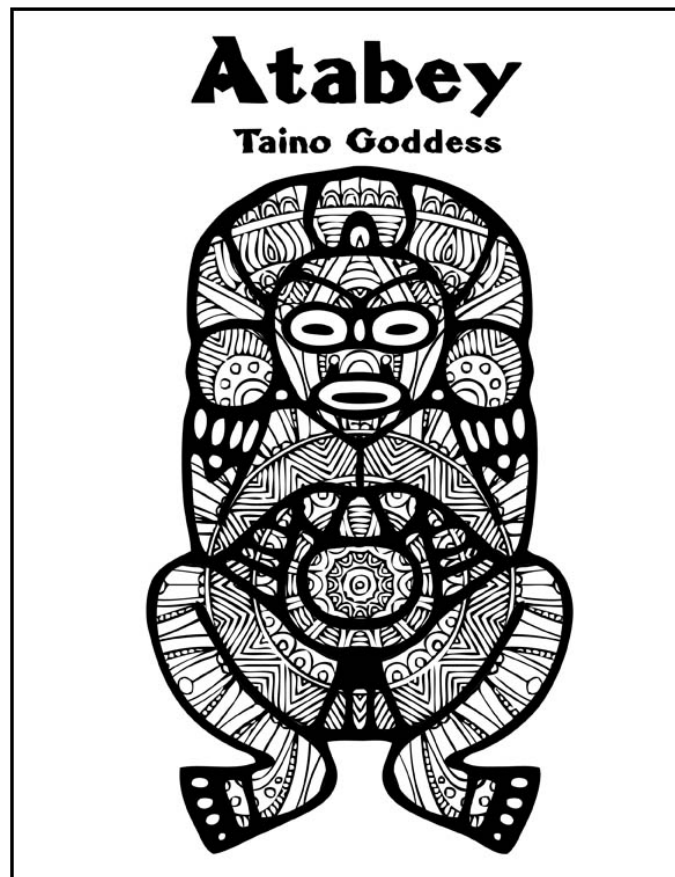


Figure 1
Image of illustration of "Atebey Taino Goddess"
Source; TainoAge Colouring Pages

In turning to the Goddess Atabeyra, Manoo Rahming is asking for the liminal keys to the gate way of the original energy of the Caribbean. To Her, the indigenous women cried out when their children were murdered and in Her resides the power to comfort and guide. In that ancient rootedness to the first peoples of this region, lies an unexamined sacred female agency – *born of*

this soil. This is not a Greek Goddess, or a Roman Goddess, not even an Indian or an African. It is the mystical embodiment of the original female agency of the Caribbean. The consciousness of an ancient, sacred Mystic Feminine who is of this soil, of these waters could bring a sense of ancient and sacred connection to Caribbean women regardless of ethnicity or religion. The idea that an empowered and benevolent mystic female presence has been present here for centuries could empower mortal Caribbean female agency.

The Mystic Feminine as the ghostly female figure manifests in the role of the Old Nurse in Lawrence Scott's "The Wedding Photograph" and as Ma Mait in Patricia Powell's "Travelling." Elspeth, an elderly Creole white woman, is losing her memory due to Parkinsons. No one, not the nurses, not even her nephew who is the narrator can help her to regain what she is desperately seeking. It is only when Elspeth is visited in her dreams by the ghost of her Old Nurse, that she is granted access to her memories. The ghost of the Old Nurse who symbolises the latent power of the enslaved African female in service to the white family, becomes the inadvertent holder of the family memories and secrets. In granting Elspeth access to her memories, she frees her from the trauma of the present reality.

Scott writes that "Old Nurse was that relative she was trying to recall, who had returned now to comfort her in the absence of her mother's protection" (80). It is the Old Nurse who has the agency; the power of transformation is in her hands. The Old Nurse as the Mystic Feminine Gate Keeper is both a repository of memories and an agent of change. In bringing back those memories to Elspeth, she transforms Elspeth's grief and angst to relief and peace. In his review, Galbo observes:

The photographs of Old Nurse and the wedding party are the mnemonic portals through which Elspeth, in the grip of disease reconnects with a childhood overshadowed by a

vexed historical legacy and, in so doing finds peace remembering Old Nurse and the dance of the anonymous spectres. (181)

Likewise, in Patricia Powell's "Travelling", the Mystic Feminine Gate Keeper is manifested in the ghostly female figure of Ma Mait. The unnamed and troubled female protagonist is visited in her dreams by the ghost of an old woman from her past in the island of Jamaica. This is a woman who as a child she had scorned, actually spat upon. Of this, Powell writes, "I spat in her face one day, her face that was full of lines like old lace and mottled with brown spots" (28). Yet, forty years later, in the midst of a deep and unexpressed angst, she is able to subconsciously summon the ghost of the woman she had scorned, to her side. Ma Mait then guides her on a journey to the underground of her repressed fears and pain on a fantastical ride where she encounters hybrid animals and characters. She encounters her longed for, long absent father as a hybrid bird man. Powell writes, "And when I could finally see, he had a face like a bird with iridescent blue black feathers and a hooked bill." (30).

Facing the true source of repressed anguish is the only way to free oneself of the paralysis of denial and mobilise a life of autonomy and joy. Of this process, Dr. Hannah Regis states, "This journey into an alternate universe equally reads as a journey into a submerged past through ancestral dreaming which facilitates self-awareness and personal mobility."¹⁶ Just like the Old Nurse, Ma Mait answers the subconscious and desperate cry for help, arriving as the Mystic Feminine to guide the troubled female on an archetypal journey through the underworld of repressed traumas. She can then emerge freed of the chains of anguish and pain. As Gate

¹⁶ Zoom interview with Dr. Hannah Regis, Lecturer, University of the West Indies, UWI, 6th Feb.2021

Keeper, the Mystic Feminine is not only the holder of the liminal keys to transformation, She is the *only* one capable of holding the memories which can transform the pain.

There is a tremendous power which is inherent in the capacity to hold the family secrets, the power to answer the most desperate of calls, no matter where they are from and the compassion and wisdom to guide the most perilous of journeys – that of the journey within. Could the realisation of the existence of this kind of power inform the articulation of female agency? Arguably, if the thousands of Old Nurses and Ma Maitis who have spent their lives in servitude to others, woke up to their own tremendous transformative power, there could be empowerment in the place of repressed traumas which would translate into the voicing of centuries of silent atrocities. The silence of shameful family secrets would no longer be held in perpetuity to poison future generations, but would be released for accountability, for healing, for transformation.

The mythological La Diabliesse and the Soucouyant (see fig.2) have long reigned supreme in the mythic imagination and cultural memory of the Caribbean.¹⁷ The Soucouyant¹⁸ is purported to be an old woman, who exhibits several powers such as flying as a ball of flames. Her demonic aspects include the leaving of her skin in a mortar and the sucking of blood that does not break the surface of the skin, leaving a blue-black mark, prompting others to say

¹⁷ The La Diabliesse has a chapter in Kevin Browne's *High Mas: Carnival and Poetics of Caribbean Culture* and appears in Ismith Kahn's short story "Shadows move in the Britannia Bar". The Soucouyant is referenced in several of Jean Rhys' works including "The Day they burned the Books" and *Wide Sargasso Sea* and features as the title of David Chariandy's novel *Soucouyant*.

¹⁸ In Barbados, She is known as a fire-hag, in The Bahamas, as old-heg, in St. Vincent as old-higue as well as in Jamaica and Guyana.

“Soucouyant suck yuh!”¹⁹ The wise old woman in possession of powers is often demonised as a hag or witch.



Figure 2
Image of graphic art “Meet the Soucouyant”
Source; the artist Everard J. McBain Jr., GemGfx Animation Studios

¹⁹ In an interview, for T&T Folklore entitled “Pt. 5: SOUCOUYANT”, historian and author Gerard Besson points out that the Soucouyant myth may be a syncretisation of the vampire mythology brought by the French with African blood sucking mythological figures, creating the Caribbean Soucouyant.

The demonisation of older women, accusing them of being either a La Diabliesse or a Soucouyant was a common practise in rural villages, for the purpose of stealing their homes and wealth, as pointed out by historian and author Gerard Besson in an interview for T&T Folklore²⁰.

The demonisation of the empowered Mystic Feminine will be further explored in “The Mystic Feminine Warrior” but it is significant to note that the word Soucouyant comes from the French Creole “Soninke sukunya” which translates into man-eating sorcerer. The Soucouyant and the La Diabliesse are the repositories of the nation’s history and therefore the Gate Keepers to transformation and change on a national level. Like the toxic masculine backlash mentioned in the introduction resulting from the advancement of women, these representations of tremendous female power have resulted in their demonisation.

David Chariandy’s *Soucouyant* explores the issues surrounding second-generation migration, mother/son relationships and the construction of identity between the diaspora and the homeland. Adele, the narrator’s mother is slipping into an agonising descent into dementia She is haunted by the memories of her encounter with a Soucouyant in Trinidad. She says in her musings “There was an old woman who did know. A woman with long memory and the proper name of things” (Chariandy 21). This old wise woman who possesses wisdom and the knowledge to heal, heals Adele’s terrible burns with cobwebs. But as she descends further into dementia, Adele thinks the old woman is a Soucouyant, or does she? It is unclear whether Adele has actually seen a Soucouyant, or if she has cast the old woman who healed her burns into the role of Soucouyant, as a way of coping with the childhood trauma of a fire.

²⁰ “T&T Folklore Pt. 4: LA DIABLESSE”

Adele's obsession with the Soucouyant reflects her psychic desire to draw closer to the Mystic Feminine as Mythological Gate Keeper. As Delisle observes:

In *Soucouyant*, cultural memory is performed in several important registers: inherited trauma or "postmemory," diasporic histories, national mythologies, and powerful nostalgias. All of these influences are received by the protagonist, often in the guise of the unearthly soucouyant, and are in turn refashioned into his own narrative. (3)

As she nears her own departure from this realm to the next, Adele reaches for the "unearthly soucouyant" as the holder of "inherited trauma or "postmemory," diasporic histories, national mythologies, and powerful nostalgias" (Delisle 3). In so doing, Adele will be granted the transformation out of the anguish of the reality of dementia into a liminal space of freedom and relief. The transformative power inherent in the symbolism of the function of the Soucouyant in *Soucouyant* speaks to the transformative power of the role of the Mystic Feminine as mythological Gate Keeper. It also speaks to the female agency inherent in the elderly females of the Caribbean who are often diminished, dismissed, or demonised. An awakening to that latent power of transformation could shape elderly female agency in untold ways.

As seen in selected postcolonial literature of Lelawatte Manoo Rahming's poem "Footsteps in this land", Lawrence Scott's "The Wedding Photograph", Patricia Powell's "Travelling" and David Chariandy's *Socucoyant*, the Mystic Feminine Gate Keeper articulates tremendous power. In her function as a repository of memories and secrets and an activator of change, She holds the keys to the liminal lands. In postcolonial societies the liminal is crucial to understanding the transformative power of the in between space, between colonisation and independence, between the mythical and the mortal, between repression and release. Whether as Goddess, ghost or mythological figure, the female agency of the Mystic Feminine Gate Keeper is

the same female agency which resides in the consciousness of Caribbean women, waiting for realisation and release.

CHAPTER THREE

“The Mystic Feminine Warrior”

An analysis of the role of the Mystic Feminine Warrior in selected mythology and religion and Her influence on female agency in the Caribbean.

In the Caribbean, the mythological La Diabliesse (see fig.3) and the religious Hindu Goddess Kali (see fig.4) exemplify the traits of power and aggression which have metaphorically and literally black-listed them as demonised. Unlike the Mystic Feminine Gate Keepers who answer the cry for help with nurturing guidance, this manifestation of the Mystic Feminine fights. The Mystic Feminine Warrior wages war on the mythological and religious battle fields of the world²¹, and has been doing so for centuries.²² The patriarchal fear of the empowered feminine is one of the factors contributing to the scourge of violence against women and girls in the Caribbean. The time has come to see through the patriarchal propaganda that has demonised the empowered feminine, both mystical and corporeal and reclaim female agency in both realms.

²¹ See “Warrior Goddesses” including Andraste (British) – Goddess of victory in battle and ravens, Anut (Egyptian), Goddess defender of the Sun God and protector or the king in battle, Athena (Greek) – Battle Goddess, Bast (Egyptian) - Cat Goddess and Protector the Pharaoh, Durga (Hindu) – demon fighting Goddess and protector, Freya (Norse) – Goddess of war, Hel(Norse) Goddess of the Underworld, Ishtar (Sumerian), Kwan-Yin (Chinese) Goddess of Protection, Macha (Irish) – Protector Goddess of woman and children, Minerva (Roman) – Roman parallel of the Greek Goddess Athena, Morrigan (Irish) – crow Goddess of war and death, Oya (Africa) Goddess of wind and storm, counterpart to Shango God of Storms, Pele (Hawaiian) – Volcano Goddess of destruction, Yama-no-Karni (Japanese), Protector Goddess of Women

²² Merlin Stone writes, “The worship of the Goddess as valiant warrior seems to have been responsible for the numerous reports of female soldiers, later referred to by the classical Greeks as the Amazons” (2).



Figure 3
Image of original water colour painting “La Diabliesse”
Source; the estate of the artist, the late Ian Ali

The Mystic Feminine Warrior archetype, like all archetypes has a specific function. She seeks out the guilty and holds them accountable for their actions. She is a shape shifter who lives in the oral traditions, often with a hideous countenance, hidden by a beautiful face. She is a hunter of destructive and abusive men. The Hindu Goddess Kali is depicted holding a sword and a severed male head. The La Diabliesse hunts drunken, abusive, cheating, raping, killing men. The Mystic Feminine Warrior is usually attended by animals or has some feature of an animal on her body. The Goddess Kali is accompanied by a jackal and a snake. In the La Diabliesse this animal is a part of her physicality. She has one human foot and one cow's foot. Depending on the mythology of the particular island, it may be a horse's foot or a donkey's foot.²³ The Mystic Feminine Warrior is the shadow aspect of the Great Mother Goddess, the wild, untamed visceral animalistic energy that is required to battle the animalistic attackers of women. Neither hunts women.

The La Diabliesse is not only present in the mythology of Martinique and Trinidad and Tobago but also appears in the mythology of Guadeloupe, Grenada and St.Lucia. The Latin American islands of the Caribbean also feature a Mystic Feminine who embodies the archetype of a beautiful/bestial woman living in the forest who attacks men.²⁴ Said to have originated in Martinique, the figure of the La Diabliesse travelled with the folkloric beliefs of the Roman

²³ In Guadeloupe and Martinique, it is a horse's foot. See video "Le dorlis (mari de nuit), le soucougnan, la diabliesse-3 légendes des Antilles-conte audio-Chimère.x" "The dorlis (night husband), the soucouyant and the la diabliesse -3 legends of the Antilles -audio tale-Chimère.x at 10:16, it states "un sabot de cheval" which translates into "horse's hoof" in English.

²⁴ In Colombia there is La Madre Monte, see "Columbia's Myths and Legends". In Dominica and Costa Rica there is La Cigupa, see "CULTURE: Dominican Monsters & Mythical Creatures". In Venezuela there is La Soyona, see Anais, "The creepiest Venezuelan horror stories".

Catholic French Planters who arrived in Trinidad in the eighteenth century.²⁵ As early as the 1880's there is a record of the legend of the La Diabliesse, referred to as the La Guiablesse in the travel memoirs²⁶ of 19th-century traveller and writer Lafcadio Hearn.²⁷ Hearn describes her as a “black poem of sinuous grace” (232) and relates the eventual demise of the man she has sent to death down a ravine. Hearn's perspective reflects the colonial hegemonic commodification of the native woman, here to serve and tantalise men.

The man, as he always is, is presented as a hapless victim and the La Guiablesse as a demon. There is no other side to the story, so there is no way of knowing whether the man was himself guilty of acts of violence against women. There are, however, multiple stories that reveal that the victim of the La Diabliesse is never random or innocent. In a Trinbago Stories documentary on Trinidad and Tobago folklore entitled *T&T Folklore Pt. 4: La Diabliesse*, Professor Gordon Rohler states, “Usually she appears to drunk men, strangely enough, wandering at odd hours of the night”. He goes on to add, “Maybe we should question why this demon is supposed to appear in the alluring form of a female, whether the Europeans were expressing their fear of female sexuality for example – the notion that the female is fundamentally evil” (52-2:10).

²⁵ The French Planters were answering the invitation of Roume de St Laurent with the Cedulla of Population in 1783. See Gabriella Matouk's article on Phillippe Rose Roume De Saint-Laurent published by The Caribbean History Archives.

²⁶ See *Two Years in the West Indies* (1890) by Lafcadio Hearn. The chapter is entitled “La Guiablesse.”

²⁷ Hearn writes: “A woman is coming along the road – young, very swarthy, very tall and barefooted, and black-robed: she wears a high white turban with dark stripes, and a white foularf is thrown about her fine shoulders;” (232)

In the same interview, historian and author Gerard Besson claims that the La Diabliesse character evolved out of the West African Goddess of Love Erzulie who easily transitions into being the Goddess of Vengeance. He states that, “The La Diabliesse is the revenge of the woman that was wronged by men.” (2:53-3:41). Dr. Kevin Browne devotes a chapter in his book *High Mas: Carnival and the poetics of Caribbean Cultures* to the La Diabliesse entitled, “La Femme des Revenants” The Queen of Sorrows. This searing, illuminating, difficult and beautiful photo essay on the masquerade of Tracey Sankar playing the La Diabliesse explores the tragic history of the mixed race La Diabliesse herself. Of this, Browne writes, “She is undoubtedly a modification of the much more pervasive trope of the “tragic mulatto” woman, whose very existence was the literal embodiment of racialized violence, rape and incest, miscegenation...” (1721 Kindle).

Browne follows Sankar as she ritualistically puts on the pieces of her costume to embody the spirit of the La Diabliesse.²⁸ The fact that Browne is a male Caribbean academic cannot be ignored when examining such statements as “This *La Diabliesse* was a *Mas* born of violations of women’s bodies, of unapologetic, patriarchal weakness, and the inherent vulnerabilities of power” (1920, Kindle). The presence and publication of this work speaks to a growing awareness of the existence of the Mystic Feminine, and, of critical importance, an acknowledgement of the sins of the patriarchy against the women of the Caribbean – both mortal and mystical. Of this Browne writes, “And I saw my tempers, my fears, my capacity for unbridled violence, my fear of magical women, and I was terrified” (1924, Kindle).

²⁸ Browne notes that Tracey Sankar is wearing the beads which are a “... crucial element in reverence to Erzulie Freda, the Haitian Vodun deity and syncretized patron of La Diabliesse” (*High Mas: Carnival and the Poetics of Caribbean*, 1628 Kindle).

How many magical women have gone underground for fear of the same unbridled violence they have seen their sisters suffering at the hands of Caribbean men? How many voices silenced, how many dreams shelved, how many lives cut short? If depictions of the empowered mystic feminine are demonised and mortal women are exploited and abused for nothing more than being women, then in both realms, the question of female agency becomes a critical issue. The presence of the La Diabliesse and the Goddess Kali have always been in the region's collective unconscious, but as dismissed, diminished and demonised folktale and religious belief. But if alternative stories of these Mystic Feminine Warriors were told, how would this influence female agency?

In a survey²⁹ conducted, forty men and women were asked about their awareness of female mythological characters and whether they were perceived as positive, negative, neutral, or mixed. There was quite a body of knowledge on mythological characters, with many knowing both regional and international figures. Of the forty responses, twenty-six came back as negative, nine as mixed and five as neutral. More than half of the responses defined female mythological figures as negative. This survey also asked for views on the empowerment/disempowerment of women in the Caribbean. The overwhelming majority felt that women were being disempowered but a surprising number also felt that this disempowerment could be altered by women taking responsibility for their own empowerment.

While this is a heartening indication of a growing consciousness of self-empowerment, the question arises – how? Ms. Deidre Ferreira who refers to herself as a Co-Creator with the Totality of Life, has been co-creating, teaching and healing for over twenty years. Her work is to rebuild

²⁹ See Appendix A - Ali, Patti-Anne, "Survey on Caribbean Archetypes and Gender", 18 February 2021.

divine architecture for reconnection to higher self and for self-sovereignty. Her spiritual work has involved hosting full moon healing circles for women. In an interview³⁰, she describes the profound benefit of these healing circles to support women to come back into themselves, lift themselves out of victimhood and to remember inner divinity and inner sovereignty. She states:

When she steps out into the world continuously holding a different vibration, she is an agent for change within the world even though the world may not be reflecting to her what she is holding on the inside.... The patriarchy and the systems that have been designed to keep humanity down both men and women cannot be sustained and begin to be dismantled.

But how easy is it for a woman to access spirituality that nurtures and supports her back into a sense of herself? There is a big difference between announcing the intention to attend Mass and the intention to attend a full moon healing circle of women. One is acceptable and encouraged because it is approved of by the patriarchy, the other suspected and feared because it is autonomously female.

The desire to control the behaviour of both the feminine archetype and the female in the Caribbean stems from the influence of patriarchal customs and religions. Of this, Dr. Karen Moore³¹, states:

³⁰ Zoom interview with Ms. Deidre Ferreira 15th February 2021

³¹ Zoom interview with Dr. Karen Moore, dated 14th March 2021. Dr. Karen Moore is a Trinidadian Clinical Child Psychologist who is a Fellow and past President of the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists. Dr. Moore has over twenty years of experience specialising in trauma work, especially child sexual abuse.

You have to look at it in the context of the patriarchal power structures which exist, and which exist in religion, in the patriarchal religions, a core function of which is to regulate and control female sexuality hence the emphasis on female purity, female virginity, female sanctity and it is cast as extreme respect and veneration for women but in fact denies women sexual agency. And when you think of the fact that patriarchal religions have been used to supplant matriarchal religion and folklore you see that there is an attack on female agency implicit in the social structure.

Patriarchal beliefs are embedded within the socio-cultural frameworks of Caribbean society, so much so that what is venerated as respect for women is in fact a controlling of female agency. These are beliefs that dictate conformity and in so doing, deny agency. Thus, feminine archetypes such as the Virgin Mary are rewarded for purity and piety and feminine archetypes such as the La Diabliesse are demonised for their sexual agency and for holding abusers accountable for their actions. This is directly reflective of society's attitudes towards female victims who are "victim shamed" if perceived to be expressing sexual agency and sympathised with, if demure and ladylike.³²

³² In February 2016, Asami Nagakiya a Japanese tourist and Carnival masquerader was murdered. In response to Nagakiya's murder, the then Mayor of Port-of-Spain Raymond Tim Kee stated, "Women have a responsibility to ensure they are not abused during the Carnival season. It's a matter of, if she was still in her costume - I think that's what I heard - let your imagination roll" ("Mayor who blamed victim's 'vulgar' behaviour for her death resigns", BBC Trending, n-p). The Mayor resigned amidst an outcry and online petition from many women's rights groups. The murder of Andrea Bharath in February 2021, who was demure and conservative in appearance received an outpouring of public sympathy with no negative references to her appearance or her behaviour, in other words, no "victim shaming".

There is nothing demure and ladylike about the Hindu Goddess Kali (see fig.4). Derived from the word Kala which translates as black, time and death, this Hindu Goddess represents eternal energy as the Goddess of destruction. There are several incarnation stories of Kali, all violent and all resulting in her vanquishing of demons. In the Caribbean, Kali worship is evident in Guyana and in Trinidad where the largest concentrations of the descendants of East Indian immigrants can be found. Kali worship is controversial for a number of reasons. The colour of this Goddess's skin is usually depicted as black. This brings with it a whole host of socio-cultural issues that reverberate not just within the colour conscious Indian community but within the wider regional ideologies about race, class and colour which are constructed upon historical demarcations of colourisation. There is also the association of the Goddess with blood sacrifices. Stephanides and Singh note that in Guyana, "... one group of temples has diverted from this tradition and accommodated the Brahminical or vegetarian mode of Hinduism, using limes in the place of the goat or cock sacrifice" (17).

The Hindu Goddess Kali is one of the clearest manifestations of the Mystic Feminine Warrior in the Caribbean. Devotion to Her appears to be more widespread and acceptable in Guyana than in Trinidad. In both Guyana and Trinidad, persons of African descent have attended and participated in Kali devotionals. Kali's ability to syncretise has also shaped a whole new manifestation of the Mystic Feminine in the form of La Divina Pastora/Sooparee Mai. The Black Madonna resides at the Roman Catholic Church in Siparia. There, She is venerated by Caribs, Hindus, Muslims and Catholics – all on the same grounds. While it has not always been a peaceful gathering, today each religious group respectfully makes way for the other on the grounds of the Catholic Church – a phenomenon that is as rare as it is transformative in the world today.



Figure 4
Image of chromolithograph “Kali trampling Shiva”
Source; Artist, R. Varma, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

It is in her uninhibited, raw maternal energy, dark skinned like most Caribbean people that Kali has waged a war against ignorance, religious intolerance, misogyny and bigotry and won. This too is the work of the Mystic Feminine Warrior and the evidence of her influence is seen in the ongoing unification of diverse religious devotees who see something in Her which is undeniable. She will not be limited by human limitations and in so doing, she is fiercely, wildly, unapologetically welcoming to one and all. If ever there were a clear example of the positive influence of the Mystic Feminine on female agency, it is the power of this Warrior who ravages intolerance and racism and misogyny with one set of hands and welcomes all with the others.

The Mystic Feminine Warrior is a very different archetype to the nurturing and maternal Mystic Feminine Gate Keeper. She has a mission and that is holding the guilty accountable for their actions and holding safe space for all those who seek Her. Both mythological La Diabliesse and the religious Hindu Goddess Kali are manifestations of the Mystic Feminine Warrior and both have been demonised for their refusal to turn the other cheek. The La Diabliesse deliberately hunts and annihilates men who attack women. The Hindu Goddess Kali, also a fearsome Warrior has utilised this energy in a different way. She severs the energetic chains of ignorance, bigotry, religious intolerance and misogyny by insisting on welcoming all who seek Her, regardless of differences. This is seen in her syncretisation as La Divina Pastora/Sooparee Mai which welcomes worshippers of all faiths (see fig. 5). In so doing, She is the mystic exemplification of the facilitation of compassionate human female agency (see fig.6)



Figure 5

Image of photo of lit candles in devotion to La Divina Pastora/Sooparee Mai
Source; photographer Ian Rampersad, on site visit to Siparia R.C. Church, 14th February 2021



Figure 6

Image of photo of the statue of La Divina Pastora/Sooparee Mai

Source; photographer Ian Rampersad, on site visit to Siparia R.C. Church, 14th February 2021

CONCLUSION

With alarming numbers of Caribbean women waging a battle for autonomy over their bodies, their minds, their lives, the intention of this work is to unveil the unexamined and powerful legacy of the complex embodiment and empowerment of female agency, as exemplified by the Mystic Feminine. While academic studies exist on female agency and mythology in the Caribbean, there does not seem to be a crossroads that connects the two. This study attempts to do so. An analysis of the role of the Mystic Feminine in the Caribbean reveals a rich tradition in postcolonial, literature, mythology and religion that points to infinite and untapped psychic feminine power. Awareness of this ancient, sacred legacy, shared by millions of women the world over since time immemorial, may raise the awareness of Caribbean female consciousness. In so doing, this energy can be harnessed to support, protect, guide and enlighten Caribbean female agency.

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APPENDIX A

Survey conducted via www.surveymonkey.com/r/JTWY25B, distributed from February 18th 2021 via what's app and email. "Survey on Caribbean Archetypes and Gender."

I am doing a study on gender ideologies and female archetypes in the Caribbean for my final year thesis and would very much appreciate your feedback to these questions:

1. In which Caribbean island are you located?
2. What is your age and gender?
3. If you are religious, do you worship/acknowledge God the Father, Goddess the Mother, neither or both?
4. Are you aware of any female mythological characters? If so, please list.
5. Are these female mythological characters positive, negative, neutral, or mixed? Feel free to expand further.
6. Did you ever read of any Caribbean female with supernatural powers (ghosts, mythological, fantasy). Please list title of book and character.
7. Was this literary supernatural female positive, negative, neutral, or mixed? ?
8. Did you ever attend a Caribbean ceremony to honour a Goddess, religious or spiritual? If so, please state name of ceremony and Goddess/Goddesses.
9. How did you feel attending this ceremony?
10. What is your view on the empowerment/disempowerment of women in your island and/or the Caribbean?

